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Interpreting the Legacy: John Neihardt and *Black Elk Speaks*. By Brian Holloway. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003. 220 pages. \$27.95 cloth.

Black Elk Speaks was, for John Neihardt, “the book that would not die” (Preface, 1972 ed., ix), and it is the enduring nature of the text, as literature, fuel for scholarship, inspiration to readers, and influence on other general-audience works about Native Americans, that interests Brian Holloway. As the story of one Lakota holy man’s vision and life within the context of the history of his people, *Black Elk Speaks* has attracted attention within the fields of history, religious studies, and American Indian studies. Yet Neihardt was primarily a poet and a teacher. Holloway’s aim in *Interpreting the Legacy* is to reclaim *Black Elk Speaks* as a work of literary art and to honor Neihardt as a remarkably sensitive and appropriate choice for the dissemination of Black Elk’s teachings. Drawing on a thorough knowledge of Neihardt’s published works and his papers at the University of Missouri, as well as published and unpublished recollections of Hilda Neihardt, Holloway refutes Neihardt’s critics and makes his case for “the sacred collaboration” that produced a modern prose epic (p. 81).

The core of the book, both literally and in terms of the argument, is the third and fourth chapters. The first of these presents close examinations of other writings by Neihardt and accounts of Black Elk to show that each man was an “activist mystic,” with the aim of sharing spiritual values through the collaboration on *Black Elk Speaks* (p. 66). Holloway explores Neihardt’s religious experiences and values to illustrate his commitment to promoting visions of “timeless unity” and his criticism of the materialism and individualism of the dominant culture (p. 52). Neihardt’s sensitivity to the spiritual value of the interview material is further reinforced by the poet’s expression of “a sacred obligation” to Black Elk in the 1972 preface (quoted in Holloway, p. 64). A quick summary of the way in which Black Elk orchestrated “a teaching arena” to immerse Neihardt and his daughters in a Lakota context before recounting his life story allows Holloway to demonstrate Black Elk’s role as a teacher (hence “activist”) with control over significant aspects of the transfer of spiritual and cultural information to Neihardt (pp. 66, 76). The Oglala elder’s key role in the Duhamel pageants in South Dakota, which presented aspects of Lakota life for tourists, supports Holloway’s view that the holy man’s conversion to Catholicism did not mark the end of his participation in Lakota religious ceremonies. Following from this, Holloway sees Black Elk as one who felt his own sort of sacred obligation to communicate the spiritual values of his culture and his vision while adapting to the dominant culture. The discussion of their “sacred collaboration” also suggests that a special affectionate bond arose between the men and their families, which Holloway uses to further combat the interpretation of Neihardt as a colonial appropriator of Native American culture. The fourth chapter of *Interpreting the Legacy* focuses on the typescripts of the interviews and the manuscripts for *Black Elk Speaks*, which demonstrate the care Neihardt used in reorganizing material and revising language to appeal to a general audience. Holloway asserts that the poetry

succeeds because it evokes oral renditions and convinces readers that Black Elk, indeed, speaks. Specific examples comparing transcript, manuscript, and published text, as well as comparisons between Neihardt and other white writers who presented Indian narratives to a general (presumably white) audience, support Holloway's points.

Being thoroughly familiar with a broad range of Neihardt's writing, including poetry, memoirs, and discussions of literature, Holloway is sensitive to his care as a writer and impatient with descriptions of *Black Elk Speaks* as anything other than a work with poetic qualities. "Not ethnography, autobiography, biography, or history, although touching all, *Black Elk Speaks* must be appreciated on its own literary terms," he asserts (pp. 36–37). Scholars who do not take a literary approach, and especially those who make what Holloway sees as inappropriate attacks on John Neihardt, come in for strong, sometimes picayune criticism. Julian Rice and his *Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing Its Lakota Purpose* (1991) receives an especially sound drubbing; only in reading the annotation in the helpful and thorough bibliography do we learn that the second half of Rice's book, which does not criticize Neihardt, is useful. The irony of Holloway's insistence on a literary approach to *Black Elk Speaks* is that, at times, the collaborative nature of the text slips from sight. Intense focus on the production of the manuscript occasionally lets Black Elk look like a character evoked by a writer rather than a participant; for example, Holloway describes Neihardt revising to intensify the setting for the great vision, concluding that this "creat[es] a dramatic tension mirroring the psyche of the young, naïve Black Elk" (p. 92).

The book has other problems as well. Holloway repeats his main ideas, especially Neihardt's "literary task of presenting Black Elk's" oral material throughout the text (p. 19). The repetition does not expand the argument, but rather suggests a limited sense of purpose and an imperfect organization. Adding to this impression is the way in which the author presents his evidence. Frequent long quotations are not always followed by in-depth discussion. Eleven lines from Neihardt's *Song of the Indian Wars* are said to show "echoes of Troy, in which men gather in a holy cause to repulse the mad, gold-crazed invaders" (p. 28). The verse clearly evokes gold hunger as an epic temptation with an ancient lineage, but the "holy cause" is left for the reader to interpret. Likewise, Holloway's inclusion of pages of reproductions from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection of the University of Missouri suggests arguments left implicit for readers to uncover. This is particularly true of the photographs, apparently taken over the course of the interviews in 1931, although they might also date from later visits—the captions do not say. The images seem included to show "the context of Neihardt's learning" about Lakota ways and the special relationship between the collaborators and their families (caption, p. 66). Holloway discusses only one of the eleven photos, and devotes little space to showing Black Elk's control over the interview process. For details, we must turn to Hilda Neihardt's *Black Elk and Flaming Rainbow* (1995), a book that also hints at some of the difficulties in translating from Lakota to English and transcribing the interviews in shorthand. Holloway's respect for Neihardt and his defensiveness in the face of scholarly critiques of the writer interfere with his

acknowledgment of the fact that, no matter how ideal a vehicle Neihardt provides us for Black Elk's message, readers and scholars today only have access to memories, transcriptions, and photographs. Although there is no reason to suspect that Ben Black Elk's translations or Enid Neihardt's stenography and typing deliberately changed the original, acknowledgment of the remove through which Black Elk comes to us is essential.

Holloway's discussion of influences of *Black Elk Speaks* uses an exacting literary approach, with emphasis on diction and scenes that recur in the work of later writers. While this credits Neihardt with producing a convincing language and emphasizing epic moments, it misses aspects of inspiration that credit Nicholas Black Elk's vision with the cross-cultural appeal that has kept the book alive. Such tributes to the enduring power of the vision as songs based on the text, the stage production of *Black Elk Speaks*, and the Hoop Dance of Lakota Kevin Locke deserve exploration. (On the Hoop Dance, see Pauline Tuttle, "Beyond Feathers and Beads": Interlocking Narratives in the Music and Dance of Tokeya Inajin (Kevin Locke)" in *Selling the Indian: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures*, ed. Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, University of Arizona Press, 2001).

Interpreting the Legacy provides a useful introduction to the study of Neihardt and Black Elk's collaborative text because it contains so much archival material, an extensive annotated bibliography, and summaries, however biased, of important interpretations of *Black Elk Speaks*. Unfortunately, unexpressed arguments and redundancies give the impression of a book constructed out of lectures and conference papers without full-scale revisions. Holloway's defense of Neihardt as a gifted writer and the right conduit for aspects of Black Elk's life story seems better suited to an article than a book-length work.

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The Invention of Native American Literature. By Robert Dale Parker. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. 244 pages. \$49.95 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

The author of two books on William Faulkner and one on Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Dale Parker has produced a book based on a number of his articles on American Indian literature. As Parker acknowledges early on, he cannot provide a comprehensive literary history of American Indian writing; after all, no one can. Historians and literary critics are beset by conflicts between coverage and preference, between ever-expanding repertoires, stubbornly finite semesters, and publishers' word counts. The inevitable selectivity of any critical study, anthology, or course syllabus makes it more rather than less imperative for those of us who teach and study literature to examine and theorize our selection processes rigorously and skeptically. Trusting his considerable intellectual acumen and pedagogical good sense, Parker does just this, as he examines a carefully selected group of Native writers and texts, focusing on two 1930s novels, John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown* (1934) and D'Arcy