

EDITED EXCERPT FROM IT NEEDS TO BE SAID FEATURING RITA BOUVIER

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ABSTRACT. It needs to be said that despite attempted erasures, the 13 grandmothers and aunts highlighted in *It Needs to Be Said* have prevailed, successfully publishing their knowledge for decades. In this feature, we explore Rita Bouvier's impact on shaping our understanding of Métisness through their published works. To combat the academic literature's lack of acknowledgment of Métis women's scholarship and raise our general awareness of its existence, this piece serves as a comprehensive documentation of the contributions to the academy of Rita Bouvier.

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1. RITA BOUVIER

A sixth-generation Métis, born and raised in Sakitawak (Île-à-la-Crosse), northern Saskatchewan, and raised by her grandparents, Rita Bouvier became a poet, educator and scholar (Barkwell, 2013). Rita's Métis kinship ties include the following surnames: Bouvier, Gardiner, Daigneault, Lafleur, Jordain, Morin and Desjarlais. Bouvier left Île-à-la-Crosse when she was 13 years old, but has maintained strong ties to the land and her family. Bouvier became the director of the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) in Saskatoon in the 1980s and began her mission to challenge the history taught in schools. Verna St. Denis and Rita Bouvier co-wrote one of the first anti-racist courses developed at the University of Saskatchewan.

Since her master's thesis *Specialized Training in the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program: A Case Study* (1984), Rita Bouvier has published several articles on educational theory and practice, three poetry collections, and *Better That Way* (2007), showing other scholars what is possible.

In the 1990s, Métis educators like Bouvier fell under the umbrella of Indigenous education, seeking to have an impact on all learners. During this time, Bouvier began to publish with two other Indigenous women, Verna St. Denis (Cree Métis) and Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaw), in two projects: *Okiskinahamakewak, Aboriginal Teachers in Saskatchewan's Publicly Funded Schools: Responding to the Flux* (1998). The work has profoundly impacted our understanding of the Indigenous experience in the Saskatchewan school system, stemming from their efforts to challenge what they saw. This success spurred future collaborations

such as St. Denis et al. (2008), which updates the experiences of Indigenous educators, and Bouvier et al. (2016), which delves into Indigenous knowledge to valorize lifelong learning.

As a leader in spreading the experience of Indigenous educators, Bouvier co-edited *Resting Lightly on Mother Earth: The Aboriginal Experience in Urban Educational Settings* (Ward & Bouvier, 2001). The collection has attracted the attention of scholars for the past two decades. Bouvier continued to publish throughout the first decade of this century, co-authoring a chapter (Bouvier & Karlenzig, 2006) on accountability and educational sovereignty. Dozens of scholars have relied on this text to grapple with the changes that the educational system must undergo to impact the lives of learners effectively. This influence on Indigenous educational theory and activism continued with her (2010) depiction of a vision for Indigenous learners, cited in *Teaching Each Other: Nehinuw Concepts and Indigenous Pedagogies* (Goulet & Goulet, 2014), which is used in education classes throughout Canada.

Bouvier collaborated with the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) on its Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) models of learning, in partnership with the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre, a resource still utilized throughout K–12 education today. She continued her work, reporting to the CCL on groundbreaking Indigenous successes with work grounded in identifying gaps. According to Bouvier, opportunities to work with the CCL ended due to governmental shifts and budget cuts; however, the legacy of the shift, including the positive outcomes for learners and the modelling it created, remains a valuable tool in classrooms throughout the country. After decades of supporting other scholars, educators, and politicians, Bouvier won the Indspire Award for Education in 2014, which recognized her commitment to SUNTEP, the development of the Aboriginal Knowledge Centre, and her work with the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation, as well as her publications. Bouvier published with the Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis (2013), proposing and analyzing future directions for scholars, politicians, and learners.

Another arena of Bouvier’s success is poetry. Throughout her life, mentors and educators encouraged her to memorize and write poetry; it was a university professor who encouraged her to publish her work, which evokes emotions spurred by an identity crisis, urbanity, diaspora, neglect, historical injustice, and migration. As a Métis poet, Rita Bouvier has made several contributions: *Blueberry Clouds* (1999) reflects an image of Métis culture and was one of remembering—a mapping of innocence to a growing political awareness. Macdougall (2006) uses the poem “Leaving Home” from that collection in her conclusion to demonstrate the loss experienced by the Métis in the 19th century. Followed by second book of poetry, *Papiyáhtak* (Bouvier, 2004), which is a dramatic monologue expressing Métis wisdom and generosity with her readers and a philosophical exploration of a concept/an idea embedded in the language Rita spoke as a child.

Rita Bouvier's third book, *nakamowin'Sa for the Seasons*(2015), is a free-verse collection that addresses the Métis spirit and resilience in the face of racial oppression. *nakamowin'Sa for the Seasons*—little songs for the season Bouvier reminds us that when times get tough, like her voyageur ancestors, we can stay the course “with fifty songs to sing.” The collection won the Rasmussen, Rasmussen & Charowsky Aboriginal Peoples' Writing Award in 2016. The impact of Bouvier's poetry on the lives of scholars at various stages of their careers, as well as its inclusion in their academic work, is notable. Her work has merited inclusion in an English anthology of Canadian Native literature, is featured in *Coming of Age: Celebrating the Saskatchewan Centennial through our Authors and Illustrators* (Kral, 2005) and has received praise from award-winning poet Marilyn Dumont (2015).

The featured poems in this inaugural edition of the Canadian Journal of Indigenous Studies come from Bouvier's fourth poetry collection a *beautiful rebellion* which walks though the life of the poet highlighting the lessons learnt along the way including childhood, forgiveness and grief. Bouvier shares it

”is my take on the ongoing resistance (idle no more, the latest) that has persisted, and how IP have survived and thrived, despite the challenges because of a deep abiding love for family, community, the land and life itself—in all of its forms. Each collection is written as a legacy for my son—who stands in for children and youth—our grandchildren who follow.”¹

The collection placed second in 2021 John V. Hicks Manuscript Award from the Saskatchewan Writing Guild being published in 2023. The poems 'L'dzimâsh', a philosophical inner monologue grappling with life, and 'words and beads, lines and silk threads' exploring the lived realities of being Métis highlighting the simplicity of simply being are featured here for the reader's enjoyment.

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