

Book Review

A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture

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A Metaphoric Mind: Selected Writings of Joseph Couture edited by Ruth Couture and Virginia McGowan. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013. 303 pp., \$34.95 paper.

Having known Joseph E. Couture for many years, I can honestly say that this book is aptly titled; Joe did indeed possess a metaphoric mind. Trained in both psychology and theology, Joe was one of those rare individuals who saw meaningful connections between the two fields, although I believe he preferred to substitute the word “spirituality” for the latter pursuit. This preference of terminology clearly originated from his Aboriginal background and subsequent involvements with Native elders and fellow searchers. Joe’s academic contributions parallel his practical experiences; while serving as a faculty member at several Canadian universities, he also functioned as a professional psychologist before his death in 2007.

At the beginning of the book, Couture’s editors set the stage for readers who wish to gain meaning from Joe’s personal journey by enjoining this caution: “The Indian way of knowing is metaphoric and symbolic in expression, intuitive, and direct in its process” (8). According to Couture, “It is difficult to describe the way the Indian mind processes content” (10). The required approach for anyone of Eurocentric background wishing to proceed in this undertaking is this: If you want to bridge the two spiritual cultures—Aboriginal *and* Eurocentric—“the key is to discover who you are and commit yourself to that” (293).

A Metaphoric Mind nicely captures Couture’s educational philosophy in five parts, each of which includes three or four of his publications. Part One elucidates Couture’s discovery of Indigenous thinking, a challenge he undertook in very practical ways, but primarily through mentorship with Native elders. Part Two follows up this theme by explicating the nature and role of Aboriginal elders, who comprise a special group of people and “are the superb embodiments of highly developed human potential” (69). It is they who “hold a key, if not *the* key, to the future survival of mankind” (77). Couture’s essay “Next Time, Try an Elder” (Chapter 4) is typical of his counseling approach, which intertwined his gentle humor with serious talk.

Part Three addresses institutions of higher learning, and pursues the question, “What is fundamental to Native education?” In this selection Couture explores “some of the basic cultural differences that seem to distinguish Native from Euro-Canadian culture, and to comment on their implications for Native educational policy” (173). The theme of Part Four is restorative justice, and it includes three essays on Aboriginal healing programs, Aboriginal behavioral trauma, and methods of traditional healing. The underlying foundation for successfully addressing these topics rests on Aboriginal core values. These include: that the Aboriginal Way is process-oriented, and completely holistic (it rests on spirituality); that all human beings are created equal; and, that “punishment of crime” (208) is not an Aboriginal concept, but learning from one’s mistakes is! The end result of successful healing should lead one to maintain wholesome, reciprocating relationships

with self, others, Nature, the Cosmos, and the Life Force. This system of beliefs obviously formed the foundation of psychologist Dr. Joseph E. Couture's counseling approach!

Finally, Part Five contains several selections featuring more eclectic themes. These papers include "On Women and Women's Circles" (which is a very encouraging letter to a female Aboriginal healer regarding a manual she submitted to him); "Excerpts from Dialogues Between Western and Indigenous Scientists" (which emphasizes the importance of the phrase "all my relations"); "Recidivism and the Need for Community-Based Healing" (which laments the punitive Eurocentric approach to corrections); and a collection of comments about the need for more human stories. In the last essay, like many Indigenous elders, Couture laments the failure of modern society to include human stories of the past as a primary means by which to discover who a people are. "It is the stories of the past, through Elders, the marvelous carriers of spiritual and moral teaching, that a growing number of people have had little or no exposure to" (291).

A brief bibliography of Couture's published works ends the book.

Joe Couture was one of the few individuals I have had the privilege of knowing who had the gift of thinking deeply as he spoke or put pen to paper. This made some of his utterances, spoken or written, seem ponderous—as they were, and definitely worthy of cogitation! One would have to ponder what Joe was saying, because little or nothing of what he said could be taken for granted. This is what happens when one is in the presence of a "metaphoric mind."

Like many of us in the sunset years of life, Joe Couture had favorite lines and illustrations. These are sometimes repeated in this book because the articles contained in it represent presentations made to different audiences: for example, Couture makes reference to an elder who counsels a seeker of truth with a metaphor urging the seeker to "go look for a moose." This illustration occurs on pages 82, 160, and 198. Similarly, the encouragement of a seeker to realize that "the answers are within you" occurs on pages 13, 201, and 291. There are others, but the good news is that the elder sayings cited by Couture are well worth repeating, particularly the admonition to "go seek a moose." As the conclusion to the admonition states, "So now, you young people, think about all that. Come back once in a while and show us what you've got. And we'll tell you if what you think you have found is a moose" (82).

The challenge is ours; it may be time to go moose hunting! Thanks Joe.

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