

Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

BASTIEN, Betty. *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitstapi*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004. Pp. xx, 235.

When the Hudson's Bay Company began to expand its trade beyond the margins of the bay, they sent Anthony Henday inland to the plains. In the late summer of 1754 he entered a camp of Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot-speaking people) with a gift of trade goods and an invitation to travel northward and trade with the Company. His hosts declined the invitation, pointing out that they already had everything they needed. The prairies abounded with plants and animals that provided most of their material needs.

As Betty Bastien tells us, the relationship Siksikaitstapi had developed with their environment defined who they were. They understood that everything has a spirit and that, if life is to continue, reciprocal relationships must be developed and maintained with all of these beings. Learning about these connections begins as children are taught about their role and responsibilities toward other members of their nuclear and extended family. As a person grows, she or he is taught to extend these responsibilities to people from other nations and to the plants and animals of his or her own world. One's identity and sense of self-worth is enmeshed in a web of interconnected relationships. Without these relationships, there can be no understanding of life's purpose and meaning. Instead, the person is left with no sense of self-worth.

The key to life's purpose lies in understanding that human beings are responsible for maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the rest of creation. Plants and animals offer themselves as material for food, clothing, tools, and shelter. In addition, the "dream-beings" provide direction for people's lives. Humans must acknowledge this assistance through prayer, ceremonies, offerings, and appropriate actions. When these conditions are not fulfilled, the relationship becomes unbalanced and the world ceases to function as it should.

As a person grows and acquires more cultural information, he or she is transformed into a more knowledgeable human being. Early in life, children are taught through stories, especially those about Napi, who is at once a sort of "creator", but also one who does not act appropriately. His role is to illustrate the actions that constitute inappropriate behaviour and to show people its consequences. Then, as a per-

son matures, she or he may enter one of the “age-grade” societies or become a keeper of one of the sacred bundles of the culture. At this stage, one goes through a formal, culturally prescribed transfer ceremony that publicly acknowledges the new bundle-keeper’s rights as well as obligations and responsibilities. This is also a time when formal transfer of knowledge — or teaching — takes place. Bastien cogently observes that knowledge has a powerful transformative role, changing a person’s identity and feeling of self-worth. This power imbues knowledge with a spirit of its own, making knowledge itself animate.

It is difficult, nearly impossible, to convey the principles of Siksikaitsitapi culture in English. Blackfoot is a non-linear, conceptual language in which words are both abstract and situational. The linguistic structure of English makes it hard to convey the concepts that are basic to Siksikaitsitapi understanding of the world. Bastien struggles with this, and some of the writing is very dense. Unfortunately, there may be no resolution to this problem.

Siksikaitsitapi tried hard to keep newcomers away from their homeland. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the fur traders established posts primarily around the periphery of Siksikaitsitapi territory. Still, disease entered the camps, killing up to half of the population and eroding the knowledge base. As whisky became more prevalent and the bison disappeared, people were confined to small reserves set aside by the Canadian and United States governments. Siksikaitsitapi soon found that their knowledge system, as well as their economic base, was threatened.

The government-imposed education system, which eventually developed into the network of residential schools, was a fulfilment of a treaty obligation intended to help Siksikaitsitapi adjust to a new way of life. Instead, the schools became a mechanism for replacing traditional Siksikaitsitapi knowledge with Eurocentric principles and methods of learning. The scientific philosophical perspective of “reductionism” replaced the knowledge that everything is a complex blend of the physical and the spiritual and that only a holistic perspective can explain life. The importance of experiential learning was replaced with an emphasis on classroom learning and memorization. Relationships were broken down as family members were separated and boys were kept away from girls. Without the family as a basis, the more complex relationships with all of creation became harder to understand.

The colonial efforts at cultural genocide have had widespread effects. The loss of the Siksikaitsitapi’s identity was not replaced with any other identity, leaving many people culturally, spiritually, and emotionally adrift. Today, the Siksikaitsitapi communities are taking control of their education once again. Blackfoot language has been introduced to the schools, often within a full immersion programme. Knowledge of the language is a fundamental requirement for understanding the principles that underpin the rest of the culture. As the youth grasp this knowledge, they are becoming more at ease asking for direction and learning regarding other matters.

Siksikaitsitapi have been the subject of many studies by anthropologists and others who were interested in the disappearing way of life of these plains people (such as Clark Wissler in 1912 and Walter McClintock in 1992). Bastien, as a Piikani working with many Kainai elders and ceremonial leaders, differs from these by discussing the culture from an emic perspective. (Kainai and Piikani, along with Siksika, comprise

the Siksikaitsitapi.) With this view from the inside, she is able to bring out the nuanced relationships among language, teaching, and the personal transformations that come from learning. It may not be hard for many readers to understand how plants, animals, and rocks are all living beings with special relationships with human beings. Importantly, Bastien extends this understanding to language and knowledge. Once we realize that language and knowledge are animate, we may wish to reconsider how we keep and use them.

Bastien has produced an important work that lays the foundation for making the Blackfoot way of knowing more accessible. Her discussions of Siksikaitsitapi ontology and pedagogy offer culturally appropriate ways of transferring this knowledge to younger generations through a Siksikaitsitapi-controlled educational system. Russell Wright, the late Siksika teacher and elder, often said, "We have been studied to death. It is time we started studying ourselves back to life." He would be proud of Betty Bastien's study.

Gerald T. Conaty
Glenbow Museum, Calgary

BERTAUD, Jean-Paul, Alan FORREST et Annie JOURDAN — *Napoléon, le monde et les Anglais. Guerre des mots et des images*. Paris, Autrement, 2004, 289 p.

À l'échelon de l'histoire napoléonienne, il est devenu très difficile de trouver des sujets originaux pouvant déboucher sur la publication d'un ouvrage. Néanmoins, il demeure toujours des voies dont l'exploration reste à faire et de ce fait, l'analyse du monde des médias sous le Consulat et l'Empire est l'un des créneaux dont la recherche ne fait que débiter. C'est dans cette optique que trois professeurs et auteurs spécialisés dans l'histoire de l'Empire et de la Révolution française, Jean-Paul Bertaud, Alan Forrest et Annie Jourdan, ont entrepris de dresser l'analyse du conflit séculaire entre Napoléon et l'Angleterre à travers les médias écrits. L'ouvrage collectif, *Napoléon, le monde et les Anglais*, a comme objectif d'étudier cette dichotomie en matière de communication qui existe alors entre les deux belligérants. Ainsi donc, s'attaquant tout deux aux mœurs et coutumes de l'autre, ceux-ci emploient des moyens très différents pour se dénigrer mutuellement.

Du côté anglais, le style caricatural devient un art des plus populaires. Ayant rapidement compris qu'une image vaut mille mots, comme le dit si bien le proverbe, les dessinateurs n'hésitent pas à dénigrer « l'ogre corse » à l'intérieur de scènes très significatives. Par exemple, Bonaparte y est dépeint comme un roi lilliputien se débattant frénétiquement dans la main d'un Gulliver aux traits de John Bull, un bourgeois plutôt prospère qui représente l'ensemble de la nation anglaise. Pendant cette guerre de 25 années, les caricaturistes londoniens ne sont pas en manque d'inspiration pour représenter Napoléon comme un despote sanguinaire avide de conquête. En cela, ils sont imités par les dessinateurs allemands qui, avec moins de talent que leurs alliés britanniques, cela va sans dire, voient en Napoléon l'oppressur des peuples d'Allemagne.