

Bo Schöler (ed.) *Coyote Was Here: Essays on Contemporary Native American Literary and Political Mobilization.* (Aarhus, Denmark: University of Aarhus, 1984. (Special Issue of *The Dolphin*, No. 9).) Distributed by Navajo Community College Press, \$12.50 paper.

Scholars doing research in ethnic literature have long been aware of the political nature of much of that literature. Although many critics find politicizing of literature difficult to deal with in their assessment of the artistic value of the works, it is dishonest to ignore this reality. Schöler has provided thirteen essays by creative writers and critics which define both the nature of the literature and the power of the political views which inform much of the creative output of contemporary American Indian writers. According to Schöler, "politics and aesthetics go hand in hand." Schöler and other European critics have done much to focus international attention on American Indian writers. Often their "outside" view provides insights about culture and political conflict which is difficult to assess from within.

Perhaps the strongest element of Schöler's book is that the essays include information on American Indian women from Zitkala Sa to those who are writing today: Wendy Rose, Anna Lee Walters, Leslie Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, Mary TallMountain, and Carol Sanchez. Missing from the discussions are materials on N. Scott Momaday and James Welch; their contemporaries Ray Young Bear, Gerald Vizenor, and Simon Ortiz do receive attention, however.

Wendy Rose, in her essay on white shamanism, makes a strong political statement about white writers who usurp and distort American cultures in their attempts to "be Indian." Such cultural imperialism is repugnant to Native American writers. Her essay is reinforced in the interview with Carol Hunter in which she extends her criticism to the racism she identifies in the feminist movement.

The anthology includes three groups of essays according to Schöler's introduction. Several of the essays provide an overview of American Indian literature, discussing tribal origins of contemporary poetry and fiction. Some of the essays focus on the writers themselves, as in the interview Carol Hunter has with Wendy Rose and in Ortiz's personal account of the interplay between his life and his writing. Ortiz writes: "There were always the stories . . . they were the truth." The links between tribal origins and contemporary expressions are examined and discussed by many of the contributors. The bulk of the book is made up of essays which focus on themes and works by individual writers. Here the reader finds detailed analyses of works by Zitkala Sa, Simon Ortiz, Leslie Silko, Ray Young Bear, and Gerald Vizenor. Joseph Bruchac, a writer himself, discusses the Long House tradition and its expression in contemporary poetry. The volume concludes with Ward Churchill's commentary on politics and poetry which he illustrates with several

poems.

The use of coyote in the title reminds readers who know the personality of this trickster of his duplicity. As Schöler points out, coyote in various forms is present in each of the writers in the anthology; so too is coyote a pervasive force in the universe: the force of human greed as well as folly. Schöler calls Coyote “a symbol of the unfailing and indomitable creative spirit that characterizes contemporary Native American writers.” As a force of greed, coyote is responsible for the present situation in the country, for it was greed that drove Europeans to steal Indian land, women, and now, the very identities and ideas of Indian writers. The folly is in the humor that many Indian writers maintain in spite of their situations. Perhaps Schöler is also satirizing the false expectation that white writers have that they can imitate Indian writers and thereby become something which they are not. Transformations are possible, but only for those who are “real” tricksters.

—Gretchen M. Bataille
Iowa State University

Ian Smart. *Central American Writers of West Indian Origin: A New Hispanic Literature.* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984) 149 pp., \$20.00; \$12.00 paper.

Ian Smart has made, as he himself asserts in the “Author’s Foreword,” a very limited approach to the very complex body of literature written by Central American authors of West Indian origin. In fact one wonders if indeed his most insistent premises are verifiable: “the region comprises one cultural area in which common factors have forged a more or less common way of looking at life . . . share an identifiable Weltanschauung.” His emphasis lies on the commonness of the West Indian experiences which he perceives to be African. To be sure, there are many critics who would take issue with him, some of whom he does allude to. The truth is that he treads on perilous, indeed highly controversial, ground. Many critics would indeed demand that we look at the nuances of differences among the authors as a way of perceiving the complexity of the Caribbean experience. To be sure, there has been a “shared” history to a point, but it is this very juncture which makes all the difference. Generally, critically speaking, one is concerned more with those areas of differences, no matter how minute, which do indeed distinguish one entity from another.

To be sure, Smart himself is inimitably qualified to write this work since he is at once a native Trinidadian and a scholar, currently teaching Spanish at Howard University. Nevertheless, one wonders at the very