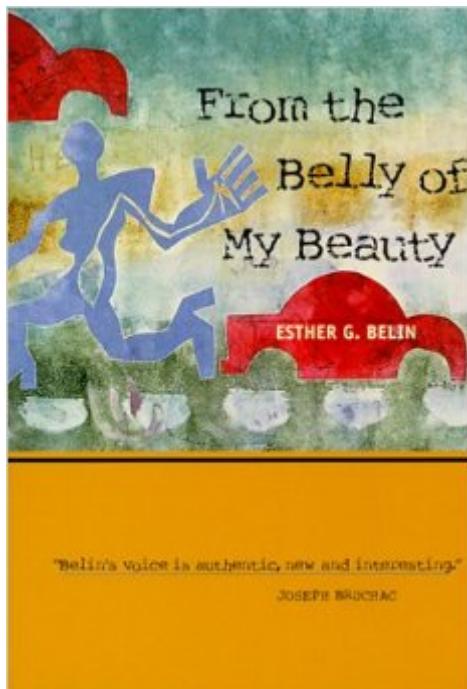


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From The Belly Of My Beauty (Sun Tracks)



Synopsis

If it can be said that Native culture is hidden behind the facade of mainstream America, there is a facet of that culture hidden even to many Native Americans. One of today's generation of outstanding Native writers, Esther Belin is an urban Indian. Raised in the city, she speaks with an entirely different voice from that of her reservation kindred as she expresses herself on subjects of urban alienation, racism, sexism, substance abuse, and cultural estrangement. In this bold new collection of poems, Belin presents a startling vision of urban California—particularly Los Angeles—contrasted with Navajo life in the Four Corners region. She presents aspects of Diné life and history not normally seen by readers accustomed to accounts written by Navajos brought up on the reservation. Her work reveals a difference in experience but a similarity in outlook. Belin's poems put familiar cultural forms in a new context, as Coyote "struts down east 14th / feeling good / looking good / feeling the brown." Her character Ruby dramatizes the gritty reality of a Native woman's life ("I laugh / sit / smoke a Virginia Slim / and talk to the spirits"). Her use of Diné language and poignant descriptions of family life will remind some of Joy Harjo's work, but with every turn of the page, readers will know that Belin is making her own mark on Native American literature. *From the Belly of My Beauty* is also a ceremony of affirmation and renewal for those Native Americans affected by the Federal Indian Relocation Program of the 1950s and '60s, with its attempts to "assimilate" them into the American mainstream. They have survived by remembering who they were and where they came from. And they have survived so that they might bear witness, as Esther Belin so powerfully does. Belin holds American culture accountable for failing to treat its indigenous peoples with respect, but speaks for the ability of Native culture to survive and provide hope, even for mixed-blood or urban Indians. She is living proof that Native culture thrives wherever its people are found.

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Customer Reviews

Browsing the Native American Literature section of my school's bookstore (NAU-Flagstaff), I came upon Esther's book and almost jumped outta my pants! Esther and I are alumni of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, and I am familiar with her FABULOUS way of "painting with words," and I have always thought highly of her work. Over the years I've always looked for her name among the circle of Native writers because she writes with such passion and human truth as experienced first hand by natives at the dawn of a new millennium. It is easy for me, as an acquaintance of Esther's, to view her work and relate the themes and subjects of her poems directly to her personality. It is so wonderful to read what she has produced in "FROM THE BELLY OF MY BEAUTY." Any avid reader of Native/Indigenous literature is definitely in for a treat, so sit back and get ready to laugh, cry and understand.

An outstanding piece of work! It surprised me when I first read the contents...a Navajo? Yes, a Native woman writing about her city life and at times, focusing on her roots....the traditional way of life. Yet her words are dramatic and powerful. A great accomplishment!

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