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to learn from this volume, those whose specializations are removed from the area will likely find this book both interesting and rather well-researched.

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**Smoothing the Ground: Essays on Native American Oral Literature.** Edited by Brian Swann. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. 364 pp. \$9.95 Paper.

In the introduction to his book *Smoothing the Ground*, Brian Swann voices a desire shared by all students of native oral literatures: "After the book appears, I hope that what Melville Jacobs once claimed will no longer be true: 'Except for a small band of professional folklorists, readers of non-Western literature are, I suppose, about as rare as nuclear physicists who read Bulgarian poetry.'" This is, indeed, a noble goal, as is the ancillary and more practical aim for the book that he expresses earlier: "to make it possible for teachers to begin including Native American stories and poems in their courses on American literature, or oral literature, or American history, or whatever." Such idealism is quite laudable, and although Swann's shot may miss its stated mark, the fact that he sets his sights so high results in a scholarly dialogue in *Smoothing the Ground* that can be a seminal tool for the teachers and students that Swann sees as his audience.

By compiling the twenty-one essays found in the book, Swann offers a compendium, of sorts, of contemporary scholarly activity in the area of native oral literatures. In effect, he has brought together writings from many—but as he is quick to point out, not all—of the people comprising a "naissance" of study in this area. This fact alone marks the book as notable. By proffering the experiences, concerns and reservations of such people as Dell Hymes, Dennis Tedlock, Jarold Ramsey, Karl Kroeber and the others, Swann does, in fact, "smooth the ground" for his reader by supplying a basis from which he might build an understanding of oral literatures and thereby an appreciation. The essays all share a similar call to avoid the excesses and inadequacies of past attempts to collect and interpret oral stories, songs and prayers.

The cry is to allow these utterances to stand on their own merits, and to cultivate an understanding of the contexts which gave them birth. This is a fine plea, as well as a basic necessity, if one hopes to see how the oral tradition lives, and this attitude is the basis of the naissances which Swann recognizes and wishes to nurture with his work.

*Smoothing the Ground* is divided into five sections, each of which presents an aspect of the study of North American oral literatures. In "Context and Overview," Kenneth Lincoln and Kenneth Roemer supply the historical background for the ways that American Indians and their literatures have been traditionally viewed by the "dominant" Anglo culture. While Lincoln focuses mostly upon the historical record of the stereotyping of native peoples in an attempt "to defend cultural independence, as reflected in the literatures of many hundreds of tribal societies in America," Roemer attempts to lay the propensity to stereotype to rest "by stressing the contexts and continuities of Native American oral narratives." The two essays, taken together, provide a broad background for the novice, and their strength lies in their ability to demonstrate that native narratives are part of ancient, yet *living*, traditions. The key word in Roemer's statement of purpose is continuities, and he outlines the types of stories that have become part of the canon of native literatures as well as survey today's unique manifestation: the Indian storyteller who blends traditional concerns and motifs with an ability to adopt and adapt the written prose narrative. The stories are still being told by people such as Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Silko, Simon Ortiz, James Welch and Scott Momaday. One particularly exciting area of research for the scholar of native oral literatures is the exploration of the relationships between oral and written performances, which leads us to the second section of the book.

"The Question of Translation and Literary Criticism" opens with Dennis Tedlock's "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narrative," a "classic" for the most recent generation of ethnographers and translators who have redefined the ways modern collectors of oral stories view their task and present their results. Indeed, one strength of *Smoothing the Ground* lies in its continuous reinforcement of the approach to collection posited by Tedlock, Hymes, Ramsey and their colleagues. No longer can texts be rewritten to conform to the expectations of an Anglo audience,

nor are they produced in such a literal translation as to be incomprehensible. Instead, an attempt is made to reproduce, as closely as possible, the event of their delivery. As Tedlock points out, silence, tone and inflection, as well the circumstances surrounding the telling of a story, are key elements of style and narrative purpose and therefore indispensable to an interpretation and understanding of an oral "text." The essays in this section range from general discussions of translation and criticism to the very specific development of a "critical model" proposed by Willard Gingerich through his examination of ancient Nahuatl texts.

However, despite the individual worth of the essays in this section, their inclusion into the work poses a serious question. For whom is the book intended? Swann has stated his concept of audience, and since the works and theories included here are well known to other scholars in the field, one assumes the essays are intended for the novice. If this is true, the section becomes redundant. An awareness of the problems implicit in ethnographies can be fostered by one essay. After all, Lincoln—in the very first essay in the book—has shown the ill results of earlier attempts at ethnography. If Swann hopes to train future ethnographers, he has missed his audience. If, on the other hand, he hopes to develop the reader's ability to evaluate written texts for their use in the classroom, the essays become too theoretical and supply too few practical examples for the novice audience.

The book's third section—"Focus on Stories"—attempts to fill this need by providing some analyses by contemporary scholars of oral stories. This is by far the most effective section of the work, for it provides not only some very fine models of explication but also demonstrates some of the pitfalls one must avoid if he is to allow the stories the freedom of their own merit. The most compelling essay in this group is Elaine Jahner's "Stone Boy: Persistent Hero," compelling because Jahner demonstrates the power of the specific—the Lakota Sioux stories of Stone Boy—to enlighten the general—"a poetics of tribal folktales." The strength of her essay lies in her refusal to adopt a comparative stance toward her material; she does not try to equate Stone Boy with the heroes of western mythology, a technique which usually results in an ethnocentric dead end. Instead, she brings her vast knowledge of Sioux culture to bear on her subject, telling the Stone Boy story and giving her reading of it simultaneously; analysis and appreciation evolve as one and, given an unexperienced

audience, this is just the skill Swann would like to see develop. On the other hand, this section also holds Galen Buller's "Comanche and Coyote, the Culture Maker," which opens with a bit of scholarly hocus-pocus. "Because the Comanche storytellers have been, for the most part, lost to time and transition, it is mandatory that the student of Comanche literature look to Shoshone versions of the creation to trace properly the character of Coyote as a mirror of the Comanche people and their culture." This is not to suggest that Buller does not have a case for equating the two cultures, but I only state that he does not take the time to develop his case within the essay. If there is one central message in *Smoothing the Ground*, it is that *each* culture should be examined individually; after all, there is no such being as the American Indian, per se, but a diverse wealth of separate cultures that the Anglo has traditionally grouped together.

The fourth section—"Native American Culture and the 'Dominant' Culture"—is an unfortunate attempt at generalization that ultimately shifts the focus of the book from native literatures to literatures about Natives. The essays, by and large, attempt comparative ties between western and native concerns. Since the book was, ostensibly, written for members of the "dominant" culture, such an approach is redundant; the reader will automatically compare another culture or literature with his own. Here, however, we are given "differences" that are found between western and native forms, rather than the thing most required by the reader: an abundance of texts unqualified by nods to another culture. The initial essay in the section is a perfect example. In it Arnold Krupat argues that "*Indian autobiography* is a contradiction in terms," but goes on to discuss Indian autobiography's roots. The reader would have been better served with an essay on the autobiographical writings *by* American Indians in this century, an area Krupat acknowledges but avoids.

The fifth section contains a rebuttal, by Karl Kroeber, of an earlier essay by H. David Brumble III, and Brumble's reply. The dialogue continues, and here one is given an apt demonstration of the complexities involved not only in working in this field, but in attempting to communicate new insights. At this point, the scholar faces the same dilemma as the tribal artist of today: how is one to supply not only particulars of a text, but also the means to interpret it through its layers of meaning and association? It's

never been easy, but it is not impossible, as many of the essays in *Smoothing the Ground* demonstrate. As its title suggests, this book is a beginning. Although it may not fulfill Swann's stated desire, it possesses some fine works, extensive citations, annotations and bibliographies, and a good heart. In spite of its few faults—or perhaps because of them—it is a valuable tool for those interested in Native oral literatures, and those who wish to carry that interest into the classroom. The ground has been smoothed, and if rumors are true, Swann will soon produce a second work to continue drawing the efforts of those comprising the naissance of study in this area.

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**Yazz—Navajo Painter.** By Sallie R. Wagner, J.J. Brody and Beatién Yazz. Northland Press: Flagstaff, Arizona, 1983. 76 pp. \$17.95 Paper.

This delightful, and accurate book is both a biography of Jimmy Toddy, and an overview of Navajo culture, especially the post-World War II era. Jimmy Toddy is probably more recognized by the Navajo name by which he signs his paintings—Beatién Yazz.

Jimmy grew up in the area around Wide Ruins, Arizona (some 25 miles south of Ganado) and often visited the trading post at Wide Ruins with his father, Joe Toddy and his grandmother, Little Woman. The owners of the store, Bill and Sallie Lippincott, took a liking to the quiet youngster and soon recognized his talent as an artist.

Eventually, Sallie set up a small table in the corner of the trading post for Jimmy to use as a "studio." With paints, paper and brushes provided by the Lippincotts, Jimmy began to produce some rather primitive, but interesting works of art.

For a time, the Lippincotts had a house guest, an artist named Peter, who enjoyed taking sun baths in his shorts. The Navajos soon dubbed him "No Shirt," and, as Jimmy produced paintings too, he got the nick-name "Little No Shirt," or Bea Aten Yazz.

Another house guest, in 1942, was Alberta Hannum. She became friendly with Jimmy and took an interest in his work. She