

Katherine Spencer Halpern, Mary E. Holt, and Susan Brown McGreevy. *Guide to the Microfilm Edition of the Washington Matthews Papers.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985) 109 pp., \$15.00.

Today it is being argued that ethnology and literature intersect in some useful ways. Yet Washington Matthews demonstrated as much a century ago, before either of those disciplines had been developed within the American academic system. And although it has been overlooked, his achievement in having done so is considerable, as this potentially useful volume suggests.

Published as a companion to the Washington Matthews papers, which have been gathered and placed on microfilm by the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, the *Guide* contains a biographical sketch, a complete list of Matthews' writings both published and unpublished, a descriptive inventory of the Washington Matthews collection previously available only in the archives at the Wheelwright, and a description of Matthews' papers scattered among several other archival collections and assembled as part of the full microfilm aggregate. Thus this book serves as a handy reference guide to the work of a unique frontier intellectual whose literary background not only fortified his objective observations of Navajo life and culture, but led to an awareness that the New World actually has its own classical past, complete with an epic tradition which does indeed rival that of the Greeks, albeit on its own distinct terms.

An army surgeon who served on various posts along the Western Frontier and who began his most important work while stationed at Fort Wingate in New Mexico, Matthews had no formal training either in linguistics or field methods, simply because there was none to be had then. Instead he was an amateur in the best sense of that term, following the bent of his open-minded curiosity, corresponding with other like-minded early ethnographers and frontier scientists like Alexander Stephen, Frank Cushing and John Wesley Powell, and allowing his literary knowledge to lead him where it may as he made his own scientific observations. He was familiar with Darwin and Herbert Spencer, but he could also quote Homer, Virgil, and Milton. So for him the work of poets and literary critics and the concerns of scientists were not mutually distinct. Thus his eclecticism seems to have helped him discover how Navajo ceremonialism and storytelling fit into a broader cultural fabric, and how that cultural aggregate fits into the geography of the entire region of the San Juan River basin.

Perhaps that is why he could compare the characters in the Navajo creation story with various members of the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses while at the same time accepting Navajo medicine men as fellow practitioners. And when his work is examined as carefully as it deserves to be, such comparisons are neither unduly fanciful nor

extravagant. To the contrary, they help explain how poetry and science intersect in the Navajo world view, and they help us to understand how, whether we yet fully realize it or not, poetry helps make a society work for those who belong to it, just as it permits the human community to coexist with the natural environment.

Modern scholarship still cannot nail down such a realization, even at a time when barriers separating the various disciplines like ethnology and poetics are allegedly breaking down. Why that is the case I cannot easily say, but perhaps the key to understanding how poetry fully meshes with other aspects of culture, or how art and technology interface in a workaday world, lies in gaining a full understanding of the tribal life of Native Americans. It is probably too late to study that life the way Matthews studied it, but he leaves an admirably clear record of his discoveries and of his openminded way of making them, as his papers indicate. Thanks to the effort that has gone into assembling those documents and producing this companion volume, we can now see as much for ourselves.

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Trudier Harris. *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985) 230 pp., \$22.50.

Trudier Harris walks a narrow line between a feminist critique of James Baldwin's shortcomings as a masculinist writer and a critical appreciation of the complexity and progression in Baldwin's fictional portrayals of black women. It is not an easy maneuver, but her balance is sure and steady.

Harris presents detailed analyses of the women characters in five books: *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), *Going To Meet the Man* (1965), *Another Country* (1962), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), and *Just Above My Head* (1979). In every case, she notes that Baldwin's women are male-oriented; that is, "they are incomplete without men or male images in their lives because wholeness without males is not a concept the majority of them have internalized." In Harris's view, this refusal to grant woman an existence independent of God or man is due to sexist shortsightedness on Baldwin's part, rather than a reflection of cultural reality.

Harris's complaint is not that the black feminine ethic of care Baldwin presents is destructive, but that Baldwin simultaneously deprives the women of the power of self. For contrast, one might look at the women characters in the fiction of Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, or Toni