



# The Thunderbird Poems

*Armand Garnet Ruffo*

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Norval Morriseau's revered work has been honoured, copied and recognized throughout the art world and beyond. Less widely known but equally captivating is the artist's personal life story, which poet and biographer Armand Garnet Ruffo related in his powerful narrative biography, *Norval Morriseau: Man Changing into Thunderbird* (Douglas & McIntyre, 2014). Ruffo immersed himself in the life and work of the artist, gaining insight into the struggles and sources of inspiration underlying Morriseau's greatest works through research and interviews with the artist himself—a connection further strengthened by their shared Ojibway heritage.

His lengthy study of Morriseau inspired Ruffo to write poems reflecting on both the works of art and the emotional context in which Morriseau painted them. *Thunderbird Poems* complements the highly evocative and poetic biography, delving into Morriseau's creative life through compressed, imagistic language, while untangling the complex and powerful threads of meaning, tradition and emotional power that resonate throughout Morriseau's strong lines and vibrant colours.

Significant themes in Morriseau's work are mirrored in *Thunderbird Poems*: Ojibway legends, Morriseau's conflicted religious beliefs, political tensions between white and aboriginal Canadians. Significant moments in Morriseau's life are also traced along with the development of his artistic career. Deeply immersed in Morriseau's life story, and possessing thorough knowledge of the Ojibway storytelling traditions which grounded so much of the artist's beliefs and creativity, Ruffo provides fresh poetic interpretations of the most renowned and striking works of one of Canada's most celebrated painters.

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