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Author
Brozzo, Shirley

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Reckonings: Contemporary Short Fiction by Native American Women. Edited by Hertha D. Sweet Wong, Lauren Stuart Muller, and Jana Sequoya Magdaleno. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 312 pages. $99.00 cloth; $24.95 paper.

It has been said that the best writers write about the things that they know best, which is certainly true about the collection of short fiction found in *Reckonings*. This collection of stories, gleaned from some of the most revered Native American women writers today, effectively blends with promising works from some of the up-and-coming writers we will be studying tomorrow. Readers of Native American fiction certainly recognize the works of Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, and Leslie Marmon Silko, but will be equally delighted by the stories told by Kimberly M. Blaeser, Reid Gomez, and Beth H. Piatote. Each woman has provided examples of her best works that keep the reader engaged until the very last page.

Collectively, the stories tell of survival. There are inklings of truth in each of the stories, bits of history woven into each fictitious piece. Beth Brant's "Swimming Upstream" relays how Anna May lost custody of her son because she lost herself in the bottle. Even after becoming sober, she cannot get him back, and he dies while in the custody of his father. She relates her life to the life of the salmon trying to swim upstream to spawn. These fish keep trying to get back home, to a place they know. Anna May has to decide if she will keep on fighting her way back upstream, or if the bottle will drag her back under. Brant uses language that is readily accessible to all readers while creating a mood that makes the reader reflect on the effects alcohol has on many Native American families. Brant's second selection, "Turtle Gal," also deals with a single-parent family and what happens to the children left behind when their parent dies. True to the customs of many minority people, someone always comes forth to take in a child. In this case the rescuer is the gay African American man. Brant, who describes herself as a lesbian grandmother, describes love, loss, and homosexuality in many of the stories she writes, including "Food and Spirits: Stories," "Mohawk Trail," and "A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection of North American Indian Women." One of Brant's strengths lies in her ability to evoke strong emotions, such as those brought forth by the often anthologized "A Long Story." This account demonstrates the correlation between Native people in the late 1800s to early 1900s who lost their children to the government boarding school system and how the same story continues into modern times when a Native American lesbian loses custody of her child to the father, simply because the woman loves another woman. The comparisons are not only poignant but chilling.

Not every story has such dire endings, even though survival is a common thread. Survival of the Native American race wouldn't be possible without the sense of humor that most Native Americans share. Many of Louise Erdrich's stories rely heavily on comic relief. "Almost Soup" is a character, a way of survival, and comic relief in the story bearing his name. Not only does he employ all his puppyness to ensure that he lives, but he also helps his savior Cally as she lingers near death. This excerpt should be reason

enough to entice you to pick up *The Antelope Wife* and learn more about these Anishinaabe people/characters.

Equally comical is Erdrich's excerpt "Le Mooz." Not only is the whole scenario of Nanapush being dragged through the swamp while sitting in a canoe pulled by a moose hysterical enough, but the ribald story of his death and mysterious resurrection to spend one more night of passionate lovemaking with his wife Margaret is enough to cause even the most straight-laced person to burst out in laughter. Loss of limb, life, land, and lovers are realities for Native American families past and present, yet these losses seem a little easier to handle when presented with a strong dose of frivolity. Even the title, mixing the French article *le* with the Ojibwe word *mooz* demonstrates the comingling of cultures, an intersection of Native and non-Native. A new language is created to cross the bridge between traditional and new. Erdrich often experiments with blending Anishinaabe words into her works, especially in her more recent books.

Language is not the issue in the stories of Anna Lee Walters. Her focus is more on the indignities that our peoples have suffered throughout the years. One relevant example is in "Buffalo Wallow Woman." Confined to a mental ward because she believes she is Buffalo Wallow Woman, prefers to be called by her traditional name, and won't give up to the whiteness around her, Buffalo Wallow Woman is caught in a time warp. White-haired Buffalo Wallow Woman is wrapped in white bandages, but she doesn't want to talk to the white doctors in white coats or cooperate with the nurses in white. She thinks perhaps she is a ghost, waiting to be taken up to the cloud beings, and may get there sooner with help from the young Native American nurse who befriends this elder. All of these examples point to an obvious disassociation with current time. Walters tells the same story about Uncle Ralph in "The Warriors." This Paiute man loves his sister and nieces but is having trouble adjusting to a life that doesn't include his being a warrior. Like Buffalo Wallow Woman, he is in the wrong place at the wrong time. Walters easily moves between the two time periods she is portraying, while creating characters who are confused and bewildered.

Although many of the selections in *Reckonings* are the works of the "big name" Native American writers, relative newcomers like Kimberly M. Blaeser are following in their footsteps. In her piece, "Like Some Old Story," Blaeser employs techniques that have worked for her predecessors. She takes a familiar story based in reality and tells it the way a story should be told. In spite of being written in the vernacular, saying things like "all youse little kids" and "somethin's after yer deer," the piece is not confusing (246, 249). It's easy to decipher and sounds natural, especially when read aloud. This selection, as well as others throughout the book, is written in a style and language that makes you feel like you are listening to your grandmother tell you a bedtime story.

Whenever our original language appears within a story, the editors have kindly given an English translation for the word as well as telling us what language the word is originally from. This is a good way to ensure that some of the language is preserved as well as showing the reader that not all words

translate word for word but may translate as an entire idea, such as *jiisakiiwinini* or shaking tent doctor (254). The translations are also helpful for anyone who does not speak a specific Native language.

Writing in traditional languages and English is a positive way to blend the old with the new. Beth H. Piatote writes of beading sessions at the university in "Beading Lessons." It's strange that we once were denied schooling with the whites, and then forced into white schools, where so much of our heritage and culture were beaten out of us. Now, you can go to a university and learn Native languages, enroll in "the Native American Experience," and study whatever Native historical accounts have been preserved. Ironically, years after the government boarding schools tried to remove our Native identities forcibly, today we can get some semblance of that identity back while connecting with other Natives in a postsecondary educational setting. Selections throughout the book help to unite the present with the past.

Despite the strength and familiarity of most of the stories in *Reckonings*, two of the included storytellers write tales that are harder to connect to. Reid Gomez's "electric gods" and "Touch. Touch. Touching" and Misha Nogha's "Memekwesiw" and "Sakura" do not flow as rhythmically as the works of the well-established writers or the other newcomers. Many sentences are short and choppy, lending a disjointed feeling to the pieces. The images presented, especially in "electric gods," seem more like a litany of ideas from which to build a character rather than a well-told story. The incoherence makes the storyline hard to follow and does little to engage the reader. These are not the stories that should be used to close the book.

Certainly, new Native writers are being discovered and published every day. Discerning readers will take from this book the lessons that they need. As a whole, this book tells about what is important to the women of our people. Our survival is made possible through our women and our capabilities to bring forth new life. *Reckonings* ensures that these stories, our stories, will not be forgotten. Instead, they will be "brought forth." As a teacher of Native American women's stories, I would highly recommend this book for general audiences, high school English classes, or postsecondary Native American Studies classes.

Shirley Brozzo
Northern Michigan University

Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel. By Sean Kicummah Teuton. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2008. 312 pages. $79.95 cloth; $22.95 paper.

Sean Kicummah Teuton's useful and engaging study focuses on a reading of three familiar, canonical texts of twentieth-century American Indian fiction: N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977). Teuton's analysis reaches out to other fiction as well, especially more recent novels that explore territory that has been relatively uncharted in the literature (such as Craig