

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann (ed.), 2003 *Qulirat Qanemcit-llu Kinguvarcimalriit, Stories for Future Generations: The Oratory of Yup'ik Elder Paul John*, Bethel, Calista Elders Council, and Seattle, University of Washington Press, stories translated by Sophie Shield, 778 pages.

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on Inuit since Brody's *The Peoples' Land* that combines conceptual insight, depth of field experience and readability. *Saqqaq* is a study not only grounded in longitudinal research, but also in longitudinal perspective.

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This usual method of speaking, the method of giving guidance to someone, apparently is like medicine which can heal a person's body and mind [...] This method of giving advice and guidance is unquestionably the right way (Paul John in Fienup-Riordan 2003: xxxix-xl).

Stories for Future Generations is a collection of narratives performed orally by Yup'ik Elder Paul John in February of 1977 during a two-week period at the newly built Nelson Island High School as one of the first elders in residence. In the course of those two weeks, Paul John performed over 60 narratives, representing both *qulirat* (legends of tales told by distant ancestors) and *qanemcit* (historical narratives related by known persons). While all of these narratives derive from a single source, the focus of the volume is not on Paul John himself. As Fienup-Riordan (2003: lv) points out, Paul John's intention, "[...] was not to use the stories to explain past events in his own life, but to use stories to shape the future lives of his young audience. [...] Paul's goal

was nothing less than to give a full and balanced view of human possibility [...].” What makes this volume so special is Paul John’s method of storytelling that combines the objectivity of instruction with the intimacy of healing, and the unique process through which this balance was preserved by Ann Fienup-Riordan’s and Sophie Shield’s fidelity in representing Paul John’s performance.

The volume begins with a short preface explaining the creative process behind the production of the volume and is followed by two introductory chapters. The first is a biographical chapter on Paul John. This chapter combines Paul John’s own words about his life, with Fienup-Riordan’s historical and biographical contextualization. This chapter gives the reader some background on Paul John and his early “Yup’ik education,” gained through living in the traditional *qasgi*, or men’s house, with his father, learning how to drive a dog team, paddle a kayak, use a spear-thrower, shoot a gun, set snares and fish traps, and all of the other things one must know to live as a “real Yup’ik.” Paul John quickly became a powerful political leader in his community and in his elder years has become one of the Delta’s most respected cultural leaders.

The second introductory chapter provides some brief background on common forms of Yup’ik oratory. It delves into an insightful, and at times analytical, discussion of how Paul John’s own struggles to integrate modern practices (Western education, Christianity, and participation in the market economy) with traditional practices (subsistence hunting and fishing, Eskimo dancing and sharing) shape not only what stories John chooses to give to the younger generations, but how he tells them as well. For as Fienup-Riordan explains, “the properly lived Yup’ik life is [often] explained with reference to that which it is not.” Many of the stories in this volume reflect Paul John’s awareness of growing influence of Kass’at ways of life and culture on the younger Yup’ik generations, and his stories appropriate these images and terms to represent areas of tension and synchronicity between the two cultures.

The performances are organized into 13 “narrative sets” grouped by Fienup-Riordan to reflect primary relationships. These include, “*A’ka Tamanni Yuullrat: Life in the Past*,” “*Yuut Ungungsiit-llu: Humans and Animals*,” “*Angutet Arnat-llu: Men and Women*,” “*Yupiuyaraq: Becoming a Yup’ik Person*,” “*Angalkut: Shamans*,” “*Nukalpait: Great Hunters*,” “*Ellminek Ikayuryqraq Yuilqumi: Yupik Survival Skills*,” and several more. The chapters and the stories within each chapter are presented in the order they were told by Paul John, and the only intrusions upon his original performance are in the form of whispery endnotes that provide some contextualizing information about key Yup’ik concepts, practices or sayings. This volume does not provide an extensive background on Coastal Yup’ik beliefs, practices and ways of knowing, and should be approached with caution by those inexperienced with Yup’ik culture. Fienup-Riordan’s (1996) volume *Boundaries and Passages: Rule and ritual in Yup’ik oral tradition* provides a nice companion volume to John’s oratory and is suggested along with Morrow and Schneider’s (1998) *When Our Words Return, Writing, hearing and remembering oral traditions of Alaska and the Yukon* as background reading for those who may need or desire more explication on the role of oratory, narrative and performance for Yupiit both of the past and today.

This volume provides not only a wealth of cultural and historical information, but through its meticulous transliteration it also provides a library of linguistic knowledge as well. Sophie Shield was the sole transcriber and translator for all 38 of the original recordings. Shield chose a prose method of representing the oral performances, but as Fienup-Riordan points out, “her paragraphs are no longer arbitrary groupings disconnected from Paul’s original performance,” but instead maintain much of the flow and natural breaks that occurred in the oral versions. The sheer length of the volume would have prohibited the “short-line” verse format that many now use in the literary representation of Native American oral narratives.

The volume’s length and density in some ways limit its accessibility to its originally intended audience, children and adolescents. In this way, Paul John’s original intentions may not be as fully reflected as his original performances in this work. At the same time, Fienup-Riordan makes clear that Paul John agreed to the production of this volume as another vehicle to pass on the collective knowledge of his Yup’ik ancestors. At the heart of the volume lies a fundamental question: What does it mean to be a “real Yup’ik” person? Paul John’s performances speak to this issue from multiple perspectives. Three central themes, authenticity, morality and survival emerge as central in both Paul John’s life story and his stories about life. It is at this intersection between what is real, what is good and what is necessary where story becomes life and life becomes story, where past and future merge and rise up to meet the present.

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