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Food and Spirits: Stories by Beth Brant. By Beth Brant. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1991. 125 pages. $18.95 cloth. $8.95 paper.

In *Food and Spirits*, Beth Brant adds to the growing body of literature written by Native Americans that combines and interweaves themes of the ancient past with contemporary lives familiar to the author. In this way, taken as a whole, *Food and Spirits* is reminiscent of N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. The stories by Brant, a Mohawk woman from Tyendinaga Reserve in Ontario, are both deeply personal and also timeless. They are situated specifically in events in the lives of Iroquois people, but their themes are universal. They tell of searching for home, for belonging, and for connections to others, and they tell of the pain of telling, of revealing oneself.

The title of the collection of eight stories comes from a tale about an elderly Mohawk man, Elijah Powless, who travels from Tyendinaga to Detroit to visit his granddaughters. He arrives at the bus depot before the girls come to pick him up, so he waits for them at a restaurant called "Food and Spirits." Elijah meets others there who have their own stories of searchings to tell. The story ends with his granddaughters' arrival and their reunion with the old man:

> Outside the sign blinked off, then on. FOOD & SPIRITS. FOOD & SPIRITS. Inside there were music, stories, good food, and friends. Elijah was content (p. 85).

In a sense, this is the kind of feeling of home most of the characters in the other stories are searching for. But for many, the journey is emotionally painful; in order to arrive at the feeling of home, they have to reveal their hurt to others. The book, then, is also concerned with the theme of healing, of self-healing through the search for home and through sharing with others, and of allowing others to help. These themes are expressed in Brant's preface, a poem called "Telling," in which she tells of her own pain and of her pain at the hurt that other people have to endure:

> The secrets I am told grow in my stomach. They make me want to vomit. They stay in me and my stomach twists... and my hand reaches for a pen, a typewriter to calm the rage and violence that make a home in me.
> I write.
> This pen feels like a knife in my hand.
> The paper should bleed, like my people's bodies (p. 13).

Brant's style of writing, a pointed economy of prose interwoven with striking, evocative images, effectively contributes to the writer's overall purpose. The writing is sharp; each detail given tells us more than just what is encompassed by its words.

Brant says that the writer's responsibility is to tell in order to heal and to change. Change, in fact, is key to many of the stories. The willingness to change, to take risks, is what helps the characters experience the feeling of home. It also shows that home is not just a physical space but an inner environment actively created by people.

Significantly, the book's first story is a reworking of the ancient Iroquois creation story called "This is History." In it, the Sky Woman who falls from the Sky World is revealed as different from other Sky People because she is curious about the world, and thus the others are glad when she leaves: "She was a nuisance with her questions, an aberration, a queer woman who was not like them—content to walk the clouds undisturbed" (p. 19). In order to create, people have to want and accept change. This is true of the Sky Woman's role in creating the earth and of contemporary people's creation of their inner and outer home.

Other stories tell of people struggling in the painful place between keeping secrets and telling in order to be healed. One, called "This Place," begins abruptly with the statement, "'Mother, I am gay. I have AIDS.' The telephone call it almost killed him to make" (p. 49). David's mother welcomes him and creates for him at the end of his life that feeling of acceptance that is part of being home. In another story, "Wild Turkeys," the central character, Violet, a victim of spouse abuse, is constantly afraid that her husband will track her down and kill her. But her fear of being found reverberates in her fear of telling others anything personal about herself. She is even reluctant to tell a woman she happens to meet that her own mother comes from the same reserve as the woman. She finally reveals that fact, but when asked for her mother's maiden name, she pretends she does not know. And then she thinks, "What a stupid thing to say. What possible harm could come from telling her mother's maiden name? Was she going to live like this forever, afraid to tell people anything" (p. 35)? In fact, this is the risk that David takes in revealing his illness to his mother. And it is the risk, once taken, that helps him find peace.

Many of the stories in *Food and Spirits* describe people's losses, too—losses from deaths, departures, disruptions. And again, in overcoming these losses, people are able to find themselves. The

collection ends with a woman's memories of her child who drowned. In "Swimming Upstream," Brant draws a parallel between the woman's longing for her child and a salmon's relentless search for its home to spawn and create a new generation. As the woman watches a salmon struggling and bleeding from pushing against barriers in its path, she sees her son and emotionally struggles, along with the salmon, to reach the place of rest. For the salmon, it is a physical place, but for the characters in *Food and Spirits,* it is primarily an emotional, psychic place that they struggle to find. And, in the searchings of these characters, all readers can find a moving portrayal of personal and universal themes.

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Essays in North American Indian History. Edited by Michael J. Gillis. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1990. 237 pages. $24.95 paper.

This book is composed of sixteen essays on American Indian history, all of which have appeared previously. As the editor states in the preface, the works were chosen with his students in mind. The book is divided into five sections—"Beginnings," "Belief," "Exchange," "Conflict," and "Perceptions"—and a conclusion, and is designed to serve as a coherent set of readings for a course in American Indian history. Each essay is accompanied by a short introduction written by the editor and a reference to the original source of the publication. This latter information is important, because the editor, for ease of reading, has omitted the footnotes and reference citations that appeared in the originals. With the reference, the serious student can check the sources the authors utilized to construct their arguments. The essays include the writings of some of the foremost historians and ethnohistorians in the country (e.g., James Axtell, Alfred Crosby, James Ronda, Bruce Trigger, and Richard White) and therefore are representative of much of the current thought in American Indian studies.

Each of the sections, except the conclusion, contains three essays that deal with specific aspects of the general subject. For a text intended for a course in American Indian history, however, the essays seem overly weighted towards the East Coast and northern Great Plains. There is, for example, only one essay each