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## RÉFÉRENCE

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. Pp xv + 292.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Pp. xvi + 438.

- 1 Robert Dale Parker's *The Invention of Native American Literature* (Cornell UP, 2003) finishes with a chapter examining the ways that American Indian writing enters the wider canon of American literatures. He pays close attention to the material conditions that underpin the selection of texts in anthologies and for university courses, noting that the process too often ends up in a choice of texts based on a conscious desire to "represent" – *this* text to represent modernist technique, *that* one to represent social realism... and *these* texts to represent certain ethnic groups. A flaw in such a process and such a logic is that it too often creates a superficial multiculturalism that pays homage to diversity while in fact merely inhabiting older structures of assimilation: something that is particularly problematic with regard to Native American writing, since the indigenous peoples of the

Americas are not another ethnic minority, but as the original inhabitants of the continents enjoy a measure of sovereignty and occupy an area at least partly outside the space of “American” literatures altogether. As Craig Womack has put it in another context, “tribal literatures are not some branch waiting to be grafted onto the main trunk. Tribal literatures are the *tree* [...] *We are the canon*” (*Red On Red*, 7). Therefore it is incumbent on any academic working with tribal writing to be conscious, even self-conscious, of the processes that lead to specific works being selected, lauded, taught, and what effect such processes can have on our understanding of Native literary traditions.

- 2 With such a raised consciousness, readers might also realise that the “canon” of American Indian literatures has been (unconsciously?) shaped to serve two somewhat opposed narratives. Although there are certainly exceptions, most students not enrolled on Native American-specific courses, and many of those who are, will be taught a literature that begins with transcribed oral chants and folktales, then maybe quickly surveys some 19<sup>th</sup> century oratory before heading for the firmly established ground of the 1970’s Native American Renaissance – N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich or, coming more up to date, Sherman Alexie. Poetry, which is as so often the poor relation, is again taught mainly through contemporary examples such as Simon Ortiz, Joy Harjo or Luci Tapahonso. This choice of “representative” material, for all the brilliance of these later writers, unfortunately masks preceding Native achievement in literary textual production, and serves an evolutionary narrative of gradual civilisation. The second narrative served up by the logic of “representing” is that of resistance, where texts most likely to be chosen if they obviously oppose the standard American mythology or if they rail against and/or subvert colonial logic. Though this second strand must see itself as oppositional to the first, they both place the story of Euro-America as central and configure Native American writing as essentially a by-product.
- 3 With the two books under review here, both collections of 19<sup>th</sup> century verse with extensive scholarly introductions and annotations, Robert Dale Parker has achieved a quite extraordinary intervention into our understanding of Native writing before 1969. He has significantly expanded and deepened the selection of texts available while, at the same time, providing a deeply researched, intellectually rigorous and yet engagingly passionate guide to the material on display and to the complexities of reading it contextually. Readers already familiar with the “long history” of Native American literature will find an abundance of new voices and new discussions, while scholars in American literatures more widely will likely have their understanding of the arrival of Native American writing entirely transformed. Both the evolutionist and the resistance-oriented strains of Native American literary study are strongly challenged by the abundance and ambiguity of this material.
- 4 In *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky*, Parker presents the complete writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (1800-1842). Schoolcraft (named Bamewawagezhikaquay in Anishinaabeg) is revealed in this volume as the first significant poet from any indigenous North American population whose writings have survived to the present day (more on those caveats later). Her writings begin with juvenilia in 1815 and continue until just before her unexpected death in 1840, and contain both poetry and short stories. An extraordinary figure in American letters, hers is not only the first voice in American Indian poetry, but she is also the first Native woman writer, and the first to write poetry in a tribal language. The poems themselves are recognisably of their Romantic period, not

the most fascinating chapter of American verse, and yet the evident metrical skill of their author and the freshness of the material make them fascinating. The stories, many of which Jane discovered and re-told in English for the first time, are amusing in their own right and also valuable as the source material for much of Longfellow's later work, among others.

- 5 Parker's introduction explains the difficulties and paradoxes of Schoolcraft's subject position. Her sense of self derived equally from her Ojibwe mother Ozhaguscodaywayquay, from whom she derived pride in her heritage and who provided her with a model of feminine strength, and her Irish father John Johnston, who gave her access to an unusually well-stocked library (and samples of whose own poetry are included here) but also pushed her towards British and colonial social models. Jane is still principally known, as she was in her lifetime, as the wife of Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, who published her short stories and translations of traditional tales without often acknowledging her as the source. Henry was and is a gigantic figure in his own right, a man who collected a prodigious quantity of material from Ojibway source, a tirelessly opportunistic and occasionally corrupt careerist who frequently worked against Indian interests, yet who also, as Parker observes, "anticipat[ed] the gradually emerging model of participant observation that came to define modern cultural anthropology" (64). As in his public life, so in his private: Henry kept – and published in private family magazines – Jane's poetry, yet he also edited and rewrote it with a free hand, with the result that most of her work must be seen as a more or less willing collaboration with her husband. Parker provides all textual variants of the poems, allowing readers to read the texts palimpsest-style. This willingness to present all available evidence and to make it clear where the limits of certainty lie is a notable feature of Parker's scholarly work throughout, more than giving confidence in his judgement in the rare instances where he ventures an educated guess on his subjects' opinions or the subtext of particular pieces.
- 6 It is difficult to avoid seeing Henry as the villain of the piece, and to valorise Jane Johnston Schoolcraft as standing in for the voiceless oppressed. Certainly there is some justification in this view, but as Parker makes clear in his superbly nuanced essay and notes on each poem, the poems are at best ambiguous and frequently somewhat contradictory in their attitudes to Indian and white culture: at one point Schoolcraft can proudly stand up for her grandfather's ancestry and achievements besmirched (as she saw it) by rumours that he had been born Sioux ("To my maternal grandfather on hearing his descent from Chippewa ancestors misrepresented"), while at others she can speak dismissively of "simple Indians." There seems little doubt from Parker's account that she accepted Henry's appropriation of her work and that the relationship continued to be a strong union (poems such as the lively and flirtatious "An answer, to a remonstrance on my being melancholy, by a Gentleman, who, *sometimes*, had a *little pleasing* touch of melancholy himself" leave little doubt of the affection between husband and wife). Certainly Schoolcraft's verse fits neither the evolutionary nor resistance-oriented modes of thinking about early Native writings, being both highly accomplished and thoroughly Native (the author's and works' grounding in Anishinaabe culture is clear), yet also Christian, Romantic and assimilationist. Yet as Parker analyses the situation clearly and with judicious nods to the ambiguity of the evidence and the gaps in the historical record, he makes it clear that it is exactly this unexpectedness, this singularity and non-"representational" core that makes these poems so valuable as a record of the times, to say nothing of their fitfully brilliant writing.

- 7 The other volume under review, *Changing is Not Vanishing*, massively extends our understanding of American Indian poetry, and in so doing offers several new avenues to explore in describing 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century indigenous American cultures. Parker begins with a reading of poems that no longer exist in any form. He proves (in what was a new insight for me) that pre-19<sup>th</sup> century several Native American poets would have written in Latin or Greek, including Caleb Cheeshahteumuck, the Wampanoag student who graduated from Harvard in 1665. He speculates that this generation – some of whom were supposed capable of composing in English, Greek, Latin and Hebrew – might well have experimented with writing poetry in their native languages as well. While he produces the one example that survives, Eleazar’s 1678 “In obitum Viri veré Reverendi D, Thomae Thacheri, Qui Ad Dom. Ex hâc Vitâ migravit, 18.8.1678,” he also urges other scholars to continue his archival research into the period in the hope of unearthing other examples. Indeed, one of the great strengths of this collection is in Parker’s clear passion for the material and desire to inspire further research in the area. Critics and students interested in early American poetry will find a great deal of interest here, and suggestions for many further routes of investigation. The introduction also clearly and carefully contextualizes the material, showing the political and historical cross-currents in Indian country of the time, providing a basic primer in 19<sup>th</sup> century American English-language poetry and the ideological biases inherent in the writing of it, and drawing out themes that recur frequently in the poems he has found.
- 8 After Eleazar, Parker moves to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, beginning naturally with Schoolcraft and then producing a cornucopia of poems, many (most?) of them anthologized for the first time. He has trawled school magazines, Indian newspapers, missionary newsletters, and many other archival sources, to find voices from across the North American continent (more than thirty tribal nations are represented) writing on a wide range of subjects. As something of an instinctual resistance-oriented reader myself, I was drawn to the Cherokee and Choctaw voices in this book mourning and in some cases angrily condemning the theft of tribal lands by Andrew Jackson and those who followed him. Israel Folsom’s “Lo! the Poor Indian’s Hope” (1831) is as clear a statement of resentment as one could wish.
- 9 Yet it is also clear from many of the voices in this anthology that literate Native Americans from many nations saw themselves as part of the narrative of civilisation, buying into the rhetoric of progress from the “Vanishing Indian.” The future envisaged here is often dutifully Christian and American, with Native cultures seen as a disappeared past. The beautiful Indian maiden and the brave warrior stereotypes make more than one appearance. As with Schoolcraft’s work, it takes careful explication to bring out the value of much of this material. And, again as with Schoolcraft, some of the most valuable poems in this collection for me are the ones that were clearly not written out of any desire to represent, and which therefore somewhat paradoxically seem to give a clearer insight into the living cultures in which they were produced. The pseudonymous “Hors de Combat”’s poem “[I’ve returned to home and scanty lunch],” with its satirical response to tribal electioneering, or the happily cynical “You Can Always Tell” by William Abbott Thompson, bring the times alive in a way that much of the more accomplished but often dully Victorian lyric verse collected does not.
- 10 Taken together, these two volumes are essential purchases for anyone with an interest in either Native American writing or nineteenth-century American verse more generally. Parker’s lengthy and insightful introductory essays will repay repeated re-reading, but it

is the sheer volume and richness of this material that will hold the attention. Parker makes a good case for Jane Johnston Schoolcraft's claim to be included in future survey courses of 19<sup>th</sup> century verse, while some of the other poets, varied in quality as they are, will be essential additions to the Native American literary canon. These living voices speak out against any tendency on the part of readers, anthology compilers and scholars to simplify the endlessly complex story of Indian -white relations or the emergence of print culture in Native nations.

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