

BOOK REVIEWS

Anderson, Kim: *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000, ISBN 1-896764-27-4, CDN\$ 16.95.

Kim Anderson, a Cree/Métis writer and educator, explains the title of her book as "There comes a point in the definition of Aboriginal womanhood where we must make sense of how ancestral traditions can fit into our modern lives. This is the "re-cognitive" part of our *recognition of being*, the part where we actively construct modern Native female identities"(p.193). Likewise one of the four steps in a process of self-definition is outlined as *resist, reclaim, construct* and *act* (p.15). The documentation of this process forms the main part of the book. The impact of colonization in comparison is summarized in one chapter as mere background. "Although I take my cue from the violence and confusion, the focus of this book is the strength, power and beauty of Native womanhood" (p.14). She further emphasizes her de-colonizing approach by illustrating "an aboriginal method of contextualizing knowledge" (p.21) and by validating the oral knowledge in Native communities. While including written work on her topic (as indicated in her comprehensive bibliography), she mostly refers to her interviews with forty Aboriginal women (listed with brief biographical sketches at the end of the book) representing a wide cross section of Indigenous nations. Included among them are well-known writers and scholars like Lee Maracle, Jeanette Armstrong, Emma LaRocque, Maria Campbell, and Marlene Brant Castellano.

Anderson's investigation into different ways of reconstructing Native womanhood does not offer definitions of the *role* of Native women today but explores a recognition of *being*, explained as "an on going exercise" (Preface). Rather than offering answers she draws her readers into a process which continues beyond the book. Her primary audience may be female Native readers, but any reader concerned about "response-ability"

is challenged to answer her question: "What will you do with the knowledge you have gained?" (p.49).

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Blackburn, Carol: *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America, 1632-1650*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000, ISBN 0777352-0471. CDN\$ 60.00.

In a reworking of her master's thesis, Carol Blackburn has provided readers with an interesting and informative account of the role that Jesuit missionaries played in the colonization of North America. Blackburn makes extensive use of the *Jesuit Relations* in her research. She, however, goes beyond the simple separation of the obviously biased accounts from the more empirical ones and looks for meaning throughout the entirety of the texts. Rather than producing a history of ideas from the *Relations*, Blackburn instead uses the *Relations* "to situate their meanings in relation to the politics of colonialism and conversion, and to illustrate that how they reveal an agenda that required Aboriginal people to be subordinated to the Jesuits" (p.11).

The book is made up of five chapters and a conclusion that concentrate on the period 1632-1650. The introductory discusses the methodology used by Blackburn and provides a short literature review. The second chapter is a short historical overview of the Jesuits and their missions among the Huron and Montagnais. Chapter three examines the Jesuits' notions regarding the savagery of the people they were encountering. Chapter four concentrates on the Jesuit perception of law, order and government and their attempts to establish obedience through coercive mechanisms of punishment in communities. The concepts of obedience and punishment are further explored in chapter five where Blackburn examines the Jesuit interpretation of the causes of infectious disease. Here Blackburn suggests that the Jesuits saw these diseases as "either divine punishment resulting from people's continued resistance to Christianity or as trials sent to test and strengthen the faith of the new converts" (p.20).

Blackburn argues that the *Revelations* were powerful rhetoric and cannot be read at face value. In fact she suggests that their oppressive

language in reference to the relationship between the Jesuits and Aboriginal people was more literary than literal. Blackburn also refutes the *Relations*' suggestion that Aboriginal people were passive. She demonstrates convincingly that "the encounter between Jesuits and Aboriginal peoples was a process of engagement...that resulted in the emergence of a complex web of relationships" (p.130). Blackburn, however, does not dismiss the *Relations* as documents of no historical significance or as simple rhetoric. Instead she argues that the Jesuits did provide authoritative descriptions of Aboriginal life. They did so, Blackburn reveals, because they believed that an accurate understanding of their missionary focus would aid them in their authority and influence over Aboriginal people and would also give them credibility in Europe.

Blackburn is to be commended for pointing out the need to heed the *Relations* within its own context. She notes, for example, that the concept of "savagery" is not an existing reality but rather "a cultural artifact embedded in a complex historical, cultural, and religious framework and is understandable only through historical and cultural analysis" (p.135).

Overall this book is an important contribution to the study of missionaries and their approaches to Indians. In addition, it also contributes to our understanding of relations between Indian people and Europeans in Canada both historically and presently. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the missionary experience, especially the approach that the Jesuits took. It is also a helpful guide to coming to better terms with the *Relations* themselves.

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Brant Castellano, Marlene, Lynne Davis and Louise Lahache (Editors):
Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise, Vancouver: UBC Press,
2002, ISBN 0774807822, CDN\$ 85.00.

I have been asked to review this marvellous and highly recommended book, *Aboriginal Education*, in 200 words. I can, however, do it in 26 words by simply quoting a 9-year-old student at a formal school: "In Bella Coola when I was lonely I'd just go up and watch the bald eagles. I had lots of

friend animals. Here there is nothing" (p.129). Another take is the opinion of Red Jacket in 1744:

We are convinced that you mean to do us Good... But you, who are wise, must know that different Nations have different conceptions of things and you will not take it amiss if our ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same as yours... (p.XII).

This book is about education, good and bad. It speaks in light of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996):

Despite the painful experiences Aboriginal people carry with them from formal education, they still see education as the hope for the future and they are determined to see education fulfill its promise (p.434).

This book is written in the honourable tradition of Claire Brant. It fulfills its promise. Yet, there are still questions as to whether governments will fulfill theirs.

I highly recommend this book. The world's hearts will need to pulse with the wisdom of this book, if our children are to survive in this millennium. As Claire Brant (1987), once said, "Look back to find new directions."

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References

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1987 Suicide in the North American Indian, in J. Morgan (Editor): *Suicide: Helping Those at Risk*. London: King's College.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol. 3 Gathering Strength*. Ottawa: Canada Communication Group.

Kulchyski, Peter, Don McCaskill and David Newhouse (Editors): *In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ISBN 0-8020-7953-9, CDN \$ 29.95.

Let me here provide a White man's review of a book that is best—and also better—reviewed by an Aboriginal Person. I apologize for the limitations of Western thinking.

As has been historically well established in knowledge about people, we do not need to be defensive about the use of personal stories and we do not need to plead for their occasional admissibility. On the contrary, professors like Gordon Allport and Edwin Shneidman, have emphasized their special power in doing the main business of psychology: the intensive study of the person.

More recently in my own field of suicidology, an international task force of The International Academy for Suicide Research (IASR) echoed Allport's and Shneidman's conclusion that the study of human events calls for not only the investigation of the general, but the individual. Although it is difficult to generalize from one individual, psychology must not be only concerned with the general. And while it may be impossible to conduct an idiographic study of every individual, one can study individuals of particular interest.

One is here reminded of Abraham Maslow's view that much of our current knowledge is "mechanistic and ahuman." Most researchers in the social sciences only know the experiment. But, according to Maslow, if we want to know the person, we have to be more open-minded. Statistical studies have an important place, but so do other methods and questions. Maslow, Allport, Shneidman and others have noted, for example, that we can use subjective reports, as in this book, as well as covert communications, paintings, dreams, stories, gestures, etc. Personal documents provide an invaluable source of data.

Let me here stop talking—it may be too mechanistic and ahuman already—and let the Elders speak. Their personal voices tell their stories.

James Carpenter (Mushkegowuk Cree):

Today's schools are better but in the past they used it for the wrong reasons. The children were wounded. There was too much hitting, there was never forgiveness toward the child, although he was only a child. And a lot of children went through it. Many people are reminded by the pain or close to being killed. One cannot take away the pain he has suffered. Sometimes he takes his own life because of the suffering when he remembers. He thinks, "I should not live because I was punished too many times, too much pain, too much suffering." That's what I say about that school. School is still a good thing, but it was not necessary for the person who ran the school to overdo it. That's the way it should be, we should talk about the issues, talk about something that is not going well and to talk about them. Those children who went to school experienced a lot of suffering. This is how it looked. That's what I have seen with my own eyes while I was there.

Rachael Uyarasuk (Inuit):

Now, after hearing about some things that happened at these places, in retrospect I can see that they did have bad effects. These people have to talk about it and let it out, then they should be happier. They should tell what is on their mind, don't keep talking about it, just tell it to someone who won't talk too much, one who will listen. Tell what is bothering you about the wrong things and bad things that happened to you and then by letting go you will be more able to be happy. First you must tell about it.

Mary Anne Mason (Shayshas):

I find that the thing that is the most important to me that I don't find today and that should be stressed more often to the younger generation to learn all they can about their traditions, about who they are, because if you know who you are, you know who your relatives are, you know who you can get help from, and who you can help. In all walks of life there is different ways of looking at these things, but I find this is one of the most important things is that. To learn your traditions.

Let me end with a story that I have heard before from both the Inuit in Nunavut and the Aborigine in Australia.

Vince Stogan (Musqueam):

As for us, remaining Elders in Musqueam, we are trying to get the young people to go our way again. Education can make you think like a White man, we are trying to get our people to think our way. I believe that it is working. Even a lot of White people are starting to look to us now, they want to see the way we work things, they see it work a lot better than the government. Elders should make sure people learn how to be Native, to think Native.

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Leenaars, Antoon A, Susanne Wenckstern, Isaac Sakinofsky, Ronald J. Dyck, Michael J. Kral and Roger C. Bland (Editors): *Suicide in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998, Cloth and paper.

The idea to produce this book goes back to 1998 when the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention was formed. At that time, Antoon Leenaars drew up a list of leading suicide preventionists, and invited them to contribute to a volume on suicide in Canada. The work was completed in 1995 and published in 1998, bringing together a total of twenty-eight papers, many of which are co-authored.

Studies of suicide among Indigenous people, especially those living on Reserves, tend for various reasons to be undertaken as if the subjects of research were unrelated to the social issues of mainstream Canadian society. The authors of this volume go a long way to redress, if quietly, that methodological error, and five chapters are devoted to the Inuit and First Nations Peoples, to whom the volume is dedicated. Happily also, with one unfortunate exception, there is no support for the misleading fallacy that "traditional" suicide among First Nation Peoples "was an act of self-sacrifice that was meant to promote the health and viability of the larger community" (p.5).

Other chapters deal with diverse topics including the epidemiology of suicide in Canada, the magnitude of youth suicide, suicide and the family, and the dimensions of suicide in rural communities. To appreciate the full significance of every contribution, however, it is necessary to record the mandate reminding other professionals (and the general public) of the magnitude of the work needed to solve a major mental and public health problem.

Suicide in Canada also offers important chapters on the creation and operation of distress centres, crisis lines, and concern for the survivors of suicide. And while the title of the last segment of the collection, *The Right to Die*, may strike discordant note, readers should persevere with arguments, because the very final chapter, by Antoon Leenaars, comes special reward, particularly for those who decide to read the whole book (with useless index!) from beginning to end. Here we gain insights into the meaning of the unbearable psychological pain suffered by suicidal victims, their cognitive constriction, and inability to adjust to the closed world in which they envisage themselves.

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Lobo, Susan and Kurt Peters (Editors): *American Indians and the Urban Experience: Contemporary Native American Communities, No. 5*. New York: Altamira. hc - 0742502740 US\$ 69.00.

This book is the reprint of a special issue of the *Native American Culture and Research Journal*. This expanded re-edition of that collection has made available to a wider public, the work of some of the most important Native and non-Native scholars engaged in the research of the sociology and anthropology of urban Indian North American. Dealing with the multifaceted realities of urban Aboriginal North Americans, it offers the chance to compare the often fragmentary positions epitomised in the voices gathered in this new collection. The reader gains both the broad historical overviews of urban Indian traditions since before the contact, and also the extra position of local experiences and case studies to poetry and photographs which poignantly show the vibrant cultural vitality of contemporary Native America. The book indeed helps to articulate a contemporary Native reality that is far more complex than the one expressed in the notion of "urban" often used in simplistic opposition to an allegedly homogenous and diametrically opposite "rural" experience. It will undoubtedly inspire future research in this too often neglected area of Native American and First Nations Studies.

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Ryan, Allan J.: *The Trickster Shift, Humor and Irony in Contemporary Native Art*. Vancouver: UBC Press, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, 304 pp., black and white and colour reproductions, ISBN 0-295-97816-3, Cloth\$ 65.00.

Over many generations Native people lost their will to speak for themselves. The years of oppression, segregation and forced integration into the majority White society had a lot to do with this silence. Those brave leaders who attempted to speak were often never heard, their voices silenced by racist laws and/or simple disbelief. It is only in the second part of the 20th century that the voice became louder and the politicians began to hear it. Much of the strength of this voice can be attributed to contempo-

rary Native artists who undertook the role of spokespersons and critics for their people.

When I first had contact with Native people I immediately recognized their fantastic sense of humor. Observing contemporary Native art, I quickly discovered that it reflects not simply the traditions and contemporary lives of people, but in fact goes much further to raise issues of great importance in contemporary society.

From the history lessons we know that perhaps the most important figure after the monarch of the medieval court was a jester. He was the one who could say anything and criticize everyone, even risking his head to gently chide the monarch himself. Most of the time he used humor to make his point, thus avoiding losing his life. I strongly believe that contemporary Native artists have assumed a similar role in our society in the latter part of the 20th century. He is very observant, he studies the past and understands the present, and tries to bring attention to the most important issues of our time, injustice past and present. Is he a modern jester or a trickster?

This role of the artist is a complicated one. In visual art you have to be precise and make the point in one short statement. In order to do this your understanding of the issue must be of the highest caliber.

In his book Allan Ryan fulfills our expectations. The text is loaded with information. There is a formal discussion of the value of works of art and their historical context together with frequent quotes from the artists about their personal experiences. Well illustrated, the text provides hours of interesting and intimate time. This book is a gem!

The majority of the works relate to political issues, but there is also a large number dealing with the imposition of European religion on Native people. Through analysis of these works one begins to understand for what purpose the new religion was used. It definitely was not a proper introduction to the true faith. It was the abuse of religious concepts to exert the control over the people and to integrate them into White society by destroying their own faiths, their languages and their traditions, a truly fascist, and not Christian, means of conquering. The church was a major part of the cultural genocide of Native people across North America. The works of art presented in this volume confirm this idea.

Although many, if not most, Native artists depend upon humor to carry this point across, most of the time the humor is very black. It is tragic and restrained. This somehow confirms my hypothesis that there is similarity between the Trickster and the Jester. Both personages are tragic figures, not quite threatened with the loss of their lives but doomed in their existence. One issue raised by the artists in their personal statements was the problem of identity. Because many contemporary artists deal with more political than

cultural issues, they face the problem of the definition of a Native artist as established by their traditional communities. In the past it was only acceptable to do traditional forms of art, such as moccasins, birchbark biting or symbolic representation of Native legends. To this day many artists follow this tradition. They do not face the wrath of their community. The moment an artist abandons those traditions and tries to express wider and perhaps more urgent social and political issues, often using western techniques, he is perceived as a traitor to his culture. The preservation of the culture is important, but every cultural group should also have one or more powerful spokespersons, people who can identify the most pressing issues of the day and have enough courage to talk about them in a strong yet simple way. I should stress the simple in here, because the statements made by Native artists today are directed both to our politicians and to the general public which may have problems understanding the more complex statements.

When I look at the illustrations in this book I am impressed with the quality of expression and with the honesty of artistic statements. Somehow Allan Ryan convinced me that contemporary Native art is superior to much western art, simply because it deals with real issues in a convincing fashion. Western contemporary art frequently identifies the issues, but leaves one questioning the honesty and sincerity of the artists. Do they really believe what they say or do they express themselves thusly simply because it is fashionable to say it? Lack of honesty is evident in western contemporary art much too frequently.

The Trickster Shift is a valuable manual of the contemporary Native art scene. It finally assembles in one huge volume art works never before seen together and often lost in small local shows or minor publications. With a great and witty writer the book comes to life. I hope that it becomes a permanent desk copy in the offices of politicians. A message to our politicians: if you don't understand Native issues, read *The Trickster Shift*. It will change your life. A message to the general public: the history of western art is only part of the story. Read *The Trickster Shift* to learn the other part. It will complete the circle.

A message to all: Don't miss it. Books like this are published only too rarely.

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