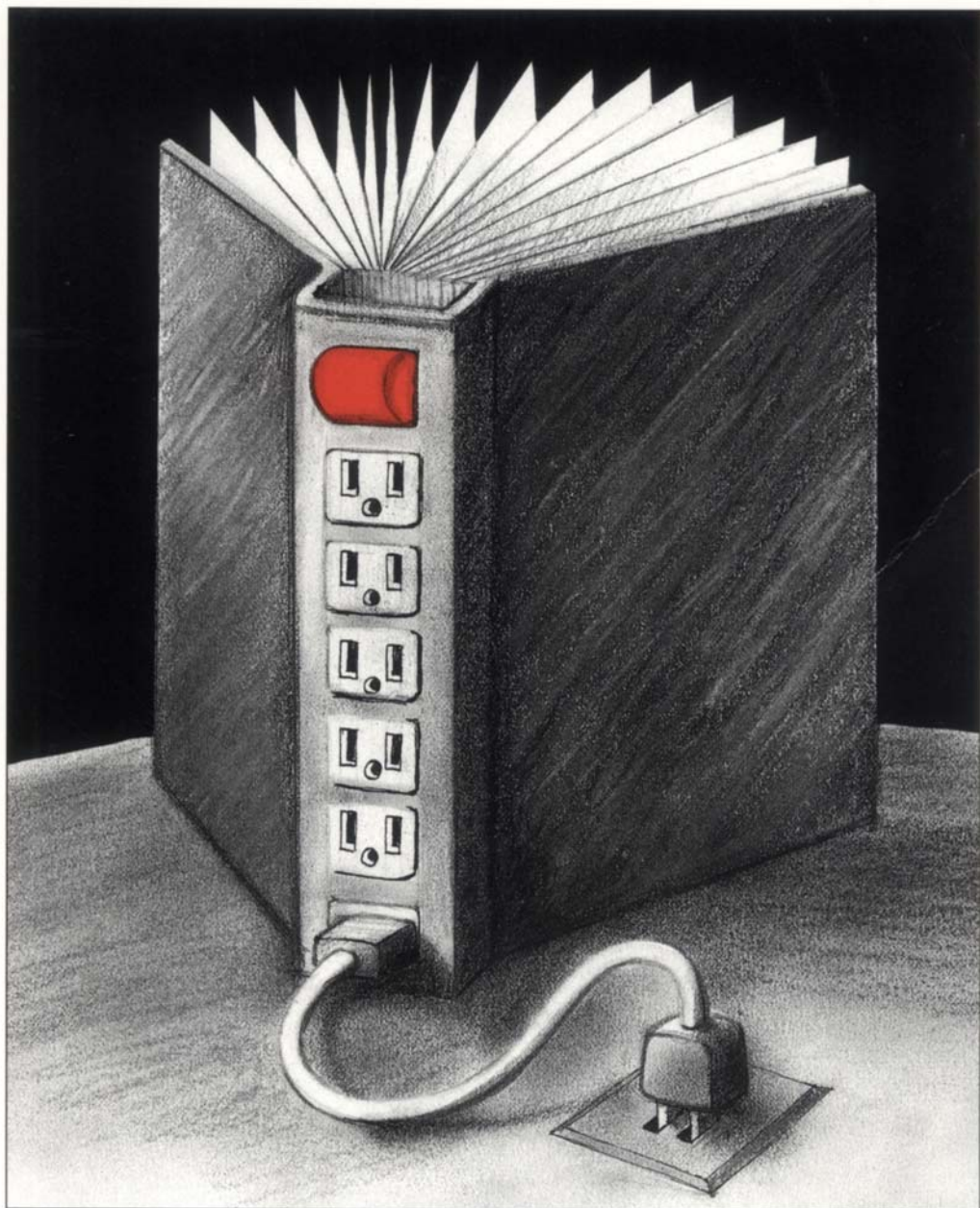


ANTIOCH *the* REVIEW

Bits, Bytes, & Books



Yellow Woman

Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today by Leslie Marmon Silko. Simon & Schuster, 205 pp., \$23.00. In her essay "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," Laguna author Silko tells us, "Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web.... As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made." Just so, Silko weaves the web of

these essays, which encompass traditional storytelling, discussions of the power of words to the Pueblo, reminiscences on photography, frightening tales of the U.S. border patrol, historical explanations of the Mayan codices, and socio-political commentary on the relationship of the U.S. government to various nations, including the Pueblo. Meaning emerges. We come to know Marmon-Silko as a woman who has sought and found meaning in the "Interior and Exterior Landscapes" of her people. We also come to know those people and that landscape—from the dangerous arroyo that swallows everything, including the Volkswagon purchased by the newly returned Vietnam vet, to Auntie Kie, who sits outside drinking strawberry soda, fanning herself with a flyswatter, and holding forth on U.S. presidents and policy. In fact, the only section of the collection that does not work is the back-to-back placement of two powerful essays in which Silko has a nasty encounter with the U.S. border patrol. Because whole sections of the tandem essays repeat verbatim, the power of the words, and thus the experience, is diluted. What is never diluted is Silko's sense of her people, her place, and her awareness of herself as a strong Laguna woman. An enriching collection to be read and re-read.

• Juliene Osborne-McKnight

Cloud Chamber

Cloud Chamber by Michael Dorris. Scribner, 316 pp., \$24.00. Dorris gives us an unsparing portrait of four generations of an Irish immigrant family in this new novel. Rose Mannion, orphaned Irish beauty and revolutionary, gives herself to Gerry Lynch, the one man she truly loves, then betrays him when he admits that he is a British loyalist. From the tree where Gerry is hanged, Rose fashions a table. So begins the saga of a family bound inexorably to the passions of the past. Eventually, Rose gives birth to two sons, one by Gerry, one by his replacement, Martin McGarry. In her determination to inflict her guilt and misery on succeeding generations, Rose makes clear that she loves Gerry's son, Andy, more. In a desperate bid to win his mother's love,

Martin's son, Robert, marries a woman just like his mother, who loves not Robert, but his priest brother Andy. Just when the family seems doomed to a repeating cycle of misplaced love and bitterness, Dorris gently introduces redemption and reconciliation in the characters of Edna and Marcella, Robert's daughters, to whom he inadvertently gives tuberculosis. Their lifelong contentious but supportive relationship rings true of generations of Irish sisters. Marcella marries Earl, a black man; their son, Elgin (named after Martin McGarry's heirloom watch), marries a Native American and so, by generations, the Mannion family becomes truly American as it accrues many cultures. Dorris utilizes the device of multiple, shifting viewpoints with seamless ease; we can see the complex family through the eyes of each character. Likewise, his deft certainty with the emotions and entanglements of a multi-cultural American Catholic family makes this a many-sided and believable novel. His concluding character, Rayona (whom readers will remember from *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*), is the current generation of the Mannion family; she is a joyful gift of the spirit. Dorris has a particularly uncanny way of getting women right. This complex novel compels and lingers; as intricately woven as an Aran sweater, it is "true" as only the best fiction can be.

• Juilene Osborne-McKnight

Black Elk

Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala

by Michael F. Steltenkamp. University of Oklahoma Press, 211 pp., \$19.95. Black Elk, the Oglala visionary who was the subject of John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, here is the subject of revisionist biography. Steltenkamp rightly asserts that his book will be the source of controversy, as it is the story of Black Elk's later years, when the holy man converted to Roman Catholicism and worked actively as a catechist, converting the Lakota to his new religion.

Steltenkamp alleges that Neihardt's portrait of Black Elk is unfinished; it casts him as the last survivor of a dying way of life, living out his remaining 60 years in bitter memory. Neihardt took liberties with Black Elk's words, eliminating all references that he saw as inconsistent with Black Elk's "Indianness."

In fact, according to anthropologist Steltenkamp, too much of the Black Elk canon is trapped in an "either-or" quandary: Black Elk was either "an old-time medicine man or one who forsook tradition in favor of something entirely new." He believes neither portrait is accurate. Accordingly, Steltenkamp presents us with a new view of Black Elk—as husband and father, as tireless and joyful catechist for his new faith, and as a powerful force in helping the Lakota to survive and adapt in the early reservation period.

At times the book is slow going, lacking the high poetic intensity of Neihardt's. However, the text does create an affirming portrait of Black Elk, who embraced Catholicism by integrating his new theology with traditional Lakota beliefs and practices. Perhaps what emerges most clearly from Steltenkamp's revisionist biography is

that Black Elk, who has been used as an icon by Hollywood, hippies, returning traditionalists, and Catholic apologists, himself managed to transcend all political and religious labels, to maintain true spirituality by adhering to "the only one essential to maintain: namely, searching for and reliance upon Wakan Tanka in the everyday course of events."

•Juilene Osborne-McKnight

Indi'n Humor

Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America by Kenneth Lincoln. Oxford University Press, 387 pp., \$39.95. In his preamble, Lincoln says that his "critics will badger the lack of systematic tidiness." He is correct, for his lack of system mars an otherwise fascinating study of humor among the Nations. Lincoln's book has everything. He bases his conclusions on Jungian and Freudian interpretations of the nature of humor and quotes liberally from scholars of humor like Mary Douglas and Johan Huizinga. The book is well salted with one-liners from writers like Vine Deloria Jr. and spiced with anecdotal Indi'n situation humor. Chapters are loosely organized around such concepts as sacred clowns, coyote humor, feminist humor, and visual humor. Towards the end, Lincoln includes chapters of in-depth analysis of the works of Louise Erdrich, James Welch, and N. Scott Momaday, including diagrammed schematics of characters and motifs. Appendices include bibliographies, a list of what it means to be Indian, an interview with playwright Hanay Geiogamah, and Lincoln's syllabus for his Indi'n humor class.

Organization for this plethora is too loose; the author wanders away from his main chapter subjects too often and in too many directions. The text lacks integration; to receive wisdom from the research, the reader must select and reorganize Lincoln's material. This scattershot approach is unfortunate, as Lincoln obviously knows his subject. He is an adopted Oglala, a Ph.D. at UCLA, and the originator of that university's American Indian Studies curriculum. Moreover, he goes after the subject of Indi'n humor with delight and his own puckish sense of good humor.

In spite of its organizational shortcomings, scholars will find the gleanings from this book worth the search.

• Julilene Osborne-McKnight

From the Heart

From the Heart: Voices of the American Indian, ed. Lee Miller. Knopf, 405 pp., \$24.00. Miller is writer and head researcher for the project that produced the 500 Nations television series and book, to which this volume might well be a companion piece. A

collection of testimony, it looks at the Native–European encounter from both sides, with primary focus on Native reaction to the settlers and their incomprehensible behavior. It is organized geographically: the Spanish–Caribbean encounter, Aztec encounters with the Spanish, encounters with the French in Canada and the Dutch and English in the colonies. To link the testimony, Miller gives brief historical backgrounds and results of encounters for the nations in each region. What emerges is a now familiar litany of conflicts, treachery, and utter misunderstandings over land, religion, lifestyles, and rights. These conflicts are seen from all sides: Columbus, calling the Taino people “fit to be ordered about and made to work,” begins a long tradition of enslavement of Native peoples; at the same time Dominican friar Bartolome de Las Casas pleads for better and fairer treatment of Natives; meanwhile, Hatuey of the Taino realizes that gold “is the God of the Christians” and that they will do anything to anyone to possess it. The voices of the Natives who lost their land, their families, and their ways of life are by turns angry, grief-stricken, perplexed. These are counterpointed throughout the book by the testimony of two kinds of settlers: those who pleaded for the carnage to stop and those Eurocolonizers who never did recognize the Natives as human beings, a convenient psychological position for stealing land and committing genocide.

• Juilene Osborne-McKnight