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Review of *Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature*. By Kenneth Lincoln

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Speak Like Singing: Classics of Native American Literature. By Kenneth Lincoln. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. xv + 367 pp. Bibliography, index. \$26.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Kenneth Lincoln's most recent book follows his others in style and content. Here he is concerned with outlining the fusions of contemporary Native American literature and oral tradition. Starting with sections on song, poetry, and lyric, he suggests that he will steer a course between the extremes of imperialism and essentialism. Some readers will appreciate his imaginative, suggestive, free-flowing discussion of oral and literary impulses from Beowulf to the poetry of Sherwin Bitsui. The central chapters focus on what he calls "crossing texts" by some of the best-known Native writers, and the idea of fusion is his guiding principle. Yet to do this, Lincoln disavows the stampede to theory that he has found "dizzying and dismaying" in favor of weaving together disparate personal insights.

For his groundbreaking *Native American Renaissance* (1983), there was little theory or scholarship to draw on. Even in *Indi'n Humor* (1993) and *Sing with the Heart of a Bear* (2000), he was exploring fields new enough that you could forgive him his lack of theory and his disregard for the intellectual traditions bordering his subject; but I find it hard to do with a book that focuses on the classics of Native American literature. His imagination flies freely through these works making one suggestion after another without following them up. His refutation of all theory leaves him with really no logical organization. While he relies on many quotes from Native authors, he also grounds his discussions with mid-twentieth-century anthropologists, not the excellent work done by contemporary Native studies scholars. The insights he offers into *Ceremony*, *The Way to*

Rainy Mountain, *Winter in the Blood*, and *Love Medicine*, for example, have been voiced before and more thoroughly explored, leaving the student of Native American literature wondering if he has read the scholarship, ignored it, or borrowed it without acknowledgment.

Lincoln doesn't want to go over the limit with heady drafts of theory, but we end up with Scholarship Light. Lincoln sees a literature where "Fusions rule," but he is content to suggest the outlines of these fusions without elaborating on their implications or how they were developed. In talking about the nameless narrator of *Winter in the Blood*, he writes, "Perhaps this stumblebum stagger is meant as an ironic figure of vision quest or fallen delirium tremens, or some of both. Visionary aloneness has morphed into a conquered Indian sense of alienation." So how is the narrator ironic, or maybe he isn't, and how and why has "visionary aloneness" morphed? And what about all those scholarly articles on alienation? Why bother with the academic tradition when we can free associate. The book leaves serious students of Native American literature with more questions than answers, and I feel I know more about Kenneth Lincoln than Erdrich or Silko.

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