Journal of American Studies of Turkey
26 (2007) : 111 - 112

Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry.

Eds. Dean Rader and Janice Gould. Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona P, 2003. 294 pp.

Demet Satılmış

Modern American Indian poetry has been blooming with considerable variety and speed since the Native American Renaissance in the late 1960s. It offers an amazing multiplicity in form and content and yet a common flavor to add certain character to it. Today, it is "the most exciting literature being written in America" (Rader 128). However, there is very little scholarly work published on it both in the US and abroad. This book has a significant place within this limited number of publications, as it offers the first and— so far— the only collection of essays on contemporary American Indian poetry.

With this consciousness in mind, the scope of the essays include topics like the hints of Native oral storytelling tradition in today's American Indian poetry, women poets and their works, genocide and continuance as represented in poetry, and American values in Indian literature. The essays are from scholars and poets such as Janice Gould, Marilou Awiakta, Paula Gunn Allen, Carter Revard, and Simon Ortiz as well as from emerging scholars such as Dean Rader and Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez, and from established scholars in the field like Robert M. Nelson and Elaine A. Jahner.

The book begins with an introduction written in the form of a dialogue between the two editors Dean Rader and Janice Gould. The editors discuss American Indian poetry and the possible reasons for its lack of publication as well as its development throughout the past few decades.

There are fourteen essays on American Indian poetry in this collection. The issues of gender, identity, community, place, aesthetics, language, and criticism are all discussed within these essays; therefore, providing a large palette for a first collection. Among the ones that stand out is Simon Ortiz's dated but still compelling essay "Song/Poetry and Language—Expression and Perception" in which he discusses the interconnectedness of word and physical world, and the function of language as not only a way of expression but also perception. Another one is Carter Revard's "Herbs of Healing: American Values in American Indian literature," where he discusses the healing power and contribution of American Indian poetry to today's American literature while drawing certain correlations between Indian poetry and the canon with various examples.

Dean Rader's "The Epic Lyric: Genre and Contemporary American Indian Poetry" clears out the stage by trying to provide a definition for the unique character

of Indian poetry and offering a solution for a proper criticism of Indian poetry—an issue of debate for some time now. On the other hand, Paula Gunn Allen's "Answering the Deer: Genocide and Continuance in the Poetry of American Indian Women" and Janice Gould's "Poems and Maps in American Indian Women's Writing" present valuable insights to Indian women's perspectives and acts on various Indian issues through writing.

In brief, this valuable first collection would be of interest not only to the readers of Indian poetry but also to the ones who wish to take a look at ethnic literatures and contemporary American poetry today.

Works Cited

Rader, Dean. "The Epic Lyric: Genre and Contemporary American Indian Poetry." *Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry.* Ed. Dean Rader and Janice Gould. Tucson, AZ: U of Arizona P, 2003. 123-142.