

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman

Margaret B. Blackman

Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1990. xviii + 274 pp. \$19.95 (cloth)

Reviewer: Jean L. Briggs

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Sadie Brower Neakok is, indeed, an Inupiaq (North Alaskan Eskimo) woman, and a remarkable one. As teacher, health aide, welfare worker and finally magistrate in Barrow, Alaska, she has been an extraordinarily effective force in the development of that community. This book is as much a history of Barrow as of Sadie.

Barrow, on the northwest tip of Alaska, has grown in the last 100 years from a small Inupiaq hunting settlement into a large bicultural town, the administrative centre of the North Slope Borough, which covers the north coast of Alaska. Sadie is the daughter of Asiannagataq, a vital and widely respected Inupiaq woman, and Charles Brower, a white whaler and powerful “trader baron” (p. xii), who was instrumental in changing Barrow.

Sadie was taught to value both traditions. Sent to school in California, she came back to live in Barrow, where she immediately put her knowledge and vast energy to the service of her community, service that ultimately earned her recognition throughout Alaska. Her domestic life—as the wife of a successful hunter and whaler and the mother of 13 children—was as busy and productive as her professional life, but one learns much less about these private roles, a fact that may be related partly to Blackman’s aims and partly to Sadie’s own reticence.

The book is a case study of a rare phenomenon, a person who has productively managed to bridge two cultures that are often on a collision course. As a strong voice from their midst, Sadie provides the young people of Barrow with a path into both past and future. She also gives a voice of unusual power to native North Americans. At another level, she carries on the Brower story, telling us more about the role of that famous family in the history of Barrow.

For me, the organization of the book works well. Sadie’s personal story is framed by an introductory chapter on the history of Barrow and by a methodological appendix on “the examined life.” The body of the book is largely in Sadie’s own words. Where Blackman adds comments to clarify or elaborate, they are printed in italics, to set them off distinctly from Sadie’s narrative. I am sorry to say, however, that the narrative itself does not always work well. I suspect that Blackman, imbued with the vibrant atmosphere that Sadie clearly creates in the telling of her tale, did not realize the disadvantage under which the uninitiated reader labours. The narrative often moves bumpily— as does life, of course, but, in written form, the mode can be tedious. Sadie’s Inupiaq ways of organizing her thoughts, the assumptions she leaves unexpressed, and her informal, colloquial English also produce a certain obscurity at times. I should like to have seen the text either more fully edited or more fully explained. As it stands, the book has to be *analyzed*, as an historical document or ethnography. I, at least, could not read it as

a "novel." Nonetheless, it is an interesting and worthwhile book, which should appeal to a variety of audiences.

One final point, which may seem minor but which I think is not, is that a much more impressive sense of Sadie's personality is conveyed by the photograph (facing page 174) than by the photograph used on the dust jacket. I wish that readers might have been introduced to Sadie through the other picture.

Actes du Vingtième Congrès des Algonquistes

William Cowan, ed.

Ottawa, Ontario: Carleton University, 1989. viii + 363 pp. N.p. (paper)

Reviewer: James R. Jaquith

Saint Mary's University

The scholarly genre usually labelled "proceedings" in English and "actes" in French has had a long and distinguished history. The volume under review fits comfortably into that tradition, updating as it does Algonquinist conferences dating from 1968 and their attendant scholarship.

The 1989 proceedings/actes presents 26 papers (two in French, none in an Algonquian language). It also contains Christina Thiele's valuable "Cumulative Index: Papers of the Algonquian Conferences, 7th through 20th."

The topics addressed encompass an extraordinary range of anthropological interests: linguistics, literacy, values, morality, social organization, culture change, archaeology, religion/revitalization, history of scholarship, education, geographic spread, political leadership, museology, folktales, hatchets/knives, basketry, economics and midwifery.

The work impresses the reviewer as very well edited and thoroughly proofread. It contains almost no "padding" and virtually no typographical errors. The research which it reflects is modern, including linguistic materials based on contemporary theory, computer applications to teaching, Salishan and Northeastern connections, and aspects of Native Studies curricula. The range of authors is admirably broad: Anglophone, Francophone, Native American, academic and non-academic.

All in all, the volume strikes the reviewer as a sterling example of its genre. It makes available a sufficient number of papers which have been most competently selected for their relevance, variety and quality. Certainly the work will be valuable not only to Algonquinists but also to many others whose concerns include matters of Native American history, culture and intercultural relations.