

Explorations in Sights and Sounds

momma so crazy she think a
angel did it to her nanananananananaaaaaa" (48)

In this poem, as is the case with a few others, the narrator's tone and attitude change markedly throughout the poem, so that by the end, one is left speechless. Silence is the only appropriate response.

davenport's poems are powerful; the language is raw and free. davenport takes readers on a journey through untraveled regions and introduces ideas that will cause many to question the very foundation of their moral beliefs. *Voodoo Chile - Slight Return: Poems* is a bold collection of poems that explores old terrain with new insights, and offers new and vibrant interpretations of some subjects readers might hold sacred. doris davenport wrings and stretches language. As with her line-break, where a foot never ends a thought, but rather requires that readers move to the next line, davenport titillates and seduces readers with her often provocative ideas. This collection of poems is appropriately titled and celebrates the endless possibilities of poetics.

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Brian W. Dippie. *George Catlin and His Contemporaries: The Politics of Patronage.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) 553 pp., \$50.00.

Although Americans in the 1990's often argue whether an artist's or researcher's work merits public funding, many agree that we should fund both the arts and scientific inquiry in nearly all their diverse forms. But the basic question of patronage remains. Federal and private funding of arts and science-related work were much in question over a hundred years ago, when the artist George Catlin requested that the United States government purchase his American Indian collection.

For decades following, it was the same story. Even though other artists and researchers (Schoolcraft, Eastman, Squirer) obtained funding, Catlin's hope for support remained unrequited. Try as he might, all attempts at obtaining government patronage failed. It was not until 1874, two years after his death, that the painter's daughter, Sarah, donated Catlin's lifework and artifact collection to the Smithsonian when, once again, money for the purchase could not be found in the federal budget.

The life of the painter from Pennsylvania, and those of the artists, ethnologists, antiquarians, Indian specialists, scientists, and others of various stripe for whom he fought for over forty years, has

been marvelously woven into a narrative tapestry by Professor Dippie. This densely elaborated study is less about the career of George Catlin (1796-1872) and the Native Americans whom he chose to study than it is of the ruthless pursuit of private and government patronage by certain professionals whose interest in self-promotion and career building is evident even today in many scholars and artists. The portrait of Catlin, of an era, and of the phenomenon of patronage painstakingly delineated in this book are not so attractive as the nearly one-hundred and fifty color and black and white illustrations presented throughout.

As Professor Dippie shows, the years from 1830 to 1836 were the most crucial for Catlin's production of works related to the Native Americans. Although his urge to travel and work drove Catlin from Philadelphia to the Rocky Mountains, north to Russian Alaska, south to the Amazon and Peru, and thence to years of work in England and Europe, those six years out west were unarguably seminal in his artistic career. From that time on Catlin's life seems to have been a frequently unsuccessful effort to survive in a seething battle for sufficient government support for his work—literary, artistic, or scientific.

With deft interweaving of historical resources, visual art works, and biographical sketches into a cogent organization of the whole, the author succeeds in both isolating and integrating his subjects so as to elucidate individual motives and illuminate an entire historical period. Although the artist-researcher-showman-author Catlin heads the list of characters, much more is available to the careful reader than a cursory examination of the many excellent illustrations will indicate.

In a catalogue prepared to accompany one of his travelling exhibitions of "Indian" paintings, George Catlin unfortunately overlooked the typographical error "hung in guilt frames" (331). Brian Dippie exploits this nineteenth-century proofreading oversight and metaphorically connects the unfortunate phrase to numerous of Catlin's professional activities away from the easel. Dippie's careful work reveals the myriad arcane plots and characters of the patronage system during Catlin's time: unscrupulous husbands of ambitious and neglected wives; great events and dashed hopes; amoral elected officials and officious royalty. Those who sought to document the American Indians and those who fought to support them enter and leave the story in tableaux as colorful and diverse as the subjects in Catlin's paintings. The names and activities of Jefferson Davis, Alexander Von Humbolt, King Louis-Phillipe, Daniel Webster, and Phineas T. Barnum appear with those of lesser known players in the patronage-seeking maze.

Catlin went westward with the intent to create an artistic

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record of the native peoples untainted by civilization. In this he succeeded more than did any other artist working during his lifetime. But after working for less than ten years in the west the artist returned to the eastern United States seeking support for his work. Indeed, Catlin spent the rest of his life vainly trying to acquire a permanent venue for his unique visual documentation of Native American lifeway.

Both the Smithsonian and the New York Historical Society were courted as potential patrons. Catlin also searched for support and patronage among government officials, often supporting his efforts by means of commercial showmanship more appropriate to the circus than to fine arts exhibitions of the period. Perhaps more support for Catlin's work came from the nineteenth-century sciences—anthropology, archeology, and geology—than from the art establishment. As Dippie so ably and thoroughly explains, Catlin the painter had less difficulty in obtaining commissions for works than did Catlin the cultural recorder in finding sources to underwrite publications and to fund projects.

Dippie further proposes that Catlin's efforts were advanced as much by the artist's claims for the instructive value of his oeuvre as by the aesthetic merit of his paintings alone. For many of the so-called "Indian specialists" of the time claimed to be guided in their work by their status as scientist or naturalist.

Several chapters in Dippie's volume focus on those who were in direct competition with Catlin for patronage. In the often acrimonious conflicts and quarrels among the various painters, writers, scientists and government agents, more was at stake than mere dollars, which Dippie amply demonstrates through his detailed references to letters and archival materials. And although the scanner of titles may initially come to this book expecting to find documentation of the visual legacy of Catlin's art, the work's more substantial contribution goes far beyond a simple record or detailed biographical rendering.

Professor Dippie has not written primarily about the appearance and meaning of individual artworks by the painter George Catlin. His scholarship here has more to do with cataloging, describing, and analyzing the system of description that Catlin intended to build. Dippie asks and answers questions about Catlin and his contemporaries which have received scant attention in previous studies of the artist or the period. For example: If the work of Catlin was intended to form a coherent whole, what was the underlying *raison d'être*? How successful was the artist in fulfilling his stated goal(s)? How does Catlin's system of recording the Native American lifeway stand in relation to other organized means of inquiry of the time? How does Catlin's work interface with the foci of the

multicultural researchers of today?

Brian Dippie has accomplished many things in this scholarly and important work. Personalities and events, in their broad scope and complex interplay, are clearly and cleverly interwoven without being lost as mere elements or components of the overall story. The author has provided a chronicle of survival and failure, of noble cause and ignoble gesture. Yet all the while there is a thread of humor and sympathy which adds detail to this scrupulously rendered examination of George Catlin and his contemporaries, in their political and social contexts, and with their activities and accomplishments.

Although the illustrations seem sometimes only loosely related to the text they are certainly essential to it. This is a book which has elicited and received wide and universally positive reviews. The scope of its coverage, the quality of the research, the documentation of bibliographic and archival sources all make Dippie's work of foremost importance for those interested in Native American history and the development of cultural studies focused on indigenous peoples of the Americas.

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Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa). *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains*. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) 241 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains was first published in 1918 and contains short biographical narratives on fifteen American Indian leaders. Included in the vignettes are such well-known individuals as Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, and Sitting Bull, and lesser recognized persons such as Tamahay and Two Strike. Most of the individuals are Lakota/Dakota but Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Dull Knife and Little Wolf of the Northern Cheyenne, Roman Nose of the Southern Cheyenne, and Hole-in-the-Day of the Ojibwa are also included in the volume.

However, this book is not the typical account of nineteenth-century American Indian leaders written from the vantage point of the late twentieth-century. The unique perspective of the author as well as its historical frame of reference render this book particularly interesting. In fact, the personal background of Charles Eastman American Indians at the turn of the century.