

THE SECRET. By RENE FUMOLEAU. Toronto, Ontario: Novalis, 1997. ISBN 2-89088-919-X. 187 p., map. Poetry collection. Softbound. Cdn\$18.95.

Fumoleau is an Oblate priest who spent many years as a missionary to the Dene First Nation of subarctic Canada and has published works of both prose and poetry about his life among them. In *The Secret*, we see him in his role as poet. His style is free verse, and often as I read one of his poems I would feel that I was reading prose cast in poetic form. Still, if poetry does truly consist of nuggets of truth, he is a poet, and a first-rate one at that.

Fumoleau has a deep sense of caring for the Dene, and he has seen the injustices wrought upon them by encounters with an alien society. That concern, or love, comes through strongly in the poems that deal with the Dene. However, many areas of human existence have given him inspiration for his poems. His compassion for others is always there, but at times there is a gentle, yet somewhat acerbic edge of satire, and even sarcasm. Fumoleau does not suffer pomposity and arrogance easily, and he lets the reader feel his irritation. He dislikes materialism and pillories it with a rapier wit.

He has a good ear: he takes random phrases he has overheard and turns them into messages, as in the humorous *Foreigners*, about a blond girl who is appalled at the many "foreigners" in the Manila airport. There are poems about his childhood and his training for the Oblate priesthood, and in each one he takes a specific incident and uses it to teach us something about the human condition.

Most poems, however, are about the Dene. Some give the reader keen insights into Dene culture, and specifically, the spiritual side of it. Others use examples of Dene ways to poke fun at the foibles of non-Dene society. In all of them, we learn about the Dene from the perspective of a staunch advocate. Can anyone enter a culture into which he or she has not been enculturated, and then have the audacity to speak for it? Fumoleau has entered the world of the Dene, and I am willing to bet that the Dene accept his depictions of them, not only because they are positive, but because they are accurate.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in the peoples of the Canadian Subarctic, but also to any interested in rekindling and expanding their own spiritual worlds. Theology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and just good human common sense are found in this slim book of poems. It should not be read at one sitting, but rather savored, by opening it at random and reading parts at a time.

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