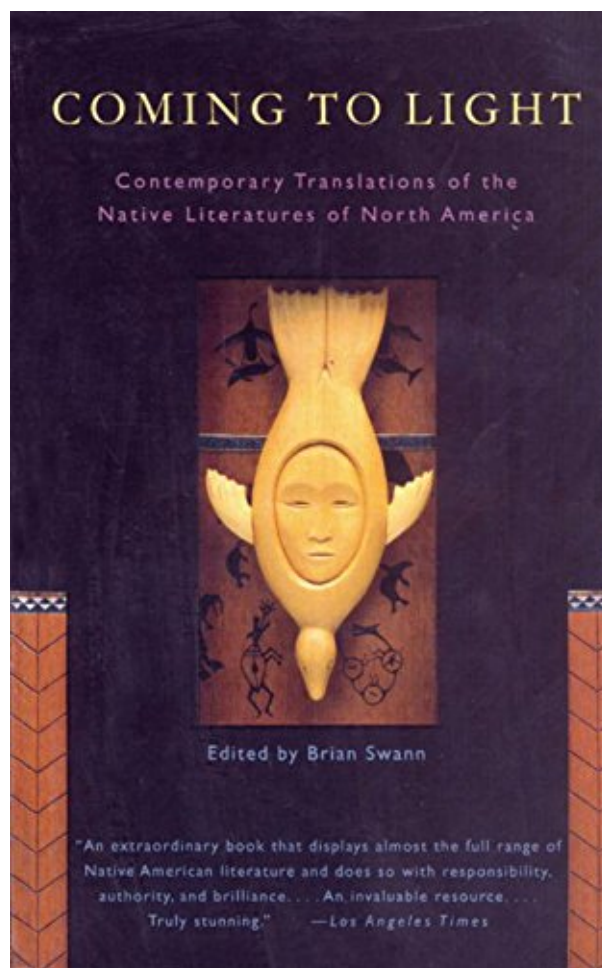


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Contemporary Translations of the  
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The vitality of the spoken word is essential to Native American cultures. Because of their dependence on oral performance, the stories, songs, legends, and ceremonies of a Native people often died with the last speaker of the language. Of the two hundred or so native languages in North America today, perhaps forty-five are spoken by over a thousand people, in contrast to pre-Columbian times, when there were as many as five hundred distinct tongues spoken by millions. But now, with the revival and heightened awareness of this vital tradition, more of the surviving literatures are being studied and translated into English so that they can be enjoyed and appreciated anew. Brian Swann, professor of English at the Cooper Union in New York City, has collected many of the new translations in *Coming to Light*, and in his introduction provides an overview, detailing changing attitudes toward the cultures of Native Americans, and the state of those cultures today. *Coming to Light* is a showcase of stories, songs, oratory, and prayer of the indigenous peoples of the continent. Unlike in previous anthologies of Native American literature, each of the translations is placed, through the use of individual introductions by respected scholars, in its appropriate cultural and linguistic context.

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Fantastic

By grasshopper4

Readers interested in the traditional stories, myths, folktales, and other cultural expressions of American Indians would be hard pressed to find a better anthology than this excellent book. Swann edited together stories from a wide range of regions within North America. He included terrific introductions by excellent researchers and authors. These introductions present sufficient background information to learn about the storytelling traditions, and the commentary helps readers understand and appreciate the texts. There is also an extensive bibliography that includes hundreds of additional sources for learning more about the stories, storytellers, authors, and societies that are represented in the book. The stories, themselves, are magnificent. Some are fairly accessible to readers with little knowledge of American Indian history and culture. Other narratives are more esoteric, and they must be read and reread with great patience. As readers develop ways to read these stories, the wonder of the tradition lights up ways to think about the verbal artistry of America's first peoples.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

A magnificent collection of Native North American literature

By Michael J. Mazza

"Coming to Light: Contemporary Translations of the Native Literatures of North America," edited by Brian Swann, is an amazing volume. Approximately 800 pages long, this anthology brings together materials from all over the continent. Cultures included range from the Yupik of Alaska to the Zuni of New Mexico to the Iroquois of southern Ontario--more than 30 different peoples in all.

Each selection is preceded by its own separate introduction which discusses such topics as the culture and language of the people who produced the text, the specific storytellers, and translation issues.

The material in the anthology includes creation myths, animal tales, trickster stories, songs, and stories of birth, death, and transformation. Some of the most remarkable selections include the Wolverine tales of the Innu, which are masterpieces of bawdy humor, and the Yupik tale of "The Boy Who Went to Live with the Seals," a magical story of human/animal relations. I highly recommend "Coming to Light."

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

An Interesting Read

By Kyle Forsburg

I read many of the stories in this book for a college course and I found them to be rather interesting and thoughtful. Many of the tales are difficult to understand at times, but that usually comes with the oral stories provided by Native Americans. I would definitely recommend this collection of stories to anyone who is particularly curious in Native American legend.

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