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## The Beginnings of Contemporary Aboriginal Literature in Canada 1967-1972: Part Two

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### Zusammenfassung

*Im ersten Teil dieser literaturgeschichtlichen Darstellung der Anfänge zeitgenössischer indianischer Literatur in Kanada standen deren kolonialer Kontext im Vordergrund und ihre Abhängigkeit von den Intentionen nicht-indigener Sammler und Herausgeber. Dieser zweite Teil erfasst nun die ersten Anfänge selbstbestimmter indigener Literatur in Kanada, deren kreative Innovationskraft erst in der Rückschau deutlich wird. Während ein Großteil der veröffentlichten Texte politisch engagiert die bestehenden Verhältnisse angreift und wiederholt kulturell nationalistisch und nostalgisch Verluste beklagt, entwickeln manche Texte ab 1967 gleichzeitig gattungstypologische Charakteristika, die rückblickend als neu und für die indigene Literatur Kanadas konstitutiv erkennbar werden. Hier ist die Verbindung von bildlichen Darstellungen mit Narrativik und Lyrik aus oralen Traditionen ebenso zu erwähnen wie das Aufbrechen europäischer Gattungskonventionen und das Transzendieren westlicher Vorstellungen von Realität. Paradigmatisch für die Entwicklung selbstbestimmter indigener Literatur, in der sich grafische Darstellungsformen, Historiografie und orale Tradition mit dem funktionalen Einsatz europäischer Literaturtraditionen und Stilmittel geradezu „post-modern“ verbinden, sind z.B. die Werke George Clutesis (Son of Raven, Son of Deer, 1967; Potlatch, 1969) und Sarain Stumps (There Is My People Sleeping, 1970).*

### Résumé

*La première partie de cette présentation de l'histoire des débuts de la littérature amérindienne contemporaine au Canada, consacrée au contexte colonial, a permis de montrer combien cette littérature était dépendante des intentions des compilateurs et éditeurs non indigènes. Cette deuxième partie rassemble à présent les premiers essais autonomes de création littéraire indigène au Canada, dont la force d'innovation n'est perceptible qu'avec le recul. Si bon nombre des textes publiés, politiquement engagés, s'en prennent aux circonstances de leur époque et, empreints de nationalisme culturel et de nostalgie, déplorent sans cesse ce qui a été perdu, plusieurs textes parus à partir de 1967 élaborent en même temps des caractéristiques définitives d'un genre que l'on peut après-coup considérer comme nouvelles et constitutives d'une littérature indigène du Canada. On mentionnera ici le lien entre représentations picturales et prose narrative ou poésie issues des traditions orales, mais aussi la rupture avec les genres européens*

*conventionnels et la transgression des représentations européennes de la réalité. Du point de vue du développement d'une littérature indigène autonome, dans laquelle, de façon quasiment postmoderne, représentation graphique, historiographie et tradition orale se combinent à l'utilisation fonctionnelle des traditions littéraires et des figures stylistiques européennes, les œuvres de George Clutesi (Son of Raven, Son of Deer, 1967; Potlatch, 1969) et de Sarain Stump (There Is My People Sleeping, 1970) ont une valeur paradigmatique.<sup>1</sup>*

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## 6. Verbal and Visual

The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of an Aboriginal genre of “words and art,” that has been thriving ever since, i.e. collections which contain a combination of narratives from Oral Traditions with artwork by the author or other members of his or her constituency. The Anishnabe painter Norval Morrisseau pioneered what has become known as Woodland Indian Art. His *The Legends of My People the Great Ojibway* combines beautifully executed colour prints of his paintings with texts. The texts were edited by Selwyn Dewdney from two sets of manuscripts, which had “poured out of Morrisseau’s mind [...] without regard to sequence,” which Dewdney rounded out with letter materials and combined into an introductory article “The World of Norval Morrisseau” (Dewdney 1965, viii). Today, Woodland Indian Art and Inuit sculptures and prints have visibly become the most prominently displayed Canadian art exports, ranging from prints and sculptures in art galleries the world over, to “international airport art,” i.e. expensive originals alongside the knick knack of mass-produced imitations in waiting lounge areas.

As early as 1970 a beautifully executed coffee table art book in landscape format brought together Herbert T. Schwartz’ collection of Inuit stories with illustrations by Mona Ohoveluk and photographic portraits of the Inuit elders who told the tales. Based on the collaborative effort of an Inuk artist and a non-Aboriginal writer, *Elik and Other Stories of the MacKenzie Eskimos* set the standard for a tradition of equally well formatted and very attractively executed hardcover books celebrating contemporary Inuit art and traditional orature, among which Maurice Metayer’s and Agnes Nanogak’s *Tales from the Igloo* (1972) is a prominent example. A similar format, using black and white photographs of soapstone carvings and texts in Inuktitut and English on facing pages, was used as early as 1969 in Zebede Nungak and Eugene Arima’s bilingual edition *Unikkaatuat sanaugarngnik atyinqualiit Puvirngniturngnit / Eskimo Stories from Puvungnituc, Quebec*. The soapstone carvings of which photographs are provided on the left page are sculptured illustrations of stories from the

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1    Ins Französische übersetzt von Emmanuel Faure, Regensburg.

Oral Tradition that are rendered in the words of the artist on the facing right. This collaborative collection honours the individual achievements of the carver and at the same time respects the Oral Tradition by reprinting it (in Latin alphabet) in the original language and in English.

Also based on a “posthumous” collaboration is *The Big Tree and the Little Tree*, edited by Jean E. Speare and illustrated by Terry Gallagher. This children’s book published by the Métis-owned and operated Pemmican Press in Winnipeg in 1973, uses one of the stories contained in Mary Augusta Tappage’s book of memories, *The Days of Augusta*, also edited by Jean E. Speare in the same year.

## 7. Orature Edited by Aboriginal Authors

Gordon Robinson’s *Tales of Kitamaat* is an isolated attempt even before the 1960s to bypass the paternalistic interference of Non-Native collectors, translators, editors and publishers. The sixty-page booklet contains a collection of Kwakiutl legends, children’s stories, hero tales, folklore and ethnohistorical information, illustrated by Vincent Haddelsey’s crests and symbols from Haisla heraldry. In his foreword, “The Author”, Stanley Rough explains that Gordon Robinson was born in 1918 in the town of Kitimat, B.C., just “across the bay” from the Haisla village of Kitamaat. As an active member of his community the author had published a number “of articles on the ancient customs of his people [...] in the Kitimat Northern Sentinel [sic!]”, but Rough stresses that “[t]he following legends and stories have been handed down for generations and are recorded here for the first time” (Rough 1956, v). The author himself does not explain for whom he decided to write them down. Written in the style of European fairy tales, the collection ranges from a number of “Weegit” trickster tales to hero stories and historical accounts from times immemorial to historical pieces describing Katsilanoo’s meeting with Captain Vancouver, as well as a brief description of pre-contact history and ethnographic pieces. Together, the texts assert Gordon Robinson’s pride in his culture. Although his brief historical comment, “Kitamaat Life Prior to 1876” contains no direct criticism of colonization, the author’s nostalgia for a life that was “entirely satisfying” (Robinson 1956, 39) also prevails in his account of Charles Amos’ campaign to Christianize his people in 1876, which Robinson concludes with the following words: “Christianity did change the social order so drastically that the old, almost carefree days were no more [...]” (41). It should be remembered here that the book was published only five years after the ban on the potlatch was officially lifted.

George Clutesi’s aforementioned collection *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* is the first entirely self authored and edited collection of oral tales – also from the West Coast – that was published by a commercial publisher. It marks 1967 as the beginning of contemporary literary writing by Aboriginal authors in Canada. This collection of tales and poems translated from the Nootka Oral Tradition, is illustrated by black

and white drawings by the author, which combine West Coast heraldry and traditional designs with modern pencil and brush techniques, and which give this work a distinctively Aboriginal visual appeal. In his introduction Clutesi himself, rather than a non-Native expert, explains the origin and objectives of his collection. He illuminates the didactic function of traditional First Nations storytelling as opposed to the often nonsensical “message” of European nursery rhymes – thus turning upside down Eurocentric notions that some tales of the Oral Tradition, like the *attenogan* as discussed by Peter Desbarats, “give us nothing but an impression of incoherence, childishness, and even vulgarity” (Desbarats 1969, xvii). Clutesi’s style is often self-consciously literary. The poems, mostly unrhymed, use repetitions, onomatopoeia and other rhetorical devices. Native names and terms, and a whole stanza in Nootka, manifest the linguistic identity of the author’s people on the printed page and demonstrate his pride in Nootka cultural heritage. As a descendant of a Sheshaht lineage of chiefs, George Clutesi was an official storyteller, and the book is an extension of his traditional function.

Like so many Aboriginal authors, Clutesi was a multi-talented artist. His Montréal Expo poem, “West Coast Indian,” is reprinted in *Son of Raven, Son of Deer*. Here, he proudly depicts the cultural practices of his people, historically moving from the painting of petroglyphs to the carving of totem poles and culminating in the ideal of being a strong provider. “In the beginning he merely marked / Then he incised rock. / Later he carved on wood to paint and colour with rock and roe. / He believed in a God; he aspired to a generous heart. / Asked for strength of arm, a true aim for his bow, / To provide and share with his fellow man” (Clutesi 1975, 125). In this text alliterations and irregular rhymes follow conventional literary patterns to extol the art and values of his culture before colonization. As such, the poem stands in line with similar ones, like “The Red-Man,” written much earlier by the Canadian Iroquois exile in Britain, Frank Prewett (1988, 1-3), or like “I am the Redman,” written a decade later by Duke Redbird (1972, 53).<sup>2</sup> Clutesi’s poem ends with an assertion of sovereignty and equity, and the tradition of sharing that reached its greatest manifestation in the potlatch tradition of the West Coast nations. “With all the powers at hand, / a great potlatch he would now command. / To bid you: ‘Come, enter and share with me!’ / A rich cultural inheritance is his indeed” (126).

The importance of Clutesi’s collection for the development of Native literature in Canada can be assessed better today than when it was published four decades ago. As we have seen, until *Son of Raven, Son of Deer*, quite a variety of books containing Aboriginal tales from the Oral Traditions of various Native nations had been collected and published throughout Canada, but Clutesi was the first traditional Aboriginal storyteller to select tales from his people for an entire monograph and to write them down in English, plus providing an introduction which explains their

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2 The Ojibway/Métis poet, artist and scholar Duke Redbird also published a poem entitled “I am a Canadian,” and a Master’s Thesis entitled *We are Métis*.

function to non-Native readers. It was not until twenty years later that Saulteaux storyteller Alexander Wolfe achieved a similar degree of literary self-determination with his collection *Earth Elder Stories*. In 1967, with his conscious effort to preserve his heritage for future generations, and to share it with a general public by publishing and explaining it, Clutesi was ahead of his time.<sup>3</sup>

After this achievement, most collections of tales from Oral Traditions edited, illustrated and published by Aboriginal authors and artists in the early 1970s had a clearly didactic function and were addressed to children. Some were put together to preserve what seemed threatened, in order to make available to young First Nations children the lessons of their elders, while others were published to teach the young in general, regardless of their ethnic background. In her short introduction to *Tales of Nokomis*, Anishnabe author Patronella Johnston relates that these stories were told to her in the winter months by an old lady for whom she did chores, but that when she told the same stories to her own foster children she realized "how little they knew of their own folk heritage. [...] So I began to put them down on paper. Otherwise they would have been gone forever" (Johnston 1970, ix). Her fellow Anishnabe artist, Daphne "Odjig" Beavon, retold and illustrated *Nanabush and the Geese* in the style of a Woodland Art comic book for school children, hoping "that besides being of entertainment value, the moral truths that were so important to Indians will continue in years to come" (Johnston 1971, ix). Her book came complete with (moralizing) didactic questions entitled: "Think and Talk", by Basil Johnston, the scholar who later became the most famous Anishnabe scholarly writer, and who was then working for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

Out of British Columbia came at least two books that were based on collective efforts involving community elders and school children: In 1971 'Ksan Book Builders published *We-Gyet Wanders On*, and two years later Indian Children of British Columbia brought out *Tales from the Longhouse*. The first is an illustrated bilingual collection of Weegit stories, told in Gitskan and English, and including 'Ksan ethno-

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3 Twenty years after its publication in Canada, *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* was published in West Germany in the Catholic "mission"-publishing house in a translation by Herta Holle-Scherer, then a professor at the German Department of the University of Regina. The title, *Sohn des Raben, Sohn des Rehs*, under the rubric "indianische Fabeln" is somewhat misleading, since there is no "Reh" (pronounced like "ray" with a glottal "r") in North America. "Rehe" belong to the deer family, but they are a very small species, and are clearly distinct from the four other species of "Hirsche" or deer, found in Europe, and ranging from "Damhirsch" (fallow deer), "Sika-Hirsch" (sika deer, an import from Japan), "Rothirsch" (red deer, a smaller cousin of the American elk or wapiti) and "Elche" (American "moose" or English "elk"). The correct title would have been, therefore, "*Sohn des Raben, Sohn des Hirschs*". Translations of terms regarding flora and fauna are tricky. So is classifying Clutesi's book under "Fabeln." It evokes the tradition of moralizing animal tales used in European education and ranging from Aesop to Lafontaine and many later adaptations, thus incorporating, as it were, Clutesi's orature into a European tradition. See: George Clutesi, *Sohn des Raben, Sohn des Rehs*, aus dem Englischen übersetzt von Herta Holle-Scherer.

graphic and geographic explanations.<sup>4</sup> The second book is based on an essay contest among Indian School Children on Vancouver Island. The results of that essay contest, Anne Caren Tate explains in her foreword, had at first been highly disappointing, since the children had written about

Indians [...] they had seen on television or in the movies. There was scarcely a mention made of Longhouses, dug-out canoes, the sea or whales, seals or salmon. In time, however, and after persuasion, the essays began to change. It was obvious that the children were going to their elders for information and that they were being told some of the almost forgotten stories, customs and beliefs. Much of the materials were so interesting that the society felt it should be preserved – the present book is the result. (Indian Children 1973, vi)

Here, the educators functionalised essay writing assignments in a way that made it necessary for First Nations children to go and consult their elders, i.e. providing a functional pretext for the transmission of traditional knowledge, a modernized didactic means presently also employed in Inuit schools in Nunavut to facilitate communication between elders and children, which would otherwise not happen, because the functional and social context is missing.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps in order to halt the “infantilization” of First Nations Oral Traditions in books for children, in 1972 the most prolific francophone Aboriginal author, Bernard Assiniwi, published together with Isabelle Myre *Anish-nah-be: Contes adultes du pays algonkin*. It contained beautifully executed naturalist black and white drawings by John Fadden (Kahonhes), the famous Mohawk artist, who also did illustrations for many *Hau-de-no-sau-nee* (Iroquois) and other Eastern Woodlands publications, including the newspaper *Akwesasne Notes*. Assiniwi’s collection brings together Oral Traditions from several nations belonging to the Algonquin language family, beginning with Kije-Manitou and the origin of the earth, often in dialogue form, and also including stories about Southwind (Sawa-Ni-Yottin), creator of life and seducer of women, who teaches First Man and First Woman (Anish-nah-be and Shkwiss) how to make love. Unlike so many morally “cleansed” and puritanically edited versions of Aboriginal traditions edited by non-Aboriginals and published in English, this col-

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4 We-gyet (or Weegit) as explained in the foreword to *We-gyet Wanders On*, is the Gitskan trickster, who “closely resembles Raven, Trickster-Transformer of Haida and Tlinget history but with this difference: our Raven, alias We-gyet, never creates: he manipulates, duplicates, instigates and disseminates but never creates. / We-gyet was caught between spirit and flesh. He was no man, yet all men” (Ksan Book Builders, no pagination)

5 The Dutch Canadianist and expert on Inuit Linguistics, Cornelius Remie, reported on this school project in Nunavut at a conference on “First Nations of North America: Politics and Representation,” held at the Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, the Netherlands, May 29-31, 2002, and organized by Hans Bak and the Netherlands Association for American Studies (NASA) and the Association for Canadian Studies in the Netherlands (ACSN).

lection opens Native literature to the erotic more than thirty years before Kateri Akiwenzie Damm turned to this thematic field in contemporary anglophone Indigenous literature (Akiwenzie-Damm). A second volume of Algonkin Oral Traditions, *Sagana: Contes fantastiques du pays algonkin*, was published by the same editors in the same year. Again, the stories begin with Kije-manitou and contain a dialogic narrative situation including the voice of a “narrateur”. Unlike many of the previous collections of orature, which often seem to celebrate the “quaintness” of Indian tales or follow an ethnographic agenda, both collections by Assiniwi and Myre aim at a sophisticated literary readership, for whom glossaries of Algonquin words are provided. They share none of the self-consciousness of earlier collections but assert Aboriginal literary equality by just being.

## 8. Consciousness Raising Prose

All of the texts discussed so far retell older stories from Aboriginal traditions, but the 1960s and early 1970s also saw the emergence of Indigenous writings about contemporary issues, that were published for reasons other than the continuation of the Oral Tradition. Increasingly, writing non-fiction in English became a mode of intertribal communication and a means to present Aboriginal concerns and viewpoints to a larger reading public, be it in short journalistic pieces in periodicals or collections or in monographs addressing political issues. Within the contexts of civil rights and Red Power amongst First Nations tribal and “movement” newspapers began to flourish, while among the Inuit an ongoing tradition exists of periodicals translated from Inuktitut (often printed both in syllabics and in the Roman alphabet) into English and/or French. Among these *Inuit Monthly*, which started in 1971 and later became *Inuit Today* and *Inuktitut Magazine*, stands out as most representative.<sup>6</sup>

An even earlier example of Aboriginal journalism is the *Old Crow News*, a collection of articles by Edith Josie, the Loucheaux correspondent of the *Whitehorse Star*. Edith Josie lived in Old Crow Village, a settlement of about 200 inhabitants, on the banks of the Porcupine River, 120 miles south of the Arctic Ocean and 80 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Her matter-of-fact pieces about everyday occurrences in her community attracted readers throughout North America, and the author became a celebrity with a growing number of fans. The *Whitehorse Star* published annually a “best of Edith Josie” edition, of which the 1965 hardcover is one example, including black and white photographs on glossy paper.

A first doctoral dissertation by an Aboriginal author was also published in book form in the 1960s. Howard Adams obtained his PhD from the University of California

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6 For a discussion of early Inuit periodicals see Robin McGrath’s pioneering literary history *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition*.

Berkeley in the History of Education, but he published his thesis, *The Education of Canadians 1800-1867: The Roots of Separatism*, in Canada. The book is an unspectacular historiography, which contains nothing that would foreshadow Howard Adams' later radicalism that characterized his academic writings and political advocacy after his coming out as a Saskatchewan "Halfbreed"<sup>7</sup> a decade later. In the late 1960s the civil rights movement and the youth protest in the United States impacted others in Canada, whose writing and artistic expression very gradually began to voice their criticism of internal colonialism. The names of artists and writers like Willie Dunn, Duke Redbird, Wilfred Pelletier, Alanis Obomsawin, and Harold Cardinal stand out.

In 1969 Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* was written and published in direct response to Jean Chrétien's *White Paper*. The title of the book ironically inverts Prime Minister Trudeau's vision of a "just society" for Canada (Cardinal 1969, 17; 28). Cardinal hopes in his book "to point a path to radical change that will admit the Indian with restored pride to his rightful place in the Canadian heritage, [...] and find his place in Canadian society" (2). The author challenges the government to honour its treaty obligations and to live up to its self-proclaimed humanitarian and democratic ideals, because "Indian people are now impatient with the verbal games that had been played" (11). Cardinal's book is an angry, powerfully verbalized, and poignantly argued attack on the dominant culture's treatment of Aboriginal peoples. It contains an abundance of illuminating and pertinent passages on education, Indian identity, the relationship to the land, and on the cultural and political conflict between Christian priests and Native medicine people. Cardinal's observation that missionaries and clergy supplanted medicine people and elders, thus appropriating the elders' power, was still valid at the time, and Maria Campbell drew attention to this fact twenty years later in an interview (cf. Campbell 1991, 47). Cardinal's critique rests on an abundant number of cases where the government and its colonizing administrators wronged Aboriginal people. He expressed forcefully and publicly the injustices they had suffered silently for too long and now his book gave voice to what had been suppressed. The book found its readers among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians alike, and it became a seminal consciousness-raiser. Politically, however, Cardinal seems content to point at grievances and appeal to the colonizer's conscience, rather than suggesting any concrete radical changes in the social and economic fabric of Canada.

Even though Cardinal says that Indians must organize (cf. Cardinal 1969, 97), the Cree activist seems to accept, seemingly without too much regret or anger, that the colonial divide-and-rule policy has been so successful that

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7 "Halfbreed" is Howard Adams' own defiant term. For the most recent and most comprehensive (auto-) biographical portrayal of the Métis leader's controversial life see: *Howard Adams 'Otapawiy': The Life of a Métis Leader in His Own Words and in Those of His Contemporaries*, eds. Hartmut Lutz with Murray Hamilton and Donna Heimbecker.



[...] the deep division between registered and non-registered Indians cannot be bridged. The Métis or non-status Indians also were in the process of attempting to organize. However, their problems and consequently their aims were markedly different from those of the registered Indians. Métis concerns were largely the responsibility of provincial governments, whereas the federal government was responsible for status Indians. Thus, treaty Indians feared that a joint association with the Métis would jeopardize their special relationship with the federal government and, more importantly, endanger their treaty or aboriginal rights. (Cardinal 1969, 115)

Unlike Howard Adams six years later in his analysis of internal colonialism in Canada, *Prison of Grass* (1975), Cardinal does not identify colonial imperialism, let alone capitalism, i.e. the material conditions, as the main enemy, but rather the individual deficiencies of "white" ethics, i.e. hypocrisy of white rulers, who speak with forked tongues across what he calls the "buckskin curtain". While perceiving parallels with the struggle of Blacks in the United States, he is not advocating international solidarity with Third or Fourth World peoples around the globe, but rather limits his analysis to the relationship between registered Indians in Canada and administrators, priests, politicians, and educators who deny Natives access to the resources they were promised in the treaties. Even some of Cardinal's case studies, fictional or real, tend to uphold the colonial give-and-take relationship rather than advocating political radicalism. Cardinal quotes an anonymous "young chief" who rejects being on welfare, because he wants to be a free man. And yet, the young chief remains stuck in his colonial mentality when he ends his statement by pointing out that Natives have enough natural resources, but then asks the colonizer for a change of advisors and a different type of handout:

Why does the government not send us men who would come to teach us the skills we need to survive in the ways of the white man? [...] Instead of sending us welfare, why does the government not send us the money to develop the resources that we have here so that people can make their living from the reserves? (Cardinal 1969, 63)

This is a plea for administrative reforms to extend the niche provided, at least on paper, for registered Indians within Canadian society. It is not a vision or an appeal for radical change, but rather remains, however well argued, an "Indian lament"<sup>8</sup>

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8 Harold Cardinal's later book, *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians* (1977) remains similar in style and political agenda. When compared to later texts by Adams, Armstrong, Campbell, LaRocque, or Maracle, the moderateness of the reformist approach in *The Unjust Society* becomes even more obvious.

As a consciousness-raiser, Cardinal's book also taught non-Aboriginals to turn their attention to Indigenous cultures and listen to the laments that were forthcoming from them. Indians and their social concerns became interesting to politically aware non-Aboriginals, and, perhaps even more lastingly, Indian spirituality became attractive to a growing number of non-Aboriginals disillusioned with formal religions and eager to get "in sync" with nature and the supernatural. Some collaborative publications catered to these new interest groups. *Who is the Chairman of this Meeting? A Collection of Essays* edited by Ralph Osborne and published in 1972 by the Toronto based Neewin Publishing Co., contains contributions by Wilf Pelletier and Ted Poole – who later together published Pelletier's biography *No Foreign Land* – as well as a poem, "On Education", by Tony Mandamin, orature by Anderson Dirthrower, a brief introduction by Farrell Toombs and drawings by the Anishnabe artist Mel Benson. Toombs' "Introduction" sets the spiritual tone for the entire collection – "the, two 'righteous persons' spoke to me, for they spoke to their God. They were holy, for they were whole. One, a Jew, [...] The other, an Oglala Sioux, [...]" (1972, vii-viii). Other contributions by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors address a variety of issues, from teaching Indian wisdom to condemning the white man's greed. The entire volume may best be described as a fundamentalist wake-up call to the Western world to mend its materialist ways. An anonymous text at the end of the book, "The Nishnawbe Institute," indicates that the collection is a product of this organization, and it captures well the spirit of human brotherhood – sisters are not mentioned – and the transcultural communication which the contributors are working for:

The members of the Institute are developing contacts with the Pan-Indian movement in North and South America. It is expected that people from European and Asian cultures will come to the centre in order to learn more about the values and cultures of North American Indians. [...] The Institute has been the co-ordinating and administering centre for the Indian Ecumenical Conference which brings together Indian religious leaders of both Christian and aboriginal persuasions to discuss common problems with the hope of overcoming religious disunity in Indian communities. (Osborne 1972, 101)

*Notice: This Is An Indian Reserve*, edited by Kent Gooderham – who also published a first anthology of Indian literature – seems to follow a similar didactic objective of awakening the public to Aboriginal grievances, though without the religious focus of the former book. It is a documentary containing an excellent selection of black and white photographs by Frederik Stevenson and (found) texts by Sheila Erickson, "a young Canadian poet whose parents happen to be Indians" (Gooderham 1972, notice on title page). The pictures are often shockingly sad. Underneath a photo-

graph showing thirty residential school students in front of a building, Erickson inserted without further commentary the following caption like a “found poem”:

I visited the residential school and noticed that the children wore excellent things made from discarded army uniforms. I think that this is one of the best uses that discarded army uniforms could be put to.  
 Proceedings of Joint Committee on the Indian Act 1947.  
 (Gooderham 1972, 14)

The photographs are interspersed with melancholic poetic texts by Sheila Erickson and extended passages from the Indian Act of 1951. Besides, there are two additional poems in the book by Aboriginal poets Leo Yerxa and Shirley Batt. In the introduction it says, that the book “is a song of praise to the celebration of Man and may represent a different reality for each reader” (2) and the photographs and texts achieve the aim of consciousness-raising by their coequal visual and verbal appeal, which strikes the beholder forcefully in its joint impact.

## 9. Poetry and Early Anthologies

The various forms of edited Oral Traditions and of “consciousness-raising prose,” may be classified or even be dismissed as ethnographic or political in nature, and not as literature in the narrower sense of the term. But poetry is certainly a literary genre par excellence. It seems to be the most popular form of Aboriginal self-expression, and therefore the most predominant genre used by Indigenous authors and by other People of Colour in North America. In the case of Aboriginal authors, the preference for poetry may have to do with structural affinities between poetry and certain ritualized forms of oratory, but more generally the phenomenon is related to the “bread and butter” issue as addressed by Howard Adams (cf. Adams 1991, 137). For economically and educationally deprived and/or struggling persons writing a short poem seems to be more feasible than the sustained and costly effort of writing a full-length novel or drama. Individual poems or forms of lyrical prose appeared scattered throughout the 1960s – e.g. Clutesi’s poem “West Coast Indian,” Tony Mandamin’s “On Education” in *Who Is the Chairman of this Meeting?*, Sheila Erickson’s poems in *Notice: This Is An Indian Reserve*, or the various poems in *Akwesasne Notes* – but there were no special poetry anthologies or poetry books by individual Aboriginal authors until the early 1970s in Canada, and they made their appearance via the United States.

In 1971 Richard Lewis edited an anthology of Inuit poetry, *I Breathe a New Song*, illustrated by Oonark and introduced by Edmund Carpenter. The book came out in New York, but the poems come from all over the North American Arctic. It is a selection of beautiful texts in English translation. Older anonymous poems and contem-

porary poetry by modern day Inuit poets are arranged thematically, and they are credited to particular Inuit cultures (e.g. Copper, Thule) or to the individual authors whose places of residence are also given. The editor explains that his collection was spurred by his "interest in the literature of Indigenous people" and that in the course of his research he "became intrigued by the quality of much of the Eskimo poetry [he] came across. But to [his] surprise there was not one collection exclusively devoted to presenting a cross section of Eskimo poetry" (Lewis 1971, 6). In his respectful introduction, "Life as it Was", Edmund Carpenter explains that in Inuttituk "to make poetry" is the same word as "to breathe" (cf. Carpenter 1971, 11). Additional ethnographic background information demonstrates the editor's scholarship in linguistics. The book shows that, at least in the United States, there was a genuine non-Aboriginal interest in contemporary poetry by Indigenous authors, and that there were Inuit poets in the North whose works warranted publication.

Sarain Stump (1945-1974) was an outstandingly gifted visual artist and poet of Shoshone background on his father's side and of European origin on his mother's. The untitled introduction to his most remarkable book of "ethnic poem-drawings", *There Is My People Sleeping*, contains excerpts from his first letter to his publisher, in which he touches upon his fascination with, and broad knowledge of, contemporary Modern Native American Art – Allan Houser, Quincy Tahoma, Santa Fe Indian School – and traditional European art – the fascinating and mysterious 15<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch "surrealist" painter Hieronymus Bosch is mentioned. In his letter Stump then explains that he wants to make his home in Canada, and he expresses a desire to meet George Clutesi, who "is the first of the Indians far away I feel like going to see" (Stump 1970, no pagination throughout). At first sight, Sarain Stump's *There is My People Sleeping* seems to invert the process of illustrating a text, because his drawings tell stories of which the few printed words of his poems – haiku-like – reveal only a skeleton. But there is more to it. The book in its entirety is a multi-media work of art, where the individual elements aesthetically and thematically support each other to enhance the book's emotional impact.

The beautiful hardcover volume in landscape format comprises 160 (my count) unnumbered pages. All texts are printed in capital letters, so no upper- or lower-case changes interfere, but each word stands by itself as equally important, a technique reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's poetry. All drawings by the poet-artist, either in ink and brush or in pencil, are printed black on white. There is a total of ten poems, all of them short, which are scattered throughout the book like headings beginning new chapters. These ten individual poems are each printed in white capital letters on a red ochre background on an uneven numbered page on the right. The facing page to the left is left blank, so the short poems stand out prominently by themselves. They are then followed by white pages with black print. With the turning of each page the reader-viewer opens a new tableau, where text and image enhance each other and challenge the visitor to connect the two media and think about how they are connected. On each of the left pages the reader finds one indi-

vidual verse (or line) of the preceding poem which opened the “chapter,” while on all pages on the right the viewer finds black and white drawings, which illustrate, comment or speak to the verse on the left. The first impression is that the red ochre pages which bear the individual poems in their entirety begin a new self-contained visual unit of drawings next to which their matching verse-lines seem like subtitles, until the reader realizes that they are the fragmented repetitions, verse by verse and page by page, of the poems s/he has just read. Thus, by the sequential arrangement of texts and icons, the visitor to Sarain’s book of “ethnic poem-drawings” is forced to embark on a de- and reconstructive reading of each poem, line by line. While some of the drawings are “naturalistic” and concrete, like those going with the poem “I WAS MIXING STARS AND SAND / IN FRONT OF HIM / BUT HE COULDN’T UNDERSTAND/...;” others are highly abstract, combining icons that seem like traditional pictographs – which Stump mentions in his introduction – with modern iconography, as in the last poem, “LITTLE TRACES IN MY MIND / BROUGHT ME BACK WHERE I WAS BORN / AND THERE WASN’T ANY EXPLANATION / JUST MY BACK SHOOK / AT THE CRYING OF MY DYING MOTHER”. It seems fitting for a visual artist-poet, that he uses an imagist poetic technique here to convey the unspeakable sadness of the persona by stating there wasn’t any explanation, but by describing instead that his back was heaving. In terms of the development of Western literary history Sarain Stump’s poetry jumps right into modernist art forms, and in its intertextual and genre-bending combination of the visual and the verbal, it unselfconsciously or almost nonchalantly enters the postmodern, which mainstream Canadian Literature was just beginning to approach at the time. Thus, Sarain Stump’s book heralds contemporary Aboriginal poetry in Canada, just as his role model George Clutesi heralded Aboriginal orature. Later poets are fully aware of Stump’s status, and it is fitting that the first comprehensive contemporary anthology of *Native Poetry in Canada*, edited by Jeannette C. Armstrong and Lally Grauer, should use on its cover the superbly executed image of the three “lazy flyin’” crows from Stump’s poem.

Perhaps encouraged by Stump’s *There Is My People Sleeping*, Vancouver’s Daylight Press in 1972 published Skyros Bruce’s (b. 1950) *Kalala* poems in a limited edition of 250 copies, of which 25 were signed by the author. The book contains thirty-seven untitled but numbered lyrical texts, which are not explicitly “Indian” in theme or structure, but whose impressionist beauty is based on metaphors which the Sleil Waututh First Nation poet took from nature’s creatures. And 1972 also saw a first collection of poems by Wayne Keon (b. 1946), who together with his father Orville Keon and his son Ronald Keon published *Sweetgrass: An Anthology of Indian Poetry*, a tongue-in-cheek title which suggests a representational comprehensiveness which this Anishnabe family collection does not contain. Most of the poems are by Wayne Keon himself, who also provided the sparse ornamental drawings illustrating the texts. While his son Ronald’s rhymed poems are more conventionally Western in style, Wayne Keon became perhaps Canada’s most experimental modernist Aboriginal poet. Keon’s highly intellectual and abstract poems repeatedly experiment with

innovative minimalist spellings and unusual word formations and syntax. Even this early collection contains such a strikingly innovative concrete poem as "Heritage" (Keon 1972, 7-9),<sup>9</sup> which should be read aloud, because this poetic honouring song celebrates the Aboriginal presence on Turtle Island by "simply" chanting the names of 82 Native nations, including "Eskimo" and "Metis," arranged in alphabetical order, thereby creating an acoustic and visual presence of Aboriginality in North America. Here, again, one is reminded of Gertrude Stein's verbal art, when she counted to one hundred by going "one, and one, and one, and one, [...]" until she had said this a hundred times, thereby giving a verbal manifestation of the weight of quantity, while at the same time conveying an impression of the uniqueness of each individual component. Keon's "Heritage" poem does a similar thing. By listing the names of so many First Nations, he conveys an impression of the great number of cultures and languages, and by giving their names individually one after the other he verbally manifests the distinctness and uniqueness of each people. The title, "Heritage," adds the dimension of historicity, which entails the longevity of the Aboriginal presence on Turtle Island, but simultaneously also the realization that most of the Nations mentioned were horribly reduced by colonization. By including the word "Beothuk," the poem signifies the genocide committed against this nation, whose extermination is commemorated and lamented by speaking their name. Each nation's history and culture is unique, and yet they shared the experience of colonization, which also brought the "new" language and the literacy which this poem uses to celebrate the heirloom of orality left by the cultures whose names must be read aloud or chanted in order to convey the full musical and historical impact of that heritage.

The appearance of anthologies of literary works by formerly marginalized groups marks their candidacy to be admitted into the dominant literary canon. Kent Gooderham's 1969 collection, *I Am An Indian*, is such an anthology placed before the Canadian literary public. It reflects the very beginning of a process of publishing Aboriginal prose monographs, but in some aspects it still follows colonial patterns. The editor is non-Aboriginal, the majority of texts are historical (either from the Oral Tradition or sections from memoirs and biographies) and there are no *belles lettres* in the narrow sense. About fifteen authors are non-Indigenous, seven are Native Americans from the United States, and of the remaining fifty or so texts by Aboriginals from Canada, only about twenty are contemporary, including recorded speeches, excerpts from memoirs, newspaper articles, historical sketches, Buffy Sainte-Marie's song "Universal Soldier," and about ten poems. Some of these seem almost spontaneous reactions to daily experiences, such as the sadness expressed in Amy Marie George's "Damian" over having to submit a baby to hospitalization, or Saul Terry's comical poem about adolescence, metaphorically describing the "Coming of Age" of a bullfrog.

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9 Also reprinted in Armstrong/Grauer, 85.

Because of the various collective traumata suffered by Aboriginal people in Canada, many of these early texts still belong to the "Indian lament" category, in which the majority of authors lament the loss of lives, land, language, and religion, and ask for pity and empathy in their poems. Some texts contain nostalgia for a past seemingly lost forever, and hatred for the whiteman who caused that loss. Others go beyond "the Indian lament" and derive strength for the future from pride in the past (cf. Rowland 1969). The greed of the whiteman and his aggressiveness are addressed in pictures of bearded men, missionaries, exploiters and developers who cut down trees (cf. Oppenheim 1969) and pollute or dam rivers (cf. Redbird 1969). The greatest sources of encouragement and strength are the earth and natural creation. Early Aboriginal poetry often addresses a holistic relationship between Native people and their surroundings: "All My Relations" as the Lakota end their prayers. Authors present individuals as surrounded by the tangible and intangible aspects of a homeland which holds the spirits and the bodies of their ancestors, a land of which Aboriginal people are and will remain physical and spiritual parts. Shirley Daniels expresses this identity with and through the land in her short poem "Drums of My Father", which forms the "Epilogue" to Gooderham's anthology: "A hundred thousand years have passed / Yet, I hear the distant beat of my father's drums / I hear his drums throughout the land / His beat I feel within my heart. // The drums shall beat, so my heart shall beat, / And I shall live a hundred thousand years" (1969, 196). Shirley Daniels belongs to the Anishnabe, for whom the Midé drum is intricately tied in with religious practices. An earlier anonymous poem from the Anishnabe tradition, "The Sky Clears" (136), states that the sound of the Midé drum causes the sky to brighten up, and the water to be calm, for the one who carries the drum. Added to the mythical and biophysical dimensions addressed in Daniels' poem, "The Sky Clears" also expresses the notion that the drumbeat attunes the heartbeat of all people to the pulse of the land.

Again and again this (meta-)physical relationship to the earth is expressed in Aboriginal writing, and this relationship is older than the New Age or the ecological concerns about our mother earth.<sup>10</sup> It has existed for ages, as a deep conviction based on sustained experience, and it permeates Indigenous North American epistemologies and life practices. It finds expression in Phil George's "Old Man, the Sweat Lodge" (68-69), in V. Rowland's aforementioned despairing "The Spirit Trail", and even in Mary Jane Sterling's "Thoughts on Silence" (37-38), where the isolated poetic voice receives an encouraging message from birds singing and flying overhead. Few texts of the late 1960s are as consciously literary in a traditional style, as Gordon Moore's poem "The Spell of the Windego", which treats a traditional topic, the luring play of the Northern lights, in a form that is reminiscent of E.P. Johnson and Frank Prewett's poetry so much earlier: "With trailing green and red between /

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10 For a discussion of an Aboriginal place-identity as expressed in Syilx, the Okanagan language, see Armstrong 2007.

And blinding yellow bars / We heed the tune of mellow moon / And dance between the stars" (1969, 107-108).

One other relatively early anthology published in Canada needs to be mentioned here, although it could also be listed under the category of consciousness-raising prose. *The Only Good Indian: Essays by Canadian Indians*, was edited by Waubageshig, an Anishnabe professor teaching Native Studies at Trent. The book includes a series of poems by Duke Redbird, interspersed between statements and essays by such prominent Aboriginal politicians and intellectuals as George Manuel, Marlene (Brant-)Castellano, Nona Benedict, Basil Johnston, Chief Dan George, and others. Among Redbird's poems, the aforementioned "I Am the Redman," echoing Clutesi's and Prewett's poems, is perhaps the most prominent. Here the Métis and Anishnabe poet evokes the image of a red man, who is a "Son of the Forest," – and thereby quite literally a (noble) savage, since, after all, the English "sa(l)vage" and the French "sauvage" are derived from the Latin "silvaticus," forest dweller, the "Waldmensch" or "Wilder Mann" of German folk beliefs. Redbird's noble savage addresses his equally stereotypical "White Brother" and admonishes him in terms which invert Christian missionizing: "Save not me from sin and evil / Save yourself" (Redbird 1972, 53).

Two other anthologies came out in the early 1970s also containing Aboriginal authors from Canada, James Houston's *Songs of the Dream People*, an illustrated popular coffee table collection, and Thomas E. Sanders and Walter W. Peek's *Literature of the American Indian*, "dedicated with great gratitude to Princess Red Wing of the Seven Crescents and John Allen McAllister" (title page), obviously catering to the New Age market.

## 10. George Clutesi's *Potlatch*

In the development of literatures by colonized or marginalized cultures, the novel is usually one of the last genres to be adopted for artistic expression, and I am not sure whether "novel" would be the appropriate term to classify George Clutesi's *Potlatch*. This monograph was published in 1969, fourteen or sixteen years before the first two Canadian Aboriginal novels, *In Search of April Raintree* (Culleton Masionier) and *Slash* (Armstrong) came into print. To me Clutesi's book seems the most remarkable and most novel-like and yet multi-generic Aboriginal text of the 1960s. Of novel length, the text combines formal oratory and poetry of the Nootka, translated/recreated in English, with varying narrative points of view that integrate historiography, myth, ritual, drama and forms of short story. In his prose style Clutesi seems close to Victorian conventions, whereas in his multi-media blending of various forms of presentation, he would appear to be (unwittingly?) in line with post-modern trends of the 1960s.

Obviously, *Potlatch* was written with great literary ambition following, it seems the Victorian style of the Canadian historical romance, which was still lingering in



readers' minds in the 1960s. In Clutesi's description of the bustling activities in preparation for a great potlatch, the following elaborate romantic sentence provides an example attesting to the author's literary ambition and conventionality:

Young boys, too, at this time of the season loved to pack the wood indoors in preparation for the coming great event while the young girls watched and poked at the fires to marvel at the myriad of live sparkling stars that floated upward on invisible surges of air currents to effuse through the smoke-hole at the ridge of the easy sloping plank roof. (Clutesi 1969, 11)

At the same time, *Potlatch* shares some polyvocal, multi-medial and multi-generic characteristics that may be (mis-)understood as postmodern features. But in the case of *Potlatch*, such blending of narrative voices, genres and media seems rather an outgrowth of Aboriginal traditions, i.e. the multi-media tradition of the potlatch itself, than an effort to follow the current literary development in mainstream, to which Clutesi seems to have had little access. In general, the transcending of Western linear definitions of time, place, reality and genre is characteristic of much of Aboriginal literature today. In its hybridity and multi-dimensionality, this early book by a male First Nation author in Canada already foreshadows the development of a literary complexity reached in contemporary minority literatures in North America (cf. Karrer/Lutz 1990, 26). In *Potlatch* it often remains unclear where the border lies between illusion (created by the skilful use of masks, music, lighting and dance in potlatch rituals), and where the outer-textual "reality" constituted by the text transcends Western notions of realism into the supernatural or magic. This approach in which the physical, the social, the psychological and the spiritual blend into a complex reality far larger than European Manichean notions of 'reality versus the supernatural' is not so much a form of literary magic realism but rather characteristic of Indigenous cosmology and everyday life practices. *Potlatch*, in its multi-generic discourse, reflects this traditional multi-dimensionality, and, quite in line with Aboriginal practices, explanations are not given, and events are described "as seen," without ethnographic or literary omniscience.

A holistic approach is also reflected in the time structure of this narrative. The narrated time spans one full cycle of the moon, from crescent to crescent, and the story relates the celebration of one full potlatch ceremony in a Nootka village before contact. Significantly, it describes a circular motion, starting with The Short One's journey to visit the master canoe builder, and ending after the close of the "Tloo-qwah-nah" (Clutesi 1969, 13), with The Short One watching "the last canoe move downstream and fade into the mist" (186). The circular pattern is underlined by the roundness of grandmother moon. Again, a circular, holistic structure is characteristic of many Native novels today (cf. Lutz 1989).

And so is the use of words and phrases taken from Native languages. Code-switching has become a conscious literary device in much Chicana/o, Métis and First Nations fiction and poetry today. The use of *pocho*, *patois* or Native phrases in English texts “constitutes literary strategies which subtly express cultural conflicts through linguistic tensions” (Karrer/Lutz 1990, 25). Clutesi’s use of Nootka terms encodes Tse-Shaht linguistic and cultural identity. Throughout the text, he uses the Nootka term for “potlatch,” “Tloo-qwah-nah,” but explains in the introduction:

Tloo-qwah-nah later came to be known as potlatch by the early Europeans perhaps because the Nootka verb Pa-chitle, to give, was often heard during these festivities so naturally the early settlers mistook that verb for the name of the feast. Pa-chitle is the verb. Pa-chuk is the noun and means article to be given. Both words were used only when the articles were given in public such as at a feast. (Clutesi 1969, 9-10)

The “Introduction” and the “Epilogue” tie in *Potlatch* with the present and the past. In his very first paragraph, the author admits that he attended the last Tloo-qwah-nah as a young man, when it was still unlawful to hold potlatches. “Indeed his [Clutesi’s] own kin was arrested for having staged such a Tloo-qwah-nah. It is then with trepidation that this eyewitness account is given and it is because of this lingering fear that actual names have been omitted” (Clutesi 1969, 9). Clutesi’s matter of fact statement makes clearer than many “lament”-poems that Native people and their culture exist under a colonial situation. Thus, the “Introduction” marks the book as an act of resistance to colonization, a defiant assertion of ethnic continuity, both in cultural and political terms, and a hymn to the highest cultural celebration in Clutesi’s culture. The “Epilogue” reaffirms this assertion. The concluding poem, “Chah-Mah-Dah, Heir Apparent of the Tse-Shaht People,” echoes Clutesi’s earlier poem “West Coast Indian.” “Chah-Mah-Dah,” extolling the virtues of a carefully bred West Coast chief, is a traditional honouring song in the form of an English poem.

There was pride in the way he moved.  
 Slow and lazy, like the stream that runs deep.  
 There was no room for arrogance in his face.  
 It smiled to all men and also to nature.  
 ...  
 When he turned, the color, the hue of his skin shone,  
 Like the copper in the light of the moon.  
 His sea-otter breech cloth glistened in the night.  
 He stood naked before his God, Creator of all men.  
 He spoke with ease. There was no hurry. The night was long.  
 He need not say that he was kind, that he was good.

No need to tell that he was generous, truthful and honest too.  
 No boasts of arms so strong, of will power secure.  
 Long years of training, of bathing in the streams of a tarn;  
 Rubbing, kneading and scouring his limbs with the herb of yew.  
 From a child to manhood he was in commune with the Creator.  
 ...  
 He was a man, rooted to the earth. To mother earth.  
 He was Chah-ma-dah, heir apparent ...  
 (Clutesi 1969, 187-188)

The strength of the heir apparent comes from his careful training for the position he is designed to hold. But it also comes directly from creation around him, from bathing in the streams, and from using the sacred yew. Most importantly, the land gives the chief identity and strength to share and hold potlatches: throughout the book there are passages of giving thanks to the chief's lands and the overabundance of food they provide to share with all. Clutesi celebrates this identity in the seemingly Western conventional form of an English poem, but in his poem he still uses methods of the Oral Tradition; thus pauses are indicated typographically.

Appearing almost two decades before the first Indian novels in Canada, and a year before Markoosie's Inuit novella *Harpoon of the Hunter*, Clutesi's innovative book is a textual monument commemorating the enormous communal spiritual and material efforts which went into conducting a potlatch, and it celebrates the sophistication and the intricate relatedness of all participants in the event. Similar to James Sewid's (auto)biography published in the same year, *Potlatch* is a bold assertion of West Coast culture and a gift to the readers. Thus, the novel is a "Pa-chuk," a public gift-giving in itself, and while it is a literary creation, *Potlatch* is also about literary creation and creativity – the Short One and others are song makers and composers. For Clutesi, like modern Aboriginal writers, there seems to be no contradiction between traditional identity and modern forms of expression on the written page or the stage. Writing is merely a technological tool that can be used, just as metal blades have superseded stone adzes in the creation of totem poles and Big Houses. Clutesi's novel shows that by the end of the 1960s Aboriginal cultures began asserting themselves as still alive and vibrant, and literature became just one further medium to express and celebrate their resilience and vitality.

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