in measured terms. Complications of poor sanitation and diseases such as typhoid, scarlet fever, measles, influenza, whooping cough, and pneumonia are described with objectivity. Finger details these difficulties as they parallel each breakthrough in education, sanitation, health care, economic developments of the twentieth century.

In all of these areas, Finger notes the strengths of the Cherokee: They retain their cultural foundations—exhibited in ball play, crafts, dance, and spirituality—as well as their language, with its logic and perspective.

Cherokee cultural foundations become the focus of economic development through tourism: the creation of the Cherokee Historical Association, the outdoor drama "Unto These Hills," the Qualla Arts and Crafts Cooperative, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, and the Oconaluftee Indian Village. In each of these developments, the Eastern Cherokee band preceded other Cherokee groups in Oklahoma and served as their model.

Finger notes that attitudes differ toward the Cherokee in the East and those in the West. He concludes that "Eastern Cherokees retain more of their myths, legends, and traditional dances, and their version of the ball play (p. 182)."

Cherokee Americans allows for parallels between past, present, and future and between history, myth, and personal experience. But the views expressed in the book grow beyond the idea that the past merely informs the present. Finger understands that the past lives in the present. His text moves the reader to overcome old codes and to collapse divisions that serve as intellectual barriers. Finger's conclusions provide truths extending beyond the historic ethnocentricities that have inhibited understanding in other studies of the Cherokee in the twentieth century.

Howard Meredith
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

Interpreting the Indian: Twentieth Century Poets and the Native American. By Michael Castro. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. 221 pages. $12.95 paper.

Michael Castro's *Interpreting the Indian* is the first book-length critical study of the many ways Native American culture has affected American literature, especially poetry. Laudably, he recognizes that this impact has sometimes occurred through misun-

derstanding and that even the best-intentioned misapprehension is still problematical. With some American poets, the impact of Native American culture has been obvious, with others more subtle, and Castro frequently is able to ennoble even the most obviously ham-fisted borrowings by providing historical context.

Castro's approach is chronological: His preface provides the underpinning necessary to understand the efforts of early ethnologists as they slowly shook off the distancing stereotypes of the noble savage and the brutish savage. His own background as an oral poet performing with the jazz musicians of the Human Arts Ensemble in St. Louis perhaps allows Castro his lucid explanation of the ways in which an almost exclusively oral tradition of chants, charms, and songs is reduced by the very term *poetry* or stripped of mimetic, dramatic, and ceremonial context when contemplated by a solitary, silent reader. With the early ethnologists who tried to describe this context for a scholarly audience Castro has some sympathy, but he shows much less sympathy as he describes in detail the failures of techniques employed by poets and "translators" to interpret Native American "poetry" loosely for white audiences. These failures are shown, finally, as failures of sympathy or cognitive understanding by Mary Austin, the Imagists, Alice Corbin Henderson, Pauline Johnson. At the same time, Castro is candid in his assessment of the real impact of early collections like *Path on the Rainbow* and Austin's *The American Rhythm,* whose long introductory essay did much to establish Native American culture as a source of ideas, themes, and images for American poets, and to begin the serious consideration of the techniques of Native American literatures.

Castro's argument is carefully bolstered by the structure of *Interpreting the Indian.* He discusses Vachel Lindsay, Hart Crane, and William Carlos Williams as a triad of poets who conceive of the Indian almost purely as a symbol, emblematic of a way of being that is rooted in the American landscape, intimate with the land yet expanded in consciousness. This triad contrasts sharply with Lew Sarett and John G. Neihardt, whose intimate contact with Indians allowed them to develop specific examples of this "Indian consciousness." Castro is able to cut through Sarett's often mediocre-at-best verse to portray his honest attempt to place the Indian "in the context of his contemporary reality" in poems like "The Box of God."

Interpreting the Indian is anchored by a close verbal analysis of *Black Elk Speaks* and the transcripts of Neihardt's conversations

with Black Elk. Castro's analysis shows that Neihardt approached the final composition of the text not as an anthropologist dedicated to fact but as a poet, "interested in images and essences." In fact, Castro demonstrates conclusively, as no other Neihardt critic—literary, anthropological, or psychological—has before, that Neihardt deleted several key portions of Black Elk's vision. Neihardt's deletions of part of the Fifth Grandfather's speech—of any mention of a "war-herb" given to Black Elk at the same time that he receives the "daybreak star herb" that symbolizes his power to heal, and of a long vision of Black Elk himself attacking and defeating an enemy—serve to minimize the violent aspects of the vision and maintain the structure that emphasizes Black Elk's holistic theme. In fact, Castro asserts that even the diction of "one of many hoops that made one circle" was Neihardt's own rendering of Black Elk's idea, images chosen by the white poet for thematic emphasis.

Equally lucid—if not so startling—verbal and technical analysis informs Castro's discussion of Olson, Rothenberg, and Snyder, all of whom sought, from Indian culture and literature, new techniques and new relationships to nature and to place. All three of these poets, representing what we now consider three separate, major, modern schools of poetry, saw Native American literature as an alternative to the ironic, academic verse fed on by the then-dying New Criticism. Olson sought a poetic form based on breath and a technique that "enacted rather than described." Rothenberg's "total translations"—for which Castro details both successes and failures, as, for example, various ways in which Rothenberg deals with the translation of vocables—depended in large measure on Olson's precepts for projective verse. Rothenberg, unlike any previous translator, refused to reduce ritual forms to conventional American poems. Like Olson, he saw this ritual language and the culture it carried as part of "a fabric of modern sources of knowledge pointing Western man away from his egotism, isolation, and alienation and toward a fuller and more harmonious relation with the universe around and within." Snyder writes, with what Olson would call "participation mystique," poems "in touch with the interacting rhythms of body, mind, and place." His deceptively simple poems, which register and narrate impressions of nature with the language of immediate experience, almost always point the reader to a belonging-in-nature, not a domination-of-nature. This is stated most explicitly in Snyder's adaptation of a traditional Mohawk prayer, "Prayer for the Great Family."

In dealing with the resurgence of Indian literature, this time written in English, Castro deals bluntly with Silko and Hobson's charges that American Indian literature is, first of all, not public property and that it is racist to assume that whites can, through some sort of superior intelligence or imagination, easily assimilate its ideas. Castro points out that the first position is not widely shared: The Hopi, for example, and Black Elk himself maintain that Indian teachings are for the world. While Silko declares that the American wish to "inhabit the soul of another people" is "pathetic evidence that in two hundred years Anglo Americans have failed to create a satisfactory identity for themselves," Castro argues staunchly that this search for a uniquely American identity is not pathetic but is a healthy recognition that Americans must forge nondestructive relationships with their language, with the landscape, with the ecology, and with the other people on this continent. The thesis of *Interpreting the Indian* is that, whether successful or failed, a steady line of American poets have looked to Indian culture and literatures as models of those relationships.

Interpreting the Indian is a complex, sympathetic, and open-minded history of the long relationship between American and Native American literatures—a relationship that, until recently, has been very one-sided. It is an account made richer by Michael Castro's sometimes minute analysis and by his background as a multimedia performance poet. Castro knows he is dealing with controversial material: He chose Maurice Kenny, the Mohawk poet, to write the preface for *Interpreting the Indian.* In that preface, Kenny points to Castro's finding that American poets are at times distorting, fraudulent, or "belligerently inaccurate" in "stealing Native American myths." He does not seem impressed that "these attempts reveal a real hunger for unity with inner and outer nature, and for an art indigenously American." Pointing the reader to Indian literature to learn about Indian culture, Kenny proclaims that "Native Americans are quite capable of defining themselves." That Castro chose this preface indicates his even-handed conception of the complexity of the task he performs admirably in *Interpreting the Indian.*

John Woodrow Presley
Lafayette College