IN OUR OWN WORDS: NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN METIS WOMEN SPEAK OUT

Edited by Dolores T. Poelzer and Irene A. Poelzer. Saskatoon: Lindenblatt & Hamonie, 198? *Sole distributor:* One Sky, 134 Ave. F South, Saskatoon, S7M 1S8

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After reading this book I was left with many impressions — northern Métis women's perceptions of their social reality; the toughness and endurance of these women in their struggle with social and economic change; an excellent and refreshing way of conducting cross-cultural research; and the value of this book as a tool for critical awareness and political empowerment. The Poelzers' research sheds light on a theme that has received little attention in the past from researchers: northern Métis women and change. The uniqueness of this book lies in the inclusion and participation of northern people in the research process. Métis women tell in their own words what it is like for them during a time of transition. In essence they talk and we listen. Dr. Irene Poelzer merely assumes the role of recorder.

Métis women discuss a wide range of topics such as education, marriage and the family, housing, religion, social development, and their struggle with maintaining the Indian way and adapting to mainstream society. The reader becomes aware of the factors that oppress Métis women in a male-dominated social structure reinforced by the dominant society's institutions, and social problems (such as a lack of employment, day care facilities and human services, the destruction of alcoholism and family violence, high food prices, inadequate housing, the devastation of mining and resource development and the diminishing knowledge of the Indian way). The existence of these problems indicates the lack of public awareness and neglect by government of the realities of northern Saskatchewan.

The prologue is as interesting as the book itself because it reveals the advantage of using a phenomenological approach in cross-cultural research. It is common knowledge that the major factor affecting research in another cultural setting is the researcher. The prejudices and politics of the researcher will affect the success and validity of the research. A phenomenological approach allowed Dr. Irene Poelzer to immerse herself in another culture, develop an understanding of its values and attitudes, and become sensitive to the needs and aspirations of Saskatchewan's northern Métis women in their struggle with change. The information revealed in this book indicates a cooperative effort; a genuine rapport was created between Dr. Poelzer and the women of northern Saskatchewan.

One should not be deceived by the title of the book: *two* perceptions of northern Saskatchewan are presented, that of Métis women and Dr. Poelzer's. She both records how Métis women perceive their reality and describes as a non-Native and non-northern resident her perceptions of northern Saskatchewan. The presentation of these two perceptions is facilitated by the use of an enjoyable, easy-reading narrative style — a refreshing alternative to empiricist formats that often bog the reader down in theoretical jargon to the point where the research becomes incomprehensible. Dr. Poelzer's personal experiences and perceptions of daily community routines and activities, conversations with people, and opinions and feelings are related at the beginning of each chapter. The intertwining of the author's perceptions and Native women's perceptions illustrates the contrasts in values of two cultures, the first impressions and sense of confusion possessed by one entering another's culture, and the compassion Dr. Poelzer has for Métis women who are struggling with rapid social change.

The use of the narrative style breathes life into the research by producing a vivid picture in the reader's mind of the paradox of northern Saskatchewan's reality. The immense landscape, dotted with lakes and blocks of tall pine, intertwined with meadows and muskegs and sparsely populated communities adhering to a life of simplicity, hospitality and the Indian way, is sharply contrasted to the social problems resulting from rapid technological change, exploitation and poverty. Although one is shocked and dismayed by the present social and economic conditions of northern Saskatchewan, one also feels a sense of optimism. The authors have demonstrated a new role for researchers, one of active participant and facilitator (rather than passive observer). The Poelzers involved themselves in the process of social change. They conducted the research with the intent of giving it back to the women to use as a tool for critical awareness and collective empowerment that will enable them to initiate direct action for improvements in the quality of life. Solutions to problems were not formulated from the perspective of the researchers (which is often the case with academic research), but came from Métis women themselves. This grassroots approach indicates the authors' sensitivity to the emergence of a new personal and collective identity among northern Métis women who are seeking self-determination.

This book is not only of value to northerners, but to those involved in the helping professions — such as educators, social workers, community developers and medical personnel. The identification of problems and solutions by Métis women provides a working base for professional helpers and will enhance cooperation between the two groups. The broad overview of topics presented will also provide a stimulus for further indepth research on particular situations in northern Saskatchewan.

The greatest value of this book is the knowledge it will provide to the general public, who know little about the complexities of northern Saskatchewan. A critical awareness will help break a very real barrier between the north and south, based on prejudice, fear and lack of understanding. Northern Saskatchewan's Métis women have willingly shared their lives with the rest of society, in the hope that an understanding will occur and southerners will support northern people through their struggle with change.

THE MOCCASSIN MAKER

E. Pauline Johnson. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1987.

Louise H. Mahood

Born in 1861, E. Pauline Johnson was the daughter of George Henry Martin, a Mohawk chief of English and native descent, and Emily Susanna Howells, an English emigree who came to Upper Canada by way of Ohio. After spending most of her adult life travelling Canada and England to perform public readings of her poetry, Pauline settled into story writing until her death in March 1913. *The Moccassin Maker*, her last collection, was published posthumously. From her life and travels, these stories are about white culture encroaching upon native-Canadian peoples' lives. This collection is not just, as critics noted, another example of Victorian literature with the vivid treat-

ment of native themes and the description of nature. It is also a book with remarkable portrayals of women's triumph through trying events.

A major cross-cultural theme is women's unique relationship to children. Tillicum in "The Legend of Lillooet Falls" expresses it best as "...a strange tie between [mothers] and their children. The men of magic say they can 'see'... though you and I cannot." Modelled after Pauline's mother, Lydia Bestman Mansion in "My Mother" reflects Johnson's own secure and happy childhood. "Mother o' the Men" and "The Nest Builder" are two other stories in which white women endure the geographical isolation from other women that was so much a part of frontier life. Yet they were still happy to raise children. Regardless of circumstances Johnson believed women are drawn to children. Catherine, a native woman in "Catherine of the 'Crow's Nest'," is committed to raising the white baby girl she found. When the father returns for his child he recognizes the attachment and arranges to have Catherine continue parenting his baby. Maarda's empty cradle-basket is the focal point of her pain told in "The Tenas Klootchman". By story's end Maarda's native heart is dancing as she looks at the orphaned baby girl she can raise. The story that sings is "The Envoy Extraordinary" for it tells of Martha Norris, who ignores her husband's estrangement from their son and visits her new grandchild. Johnson's stories affirm that women's strange ties to children can promote happiness in less than ideal circumstances.

While Johnson's mother-woman characters do not always challenge woman's role in society, they do address the hypocrisy of white religion that has emotionally, physically and spiritually maimed both white and native people. In a short essay, "A Pagan in St. Paul's Cathedral," the native narrator notes the contrast between a native's harmony with nature and this magnificent but cold stone structure, the 'home' for the Great White Father, called the King of England. In "As It Was in the Beginning," the Cree chief's daughter is raised in the Christian mission. Escaping the mission, she can not escape dreaming "...nightly of the horrors of the man's hell. Why did they teach me of it, only to fling me into it?" In the story "A Red Girl's Reasoning," Christine, married to white Charlie MacDonald, asks: "Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine?" Unreconciled, Christine leaves her husband. Inter-racial marriage is a major source of tension. For Rev. Joe Cragstone his love for Lydia, a native woman accused of theft, costs him his priesthood in "The Derelict." In the fast-paced drama, "Her Majesty's Guest," the Rev. Tom Barrett, is helped by a native woman to locate where criminals have stored good whiskey. The women in these stories break any presumed code of silence to challenge both races to respect the differences in religion and culture.

The introduction by A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff provides a comprehensive background of the author's life and, work and an analysis of the stories within the genre of Victorian literature. While thorough in her analysis, the only weakness is Ruoff's reference to the native people as Indian. This seems out of place today when many are trying to correct the errors instilled by the white world. Continuing to perpetuate such a mis-naming of native people is unfortunate.

Johnson's stories affirm native people, religion and culture. They affirm women's strength as protagonists challenging destructive forces in the patriarchal white and native societies. Yet a characteristic motif of Victorian literature is romantic love. Her stories' shortfall for the modern reader is that their heroines are idealized and romantic. While naive romantic love does not resolve racial tension, with these stories Johnson created for herself a sympathetic audience who identified with her characters' struggles against tremendous odds. We were fortunate that Pauline Johnson wrote these stories and even more to have the collection republished for our use.