

Kodó, Krisztina

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Me Tomorrow: Indigenous Views on the Future

Drew Hayden Taylor (ed)

Madeira Park, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 2021, 211 pp, ISBN 978-1-77162-294-3 (paperback)

Krisztina Kodó

Kodolányi University, Hungary

Me Tomorrow (2021), edited by Drew Hayden Taylor, is a follow-up to his previous *Me...* series: *Me Funny* (2005), *Me Sexy* (2012) and *Me Artsy* (2015). The volume consists of thirteen essays written by Indigenous writers, playwrights, educators, activists, and leaders who offer their views on the future of Indigenous peoples in ten- or twenty-years' time. The authors look to the seventh generation, offer ideas on the unity amongst the tribes, mutual support for each other, the necessity of tackling poverty and giving the future generations hope through education.

In his introduction Taylor sets the tone by stating that “these are changing times” (1) and the “disappearing Indians [...] haven't quite disappeared” (1). In the past hundred years Indigenous communities have managed to adapt to the norms set by the dominant culture and even “persevered” (1). But having the past at his elbow is just as important, because “you cannot know where you are going without understanding where you've been” (2). Therefore, ancestral knowledge serves as a basis for looking toward the future.

The writings of seven Indigenous educators, leaders and activists feature in the volume. The first essay within this group is titled “Paint it Red” and is written by Darrel J. McLeod, who supports the view that the earth has provided Indigenous peoples since time immemorial with all the food and medicine that they needed to maintain and enhance their physical and mental wellbeing (8). The multi-generational trauma needs time to heal, but McLeod is optimistic and believes that they need to get back to the “intimate, immersive relationship with water” (21) and Mother Earth to reclaim their space. Minadoo Makwa Baskin and Dr Cyndy Baskin are mother and son, who express their individual opinions on a hopeful future, the fulfilment of prophecies, Canada's need of the Indigenous peoples, and education and Indigenous knowledge in education. Dr Cyndy Baskin states that “Indigenous peoples have always been resilient and able to adapt to an everchanging world” (46). And the “strength of their



ancestors seven generations back lives in their blood” (46), which will be passed on to the next seven generations. They offer a positive view of the next generations and project “sur-thrивance” for their peoples (47), which entails not only survival but also thriving. Autumn Peltier, water activist and advocate, focuses in her essay “In the blink of an eye” on her Aunt Josephine’s saying “Never stop the work you’re doing, don’t let anyone stop you, keep learning and keep loving the water” (79).

Clarence Louie, Chief of the Osoyoos Indian Band, considers it important to go beyond “good words and promises” (105) because it is important to “properly plan our future – not just for one generation [...], but for seven generations into the future” (106). And according to Louie, seven-generation thinking means “Nation building or Nation rebuilding” (118). Education is of strategic importance, but education needs vary and education is specific to each Indigenous community. Shelley Knott Fife, education specialist, considers that Indigenous education will require “clear communal vision and cooperation, [...], program composition and family support networks” (135), which must be within the capacity of the community to develop themselves. Tae:howęhs, aka Amos Key Jr., whose spiritual name means “he works with words” (167), makes suggestions that may be considered in the future by Indigenous peoples and settlers alike. Amos Key Jr. urges the “Me Tomorrow” of Indigenous peoples to join forces, “to adopt new thinking, and to debunk colonial definitions and colonized understandings of Indigenous culture or Indigenous cultures” (182). Tracie Léost, Métis activist, also speaks of the seven generations that the Métis Nation needed to find itself and become the “Found Nation” (189). She also quotes Louis Riel, who once said that “My people will sleep for 100 years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back” (190). Léost believes that “we have seven generations of strength woven into our existence” (194), and confirms and adds to the positive visions of the above-mentioned educators, leaders and activists.

Romeo Saganash is a prominent political figure who served as Member of Parliament (MP) for Abitibi-Baie-James-Nunavik-Eeyou in Quebec from 2011 to 2019. His article “No reconciliation in the absence of truth and justice” relates his years spent in Parliament and explains that “the challenge Canadians face is simply to truthfully reflect on what really made this country possible today, and at what expense the Canadian dream was possible” (78). In face of the many upheavals around the world, Saganash regards love, courage, respect, honesty, wisdom, humility and truth as the future guiding principles of the Indigenous peoples.

The other substantial group in the volume consist of writers, poets and playwrights who express their views on a future filled with hope and determination. Dr Norma Dunning, Inuit scholar and writer, offers an emotionally charged piece entitled “Future We In-U-Wee” in poetic form. The piece tells the story of the Inuit past and present and ends on a playful positive note: “Future We In-U-Wee / Is today not tomorrow



/ Future In-U-Wee / Is the us we are supposed to be” (54). The poet, playwright and ecologist Shalan Joudry places her emphasis on storytelling and “sharing stories the old way” (93). Joudry finds that education is of major importance for Indigenous children, especially in terms of creating a balance with the natural world and keeping oral stories alive (94). She considers “the simple, natural and ancient ways that will outlive us all” (103) as the most effective. Raymond Yakeleyu, filmmaker and writer, addresses the future with hope stating that “in a hundred years we will still be here, as integral parts of Canada, asserting ourselves with pride, making our own trail” (147).

Another well-known writer and traditional teacher is Lee Maracle, whose essay “We appear to have fallen on dark times” examines the interconnectedness between the United States and Canada. According to Maracle, stability since the 2020 US elections and the 2021 attack on the Capitol Building in Washington, DC, has been undermined and “America is falling into the darkest of times” (197). However, Maracle asserts that the Salish people are in the midst of a cultural revival, which began in the late 1970s and 1980s (197). Her views coincide with the previous authors that “one hundred years from now we will be more united on this island than ever before. [...] Our young people will lead the way, back toward our beliefs and forward toward their humanity” (206).

Drew Hayden Taylor is not merely the editor of the volume, but also includes a piece titled “Strangers in a not so strange land” in which he tells the story of his own childhood and his early interest in science fiction. He also investigates the flourishing of Indigenous literatures in the last forty years and offers numerous literary examples. Taylor as a fan of science fiction also draws the reader’s attention to the birth of Indigenous science fiction, which offers a vast range of futuristic interpretations and stories that delve into future explorations of Indigenous peoples. Taylor states that “science fiction, by its very nature, asks us to believe what could be, not what is. Maybe that’s why it’s become so popular in First Nations cultures. Most of it shows us as survivors, regardless of what’s happening” (166).

Me Tomorrow is an engaging read for scholars and anyone interested in learning about the experiences, stories and hopes of Indigenous peoples of Canada and North America. The essays featuring in the volume offer ancestral knowledge presented by a wide range of authors, playwrights, leaders, activists, storytellers and educators, who express their pride, optimism and unrelenting faith in the younger generation and the next seven generations.

