

## Helen Betty Osborne

BY MARILYN DUMONT

Betty, if I set out to write this poem about you  
it might turn out instead  
to be about me  
or any one of  
my female relatives  
it might turn out to be  
about this young native girl  
growing up in rural Alberta  
in a town with fewer Indians  
than ideas about Indians,  
in a town just south of the 'Aryan Nations'

it might turn out to be  
about Anna Mae Aquash, Donald Marshall or Richard Cardinal,  
it might even turn out to be  
about our grandmothers,  
beasts of burden in the fur trade  
skinning, scraping, pounding, packing,  
left behind for 'British Standards of Womanhood,'  
left for white-melting-skinned women,  
not bits-of-brown women  
left here in this wilderness, this colony.

Betty, if I start to write a poem about you  
it might turn out to be  
about hunting season instead,  
about 'open season' on native women  
it might turn out to be  
about your face    young and hopeful  
staring back at me    hollow now  
from a black and white page  
it might be about the 'townsfolk' (gentle word)  
townsfolk who 'believed native girls were easy'  
and 'less likely to complain if a sexual proposition led to violence.'

Betty, if I write this poem.

Notes: Poet and writer Marilyn Dumont earned her BA from the University of Alberta and MFA from the University of British Columbia. She is of Cree and Métis ancestry.