

## Book Reviews

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***Maps and Memes: Redrawing Culture, Place, and Identity in Indigenous Communities.* By Gwilym Lucas Eades. Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. xxi + 236 pp. Figures and tables.**

Aboriginal peoples in Canada are forwarding their interests, invariably related to land according to Thomas King,<sup>1</sup> with increasing clarity and effectiveness. Academic, legal, regulatory, and legislative institutions of our shared country are struggling, with varying degrees of success, to acknowledge and address the colonial and intellectual legacies limiting their ability to respond in meaningful and helpful ways to these calls for change. The national interests, protected and advanced by these institutions, are built upon Western precepts of order and value. Canadians' contemporary challenge is thus twofold: to re-construct national institutions to acknowledge the plurality of cultures in Canada, and to better understand the diverse ways of being of this land.

Eades' *Maps and Memes* offers both theoretical and practical directions to more fully understand and address issues related to the relationships between Aboriginal peoples and their land, and between these same people and the institutions regulating that land. His work is informed by his upbringing amongst First Nation communities in northern British Columbia and his graduate studies, including extended stays in a several northern Canadian Aboriginal communities. *Maps and Memes* addresses the relationships between Canada and Aboriginal peoples using the lens of cartography. He notes the ubiquity of maps in these relationships and suggests "they ... sometimes cause us to lose our way. The use of and belief in paper maps ... can result in the unmooring of self from primary connections to the earth's surface upon which our survival depends" (16). Through the course of the book, however, Eades presents both personal community-based research and theoretical evidence "to make the case that radical geospatial measures can be harnessed alongside and in tandem with institutional pressures to break ... negative momentum" in the characterization of Aboriginal communities (202).

The book begins with the description of Eades' construct of a cross-cultural cartographic device, the *place meme*. A review of contemporary neurological science suggesting its universal applicability is followed by the introduction of the three field sites Eades draws upon for his subsequent analysis: the Nisga'a land claim settlement area in British Columbia, a commemorative event carrying forward the cultural values of the relocated Cree village of Wemindji on James Bay, and an extended visit to the mixed Cree/Inuit community of Kuujjuarapik on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay. In all three, Eades highlights the proponents' interest in the enhancement of community health through re-connections to the land, the focus of the book.

A review of Cree ethnography highlights the challenges of creating a coherent blend of external and internal knowledges. Drawing upon Tim Ingold's work, Eades notes the importance, and difficulty, of bringing together the Indigenous wayfarer's performed land practices with the newcomers' travel over mapped routes. The middle section of the book provides a history of the abstracted cartography used by state institutions to manage Aboriginal peoples, noting its debilitating consequences. His subsequent description of counter-mapping illustrates how Aboriginal use of maps can positively modify their presence before state institutions. Eades also notes how more recent Aboriginal counter-mapping edges the discourse away from strictly institutional frames to more meaningfully ways of forwarding their own interests. The book concludes with an account of Eades participation in the annual commemorative walk, *kaachewaapechuu*, from Wemindji to the community's previous village site at Old Factory and the associated celebration of identity. These episodes provide a platform for an elaboration of the value of the place-meme as a trans-cultural feature allowing better understanding across the divide between Aboriginal peoples and the state.

*Maps and Memes*, with its emphasis on youth re-engagement with place and heritage, is an optimistic contribution to the literature fostering Aboriginal community well-being. Eades highlights the strength of Aboriginal resilience and adaptation following revolutionary cultural and social changes threatening the continuity and utility of their knowledge and lifeways. He argues forcefully that the radical use of counter-mapping and sophisticated digital cartographic tools by Aboriginal peoples are effective ways of engaging with the state and regaining the values and control of their traditional lands.

The text traverses the uneasy country of continuing Aboriginal agency and their absorption and adaptation of Western technologies and institutional structures, both with significant cultural and practical effects upon their lives. A current listserv exchange—“What would the ideal traditional knowledge, land use, and occupancy study / database look like?”<sup>2</sup>—considered the value of systematic cartographic and database formats for the external representation of Aboriginal interests. The discussion swayed between the development of effective tools for creating convincing submissions to courts, assessment boards, and other official government bodies, and warnings of the corruption inherent in anything less than a clear and uncompromised community-based forwarding of Aboriginal values and interests. The debate is a reflection of the broader academic discussion. Eades’ work appears to be leaning towards the former perspective.

The central element of *Maps and Memes* is the establishment of place memes as a useful concept to facilitate a cross-cultural conversation about the future. Eades makes a real effort to demonstrate its universal validity. His neurological review of place making works to minimize cultural difference as a factor in Aboriginal/State relations. The emphasis on place memes also relies upon toponyms. While these are important elements of place the text provides little acknowledgement of the narratives of meaning, the discourses of cultural difference, that these places are contributing to. William Cronon reminds us that “narratives remain our chief moral compass in the world.”<sup>3</sup> And it is in these contrasting cultural narratives that the conversation about how to be in the world take place.

Eades’ pursuit of this universality also makes for a number of curiosities. References to Cree Elders and tallymen as “living geographic information systems” (75) appears to suggest hierarchies of knowledge rather than the social delegation of responsibilities for relations to place, while his startling suggestion that Aboriginal justice systems are racist (93) belies a belief that European Enlightenment values are universal truths and not culturally contingent. Surely it is the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to represent themselves in law cases and regulatory matters, which Eades obviously supports, which is useful. While the absence of culture in the theoretical construct is problematic, I look forward to the development of Eades’ place memes as it incorporates issues of cultural leadership and diplomacy across cultural divides.

Eades’ major contribution is the reinforcement of the importance of place to Aboriginal peoples. Portions of this review were written at and inspired by the story of Smart Beaver Man’s canoe camp on the Yukon River just

above Lake Laberge. The potency of place and story, even if only partially understood, help render vague ideas into a more meaningful and purposeful conversation between cultures. Eades and his *Maps and Memes* provide some promising suggestions on concrete contributions that can be made to move ahead with more respectful pluralist relations.

#### Notes

1. Thomas King. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 218.
2. Traditional Ecological Knowledge / Traditional Land Use Practitioners—Canada, “What Would the Ideal Traditional Knowledge, Land Use, and Occupancy Study / Database Look Like?” (Fe - Se 2015), LinkedIn Interest Group, <https://www.linkedin.com/grp/post/4892298-5960787264400285699>.
3. William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992): 1369.

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#### ***Duke: A Novel.* By Sara Tilley. St. John’s, NL: Pedlar Press, 2015.**

Yukoners know about the 24 carat drunkenness that can only be achieved in Dawson City. There is something fantastical in the water and the air, a localized phlogiston that radiates from the dredge tailings, rolling up the Tintina Fault like mustard gas, launching party animals on whirligig benders, shoving teetotallers off their wagons, leaving us drinking electric-blue hootch out of plastic jugs by the river. We each have our stories.

Sara Tilley’s new book, *Duke: A Novel*, begins with a song of eternal Dawson, “where you can see the good / & the bad, all mixed ... where the saloons never close / & neither do their women” (13). The intoxicating gold of that “Shiny City of Dreams” (13) runs through the story that follows. Yukoners will recognize its tang.

Duke is Tilley’s fictionalized account of her own family history, starting at the turn of the last century with her great-grandfather Marmaduke Tilly (later Tilley) a young man in a “preachy frame of mind” (27) who is cast out from his home in Newfoundland, works his way up the Yukon stoking a riverboat, collides with the fleshpots of Dawson City on the crest of the gold rush wave, and travels beyond the world of laws to the Alaskan frontier. His story is sparingly interleaved with that of his daughter Eva, a literary young saint who knows a later, very different version of the wide-eyed young man we meet on that northern quest.