

Book Reviews

The Arctic Sky: Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend.

John MacDonald, Royal Ontario Museum and

Nanavut Research Institute, \$29.95 softcover, 313 pages.

Reviewed by *Barbara Quinn*

John MacDonald's book *The Arctic Sky: Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend* contains an impressive in-depth account of the Inuit's intimate relationship with the celestial bodies. The book explores how the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic incorporated the stars, planets, moon, and sun, as well as other celestial and atmospheric occurrences into their sociocultural and navigational systems. Central legends and myths are also recounted to demonstrate the practical and mythological importance of the celestial sky to northern Canadian Inuit's lives. Photographs of ivory carvings and other Inuit artifacts, which now make their home at the Royal Ontario Museum, supply the reader with a visual depiction of this northern Inuit cosmology.

Manager of the Igloodik Research Centre in the North West Territories, and personally interested in astronomy, MacDonald's reasons for taking on this project were twofold. First, Inuit astronomy had been given meager attention by ethnographers and warranted greater consideration. MacDonald decided that the best way to begin to address this absence was through formal research that studied the correlation between Inuit and European star and constellation names. Second, as a specific type of knowledge, astronomy and sky lore had almost disappeared in Inuit communities. Having worked with Inuit elders over the past 10 years, MacDonald states that he set out to collect this endangered knowledge of the celestial sphere so it might be preserved for future generations of northern Inuit peoples.

As informative and fascinating as this book is (MacDonald discusses not only Canadian Arctic star lore but also northern Alaskan, Greenland, and Russian local knowledge on this subject), it is still a book that produces stereotypes and questionable representations of the Inuit peoples. What begins as a project to relate the names of Inuit and European stars and constellations becomes a value-laden comparison of Inuit and Western worlds. Perhaps inadvertently, MacDonald extends his study of cross-cultural celestial nomenclature into a cross-cultural analysis of knowledge systems, juxtaposing what "Western" knowledge knows to be the legitimate "truth" about astronomy with the mythological "beliefs" of the Inuit world.

This juxtaposition comes forth most clearly in the format that MacDonald uses to structure this book. For instance, MacDonald will start off a discussion of some northern celestial phenomenon with the "proper" Western scientific description followed by the "local" Inuit description of the same phenomenon. The section in this book on sunspots begins with a scientific definition of what sunspots "really are": "astronomers have determined sunspots to be relatively cool areas on the surface of the sun" followed by what the anthropology literature claims the Inuit (non-astronomers) believe the sunspots are "the scars resulting from the Sun's self-mutilation." It is telling that despite MacDonald's claim that he is interested in

the astronomy of the Inuit peoples, he does not see them as astronomers in the "proper" sense of the word.

The end result is a book that presents us with two familiar images: the first is of a progressive modern Euro-Canadian society underpinned by a scientific, and therefore a universally legitimate, knowledge of reality. The second image, constructed against this authoritative backdrop, is one of a people who can only provide an exotic interpretation of this reality.

Into the Daylight: A Wholistic Approach to Healing.

Calvin Morrisseau, University of Toronto Press, 1998,
104 pages.

Reviewed by *Malcolm King*

This is the personal account of a Native person, Calvin Morrisseau, who grew up in the culture of alcohol and solvent abuse that was, and is, all too familiar in First Nations communities throughout Canada. In this book, Morrisseau relives, again and again, the painful experience of his young friends dying while sniffing gasoline, the abuse he suffered, both physical and sexual, his own slippery road into alcoholism, the despair of hitting bottom, and finally the long pathway to recovery, started by his mother who found her own Red Road of healing. Calvin Morrisseau survived his own personal degradation and hell, and gradually came to discover his inner self and his Anishinabe identity and his own inner strengths. In time he made his way back to the sense of balance that is integral to the Native Anishinabe concept of healing, and now he is able to help others with their own healing.

Morrisseau describes the process of healing in terms of the whole person, the whole family and the whole community, hence the theme title *A Wholistic Approach to Healing*. He emphasizes personal responsibility: taking responsibility for one's own healing: responsibility for our own feelings, responsibility for our body, for our sexuality, and for our breath. His model of healing is simple, based on rekindling the values that led in former times to accord and harmony among his Aboriginal people. In his approach to healing, people have to make their own choices to gain the freedom to enter into recovery by recapturing their sense of balance and spirituality, and redevelop their ability to cooperate and share. Morrisseau describes an interdependent system of individuals, families, and communities, in which needs, desires, values, and purpose are communicated. The responsibility to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to grow to their full potential is a shared one.

Morrisseau's book serves as a valuable pointer that modern psychiatry and medicine have failed the Native people in many ways, by failing to recognize their basic concept of the process of healing, involving the participation of the Elders and the community in the process. In the Native culture, we are all linked in many intertwining circles: in ourselves, in the intertwining of our mind, body, soul, and spirit; in our family, in terms of respect, communication, intimacy, and physical needs; in the community, in common goals, values, purpose, and responsibility. Individuals have within themselves the innate ability to participate in their own healing; indeed healing has to involve the individual, as well as those around

them. The true test of humanity is to help those still struggling to find recovery and to make recovery available to those still suffering the ravages of addictions and social injustice.

Morrisseau's book provides many interesting observations for the student of cultures, such as the peculiarities of nonverbal communication, like his mother's gesture for salt (p. 32) and the use of silence as an acceptable form of communication in the Native culture. Some still underlying anger surfaces from time to time in the writing. Also, his message, although extremely valuable, is perhaps not as universal as some would imply. Not all Anishinabe people grew up in the culture of solvent and alcohol abuse, although many did. At the same time, there are many individuals in the non-Native community who suffered abuse. These people too can learn from his approach. His book offers guidance not only for individuals to find their healing pathway, but also for communities. The healing model can be used by an individual seeking to heal himself, by a professional as a tool for assessment and treatment, and by a community in crisis.

Our health professional education system is slowly changing to better address the important issues of culture and humanity, and in doing so, may better address the needs of all citizens. Works such as this by Morrisseau will help the western medical-psychiatric system in its own evolution. Calvin Morrisseau has survived his own personal journey of healing and made his way back to the Red Road, the Anishinabe way, and his book may help others to benefit from his experience.

Response to a Response: Review of *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* (1997).

John W. Friesen

I have rarely encountered a book review that so severely criticizes a published work to suggest that there is nothing good about the book under review. This appears to be Professor Marker's assessment, although he does not adequately substantiate his claims (Marker, *CJNE*, 22, 1998, pp. 151-152).

To begin with, Marker falls into the dubious writer's ploy of yielding to a metaphor and then becoming entrapped by it. In this case, the reader's attention is drawn to Marker's grandmother's Mulligan stew, but the metaphor does not provide proof for Marker's case; in fact it weakens it considerably. It would indeed be difficult to find sufficient evidence to bolster the various subpoints of the analogy, that is, the "less than accurate information, alleged overstatements, unfounded generalizations, assemblage of disembodied facts, simplistic propaganda, pulpit style of writing, misdirected revisionist sentiment and contradictions." That

Editorial Comment. Honoring a commitment previously made, the editors have agreed (for this one time only) to print an author's response to a book review that appeared in a previous edition of *CJNE*. This response is not a refereed contribution, so we have taken the liberty of shortening it somewhat. We would really like to be able to reverse the trend of the past 500 years by allowing Indigenous writers to have the last word, but ...

is quite an agenda! I find it difficult to believe that after 30 years of research in Native education I would have nothing to offer the field in writing.

It may be a relatively minor point to some, but Marker even got my name wrong, unfortunately forgetting my middle initial in the review. This may not seem important, but that initial differentiates me from either other John Friesens in the Calgary phone book. In addition, the headline of the review does not indicate the number of pages in the book or mention the 17-page list of references or 8-page index.

Proceeding on a more formal tack, it might be useful to follow up the list of charges against *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* and point out their invalidity. The first charge is that the book is based on "good intentions" and tries to get the reader to "reappreciate the Indians and promote harmony and friendship." Marker says that this kind of writing is not academically justifiable. Why not? Does academic writing have to be caustic, condemning, and negative? I would have thought that with all the denunciatory literature about First Nations spawned in the first few decades of this century it might be refreshing to read something both positive *and* academic. Evidently Professor Marker would disagree.

The charge that the book contains contradictions is backed up by an unfortunate example. The reviewer fails to catch the satirical intent of the quote he cites on page 249 about "today's enlightened multicultural perspective." Having personally followed that field around for three decades I can testify that it is anything but enlightened. Intolerance, misunderstanding, and plain old racism are still rampant. Probably no one knows this better than Canada's First Nations, having suffered every kind of maltreatment over the centuries since first contact. The point the book makes is that the incoming Europeans did not bother to discover the nature of First Nations' spirituality. They came to conquer, subdue, and exploit. Had they taken the time to learn even a little of Aboriginal ways they might have discovered a number of significant similarities of the local teaching to their own ways. This does not contradict the fact that the *essence* of Native spirituality differs from the European model even though ritualistic practices may have some parallel. European-inspired religion, as the text suggests, is an organized, structured, creed-formatted answer to a metaphysical or spiritual questions such as, "Why am I in the universe?" First Nations have always provided a *spiritual* answer to this kind of question, their perspective offering a much wider scope from which to draw insights for one's individual spiritual journey. Individuals on their journey can learn from any entity or process in the universe—indeed from any and all entities and/or spirits.

European-originated religious systems have tended to organize a particular individual's personal vision in the form of a structured response to the question of spirituality, that is, Martin Luther (Lutherans), Menno Simons (Anabaptists), Ulrich Zwingli (Reformed), Charles Russell (Jehovah's Witnesses), John Calvin (Calvinists, that is, Christian Reformed, Presbyterians, or Baptists), and so forth. Had the Europeans looked for a *spiritual* form of response to an ontological query, they might have found it in the First Nations' format. Europeans boasted about "being spiritual," but they settled instead for an organization that primarily uses spiritual language with no particular concern about its application in daily life. Marker's

failure to grasp this important difference shows a lack of familiarity with both organized religion and traditional spirituality.

The foregoing does not imply that there were no similarities between the ritualistic practices of both traditional First Nations' spirituality and European forms of Christianity. It was the foundational orientation of the two perspectives that differed. As Chief John Snow in *These Mountains are our Sacred Places* (1977) says of the Wesley Band, Nakoda Nations has written, "if one understands the native religion of my people, it is not difficult to understand why so many of us embraced the gospel of Christianity—the concept of God was nothing new to us." After the initial missionary efforts among the First Nations bore fruit the converts came to realize that the practical application of the new perspective could quite negatively affect their daily lives.

The criticism is made that my book is "simply brimming with overstatement and unfounded generalizations." Sadly, the review does not offer a single example of this grossly exaggerated, unfounded claim. In light of this criticism, it does seem a bit incongruous that a volume like *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* would cite and quote from a 17-page list of duly-recognized references, and yet have its contents comprise "simplistic propaganda," as the reviewer suggests.

Marker would have the book make a great deal more of the differences between Canadian and American policies toward First Nations, although the text does make mention of this in the ninth chapter. For most of First Nations' history, the USA-Canadian border was a nonentity. It was a much later drawn artificial line and completely unknown to the First Nations of North America for the greater part of their lives. In fact, when the USA formed itself in 1776 their leaders worked havoc with the established occupied areas for the Iroquois and other members of the Six Nations. Today members of the Blackfoot/Blackfeet Nations still cross the boarder without having to declare their personal goods because of the jointly government-sponsored Jay Treaty. Historically, many tribes freely traded across the "border" (?), for example, the Mandan and Plains Cree freely traded without regard for the European-inspired kind of demarcation. Centuries ago a band of Lakoda Sioux evolved to become the Assinboines, who migrated to what is now Saskatchewan who left because of the Riel wars. Later some of them (Montana Band) migrated to Hobbema. In this context, the USA-Canadian border figures little in First Nations history. Aside from trying to annihilate the Indians (before the Removal Plan of Andrew Jackson), both countries gave out diseased blankets, both finked out on treaties, and both generally berated Indian culture and tried forcibly to evangelize the people to Christianity.

Despite Marker's protests to the contrary, there are several strong parallels that may be drawn with regard to the role/fate of residential schools in both countries. The USA may have shut down most of these schools in the 1940s, but the Canadian government turned theirs over to government bureaucratic control only about a decade later. On a recent visit (1998) to Anadarko, Oklahoma, my wife and I were informed that there are still three successful residential schools for Aboriginal students in the USA, and the Riverside Indian School at Anadarko (the oldest in the USA) enrolls several hundred students and has a waiting list of 200 plus students. These residential schools are endorsed by Indian officials, parents, and educators.

In this context, it would be safe to say that residential schools are still very much part of the picture of Native education in the US.

Perhaps the most unfortunate charge made by Professor Marker in the review is the implication that only Indians can write about Indians. Promoted to its logical extreme this position is simply racist. It is an *ad hominem* attack and does not belong in the arena of academe. It is wrong to belittle a writer because of his or her ethnic background, as was done to me in this review. The notion that only members of a particular ethnocultural community can write about themselves is not justifiable. If it were adhered to by all academic investigators, it would severely limit the advancement of research. If only Indians can write about Indians, and only Chinese can write about Chinese, only Germans can write about Germans, and only French can write about French, what kind of literature would result? A related question might be, "What are the qualifications for an *Indian* who might be permitted to write about their culture? Can only Status Indians apply or must they be full-blooded Indians? (Status, by the way, is a non-Native-assigned category of people). How much Aboriginal blood does a writer have to have in order to qualify as an Indian? May only those Indians put pen to paper who have been endorsed by a particular Indian community? Should these writers have training in the white man's form of schooling before they begin a writing career? After all, writing is a non-Native phenomenon, because historically the Aboriginal peoples thrived on the oral tradition. How can one be sure that a First Nations writer trained by a non-Indian institution will still write like an Indian?

Marker challenges his First Nations colleagues to write and speak about the topics in *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada*. I fear this challenge is inappropriate in what is allegedly a book review. It sounds a little like the promotion of "good intentions"! If these folk don't immediately take up their writing and speaking careers, what role, if any, should non-Natives play in encouraging them to do so? From a multicultural perspective it would seem that everyone can benefit from writings about one's own ethnocultural group by "outsiders," because this format can provide a unique perspective. When outside writers attempt to describe the lifestyle of a particular community, their descriptions afford that community the opportunity to understand what these observers are thinking. This in turn may help them to find ways to explain their way of life to outsiders. In an enhanced perspective of any alternative *Weltanschauung* is a valid academic objective, it is in fact mandatory that we learn what other people are thinking. This is why Japanese need to write about First Nations, and so forth. Then, and only then, can there be true communications because we can begin to understand each other's thoughts. Any argument to the contrary is errant because it assumes, logically projected, that one has to be part of an explosion to be able to write about the effects of dynamite. Such a stance cannot be academically justified; it is a silly statement.

My reviewer suggests that *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* should have been written as a one-tribe study, but such an undertaking would have been a bit like reinventing the wheel. Many such studies already exist. It should be noted that studies of this caliber have been written by both Native and non-Native writers and have been lauded in both communities.

Another consideration of the same charge emanates from the observation that because non-Indians have been writing about Indians for a long time and they

have apparently never gotten it right, they should stop. But why? Can non-Indians not *learn* to write about Indians? Is it impossible for them to improve their knowledge of Aboriginal ways? Are Indians not able to teach non-Natives about their beliefs? Conversely, can Indians learn to function in the non-Native, European-inspired world of academe? Obviously they can, although Marker's piece is a poor indicator of this possibility. An exchange of ideas about a common milieu constitutes true multicultural exchange, something that most Canadians allegedly prize.

Marker's approach reflects a slightly outdated mode of reactionism. It is a classic form of the antithetic mode outlined in Hegel's dialectic of the 19th century. This stance was grossly exaggerated in the 1960s by those who urged recognition of the rights of First Nations and begged for an appreciation of their cultural heritage. These critics had their place, but we have come a long way since then. Today many academic investigators, both Native and non-Native, studiously ponder alternative or opposing perspectives and try to find a kind of middle ground of understanding.

I recently listened to a Cree Elder in one of my classes explaining the significance of the sundance, the pipe, and the sweat-lodge. He said that in his tribe the sweat-lodge ceremony has four rounds, as does the sundance. He explained that every act in these ceremonies must be positive—filled with love for everyone. Even the four colors and the four directions speak to this unity of humankind. He also noted that in the second round of the sweat-lodge participants are to pray for everyone, including their enemies. Everything spiritual in the Native spiritual world is to be regarded as positive, loving, uplifting, accepting. This has been my experience over the past three decades of researching and teaching in First Nations communities. It could be a real improvement to witness this same spirit in the academic realm even in the writing of book reviews. That would be a noteworthy cultural exchange with the First Nations of this land.

The reviewer suggests that the promotion of harmony and friendship is "at best a dubious academic enterprise." The implication seems to be that academics can only be involved in objective, analytic, neutral prosaic enterprises. If it was possible to attain that high level of academic exercise, why do academics who professionally scrutinize the same data still disagree among themselves? Personally, I would opt for a little more promotion of harmony and friendship. In keeping with this objective, I herewith offer my hand in peace and harmony to my colleague Professor Marker.