

pinch for the less discriminating, others should wait for the more detailed and authoritative volumes on the Northwest Coast and the Plateau in the Smithsonian's *Handbook of North American Indians* series, due out in the next few years.

**Native American Renaissance.** By Kenneth Lincoln. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Pp. 313, notes, index. \$22.50 cloth.

Reviewed by Timothy Cochrane.

**Native American Renaissance** is a critical appreciation and examination of modern Native American prose and poetry. Focusing primarily on the last two decades of published fiction, Lincoln traces the sudden flowering of Native American written art. And as a part of his task, he traces the dynamic adaptation and influence of oral literature on the printed text. Lincoln articulates numerous continuities between oral and written literature, for example, the seemingly pan-American belief that words embody, not merely denote meanings, objects, and the natural world.

The collection of essays focusing on select Native American authors also includes a succinct review of the history of printed Native American literature and a handy, yet sophisticated, characterization of American Indian verbal art. Lincoln's efforts to characterize oral literature (in order to follow its reemergence in creative writing) is of special interest to folklorists. He recognizes eight underlying tenets of "ancestral" verbal art: 1) the primacy of words in Indian life, 2) the presence of nature in oral literature, 3) the creative economy of verbal art, 4) the welcomeness of play in all speech realms, 5) the tendency to see "the world through symbolic detail," 6) the propensity of "songs" to invigorate other cultural phenomena,

7) oral literature's ability to help people survive, and 8) the cyclical worldview of most Native Americans.

**Native American Renaissance** is an ambitious project not without flaws. Rich with ideas, Lincoln rarely places them in any order of importance and thus undermines some of their impact. Another problem is that Lincoln writes with poetic license which sometimes obfuscates or detracts from his point at hand. For example, his affection for the word "tribal" - with a dozen or more meanings - detracts and blurs his thoughtful arguments. Also, Lincoln's easy acceptance and even cheerleading of American Indian mysticism may also put off readers who are not "believers" at the onset. Finally, the book is most successful when it assumes the reader has read N. Scott Momaday, Howard A. Norman, James Welch, Leslie Silko, and others' works. It is compromised when Lincoln summarizes and thus "reduces" the very works he successfully argues are significant and worthy of greater attention.

Even with its faults, **Native American Renaissance** is a fine book which thoroughly demonstrates that Native American literature is re-emerging in wonderfully complex relations and forms.