

latter; totally different political circumstances called for different solutions. And to attribute the mortality rate in Amerindian languages solely to residential schools is to wildly oversimplify the situation. Languages, Amerindian and otherwise, change over time, eventually so altering their characteristics as to become, in effect, different tongues. Amerindian languages were being born, were growing and transforming into new forms with some eventually disappearing, long before the arrival of Europeans. That said, the active campaign against Native languages is not to be condoned.

To cut this short, it would have been helpful if Rotman had defined his terms, such as that much abused term "nation". Using it without distinction to refer to a large complex state such as Canada as well as for small Amerindian groups in order to imply equality is, to put it simply, confusing. Playing games with words neither clarifies political issues nor does justice to Amerindian aspirations.

The strength of this work is in its exposition of Crown/Native fiduciary relations, issue by issue in court case by court case. As such it fills a gap in Canadian legal history, making an impressive contribution to a better understanding of a previously neglected aspect of the Canadian confederation. It also raises questions: if the Crown/Native fiduciary relationship is between equals, then does it work only one way? A fundamental characteristic of traditional Amerindian treaties was reciprocity. Does that apply, and if so how, to Crown/Native fiduciary doctrine?

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Silko, Leslie Marmon: *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, ISBN 0-684-81153-7 Cloth CDN \$31.00.

The acclaimed novels *Almanac of the Dead* and *Ceremony* have left an impression on countless admirers who can scarcely wait for new works of fiction from Arizona writer Leslie Marmon Silko. In the meantime, fans of her work should be content to trace the progression of Silko's art through this collection of essays. The material in this collection includes some previously published material, discussing topics ranging from her Laguna Pueblo upbringing and her recent run-ins with the border patrol to her

interpretation of the appearance of a serpent in the rock near Paguate. This book not only demonstrates the history that contributes to the original voice present in her novels, it also gives an indication of the direction Silko plans to take in future work. New pieces demonstrate her fascination with rocks and rain and her desire, in what she calls "essays," to capture the life within these natural elements. But her essays are so personal, artistic, and emotional that the term almost seems inappropriate.

In one piece titled "On Nonfiction Prose," Silko relates her frustration with the traditional Victorian essay writing style taught in schools and universities. Indeed, her essays are much more effective because they come from personal experience. They are eloquent stories where the multiple lessons and teachings are pulled out by the reader rather than being laid out point by point. Two excellent examples are her pieces regarding, respectively, the U.S. Border Patrol, and Immigration and Naturalization Services. Nothing by Victorian writers Ruskin, Berkeley, or Macaulay could hit the reader with the same impact these stories have. Her condemnation of racism, clearly shown to exist throughout all levels of government and the courts of justice, displays so much anger and frustration, it is difficult to imagine a better way of presenting her argument. The very notions of freedom and human rights are denied the First Nations by governments created to uphold these values. While this argument may not be new, Silko's presentation is fresh, timely, and in dealing with a specific incident, makes even those of us who are acutely aware of such actions take a second look. Our complacency is shaken again by her writing. Her style of essay seems to progress logically from the form of Pueblo storytelling described in the first two passages of the book. Her insights here are so clearly presented that both the novice and the scholar of Native Studies will absorb much of her teaching.

Pueblo storytelling, Silko tells us, is multifunctional. Part map, part recipe, Pueblo stories are a record of genealogy, of social history. They enable societal cohesion, and also provide therapy. Storytelling also provides the Pueblo with an identity, one that symbolically and materially places the Pueblo in relation to the land. It is because of this relation that Silko is fond of repeating that human beings are a natural resource, no different than water or rocks. The earth does not belong to us, we belong to it. This relation is disrupted when land and resource development intrude upon the Pueblo stories. The "maps" in the stories are altered. The places and landscapes that are destroyed materially are also the ones that make up the Pueblo stories. Being related to the land in the stories ensures balance in the ecosystem, and sustainable use of resources. Silko's comments about storytelling really sparked my interest. It would be great to see

her quality of insight applied to a book-length examination of storytelling and its functional importance to the maintenance of traditional Native culture.

Silko appears to have succeeded in demonstrating clearly in print that the land is alive. Silko's excerpt from her forthcoming "An Essay on Rocks" vividly demonstrates the life that she sees in rocks. She combines photography with written words to tell a story about a particular rock. Although this experiment in merging pictures and text to tell a story appears at first blush to be entirely original in form, it is, in actuality, a continuation of traditional Native American literature. Silko, obviously knowledgeable about ancient Mayan and Mixtec screenfolds, tries to recreate a similar fusion of text and picture. In doing so, she demonstrates how traditional American Indian culture is not static. It takes on new forms and adapts and changes with time. A recurring theme in the pieces collected for *Yellow Woman* is the negation of the view that traditional Native culture is somehow fixed or impervious to change. American Indians, Silko tells us, are always changing the ways they teach, they live, they eat and the way their stories, songs and dances are presented. But more lucid than a telling is an example. Silko illustrates in her essay on rocks that American Indian cultural forms of expression can be reclaimed using contemporary technology. But change is a relative thing indeed.

For example, at first, I was critical of the inclusion of two articles from the early eighties in a book subtitled *Essays on Native American Life Today*. Their arguments seemed, at first glance, to be outdated and obvious. But taking "today" in the Native American sense, one realizes that "today" could mean this generation, or even this century. In this sense, these two essays are not only quite recent but indicative that the same points made in 1981 and 1984 still hold water in 1997. Discussing the possible re-election of Reagan, Silko concluded that it didn't matter for Native Americans whether a Republican or a Democrat were in the White House because "American presidents are just there to give the people a good show." The inclusion of these essays is surprisingly relevant given the recent re-election of Bill Clinton. Has his presidency been more effective for American Indians than either the Reagan or Bush administrations? Can Indians living in Canada say that the Liberals under Chretien are better than the Conservatives under Mulroney? Native people of Canada do not need to be reminded who introduced the White Paper in 1969. Silko's collection of essays portrays many concerns of Native American life today more forcefully and eloquently than could any Royal Commission. But that is the strength of a good storyteller, one who is able to provide educational teachings through fiction and non-fiction alike. Having proven her ability to master fiction, Silko

demonstrates her storytelling success with non-fiction in the *Yellow Woman* collection.

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