

English Literature Enriched

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There is a windsong that chants
a tune
From past, present and future;
That chants from chill
to morning cold.

"Come share our land, the beautiful,
Because you find as good no more."

—JOHN ANGAIK

The world of English literature is extended and enriched by the writings of those poets, authors, whose words may be English but who share a different tradition. These and writings found in English only in translation, are the basis of "Writers in the World Tradition of English Literature."

From a long, proud and rich oral tradition modern Eskimo poets and writers are contributing a unique Eskimo-English literature to modern America. A sampling of this is included in the Winter 1970 issue of the University Review—the literary quarterly of the University of Missouri—Kansas City.

In their poems, songs, stories, the Eskimo writers in the quarterly tell of their great love for their land, of their people who hunt the seal and the walrus and seek the great whales.

In "Whaler's Moon" by Howard Weyahok, the poet tells the story of the ancient whalers of Tigara, which is now called Point Hope. Allignuk, the Dweller of the Moon, allots the whales according to the heart and richness of the soul of the pleader:

Oh Allignuk, Dweller of the Moon—
Allignuk, great and generous
giver of whales
I, Nikuwanna, whose wife I am
of Killigvuk,
A young and hopeful new whaler
of Tigara,
Implore thee for thy life-giving
gift...

In Point Hope, even today, the men go out to seek the whale and the other bounties of the sea. Though the tradition of the Eskimo is long, the English written tradition is new, unfinished. It draws heavily on the songs, the poetry of an oral culture.

The traditions of the past are part of the political aspirations of today. Phillip Guy, a

board member of the Alaska Federation of Natives, writes of the love of the Native people for the land, and of the government which tries to take it away from them.

Howard Weyahok, who writes poems of the ancient whalers, also writes political editorials as Howard Rock, editor of the Tundra Times. Many of the Eskimo pieces are reprinted from the Tundra Times. Mr. Rock helped to collect Eskimo and Indian pieces included in the volume.

One long section of the quarterly is devoted to the Eskimo story of the days "...In the Beginning," as told by Robert Silook and illustrated by Robert Mayokok. The author and the artist worked together to show the way the Eskimos lived in the days when Alaska was "the warmest place on even the whole world then and it was warm all three hundred and sixty-five days a year." Roger Silook's epic of his people intertwines the native tradition and the western tradition which he, as a modern Alaskan, cannot escape. It is fused with his knowledge of the English language.

Among the Eskimo contributions are Eskimo folk songs, and poems which use the medium of the song as their tie with their people.

Among the works from other lands are ancient siju from Korea, translations from Japan, Nigeria, Guyana and Australia and a poem by Sandra Johnson, a Makah Indian of the Northwest, which relates her peoples' love for the sea from whence their life comes.

Works in English, written from other traditions, enrich the realm of English literature beyond its narrow beginnings in Anglo-Saxon England. In its earliest times, English literature fused the Anglo-Saxon's and their Norman conquerors. Today, as the language spreads, it grows richer through the people who choose to write in that language and through it share their own culture.