

of her children, where the members of the extended family passed down their wisdom to the younger generation. Ortiz Cofer describes the scene: "It was on these rockers that my mother, her sisters and my grandmother sat on these afternoons of my childhood to tell their stories, teaching each other and my cousin and me what it was like to be a woman, more specifically, a Puerto Rican woman." Many times what they recited to the young were *cuentos*, the "morality and cautionary tales told by the women in our family for generations: stories that became part of my subconscious as I grew up in two worlds, the tropical island and the cold city, and which would later surface in my dreams and in my poetry."

What Judith Ortiz Cofer gives us in this book then is not a chronicle of her life, but a reclamation of significant memories that, as she explains, "connect myself to the threads of lives that have touched mine and at some point converged into the tapestry that is my memory of childhood." She weaves this tapestry with pieces of prose writing interspersed with poems that illustrate the experiences and tales she relates.

After reading Ortiz Cofer's remembrances, the reader quite clearly understands that her divided loyalties have been somewhat resolved. She has decided to live in a bicultural world—building her professional life in the modern North American city in which she now resides, but spending a great deal of time visiting her mother in the small Puerto Rican town where she has settled permanently. Here her mother has assumed the elderly Mamá's role of reciting tales in order to preserve the life she loves. However, her mother's world is doomed by the intrusions of "progress." The Pueblo now is surrounded by shopping malls, condominiums, and even a Burger King.

The book ends on this sad observation by the now mature Ortiz Cofer. However, she has helped us to remember and understand a rich and exciting culture that is fast disappearing, along with all the other "old" cultures in the world.

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**Laura Coltelli. *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) ix, 211 pp., \$22.50.**

Among the interviews in this volume, which were conducted in September 1985, some are quite important, all of them are extremely interesting, and together they form an aggregate that cannot be ignored by anyone currently working in the field, for collectively they raise a number of issues that are central to current discussions of (specifically) American Indian and (generally) "minority" literatures.

There is, above all, the question of the systemic origins of textual meaning, which ties in with the question of legitimate and illegitimate readings of a text. Coltelli begins her introduction with a programmatic flourish: "Before we can

make valid critical interpretations of the works of American Indian writers, we must consider their traditional and historical background,” and she consistently directs the interviews towards questions of *traditional* sources. The relevant context for American Indian texts is thereby defined more or less monolithically, and as essentially different, or radically “other.”

This coupling of the contemporary anglophone American Indian text with the traditional non-anglophone culture tends to disregard the interculturality of much contemporary “minority” writing, which emerges from several of the interviews themselves in different ways. Paula Gunn Allen, who (like other authors) characterizes American Indian literature as multi-ethnic, insists on the multiplicity of her own cultural backgrounds and her freedom to choose among them for her life and work; in this context, she talks at length about the work of *translation*, as does Simon Ortiz. James Welch carefully (and humorously) evades all suggestions to the contrary made by Coltelli, who occasionally is an over enthusiastic and somewhat intrusive interviewer, and firmly characterizes his own texts as contemporary “western” novels that stand in the “dominant” tradition, rather than as recreations of traditional storytelling. Wendy Rose and Gerald Vizenor, more consistently than others, explore the metaphor of the *half-breed* and related notions of intercultural communication (and conflict)—Rose more pragmatically and in a more linear fashion, Vizenor in his characteristic balancing of opposites. Leslie Silko’s stress on the aspect of change, which is clearer with her than with many of the other authors, also belongs in this context. Finally, the same basic gesture towards interculturality occurs when N. Scott Momaday aligns himself to an experience of the American West as well as to a tradition of western art, which he bases on a single notion of creativity—defined, in one sense, as the making of images. It is in this interview, too, that he talks a bit about one of the sources of his modernist views: his studying under Yvor Winters.

At the same time, authors—Momaday foremost among them—display a tendency to ground their own and others’ works in *place*, a notion that does imply the continuity of a specific line of tradition, viewed holistically. Allen thus focuses on the impact of the traditions of their respective cultural areas on the work of Momaday, Silko and Welch; Ortiz describes his work as being imbedded in place, and the notion recurs in different shapes with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, Linda Hogan, and many others. It is no wonder then that the introduction, which is an overview of points raised in the interviews rather than the presentation of an independent critical position, tends to connect opposites: American Indian literature is innovative *and* traditional, or “rooted in the past, as well as in contemporary social realities.” It is also “easily distinguished . . . [from] ‘white shamanism,’” although Coltelli uses many of the stereotypes employed by pseudo-“Native” writing to characterize the genuine product; and it is tribal as well as pan-Indian. On one level, the introduction thus avoids dealing with many of the gravest problems of legitimation encountered by contemporary native writing (not only in the US), and by American Indian cultures in general. On another level, this strategy is useful in that it prepares readers for the great variety of viewpoints that they are going to encounter; at the

same time it does raise the questions of tradition and innovation, the legitimate and the fake, and tribalism vs. pan-Indianism in their minds.

It is impossible to refer to all areas discussed in the volume. But one should at least mention in passing that Allen most clearly tries to effect a fusion of nativeness and feminism (and it is very interesting to compare her gestures of inclusion and connection with Hogan's careful distinctions between native and white feminism, for instance, or between the views expressed in individual texts and what may appertain to the literature as a whole); that Ortiz establishes a well-developed framework of post-colonialism for his writing; that the Vizenor interview is perhaps the most useful text in the collection as consistent self-interpretation, though another candidate for this qualification is Welch's, which is very specifically on the traditions and conventions employed in his novels; that Silko, in a preamble to her interview, connects it with her then ongoing work on *Almanac of the Dead* and points out that it predominantly "has interest and value in so far as it illuminated the evolution of certain characteristics and themes in *Almanac*," and that Erdrich/Dorris make quite clear the extent of their collaboration.

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**Adelaide M. Cromwell, ed. *Dynamics of the African/Afro-American Connection: From Dependency to Self-Reliance*. (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1987) xviii, 161 pp., \$17.95.**

This book is a valuable contribution to African and African American studies in that it brings together and reviews the history of relationships between people of African descent. This book is also important because it details the social, political, and economic issues that affected the development of and communication between Africans and Afro-Americans. The quality, style, and content of the articles vary, but the sequence in which the articles are presented in the book seems logically ordered.

The book contains the papers presented at a seminar held in Liberia in January of 1983. The stated intent of the seminar was:

1. To assess the relationship and improve communication between Africans and Afro-Americans with the result of improving both identities.
2. To increase the understanding of Afro-Americans of the complexities and values of African societies, and of Africans of the role and status of Afro-Americans in American society.
3. To make more viable and effective the role of Afro-Americans in US/African relations.

While the complete achievement of these goals would be a lofty accomplishment, they were fulfilled to a degree. The book was very successful at summarizing the history of African/Afro-American interaction. The extent to which