

Roman, Trish Fox (Editor): *Voices Under One Sky: Contemporary Native Literature*. Scarborough, Ontario: ITP Nelson Canada, 1994, ISBN 0-17-603979-1 Paper CDN \$19.95. (*Voices Under One Sky: A Guide*, 0-17-603989-9 Cloth CDN \$20.75.)

Voices Under One Sky is an anthology of writing, illustrations, and photographs that contains works by some of the best contemporary Aboriginal writers from both sides of the US/Canada border. Although most of the anthology is comprised of works by well-known writers, it also makes room for newcomers. Published as an educational text, *Voices Under One Sky* is accompanied by a teachers' guide and includes a map of North American cultural and linguistic areas (a somewhat inaccurate one in that it situates the Sauteaux in the James Bay area and the Métis in the North West Territories).

There are many kinds of writings in *Voices Under One Sky*. The anthology contains short stories and poems, and eases students' introduction to the study of poetry by including the texts of popular songs, such as Buffy Sainte-Marie's classic "Universal Soldier" (p.153) and Curtis "Shin-goose" Jonnie's "Reservation Blues" (p.61). The anthology also includes excerpts from novels, such as Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (p.156) and a short story by Louise Erdrich, "The Leap" (p.161), which later became part of her novel *Tales of Burning Love* (1996). In addition, *Voices Under One Sky* contains memoirs, profiles, and legends. George Peequaquat's "We Missed the Bus" (p.100), for example, is the ironic title of his memoir of the ill-fated journey to residential school. In "Running Eagle Woman-Warrior of the Blackfeet" (p.108), Beverly Hungry Wolf profiles a well-known—in fact legendary—historical figure. And Alexander Wolfe relates the legend of "Grandfather Bear" (p.186) as told to him by his grandfather, Earth Elder.

The teachers' guide which accompanies *Voices Under One Sky* was designed for use in secondary schools. Both the anthology itself and the teachers' guide are organized into six thematic groups, but at the end of the text readers are offered another index of alternate thematic groups. The guide contains lesson plans for most selections from Canadian contributors, but contains few for selections from the United States. Each lesson plan suggests ways to introduce the theme of the work being studied, summarizes the work, refers students and teachers to related reading, and supplies background notes. Many secondary teachers avoid teaching Aboriginal literature, especially literature that makes reference to cultural events and practices, because they do not understand many of these cultural references and fear that they will commit some kind of cultural *faux pas*. The teachers' guide to *Voices Under One Sky* is designed to fill in these gaps.

Thus, the background notes to Jordan Wheeler's story, "A Mountain Legend" (p.16) explain the meaning of the story's reference to "seeking a vision" (p.17) and the significance of the eagle. This is both a good and a bad feature of the teachers' guide: good in that it makes the literature accessible, but bad in that it tends to take a Pan-Indian approach to Aboriginal cultures.

Today, most members of mainstream society apply generic labels to the Aboriginal peoples of North America. As a result, we are identified as "Natives" or "Aboriginals" or, of course, "Indians." But these labels belie the multitude of diverse cultures that belong to the original inhabitants of this continent. The anthology *Voices Under One Sky* defies this practice of homogenizing our identities. Not only is each writer identified by tribal affiliation, each work chosen reflects the culture and experience of the Aboriginal people depicted therein.

Unlike the anthology, however, the teachers' guide does tend to present a generic Aboriginal culture which is based, for the most part, on Ojibway and Plains cultural practices, using the Medicine Wheel and the Seven Teachings of the Ojibway as a framework for literary analysis. The teachers' guide does not even attempt to explain other cultures, especially those from the U.S. contributors. As a result, it glosses over the culture of the Warm Springs people portrayed in Elizabeth Woody's "Homecooking" (p.174) and the Pawnee of Anna Lee Walters "The Warriors" (p.115). This is a serious shortcoming of the teachers' guide.

The anthology, however, is a valuable one and need not be limited to use in secondary schools. At the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, we use the anthology in Matriculation English classes for students who have gained conditional entrance to university. The stories from the oral tradition and the stories by contemporary writers are deceptively simple. Oral stories have always been intended for all members of the community and, therefore, must be entertaining and understandable on many levels. The contemporary Aboriginal writers whose works appear in this anthology have integrated elements from the oral tradition into their writing, making their stories easily understood by a variety of readers. Although our instructors find the works contained in this collection complex enough to introduce students to university-level studies of literature, our students tell us that they've taken this anthology home and shared it with their families.

To make this strong connection between the oral tradition and the written, *Voices Under One Sky* includes life-writing, not only in the form of personal memoirs but in firstperson narrative fiction. Leslie Marmon Silko's personal memoir "When I Was Thirteen" (p.26), for example, presents a seemingly factual account of an almost fantastic incident that happened to the author. Wes Fine Day's short story, "The Hockey Game" (p.54), on the other hand, purports to be fiction, but its tone is conversational, and it is

written as if it were an autobiographical account. Fox Roman chooses works that show how the oral tradition blends with the written one.

Many students at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College complain that contemporary Aboriginal literature paints an overly bleak picture of their lives. They argue that they need to hear the happy stories too. *Voices Under One Sky* supplies a balanced picture without avoiding difficult topics. Rita Joe's poem, "I Lost My Talk" (p.76), for example, deals with the poet's anger at the government policies that tried to eliminate the original languages. However, many other works are stories of healing and hope. Kim McLain's "The Blue Hand Shield" (p.132) tells how an Elder teaches a young man to grieve and to find spirituality.

I recommend *Voices Under One Sky* for use in grades ten to twelve and for introductory classes in Aboriginal literature at the university level. It is both accessible and visually appealing, and it presents a balanced picture of contemporary Aboriginal life. The only thing that it lacks is contributions from the dynamic world of Aboriginal drama, an omission that I hope will be amended in future editions.

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Reference

Erdrich, Louise
 1996 *Tales of Burning Love*. New York: HarperCollins.

Rose, Wendy: *Now Poof She is Gone*. Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1994, ISBN 1-56341-049-4 Cloth USA \$18.95; 1-56341-048-6 Paper USA \$8.95.

"Let us empower ourselves through the rituals of sharing burdens," writes Wendy Rose in the preface to her short collection of poetry, *Now Poof She is Gone*. Appropriately stated, Rose presents what she refers to as "me" poems written over a thirty year period from 1962 to 1992. Her poems are thoughts about her life, written as she experienced it. They deal with her beliefs, emotions and identity. Deeply personal, Rose's collection