

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann, 2005 *Wise words of the Yup'ik people. We talk to you because we love you*, Translations from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press.

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann (ed.), 2005 *Yup'it qanruyutait. Yup'ik words of wisdom*. Transcriptions and translations from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden with Marie Meade, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press.

Murielle Nagy

Volume 32, Number 1, 2008

Inuit urbains  
Urban Inuit

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029829ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/029829ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Association Inuksiutiit Katimajit Inc.  
Centre interuniversitaire d'études et de recherches autochtones (CIÉRA)

ISSN

0701-1008 (print)  
1708-5268 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Nagy, M. (2008). Review of [FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann, 2005 *Wise words of the Yup'ik people. We talk to you because we love you*, Translations from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press. / FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann (ed.), 2005 *Yup'it qanruyutait. Yup'ik words of wisdom*. Transcriptions and translations from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden with Marie Meade, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press.] *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 32(1), 168–170. <https://doi.org/10.7202/029829ar>

anthropologues et sociologues ayant un intérêt pour l'art inuit et ses processus de production, de distribution, et de sa réception critique.

Yves Laberge  
Département de sociologie  
Université Laval  
Pavillon Charles-De Koninck  
Québec (QC), G1V 0A6, Canada  
Yves.Laberge@fp.ulaval.ca

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann

2005 *Wise words of the Yup'ik people. We talk to you because we love you*,  
Translations from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden, Lincoln and London,  
University of Nebraska Press.

FIENUP-RIORDAN, Ann (ed.)

2005 *Yupiit qanruyutait. Yup'ik words of wisdom*. Transcriptions and translations  
from the Yup'ik by Alice Rearden with Marie Meade, Lincoln and London,  
University of Nebraska Press.

In her introduction to *Wise words of the Yup'ik people. We talk to you because we love you*, Ann Fienup-Riordan (p. xiii) writes "Conscious culture is the trademark of the new millennium in Alaska as elsewhere, requiring efforts to preserve and reproduce past practices and defend them against assimilative pressures." She proceeds to explain how, in 1998, the Calista Elders Council (CEC) developed a plan of action to preserve and transmit Yup'ik values and traditions, including annual youth and elders conventions and gatherings, and a series of bilingual publications. The books written by Fienup-Riordan and those edited by her are part of the CEC's mandate, and both have to be congratulated for the quality of their contents. Indeed, as the author observed, "elders' statements are not casual observations but self-conscious and carefully crafted public presentation" (p. xxxvii).

Among Arctic peoples, learning was mainly achieved through observation and practice, with oral instruction restricted to the transmission of a moral code (p. xxxiii). Aimed at Yup'ik young people, *Wise words of the Yup'ik people* focuses on ideal behaviour and rules for right living. It demonstrates the essential part of codified moral instruction in Yup'ik education (p. xxxvi). While working on that book, Fienup-Riordan kept a running file in Yup'ik and English of all statements quoted in the original transcripts. The results of her efforts is *Yupiit qanruyutait. Yup'ik words of wisdom*, a bilingual companion to *Wise words*.

In *Wise words*, we learn how the Yupiit of southwest Alaska have kept their pre-Christian view of the world, especially their beliefs in the essential personhood of animals and the responsiveness of the natural world to human thought and deed (p. xx). Chapter 1 presents traditional Yup'ik oral instruction and its moral code surrounding relations. Chapter 2 discusses how Yup'ik people are expected to experience the world

around them and the subsequent ethical requirements to treat both human and nonhuman others with compassion and restraint. These two qualities are indeed at the basis of traditional Yup'ik education. In that chapter, the power of the human mind is considered both powerful and dangerous, as highlighted by Theresa Moses (June 2000): "They told us that a person's gratitude is powerful, and their hurtful feelings are also powerful. If we anger that poor person, it can push us into negative circumstances [...]" (p. 45). As Fienup-Riordan explains, "in the western view, the pursuit of individual ends is taken for granted as a condition of being human. Among the Yupiit, people were social beings first and individuals only if they followed their own minds, in which their downfall was assured" (p. 56).

Chapter 3 explores adages such as "Boys are like puppies," and "Ears are eyes," used to illustrate Yup'ik moral instruction. In that chapter, the notions of compassion and restraint are once again emphasised. "Responding to a request was one of many ways a person put aside personal desires" (p. 85). Chapter 4 is about the relationship between parents and children. "Your sons and daughters will do the things they see you doing (Elisa Brink, March 2000: 72)" (p. 118). Notably, Fienup-Riordan remarks that "parent's care and affection did not take the form of permissiveness sometimes mistakenly associated with Inuit child rearing" (p. 129). Chapters 5, 6 and 7 describe the moral code of interpersonal relationships between men and women, extended family, one's community, and strangers. "People can transform themselves, even though they have become adults. They can abandon some of their behaviour. [...] They say [...] if their spouse is no longer replying to their negative behavior, they change their disposition and start to live peacefully together (Frank Andrew, September 2000: 141, 127)" (p. 180).

Chapter 8 explains the contemporary relevance of past practices based on elders' belief in the essential unity of humankind and respects of cultural differences. It presents Yup'ik views of self and others. "Appearances are deceiving. [...] Wolves running in the grass might be the beluga whales in mammal incarnation" (p. 233). Chapter 9 is about how to treat individuals who did follow the instructions. With those who did not behave properly, the first correctives were love and encouragement rather than criticism and punishment (p. 259). "Yelling at children was also proscribed as it would make it even harder for them to listen to future instructions" (p. 258).

Chapter 10 describes traditional restrictions following major life events such as first menstruation "to avoid annoying or frightening human and nonhuman companions in a sentient universe" (p. 267). "[...] people were enjoined to follow the rules rather than their own minds and desires" (*ibid.*). Chapter 11 concludes with a discussion of the contemporary role of elders "to make their past present" (xxxiv). As they were instructed in the past, they told young people that "what they did would come back to them" (p. 300).

*Yupiit qanruytait. Yup'ik words of wisdom* is a bilingual book of first-person accounts by Yup'ik elders, without contextualisation or anthropological analysis, except for the introduction by Fienup-Riordan. Elders even made the point that "we lose something when stories are explained" (p. xviii). Indeed, "successive hearings or

readings reveal different meanings, depending on the experience the listener brings to them” (p. xviii).

The order of the first seven chapters are the same as in *Wise words*. Chapters 8 and 9 are the equivalent of Chapters 10 and 11 in *Wise words*. Compassion and restraint receive greater emphasis in *Yup'ik words of wisdom*. “He was told not to hate the person who hurt him, but to let it go, as if he was braiding it into strands of hair, not reacting the same way he was treated and not retaliating against the person who hurt him (Frank Andrew, October 2001: 135)” (p. 21). “A person who has no strong conviction, one who does not adhere to instructions, favors indulgent and fun things and becomes addicted to those behaviors (Frank Andrew, September 2000: 96, 136)” (p. 41).

As Fienup-Riordan notes, “[...] these extended accounts will interest Yup'ik readers but also a larger audience, including linguists, folklorists, anthropologists, historians, and others interested in Native American oral tradition. [It] is for those who want not only to know what the elders have to say, but also how they say it” (p. xviii). In fact, both books should be of interest to this audience.

Murielle Nagy  
CIÉRA  
Université Laval  
Pavillon Charles-De Koninck  
Québec (QC), G1V 0A6, Canada  
murielle.nagy@fss.ulaval.ca

GESSAIN, Robert

2007 *Inuit: Images d'Ammassalik, Groenland, 1934-1936*, Paris, Éditions de la Martinière, 147 pages.

Le «Prix du Cercle polaire 2008», devant «contribuer à faire découvrir les régions polaires à un public de non-spécialistes», a été remis en mai 2008 à *Inuit: Images d'Ammassalik, Groenland, 1934-1936*. Ce magnifique album de photographies anciennes présente le village d'Ammassalik, situé sur la côte est du Groenland. Tous les textes et toutes les photographies sont de Robert Gessain (1907-1986). L'organisation des chapitres et le choix des textes de ce livre posthume ont été laissés à la famille de celui-ci. La plupart des photographies datent de 1934 à 1936, sauf une douzaine d'images en noir et blanc regroupées dans l'épilogue, qui furent prises en 1966, alors que la population locale avait presque triplé (p. 151). À l'origine, les sujets choisis par le jeune anthropologue Robert Gessain touchaient la vie quotidienne des Ammassalimiut, leur logis, leurs traditions, leurs déplacements. On peut y voir de nombreux portraits d'autochtones, des tentes (pp. 30-31), quelques masques artisanaux, des outils pour la chasse et la pêche. En plus de sa thèse de doctorat (soutenue en 1957), Robert Gessain avait consacré quelques livres et plusieurs articles à la région d'Ammassalik, où il avait longtemps séjourné et hiverné. On croit comprendre que le présent album regroupe des photographies inédites avec des commentaires provenant