

## Book Reviews

*Pauline: A Biography of Pauline Johnson*, by Betty Keller. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1981 [1982]. Pp. [v], 317; illus.; selected biblio; index. \$19.95.

Pauline Johnson, known also as Tekahionwake or "The Mohawk Princess," was born in Brantford, Ontario in 1861 at Chiefswood, the residence of her Mohawk father, George Johnson, and her English Quaker mother, Emily Elliott. Her education befitted the daughter of a chief who sat in the Mohawk senate: tutored at home until the age of 14 by an English governess and her mother, then educated at Brantford Collegiate for two years. It was there that she cultivated her father's taste for costumes and pageantry — the parlour and study of Chiefswood were adorned with pictures of Napoleon and Bismarck — by performing in school plays. Seven years after leaving Brantford Collegiate she sold her first poem to *The Week*; during the next thirteen years she sold only thirteen more poems. She might have remained a minor, unprolific poet had former school friend Frank Yeigh not invited her to participate in a group poetry reading at the Young Men's Liberal Club of Ontario in Toronto in 1892. When she recited "A Cry from an Indian Wife," inspired by the Riel Rebellion of 1885, the audience "broke into wild applause." A week later Yeigh, acting as her manager, booked her into Toronto's Association Hall. Pauline Johnson's career as a professional recitalist and platform entertainer had begun.

Billed as "The Mohawk Princess" and dressed in a fringed buckskin dress with wampum belts and a Huron scalp hanging from her waist, she recited such poems as "The Song My Paddle Sings." Pauline Johnson travelled back and forth across Canada and the United States over the next sixteen years. Sometimes she was alone, but more frequently she toured with her partners, first the elocutionist, ventriloquist and impersonator Owen Smily, and then the "entertainer and monologist" J. Walter McRae. She also travelled abroad. On her first trip to Great

Britain in 1894 she arranged for the publication of her book of poems, *The White Wampum*, by the Bodley Head, and with letters of introduction from such personages as Lord Aberdeen, W. F. Cockshutt and Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper she gave recitals at the social evenings of Lord Ripon, among others, and hob-nobbed with artists Sir Frederic Leighton and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. On her second trip, in 1906, under the patronage of Lord and Lady Strathcona she and McRaye performed at Steinway Hall as well as in the drawing rooms of London's Mayfair.

In 1909, after sixteen years of one-night stands in everything from community halls in Kootenay mining towns to fashionable London parlours, Pauline Johnson's performing career ended. Choosing Vancouver for her retirement she took an apartment in the city's West End and spent her time "writing, walking, entertaining, and then more writing." Besides providing stories for *The Boy's World* and *Mother's Magazine*, she combined the poems in *The White Wampum* and *Canadian Born* into *Flint and Feather*. Nor was she neglected by her distinguished patrons and friends during her last years. The Duke of Connaught visited her on his trip to British Columbia in 1912. Chief Joe Capilano, whom she had met in London in 1906, recounted his legends, which she put into story form. They first appeared in the *Vancouver Province* and then, in 1911, were combined under the title, *Legends of Vancouver*. When there was not enough money to live on from her writing and when she was suffering from cancer, funds were raised by the city's mayor, Charles Manley Douglas, the Women's Press Club, the Women's Canadian Club and her old patron Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper. Public interest in Pauline Johnson did not stop with her death in March 1913. The city's leading sculptor, Charles Marega, produced a monument to her memory. In 1922 it appeared alongside her ashes, which had already been inhumed, by special permission, at Stanley Park's Ferguson Point.

Betty Keller's *Pauline: A Biography of Pauline Johnson* is the first major work to appear on the life of the enigmatic "Mohawk Princess." Unaided by Johnson's manuscripts — they were destroyed shortly after Johnson's death by her sister — the task of reconstructing so peripatetic a life must have been difficult. Keller admirably establishes Johnson's performing circuits and gives much-needed attention to a little-written-of era in Canadian cultural history — the itinerant music hall entertainer. Yet in trying to enliven the central character, to make up for the lacuna of manuscript material which might have allowed the voice of Pauline Johnson to come through, Keller succumbs frequently to using inappropriate generalizations, citing reconstructed conversations and uncritically

accepting newspaper articles, memoirs and Johnson's own published reminiscences. Pauline Johnson's life might have been illuminated if more attention had been given to the public and to the patrons who responded so overwhelmingly to her work. What, for example, made people as diverse as the Canadian Governor-General and a Halifax bank clerk attend salon and opera house evenings to hear her recite? What about the poems and stories themselves? Keller gives them virtually no literary analysis or aesthetic judgement. Nor does she scrutinize their content or the source of their inspiration. How did her poems compare with those of her contemporaries, and why has interest in her work not been sustained? These and many more questions might have been asked.

I came away from the book with a much better idea of Pauline Johnson's travels, her stage partners and her lovers, but of Johnson herself, of the quality and the content of her poetry, of the force that motivated her to write her poems and to perform and of the milieu that enabled her to sustain a reputation on the platform for sixteen years, I am still uncertain. The subject must clearly emerge from a biography; Pauline Johnson does not live in *Pauline*.

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*The Forces Which Shaped Them*, by Mary Ashworth. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1979. Pp. 238.

The main part of this book is a factual, non-emotional account of the problems encountered by native Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Doukhobors and East Indians in B.C. in obtaining an appropriate education for their children. It covers the years between 1858 and 1979.

Professor Ashworth has researched her topics thoroughly. Her material is presented through quotes from the journals and reports of the early missionaries, the minutes of school board meetings, editorials from newspapers and magazines, and interviews with adults who were children during the years under discussion. Relevant sections of Royal Commission reports, Immigration Acts, UNESCO monographs, Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports, doctoral dissertations, books and unpublished research are also included.

The introduction by Rosemary Brown suggests that this historical survey is evidence that there was and continues to be a political plot to promote racism and to exploit minorities by denying their children an