

"Ensa Sauvagement": Amerindian (and Quebecois) authors: 1990-2020

Otherness and the presence of the other have always been part of the history of colonization in the Americas - both from the point of view of the first Amerindian and Inuit nations, and from that of European settlers, merchants and missionaries. **Denys Delâge's *Le pays renversé. Amérindiens et Européens en Amérique du Nord-Est - 1600-1664*** illustrates the devastating influence of European capital during Dutch, French, English and Swedish colonization. The European market disrupted the circuits of trade and exchange between tribes, Christianity tore apart the unity of aboriginal communities, particularly among the Wendat (Huron) nation, epidemics and inter-tribal conflicts due to the European presence considerably reduced the native population - in half a century a vast territory, as far as the Mississippi and the Great Lakes, became depopulated, a civilizational space disintegrated. This made it all the easier for European settlers to penetrate. This civilizational tragedy affected contact between Europeans and the First Nations from the outset. Inequality and disparity were to Europe's advantage. However, North-East America escaped the intensity of genocide and slavery experienced by other regions of the New World.

One factor undoubtedly helped to moderate the situation - the need for, and later the habit of, negotiated relations, including in New France, where the small number of settlers and merchants on the one hand, and climatic conditions on the other, hampered European superiority. For a long time, the agricultural activities of the French settlers complemented the hunting and fishing activities of the Native tribes, as in the case of the Quebec region, where the French took the place of the extinct Stadacona Iroquoians in trade with the Innu and Algonquin. In the 17th century, certain Amerindian tribes - Abenakis, remnants of the Huron-Wendat, but also Iroquois - settled as farmers near the settlers. Several activities brought Europeans and First Nations together and demanded collaboration, notably the fur trade, on a continental scale and for more than two centuries. Alliances, rivalries and wars - between the French, English, Dutch and their Amerindian partners or allies - were forged and broken around this trade. Trade and war entail the need for negotiation and a certain respect for others. It wasn't until the Anglo-American War of 1812-1814 and the Peace of Ghent that the importance of Native tribes as military and political allies came to an end. At the same time, the fur trade collapsed as continental hunting areas were exhausted, while European industry turned to Canadian timber and the territory's agricultural potential. The woods and soil occupied by the Amerindians became the focus of economic interests. These factors contributed to a deterioration in the situation of the First Nations in the 19th century. Although the Indian Act of 1876 was designed, beside other things, to protect the cultural identity of the Amerindians, it also regulated segregation by establishing Indian reserves, where tribes were placed under the tutelage of the federal government and thus deprived of legal personhood. The Act also defined the rules governing Indian status, which was transmitted through paternal lineage only, and excluded those who settled for more than five years outside the reserve - in other words, a potential elite. In fact, its aim was a gradual assimilation, supported by the Indian Schools Act of 1894, which allowed Amerindian children to be placed in residential schools, far from their parents and tribal environment, in order to acculturate them.

The situation - legal, social and cultural - did not change until the mid-20th century. Thanks to the emergence of Native American elites, Amerindian and Inuit communities set up political representatives to assert their territorial rights and negotiate with federal and provincial authorities.

This evolution is reflected in literature. While 17th- and 18th-century texts made the Amerindian an essential component of New World themes, the 19th century tended to erase his image, replacing it in part with that of the "white" savage - the *coureur des bois*. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that literature rediscovered the Aboriginal - first as a

theme, and later, thanks to a growing number of Amerindian authors who placed the issue in a different perspective.

In New France and Canada, the coexistence of settlers and Amerindian ethnic groups was conditioned by the demographic factor. When Samuel Champlain died on December 25, 1635, Quebec City had no more than 300 settlers. In 1660, the colony's French population was less than 3,000, a number that Colbert's efforts raised to nearly 10,000 by 1681. As a result, European settlers were for a long time in the minority. According to estimates, Canada's territory was inhabited by a million natives at the start of colonization. Some tribes formed confederations - such as the Huron or Iroquois - numbering between 20 and 30,000 people. Iroquoian languages were spoken by almost 100,000 individuals. Several tribes - Micmac, Innu, Maliseet, Abenaki, Cree - shared the St. Lawrence valley, numbering 25,000. It was only at the end of the 17th century that the demographic balance shifted to the disadvantage of the natives, who numbered just 7,000 at the time of the Conquest, compared with 70,000 French-Canadians.

The French set about Christianizing and francizing the Amerindian tribes. However, the balance of power and cultural preponderance did not initially favor the French. Until around 1660, settlers and missionaries had to adapt to the Native languages. **Marie de l'Incarnation**, abbess of the Ursulines, had to learn Innu, Algonquin, Wendat and Iroquois. In 1640, a year after her arrival, she commented on the situation: "[...] *this end of the world where one is wild all year round, if not when the ships have arrived that we take back our French language [...]*." By 1664, she had already noted that the number of Amerindians in her circle had dwindled to one-twentieth, and that French girls now outnumbered the young women welcomed to the convent. This was also the period when French began to establish itself as the language of communication with the First Nations. However, it is estimated that as late as 1700, one out of every two colonists had had contact with the culture of an Amerindian tribe in his or her youth.

The image of the "other" that emerged during the colonial period is instructive in several respects. There is, for example, a tendency towards uniformity and indifferentiation. Despite the diversity of Amerindian tribes, Europeans simplified their representation to the figure of the Sauvage. Inversely, this simplification also applied to the image of the white man, which was to be found much later in the writings of Amerindian authors.

The situation in Canada in the 17th century was described in detail by the Récollets and Jesuits, who published their collective reports - *Relations* (1632-1673) - every year in Paris. Their descriptions of Native culture mixed contempt with admiration. The sense of superiority of the holders of Scripture - in the literal and religious sense - does not preclude high regard for a civilization based on orality and the culture of the spoken word. The Jesuit **Paul le Jeune** appreciated the rhetoric of the Amerindian chiefs - "*a rhetoric as fine and refined as could come from the escolle of Aristotle, or Cicero*". His colleague **Barthélémy Vimont** left an admiring account of the staging of an Iroquois messenger's oratorical performance.

A similar ambivalence characterizes the image of the Indian. The **Good or Noble Savage**, who lives far from corruption in the bosom of Nature, is contrasted with the Barbarian, the Cannibal who must be civilized. This ambivalence reflects certain imperatives of European identity thinking. Either the need to assert superiority prevails, in which case the image of the other emerges as negative, or the other serves as a mirror to question and even cast doubt on one's own civilizational values. A case in point is the complex work by **Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce, baron de Lahontan** *Nouveaux Voyages de Mr. baron de Lahontan dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (1703), which contains curious dialogues between the author and the Huron chief Adario. This imaginary dialogue, which, at least in fiction, lends the voice to the other by placing him or her in a subjectal position, confronts European values with "savages". Lahontan thus introduces the idea of the good savage and natural life, modulated by the rationalist skepticism and relativism of the Age of Enlightenment. Lahontan's interest in the other and the

concept of the state of nature revives certain aspects of earlier theological reflection. The discovery of the New World raised the question of the religion of savages, in particular whether their religion is part of biblical history and whether savages are concerned with Original Sin and the Fall. Assuming that the Indians are outside universal history, i.e. below Good and Evil, and not concerned by the Fall, they are approaching the state of nature: hence the idea that will be followed up by **Jean-Jacques Rousseau**. The opposite hypothesis would mean that Indians share the universal religious sentiment, however distorted, and that it is therefore possible to discover rudiments of the true faith and points in common with European culture. For this reason, some Jesuits paid attention to mythological representations and stories. In his *Relation*, **Jean de Brébeuf** describes the Huron ritual of the Feast of the Dead, and notes the story of the soul's journey to the land of death, which bears some resemblance to **the myth of Orpheus**. This approach was taken up again in the 18th century by another Jesuit, **Joseph-François Lafitau** (*Moeurs des sauvages américains*, 1724), considered the founder of ethnology.

The Amerindian is present in the very first literary texts that relate to the New World by their origin or their theme. Many of the above observations point to the presence of both exclusion and inclusion as structuring relationships. A pertinent analysis of the problem is provided by Bernard Andrès, who compares **Marc Lescarbot's *Le Théâtre de Neptune*** (1606) to the school shows at the Jesuit College in Quebec City, organized as part of the festivities to mark the arrival of a new governor or other dignitary. The place given to the presence of Amerindians seems very important. The *Théâtre de Neptune*, which, in imitation of royal entries, stages the homage paid by Neptune, his Tritons and the inhabitants of the New World to vice-governor Poutrincourt on his return from expedition, distributes 78 verses out of 238 between four characters representing the savages. The text contains five Micmac lexemes. The "linguistic" presence is even more pronounced in Jesuit shows, which feature long lines and tirades in various Amerindian languages. There is thus a strong tendency to integrate the other into one's own cultural context as part of one's self-image. Bernard Andrès' study raises the question of the actual presence of Amerindians as actors - speaking subjects. The answer is negative. In the case of the *Théâtre de Neptune*, it's highly unlikely that Acadian Micmacs could have learned long passages in French in such a short space of time. As for the Jesuit plays, it is attested that the roles of the Huron savage, the Huron prisoner, the Algonquin, the Nez-Percé and the Northern stranger were played by young schoolchildren who learned to recite the lines in native languages. From the outset, the inclusion of the other is linked to instrumentalization. Its image is constructed in such a way as to satisfy the values attributed to it. Words that don't belong to him are put into his mouth as his own, and in his language. Such an inclusion of the imaginary Amerindian means, at the same time, the exclusion of the real Amerindian.

The objection is obvious: this kind of deformation accompanies, to a greater or lesser extent, the constitution of the image of the other in general. In the case of the First Nations, however, the situation is different, perhaps even more serious. In fact, in the competition between oral culture and writing, it is the authority and fixation of the text that prevails over orality. Added to this is the authority of colonial power over the colonized. While French-Canadians can counter the image presented to them by English-Canadians with their own version of self and other, the influence of oral tradition is less powerful, and the voice without the support of text fades with time. The strong retort of the Amerindian can only come with writing. In the case of French-Canadian and Quebec literature, this will not happen until the 1970s, with the arrival on the scene of writers from the First Nations. It's important to bear this in mind when examining the image of the Amerindian or Inuit from a historical perspective.

From the 19th century onwards, the presence of the Amerindian fades in favour of a mediating figure - that of the **coureur des bois**, no doubt under the influence of the historical and adventure novel and the major influence of **James Fenimore Cooper**. The mediation of identity consists in projecting the traits of Indianness onto a character typified as French-

Canadian - in a positive or negative sense. A sort of double image of Canadian identity is formed, contrasting the *coureur des bois*, **adventurer linked to nature and discoverer of the land**, with the sedentary **inhabitant**, farmer and landowner. One or other of these characters, and often both, have crossed the history of French-Canadian literature from **Joseph Lacombe's *La Terre paternelle*** (1846), to **Louis Hémon's *María Chapdelaine*** (1914 in magazine; 1916 in book), to **Noël Audet's *La Terre Promise, Remember!*** (1998), to name but a few chronological milestones. This longevity suggests a hypothesis: the figure of the *coureur des bois*, by integrating the image of the Amerindian, seems to reproduce the identity situation of the origins - colonization and the face-to-face confrontation with the aboriginal.

Jacques Ferron has proposed another way of including the Amerindian - *métissage*. However, Ferron's awareness of a composite, plural identity does not imply the possibility of giving the other his or her voice, of establishing him or her, in his or her own right, in a subjectal position. It was undoubtedly **Yves Thériault** who more systematically envisaged such an identity. Several of his many novels and stories build their plots by confronting different civilizational and inter-ethnic conditions. The author frequently exploits Inuit and Amerindian themes. The best-known is certainly the Inuit trilogy *Agaguk, roman esquimau* (1958), *Tayaout, fils d'Agaguk* (1969) and *Agoak, l'héritage d'Agaguk* (1975). However, preference will be given here to the Amerindian theme, which offers the advantage of a complex perspective insofar as the relationship between majority culture (French-Canadian and Québécois) and minority culture (aboriginal) sheds light on the processes of appropriation and de-appropriation of the other. One case in point is *Ashini* (1960), one of the first major texts in French-Canadian literature to attempt a change of perspective by imagining the point of view of the other, the Non-Québécois. Could this be the result of the Innu ancestry mentioned in the author's biographies? In any case, this fact must be seen in the broader context of the exploration of otherness, a constant in Thériaultian inspiration.

Ashini's particularity lies in the narrative perspective that reverses the point of view: the other is installed in the subjectal position. The narrative is told in the first person singular, with internal focus. In the character-narrator - *Ashini*, an old Innu hunter - the other acquires a voice, the world is narrated and seen through his eyes, and the axiology is structured on the basis of his value judgments. Of course, the paradox of this narrative orchestration is worth noting. *Ashini* is written in French, for a French-Canadian audience. In other words, the other expresses himself not in Innu-aimun, but in a language that is not his own, but which, from his point of view, is precisely that of the other. Yet, through the artifice of writing, it must nonetheless appear strange and foreign, like a different kind of French - Innu-aimun in French. Thériault's stylistic subterfuge consists in accentuating the illusion of orality. The text is composed of short, juxtaposed sequences, interspersed with blank spaces between paragraphs. The syntax is simple, paratactic. Dislocations ("that one, I knew his name"), anaphoric or epiphoric repetitions and ellipses underline the spoken character. The I narrator addresses a you who listens to his deep, ceremonial voice, that of a tribal elder passing on an important message to the next generation.

Let's briefly recall the story: *Ashini* (Innu for "rock") is one of the last hunters still attached to ancestral customs. He has no family left: his two sons are dead, his daughter has left for the city, and his wife has died. So he decides to devote his life to his people. He wants to negotiate with the Great White Chief of Ottawa to obtain a territory that would be a country where his people could regain an independent, free life. So he speaks to Lévesque, the superintendent of the Indian reserve. The dialogue, set in the middle of the story, foreshadows the denouement. No matter how many messages *Ashini* sends, written in his own blood on birch bark, the Grand Chief from Ottawa doesn't come up at the meeting place. He has lost face in *Ashini's* eyes and, to humiliate him and force him to act, he commits suicide. The sacrifice is pointless, as the Innus in the reservation - the "they" in the superintendent's line - don't react. Seen from the

outside, following the shift in focus, the sacrifice is devalued: "*Ashini, Montagnais, 63 yaers old, commits suicide in a moment of insanity*".

Ashini's identity seems to correspond to the spirit of the Quiet Revolution period, which simultaneously accentuates defensive and emancipatory national models, while paving the way for the gradual integration of the other's difference into a new conception of Quebecitude. In the 1970s and 1980s, the situation shifted in favor of greater sensitivity to otherness, including that of the First Nations. **Marie-Renée Charest's** play *Meurtre sur la rivière Moisie* (1986), whose plot was inspired by a news article - the death of two young Amerindians - aroused such emotion that the police were ordered to reopen the investigation of their racist crime. A number of Quebec authors work on Amerindian themes, drawing on myths and tales. **Marc Doré**, for example, rewrote *Kamikwahushit* (1977) for the stage, an Amerindian tale that bears witness to a curious syncretism with the European fairy tale.

The 1970s also saw the emergence of authors of Native origin. Unlike non-Natives, they had the advantage of being able to present their point of view on identity directly, without going through the detour of making oneself aware of the other. They are few in number, it's true, and their entry in literature is a decade behind that of English-Canadian and American literature. Among the first, we should mention **Max One-Onti Gros-Louis**, boxer and chief of the Wendat village of Wendake-Ancienne-Lorette, who recorded his autobiographical story *Le Premier des Hurons* (1971) in collaboration with Marcel Bellier. Innu writer **An Antane Kapeshe** wrote her memoirs first in Innu-Aimun, before completing them with the French version *Eukuan nin matshimanitu innu-iskueu/Je suis une maudite sauvagesse* (1976). She recounted the myths and tales of her people in *Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays?* (1979). The issue of identity is strongly implicated in the historiographic and ethnographic work of **Huron-Wendat Georges Emery Sioui**. The importance of his book *Pour une autohistoire amérindienne. Essai sur les fondements d'une morale amérindienne* (1989) consists in the change of perspective: historical facts are considered from the Amerindian point of view. He is also the author of *Wendats. Une civilisation méconnue* (1994). **Bernard Assiniwi's** work is varied. After collecting and presenting Algonquin myths, tales and fables in *Anish-Nah-Bé* et *Sagana* (1971 and 1972), he became a historian with *Histoire des Indiens du Haut et du Bas Canada* (1974), a novelist with *L'Odawa Pontiac. L'Amour et la guerre* (1994) and *Saga des Béothuks* (1997), and playwright with *Il n'y a plus d'Indiens* (1983). The play illustrates the conflict between the older and younger generations and the disintegration of traditional values. In theater, the international breakthrough of the **Ondinnok company**, founded in 1985 by **Yves Sioui Durand**, author of ritual mythological dramas *Le Porteur des peines du monde* (1985), *Aiskenandahate. Le voyage au pays des morts* (1988), *Iwouskéa et Tawiskaron* (1999) and historical-mythological transpositions *La Conquête de Mexico* (1991) and *Kmùkamch l'Asieindien* (2002). Yves Sioui Durand's art is syncretic: it contaminates myth and history, ritual Amerindian theater with the European dramatic tradition; the mix of languages (Mohawk, Innu, Nahuatl, French, English, Spanish) indicates his broad conception of Amerindianness. According to the playwright, it's not so much a question of "*reconstituting ancient Amerindian ritual theater as reinventing it in a contemporary form*". His experimentation is part of the contemporary Quebec theater movement, as demonstrated by his reworking of Shakespeare's *Hamlet - Le Malécite* (2004; in collaboration with Jean-Frédéric Messier).

Maurizio Gatti, in *Être écrivain amérindien au Québec* (2006), aptly sums up the key questions facing all Amerindian writers and their identity. What is Native literature? Who can or should be considered an Native writer? What constitutes the Native tradition? In what language should we write? No answer is satisfactory or definitive. Indeed, neither ethnic origin nor physical appearance is a reliable defining criterion, since interbreeding is sometimes so extensive that certain ethnic groups - such as the Huron-Wendat - are physically indistinguishable from the surrounding population. Many authors, such as **Robert Lalonde** -

half Mohawk, half French-Canadian - don't see Amerindian descent as a reason to consider themselves Amerindian writers, even if their Amerindian experience is present in their work. The mixed-race origin is the reason why some others - **Bernard Assiniwi** or **Michel Noël** - are not recognized by Native communities. Exclusion also affects certain intellectuals of Native origin who did not accept living on reserves and who, now urbanized, reconcile their Amerindian identity with modernity. The very notion of Amerindianness is an abstraction that covers enormous differences in lifestyle, language and interests. The Wendat, farmers, craftsmen and traders settled around Quebec City, have very little in common with the Cree tribes, some of whom are still attached to their tundra hunting ways. The linguistic situation is no less complex. It's not just a question of choosing between French/English and one of the Amerindian languages, but also of communication between the Amerindian communities themselves, and between Amerindians and non-Amerindians. Communication and communicability have an impact on the book market and publishing.

The expression of different identity positions will be illustrated by Amerindian poetry. This approach is justified, among other things, by the nature of lyrical expression, its capacity for concentration and, consequently, its diversity, which allow us, in a short space of time, to capture the variability and mutations that Amerindian identity has undergone over the last three decades - a rapid transformation that corresponds to the evolution of identity in Quebec and Canada. We can therefore expect a number of overlapping identity models.

An example of the defensive national model can be found in some of Huron-Wendat **Jean Sioui's** meditations:

I had a beautiful tree in front of my house
I meditated in the shade of its branches
a sudden strong wind blew it down

I missed it for a long time

Today I remember
I remember it
looking at the new shoots
right where he was
My people are the same
I know they will survive
(I had a beautiful tree)

In these times
we are given
artificial rights under reserve

In our time
we possessed
natural rights without reserve
(In those days)

The paraphrase of the Quebec national (and nationalist) motto "*Je me souviens*", and the positioning of the lyrical subject - the collective US - indicates the identity paradigm of the defensive national model. The latter is developed by the image of the tree, which, with its roots, designates the inalienable place of identity - the land, the country. The glorious past, interrupted by historical disasters ("storm"), is evoked to connect with the promise of the future. The other is designated as the cause of historical evil, even bitterly ironized by the use of the diaphore "reserve" in a context that contrasts "artificial rights" with nature and "natural rights" (with connotations evoking 18th-century debates on the state of nature).

In addition to the defensive national model, some authors also highlight the predominance of the inclusive, integrating imaginary that characterizes the emancipatory national model. Witness **Myra Cree's** (self)ironic political satire "*Mon pays rêvé ou la PAX CANATA*". The poem is formulated as a dream of sovereignty - in fact, a challenge to sovereigntist Quebecers, but one that expresses above all a desire for equality, for recognition by others. Hence the "*three visions of this country*" - that of Anglophones, Francophones and First Nations working together, sharing the wealth. Inclusion goes beyond Canada; the vision extends to the whole world and the appropriation of universal cultural achievements represented here by French references. The inclusive movement is reflected in the language: a playful synthesis of lyrical and administrative style, with puns based on slang ("*y'a du bouleau et du pin pour tout le monde*"). Lyrical flights of fancy do not exclude a biting, critical eye, directed at both white politicians (the parody of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien) and the evil that gnaws at Amerindian society (alcoholism, drugs, domestic violence). The Oka conflict and the army's intervention against the defenders of the Mohawk cemetery (1990) are evoked:

My dreamed country begins, obviously,
 the day after a final referendum,
 once the "verdict rendi
 as the ineffable Jean Chrétien puts it.

Autonomy is achieved,
 we have our own Parliament,
 there are now three visions of this country.
 In Quebec, we're buddy-buddy with the French-speaking community
 who have taken up the study of Aboriginal languages.
 Our reserves, about which we used to say so much,
 have become summer camps
 and our chiefs, equally divided between men and women
 equally divided between men and women.
 In Kanesatake, where I live,
 there's birch and pine for everyone.
 The golf course is gone
 and everyone, white and redskin (I dream in color)
 can enjoy this enchanting site as they once did.
 Our young people no longer drink or take drugs,
 school enrolment has taken a prodigious leap forward.
 Everything is going so well in our families
 (there's no longer any trace of violence)
 that the Quebec Native Women's Association
 has become a literary circle.
 Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*
 has just been translated into Mohawk;
 Elizabeth Badinter's *XY of masculine identity*,
 should be translated into Montagnais for the Salon du livre
 to be held in Kanawake,
 and Duras's *L'Amant*, in Iniktituk (that's going to defrost in the igloos).
 [...] I pinch myself to believe it, probably too hard,
 because that's when I woke up.
 With my best wishes,
 that next year,
 if we are not more,
 we may be less.

The theme of identity is not only present in public and political discourse. It penetrates to the most intimate level of the individual, where it can reveal vulnerabilities. Such is the case with métissage, which concerns ethnicity as much as culture and language. What Myra Cree

sees as a dream appropriation, Wendat **Éléonore Sioui** observes with the ironic detachment of one who contemplates her wounds. The poem is entitled "Autochtonicity":

In a glass
Of white wine
Put two or three drops
Of Indian blood
Add an ounce of pollution
Brew European style
And you've got a second-class blend
Then ferment the elixir residue
Which will give you a third-class
Whose dilution becomes
Native American
Contaminated in its authenticity.
Make big plans, aim high in hope and work
Do not make little plan as it gives no magic stir (Autochtonicity)

The mixing of languages can, of course, evoke acculturation, as here. But it can also express a doubling of oneself that is an enrichment. The path is not an easy one, as the acceptance of multiple identities, in some cases, only comes at the end of anguished questioning. This is the song of the mixed-race woman who addresses the totemic wolf Mahiganou in French and Cree. Struck by exclusions on both sides, exposed as she is to a fragile in-between identity, she finally assumes her in-between position, integrating both sides of her being. The author of this poem is **Diom Romeo Saganash**:

My only guide tonight
The spirits dancing in the boreal sky
And the subdued light of the full moon.
Ni-wanshin, ni-madoune
I'm lost, I'm crying.
Tèou-higan kiè ni-bètèn
I've always heard echoes of drums crying out
These echoes that chase me
Come from the north, from the forest,
Nouchimich,
my father's homeland.
Other rhythms and melodies reach me
From elsewhere
And draw me too
To the east, to the other side of the endless sea, to my destiny
My mother's homeland.
I am mixed, I am half-breed
I weep.
Are we doomed,
We people of red and white blood
To wander?
Neither pale nor copper-faced
I am heir to cultures thousands of years old
At the same time
Hundred-year-old problems.
[...] "Dandè è touté-in?
Jè gon wè ji-madouin?"
Where are you going?
Why are you crying? Moush ni-mayim-goun
Majish ni-shingadi-goun
Wèn-ni, Mahiganou? Wèn-ni Bèj-witamou.
My screaming sisters call me Majish

The ugly one
My Quebecois sisters accuse me
De blanche manquée
Tell me, Mahiganou, who am I?
Because I don't like myself.

[...] No, you're not half of one and half of the other
You're one AND the other
A white woman with a screaming soul
A Crie with a white soul
You decide what to do with it." (Mahiganou)

An Antan Kapesh (Kuujuuaq 1926 - November 2004)

Born in 1926 near Kuujuuaq, An Antane Kapesh lived a traditional life - hunting and fishing - until the creation of the Malienam reserve, near Sept-Îles, in 1953. She never attended a "white man's" school; her entire education came from her Innu family. She married in 1943, giving birth to nine children.

From 1965 to 1967, she was chief of the Innu band of Matimekossh, near Schefferville. To defend her people and share their injustices with the world, she learned to write in Innu-Aimun. A few years later, in 1976, her writings took the form of an autobiographical essay entitled *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*.

She was one of a group of pioneering women who published in the 1970s to make their voices heard, alongside **Maria Cambell**, **Rita Joe** and **Lee Maracle**, among others. She died in November 2004 at the age of 78.

Her first autobiographical essay in 1976, *Eukuan nin matshi-manitu innushkueu / Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse*, is considered a "visionary" text and "the founder of Native literature in Quebec". It was published in Innu-Aimun, with a French translation by José Mailhot, making An Antane Kapesh the first Innu writer to be published in French in North America. This essay-testimony defends her culture by contrasting it with that of the whites. In it, she denounces the injustices and social problems suffered by her people, including the uprooting caused by residential schools, which Kapesh "*presents as places of deculturation of great violence, among other reasons because they cause the breakup of Innu families by physically separating parents from children, a separation reinforced (and perpetuated long after the children have finished school) by the creation of a cultural and linguistic difference between generations that has repercussions on a distorted relationship with the land.*"

She describes the history of her people, taking the side of both her own and the exploiters who dispossessed her nation. While preserving her own identity, she is innovative in her descriptions of real-life characters and her many questions. Her essay expressing "*an exhaustive analysis of the colonization of her territory*", also contains many elements of oral tradition.

In 1979, she published a second book: *Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays?* Through the story of a child (the native people) and the so-called Polichinelles (the whites), she paints a striking, symbolic portrait of dispossession. The essay is divided into five parts, each representing a different stage of dispossession (description of the territory, practice of traditional activities, arrival of the whites and exploitation of the land, sedentarization and attempts at assimilation, and finally, revolt and enunciation of new conditions for cultural dialogue). In each of the book's sequences, the child (the indigenous people), through his many adventures and encounters, politely submits to the white man, trying in vain to make him understand what is happening to him. With this essay, An Antane Kapesh creates a true story, that of a powerless native against the exploiters of his nation's resources. The story was adapted for the stage by An Antane Kapesh and José Mailhot in 1981. The play was performed in Montreal.

Michel Jean (1960 Alma)

Michel Jean hails from the Mashteuiatsh community in the Saguenay/Lac-Saint-Jean region of Quebec. An anchor, host, investigative reporter and writer, he holds a master's degree in history from the Université du Québec à Montréal and has been working in journalism since 1985.

A radio host and journalist in Sorel and Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Michel Jean has also worked as a parliamentary reporter at the Legislative Assembly for Radio-Canada Television in Regina, Saskatchewan, and as a journalist for Radio-Canada in Toronto, Montreal and Quebec City.

His experience as a reporter inspired his first book, *Envoyé spécial* (2008), as well as some of his other novels. His Innu origins are explored in *Elle et nous* (2012), through the story of her grandmother Jeannette Siméon. In *Le vent en parle encore* (2013), the author deals with residential schools and raises awareness of Aboriginal issues. His novel *Kukum* (2019) won the Prix littéraire France-Québec in 2020 and was a finalist for the Prix Jacques-Lacarrière. In October 2021, he published his eighth novel, *Tiohtiá:ke*, which tackles the issue of urban Aboriginal homelessness.

Active on the literary scene, he co-edited the short story collection *Pourquoi cours-tu comme ça?* (2014). He is also the editor of *Amun* (Stanké, 2016), which features ten First Nations authors and will be republished in France, as well as *Wapke* (2021).

Naomi Fontaine (1987 Uashat)

Born in an Innu community near Sept-Îles, Naomi Fontaine is a French teacher who graduated at Université Laval in Quebec City. During her studies, her talent for writing was noticed by François Bon, a professor of creative writing, who encouraged her to put her voice forward.

She then began entering creative writing competitions, including the Canadian Aboriginal Writing and Art Competition, and writing texts that would give rise to her work *Kuessipan* (2011). She then pursued her literary career as part of the Première ovation program at the Institut canadien de Québec, under the mentorship of Jean Désy, a physician and friend of Innu intellectuals.

It was then that she returned to Uashat and began her career teaching teenagers in her community. Her second novel, *Manikanetish* (2017), was inspired by this. In 2019, she publishes *Shuni : ce que tu dois savoir*, a message to her white friend explaining the issues of exclusion that the Innu feel and that majority society fails to see.

Naomi Fontaine seeks to deconstruct stereotypes of Innu communities by giving an important place, through her writing, to their power and their history.

Having also published in various journals and collectives, Naomi Fontaine collaborates notably with Laure Morali and Haitian Rodney Saint-Éloi (*Les bruits du monde*, 2012) and Michel Jean (*Amun*, 2016). She also edits and prefaces two books by An Antane Kapesh *Je suis une maudite Sauvagesse* (2019) and *Qu'as-tu fait de mon pays?* (2020).

Julie D. Kurtness (Chicoutimi 1981)

J.D Kurtness is the daughter of a Québécoise mother and an Innu father from Mashteuiatsh. In 2017, she published her first novel, *De vengeance*, for which she won the Voix Autochtones award in the "Pre-eminent book in prose by an emerging Aboriginal writer" category, the Découverte award from the Salon du livre du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and the Coup de cœur award from Les amis du polar. *De vengeance* follows a female serial killer who takes on all "the violent, the thieves, the polluters, the profiteers and the hypocrites". This first book is recognized for its "corrosive humor" and "rare punch". His second novel, *Aquariums*, "a polyphonic anticipation novel whose plot revolves around a nasty, destructive virus", will be published in 2019. He is a finalist for the Voix autochtones awards in the "Preeminent Book in Prose" category.

Also a short story writer, two of his short stories, "Mashteuiasth, P.Q" and "Le stylo", have appeared in Moebius magazine. Her short story "Les saucisses" appeared in the collection Wapke, edited by Michel Jean. In 2022, she published the novella *Bienvenue, Alyson* with Editions Hannenorak, in 2023 an dystopic *La Vallée de l'Étrange* (*The Uncanny Valley*).

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine (1991 Baie-Comeau)

She grew up with her grandparents in Pessamit and had to move to Baie-Comeau with her parents at the age of 4-5. This was a great challenge for Natasha, as when she arrived in kindergarten she spoke only Innu-aimun. However, as a teenager around the age of 16, she became aware that she spoke only French at school and at home. Even noticing that her parents spoke French to each other, the young teenager at the time decided, out of a sense of urgency about her identity, to reconnect with her roots through art, among other means. It was **Richard Desjardins'** documentary, *Le peuple invisible*, that sounded the alarm. It was through art that she was able to release and express the anger she felt about her identity.

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine is a great activist for aboriginal rights, and campaigns against the discrimination and racism she herself has experienced in her schooling and personal life. She is also a representative of the **pan-Canadian Idle No More aboriginal movement**, with whom she has had the opportunity to travel throughout Quebec, Canada and other parts of the world as a poet-slammer and lecturer: "*The message she carries is that of the meeting of peoples and cultures, of respect, exchange and dialogue, in the name of dignity and humanity*". Its aim is to bring people of different origins together, and to create a dialogue that will enable greater openness to differences and the cultivation of respect. She offers a voice to the voiceless through her various public appearances, but also through her poetry. One of these is her poem *Cri*, included in her collection *N'entre pas dans mon âme avec tes chaussures* (2012). This collection is followed by others: *Manifeste Assi* (2014), *Bleuets et abricots* (2016) and *Nanimissuat Île-tonnerre* (2018). She is also a novelist: *Nauetakuan: un silence pour un bruit* (2021) traces the quest for identity of the narrator, an academic and urban intellectual who goes back to the mythical sources of her community to come to terms with the rifts in history that have struck her family.