I mean no wrong in writing
or speaking your language. I mean
to understand you on your terms,
in your words.

NAOMI McILWRAITH

kiyâm is a beautiful and contentious collection that explores the ways in which a writer may speak stories from a world many consider her not part of, but one to which she is spiritually very close. Naomi McIlwraith addresses these concerns through her poetry and its liminal navigations of the borders between English and Cree, between written and spoken texts. She brings to the forefront her concerns about voice and the right to speak certain stories, but rather than allowing voice to become something that circumscribes and limits her, she attempts to represent a variety of histories and stories in a respectful manner and with a careful ear for the essential musicality of language. She engages with an intersection of cultures and histories in a way that pays great honour to all these histories and to the overarching power of the personal narrative — in her case, the one connecting strand that pulls all of her divergent worlds together. McIlwraith strives to engage with each of her worlds with understanding, but she is also wry, humorous, and deeply honest. Her voice is a clear and engaging one, navigating the uneasy waters of translation/transliteration with care and grace.
kiyâm is a direct engagement with European literary tradition and the history/baggage of the written word, held up against the oral tradition of the First Nations and Métis. The collection provides an intriguing view of a woman and a writer treading the pathways between those worlds, knowing that certain stories are in danger of being lost and that moving them from the oral world to the written world is one of the most certain ways of preserving them, yet knowing at the same time that this move alters their essential meaning and form.

This is an important collection in its negotiation of two vastly different linguistic worlds. Possessing a deep-felt respect, as well as many moments of startling beauty, kiyâm is a collection that is sure to challenge and inspire, and, most certainly, to resonate.

JENNA BUTLER