

**Frances FRASER, *The Bear Who Stole the Chinook: Taies from the Blackfoot*, Introduction by Hugh A. DEMPSEY (Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 1990, xiv+129 p., ISBN 0-88894-685-6)**

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This is a collection of stories from the Blackfoot, many of which focus on Na-pe, the Old Man, the mythical trickster-creator of the Blackfoot who is sometimes wise, sometimes foolish and often humorous. A striking number of tales feature women; "The War-Trail of Sin'opa", for example, is about a warrior woman revered by men and hated by other women. "Calf Looking's Wife" concerns a "faithless" woman and the horrifying revenge her husband took upon her. Some of the stories would delight children, especially if read aloud. In the title story, they learn why the prairie chicken has spots, why owls have such big eyes, and why bears sleep all winter and wake up dreadfully cross.

These narratives appeared in Frances Fraser's two books published in 1959 and 1968. In his thoughtful introduction to this volume that brings together these earlier works, Hugh Dempsey explains that Fraser (1920-1989) was born and raised on a farm south of the Blackfoot reserve in Alberta and retained close connections with her aboriginal neighbours and friends throughout her life. As a young girl, she acquired a working knowledge of the Blackfoot language. She showed an early interest in collecting and recording Blackfoot stories, but did not begin to publish these until the 1950s in newspapers and later in book form. According to Dempsey, she was respected by the Blackfoot who encouraged and supported her work, fearing that their stories might be lost forever.

Dempsey points out that Fraser was aware that "among a people who had no written language, the accuracy of story-telling was extremely important" (p. xiii). It is not completely clear, however, just how "accurate" or representative these stories may be, and some caution must be used in approaching them. It is noted that Fraser "spent hours with elders" (p. xii), but her actual process of recording and translating is not vividly described. It is unfortunate that Fraser's informants remain anonymous and that the multiple authorship of this work is submerged. She apparently consulted both women and men elders and it would be interesting to know to what degree these stories reflect different domains of experience. In deciding which to publish Fraser excluded some that she thought were "brutal and not exactly for children" (p. xiii), and the collection might be partial in other ways, reflecting only what was disclosed to her despite her bonds of friendship and knowledge of the language. The texts do not, to me, read as direct speech, and this suggests that they may have been changed or embellished in order to tell effective stories. They may also reflect Fraser's own voice and concerns. Was she strictly a scribe or did she interpret as well?

One of the most intriguing things about this book is the introduction to Fraser herself, who deserves further serious study. She can be seen within the context of women collectors or field researchers whose work has been neglected or undervalued. Some others, most notably the journalist Mary Weekes of Regina, have also been overlooked. As Dempsey notes in his introduction, when Fraser began publishing, few had written very much about the Plains Indians. She was in great demand as an authority on the Blackfoot by the 1960s but was interested in other topics as well, and was frustrated when her publisher showed no interest in her work, entering what Dempsey describes as “a long and bitter period in her life” (p. xi). Someone should further explore the life and work of Frances Fraser, and Douglas and McIntyre should be commended for bringing her to light again.

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Theodore C. HUMPHREY and Lin T. HUMPHREY (eds.), “*We Gather Together*”: *Food and Festival in American Life* (Logan, Utah State University Press, 1991, 289 p., ISBN 0-87421-155-7).

This volume consists of fourteen essays divided into three sections: Part I — Family and Friends, Ritual and Renewal; Part II — Regional Specialities: Work and Play; and Part III — “Boosterism”, Food, and Festive Performance. In addition, the volume has an Introduction by Theodore C. Humphrey, Sue Samuelson, and Lin T. Humphrey, and Afterword by Michael Owen Jones, an Appendix with “Soup Night Recipes and Philosophy” by Lin T. Humphrey, and a Selected Bibliography prepared by Michael Owen Jones and Theodore C. Humphrey. All of the contributions celebrate the way in which formal and informal family, neighbourhood, and community groups express their identity and celebrate their unity through rituals of commensality. The foods themselves, the traditions involved in their preparation, serving and consumption, and the collective experience of both working and eating together all communicate powerful messages of group identity and continuity.

The essays cover a wide range of food-centered festivals in United States culture. They are exemplary in focusing attention and analysis on events that most