



## BOOK REVIEW

*Native American Picture Books of Change: The Art of Historic Children's Editions*, by Rebecca C. Benes with a foreword by Gloria Emerson. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2004. Ilus., notes, biblio., index, 168 pages. ISBN0-89013-471-5, \$45.00.

Almost as soon as Elizabeth Willis De Huff, wife of the newly-appointed superintendent of the Santa Fe Indian School, John De Huff, arrived in 1918, she began to involve herself in the education of the children. Here she found military discipline; English only; a substandard educational system, devoid of the arts; and teaching material that was totally irrelevant to the lives of the Native children. By encouraging the students to share their folklore and songs, she collected some 50 tales, which she compiled into a reader-sized book. For an illustrator, she turned to a talented student, 18-year-old Fred Kabotie. Harcourt-Brace published the book, *Tatay's Tales*, in 1922, and nominated it for the American Library Association's Newberry Award, that honored the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children in 1923. It lost by one vote—to Hugh Lofting's *Voyages of Dr. Doolittle!*

Thus began four decades of publishing, whereby Anglo writers, teachers, and folklorists, desperate for books and materials that related to the Indian students' cultural traditions, collaborated to produce English and bilingual books that also featured some soon-to-be leading Native artists of the 20th century, including Allan Houser, Oscar Howe, Gerald Nailor, Quincy Tahoma, Andrew Tsinajinnie, Hoke Denetsosie, and Andrew Standing Soldier.

The publication of *Native American Picture Books of Change*, which is itself a spectacular book, and a very good read, culminated some 20 years of prodigious archival research. The author stresses, "This is not a study of Native American Education even though education and educators do enter into the story. It would be more accurate to say that it is a first step in explaining the history and motivations behind some unique books that are among the most interesting and groundbreaking of all American children's literature" (p. 4). In addition, Benes not only analysis style and critiques the art, but tells us something about each artist.

Dorothy Dunn was hired to run the art program at the Santa Fe Indian School in 1932. Dunn had a profound influence on her students, encouraging

them to paint what they knew, rejecting the European tradition of representing form and space through perspective. Howe, Begay, Hauser, Nailor, and Tsinajinnie were among her famous students. By this time, the *Meriam Report* was out and when John Collier became Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1933 he set out to redirect an educational system that was relevant to the students' cultural background.

Isis Harrington, principal of The Albuquerque Indian School between 1922 and 1933, was another who believed that instruction should relate to the children's cultural heritage, and her work reflected the reforms recommended by the *Meriam Report*. She produced a small reader, *Komoki of the Cliffs*, about a Hopi boy from Oraibi, and her children illustrated the book with some forty watercolors. They must have been very pleased when the American Society of Graphic Artists included the book in its list of the 50 best illustrated books of 1934.

In 1939, Louise Abieta (E-Yeh-Shure, Blue Corn), a student in Isleta Pueblo, New Mexico, published one of the first books by an American Indian, *I am a Pueblo Indian Girl*, which was illustrated by three of the leading Indian painters of the century: Houser, Nailor, and Tahoma. At first it was not well received since American readers did not understand the book. However, according to Rebecca Benes, it has come full circle and the book is "exceptional for the sheer beauty of its illustrations and its haunting poetry and for being one of the first picture books ever to be written and illustrated by Native Americans" (p. 34). Years later, Pablita Velarde of Santa Clara Pueblo, also influenced by Dorothy Dunn, wrote and illustrated her own book, *Old Father Storyteller* (1960). "I thought it would be a good thing if an Indian wrote an Indian book" (p. 128), she said.

More changes were to come when Willard Beatty became director of education for the BIA in 1936. Believing that bilingual textbooks would further literacy in both languages, he conceived the idea of four series of Indian Life Readers at the third grade level for Hopi, Navajo, Pueblo, and Sioux (now Lakota) children, and hired educator Ann Nolan Clark as principal writer. Many of these books ultimately became classics and are in print today. Readers will recognize Clark's "Little Herder" Navajo series, which reflected life on the Navajo Reservation and was illustrated by Hoke Denetsosie. Fred Kabotie created the art for Edward Kennard's *The Field Mouse goes to War* for the Hopi series; Andrew Standing Soldier (Oglala Sioux) was featured artist for the Sioux books, which included *Pine Ridge Porcupine* and *The Slim Butte Raccoon*; while Clark wrote *Sun Journey* (Zuni) for the Pueblo series illustrated by Percy Tsisete Sandy. It is interesting to note that many of these books were published in government print shops at the Phoenix Indian School, Chilocco Indian School, and Haskell Institute.

The author provides notes, bibliography and index, and lists of picture books by author and by artist, along with 106 color plates and 44 black-and-white illustrations of original art and book covers. In addition to the artists, featured here are many of those who influenced the creation of story-picture books that were

culturally sensitive for American Indian children: Elizabeth De Huff; Dorothy Dunn; John Collier; Ann Nolan Clark; J. D. Enochs; Willard Wolcott Beatty; and William Morgan collaborated with Robert Young to produce a new orthography of the Navajo alphabet.

I could not say it any better than Rebecca Benes herself when she concludes that the “books constitute a priceless, ongoing verbal and visual record of American Indian Life in the Southwest and on the Great Plains. As a multicultural expression that respects the cultural values and languages of Indian Native communities, the picture books were ahead of their time” (p. 138).

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May 15, 2004