

Quill & Quire

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Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past

In his preface to *Our Story*, Rudyard Griffiths comments that "each of the Aboriginal authors has chosen an historical event and through the act of storytelling, turned it into a work of fiction," in hopes that the collection will serve as "the basis for two cultures not only to better understand and appreciate each other, but also to move forward together." Unfortunately, while *Our Story* largely succeeds with the former, it occasionally falls short of the latter aspiration.

Our Story is an impressive collection of original fiction from nine of Canada's foremost native writers. Brian Maracle's retelling of the Iroquois creation myth in "The First Words" is powerful and haunting, while Basil Johnston's "The Wampum Belt Tells Us..." (a recounting of the arrival and settlement of the French) is at once an exploration of history and a vigorous, and at times dispiriting, recreation of a world view now largely disappeared.

Jovette Marchessault's "The Moon of the Dancing Sons" is, simply, beautiful and heartrending, while Rachel A. Qitsualik's "Skraeling" is a narrative of the highest order. At its best, as in these stories, *Our Story* bridges native and European narrative traditions with considerable force.

Unfortunately, the collection occasionally falls victim to polemic and the pedantic. Thomas King's "Coyote and the Enemy Aliens," for example, wraps the treaty process and the reservation system into a Tricksters narrative along with the forcible relocation of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. It's certainly a valid historical parallel, but the story feels heavy-handed and clumsy, the conclusions a little too obvious. While other such moments in other stories are largely passing, the effect is cumulative, and does the collection a disservice.

The likely audience for a collection of this type is probably knowledgeable of, and sympathetic to, the issues being raised. When writers cross the line from the literary to the pedantic, the tone of the volume shifts from co-operative to antagonistic, from understanding to defensive. This hardly aids the anthology's

mission to help two Cultures "move forward together."

- Robert J. Wiersema