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Review of *How Should I Read These?: Native Women Writers in Canada* By Helen Hoy

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How Should I Read These?: Native Women Writers in Canada. By Helen Hoy. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. x + 264 pp. Bibliographical references, index. C \$55.00 cloth, C\$24.95 paper.

Helen Hoy opens with a quotation from Eden Robinson's short story "Queen of the North" in which a non-Native asks, "How should I eat these?" The response is, "With your mouth, asshole." Hoy poses challenges of reading and understanding Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*, Maria Campbell and Linda Griffith's *The Book of Jessica*, Ruby Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun*, Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*, Beverly Hungry Wolf's *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*, and Eden Robinson's *Traplines*. She articulates her position carefully, presenting a scholarly argument that frequently cites the critical and theoretical perspectives of her contemporaries. Interspersed with this critical positioning, she offers personal anecdotes and narrative, making her book read like an extended conversation. Her approach, as indicated by the interrogative in her title, is not to take any single position, but to pose questions and describe her process and the challenges she has faced reading, teaching, and thinking about these seven works.

Slash, for instance, teaches Hoy to confront her own "racism and cultural arrogance" and leads her to discover that the text offers a strategy for how readers might read it from "the inside out." Her discussion of *The Book of Jessica* examines issues of cultural appropriation and the challenges of collaboration, noting how cooperation quickly dissolves into co-optation. *Honour the Sun*, in ways different from *Slash*, suggests means that readers might use to learn to listen to silence. She considers how Culleton raises questions of authenticity and identity throughout *In Search of April Raintree*. Identity is not static, but dynamic; the construction of self is a process of on-going negotiation, multiple affiliations, and positionings. Hoy looks at how Beverly Hungry Wolf, in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*,

further challenges Eurocentric notions of individuals and individualism by creating an innovative form of life-writing that is not about the self, but foregrounds relations and relationships. *Hungry Wolf* offers readers "more than just a genealogical and tribal positioning"; she creates a "cumulative layering of relational mappings." In so doing, she does not focus on her self or her story, but "locates herself primarily as the repository of what others have to tell," thereby challenging the "dismissal or erasure of Blackfoot women's lives."

According to Hoy, Maracle's *Ravensong* offers opportunities for readers to re-think their assumptions and "repositions both white and Native reader" so that the "Native reader is the one with full citizenship." Finally, in considering Robinson's *Traplines*, Hoy discusses the trap that readers and critics fall into when they categorize or read these writers solely as Native authors and consider their works only in a colonial context.

Hoy's conversations are engaging, but at what point does cultural sensitivity become intellectual timidity? She figuratively describes her book's structure as "a series of switchbacks on a mountain trail"; one function of a trail, however, is to go somewhere. Certainly writers, like hikers, should appreciate and acknowledge their process, but those who just engage with their process without articulating their direction may end up lost.

Drawing on Eden Robinson's quotation for her title and her approach to her book, Hoy seems to shrink from a parallel bluntness in her analysis.

"How should I read these?"

With your eyes and mind open.

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