

The American West: Out of Myth, Into Reality

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rative collections gathered for the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology to produce four volumes of American Indian "myths and legends." This particular collection, first published in 1914, presents 102 American Indian traditional tales drawn mostly from Cherokee (23), Menomini (25), and Ojibwa (23) tellers as set down by such anthropological folklorists as James Mooney, Albert E. Jenks, Walter J. Hoffman, and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Plainly yet engagingly rendered in prose departing but little from the original sources, the stories concern origins, primordial elements, plants and animals, and culture heroes and tricksters. Historian Peter Iverson's new introduction succinctly sketches Judson's life and editorial methods, astutely lauds her as a pioneer of contemporary "multiculturalism," and argues convincingly for the ongoing importance of traditional storytelling among native peoples.

Serious students of American Indian storytelling might wish for more. Perhaps a bibliographic reconstruction of the sources from which the tales are drawn? Perhaps the names and brief biographies, to the extent available, of the original storytellers? Perhaps comparative notes on those stories in the collection that are widespread and oft-reported in oral tradition? Complaints aside, however, the republication of *Native American Legends* is most welcome, for both its historical significance and its clear, sensitive rendering of well-chosen, compelling traditional stories.

The American West: Out of Myth, Into Reality, by Peter H. Hassrick. Seattle: University of Washington Press for the Trust for Museum Exhibitions, 2000. 176 pp. 135 illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 paper.

Reviewer Joni L. Kinsey is associate professor of art history at the University of Iowa. She is the author of *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West* (1992) and *Plain Pictures: Images of the American Prairie* (1996).

This bountifully illustrated book, written to accompany a traveling exhibition, is a good introduction to American western art, its history, and its current reputation. Written for general readers rather than specialists, it is light on text and even shorter on details, but it nevertheless offers a decent overview of the main currents of western art and recent thinking about it. The central essay, written by an authority on the subject, surveys the breadth of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painting. It is followed by rather short syntheses of some of the themes in the field written by several other scholars. Hassrick, most recently the Charles M. Russell Professor of Western Art at the

University of Oklahoma and now an independent scholar, has had a long career as a curator, museum director, author, and scholar of western art, and his insights are both to the point and accessible to the interested reader.

Hassrick begins by noting that significant revisions in western art history in recent years have changed the ways we think about this material. No longer is western art a "sleepy" subject devoted to the triumphs of Anglo-American development. Through the work of a variety of scholars in a number of different disciplines we have come to recognize that the period of western expansion was a complicated time when cultures clashed and much was lost in the name of progress. So too is the art a complex mix of ideologies, images, and events that exemplifies the attitudes, attributes, and atrocities of the age. The art remains unchanged, of course, but our new perspectives make it much more interesting than it used to be.

To help sort through the diverse range of material that is western art, Hassrick identifies four phases within it: the art of exploration, the frontier experience, landscape grandeur and national identity, and the demise of native cultures and indigenous animals. Within these chronological and thematic boundaries, he further points to three mythic themes: progress, Eden, and masculinity (which might be better called *gender* since the general absence of women from most western art is just as important and revealing as the emphasis on men). These are useful parameters for anyone approaching the subject, and they constitute the most original and valuable aspect of the book. Hassrick illustrates each category with several carefully selected paintings, but unfortunately does not follow through with enough text to be of real help, offering only a scant two pages per theme. Readers looking for information about the artists, their careers, a chronological overview of western art, or other aspects of the field will have to look elsewhere, because this is a thematic synthesis, and a rather sparse one at that. This is rather unfortunate because with even a little more content this could have been a fine book with uses beyond the casual read.

The supplemental essays only emphasize the point, primarily because they are so general and brief. Instead of a couple of meaty and engaging discussions of the fascinating emphases of western art, we have some 15 one- to two-page synopses. The topics themselves are important issues, ranging from "The Noble Savage and Heroic Civilizer" and "Artists' Quests: Explorations/Exploitation" to "Cultures in Conflict" and "The Minute versus the Grand." Such topics would be worthy of lengthy treatments in any serious study. But even in a book of modest aspirations they are subjects that should be integrated with-

in an essay that respects their significance without minimizing them in too brief an overview.

The reproductions within the book are excellent and substantially augment the text. Together they form an attractive package that will be a nice addition to coffee tables and collections of museum catalogs, even if it is not an especially significant one.

Happy as a Big Sunflower: Adventures in the West, 1876-1880, by Rolf Johnson, edited by Richard E. Jensen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society, 2000. xxxii, 270 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$15.00 paper.

Reviewer Terrence J. Lindell is professor of history at Wartburg College. His research and teaching focus on the World War II home front and the history of immigration and ethnic groups in the West and Midwest.

Rolf Johnson, the American-born son of Swedish immigrants, began keeping a diary on the last day of 1875, a few months before his family joined a group of Illinois Swedes in a venture to build new homes for themselves in Phelps County, Nebraska. He continued the diary, with varying degrees of consistency, until the fall of 1880 (though there may have been later entries no longer extant). Johnson, who turned twenty the day he headed west, experienced the early days of farm- and community building on the Nebraska frontier. While in Phelps County he performed farm work for his father and neighbors, got involved in local politics, taught school for a term, and led an active social life. He apparently suffered from wanderlust, for he also took part in a buffalo hunt, spent two seasons as an itinerant harvester, and in 1879 abandoned a homestead claim for adventures in Dakota, Colorado, and New Mexico. That colorful characters and the romance of the road appealed more to him than mundane farm life is evident in the depth of his descriptions.

Portions of the diary have previously appeared in print, but only in limited venues. Richard Jensen, who does an impressive job of filling out Johnson's story in the notes, is to be commended for bringing this work to a larger audience. It will appeal primarily to general and scholarly readers interested in the 1870s Nebraska frontier, but will also attract those interested in the Black Hills gold rush and the Rocky Mountain West.

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