



sacred legends of the Sandy Lake Cree

Sacred Legends of the Sandy Lake Cree

by James Stevens and Carl Ray

McClelland and Stewart, \$6.95

These collected Cree Indian legends have never been recorded before. Preserved only in the memory of the elder story-tellers on the reserve, according to tribal custom, they now appear in print for the first time through the collaboration of James Stevens, dedicated collector of native folklore, and Carl Ray, self-taught Cree artist, who translated the stories of his tribe and illustrated them.

There is still a world where men with "mystic power" place curses on adversaries, where marriages are usually arranged by parents, and old ceremonies are held to cure sickness. The sacred legends of the windigo, thunderbirds and avenging gods still survive in Cree belief and are published in this exciting collection, a book that is as fascinating for the beauty of its dramatic drawings as it is for the newly published legends themselves.

a new encounter with canada

Notes for a Native Land:
A New Encounter with Canada

edited by Andy Wainwright

Oberon Press, 1969; \$2.98

reviewed by Sheelagh Russell

The reader at this point may be asking "Why a review of a book already two years old? Where are the reviewers when they should be combing the latest arrivals for the recent Mailer, Hood, or Joyce Carol Oates?" This then is the apology, not that the book itself needs one. What does the reviewer do when through lack of foresight and a distaste for work, he is faced with a page to fill with 1 1/2 columns, 10 medium of book review, can't recall having read a recent book within the past six months, and is, a little reluctantly, becoming more involved than expected in the eighteenth century novel? Your guess is probably correct. I have chosen to review a book that in the present situation is timely, and which besides is included in many lists as optional reading for students of Canadian literature.

"Notes for a Native Land: A New Encounter with Canada" is Andy Wainwright's attempt at what today seems old-hat and downright dangerous, if it is not doomed to failure, an attempt to bring together in one book Canada's top artists presenting in their own way what Canada means to them. A novel approach, for each writer is given free rein, but this freedom soon breeds anarchy, with the result that each segment tends to carry the rest along with it. One is left wishing that each artist could present us with a book or painting of his own. But, in a way, is it not this very freedom in Canada which "Notes for a Native Land" is trying to celebrate?

Andy Wainwright's brief introduction needs to be quoted in full, for it sets forth most intensely his unique vision of the work. Would that the rest of the contributors had lived up to this standard! But that will be dealt with later.

"I suppose I am concerned that this country

does not exist. I have tried, at different times in my life, to be its child, its student and its poet. These stages have come together in my present role of lover. (Are you listening, Canada?) Loving this country is like loving the perfect woman of everyman's imagination. She certainly exists somewhere, her approximate measurements are known (parts of her body are glimpsed on better days, but the eyes always belong to another or else the smile is not really a smile), and at times her presence is so strong that the roles are reversed and she becomes the lover. Yet her name is only that which others give her. A lover's conviction does not breed reality.

"This book belongs to those who wrote its various parts. They were asked, quite simply, to speak of this elusive lover as they wished. Some have been harsh, others gentle. I believe that each has been honest. This is no small thing, for it is never easy to be honest about a lover one cannot completely touch. I believe too that Canada has been watching their struggle and has chosen to leave a mark on nearly every piece of writing. She lives beyond the pen; it is not enough to read the words within. Every man must transcend national borders; understanding and love are not found in nationalism. But an essential part of each Canadian psyche is a lover found between these borders, embodied at times in geography, harsh and gentle, and sensed so strongly when one returns after an absence.

"But Canada is a lover that one will never bed. Too few of us have the guts to follow her, to embrace a land and its people and walk away unashamed to understand the reasons why".

The book's contributors are some thirty-odd members of Canada's artistic community, some native-born, some immigrants, some regionalists,

some concerned with a more universal approach. There are painters such as Ross Mendes, poets such as Alden Nowlan, journalists such as Graham Fraser, and critics such as Northrop Frye, as well as a number of those less easy to classify.

Their comments range, if a cliché is permitted, from the ridiculous to the sublime. Raymond Souster's "Very Short Poem" is:

"...But only God can make a tree."

He'll never try it in Sudbury.

Surely he isn't serious; this cannot possibly be the last word on so vital a topic! Or can it?

The titles themselves prove intriguing in such a collection: "Should Canada Interfere in its Own Internal Affairs?" - James Bacque, "Cold Comfort" - Ian Young, "Gut Feeling" - Peter Regenstreif, "Notes on a WASP Canadian Nationalist" - Dennis Lee, "America: True or False?" - Northrop Frye, "Canada, Be Jones!" - Lister Sinclair. My own favorite, and truly representative of the feelings rampant in Canada, is a lively piece by that enfant terrible of the Maritimes, Milton Acorn, "Goddam it Prince Edward Island needs that Causeway." Then there are the more traditional views: Margaret Atwood's "The Journals of Susannah Moodie." (ps a real experience in "gut feeling" is Shakespearean actress Mia Anderson as Moodie on CBC records.)

At a time when Canada appears to be groping towards some sort of national spirit, Wainwright appears to be on the right track. But what has he really done? This activity demonstrated in "Notes for a Native Land" was begun long before its publication, and will continue long after. It is an artist's forum, and Wainwright attempts to open our eyes on what has been under our noses for years. Only time will tell if he has been successful.

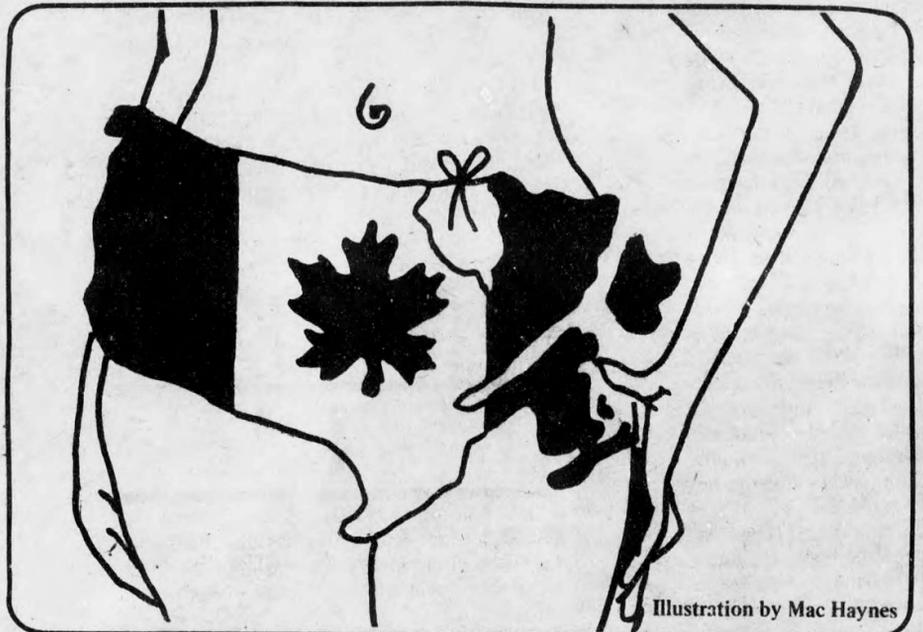


Illustration by Mac Haynes