

ASAIL Notes

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The concept of mutual respect embodied in the Two Row Wampum, in which Natives and non-Natives will not interfere in each other's affairs, must now be brought to life . . . our 'row' must be made strong enough to withstand any and all attempts by foreign powers to control it . . . with the guidance, will and authority of the people, we must simply go ahead and exercise our right to self determination in order to maintain it! -- Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, 1993.

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ASAIL NOTES

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Editor's Note

This issue is dedicated to Native Literature in Canada, which has seen enormous growth in the last few years, but which, for a number of reasons, has remained relatively unknown in the United States. In the States, we hear of the better known Native writers in Canada: Maria Campbell, Tomson Highway, and Basil Johnston. But, to our detriment, we may not hear of emerging voices from across the border such as Duncan Mercredi, Richard Green, and Don Saywer. This issue presents a small part of the available new fiction and poetry from by emerging writing across the arbitrary border between us and the First Nations people of Canada.

I would like to thank publicly several people who helped me put together this issue: Caroline and Brooke at the Woodland Pattern Bookstore in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Armand Ruffo, Rolland Nadjiwon, Miranda Chitze, Mitzi Brown, and especially Laura Murray.

Native Writing School

The En'owkin International School of Writing and Fine Arts Program is a two-year credit program, leading to a certificate in First Nations Creative Writing awarded jointly by the En'owkin Centre and the University of Victoria.

For more information, write to:

En'owkin Centre
257 Brunswick Street
Penticton, British Columbia V2A 5P9
(604) 493-7181

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Publishers of Native Books in Canada

Pemmican Publications Inc.
Unit #2
1635 Burrows Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2X 0T1

Pemmican publications was incorporated in October 1980 as a Métis publishing house. The purpose of the press is to keep alive the memory of Louis Riel as one of the founders of Manitoba, and to provide opportunities for Métis and Aboriginal people to tell their stories from their own perspectives. Pemmican is committed to publishing books which depict Métis and Aboriginal lifestyles in a positive manner, and which address Métis and Aboriginal historical, social and contemporary issues.

Louise Erdrich, author of *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*, says: "The books available from Pemmican Publications are varied, fascinating and illuminating. Many of them are must reads for anyone who seeks to understand the historical and contemporary situations of the real first people of the Plains."

Theytus Books, Ltd.
257 Brunswick Street
Penticton, V2A 5P9 British Columbia

In 1980, Theytus Books established itself as the first publisher in Canada to be under First Nations ownership and control. The company is entirely staffed by Aboriginal people and has published over sixty titles. After fifteen years of operation, the company continues to carry out its mandate of producing quality literature presented from a First Nations perspective.

Theytus' general philosophy has remained intact since its inception and is contained in the company's name. "Theytus" is a Salishan word which means "preserving for the sake of handing down." The name "Theytus" was chosen to symbolize the goal of documenting First Nation cultures and worldviews through books. Beyond that, Theytus strives to produce appropriate reading material amid information about First Nations people through the promotion of First Nations authors.

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Some Recent Publications

Gatherings Volume VI: "Metamorphosis: Manifesting and Respecting Diversity in Our Transformation," edited by Linda Jaine and Don Fiddler (Penticton: Theytus, 1995). *Gatherings* is the only journal focussing on literary writings by Aboriginal authors in North America and features a wide array of poetry, short stories, essays, drama, criticism, biography, songs, excerpts from works in progress and oratory. "*Gatherings* is an exciting and impressive journal . . . The writing here is tough, uncompromising, often painful and necessary. You will come out of *Gatherings* know a lot more than you did going in." -- Margaret Atwood.

Just Talking about Ourselves: Voices of Our Youth, Volumes 1 & 2. (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995). *Just Talking About Ourselves* is a series of anthologies by First Nations youth. The prose that comprise these anthologies are true depictions of the lives of the Native youth in urban amid reserve settings. Many of the submissions talk of sadness, despair, and the joy of being a young Native person amid surviving in today's realities.

Stories of the Road Allowance People, by Maria Campbell, illustrated by Sherry Farrell Rocette (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1995). Celebrated author Maria Campbell draws heavily from her Métis heritage with this compilation of old-time and contemporary stories.

Wolf and Shadows, by Duncan Mercredi (Winnipeg: Pemmican, 1995). This is Duncan Mercredi's third book of poetry. In this volume his poetry continues to reflect on the experience of becoming "citified." The poems deal with both the loss amid the preservation of traditional ways in the urban environment. A longing to go back to a simpler time is offset by the realization that this return is possible only in memories. There are also glimpses of hope for the future, especially for children.

Sing, Like a Hermit Thrush, by Richard G. Green (Winnipeg: Pemmican, 1995). Darin Captain, a thirteen year-old Turtle Clan Mohawk youth, begins a cultural re-awakening that allows him to find out about himself and reach an understanding that it is ok to be different.

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my heart is a stray bullet, by kateri damm (Cape Croker, Ontario: Kecedonce Press, 1995). The poems in this collection examine issues of identity, positionality, desire, and unity from the perspective of a First Nations woman of mixedblood. Through the blending of voices, traditions amid memories from First Nations amid European cultures, the poems represent a challenge to re-define notions of authority, identity, amid genre. They probe, question, amid problematize definitions of "Native-ness" and assert the interfusional, multi-dimensional space of the mixedblood.

The Moon and Dead Indians, by Daniel David Moses (Ontario: Exile Editions, 1995). In these linked plays, part of the Theatre Pass Muraille's 1996 season, Daniel David Moses, the prize-winning playwright and a "registered Indian," explores the "frontier" amid discovers that a human face of the old West was more than cowboys and Indians. The *Globe and Mail's* Ray Conlogue says Moses "writes with a poetic suggestiveness that recalls Tennessee Williams: he is operating as an artist, not as an explainer or apologist for his people."

I'll Sing Til the Day I Die: Conversations with Tyendinaga Elders, edited by Beth Brant (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 1995). From the jacket: "This is our history, as passed down from the Elders. Our Elders are walking history books. They have acquired lifetimes of knowledge during their stay on Mother Earth. Although there may be no scientific dates attached, nor Carbon-14 dating to support the accounts of this verbal history, it is the way we have recorded our story since our existence -- long before Columbus, or the coming of Cartier." An excerpt from the book: "If I had it to do over, I wouldn't change many things. Maybe a few! But I had a vision when I was younger, about being Chief and helping out the people. I tried to do my best. You know, this is the Mother Reserve of the Iroquois Confederacy, and it's very special here. ALL of us have to do our part." -- Earl Hill.

The Bear Walker and Other Stories, by Basil H. Johnston illustrated by David A. Johnson. (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1995). In the tradition of *Tales of the Elders Told* and *Tales of the Anishinaubaek*, Basil Johnston's newest work, *The Bear Walker*, brings to the printed page the spoken myths of his people, myths that have inspired the exquisite paintings by David Johnson. Here is the native spirit, as told by

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the elders, tales of wisdom amid humor, vision and fantasy, alive with a sense of the magical possibilities of life lived close to nature.

Native Canadiana: Songs from the Urban Rez, by Gregory Scofield. Gregory Scofield is a hip and streetwise Métis activist, and one of Canada's most exciting young writers. His first book, *The Gathering: Stories for the Medicine Wheel*, won the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize. Patrick Lane writes: "These poems are painfully beautiful, painfully honest. The poems move through the dark worlds of childhood amid manhood and bring to us the gift of light amid affirmation with a lyrical intensity that astonishes."

Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1996). *Song of Rita Joe* is the story of Joe's remarkable life: her education in an Indian residential school, her turbulent marriages, and the daily struggles within her family amid community. It is the story of how Joe battles with racism, sexism, poverty, amid how personal demons became the catalyst for her first poems and allowed her to reclaim her aboriginal heritage. Today, her story continues: as she moves into old age, Joe writes that her life-long spiritual quest is ever-deepening.

The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway by Basil Johnston (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995). Spiritual tales, tribal teachings, and Native legends are provocatively interwoven through the time-honored oral traditions of the Ojibway, the ancient American and Canadian Indian tribe. Brought together in published for the first time by Basil Johnston, the world's leading Ojibway expert, the *Manitous* is a definitive, spellbinding collection, one that represents the rich spiritual canon of one of the oldest North American Indian peoples. Manitous are mysteries and spirits -- the essence that infuses and safeguards plants, and animals, including humans, in all aspects of life.

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Poetry

by Armand Garnet Ruffo

No place to feel sorry for yourself.

You said it was the same everywhere
and rolled up your sleeve. To show me
what I thought was a bracelet
tattooed to skin
but was really camouflage
for a white scar
so faint it showed more the dream of death
than the actual attempt.

Call it consequence or memory.

Do you think it was any different anywhere else?
Africa, Asia . . . you said, when I complained
about what they had done
to my ancestors
to Great Turtle Island.

The history of the world (you said,
by this time looking quite bored with me
or was it sadness I detected?)
in one short line.

The victor writes the books,
 pins the medals
 takes the bows,
 names the buildings,
 the cities, provinces
 whole countries even.

There you have it.
But they made treaties, I said.
Promises?
That was when you laughed.

Armand Garnet Ruffo, Objiway, teaches at Carleton University in
Ottawa. He is the author of *Opening In the Sky* (Theytus).

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Essay

Harvesting the Colonies by Rolland Nadjiwon

When writing about their communities, Native American writers often inadvertently write from a fundamentally indoctrinated viewpoint. Such writings reveal the assimilation of foreign definitions consistent with intense cultural absorption and extreme colonialism. For instance, Native Canadian playwright Tomson Highway accepts the Marxist view that man is by nature a producer supports the notion of progress as continuous replacement, and the notion that what is replaced is inferior to that which is doing the replacing. In his play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Highway's bush camp must be replaced by urban sprawl, his Cree language must be replaced with English, and biological parents must be replaced with surrogates.

Highway is aware that he has been intensely indoctrinated to accept linear, Euro-American thinking about becoming and progress.. He says that "the European system is a straight line, what I call the Genesis to Revelations line: progress, progress, progress, point A to point B, until the apocalypse comes" (Nancy Wilson, *Books in Canada*, 1989). Highway seems to understand this point but does not use his knowledge to challenge this apocalyptic, linear progress inside his head or in Wasaychigan Hill. Highway's characters have, in fact, adopted alien ideas of who they are into their own hives. His characters are marginal and individuated. They feel the need to pull away from their own social life and distance themselves from the rest of their community. Zachary believes that by becoming a baker and owning a bakery he can create this distance. Big Joey believes that by becoming the owner of a series of radio stations he can accomplish the same thing. Spooky Lacroix believes everything about Indians is wrong and can only be corrected by everyone becoming a born again Christian. Simon Starblanket thinks it can be done by becoming a born again Indian. All four characters accept that they, and their community, are not good enough and must change.

Highway deals with becoming and progress as though they were always a component of Wasaychigan Hill culture when he knows, in fact, they are not. Highway's dilemma is not about Indians leaving their communities but about their staying. His characters must distance themselves from

{8} their community and each other without leaving -- they must pull out without going anywhere.

Highway thinks that Native communities are tragedies and are generally negative experiences. The solutions to the problems, he believes, lie outside those communities in the whiteman's world. John Bemrose understands Highway to believe:

[Canada's Native people] have abandoned Nanabush to drift in the alien, commercialized society around them. It is a fate that Highway admits he came close to sharing. But instead of ending up a drunk or a suicide, he clung to the safety rope of academic achievement.

These judgments illustrate the mental colonialism which, once accepted by Native people, causes Native people to destroy themselves and their communities from the inside. They are main stream Euro-American, stereotypical, amid categorical definitions of Native Americans.

There is little that is real in the portrayal of Native people as white people turned inside out, or that Native culture is achieved by assuming a position the exact opposite to Euro-Americans. A valid Native person becomes someone who wears and "Indian shirt," and loudly decries all that is associated with being white, e.g. school, church, institutions, bureaucracy, amid etc. The result is that Indian history gets .cleaned up to meet middle class white standards to that whites were the ones who introduced scalping to North America, Indians never killed women and children in battle, and Indian religion is just good modern ecological practice. Native writers often portray capitalism as the answer to every Indian problem, from alcoholism to governmental inefficiency. Ironically, their motives stem primarily from a desire to be accepted by the whites whom they appear to criticize. Much of Native American literature is to tell white people how badly they have treated Native people in bringing them to a culture of suicide, violence, alcoholism, and despondency. Rita Joe, a Micmac poet writes: "Please understand; / Because all our life has already been labeled." In both statements she condemns the whiteman for what he has made her, and herself for staying that way. Rita Joe feels she has no choice because the chisel carving the image is a mechanical relationship and she is not the chisel. The relationship is set and named

{9} with a label. In her next poem she says: "I speak like you / I think hike you / I create like you." Here Rita Joe's fate is sealed not only from the outside carving of the chisel but from within. Her speech, thought, and ability to be original is no longer her own. Rita Joe's enemy has moved from external to internal. She has, in fact, become her own enemy through the surrender of her internal self to the power of the external chisel, and she wants to tell about that.

Literature about Native people amid its interpretation of Native American realities is popularized by Euro-American media because the media is able to deflect from Native people the ability to see imperialism amid colonialism as the root cause of many problems in Native American communities. This Euro-Americanism amounts to a cultural genocide which annihilates Native people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage, in their unity, in their capacities, and in themselves. Native people develop negative images about themselves which cause them to want to distance themselves from their own people and their communities. It causes them to identify with that which is furthest from themselves such as other people's religions and languages.

Any definitive struggle against this annihilation is brought into serious moral and righteous doubt and, consequently, any possibility of success is seen as a remote and ridiculous dream. The results to real Native people in real Native communities are ultimately despair, despondency, amid a collective death wish. For this tragedy, Euro-American imperial colonialism presents itself as the only cure which can allow Native people, like Zachary Keedhigeesik, to awaken from their bad dream into the nightmare of their reality.

Rolland Nadjiwon, Potawatomi, has a BA English/Political Science and is a political refugee in Canada, father of four, grandfather of three. He also has a book of poetry coining out soon.

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The Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures Membership

Our association by-laws passed three years ago, and in accordance with them we are calling for readers to join. In the past, the association's two publications -- ***SAIL (Studies in American Indian Literatures)*** and ***ASAIL NOTES*** -- were separate entities with their own subscription forms, mailing lists, and so on. Now, the two are funded from membership funds and contributions from supporting institutions. This means that you can now receive both publications, as well as all rights and benefits of membership, by contacting Robert Nelson, SAIL Subscriptions, Box 112, University of Richmond, Richmond VA 23173.