

Darwin HANNA & Mamie HENRY, *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nl̓a7káp̓mx People* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1995, 217 p.); Cecilia SUGARHEAD, *Ninoontaan/I Can Hear it: Ojibwe Stories from Lansdowne House* (Winnipeg, Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics, Memoir 14, 1996, 224 p.)

At a recent conference on Native American oral literature at the University of British Columbia, Shirley Sterling moved members of the audience to tears as she spoke of her life and work. A well-known Nl̓a7káp̓mx storyteller and author of *My Name is Seepeetza* (Douglas and McIntyre, 1992), Sterling is also currently a graduate student whose research material includes the new collection compiled by Darwin Hanna and Mamie Henry. As Sterling's presentation made clear, *Our Tellings* has already taken its place in the academic world as an indispensable resource for all those studying interior Salish language and literature and as one of the few collections in the vast literature on First Nation oral traditions initiated and completed by First Nations people.

Darwin Hanna spent three years doing research and travelling around the Lytton area recording the memories of the community's elders. Mamie Henry, who translated many of the stories, is a Nl̓a7káp̓mx elder who helped develop a writing system for Nl̓a7káp̓mx̓sín. As Wendy Wickwire stresses in her preface to the book, the inclusion of local detail and dialect gives the stories and their translations a particular authenticity. By acknowledging the elders who told and translated stories, the editors give a strong sense of this collective endeavour. While copyright for the stories

is held by Mamie Henry in trust for Snk'y'peplxw (Coyote House) Language and Culture Society, individual storytellers are recognized and given brief biographical descriptions at the end of the book. There are also photographs of a number of the contributors.

*Ninoontaan* has similar strengths as a collection. It contains the stories Cecilia Sugarhead heard growing up in the Lansdowne House area of northern Ontario, mainly from her grandmother and mother-in-law. Whereas *Our Tellings* is accessible to a general audience, *Ninoontaan* is primarily a collection for Ojibwe speakers and for those studying the Ojibwe language, opening with a technical discussion of Ojibwe language and writing systems. Intended as a reader for Ojibwe speakers, the texts appear first written in syllabics then in Roman orthography, with the Ojibwe text on the page facing the English translation. As the introduction states: "The Ojibwe texts are the items of linguistic and cultural relevance, while the English translations are at best approximations to the Ojibwe originals, and in many cases may be subject to revision and improvement" (xxxix).

*Our Tellings* is divided into two sections, Sptákwelh (Creation Stories) and Spíłaxem (Non-Creation Stories) with twenty-five stories in each section. In the creation stories, one encounters a variety of animal people, including Transformer and Coyote. From the perspective of a cultural outsider, the most striking of these stories is "Sore Man" told by Mabel Joe. In this story, a beautiful woman agrees to marry a man whose body is "a mass of sores" then discovers that he can remove his outer body at will revealing a nice-looking man underneath. The Spíłaxem record the history of the region ranging from "Making Baskets" and "Native Foods" to stories foretelling the arrival of whites and memories of contact with Simon Fraser. With the text of the stories, there are a number of useful appendices, including a key to orthography for the Lytton dialect of N1ha7kápmsín, a glossary of N1ha7kápms words, a key to the tapes, translations, and transcriptions, and a bibliography.

The last piece in the collection records Darwin Hanna's conversation with his father, Buddy Hanna, and his grandparents, Fred and Bea Hanna. The younger Hanna directs the conversation, keeping the elders focused on details concerning material culture. For example, at one point, Bea Hanna turns from the subject of waterproofing baskets to claims made by certain whites concerning their influence on N1ha7kápms ways by telling the story of an ancestor who taught whites the ways of the N1ha7kápms. Darwin Hanna's next question, concerning how colours are added to the designs on the baskets, steers the conversation back to the original subject. To a

cultural outsider, there seemed to be many other stories waiting to be told at this point in the conversation, and I wondered how this last section will be interpreted as readings of these stories emerge. Both *Our Tellings* and *Ninoontaan* undertake to keep that conversation going so that the stories waiting to be told will be heard.

Renée Hulan