



Me Funny

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Humor has always been an essential part of North American aboriginal culture. This fact remained unnoticed by most settlers, however, since non-aboriginals just didn't get the joke.

For most of written history, a stern, unyielding profile of "the Indian" dominated the popular mainstream imagination. Indians, it was believed, never laughed. But Indians themselves always knew better.

As an award-winning playwright, columnist, and comedy-sketch creator, Drew Hayden Taylor has spent 15 years writing and researching aboriginal humor. For *Me Funny*, he asked a noted cast of writers from a variety of fields — including such celebrated wordsmiths as Thomas King, Allan J. Ryan, Mirjam Hirch, and Tomson Highway — to take a look at what makes aboriginal humor tick.

Their hilarious, enlightening contributions playfully examine the use of humor in areas as diverse as stand-up comedy, fiction, visual art, drama, performance, poetry, traditional storytelling, and education.

Me Funny Details

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From Reader Review Me Funny for online ebook

Ana says

This was such a good book. My favorite is Kristina Fagan's essay on how Native humor relates to trauma, survival, conformity and violence is eye-opening and it provides concrete examples from Native literature. Janice Acoose and Natasha Beeds have an interesting conversational essay about the Trickster, the embodiment of all kinds of humor. Drew Hayden Taylor and Karen Froman tackle the mixed-native issue, while comedian Don Kelly gives insight into his comedy routine. And there is more discussed here so wholly recommend this book.

Itisme says

This was a good book with some valid points I had never considered and some I had. It is a series of essays and some humour bits on North American Aboriginal humour.

Well compiled and structured.

This was a library loan.

Rebecca - calm+clamor says

I'm a big fan of books of essays or short stories. The most beautiful thing about this book to me was how every single essay took a different form, addressed a different topic, or used multimedia in an interesting way. My favourite essay in this book has to be "Why Cree is the Funniest of All Languages". The words on the page (visually) just make me giggle. Some of the essays are more academic. Some of them are more casual. This is a fabulous introductory reader to Indigenous literature that really answers the "Who", "What", "Where", "When", "Why", and "How", of a particular form of humour.

Jennww2ns says

Read about 70% - skipped some entries because they were dull like "Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching" which talks about how infrequently Native humor is interpreted and then goes on to interpret it for 22 pages.

Anna Schno says

I laughed, I wondered, I was bored, I was entertained and I learned a lot.

Not all essays were to my liking. Some are more based on fact listings or quoting others. Most are explanatory about what Native Humor is and what it isn't. Only a few are funny in itself.

Best: the examples in between the chapters were very entertaining.

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Morgan Dhu says

Me Funny, edited by Ojibway playwright and humorist Drew Hayden Taylor, is a collection of meditations and ruminations on the subject of Indigenous humour. Many of the contributors are Indigenous Canadians, writers and playwrights engaged in the creation of the very art which is the subject of the collection.

I found this collection among the Toronto Public Library's online ebook offerings. I was browsing their Indigenous section and somehow it seemed that after reading two books in quick succession that focused on the oppression of Indigenous peoples, I wanted to read something from the other side, something that looked at Indigenous survival - and what speaks more to the survival of a people and their culture than their laughter.

I was not completely unfamiliar with the territory when I chose this book - I've read some of the work of Drew Hayden Taylor, and Tomson Highway, and Thomas King before now, enough to have gotten a glimpse of what indigenous comedic writing can be like, and know that it makes me laugh, and makes me think. As did many of the contributions to this volume.

Among the working comics, writers and playwrights who share their perspectives are Ojibway stand-up comic Don Kelly, who offers thoughts on the nature of Indigenous comedy within the context of the Canadian comedy circuit, interspersed with excerpts from his routines, and playwright Ian Ferguson, who talks about the differences between Indigenous humour intended for mixed audiences, and "our jokes" - humour by and for Indigenous peoples.

In "Whacking the Indigenous Funny Bone," Taylor provides some of his own perspectives on the nature of Indigenous humour, with particular focus on what has been one of the recurring themes of his own work, relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In "Ruby Lips," Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, a Northern Tutchone storyteller, offers a poignant story, sour and sweet, about her characters Johnny Silverfox and Mary Malcolm, who embody both the tragedy and the drive for survival that are so often interwoven in Indigenous life and literature.

Janice Acoosta (Cree/Métis) and Natasha Beeds (Cree/Afro-Caribbean) discuss "Cree-ative" comedy - with notable emphasis on the Trickster figure - in the form of a two-handed play/dialogue that veers wildly between interpersonal humour, satire, and detailed analysis of the comic writing of Cree writer Paul Seesequasis.

Cherokee writer and scholar Thomas King interleaves a discussion of the difficulties of defining Indigenous humour with passages from his popular CBC radio comedy show, The Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour.

In "Why Cree Is the Funniest of All Languages," an elegiac meditation on language and mythology, Tomson Highway talks about the soul - and the gut-level presence - of Indigenous humour.

Mohawk academic and parent Karen Froman, in "Buffalo Tales and Academic Trails" talks about her own uses of humour in teaching, both at the university level, and as a volunteer resource person on Indigenous issues at her children's school.

In one of the few pieces to address visual comedy, Alan J. Ryan's "One Big Indian," analyses both the creative process in Bill Powless' satirical paintings of Indigenous people, and the nature of public reaction to the paintings and the questions they raise about Indigenous representation for the white gaze.

Métis scholar Kristina Fagan's essay "Teasing, Tolerating, Teaching - Laughter and Community in Canadian Literature" examines the ways in which Indigenous writers have portrayed and used humour to strengthen community and cohesiveness - both by ambiguous example, and by teasing, even humiliation, as a form of coercion. She illustrates this through a discussion of the prevalence of the joker or jester figure - often an elder, but hardly a serious and sage advisor - who simultaneously defuses tension, transmutes fear or tragedy to laughter, and provides multiple lessons, sometimes contradictory or self-subversive, to be teased out of his or her words and actions.

As Mirjam Hirch notes in "Subversive Humour - Canadian Native Playwrights' Winning Weapon of Resistance," it has only been in recent decades that white observers were aware of the existence of Indigenous humour. Early writers on the subject depicted the indigenous peoples of North America as serious, placid or warlike by turns, but never funny. This view, however, has been thoroughly discredited with the emergence of a body of Indigenous humour, much of it expressed through theatre as the literary form closest to traditional storytelling forms. Hirch traces the roots of Indigenous humour from pre-colonial sacred rituals involving reversals and 'tricksters' and notes, as other contributors have, the importance of teasing in Indigenous cultures as a means of social control. She also talks, as others have, about how Indigenous people have used humour as a way to cope with and heal from trauma, and as a way of 'retaliating' against their oppressors without incurring punitive reaction.

Sprinkled throughout the volume are a series of jokes that the editor has written/collected/curated under the collective title "Astutely Selected Ethno-Based Examples of Cultural Jocularity and Racial Comicalness."

I don't know if I could do any better defining Indigenous humour now than I could before reading this, but I certainly enjoyed it, and more than one passage left me smiling, even laughing. Maybe that's the best reason for reading it.

Phoenix says

Native Sensibilities

Interesting collection of pieces on the state of Canadian Indian humour, some analytic, others just plain funny. I especially enjoyed the discussion of Bill Powless's controversial 1984 painting "Indian's Summer" featuring a fat Indian man in swim shorts, male boobs hanging over his chest wearing a silly too small umbrella hat and holding a melting popsicle, posed relaxed with an enigmatic but satisfied smile.

Comedy derives from tension, tragedy and conflict and many of the comics draw on misconceptions that non-natives have of the native populations, the historic dispossession of their land, relationships with government treaties and issues of mixed heritages. Don Kelly and Drew Haden Taylor both touch on political correctness and the notion of an "in" joke, in the sense that someone on the inside of a culture can give themselves permission to tell a self deprecating joke whereas someone from outside the culture cannot. Another source touched on is the cultural motif of Trickster/Raven/Coyote and the tradition of native storytelling. Mirjam Hirch in her essay "Subversive Humour" takes that insight into native theatre with a discussion of plays such as "The Rez Sisters" and "Dry Lips Ought to Move to Kapuskasing"; Thomas King

offers a script from his hilarious Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour, replete with commentary on what he thinks he's trying to accomplish with each scene - as a fan it's always fun to get inside the creative process.

Honourable mention should go to Jan Acoose & Natsha Beeds for their dialog "Cree-atively Speaking" which on first reading I didn't care for because of the repetitive punning on the word "Cree", usually followed by "ative", but I could see it working as a performance piece. As for playwright Thompson Highway's conjecture that "Cree is the Funniest of All Languages", he also states in *Me Sexy* that "Cree is the Sexiest of All Languages", and if you read his short story concerning Old Man Coyote, Coyote Woman and the origin of sex, I have to agree that he's right on both counts.

Bree Riley says

I was a little disappointed with the collection of essays here. A lot of the same points were repeated throughout the essays (which is Ok) but I felt like the ideas weren't really explored as much as they could have been. I could sum up most of the points in the book with the following: Indigenous people have always had humour and their humour often takes the form of teasing and self-deprecation. Humour has also been a way for them to cope with their suffering. ... Like I said, nothing wrong with having these points repeated but I was looking for a little more analysis.

In particular I did really really enjoy Tomson Highway's essay about "Why Cree is the Funniest of all Languages." He talked about the contrast between Cree and English (and French) and how the sounds and structure of the languages affect the speaker's style of communication. I am a sucker for linguistics so this was perfect.

The Trickster was mentioned a little bit here and there, but again, I would have enjoyed more focus. Since reading Thomas King's "Green Grass, Running Water" with his character of Coyote (one name for Trickster) I have wanted more more more. He /she is chaotic, clumsy, fun, curious, devious, oblivious and I would have loved to see more attention paid to him /her.

If nothing else, this book has given me a few more authors /comedians to check out.

Alan says

I had originally expected this to be more along the lines of humorous stories rather than the essays about indigenous humour that it actually consists of. There were still plenty of jokes and stories interspersed throughout to lighten things up. My favourites were *And Now, Ladies and Gentlemen* by stand-up comic Don Kelly, which included generous portions of his stand-up act, and *Why Cree is the Funniest of All Languages* by playwright/musician Tomson Highway.

Geoffrey Kelley says

Not easy to be serious about humour, but most of these essays succeed. Those written by Thomas King, Tomson Highway, Ian Ferguson, Karen Froman and Drew Hayden Taylor were particularly amusing and interesting.

Melinda Worfolk says

I completely forgot to add this book after I read it in September for the First Peoples English Literature course I'm developing. I quite enjoyed many of these essays; Drew Hayden Taylor (a funny man, himself) has chosen several of the most well-known Aboriginal humour writers/performers in Canada to contribute essays for this collection, and many of the essays are both funny and insightful. They are a little bit uneven, but I thought the following were particular standouts: Kristina Fagan's essay about laughter and community, Karen Froman's essay about humour and academia, and Thomas King's essay about the CBC Radio One show he wrote and acted in, *The Dead Dog Cafe*.

I also laughed my head off at many of the jokes in the "intermissions" interspersed throughout the book.

Chris C says

Mixed collection of pure humor essays down to papers seemingly written for a Master's dissertation; didn't walk away with a lot of insights or interesting takes on Native Canadian humor and it was a real slog to get through

Gord says

A collection of essays featuring diverse FN funny folk, from standup comedian Don Kelly to playwrights Tomson Highway and Drew Haden Taylor, and writers such as Thomas King, storyteller Louise Profeit-LeBlanc, and educator Kristina Fagan.

A semi-formal study of FN humour that will have you laughing out loud.

Herman says

This book had some good jokes a few good stories, and some that didn't carry a message was too specific for easy understanding. This is a serious attempt to understand the important question why are native people so funny? Problem is most of the contributing writers are themselves professional comedians and not a real representative cross-section of the target population, so to make my own very small contribution to this topic I offer up my wife's latest cell message chat;

My brothers sorry I can't join u this Saturday I have an AA speaking commitment but pls let me know for next time

Who this (Jimmy)

Chris

from? (jimmy)

Who dis? (Eddie)

Rob (jimmy)

Worry About it (Rock&Sweat)

Who is this is (Louie)

This is a group Tex from Sweat (Louie)

JK (Rock&Sweat)

I'm going to kick ur asses it's Chris from tule river bitches

Who say who dat when I say who dat, who dat jk (Eddie)

Lol good one Chris!!!!(Jimmie)

My Mom Called Me A Bitch Once, Once.(Rock&Sweat)

?

((They go on like that all the time I guess the answer to the question why are natives funny it's because they practice it all the time)

Nicole says

This was structured as a book *about* humour rather than a book *of* humour, but most of it was funny itself and almost all of it was interesting. The articles ranged from light reading to fairly academic.
