

rhythms of the island peoples that the poetry has gained stature. In itself this idea is not novel; however, Brown has included so many excerpts from the poetry itself along with his interpretations that the reader must forget the cliché and agree with the author's evaluations.

Although Brown has arranged his work historically, he has a primary and certainly valid thesis that undergirds the whole. As the West Indian poet takes his place in the sun, he must deal honestly with his own identity — not British, not African, but someone combining both, yet very different. And the best poets find a way to reconcile or transcend the contradictions. Brown looks at minor and major poets, finding that West Indian poetry is “still a young tradition of poetry,” and that it does have something unique to offer to the poetic world. Perhaps one of the most insightful accomplishments of the book is the chapter-long treatment of both Derek Walcott and Edward Brathwaite. He finds Walcott's perspective to be a private one, while Brathwaite's is a communal and cyclical one. As fine as Brown's literary criticism of each poet is, his comparison of the two alone makes this book abundantly worth the reading.

I found the volume exceedingly well-written, enlightening, and most informed. Brown's fresh perspective makes this an especially valuable addition to the relatively few critical books on West Indian poetry.

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Joseph Bruchac, ed. *The Light From Another Country: Poetry From American Prisons.* (Greenfield Center, N.Y.: The Greenfield Review Press, 1984) xxvi, 326 pp., \$9.95 paper.

In recent years, poetry anthologists have strayed from the literary field into the terrain of sociology, where they have collected an odd assortment of scriblings: poems focusing on female athletes, the children of alcoholics, Vietnam War veterans, gays and lesbians, scuba divers, and numerous other ethnic, social, and occupational groups. In fact, the proliferation of such anthologies has been so great that absurdity long ago set in and one expects shortly to see collections devoted to hangnail sufferers and carpet layers.

It is into the midst of this clutter that Joseph Bruchac has placed his anthology of prison poetry, and so one may be inclined to dismiss his book as just another manifestation of the urge to specialize. That would be a sad mistake, because Bruchac's collection is that rare thing these days, an anthology of poems with a meaningful and compelling co-

herence.

What sets Bruchac's anthology apart is not its focus on poetry by writers in prison but its celebration of the diversity found among those writers. Bruchac's volume is a microcosm of the larger world, and so it escapes the claustrophobic vision of many other prison poetry anthologies. Here a reader can find poems by women as well as by men, by blacks and whites, Chicanos, Native Americans, immigrants, and even an Eskimo. Not least among the anthology's accomplishments is its representation of the variety of human beings behind bars, as opposed to the generic vision of "prisoner" that many people hold.

Although Bruchac asserts in his Preface that the poems in the volume are about "more than just prison life," most of them remain tied in some way to the prison experience. Even those poems which seem to deal with nature are, in the prison context, probably reflections of a desire for freedom; and many of the natural subjects—birds and leaves, for example—are viewed through the restraining bars and fences. Still, this is not a weakness of the poetry; and one wonders why Bruchac felt the need to argue the point, however briefly. After all, confinement is the overwhelming fact of a prisoner's life; it would be surprising if it didn't infiltrate and color his every thought.

Almost as interesting as the poems are the poets' photographs and their brief biographical statements. Looking at the photos and reading the hopeful, ironic, absurd, or resigned statements, one cannot avoid regarding these writers as individuals. And this is Bruchac's most significant accomplishment, bringing his readers face to face with the singularity of each poet represented in his collection.

Among the many unknowns in the volume are a few poets who have fairly large reputations. Most notable among them are Etheridge Knight and Daniel Berrigan. Perhaps Bruchac felt including such writers would lend legitimacy to his book, but he could easily have dispensed with them and retained a strong anthology. Berrigan seems especially out of place as a prisoner of conscience, especially in light of Bruchac's prefatory assertion that the poets in his book are not political prisoners.

But these are small quibbles in view of the larger accomplishments represented by the anthology. Bruchac's collection leads us away from stereotypes of the prison poet, implicitly asserting that all writers in prison cannot be represented by Jack Abbott or by Eddie Murphy's characterization of the "Kill Mah Lanlord" poet. Rightly or wrongly, many people in our country live their lives behind bars and barbed wire. Regardless of what they may have done, they remain human; and although they may be set apart they are still part of us. This anthology reminds us of that.

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