

BOOK REVIEWS

Judson, Katharine Berry (Editor): *Myths and Legends of the Pacific Northwest*. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997, ISBN 0-8032-7597-1.

Ninety years ago, Katharine Berry Judson, a transplanted easterner and subsequent librarian and historian in the states of Montana and Washington, published a collection of Native American myths and legends (McClurg, 1910). In 1997 the University of Nebraska Press reissued this material under the title *Myths and Legends of the Pacific Northwest*. Jay Miller, a modern interpreter of Amerindian folklore from Prince Rupert, BC, introduces this still attractive volume.

In addition to the traditional stories themselves, this book provides an interesting perspective on how Native mythology was presented to a largely non-Native readership early this century. Miller states:

It is symptomatic of European attitudes toward Native Americans that she did not stop to realize that some of the references she uses (such as a stone bridge) were never a part of local native technology. Similarly, she treats all natives as though they lived in tipis, wore leather clothing, and called their women squaws. Such stereotypes are, of course, derogatory because they deny the complex richness of native life.

One of the photos depicts hisqua shells taken from an Indian grave at old Ft. Columbia, WA (p.76), a clear case of disrespect for the dead; while in another instance, a massacre is blamed on the Cayuse people—providing an example of non-Native historical bias which can no longer be defended. Many tribal names referred to in the text are outdated because current practice adopts those used by the people themselves and not the labels applied to them by outsiders. Given these non-Native prejudices and dated applications, one might wonder why this collection should be republished. There is some value in its demonstration that progress has been made in human rights awareness. Also the book offers an important reminder that what today might be modern and progressive in terms of current literature by Whites about Native Americans will be equally ludicrous a century from now. Judson's collection was considered avant garde in her time.

Many of the more than fifty myths in the collection had been recast for a general American audience (3) and something is lost in the translation since the original narrative was oral, not written, in nature. Thus, the reader loses that communal sense of the story-telling event. Some stories are only small remnants of much larger sagas and therefore the greater impact of what was meant to be conveyed cannot be replicated. Judson seems hardly aware of the interrelated nature of life (plants, animals, inanimate beings and humans) being depicted and thus, the stories are rather one-dimensional in their presentation. Again, this reflects the prevailing wisdom of her time.

There are obviously some redemptive features as well. The tales represent a distillation of tribal memory (5). They provide apt negative examples to teach Native children what not to do (a number of taboos are included for example) and they promote environmental wisdom.

What is most intriguing to this reviewer are the common themes shared by some Native stories and classical Greek and other mythologies. Ancestral beings arrive by canoe and name settlements, physical features, etc. in much the same way Odysseus did by warship in Homer's *Odyssey*. Just as Prometheus stole fire from the gods and paid his price in suffering, so Coyote, Beaver and Dog are portrayed in acts of bravery, hubris and punishment. It is interesting also to note the existence of a flood myth (79), of humans naming animals (87), and of a mother vowing her firstborn child to her god (92). One cannot deny that Native American mythologies share in the presentation of certain common monomyths or major human themes with all the great religious and human cultural traditions. The major mythic themes in the collection are stories of creation, the origin of different human races, theft of fire from the gods, naming of certain local physical features (rivers, mountains, etc.) and the significance of the salmon for the people of the region.

Another credit to Judson is her attempt to convey these stories simply and without academic embellishment. Even if many anecdotes seem isolated from their original context, there was obvious effort on the part of the original editor not to read into these stories a certain White religious bias. It is quite likely that at least some of the narratives have been doctored in order to minimise offence (e.g. sexual nuance) to non-Native readers of the early 20th century.

Here, as in many collections, the folklore provides answers to the origins of various local Pacific Northwest tribes. Explanations are offered for why some animals are considered friends and others, adversaries; or why twins were considered a bad omen in certain traditional societies (pp.102-108). The humour in many of these anecdotes is really outrageous

but often largely underemphasised (see, for example Coyote and the Dragon, pp. 116-117).

Modern readers owe much to early redactors of Native American mythology with the quality of Katharine Berry Judson. As Native people take more and more opportunity to interpret their own stories to wider audiences they have a debt of gratitude to women and men like Judson, who—even though a person of her times—opened the way for a more authentic telling of immortal stories with universal human application.

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Mackie, Richard S.: *Trading Beyond the Mountains: The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793-1843*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997. ISBN 0-7748-0613-3, Paperback.

To write histories of Turtle Island in the 1990s is to enter a conversation transformed by postcoloniality. Hayden White, Foucault, Paul Carter, Said, Mary Louise Pratt and others have rendered Eurocentric, top-down histories retrograde. Thus, discussion of the Pacific slope fur trade now features Cole Harris's application of Foucault and Giddens in order to explicate strategies of power, Sylvia van Kirk's research into gender and sexuality, Brian Fawcett's attention to emplotment, Daniel Francis's casting of George Simpson as the man "who turned the canoe into a weapon of bureaucratic tyranny," and Hal Niedzviecki's description of the Hudson's Bay Trading Company and the North West Company as "Canada's first corporate merger" and Simpson as "Canada's first bloated CEO."

Richard Mackie writes a more traditional history in *Trading Beyond the Mountains*. He concisely outlines his project in the Introduction when he states, "This is a study in commercial policy, environmental adaptation, and capitalist success." His statement implies a specific understanding of "trading" and "trade" as commerce and as the application of capital. The mantras of capitalism—expansion, profit growth, product diversification, market penetration—are, willy-nilly, assumed to be "good" ingredients for "success." The book's title further implies an Anglocentric view, looking *beyond* the established perimeters of capital, to the hinterlands. The reader who understands the title of the book in this way, and is comfortable with

the approach, will find *Trading Beyond the Mountains* an exemplary study—thoroughly researched, clearly written, and voluminous. If, however, she or he has postcolonial concerns, or believes that “trade” involves exchange *between* parties, or seeks a view *from* the supposed margins, this book will frustrate.

Trading Beyond the Mountains focuses on the HBC after its merger with the NWC in 1821. The London-based directors of the HBC appointed George Simpson Governor of the Columbia Department, as they designated the region from the Rockies to the Pacific and from the cordilleran interior north to the Columbia River in the south. Simpson’s corporate strategy sought monopoly control over the area, the development of internal supplies of food, reduced labour costs, the application of new technologies (especially in transportation), the nurturing of new export markets (e.g., Oahu), and the search for export commodities other than fur. Simpson’s goal was to rationalize HBC operations and to diversify from the fur trade.

Mackie details how trade in salmon, agricultural products, and especially lumber grew while trade in fur stagnated; how the HBC increasingly obtained its supplies from the Sandwich Islands or grew produce at Fort Vancouver, rather than transport supplies from York Factory or London; how company employees switched from being *courier de bois* to work within the stockades; and how the company located and developed markets for new Pacific exports. Thus, by 1841-42 the HBC had become a general trading company on the Pacific, and could be better headquartered at Fort Victoria on Vancouver Island—connected by sea to London, San Francisco, Oahu, Fort Simpson, and Sitka—than at Fort Vancouver on the treacherous Columbia. Mackie points out that the company’s eastern origins were still apparent—in the fundamentals of its corporate culture and the demography of its workforce, for example.

Mackie’s scholarship is diligent, and the study is well illustrated, with Eric Leinberger’s cartography especially noteworthy. In sum, *Trading Beyond the Mountains* will provide helpful source material for cultural commentators participating in the current conversation.

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Sterrit, Neil J., Susan Marsden, Robert Galois, Peter R. Grant, and Richard Overstall: *Tribal Boundaries in the Nass Watershed*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998.

Gisday Wa and Elgam Uukw: *The Spirit of the Land: Statements of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs in the Supreme Court of British Columbia 1987-1990*. Second Printing. Gabriola, British Columbia: Reflections, 1992.

There are two recent events of significant importance to students of Native studies. One is the recent treaty, the Nisga'a Agreement, and the other is the December 1997 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Delgamuukw*. The Nisga'a Agreement is the culmination of a series of Nisga'a claims to territories in the Nass valley of British Columbia. However, the Gitksan claim that the Nisga'a have included Gitksan territories within the Nisga'a land claim. Although the *Delgamuukw* decision was sent back down for a retrial, the Court of Canada held that the lower courts must take the oral histories of Aboriginal groups seriously and give equal weight to such evidence.

Tribal Boundaries and *The Spirit of the Land* will be very useful books for those interested in learning more about the issues surrounding Aboriginal land claims generally. More specifically, these two books focus on the claims being made by the neighbouring First Nations in the northern interior of British Columbia. With the pronouncements of the Supreme Court of Canada in *Delgamuukw*, the courts will have to give greater weight to oral histories, something that many academics have been doing for some time (Cruikshank, 1994; McLeod, 1992). Thus, the time is right for students to have available to them examples of claims based on oral histories. Both *Tribal Boundaries* and *The Spirit of the Land* provide oral historical evidence to support Aboriginal title claims. *Tribal Boundaries* deals with the issue of competing claims between First Nations to the same territories, an issue which has not received much academic attention.

The purpose of *Tribal Boundaries* is to "initiate substantive discussion between [the Gitksan] and the Nisga'a by examining and evaluating the available evidence pertaining to the competing claims" (p.3). The authors utilize both the "Gitksan tradition, in which evidence of territorial ownership is formally validated, and the Euro-Canadian academic tradition, in which evidence from documentary sources is researched and analyzed" (p.3). One commentator has stated that documentary evidence "will do little more than amplify and synthesize the oral evidence of the claimants themselves" (Elias, 1989). However, the Gitksan no doubt realize that the more evidence

that can be entered, the stronger the argument that a claim has been proven.

The book is the publication of a report written for negotiations between the Gitksan and Nisga'a before settlement of the Nisga'a land claim. Since the initial report did not "generate the intended dialogue concerning the Gitksan-Nisga'a boundary, with either the Nisga'a or the federal and provincial governments," it was decided that publication was necessary to "educate Euro-Canadians, especially in the political arena" (p.3). It was also intended to reach a wider audience such as "anthropologists, legal experts, geographers, and historians."

The authors of *Tribal Boundaries* make use of a variety of sources to evidence Gitksan ownership of traditional territories. They especially make great use of oral histories (*adaawk*) as well as personal knowledge and experiences on the land. The intimate knowledge of the land is evidenced by the many hunters, trappers, fishermen and other community members who have place names in their own language. Some geographical features which the Gitksan have a name for do not have English names on maps. Other sources are documentary in nature and include studies by historians and anthropologists, Royal Commissions, travelers' notes, missionaries' documents, etc.

The evidence presented in *Tribal Boundaries* makes a compelling case for Gitksan ownership of some territories included as part of the Nisga'a land claim. The authors begin with the presentation of oral histories of the Gitksan and illustrates that some land was owned by certain Gitksan Houses from time immemorial, while some lands were acquired through wars or as a means of compensation for a wrongful death or murder of a Gitksan member. The next four chapters present "documentary record" of the Gitksan themselves, the Nisga'a and the Euro-Canadian explorers, surveyors and settlers which corroborates the oral histories. For example, in 1919, a rancher named E.L. Davies was turned back when he attempted to travel through the Gitksan's valley, and he stated "Further I wish to state that the Indians [Gitanyow] claim all the country 60 miles wide and 115 miles long, starting at 10 mile post on the road running into the [Kitwanga] valley. They further said that they would not allow any white man to settle in this valley beyond 10 mile" (p.84). Many of these documents record the respective First Nations' Chiefs or other members describing the extent and nature of their territories.

The authors conclude that there are quite specific boundaries between the Gitksan and their neighbours, the Nisga'a and the Tsetsaut, which can be determined from the evidence presented. The authors claim that "The evidence presented in this book can provide the basis for an objective

assessment of the Gitksan-Gitanyow and Nisga'a boundary" (p.250). I would agree. However, one must keep in mind that this material is presented from the Gitksan perspective.

The Spirit of the Land is a reprint of the Statements of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs to the trail court in their land claims case. It was first printed in 1989. The purpose of this book is essentially to present to a wider audience the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en case for Aboriginal title to the nearly "22,000 square miles on and surrounding the Skeena, Bulkley and Nechako river systems" which they claim "have been occupied and protected by these nations for thousands of years" and "have not been surrendered" (p.1).

The book begins with Gisday Wa's address wherein he states to the Court in Smithers, "Each Wet'suwet'en plaintiff's House owns similar territories. Together they own and govern the Wet'suwet'en territory. As an example, the land on which this courthouse stands is owned by the Wet'suwet'en Chief, Gyolugyet..." (p.5). In Delgam Uukw's address to the Court, he states "The Europeans did not want to know our histories; they did not respect our laws or our ownership of our territories. This ignorance and this disrespect continues." Thus, the hereditary chiefs were asking the trial judge to learn their histories and to end the disrespect shown their ownership of their territories. The publication of this address reaches a much wider Canadian audience.

After providing a brief history of the claim in which they show that the chiefs have been asserting their rights to their lands for more than a century, there is a chapter entitled "The Nature of the Evidence". This chapter was obviously written by the legal counsel for the hereditary chiefs who try to convince the trial judge to do something out of the ordinary, that is, to view the evidence presented, not through his European-influenced legal lens, but rather through the lens of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en. The framework for the development and integration of the oral histories of Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en witnesses has been termed "a masterpiece construction of a model" (Elias, 1989:7).

The argument is made in *The Spirit of the Land* that there are implicit assumptions of Euro-Canadian superiority when courts reject the oral histories of First Nations as compelling evidence of Aboriginal title. Indeed, it is stated, "The challenge here, both for the Court and for us as legal counsel, is to understand and overcome the tendency to view aboriginal societies as existing at an earlier state of development" (p.21). Other challenges for the Court are laid out, including "the problem of communication between very different cultures" (p.22). The problem is not only language interpretation, but also the appreciation that "The Gitksan and

Wet'suwet'en world-view is of a qualitatively different order" (p.22). The world-views of the plaintiff First Nations are put forth and contrasted with the Western world-view, and counsel cautions the Court that "The nature of the continuum between humans, animals, and the spirit world, within cycles of existence, underpins much of the evidence you will hear" (p.23). Thus, the evidence must be considered through the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en world-views.

Legal counsel give an overview of the evidence of Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en societies "in order to illustrate this interconnection between the Indian world-view and the distinctive elements of these societies." Although evidence is not actually presented in this book, an outline illustrates what would make up the evidence at trial. Evidence would include oral histories told at a Feast and witnessed by other Chiefs and the public. Other sources tied to the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en culture and governance structures include crests, totem poles, and songs. Such sources illustrate how the First Nations' governing structures are rooted in the spirit of the land. Since the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en languages have not been written down until very recently, their evidence, which is based on oral traditions, requires the "evidence of the Chiefs and elders in which they will relate the history of their Houses' territories and of their names" (p.37). The significance of the evidence is that it "not only relates the essential elements of Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en ownership and jurisdiction to a time long before Europeans came into their territories, but it documents the depth of the Indian peoples' presence in and relationship to these territories" (p.37).

In order to assist the trial court in how it should view the evidence of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en going back before the written historical evidence, legal counsel states that "Some assistance will be provided the Court in the form of archaeological and geological evidence which relates significant events and places referred to in the *ada'ox* and *kungax* (oral histories) to conventional 'scientific' proof" (p.37). Historical documentation would also be provided as part of the evidence.

The courts have generally given oral histories little weight as evidence because of the concept of hearsay, that is, where the information being given is second hand or even further removed from the actual speaker of the words (Gover and Macaulay, 1996; Pylypchuk, 1991). However, as the argument is developed in *The Spirit of the Land* the validity of oral traditions is ensured within First Nations by the retelling of the events in public. "Thus, when a Chief describes the events that took place long ago, events that he or she should not possibly have witnessed, these can be told as established truths by virtue of having been tested and validated at a succession of narrations" (p.39).

The nature of the legal argument is then set out where it is argued that the Aboriginal rights of the claimant First Nations have legal recognition at common law, the Royal Proclamation of 1673, and s35(1) of the Canadian constitution. They argue that these existing rights have not been extinguished and can only be dealt with through a settlement process. The book concludes with a short chapter entitled "A Travesty of Justice" in which criticism is directed at the trail judge's decision. They state that Justice MacEachern made a "political decision" by virtue of his "retrogressive legal thinking" and by his "ignoring or rejecting legal gains made in the last few years by native people all over the country" (p.95).

One criticism of *The Spirit of the Land* is that there are no sources cited as footnotes or endnotes. A researcher would have to find the actual source on her own with no real leads from the text. It is, however, very well written and contains a map and a sprinkle of photographs throughout. On the other hand, *Tribal Boundaries* is a very well documented book. It contains 9 Appendices, Glossary of Terms, Glossary of Place Names, Glossary of Chief's Names, 20 pages of endnotes, an index and a bibliography made up of published sources, manuscript sources, map sources and tape sources. It also contains many maps throughout including copies of Native maps of specific areas. It too is well written.

Both of these books add to the literature on Native studies. More specifically they deal with the presentation of evidence, especially of oral histories, and the argumentation for Aboriginal title to lands in the Nass Valley area of British Columbia. There is much in the way of the culture, traditions, governance and laws of the First Nations presented in the oral histories. These traditional First Nations' sources are backed by documentary and other scientific evidence to make compelling arguments for their land claims. Government officials, lawyers and judges, as well as various academics with an interest in Native studies, particularly land claims, ought to read these books.

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Teichroeb, Ruth: *Flowers on My Grave: How an Ojibwa Boy's Death Helped Break the Silence on Child Abuse*. HarperCollins, \$26.00.

This is the story of one boy's all too short life, living in a system and a culture gone completely and inexplicably awry. In telling the story of the short, traumatic life of Lester Desjarlais, Ruth Teichroeb wipes clean the film of silence that shrouds many Native Reserves. She tells of generations devastated by abuse from family, friends, and other adults hidden behind positions of power and influence. Based on the inquest into the suicide of Lester Desjarlais in 1988, Teichroeb presents a compassionate in-depth story of the crisis befalling Native children. Teichroeb, a reporter for the *Winnipeg Free Press* had no idea what compelled her to write this book, just as she had no idea where the material would come from, or what horror she would eventually unearth as she dug deep into the history beyond the life of young Lester.

The result, *Flowers on My Grave* is an eye-opening, heart-pounding, riveting tale of generations of Native people who have endured poverty, powerlessness, and emotional poison—a powerful legacy that continues to hurt the present generation and their children. Teichroeb explicitly details why the White method of dealing with sexual abuse is inappropriate within the confines of Native culture. Neither the offender nor the survivor is

helped. for anyone interested in exploring the myriad areas of abuse, teen suicide, cultural differences, and the effects of marginalization, this book is a must-read.

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