

Collector and Source: Whose Voice Should Be Heard?

John L. Peyton, *The Stone Canoe and Other Stories*. Blacksburg, VA: McDonald & Woodward, 1989, paper, \$14.95 (ISBN 0-939923-07).
Frances Fraser, *The Bear Who Stole the Chinook: Tales from the Blackfoot*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990, paper, \$12.95 (ISBN 0-88894-685-6).

Review by Diane Tye

The Stone Canoe and Other Stories, written and illustrated by John Peyton (1907–), and *The Bear Who Stole the Chinook: Tales from the Blackfoot*, by Frances Fraser (1920–1989), both draw their inspiration from the oral narratives of North American aboriginal peoples. John Peyton's stories are based on narratives he heard from the Anishinabeg (Ojibway) of the Great Lakes region, while Frances Fraser's collection of tales originated with the Blackfoot who lived near her home outside of High River, Alberta. Notwithstanding the variety of narrative types in each—ranging from origin myths to local legends—the publications have their own internal consistency. The Fraser book, in particular, reflects Blackfoot worldview, with many of the narratives focusing on the central, yet complex figure of Nega, the trickster god. On the other hand, a comment by John Peyton in his preface suggests that many of the narratives in his work come from a single source, an elderly female storyteller he refers to as Gramma Wadikwano. While one is not able to judge for certain, it may be that the Peyton book represents a supplemented individual's narrative repertoire.

Distinct differences between the two volumes reflect contrasting goals and attitudes held by the collectors. In his preface, John Peyton remarks on his inability to duplicate the oral nature of the tales he heard from Wadikwano. Peyton opts, then, for a recreation of the tales, and his versions reflect obvious rewriting. This rewriting often leaves the reader wondering which part of the story is original and which part has been fashioned by the writer. There is a consistent intrusion of western worldview, which at times is both annoying and distracting. For example, in a tale titled "Black Spruce," Peyton writes, "The black spruce of the subarctic forest is not like the tidy cone-shaped Christmas spruce that you plant on lawns" (31). In many ways, Peyton has appropriated the tales for himself and, one assumes, the expected largely white readership.

While the stories in Peyton's collection have lost their oral quality, those in Fraser's book resonate with oral authenticity. In his introduction to *The Bear Who*

Stole the Chinook, Hugh A. Dempsey, Associate Director of the Glenbow Museum, notes that Frances Fraser was paid a high compliment in 1968, when a ritual dance, performed to one of the tales she had collected and translated, ended on the right beat with the right foot. Her tales flow beautifully and, while undoubtedly they have been reworked by Fraser, there is a much stronger sense of her as recorder, rather than re-creator.

If one regards fieldwork as process rather than product, as it surely is, the reader must know something of that process—understand the collector's techniques and attitudes held towards informants and materials, for example—in order to fully appreciate the finished collection. This is especially important when the collecting is conducted across cultural boundaries. Both Peyton and Fraser are representative of many of the earlier collectors in North America in that their fieldwork was unpaid and secondary to other responsibilities. For example, Fraser fit folklore fieldwork into a lifetime of other activities, such as raising a family and being a journalist. Hugh Dempsey's introduction to Fraser's collection then is invaluable, for it both offers insight into Fraser's collecting practices and her relationship with the Blackfoot, and successfully places the narratives into the life of the collector. It is unfortunate that John Peyton's collection contains no similar introduction or effort to place the tales in any context, for the reader is left to wonder what led Peyton to the Anishinabeg, and what he and his informants meant to one another.

Both books are significant for what they reveal of North American aboriginal culture, but they also raise important questions for fieldworkers. The collected tales, particularly John Peyton's rewritten versions of aboriginal narratives, cause one to think about the responsibilities of fieldworkers to their informants. Whose material is it? Who has the right to speak? Whose voice should be heard? Through rewriting does the collector effectively silence the people with whom the narratives originate? Both books prompt one to question when it is appropriate to collect outside one's cultural group and, more centrally, how much a collector

should intrude on the material.

Whatever problems they may contain, collections like these are welcome. Through thinking about some of the questions they raise, North Americans may appreciate not only a little more of aboriginal people's values, but better understand what role members of the larger white population have played in the preservation of native traditions.

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