

# Native writers' work: humorous, profound

by Wallace M. Olson

for the Tundra Times

*Alaska Native Writers, Storytellers and Orators*, a special issue of the Alaska Quarterly Review, has been reprinted and is now available to the general public.

It is a real pleasure to see this issue on the stands again. It is one of the best collections of Alaskan Native writings and translations that there is for such a low price.

Many times a person has to search through many obscure books and old newspapers to find examples such as these.

The first half of the issue is devoted to older, traditional stories, but now translated into very readable English. All of the storytellers are Native, but a few of the translators are non-Native specialists who have spent much of their lives working with Native literature.

The second half is modern Native

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poetry, fiction and non-fiction. It is really refreshing and enjoyable to see that many Alaskan Natives are active contributors to the flow of contemporary literature. The writings are sometimes humorous, sometimes profound and sometimes both.

Currently there is a strong movement to look at Alaskan Native literature not as something unique and limited to our state, but as a reflection of the deep, inner nature of all human beings. Around the world, people have many of the same values, ideals, hopes and dreams. Literature from various cultures is like a bank of spotlights

throwing light on human nature from different angles.

For teachers who want to go beyond the standard literature texts, this publication can easily be brought into the classroom on the high school or college level. Elementary teachers may even find a few examples for use in their classes.

The special issue is also just enjoyable reading for the average person. It is the kind of book that one can pick up and read for a few minutes and then set it down and go back to it later. Several of the poems and speeches can be read and reread to get at the depth

of meaning contained in them.

The materials come from the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Yupik, Inupiaq and Dene — all Alaskan Native people. The only weakness is the lack of material from the Aleut culture. But that weakness can be turned into strength — we can demand that another special edition be published with an emphasis on the rich Aleut cultural heritage.

One of the nicest things about this publication is the fact that it is all-Alaskan. It is not some outsider writing about an unfamiliar scene; it is Alaskan Natives making their contribution to the world of literature.

The book is published by the Department of English, University of Alaska-Anchorage, 3221 Providence Drive, Anchorage 99508. The price is \$5.

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