

feminist work in political theory by scholars like Mary O'Brien, Zillah Eisenstein and Nancy Hartsock is not found within the discipline of political science. It is also not found in this volume but could easily serve as a framework for interpreting its rich historical base.

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Two Spirits Soar: The Art of Allen Sapp; The Inspiration of Allan Gonor, by W.P. Kinsella. Toronto: Stoddart, 1990.

That a person may be articulate in one medium but not in another — the illiterate jokester, Frank Fencepost, of W.P. Kinsella's early Indian stories, for example — is not a fiction. Kinsella once came upon a Cree painter who, unable to read or write, was able to capture the essence of prairie Indian life in his remarkable paintings. Kinsella first saw Allen Sapp's art when he was trying to find the right voice for his own work:

There are stories of viewers being moved to tears by the art of Allen Sapp. I can verify that those stories are not exaggerated. When I first saw Allen Sapp's work, not in person, but photographs of his paintings, they touched my heart as no works of art had ever done before. I have visited famous art museums, seen world-renowned masterpieces, and though I recognized and appreciated their quality, and in some cases their beauty, no works of art ever totally moved me until I saw Allen Sapp's paintings.

Many art lovers who have never experienced the world of Allen Sapp are attracted to his work and moved by the exotic locations and subject matter of his paintings, but it was the familiarity of Allen's paintings that touched me.

What immediately impressed me was that Allen had exactly reproduced prairie scenes that were also stored in my memory, scenes so real that they quickly transported me back to my childhood on a remote homestead in Northern Alberta. The landscapes of the paintings, the backgrounds of poplar and birch trees, the prairie grasses, the winter skies were so accurate, so much as I remembered them, that I developed an instant attachment to the paintings, a longing to own them. (p. 1)

Two Spirits Soar is a commodious book containing reproductions of over eighty full-colour paintings, dating from 1969 to 1989, with an accompanying text by Kinsella. Asked in 1988 if he would write a text for a proposed collection of Sapp's work, he was overjoyed to help his friend. He explains why:

Though I had been familiar with his paintings for a number of years, I didn't meet Allen Sapp until the fall of 1978. I had recently returned to Canada after several years of graduate study in Iowa City, Iowa, and soon after my arrival I discovered that Allen was having an exhibition at the Gainsborough Gallery in Calgary. Even though I knew it would be painful to look at a gallery full of his paintings and not be able to afford one, I wanted to see his work, and since he was going to be appearing at the gallery, I wanted to try to convey to him, in person, how much his work meant to me. (p. 4)

The painter and the writer finally met about two years after Kinsella's first book, *Dance Me Outside*, was published. Before they met, Kinsella had been trying to find the right words to capture "the essence of [Sapp's] painted scenes." Just after handing Allen Sapp a copy of *Dance Me Outside*, Kinsella heard someone remark at the gallery that the painter was illiterate. The writer was mortified. A few weeks later he got a letter from Dr. Allan Gonor, a Saskatchewan physician who was Allen Sapp's friend, "inspiration," and a selfless promoter of the paintings. Gonor had read some of Kinsella's Indian stories to Sapp, who became an instant fan, if not reader. A year later Kinsella and Sapp were guests at the doctor's home, by then a virtual Allen Sapp museum.

In *Two Spirits Soar* Kinsella explains how thrilling it was to sleep in a bedroom with eleven Allen Sapp paintings on the walls! Until Dr. Gonor's death, in 1985, the camera-toting physician took hundreds of photos of the two side by side, until finally the painter turned to the writer with a Frank Fencpost-like whisper: "I expect our souls are gone by now." (p. 9)

Judging by Allen Sapp's comments (faithfully transcribed by Kinsella) beneath each of the pictures in *Two Spirits Soar*, Sapp has a better command of verbs than Silas Ermineskin, the narrator of *Dance Me Outside*; but he shares Silas's sense of humour. The caption to a painting of a family in a field near a clump of burning logs explains: "Supper was often cooked outside in the summer over an open fire. Today people call it barbecuing." (p. 63)

Allen Sapp tells Kinsella what it is like to grow up in a racist country. Forced to attend a residential school (at Onion Lake, Saskatchewan), his hand was slapped if he drew pictures when he was supposed to be copying letters in a language he didn't know. He was forbidden to speak the Cree he had learned from his grandmother (after his mother's untimely death from tuberculosis). He didn't need to learn the white man's lessons about discipline since old Maggie Soonias had told him to respect the rights and property of others, to not waste time gambling, and to never drink alcohol. It was Maggie who was responsible, more than anyone else (even Dr. Gonor), for Allen's choice of profession. Allen was a sickly child who suffered from meningitis and other ailments — Kinsella remarks perceptively that the interior scenes in Allen's paintings of the Red Pheasant Reserve are "from the point of view of someone lying in a bed." (p. 13) During one of the boy's illnesses, Maggie's sister, a tribal Nootokao (elder), dreamt of his death. Maggie decided that the child should be given a new name to avert fate. The Nootokao stood by his bedside, touched Allen's forehead, and said "Kiskayetum": He-perceives-it. Allen Sapp was to prove true his heritage in every sense. He chose to remain illiterate in the white man's language and to give shape to his perceptions on canvas with a paint brush.

However, the ugly reality of Native life is something that Sapp avoids. He tells Kinsella that he is embarrassed to show his people in a negative light. Kinsella says his own stories about the "Ermineskin Indians" also avoid ugliness. "*Disturbing* is not an adjective I want applied to my fiction." (p. 20) Whereas Kinsella considers himself "first and foremost an entertainer," Sapp is a witness to his people.

When Sapp speaks to us in words (in the captions to his paintings in *Two Spirits Soar*), he uses what grammarians refer to as the literary present. For example, he recalls how he began his professional career with the sale of a drawing to a white lady when he was still a school kid: "That five cents, brand-new money [big as the present "Loonie" he observes], makes me happy." (p. 25) This is not semi-literacy or simplicity or, as Kinsella puts it, "truth as memory edits it." (p. 20) It is the same power of total recall that makes his paintings so unstylized. (As a sort of footnote to socioeconomic history, Kinsella mentions that he, born six years later than Sapp, sold his first piece of writing, at about the same time in *his* life, to the *Edmonton Journal* for seven dollars.)

Unfortunately, Kinsella documents stages in the careers of the two men rather than letting us soar with them. At some points in the text it would suffice to have just the pictures with their dates and captions. Take, for example, *Summer Pow-Wow at Piapot* (1987): "I meet many friends and I feel happy when I am dancing at pow-wows" (93). At one point Kinsella sounds like someone from Indian Affairs:

Although many native cultural practices were at one time criticized by society and banned by government, native culture did not die but simply went underground. Rather than lamenting the past, the native people today proudly participate in these events. Allen Sapp affirms that much of his inspiration and enthusiasm for painting comes after he has renewed himself by participating in the once-frowned-on rituals of pow-wows and Sun Dances. Allen is an accomplished dancer and likes to dance at pow-wows while dressed in colourful regalia. Once, a visitor from Germany inquired of Dr. Gonor where he might find Allen Sapp, to which Dr. Gonor replied, "Allen Sapp the artist?" "No," answered the visitor, "Allen Sapp the dancer." (p. 90)

Finally, we might connect Sapp the painter with Kinsella the writer of baseball stories. *Two Spirits Soar* tells us what it feels like to be Bill Kinsella. He loves the countryside around Darwell, Alberta, as the Cree loves the Red Pheasant Reserve in Saskatchewan. Upon first seeing them, Kinsella wanted to have Sapp's paintings on his own walls because they are vital to him. They are the closest the writer can get to the land as it once was and never will be again. As we read through the commentary of *Two Spirits Soar*, we understand how *Kinsella* looks at the world.

We note the unbounded enthusiasm which the writer brings to the paintings — more than casual viewing, more like his passion for baseball. We note, too, that it is the dimensions and texture of the artist's physical world that is focussed. It is remarkable that nowhere in his moving praise of the art does Kinsella mention the sight of people or the remembered sound of the human voice, although there is not one of Sapp's paintings which does not centre on one or more Native people: a mother or a father, children skating on a frozen slough, men at work in the bush, a woman tending a fire, a man pitching hay in the barn or feeding a horse — people of all sorts dancing and singing at pow-wows, working with the land. The scene is always communal and natural. Allen Sapp's world is clearly that of the Prairie Indians of central Alberta and Saskatchewan; the Ermineskins who inhabit this land in *Kinsella's* work are wholly of the writer's imagination.

Looking at a painting, Kinsella imagines what it would *feel* like to be there at this moment. He puts his feelings into these words:

I could smell the freshness of a spring thaw, hear the snow squeaking underfoot, hear the bite of the ax felling a tree, smell the bitter odor of bark and pine sap in the air, hear the horses shaking their harness, making breathy, trembling noises as they pulled a load of logs or hay. (p. 4)

We, too, would like to hear the sound of the horse — breathy as it labours against all that gravity, the unending pull downward.

An acute sense of hearing notwithstanding, an art critic once wrote that an Allen Sapp painting has “an atmosphere of stillness and timelessness and sensitivity to the nuances of nature.” Sounds like a religious experience of the highest order! In fact, the comment appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* (5 May 1976). Thinking of Kinsella responding to Sapp, the critic might be describing the rapture that takes hold of W.P. Kinsella whenever he contemplates baseball. The journalist has put into words the aesthetic experience of the pure baseball worshipper, the ideal fanatic, for whom the merely human players lose significance as he or she is caught up in their magic motion. Bill Kinsella sees things as an artist. Like Sapp’s, his is the aesthetic imagination.

With his friend Allen Sapp, the writer truly loves this earth, both the rough prairie grassland and the carefully clipped field of the ballpark. Bill Kinsella brings to his writings — whether about people on reserves or baseball diamonds — the felt quality of living in a *physical* world. He says in *Two Spirits Soar*: “Allen works with paint on canvas while I work with a typewriter or word processor on paper, but we both employ the senses — sight, sound, taste, touch, smell — to make our viewers or readers experience the pictures and stories we want them to enjoy.” (p. 4)

Recall the phrase about the “breathy, trembly noises” of horses overheard in an Allen Sapp painting. In one of the baseball stories in *The Thrill of the Grass* (1984), the narrator thinks of the miracle which spring brings to the aging players as they return to the field:

The old-timers will raise their heads like ponies, as far away as the parking lot, when the thrill of the grass reaches their nostrils. And, as they dress, they’ll recall sprawling in the lush outfields of childhood, the grass as cool as a mother’s hand on a forehead. (pp. 195-96)

Such is the exhilaration of the renewable land. (Not by chance, the narrator has started a movement to get rid of artificial turf.) After a northern winter, a person should thank the sun that nourishes the grass and the kernels of his buttered popcorn. If he is W.P. Kinsella or Allen Sapp, he agrees with an Indian Chief, Little Bear, who once said, “The earth is all that lasts.” The whites and the Indians make contact in Kinsella’s world.

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