

Silvester J. Brito. *Looking Through a Squared Off Circle.* (Marvin, SD: The Blue Cloud Quarterly Press, 1985) 22pp., \$2.00 per.

Twenty two poems shimmer with iridescence in *Looking Through a Squared Off Circle*. The interaction of shifting colors and tones in Silvester Brito's poems flood the reader's mind with the bittersweet pain and beauty of the American Indian experience.

The beauty of his spirit resonates in "A Creation Gift." Brito's strength, inherited from Comanche and Tarascan Indian forebears, shines through these lines from "A Creation Gift":

Because of these wisdom catchers
I have known eagle power
strength out of spirit waters
patience in flowering summer, and
blessings from our cloud fathers.

Dichotomies of beauty and pain, of old and new often laced with humor, are delineated in these poems: "Indian Paint Brush," "Red Eyed Man," "Indian Pick Up," "New Sun-Dance," and "Turbulent Son."

It is well established that American Indians were friendly to the first European settlers in the Americas. However, with a history of divide-and-conquer tactics used by the European settlers, the invasion of Indian lands, and the making and breaking of treaties, the relationship between American Indians and whites was molded into a less-than-amiable form.

A sense of loss and betrayal permeates many of Brito's poems. Two examples are "Red Sundance Man," and "Broken Treaty." Insight into the significance of the collection title, as well as insight into the depth of the Indians' alienation from the white world are brought into sharp focus by the powerful imagery used in "Broken Treaty":

Your christian words
in hypocritical ink
have eroded to
white puritan dust,
remove me from
the vacant center of
our broken circle.

Giving flesh to the conflicts between the Indian world and white world are Brito's portrayal of *time* in "Reality": "The present is both past and future, it is a circle" and in "Lead Guitar Man": ". . . the time is now, today/it is the only way."

While recognizing the diversity of American Indian cultures, some traditional core values help define commonalities among them. Deeply religious and spiritual, most American Indians view the universe as a harmonious whole, with every being and object in it, sacred. Their conception of the earth and their relationship to the land differ markedly from that of whites. Brito captures the reverence for nature and the spiritual/mystical connectedness that unify American Indian cultures in "Meta-Center-Charms," "Beholden: Mother Earth," "Death Watch,"

and "Indian Spirit Word."

Looking Through a Squared Off Circle, graced by an appropriate cover drawing by Paul War Cloud, includes explanatory notes and biographical data on the poet. The strength of Brito's collection lies in its connectiveness with the essence of the traditional, as well as the current, American Indian experience. Brito's poems are strong: authentic in voice, intense in imagery. With the twenty two poems in this collection, Brito whets the reader's appetite for more.

— Theresa E. McCormick
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Lloyd W. Brown. *West Indian Poetry*. 2nd edition. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann, 1984) 202 pp., \$15.00 paper.

From the outset, the reader must be aware of encountering a rarity indeed: a first class scholar who can write objectively and at the same time maintain his involvement with the literature under scrutiny. One would seem to negate the other. But Brown successfully manages each; as a Jamaican, he holds Caribbean literature dear to his literary heart. Yet his claim to scholarship may not be denied, as a perusal of this book will confirm. Brown knows his subject thoroughly, and in scholarly fashion has been able to distance himself sufficiently from the material to present a firm and fair evaluation of *West Indian Poetry*. The book comes near to being a variorum edition in that he offers both a "Chronology" of West Indian history, including both relevant events and works of poets, dating from 1759 to 1981, and a first rate "Bibliography" of primary and secondary sources. All entries are briefly annotated.

In his "Preface" Brown discusses what he perceives to be the major flaw in literary criticism of Caribbean poets: critics tend to be viewed historically and pushed into tidy little literary movements rather than developmentally; that is, by the manner in which they define themselves. Brown has looked at the poets' works and has considered how the poet has contributed or failed to contribute to the development of a West Indian consciousness. This is not to say that he has ignored literary movements; in fact, he has found that so long as the Caribbean poet attempted to write in the "British" manner, following for example neo-classicism, his poetry remained inferior. Likewise when the poet attempted superficially to include the native dialects, the poetry also failed. It is only as the poet has been able to find the language and