

**Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands. *American Indian Women, Telling Their Lives*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) 209 pp., \$18.95.**

An epigraph to the preface of *American Indian Women, Telling Their Lives* is a traditional Cheyenne saying:

A Nation is not conquered  
Until the hearts of its women  
Are on the ground.  
Then it is done, no matter  
How brave its warriors  
Nor how strong its weapons.

American Indians are not conquered. The heart of the American Indian woman is not on the ground. In taking over the control of the telling of her life, she preserves the reality and meaning of tribal history and culture. In asserting the reality of her heritage, she establishes and proclaims a unique identity with which she will shape her future.

Examining the work of several disciplines in order to illuminate the development of types, methods, and themes of American Indian women's autobiographical writing, Bataille and Sands make a significant contribution to scholars, students, and general readers interested in autobiography, biography, and oral and written tradition of American Indian literature, literary criticism, history, and ethnographic studies. Despite their wide backgrounds as writers and editors of materials focused on American Indian life, however, it is the writers' enormous ambition that contributes to their book's major weakness: the authors cover so much ground that they stumble occasionally in their attempts at logical organization of the wealth of material. In addition, their focus in the preface is on the need to clarify the centrality of women in American Indian cultures. The reader is misled by these introductory remarks; since Bataille and Sands are as concerned with the types, methodology, and literary quality of the Indian stories as with their content, they do not consistently, nor primarily, focus on the ways in which these narratives erase the popular stereotypes of American Indian women's low status in tribal culture.

In spite of occasional organizational lapses, however, the book's strengths far outweigh its drawbacks. The authors trace both the written tradition of Euro-American autobiography and the oral tradition of American Indian literature which paved the way for the American Indian women's autobiographies they examine. They note the ways in which autobiography was adapted to the New World by such famous autobiographers as Thoreau, Franklin, and Henry Adams and in such forms of personal narrative as the captivity narrative, the western hero autobiography, and the slave narrative. Native American autobio-

graphy was most distinguished from Euro-American tradition by its methodology, that of bicultural composite authorship, and Bataille and Sands depict clearly the role of the editor-collector in both the oral and written processes which led to eventual publication of native autobiography.

*American Indian Women* chronicles the ways in which the thematic concerns of stories told by American Indian women have changed over a period of a hundred and fifty years. In the stories told to the ethnographers and in the 1936 *Papago Woman*, the traditional Indian woman, engaged wholly in tribal life and family relationships, emerges as a woman aware of herself primarily in terms of her tribal roles. Later narrators represent the Indian woman caught in the beginnings of the process of acculturation. These tellers record the significant changes in Indian life brought by the continual removals and forced migrations of tribes, the influence of Christianity, the impact of reservation life, and the new importance of school education that weakened the informal education or cultural transmission which helped children become responsible adults in Indian society. Still most concerned with the female roles of mother, wife, and grandmother, these tellers, particularly Mountain Wolf Woman, portray women as enjoying greater self-confidence than men in a culture undergoing rapid changes which destroyed its traditions. Bataille and Sands point out that women's roles as caretakers of children and family did not change significantly despite acculturation. Having experience with the institutions of white society, Mountain Wolf Woman nevertheless clung to tradition; like many Indian autobiographers, she came to see herself as a transmitter of culture, a link between the traditional life of her people and the life of future generations.

*American Indian Women* predicts both change and continuity in the narratives to come. Books written by or about Indians are now frequently reviewed by American Indian people. Indian women trained as scholars in Indian studies will influence the telling of American Indian women's lives and bilingual Indian women will serve an invaluable function as collectors and editors. Improving their writing skills, Indian women will experiment more with style and structure and exercise fuller control over their material; frequently the recorder-editor will be eliminated from the narrative process. The desire to protect the uniqueness of Indian life which created the drama and structure of Indian women's narratives in the past will continue to do so, perhaps with new emphasis. Nevertheless, new alternatives in lifestyles will lead to new themes and modes of expression.

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