

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Stories of the Sioux. By Luther Standing Bear.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5m2538tz>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 12(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Marken, Jack

Publication Date

1988-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Stories of the Sioux. By Luther Standing Bear. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. Bison Book. 79 pages. \$12.95 Cloth. \$4.95 Paper.

This small collection contains twenty short tales, ranging in length from about three hundred to a thousand words. They are an interesting lot, but they added very little to the canon of Sioux stories when they first appeared in 1934. By then several collections by Charles A. Eastman and his wife Elaine Goodale had been published. And Ella Deloria's *Dakota Texts* had appeared two years earlier. The best single collection of tales of the western Sioux, it has not been superseded.

Standing Bear's collection contains no stories about Iktomi, the Sioux trickster, or Iya, the ogre. Nothing about Two-Face or Stone Boy. Nevertheless Standing Bear's stories fit under several traditional categories of tales. Some are mythological stories. "The Old Woman Who Lived with the Wolves" is about a lost woman cared for by wolves, who after returning home collects meat from her band to feed her wild friends. Knowing their language, she later learns from them when blizzards or enemies are approaching. "The Hunter Who Was Saved by the Eagles" is supposedly about a friend of Standing Bear's grandfather, who was saved from a cliff ledge by holding onto the legs of two baby eagles, leaping off, and being carried to the ground. "The Magic Tree" is about a cottonwood which bounds noisily across the prairie until it arrives near others of its kind at a creek and roots in. "The Holy Dog" is about the sudden appearance of a horse among the Sioux and its taming by an intrepid warrior. In "Thunder Horse" after a storm a large rock near a Sioux village contains the hoofprint of a great horse on it. And in "The First Fire, a young warrior discovers fire by accident, brings it home, and others discover it cooks buffalo meat.

Some of the stories seem to be accounts of actual historical events. In "The Arrow-Thrower," the warrior throws an arrow into a person trying to steal his father's horses. "Standing Bear's Horse" is about Standing Bear's grandfather's horse which finds a lone buffalo and saves a band of warriors from starvation. In "Crow Butte" the place is so-named because a group of Crow warriors escaped from Sioux warriors there. "The Snow Woman" is about a news carrier discovering a sleeping woman running away from a potentially bad husband. The news carrier

takes her to a neighboring band and marries her. In "Grandmother and the Bear" an elderly woman frightens a bear away.

A few stories deal with the power of medicine men. One, evidently a Yuwipi medicine man, tells White Crow where to find his lost horses, one of which he gives to the medicine man in "How the Medicine-Man Found the Lost Horses." In "The Deer Dreamer," a medicine man has the power to force deer to enter a deer trap. In "Thunder Dreamer the Medicine Man," during a gathering of a band of Sioux a medicine man calms the wind and rain and brings the sun out, a power which some medicine men are still said to possess. In "The Year of the Buffalo," a buffalo dreamer brings buffalo to a starving band of Sioux.

Three stories contain accounts of human emotions in animals. One buffalo succors a wounded brother until he is well enough to rejoin the herd in "Buffalo Brothers." A colt pitifully cries and laments at losing his mother in "The Singing Colt." He is found by Horse Dreamer for whom the colt becomes the winner of all races. "The Faithful Horse" is about a wounded horse who walks painfully to his owner's tipi several days after being given up for dead on the battlefield.

Two stories are about uncommon acts by seemingly ordinary people. In "The Leap of Hawk Dreamer," a warrior makes a prodigious leap to escape pursuing enemies—it seems almost every tribe has such a story. "The Woman Who Killed the Owl" is a humorous title for a story in which a woman threw a large bone to silence a persistent hooting owl. The next day it was discovered that she had killed a Crow warrior who had been hovering nearby.

These little stories are like others which appear in collections of Sioux tales. They have a simplicity and charm that capture the rural spirit of early Lakota life in which closeness to natural scenes and animals gave a freshness and uncomplicated pleasure to life. They are most like stories which are in *Legends of the Mighty Sioux*, compiled by Workers of the South Dakota Writers Project and published in 1941. This collection of forty short tales has been reprinted at least twice. A number of tales from this were dramatized in a beautiful film by Charles and Jane Nauman of Nauman Films in South Dakota in the late 1960s.

The major collections of Sioux tales are the following: Martha W. Beckwith, "Mythology of the Oglala Dakota," *Journal of American Folklore* 43 (Oct.-Dec. 1930), 339-67, which were collected from the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1926; Eugene Buechel,

Lakota Tales and Texts, ed. Paul Manhart, Pine Ridge: Holy Rosary Mission, 1978, entirely in Lakota, these have not been translated for publication; Ella C. Deloria, *Dakota Texts*, New York: G. E. Stechert, 1932, reprinted in Vermillion, SD: Dakota Press, 1978, still the best collection of stories from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in western South Dakota; Charles A. Eastman and Elaine Goodale, *Smoky Day's Wigwam Evenings: Indian Stories Retold*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1924, these short tales focus on animals, and each ends with a stated moral; Eastman and Goodale, *Wigwam Evenings: Sioux Folk Tales Retold*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1909, reprinted Eau Claire, WI: E. M. Hale, 1937, these two collections are of eastern Sioux, who were Dakota speakers; Mary H. Eastman, *Dahcotah; or Life and Legends of the Sioux Around Fort Snelling*, 1849, reprinted Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1962, and New York: Arno Press, 1975, this contains seventeen legends, accounts, and other material collected by a woman who was unsympathetic toward the Sioux.

Other important collections not mentioned above are *The Sound of Flutes and Other Indian Legends*, ed. Richard Erdoes, with stories by Lame Deer, Jenny Leading Cloud, Leonard Crow Dog, and others, New York: Pantheon Books, 1976, here are thirty short legends told by twelve storytellers; James LaPointe, *Legends of the Lakota*, San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1976, a retelling of twenty tales; Marie L. McLaughlin, *Myths and Legends of the Sioux*, 1916, reprinted Bismarck, ND: Tumbleweed Press, 1974, contains approximately forty tales collected by a part Sioux who was married to Agent James McLaughlin; Stephen R. Riggs, *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography*, ed. James Owen Dorsey, Washington: GPO, 1983, part Second, "Texts," contains eight stories in Dakota with interlineal and free translations, an important early collection, it has been reprinted twice; Ronnie D. Theisz, *Buckskin Tokens: Contemporary Oral Narratives of the Lakota*, Aberdeen, SD: North Plains Press, 1975, the narrators are Henry Black Elk, Kate Blue Thunder, Irene Clairmont, and Christine Dunham.

Wilson D. Wallis made an important collection of stories of the Sioux of Canada. It is "Beliefs and Tales of the Canadian Dakota," *Journal of American Folklore* 36 (1923), 36-101. These were told by Sioux at Portage La Prairie and Griswold in Manitoba in 1914. Elaine A. Jahner has edited James R. Walker's *Lakota Myth*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. With over four hundred pages of stories and comment, it is the most important

of the recent collections. It is highly useful for information about the Lakota belief system as Walker understood it from the medicine men who told him these tales.

A final collection is by Zitkala-Sa, *Old Indian Legends*, Boston: Ginn & Co., 1901. This contains fourteen tales, mostly with Iktomi as central character. This has been reprinted in 1987 by the University of Nebraska Press.

Jack Marken
Professor Emeritus
South Dakota State University

Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays. Edited by Christian F. Feest. Aachen: Edition Herodot, Rader Verlag, 1987. 643 pages. \$70.00 Paper.

This massive collection of thirty-two interdisciplinary essays, edited by the noted ethnologist and curator C. F. Feest of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna, pursues four main themes. It offers, first, a series of studies that establish aspects of the pictorial record of indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere as preserved in European collections since the mid-sixteenth century. The work explores, second, what might be called ethnological entrepreneurship, that is the collection and exhibition not only of artifacts but also of either forcibly imported or contractually engaged indigenous people who were put on display for profit, to a lesser degree also for the spread of ethnographic knowledge. The collection probes, third, European thinking about indigenous people as expressed in newspaper reports, learned essays, literary texts, or ritual practices of "Indianizing" organizations. A fourth, if sparsely covered theme examines the reaction of indigenous visitors of the northern Western Hemisphere to nineteenth and twentieth century Europe.

A good third of the essays were given as papers at the annual meeting of the informal American Indian Workshop that convened in Rome in 1984, the others were written specifically for this work. According to its editor it pursues three goals: It hopes "to explain European preoccupation with Native Americans/Indians" (page 1), to promote a hitherto neglected field of research, and to intimate the wealth of materials hidden in European depositories. The collection achieves these stated goals. The sec-