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## Review of Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada

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*Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*. Edited by Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance. Preface by Emma LaRocque. Introduction by Gloria Bird. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. Introduction, foreword, preface, afterword. xxx + 287 pp. \$12.95 paper.

The radiant image of Binaseek in Evelyn Nelson-Kennedy's "Our Modern Powwows" provides a fine invitation to this anthology:

Binaseek . . . walked with a limp and talked only to herself. The old people said that she had been severely burned in her youth and had never been the same since. Her withered right hand was evidence to the truth of the story. Binaseek had made a belt for her dress. The brown piece of cloth was wrapped around her waist, decorated with oversized buttons. Her stockings lay wrinkled at her ankles. The children laughed at her pathetic attempts at sewing. Binaseek, oblivious to the pointing children, danced around the drum with a look of pride and pure enjoyment radiating from her wrinkled face. (p. 220)

You'll not likely find another such collection of women's writing anywhere, and after reading this one you may well wonder why. For too long in both Canada and the U.S., even those scholars, editors, historians, and publishers interested in women's and Native people's issues have neglected a most important source—Native women themselves. Here, in one encompassing stroke, editors Perreault and Vance show us simply and courageously what to do: "give a place for Native women to speak," in an agenda "not specifically literary nor narrowly political" (p. xi).

Fifty-one voices speak in *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*. Whether they are the strikingly individual voices of women making first attempts at works written in English, or those of accomplished poets and scholars, what resonates throughout is a communal voice. Though there are numerous differences in experiences, values, and politics, there is a sure commitment to Native heritage and identity.

"I was born in an igloo at Arviat, Northwest Territories," writes Jean Koomak, introducing her brief (seventy-five-word) "Jean's Story." "When I was sixteen, my parents told me to marry. I have nine children" (p. 135). And preconceived critical notions fall away before her accomplishment. Barbara Higgins's rich and unstinting "God's Man on Earth" and Clare McNab's rollicking "The Porcupine Quill Saga," both non-fiction, are for me particular treasures. Where else would we hear their honest, humorous voices describe the pain and joy, the loss and discovery that comprise contemporary Native women's lives?

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