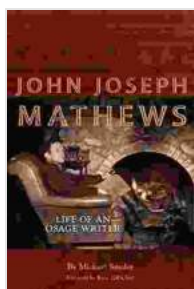


The Life and Works of an Osage Writer: American Indian Literature and Critical Studies 69

John Joseph Mathews (1894-1979) was an Osage writer, anthropologist, and lecturer who made significant contributions to American Indian literature and critical studies. His work explored the complex cultural identity of Native Americans and the challenges they faced in the 20th century. This article examines the life and work of Mathews, focusing on his major literary works and their impact on American Indian literary scholarship.



John Joseph Mathews: Life of an Osage Writer (American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series Book 69)

★★★★☆ 4.2 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 4981 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 281 pages



Early Life and Education

Mathews was born into the Osage Nation in Oklahoma Territory in 1894. He grew up in a traditional Osage home and attended a Quaker boarding

school in Kansas. Mathews later attended the University of Oklahoma, where he studied anthropology and English. After graduating in 1920, he worked as a field anthropologist for the Smithsonian Institution, studying the cultural practices of various Native American tribes.

Literary Career

Mathews began writing in the 1920s, publishing short stories and poems in various literary magazines. His first novel, *Sundown*, was published in 1934. The novel tells the story of a young Osage man who struggles to reconcile his traditional culture with the modern world. *Sundown* was a critical and commercial success, and it is considered to be one of the first major works of American Indian literature.

Mathews published several other novels, including *Wilderness Road* (1936) and *Sequoia* (1961). He also wrote non-fiction works, including *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* (1961) and *Talking to the Moon* (1945). Mathews's work was praised for its authenticity, its insights into Native American culture, and its powerful storytelling.

Critical Studies

In addition to his literary work, Mathews was also a respected literary critic. He published numerous essays and articles on American Indian literature, and he helped to establish the field of American Indian literary criticism. Mathews argued that American Indian literature should be judged on its own terms, and he called for a more inclusive approach to literary studies that recognized the unique contributions of Native American writers.

Mathews's critical work had a profound impact on the study of American Indian literature. He helped to raise the profile of Native American writers

and to establish American Indian literature as a legitimate field of study. Mathews's work continues to be read and studied by scholars and students today.

Themes in Mathews's Work

Mathews's work explored a number of important themes, including:

- **Cultural identity:** Mathews's work often explored the complex cultural identity of Native Americans. His characters struggled to reconcile their traditional cultures with the modern world, and they often faced discrimination and prejudice.
- **Historical trauma:** Mathews's work also addressed the historical trauma experienced by Native Americans. He wrote about the forced removal of Native Americans from their land, the loss of their traditional way of life, and the violence and oppression they faced.
- **Spirituality:** Mathews's work was deeply spiritual. He believed that Native Americans had a unique connection to the natural world and that their traditional ceremonies and rituals were essential to their well-being.
- **Hope:** Despite the challenges they faced, Mathews's characters often expressed a sense of hope and resilience. They believed that they could overcome adversity and that they could create a better future for themselves and their people.

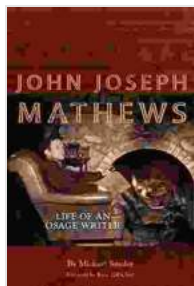
Legacy

John Joseph Mathews was a pioneering figure in American Indian literature and critical studies. His work helped to raise the profile of Native American

writers and to establish American Indian literature as a legitimate field of study. Mathews's work continues to be read and studied by scholars and students today, and it continues to inspire and inform contemporary Native American writers.

Further Reading

- John Joseph Mathews on Britannica.com
- John Joseph Mathews on Encyclopedia.com
- John Joseph Mathews Collection at Oklahoma State University Library



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