

more elaborate gift giving. Types of songs, styles of dancing, and ritual sequences among different Dene groups in Alaska, the Yukon, and British Columbia are examined in both historical and contemporary context to explore the relationship between indigenous beliefs and Christian borrowings in these complex ceremonial practices. The editors point to the difficulty of reconstructing this relationship between tradition and cultural borrowing, noting the influence of conflicting ideologies.

Part Two presents the same texts and prophecies in Dene Dháa. This section is introduced by a very helpful explanation of the phonetic characteristics of the vowel and consonant systems. The editors also explore the three major dialect differences which represent former settlement and marriage patterns in northern Alberta and the development of the current orthography.

This is an important and carefully presented collection. Its existence is testimony to the continued vitality of traditional texts among the Dene Dháa. The editors note that many traditions continue and are being revitalized, and that people of all ages continue to speak the Dene language. The Tea Dance religion is practiced in Assumption and Meander River by several prophets and singers, some trained within the last few years. Yet there lingers the sense that imminent potential loss and the realization of many of Nóggha's prophecies inspired the collection. In the words of one elder that conclude the English texts, "We are becoming like white people ... I am afraid our children are slipping away from us." (p. 86) The need to preserve and balance the traditional knowledge of the pre-fur trade era from which these stories come with the inexorable and immediate power of media culture render this excellent collection an extremely valuable contribution.

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*Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, edited by Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance. Edmonton: NeWest, 1990. Pp. 294.

This collection joins a growing body of Native writing published in Canada. Established Native writers such as Maria Campbell, Thomas King and Emma Laroque have praised it for breaking through still-powerful barriers of silence, convention and ignorance. The writing in this volume testifies to a new confidence and self-reliance which now characterizes Native women. If "writing the circle" entails loyalty to traditional values, (p. 294) this circle has been enlarged by a richness of experience not available to previous generations.

Fifty-two writers have contributed to this anthology. They range in age from twelve to seventy-one; most live in the prairie provinces. With few exceptions they are mothers who have had some postsecondary education. Most have not previously published. Their writing includes poems, short stories, essays and brief reflections. Some themes recur and thus dominate:

gratitude to a grandmother, early memories of home and school, maternity, grief, and struggles to be free of pervasive apathy and violence.

For the editors, *Writing the Circle* "was initiated for only one purpose — to give a place for Native women to speak." (p. xi) Mindful of "systematic racism and sexism in our society," (p. xii) they have emphasized inclusion rather than selection, and self-definition rather than predetermined categorization. "We made no attempt to define 'Nativeness'," they assert. (p. xii) "No boundaries were made as to what forms writers could choose, nor were there any suggestions or restrictions about content." (p. xiii) In preparing the texts, the editors saw themselves as facilitators and assistants rather than judges.

What is not explained is the way in which the "individual pieces" (p. xiii) which make up the collection were solicited. In a separate acknowledgement, the editors thank "those individuals who urged their friends, students and relatives to submit material for this anthology"; (p. xxxi) they make no claim to "representivity." But at some level of this solicitation, as well as in consultation with the writers, editorial discretion was exercised. More information about the process of collection and revision is needed to justify the editors' claim "to listen and to learn, not to restrict and define." (p. xiii)

Nearly every writer included in the anthology claims to write from the heart. Writing is not style or art, but communication, therapy, a search for self, and for Jean Koomak, the way to get a job. (p. 142) Some of the texts refer, haltingly or eloquently, to personal experience; others are labouriously imitative of ritual songs and traditional tales. A few, such as the poems and story of Alice Lee, are powerful, polished, direct and deceptively simple. Lee tells of a child's first experience of school —

...the  
year i turned six i began school i wanted to learn to read  
the first day i learned that the teachers are white the  
children are white in my new book Dick Jane and Sally are  
white i learned new words at recess squaw mother dirty half-  
breed fucking indian i hope i know how to read soon i already  
know my colours (p. 160)

— and of confession:

there is a snake inside you  
the priest said  
i must get it out  
so you will stop doing bad things

i remember  
his hands  
under my skirt  
inside my panties  
looking for the snake

...  
he said it was my turn  
to look for his snake  
... (p. 158)

Other texts in *Writing the Circle* describe emotion with delicacy and restraint, as in Marilyn Dumont's story of her father's visit to the farm he had abandoned —

My father's face tightened. I turned away, breathing silently and pretending not to notice. It was better that way. My father brushed his hand across his face. It could have been sweat. (p. 46)

— and in Emma Laroque's poem about her father's visit to the grave of his long-dead wife:

So caringly, so angrily  
does he rip those weeds  
To make her place of rest  
as neat as her house was.  
If he could  
I know he would  
lift her  
tenderly  
out of there  
out of solitaire  
and hold her  
and caress her  
in the way of their youth. (p. 146)

Whether awkwardly or subtly expressed, all of the contributions have an extraordinary intensity of feeling. They *are* written from the heart, as if in capital letters: these things must be said, this way, now.

Equally extraordinary, given the narrow and desperate situations that many of these writers describe, is their lack of anger and bitterness. One could argue that this calm is superficial, that Natives have long turned anger and resentment in on themselves, with consequent low self-esteem, substance abuse and family violence. Traditional values and social structures have been severely tried and threatened; Native culture has been stifled. The editors of the collection support this position. They read these texts as instances of "the righteous anger that resists the injustices and brutality of a white culture." They stress that "Links among all women are forged in the bridges of pain inscribed here." Although they add that there are "bridges of tenderness too," the emphasis is on suffering and injustice. Native women, like all women, are to be defined by the pain of victimization and maternal tenderness. While they claim that many (not all) of the writers exhibit a "spiritual energy," they do not expand or comment on this spiritual dimension. (p. iii)

The big revelation of this book, however, is that healthy stable relationships, happiness, confidence in one's own abilities and optimism are the *norm* for the contributors. Of course they have known pain, but they refuse to be *defined* by it, hence their courage, their emphasis on positive values and experiences, and their lack of resentment. The realization that it is up to them, and them alone, to determine the course of their lives is stated over and over again. Vickie English-Currie quotes a woman who had been through the horrors of residential school life: "All my life, I have blamed the past situation for my present instability of life and feelings of being cheated

and short changed... Now I have done something about it." (p. 59) After nine years of drinking, seventeen-year-old Norma Gladue stopped: "It was very difficult but that's what I wanted. I wanted to turn a nightmare into something that people can learn from instead of being afraid." (p. 68) Bren Kolson writes, "I am fixed, in sanity, on surviving." (p. 130) Annette Lee sees how she actually contributed to the prejudice syndrome: "The way I viewed others, non-Natives, affected how they treated me... In response to my negative attitudes, people (students, non-Natives) left me alone, to wallow in my self-pity and misery... I was the one who had built a wall around myself ... it feels good to break free from such a negative self-concept." (p. 164-66) After her baby died, Pauline Gadwa realized, "I had to figure out what made me happy. When I did, I came around full circle, back to the things that had made me happy before." (p. 66)

The aim of all the contributors is to write this circle of self-affirmation. Most succeed. A few cling to the ideal of an earlier, simpler life: Bertha Blondin, for example, maintains that before contact the Dene "lived in perfect health and strength. They had mental strength and active healthy well-balanced growth...that puts to shame the strength and power of civilized man." (p. 21) This may well have been true, but Sara Jerome reports that her Dene grandmother, who lived a traditional life on the land, "On many occasions ... cried about the hardships she had endured and reminded me that we were so lucky to have all the modern conveniences today." (p. 116) Native women now have many more options than their grandmothers had: city life as well as the reserve; community leadership as well as domestic routine; a chance to interact, as equals, with people of other cultures. Of necessity their lives are more complex than those of their grandmothers; at the same time, their loyalties are more carefully and consciously chosen. The problems are still there, but these women have discovered the way to surmount them — by faith in themselves and their own abilities.

In the context of this collection, Emma Laroque's texts (preface and poems) are both privileged and exceptional. As writer of the preface, Laroque is in a position to speak for the other contributors (and the editors) as well as for herself. And although some of her poems are fine writing, they are exceptional in this anthology: they present attitudes which most of the other writers have left behind. As a whole, the contributors' perspective is post-colonial; there are scars but the direction is affirmative rather than reactive. Laroque, by contrast, is still locked in a vice of resentful, angry protest. "... our words have been usurped, belittled, distorted, and blockaded in Canadian culture... Oral traditions have been dismissed... We were branded as 'biased'... Our anger, legitimate as it was and is, was exaggerated as 'militant'; and used as an excuse not to hear us..." (p. xv-xvii) In these comments the passive voice reveals the writer's sense of victimization: she is overwhelmed by outside "forces," locked in colonial reaction and incapable of setting her own course:

Sometimes I want to run  
But I can't —

I can't  
I can't (p. 154)

At the risk of satisfying "a scholar's and writer's fear of the revenge of criticism," (p. 143) I suggest that Laroque read again the writers she claims to speak for in her preface — Clare E. McNab, for example:

I know who I am  
I just have to stop proving  
it to everyone else.  
DAMN! (p. 210)

Laroque's condemnation of non-Native publishers and readers reflects her fear of criticism. Non-Native interest in Native writing is described as "infantilizing," (p. xvii) "soft-sell" (p. xvii) and "appropriation." (p. xxv) Whether indifferent or curious, the Canadian literary scene has not produced the right reactions. "For the last two decades," complains Laroque, "we have been faced with the weary task of having to educate our audiences before we could even begin dialoguing with them!" (p. xxii) While she acknowledges that "English is the new Native language," (p. xxvi) Laroque wants to distinguish the way in which this language is used by Natives and non-Natives. The latter are characterized as a single masculine "colonizer" — historically the Indian agent, in Laroque's preface a dubious rhetorical figure:

For, it must be said, that perhaps the height of cheekiness in a colonizer is to steal your language, withhold his from you as long as he can, then turn around and demand that you speak and write better than he does. (p. xxi)

I do not understand the statement that English was "withheld" from Natives, given the zeal with which teachers imposed it for decades in residential schools, even as they tried to eradicate (not "steal") Native languages. Nor do I understand the requirement to speak and write "better" than those whose first language is English. As for the "colonizer," I confess I find it hard to place myself in this scenario, since for a long time I saw *myself* as colonized. For me the figure of the colonizer is feminine, none other than the queen of England, whose visits to Canada are reminders of our imperfect political evolution, and of my personal experience in Britain as a teenager: with every word my accent betrayed me as a colonial — insufficiently cultivated — in a word, quite "savage"! Most British and Canadians have progressed beyond this primitive impasse. Natives and non-Natives are evolving too, beyond the hard (racial) line which Laroque draws in her preface. As Willow Barton writes:

didn't you say forgiving is the lame old leg  
we sometimes have to carry around reminding  
that we cannot hate all for one sin done

beneath our skin, sinew for sinew, bone for bone  
white or brown, yellow or black, skin for skin  
we are all the same, we love, we die, we sin

i have a long way to travel on life's road  
i cannot carry hate upon my back and yet  
i cannot forget that i am cree

my child will look upon my face  
it will not be with shame or hate  
i will dance my dreams upon an eagle's wing  
and fly higher, higher, higher (p. 18)

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"The Fur Trade." Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Alberta. Opened October 1991.

Glenbow Museum's new fur-trade exhibit is a permanent addition to its "Canadian West/Native Peoples" floor. It fills a gap between exhibits on Native peoples and on settlement by addressing Native/European first contacts in the fur trade.

The ethnology department and museum designers have successfully made much of a very small space. The exhibit is built around two central structures: a birch-bark canoe and a representation of Nottingham House post on Lake Athabasca. The text is succinct and readable, with messages more subtly contained in the imagery and artifacts. For instance, visitors are greeted by two figures labelled "The Indian" and "The Trader" which illustrate, by their apparel, the merging of cultures. The exhibit has a notably "modern" look next to those from the 1970s, both in its clean, bright, uncluttered look and in the attention to an interpretive story line, as opposed to a focus on outstanding but uncontextualized artifacts. It is "modern" in other senses as well. A close look reveals the incorporation of some interesting new themes and interpretations.

This is not the oft-told story of Native peoples enthusiastically drawn into trade by exploitative entrepreneurs using the lure of superior European technology and civilization. Nor is it a celebration of the newcomers' heroic determination and accomplishment, their "discovery" of transportation routes through North America, and their conquest of climate and geography to bring trade goods in and furs out of the interior of the continent. The exhibit focusses on the part played by Native peoples in the fur trade. The various essential roles of Native women are itemized, and the unique contributions and society of Métis peoples highlighted. These roles are discussed with reference to the interdependence of Natives and traders, emphasizing the traders' dependence upon Natives. The usual "great men" of the fur trade are played down — photos of only four fur traders are featured, and none of the traditional explorers are mentioned.

The exhibit is unusual for interpreting the trade as more than economic. In the text about trade ceremony we read that for Native peoples, trade "was a way of developing and reinforcing social relationships between individuals, between families and between nations. Only relatives would engage in trade with each other. Where no blood relationship existed, people created relationships by marriage or by exchanging gifts and promising to treat each