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Singing an Indian Song: A Biography of D'Arcy McNickle. By Dorothy R. Parker. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992. Photographs, preface, prologue, notes, bibliography of McNickle's published works, references, index. x + 316 pp. \$35.00.

D'Arcy McNickle occupies a position of relatively minor but increasing stature in American Indian history and literature. Dorothy R. Parker's volume is thus a welcome addition to the increasing number of monographs, critical studies, and general commentaries about this ordinary but successful individual.

Modern biography is characterized by a fascination with people who, although notable, are seldom as illustrious and "famous" as the figures who traditionally engaged the attention of earlier, particularly nineteenth-century, biographers. In this sense, McNickle is clearly a modern subject; and reader interest in him, although keen among enthusiasts, will probably be limited.

He is known primarily for his association with the Newberry Library in Chicago in the formative stages of building its American Indian archives and as the author of *The Surrounded* (1936), a novel which, along with McNickle's two other lesser known novels, *Runner in the Sun* (1954) and *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978) is generally credited as a precursor to the contemporary renaissance in American Indian fiction. And, perhaps most significantly of all, McNickle is remembered as an official under John Collier in the days of the Indian New Deal and the Indian Reorganization Act.

Parker's biography of McNickle both succeeds in promoting an "ordinary," relatively obscure individual and falls short in dealing with detail. On both scores the reader response may be ambivalent. More speculation about McNickle's psychology would be of interest, though one wonders if, it would matter all that much. One would need to consider the larger cultural, family, ethnic, class, gender, and sexual contexts of the person being ren-

dered. Parker's version of McNickle's life is perhaps most successful and compelling in regard to his family but McNickle's life as a mixed-blood person who lived in two worlds is more mundane than revealing. Or perhaps his true significance awaits a more probing analysis.

Attitudes of the biographer are perhaps the most interesting aspect of biographical studies. How closely does the biographer empathize with the subject and how are the incidents and causes of a person's life rendered? Parker either succeeds or fails, depending on reader bias, at biographer's self-effacement, staying out of the picture except for inadvertent gratuitous remarks about McNickle's cash flow.

Singing an Indian Song is not as *au courant*, as provocative and daring and speculative as some might wish. Literary critics will wish that Parker would engage in more independent analyses of the novels and other writings of McNickle and the "psychology" in and behind the, rather than summaries of plots and the views of others. And historians will wish that the author would present a larger, more sustained cultural and national context in wish to consider McNickle's contributions to United States Federal Indian policy.

Singing an Indian Song, then, will perhaps seem at once too traditional and "expository" and too tentative in advancing both psychological and cultural conjectures about what made McNickle tick as a multi-faceted, mixed-blood writer and policy maker.

It must be remembered, however, that a biographer and a biography cannot be all things to all people. As a standard accounting of D'Arcy McNickle, an ordinary but significant man who influenced not only Federal Indian policy but our understanding of the tensions of cultural conflict and assimilation, Dorothy R. Parker's "objective," "traditional" biography is a useful and commendable work.

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