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## Introduction

BARBARA J. COOK, LYNN DOMINA,  
AND SUSAN GARDNER

This special issue of *SAIL* originated with a discussion group formed by *ASAIL* and chaired by Ellen Arnold during the winter and spring of 2005. Among other recommendations, this group eventually suggested that *SAIL* devote a special issue to teaching and pedagogy. The three of us, Barbara J. Cook, Lynn Domina, and Susan Gardner, volunteered as guest editors. We were surprised and gratified at both the number and range of submissions we received. Despite the frustrations we all sometimes feel in our attempts to ensure Native American literature a more significant place in the classroom, many of our colleagues, nationally and internationally, have created engaging and provocative courses. The submissions we received revealed intriguing approaches to contexts and to individual texts. We look forward to more pedagogically oriented articles in *SAIL* and elsewhere.

You have before you articles by five teacher-scholars. While Conrad Shumaker overtly discusses assumptions revealed by the environments we design for learning, each of the articles in one way or another demonstrates how site specific Native American literature is. Native American courses inevitably (and, one hopes, intentionally) also become similarly site specific. Kimberly Roppolo and Chellee L. Crow travel to a group of students in Oklahoma to teach an intensive summer course in American Indian literatures. Shumaker describes his experiences designing his summer travel course, during which students from the University of Central Arkansas serve and learn in the American Southwest. Reginald Dyck describes teaching in Ohio, where he encourages students to interpret Indian presence through

petroglyphs, maps, and DNA, although Ohio can seem, at first glance, distinct from “Indian country.” Jane Haladay describes her pedagogy, when she was teaching at the University of California–Davis, as a means of undermining colonialism within a colonialist setting, specifically as applied to Richard Van Camp’s novel *The Lesser Blessed*. Finally, Margaret A. Toth discusses her experience teaching the novels of Louise Erdrich, the necessity of foregrounding Erdrich’s reliance on Ojibwe knowledge, and the inherent dangers when a white faculty member teaches a Native literature course.

We are grateful to each of these contributors. They have not only helped us rethink our own teaching but also revised and polished their essays while meeting a series of deadlines with grace and good humor.

# Special Issue

Volume 19, Number 1

**GUEST EDITORS: BARBARA J. COOK,  
LYNN DOMINA, AND SUSAN GARDNER**



# Native American Education vs. Indian Learning

Still Battling Pratt after All These Years

KIMBERLY ROPPOLO AND CHELLEYE L. CROW

As Virginia Carney, an Eastern Cherokee professor at Leech Lake Tribal College (Anishinaabe), pointed out in her presentation at the 2002 meeting of the Modern Language Association, teaching American Indian literatures to American Indian students is a pedagogically unique situation that is complicated by several elements: tribal heterogeneity (or lack thereof) in the classroom; the identity of the instructor; the texts being studied, as well as the identity of the authors of those texts; and many other factors. For instructors of American Indian ancestry, particularly those from tribes other than those of their students, the responsibilities involved in teaching American Indian literatures perhaps increase exponentially. Many American Indian instructors, having become part of the intertribal world of Indian academia in America, feel we have a vested interest in seeing American Indian students succeed—no matter from what tribe, they are *our future*. With only 1.1 percent of college graduates being American Indian and only 13 percent of Native people earning a degree (U.S. Office of Management and Budget), *every* American Indian college student needs to succeed if we are to have what many elders stress: education in both mainstream and in traditional ways for our peoples not merely to survive but also to thrive in the years to come. Many of us were educated in a system that was neither friendly to our learning styles nor designed to encourage our success, and we enter these situations with a hyperawareness of and hypersensitivity toward the needs of our students. Perhaps even more than non-Indian instructors, we are also aware that though there is com-

monality, there are distinct cultural differences between us and our students, some of which are tribal and some of which have to do with our degrees of assimilation.

This is precisely the situation in which we found ourselves when asked by the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes to teach a one-week, three-credit-hour course in American Indian literatures to a group of mostly Cheyenne and Arapaho students in El Reno, Oklahoma, in association with Redlands Community College. While Redlands is a local community college, the tribal education director negotiated to offer the course to tribal and nontribal members under the auspices of this public institution. Primary funding for the course came from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. The tribes funded half of the teaching stipend along with room and board for the two of us and tuition and books for students who were tribal members, and Redlands funded the other portion of the teaching. Though we knew there would be grueling eight-hour days in the classroom, plus additional guided study time afterward to meet the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' accreditation requirement for contact hours, we had both been adopted by a well-known local Cheyenne family, the Blackbears, and felt an obligation to give back to the young people in this community. Even though there would be no members of the Blackbear family in the classroom, this was their tribal government paying us, their community trusting us, and we were honored by that. Out of respect for our relationship, besides our commitment as educators, we wished to do the best job possible. This situation was also prime for beginning a study in an area in which we were both interested: how do we best meet the learning needs of these students in regard to American Indian literatures? We had two measurement instruments at our disposal that we would incorporate besides utilizing methodology supported by the literature, and we felt we could do a qualitative study based on our experiences, a study that we hope to refine and expand greatly in the future. Though this project would be limited in scope and would only be a pilot, with the students' willingness to participate, we felt that we would have something of value to offer the discipline.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTED:

## WHAT WE KNEW

Much effort has been devoted to improving educational outcomes for American Indian students, though philosophies behind that effort have varied throughout the years. From colonial times forward, churches had established mission schools to use education to Christianize various Indian tribes. This set up a paradigm for education as assimilation that was later copied by the U.S. government (and continued in Canada with its government policy of “farming out” First Nations education to the churches). Captain Richard Henry Pratt, who experimented with educating Indian prisoners at Fort Marion and Hampton Institute and founded Carlisle Indian School, apparently thought that he was helping Indians but believed Indian culture to be inferior to white culture. His philosophy differed from popular sentiment at the time that the “only good Indian is a dead one” (Adams 51–52). Rather, he contended that the survival of Indian peoples meant “kill the Indian in him and save the man” (Adams 52). Early government-supported Native American education at institutions such as his focused merely on how to thoroughly assimilate Indian peoples and eradicate tribal cultures to the perceived benefit of mainstream culture as a whole as well as to the perceived benefit of Indian people and therefore justify colonization. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school system itself had three phases: day schools located at reservations or forts, where the children were allowed to go back home at night; boarding schools located on or near the reservations, fenced in like World War II American internment camps for Japanese Americans; and, finally, boarding schools where the children were actually sent away to be “civilized.” In 1865 President Ulysses S. Grant began the third phase, recommending the children actually be removed from the homes (as they had been in many of the church schools) to best achieve the total removal of cultural identity, which had always been the main goal of Native American education. Carol Robinson-Zañartu, in “Serving Native American Children and Families: Considering Cultural Variables,” suggests that the purpose of Grant’s action was to force the tribes “to

give up virtually all that was sacred and unique in their traditional life-styles. . . . [B]y 1890, attendance in government-run . . . schools was supported as official policy” (375). Jon Reyhner says that much of the enthusiasm that fueled this government support was because of the “success” of Carlisle. E. Fuchs and R. J. Havinghurst claim the government again increased its efforts to remove children from their homes in the 1950s and 1960s. They claim that close to 70 percent of the children the BIA had responsibility for were in boarding schools at that time (qtd. in Robinson-Zañartu 375). We believe it is no accident that this coincided with the wholesale removal of families from the traditional cultures that had been somewhat maintained on the reservations through the newly adopted program of Indian Relocation, which moved families to large urban centers in hopes that they would assimilate. The effects of these policies in education continue to be felt. Native students have an astronomical high school dropout rate—two times higher than the national average—a phenomenon some Native students attribute to cultural insensitivity, lack of quality instruction, and racist behavior on the part of some instructors (“American Indian School Dropouts and Pushouts”). We see these, where they exist, as residual effects of old policies.

Today, Native American education focuses on how to ensure survival of tribal peoples in both the mainstream and in Indian Country, where traditional ways are valued. Moreover, William G. Demmert Jr., in “Improving Academic Performance among Native American Students: A Review of the Research Literature,” says that “a school curriculum that promotes the language and culture of the community tribe served—adopted in partnership with that community—holds significant promise for improving academic performance for Native children” (17). Many studies suggest that a heavy emphasis on “local knowledge” in course material causes significant gains in student performance (Demmert 19). One particular study done in an Arizona Indian community high school, which promoted language preservation and aspects of both mainstream and traditional culture in the school curriculum, had the astounding result of producing a senior class with only two dropouts and with 50 percent of its graduates going on to college (Demmert 24). This research supported

what we had already planned based on our instincts as teachers: a course of study that began with Cheyenne and Arapaho oral literatures and moved on to contemporary Cheyenne and Arapaho writers and then on to contemporary writers from other tribes. Not only because there are few contemporary published writings by Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal members, but also because this particular community is very insular, we felt it would benefit the students to begin to see some intertribal commonality both to ensure their survival in the intertribal world of Indian academia, where they would not necessarily have other Cheyennes and Arapahos in their immediate support group network, and to help them recognize and value their differences from other tribal cultures, to help them see *how* they are unique and valuable as peoples.

We are involved in ceremonial and social activity with the community of which the Cheyenne and Arapaho students we were about to teach are a part, so we knew a good deal about socially acceptable behavior among the Cheyennes and Arapahos and had more of a cultural context than we would otherwise have. In other words, we had some community recognition and relationships that would add to our authority and acceptance; we had schemata ourselves that the literature fit into that at least in some way resembled our students'; and we knew "how to behave," that is, we knew what behavior was appropriate for a Cheyenne woman, which we were considered to be by some because of the social kinship relationships we have formed. Moreover, we thought that perhaps we might have to deal with the issue of gender and also of status in the classroom, depending on the exact makeup of our student population, both in terms of how students reacted and interacted with us and in terms of how they reacted to and interacted with one another. Finally, we hoped that because we did "walk between both worlds" we could show our students that the Cheyenne and Arapaho community was not mutually exclusive of the mainstream academic world, that, in fact, they could thrive as well in the subculture of Indian academia. In other words, they would not have to "sell out" to succeed.

Several scholars whose work we then consulted reaffirmed that we were on the right path and that our teaching styles would be appro-

priate for this particular situation. L. Little Soldier suggests that a more informal, flexible classroom organization that entails more group-oriented tasks and the integration of the teacher into the classroom rather than his or her being positioned behind a podium or in another position of authority, with the goal of this being a shared locus of control, facilitates learning for American Indian students (qtd. in Demmert 19). R. C. Tharp and L. A. Yamauchi urge teachers to use “instructional conversation,” that is, to create a dialogue between teacher and students about the material in which “prior knowledge and experiences” are used to schematize new knowledge for students to increase higher level learning, rather than to lecture (qtd. in Demmert 19). We felt well prepared in regard to how we taught. We both tend to be highly involved instructors, moving about our classrooms, sitting on our desks as well as in empty student desks at times, talking *with* as much as *to* our students. We bring in analogies and references from popular culture as well as subculture information with which we are familiar and to which our students relate. Roppolo, for instance, might have her Blackfoot students hypothesize whether or not they share any cultural or historical similarities with tribes depicted in the literature read for class. Crow might make a reference to *Law and Order* or *The DaVinci Code* in a character analysis in one of her literature classes. We both also incorporate the use of group work in our classrooms.

However, we did both have an issue to deal with in terms of “who we were.” We are both light-skinned women descended from Southeastern tribes, which, in our perception, put us at a disadvantage with students from mostly Plains tribes. This is a socially discomforting topic but one that must be addressed if this article is to be an accurate narrative of our methodologies and an analysis of our students’ learning styles in hopes of improving the praxis in regard to Indian learning. Cherokee jokes are some of the most common in Indian Country, most of them having as the basis for their humor Cherokee blood quantum or lack thereof. For instance, “How many Cherokees does it take to screw in a light bulb?  $\frac{1}{32}$ .” Or, “What do you call a room full of Cherokees? A full-blood.” Many Plains Indians seem to assume that any light-skinned person with

Southeastern descent is not a “real Indian” but rather a “wannabe” Indian with a mythological Cherokee “princess” for a grandmother. Cultural acceptance for those, like us, immersed in a Plains setting seems ironically to be more dependent on learning about that particular Plains culture than on any sort of participation, familiarity, or acceptance within our own.

In regard to learning styles, we both believed that American Indian students tended to be visual as well as holistic learners. Karen Swisher and Donna Deyhle claim in “The Styles of Learning Are Different, but the Teaching Is Just the Same: Suggestions for Teachers of American Indian Youth” that “visual strengths are encouraged” when “the traditional cultural patterns are reinforced in many Indian communities.” In fact, William Brescia and Jim C. Fortune suggest in “Standardized Testing of American Indian Students” that this particular group of students is actually put at a disadvantage when required to read written instructions and when required to give verbal responses. Brescia and Fortune acknowledge that while there are several factors that influence test scores, acculturation being an influence on both achievement and ability tests, the underestimation of language is the second most influential factor in test scores. They perceive the “inability of many Indian students to read the questions accurately or to give appropriate verbal responses” as the problem. In other words, “tests which do not make extensive use of verbal language are not subject to underestimation as much as those that depend on verbal instructions and reading.” Darold L. Shutt supports this, claiming Indian students’ IQs were actually more accurately measured by a test designed for deaf children (qtd. in Brescia and Fortune). This focus on the visual is connected in the literature to corresponding tendency toward holistic thought. Tharp “described Native American cognition as the ‘anchor example’ for holistic thought, in which the pieces derived their meaning from the pattern of the whole, rather than the whole being revealed through the analysis of each of its sections” (qtd. in Robinson-Zañartu 377). Neither of us had heard nor read anything professionally that contradicted this visual and holistic learning style theory for American Indian students.

We believed as well that our Cheyenne and Arapaho students would perhaps be communal, perhaps be reticent about talking in class, perhaps not make direct eye contact, and perhaps require more “wait time” both before and while answering a question, *if* they were willing to do so, because of the rhetorical structure of the speech and the typical speech behavior we were accustomed to hearing and observing in the traditional community. The research backed this up. Robinson-Zañartu claims, “Frequently, silence is culturally appropriate, although it is often misinterpreted in school as inappropriate or a sign of difficulty” (379). Though we had a cultural perspective for this potential silence, we wanted to keep in mind that it could be exacerbated by “typical instructional approaches . . . [which] result in students adopting a ‘mask of silence,’” according to R. Dumont Jr., and that “us[ing] conventional non-Native ways of exercising authority and enforc[ing] a ‘school’ definition of learning (far removed from the experiential learning promoted within the community) . . . [could make] students stop . . . talking and otherwise refuse . . . to participate” (qtd. in Estrin and Nelson-Barber). Because of these preexisting beliefs and because of time constraints after class meetings, we planned on doing all the reading out loud together in the classroom, hoping that it would not be deadly, that we would be able to keep the class interesting and have ample time for discussion. We also would bring in visual learning by using films that we would connect back to the literature, and we set up the final projects for the course in such a way that students with a variety of learning preferences and styles could succeed, allowing them to use not only writing to show us what they learned but also a variety of media, such as video, music, presentations made using Microsoft’s PowerPoint software, beadwork, drawing, or painting. We felt this fit in well with a constructivist perspective, which both of us adopt to an extent in the classroom, letting the students present the knowledge in ways that paralleled the ways in which they had schematized the material.

Constructivism can be defined as philosophy, as learning theory, and as application in the classroom. As a philosophical view, constructivism is how individuals view and then construct their world and knowledge. As a learning theory, constructivism explains how

people learn. Finally, constructivism is becoming more representative of teaching strategies. Constructivism posits that students are not void of knowledge. Students enter the classroom with a multitude of diverse experiences encoded into their memories (schemata) on which new knowledge will be constructed. While constructivism as a philosophy is not new, its application to modern education is still in its formative stages. Constructivism posits that by building on previously constructed knowledge, students can begin to grasp new concepts and move from simply knowing the material to actual understanding. By constructing new knowledge on previously constructed knowledge, critical thinking is promoted, and this allows the integration of concepts within and between disciplines, the representation of concepts in multiple forms, and the ability to justify, defend, and reflect on the concepts learned.

#### THE CLASSROOM

Since results in Indian learning might not be as easily measured as those in Native American education, qualitative, rather than quantitative, studies must be used to do so. This section of our article will, therefore, follow a narrative structure, while it contains a small amount of quantitative data.

When we actually entered the classroom situation, we were both disappointed and pleased to have a total of five students. In this article, we will refer to the students by pseudonyms. Mary (Cheyenne) was one of our three female students. The other two were Melody and Cassie, cousins (Cheyenne and Arapaho). One male student was Donald (Cheyenne and Arapaho). The final student, James, was Delaware but was phenotypically white and appeared to be very assimilated. In fact, to be quite honest, though both of us have been subject to the same assumptions, we both at first assumed he *was* white. James had grown up around and was friends with the Cheyenne and Arapaho students in our class. James and Cassie had both already been away for a year at Haskell, while the others had just completed high school and were planning on attending either Redlands or Haskell in the fall. (Established in 1884 in Lawrence,

Kansas, Haskell was one of the most notorious off-reservation boarding schools. However, the boarding school has since transformed itself into Haskell Indian Nations University, a secondary institution of choice for many Native students today.) The students all seemed to be enjoying their experiences at their home institutions or to be looking forward to doing so, though they did find some aspects of higher education intimidating, as most students do. However, some of their precollege educational experiences, we were to later find out, had been horrific. In their high schools, for the most part, they had experienced what Elise Trumbell Estrin and Sharon Nelson-Barber describe in "Issues in Cross-Cultural Assessment: American Indian and Alaska Native Students":

Common practices of many schools have either directly or indirectly devalued Native ways of life. . . . When teacher and students have no shared cultural identity, a teacher has less to go on in making decisions about what is appropriate to teach students and how to effectively teach it. In such circumstances, the teacher is also less able to accurately interpret students' motives and behavior [because of] a general lack of understanding about certain culturally based pedagogical practices employed by Native teachers, such as their practice of sharing classroom control with students rather than exerting unilateral control themselves.

Just one experience that Donald had serves as a good example of this. He had written a paper for a high school English class on the assigned topic of "someone he admired." He chose as the focus of his paper his brother, a Sun Dancer. The teacher first praised the paper; in fact, she suggested it was suitable for publication. However, when he refused to substitute her preferred term "medicine man" for his more culturally appropriate term "ceremonial person," the teacher did not understand. When she queried him as to why he refused to make the change, he said that this was the way his brother would be referred to in his religion. The teacher asked what religion that would be, to which Donald replied, "Our Cheyenne ways." The teacher told him that Cheyenne ways did not constitute a religion and failed the paper.

On that first day of class, after we had made introductory remarks and completed other administrative tasks, we explained to the students that we would like for them, *if they chose*, to participate in two assessments designed for them to better understand their own learning styles and, as a result, to help them succeed in this and other college courses. Since part of the reason we were brought in was to help these particular students improve their grade point averages by studying something at which the tribal education director felt they would have more likelihood of succeeding, all the students were eager to do this, as they felt they would benefit both now and in the future. One assessment was Joyzelle Godfrey's "Assessment of Personal Tendency toward Individualism or Collectivism." Donald and Mary both tested more collective than individual, both with a "5" for individualism and a "9" for collectivism. The other three tested nearly the same in the opposite direction: Melody, James, and Cassie each tested "10" on individualism and "4" on collectivism.

The other assessment was the "Brainworks Personal Evaluation," created by Synergistic Learning Incorporated. This measurement tests right brain/left brain and, therefore, audio/visual preference. Further information about the validity of this instrument can be found in a study conducted by C. M. Chewar and D. Scott McCrickard, "Dynamic Route Descriptions: Tradeoff by Usage Goals and User Characteristics." In our use of the instrument, four of the five students tested more auditory than visual, with preferences ranging from 56.3 to 73.3 percent auditory and 26.7 to 43.8 percent visual. One student had a 50/50 split. Hemispheric preference ranged from 54.5 to 65 percent left-brained and 35 to 47.87 percent right-brained. On the whole, the results contradicted the literature, a crux we would struggle with in our evening discussions with each other until the very end of the course.

As we planned, we began with Cheyenne and Arapaho oral literatures recorded in Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz's *American Indian Myths and Legends*.<sup>1</sup> We also watched the documentary *American Indian Sacred Ground*, partially because it somewhat effectively sets up the discussion for the importance of story with its focus on Native oral traditions behind the particular sites mentioned in

the film, though it does so with limited cultural insight, and partially because local people participated in one of the scenes. We moved on to contemporary Cheyenne and Arapaho writers Lance Henson, Susan Shown Harjo, and Margaret Behan. The students responded well to this material, appreciating that we used writers whose names they recognized and oral literature with which they were more or less familiar, having heard some of the stories from relatives and ceremonial people. They were able to compare these recorded oral stories with the versions they knew. They also appreciated the local settings of the stories, with places such as Watonga and Calumet mentioned in the literature. Throughout the week, we would keep bringing the students back to these questions: What does this mean for your peoples today? How can we apply this in a way that will make things better for Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples? Mary wrote in her final project, "We read some of Lance Henson's poetry for the Cheyenne People. It was interesting because it is how we are. . . . How we are today comes from what we read. We read things and we start to believe how we should be." However, the students did not just accept the texts wholesale because of what was familiar. Mary interrogates and deconstructs the text: "The part where he [Henson] put 'peyote ritual' does not seem very appropriate to me. It seems like a white man would put something like what he put."

We dedicated the entire second day to what happened in Sand Creek as remembered in literature and film. We started with Simon Ortiz's *From Sand Creek*, which could also act as a bridge to writers from other tribal backgrounds, as it contains Cheyenne and Arapaho content but is written by an Acoma. Since our students were giving up participating in the first Sand Creek Memorial Run to take our course, we wanted to give them a chance to pay their respects to those lost, injured, and traumatized in that massacre. That day our classroom became suddenly and surprisingly multigenerational when an Arapaho elder joined us. As there is even less Arapaho written literature and almost no recorded oral traditions, we were glad for her presence, as we wanted to include this perspective for both political and pedagogical reasons. The elder told the Arapaho version of what occurred at Sand Creek. The students sat, as they would be expected

to traditionally, in silence, eyes averted, with only James at one point interrupting with a question. As was culturally appropriate, we too let the elder take the central presence in the classroom and put ourselves in the subaltern position of learners. When the elder finished her story, we took the opportunity to give her a course packet as a thank-you gift for sharing the story and got her to take turns reading along with us. We were not sure at that point *why* she was there and knew no other way of handling the situation; she had not offered to tell us why she was there when she was telling her story, and we certainly were not going to commit the mistake of *asking*. After we read and discussed the text, she then let us know she had come in hopes of hearing a local scholar, an anthropologist whom the tribal education director had, unbeknownst to us, arranged to have speak the next day. After we had cleared up the miscommunication by calling the education director at lunch, we offered to and subsequently did drive the elder to her home. We had been, after all, appropriately trained, but we also knew that if she stayed, we might never get our class back. While we would have enjoyed having her for the remainder of the course, and in fact had invited her to return, we did, after all, only have one week.

The students' silence during this part of the course also was surely contributed to by another factor: a cousin of Melody and Cassie's had been murdered the first night of our course, reflecting in a disconcerting way the genocidal content we had focused on for the day. The victim had been an Indian teenage girl, supposed to have been impregnated by a white, middle-class boy in a nearby small town, who was now the leading suspect. It was alleged that rather than having the community find out he had been having sexual relations with her, he and several of his friends murdered her. This constituted killing, in the opinions of our students, both a Cheyenne-Arapaho woman and child; moreover, the students expressed disbelief that the killer would ever be convicted, based on their previous experiences with the inequalities of the justice system in regard to Indians and whites in that part of Oklahoma. Melody and Cassie had been absent the first half of the class that day because of the death, and James, apologizing to the others in case his statement might be con-

sidered inappropriate, let us know of the tragedy. Perhaps because of this, the material for the day was even more real for the students. Mary wrote,

The Sand Creek Massacres of 1864 is such a horrible event for the Cheyenne and Arapaho people. All I can do is imagine waking up in the morning to the sound of gunshots coming towards us. Thinking that day would be like any other day. It amazes me how one of my ancestors managed to escape the horrible attack, because if it wasn't for them, I know I sure . . . would not be here today. I am very thankful to be here. Literally, it [angers] me . . . how they could do such a thing like that to human beings. It makes me even more angry that the President of the United States basically congratulates them for doing that. Then for Chivington, who was a Methodist missionary, [to] turn around and speak about this crucial event like it was some sort of entertainment. I just can't imagine how terrible the Sand Creek site looked that day.

Her next statement made clear that the connection with the present event was certainly in the minds of the students:

This is what I think about the Massacre because I was told about it, but now I know how badly they were murdered and *for that man to not get convicted makes me very mad* . . . today there is still very much hatred among the people who aren't us. It may not be seen as much but it's still out there. Still haunting us and I think will always continue to haunt us. (emphasis added)

During lunch, we as instructors discussed this situation and decided that rather than fighting this dynamic we would use it to both help the students get through this difficult day and give them a context for the readings. Since Melody and Cassie had returned, much to our shock, we felt compelled to do this as sensitively as possible and at the students' lead. We read the section of *The Conquest of the New World: American Holocaust*, by David E. Stannard, that explains how seven hundred armed soldiers under the command of Colonel

John Chivington, a former Methodist missionary and elder in the church rode into and slaughtered Cheyennes of all ages camped at Sand Creek, located in present-day southeastern Colorado (131). We also watched the Time-Life series documentary *Cheyenne: The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian*, truly becoming facilitators and allowing the discussion to be as much therapeutic as it was instructional. The death of this unfortunate young woman had made the slaughter of their ancestors even more real—we felt we made the only ethical choice.

On the third day, we moved into literature from Indian, but non-Cheyenne or Arapaho, writers. We were somewhat apprehensive that our selection might be inappropriate. However, reading Cree playwright Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* brought some much needed humor, particularly since we used a reader's theater approach to the text and some of the scenes used strong language and bodily humor, allowing the students to vent some of their frustrations. It was especially humorous when we as instructors were required to sing when our characters did. But the students were also able to relate to the complex social issues Highway's work addresses. Mary said, "I enjoyed the play because it shows how much these women want to play bingo. I know people who are actually like that. They'll do anything just to go to play. And these characters are much like actual people I know." Mary's comments, as well as the comments by the other students in the classroom both before, during, and after reading the play, demonstrate why we began with literature with which they would probably be familiar and then broadened the scope to intertribal literature. The students and we as instructors all saw a reflection and validation of personal and tribal realities in this literature, fitting contemporary Native literature into the oral traditions, one of the primary traditional means of expression of tribal realism. Both the oral traditions and contemporary literature are grounded in specific tribal metaphysics and perspectives on history, unlike the dominant culture texts forced upon Native students as intellectually superior to their own in much of their education. This focus on the local and tribally specific that moved centripetally toward the intertribal world also allowed the students to see what they held in

common with the realities of others from different tribes and experiences. While there may be tribal differences, there are also similarities in the everyday lives of all in Indian Country, and both of us as instructors felt building bridges by finding these commonalities empowered our students in a Foucaultian sense.

After lunch, our visiting scholar arrived. She made a presentation on Cheyenne and Arapaho political history. The students listened attentively but somewhat unenthusiastically to her presentation. We attempted to ask questions to the scholar during the question-and-answer period, as the students did not really offer any, and we wanted her to feel appreciated for her efforts. We did try after she departed to make connections for the students, reminding them that someday the business committee would come from their generation. At this point, they had never considered that fact, but Cassie quickly volunteered that she would be chairperson, and the others agreed that she probably would.

After this brief discussion and a break, we watched *Dance Me Outside*, a feature film centered around the lives of several young people on a fictional Indian reserve in Ontario. Though in many ways the film is about growing up, it is more accurately about the cycle of life and the sacredness of it. The central tragedy, however, is the murder of a young Indian woman by a non-Native male. Again, our choice would unfortunately be a reminder of recent events, with the death of Little Margaret too much like the death that had just occurred. But the students again seemed to overcome this and let the connections and their existing schemas guide their interpretations, much as Tharp's work suggested it would. Cassie wrote:

Today we read aloud a very unique play *The Rez Sisters* and watched a modern film *Dance Me Outside*. These two things were similar because it dealt with the Northern way of life. The movie was pretty good, but there was an issue that really hit home, not only for me, but for some of the other students. I thought the play was really funny and it kept my interest the whole time. The characters were a good mixture and brought certain attitudes out of the others. It was a lot of fun because our instructors let us read it aloud and assigned us each a char-

acter. Watching the movie and reading the play made me realize how different life on a reservation is from the way I live. I've never lived on a reservation and I've only visited one. Well, I guess you could say Concho is almost like a rez, but again, I have never lived out there. El Reno has a lot of Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal members living in it and certain things I [have] seen in the movie or read were similar to the things I see around here. I can say that drinking and partying are similar, but we all don't live in just one part of town. I also took notice [of] how there are differences in traditional ways in values [in other tribes].

The fourth day we read poetry by Muscogee Creek poet Joy Harjo and Spokane–Coeur d'Alene writer Sherman Alexie; short stories by Alexie; a short story by MariJo Moore, a North Carolina writer with Cherokee ancestry; and short stories from Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Silko and from Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. We began the poetry section that morning by playing Joy Harjo and Poetic Justice's CD *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century*, listening to her "Fear Poem," "The Real Revolution Is Love," and "She Had Some Horses." We then read some of Harjo's poems from various texts. The students showed a marked preference for the recorded version rather than the printed poems. Mary said, "Her reading her poetry and them playing the music makes it more meaningful and more understand[able] . . . it makes it intense and it gets you into it more." We then read Alexie's poetry. Much of the content in the poems we had chosen from both Harjo and Alexie dealt with drinking, suicide, survival, alienation from mainstream culture, and genocide. Mary said, "Their poetry seems like it's reality, and basically, it is. A lot of these writings came from their own personal experiences." Cassie said of Harjo's "Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window" that it "was by far one of my favorites. . . . I feel the woman was someone who had experienced or thought [about] things almost every woman could relate to."

After a break, we read the prose selections, discussed them, and then broke for lunch. When we returned, we watched the movie *Lakota Woman*, which, regardless of any controversy surrounding its

creation as a text or as a film, offered us the opportunity to tie in the visiting scholars' presentation from the day before, as there were parallels with the problems in tribal politics locally. Despite all the problems their people shared with those whose lives are depicted in this film, the students found positive aspects. Mary said, "They didn't give up because they wanted to bring back and keep their old ways. They stood up for themselves and their people. They had pride in who they were and who they are."

That evening we felt we had to find some resolution as to why these students tested more auditory than expected and preferred auditory learning such as the CD over the printed text that they as supposed visual learners were supposed to prefer. We also were still puzzled as to why three of them tested so much more "individualistic" than "collectivist." We decided to create our own measurement, attempting to measure what we felt might be a yet unquantified variable, assimilation. Using our familiarity with Cheyenne culture, we constructed a twenty-four-question survey, which we then modified in consultation with one of our Cheyenne relatives who holds a master's degree in education, Wilma Blackbear White Bird. We planned to administer the survey, with the students' agreement, the next day.

When we entered our classroom the next morning to prepare for the day, however, James was there early. Yet another tragedy had occurred. James had been up all night completing his final project in an emergency room in the city. His brother had been severely beaten in a nightclub by several staff members, to the extent that his skull had been not just cracked but cracked open. We were completely taken aback that he had been determined to finish his coursework and was worried that he might not pass the class since he would have to be absent that final day. We reassured him that this was in no way the case, that, indeed, he could turn in his work and go to be with his brother, the place we felt he needed to be. After he left, we read this portion of his final project:

I am Indian

Ortiz and all of our elders report that Sand Creek was a horrible, fighting incident that has changed my life as well as every Indian person from yesterday and today.

I lived with my people “hating on me” because they see me as white! “It is done by enrollment number, last name first, first name last” (Alexie).

In reality, I’m as much Indian as any other fellow Indian I’ve ever met. What makes me different? Nothing! My great grandfather drove his car head on into an oncoming train and ended his life. My grandfather, who I have the deepest love and respect for, was abandoned in a basement for three days when he was three years old. When the government found him they put him in Riverside where he was beat and raped. At the age of fifteen he was desperate, so he ran away. Today, I can say I am proud, but sad. My grandfather . . . a full blood Delaware, overcame adversity and earned a bachelor [degree], two masters [degrees] and his Ph.D. in Public Health Administration from the University of Oklahoma. He was Deputy Director of Indian Health Service for nineteen years.

Two years later he ended his life with a 12 gauge shot gun. My grandfather’s report reads “Indigent Indian Male with mortal wound to head, excessive . . . bleeding, deceased.”

Everyday I tell myself “don’t get mad.” I’m now sitting at the . . . Medical Center, and my brother is unconscious and has fractured his skull. I don’t know what is going to happen to him. I am tired and scared to death, but I am still hopeful. I pray as we as Indians will stick together rather than fight amongst one another . . .

WE ARE OUR HISTORY . . .

When the other students arrived, we did what James had requested of us and read his final project to the others, prefacing it with an explanation. Though this was again a very difficult day because of the violence that repeatedly interrupts Indian life, not only in western Oklahoma, but throughout all of Indian Country, our students, led by James’s example of strength, wanted to go on with the coursework. We did ask that they take our assessment, to which they readily agreed. We also asked for them to comment on the wording and content of the questions in order for us to further develop it in the future. The students ranged in results from 7 assimilated vs. 17 tra-

ditional to 4 assimilated vs. 20 traditional. They offered helpful suggestions on wording that we will incorporate in future versions of the measurement. We spent the rest of the morning discussing the connections and differences between what we had read and their experiences. We also spent some time discussing what they might expect in further higher education, what their goals were, in short, how they would “walk in between two worlds.”

We had lunch as a group as a gift from the tribes and returned to campus for student presentations. Donald, the most auditory of the students, had created a poem. Melody had made a beadwork collage, which she narrated during her presentation, each aspect representing some part of her learning in the course: a tipi for “coming together in ceremony”; a U.S. flag and a white flag to represent Black Kettle and his people; Bear Butte and the Big Dipper from the oral stories; a basketball for Sherman Alexie; a bingo card for the Highway play; and an upside down flag for *Lakota Woman*. She said that she did the beadwork because that is what she is “good at,” and it allows her to express herself “bigger,” that text would “fill much more paper to describe the same thing in words.” Cassie and Mary both chose to keep reading journals. They both admitted to keeping a personal journal as well. Cassie said that journaling allows her to express herself best; Mary says she usually writes down her daily thoughts. We took the students to the tribal complex and said our goodbyes.

#### WHAT WE LEARNED

Our conclusion, after reflection, is not that these particular students tested more auditory because they were more assimilated nor that their test results might be skewed because they were “reacculturated” and might be testing more traditional than they really were but rather that the visual-auditory split was so even because teaching in traditional settings involves both senses almost equally. When a younger or lower status person is being instructed in a ceremonial or social situation in the Cheyenne community on how to complete some task, it is our observation that often the person being instructed will stare at the ground or in some other direction rather

than making eye-contact with the elder or ceremonial person speaking. Often, the speech will be long and will require the listener to remember not only a cultural context (story) related to the current situation but also lengthy and sometimes complex instructions to follow after the speech has ended. Many times, the listener will have to recall actually seeing the task done in the past to follow the current instructions, and we have found that *not* having seen the task done in the past handicaps the listener severely. When these tasks are ceremonial in nature, there is a low tolerance for mistakes, though there are provisions made for making them. There is also a large degree of shame on the part of the learner for not “getting it.” The situation is too important for mistakes, particularly since, as others have pointed out, the cultures have always been one generation away from losing traditions. This sort of teaching clearly requires both sharp visual and auditory skills.

Education is key to American Indian survival and sovereignty. For both American Indian and non-Indian instructors who are committed to Indian learning, the opportunity exists to affect real change that can benefit not only our students but also Indian peoples. Our focus must be not on Native education, on making the learners fit our predetermined theories or essentialist notions of self or the always traditional, visually learning Native but rather on Indian learning, doing what we have to do and changing our theories in the midst of practice to make sure real learning is occurring, giving birth to new pedagogies that come, like the learners, from out of the cultures and build bridges to the mainstream, bridges that do not have to be burned afterward. To contradict Pratt, Indians do not have to die, and they are already men and women who can become leaders for their peoples. For that to happen, the education we offer has to be something families and tribes can really believe in, an education that values traditional ideas and ways of thinking; local language, culture, and knowledge; and an education that causes the kind of change in a human being, in a family, and in a people that is necessary for survival.

Namšem, our grandfather, tells us that this is the key idea behind ceremony, that a ceremony causes a human being to willingly and

knowingly undergo change. A ceremonial person gives a selfless sacrifice; he or she suffers and does without for the sake of those he or she loves. He or she undergoes the pains of birth and the pains of being born, of giving birth to a new and changed self. A “real education,” an education for real people, enacts that sort of change. It changes a person into someone who can think in two ways—both traditionally, synthetically, and in the way of the Western tradition, analytically. It allows a person to be both part of his or her people and to abstract about their needs in terms of survival. It allows a person to have a different sort of a window on several worlds—the world of the tribe, the world of intertribal culture, and the world beyond the tribes, a very different world where both tribal and nontribal people intermingle, collide, and combust on varying levels around the world. From this perspective, the most traditional teachings of all the various peoples make absolute sense. One begins to see that there are many ways of telling truth, of understanding what is, that all peoples try to discover. It reaffirms our own truths and makes us value the truths of others.

In “A Reclamation of Power,” Comanche and Kiowa scholar Cornell Pewewardy asserts:

If you can make a people believe that your truth is the absolute truth, and they are convinced of that, then you have absolute power control over them, because you created their worldview. When Americans look at indigenous peoples, they believe that what they see is real, but it’s a virtual reality that’s manufactured. The better we know who we are as tribal people the more difficult it will be for people outside our tribal communities to oppress us. Probably the worst thing you could do to a people besides Extermination is to assimilate them. We were intentionally miseducated. Education is a form of termination.

The process of undoing this must be intentional. Just as the cultural genocide brought about by education for assimilation was a series of conscious acts, resistance and change must be conscious acts. We have to admit that as Indian and as non-Indian educators what we offer to students is different but equally valuable in this

struggle. This is not essentialism. It is recognizing that ethnicity is a variable in the classroom. It is the inclusive valuing of difference and the recognition that the Indian and non-Indian worlds are not mutually exclusive. We can only seek common ground if we admit that our current positions within a mixed classroom are different but in proximity to one another.

If we recognize the importance of auditory learning in American Indian traditional cultures, then we open the door to the possibility that serious study of indigenous languages offers fruit for specific, tribally grounded pedagogies. For instance, in the Cheyenne language, there are ways of relating what you know that correspond to different Cheyenne ways of knowing: it is snowing; it must have snowed; they say that it has snowed. Language has epistemology built into it, in other words.

Acceptance of this concept about what the auditory components of Indian learning offers to possible pedagogies extends just as naturally to tribally specific methodologies about visual learning. What traditional visual learning activities does a particular tribe have that offer themselves to examination in terms of our pedagogies? Not only do we key in to our students' schemata when we examine questions such as this, we also offer new ways of learning to one another, ideas that would never occur to educators without learning about the cultures of their students and valuing these. Patricia Hilliard believes that "teaching is reciprocal process of teachers learning from students as they learn from us" (qtd. in Ben-Yosef 82). Moreover, Elite Ben Yosef claims that

we can create the bridges by opening our minds and the doors of our classrooms to local and vernacular literacies and using them as building blocks on which to construct our teaching . . . the openness to and acceptance of differences, both in theory and in action, is the basis for creating a just and inclusive classroom. (82)

It is time for us to give a place to our students in creating Indian learning, rather than forcing the preconceived theories of Native American education, however good their intent, upon them. When

their practice does not match our theory, it is time for our theory to change, to respond to the needs of the learners and allow real learning and change to take place.

#### NOTE

1. From this volume, we read the introduction and several Cheyenne or Arapaho stories: "The Old Woman of the Spring," "Arrow Boy," "The Great Medicine Dance," "Great Medicine Makes a Beautiful Country," "Sun Teaches Vehoo a Lesson," "The Life And Death of Sweet Medicine," "The Quillwork Girl and Seven Star Brothers," "Chase of the Severed Head," "Where the Girl Saved Her Brother," "Doing a Trick with Eyeballs," "Coyote Dances with a Star," "The Great Race," "Double-Faced Ghost," and "The Death Of Head Chief And Young Mule." While some of these stories are attributed to the Northern Cheyennes (Suhtai), many Southern Cheyennes (Tsis-tsis-tas) have Northern relatives and have heard Northern stories, and some Tsis-tsis-tas have married and moved north, so some of the stories, such as "The Life and Death of Sweet Medicine," are properly Tsis-tsis-tas in origin. We also read two stories from other tribes that have Cheyenne content: "A Cheyenne Blanket" (Pawnee) and "Chief Romannose Loses His Medicine" (White River Sioux); additionally, Chief Romannose is the ancestor of some of the students we taught in this course.

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## Appendix

Note: We designed this assessment specifically to measure degrees of assimilation for this particular student population only to investigate possibilities of variables with our unexpected results with other assessments. It may or may not be appropriate for other cultural groups. Moreover, no value judgments were attached to these results, and no objective claim to its validity can be made. It is simply one of the assessments we used.

The key following the assessment reflects the expected “traditional” answers.

*Please answer the following T (true) or F (false).*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ If I acquire a beautiful object that I value greatly and someone I respect will appreciate it, I would give it to them as a measure of my respect and gratitude *without regret*.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ The purpose of education is to improve the quality of my own life in terms of material comforts. People who don't go out and get an education in order to get a good job deserve to do without.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes tradition is tradition. I go along with it, even if I don't understand the reason for it because I know my elders and my ancestors must have had good reasons for this particular practice. When I am older and more experienced, I may be able to understand it.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Life experience is more important than book learning, though both can be beneficial.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes hard things have to be said, but it is important to say them in a good way so that people won't be offended *no matter how bad* their own behavior has been.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ Making personal sacrifices in order to grow is something I feel is very important.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ When decisions affect a whole group of people, the smartest people in that group should make the decisions without regard for the opinions of each person. People who don't know what

they are talking about don't necessarily need to be heard—it wastes time and can lead to bad decisions that affect too many people.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ There are clearly defined roles for men and women. Some things that are okay for one are not okay for the other, but both are equally important.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ My family's needs are more important than my own.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ Elders must be treated with respect *no matter what*.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ When you have accomplished something great, it is something you should tell other people about. It is good to be proud of yourself. You have done well.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ It is important to be on time.

13. \_\_\_\_\_ Making a child feel ashamed is not necessarily bad if it teaches appropriate behavior.

14. \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes bad things happen that make us all cry. Neither men nor women should feel ashamed of doing this in public when these things are really bad, like the death of a child.

15. \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes some people can see/hear spiritual beings, and this is both normal and natural.

16. \_\_\_\_\_ Asking spirits other than God for help in life is wrong.

17. \_\_\_\_\_ Dreams should be used as a guide in decision making.

18. \_\_\_\_\_ Seeking one's own happiness is more important than belonging to your family or tribe.

19. \_\_\_\_\_ All parts of creation are equal.

20. \_\_\_\_\_ All people who claim to heal others through spiritual practices are fakes and take advantage of innocent people.

21. \_\_\_\_\_ The past is the past. Bad things sometimes happened, but no one alive today should feel guilty for it or be hurt by it because they weren't around back then. People should just get over it and move on.

22. \_\_\_\_\_ It is possible for people to receive knowledge from supernatural means like visions or spirits.

23. \_\_\_\_\_ If I went to somebody's house after eating a large meal and they offered me food, I would politely say that I was full, but thank you, or find some other way of turning down the offer.

24. \_\_\_\_\_ If someone I really respect is trying to tell me something really important, I don't look straight at them because of respect. I look down and really listen and pay attention.

**KEY**

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. T | 9. T  | 17. T |
| 2. F | 10. T | 18. F |
| 3. T | 11. F | 19. T |
| 4. T | 12. F | 20. F |
| 5. T | 13. T | 21. F |
| 6. T | 14. F | 22. T |
| 7. F | 15. T | 23. F |
| 8. T | 16. F | 24. T |

# Out of the Classroom and into the Canyons

An American Indian Travel Course in Theory and Practice

CONRAD SHUMAKER

## THE PROBLEM OF THE CLASSROOM

At the beginning of my American and American Indian literature courses, I ask students to look at the room we are sitting in: “Imagine that you’re anthropologists from Mars. What cultural assumptions about the world in general and about education in particular can you find here?” At first they are not sure what I am talking about, since finding assumptions in architecture is usually new to them, but as they catch on, they begin to see that most of what they have experienced as education is built into the room. The shape and arrangement of the room say that knowledge is something the teacher possesses and they will receive. If they want to see another student who has something to say, they have to fight against the linear, rectangular layout. The desks say that bodies do not count—education is purely intellectual, and we have to be more or less immobilized to participate. The gray, unadorned walls and the windows (always at the back of the rooms I teach in) say that learning is serious (and probably boring) and can take place only in the absence of “distractions” such as varied colors and natural phenomena—grass, trees, sky. Learning is divorced from place—what we are doing could be done equally well if we were in a similar space a thousand miles away—and, of course, similar discussions *are* going on in similarly disconnected spaces even as we speak.

I point out to students that the average classroom full of Americans has a comfort range of approximately four degrees Fahrenheit: if the

temperature is below seventy-two, some students will be shivering and reaching for sweaters; if it is above seventy-six, some will begin fanning themselves. The presence of the heating and cooling unit affirms that this is the way things should be, even if the unit seldom works well in practice. If we are comfortable with the temperature, we can forget about bodies and be minds—the “thinkers” that Descartes told us we are.

Above all, the room shows that we are a rectangle-making people. The room and virtually everything in it (except for the people) are rectangular. Concrete blocks, blackboards, books, paper, maps, desks, seating charts, calendars, the ubiquitous cell phones—everything proclaims that the rectangle, with its “right” angles is the “correct” shape, and if something is not right, we will *rectify* it. The word “right,” and the root “rect” originally come from Indo-European *riht*, meaning “straight,” and “rich” comes from the same root. Our assumptions are obvious here: straight, right, correct, erect, rich—these define what we value.

Going outside does not change things much. If we examine the Euroamerican approach to land we see that the rectangle-making propensity governs our view of what is around us. We map land using latitude and longitude, imposing rectangles on an earth whose sphericity we are proud of having discovered. We divide areas of land into square sections, and then we arrange rectangular buildings into blocks. So the classroom is a microcosm of a created world filled with cultural assumptions about what is right and what needs to be corrected. Since the rectangle is extremely rare in nature, our maps, cities, and buildings (not to mention our calendars, paintings, books, etc.) proclaim our assumption that we need to impose our own particular order on a world that in our view is disorderly on its own terms.

Bringing American Indian literature into such a space creates tensions that are obvious but often inconvenient to acknowledge. The web of creation made by Spider Woman in Pueblo cultures is far removed from the linear and closed space of the classroom, which proclaims its disconnection from the world around. Though Pueblo and Hopi dwelling spaces are rectangular because of the materials

and environment, the *kivas*, or sacred spaces, are often round. More important, the view of the world is one of cycles, of receiving and giving in a circular relationship, a relationship not with “nature” (an abstract concept that reveals our culture’s separation from what surrounds us) but with a particular place and its beings.

Thus the situation gets much trickier when we think more deeply about the issue of place as it is embodied in the classroom. Unlike traditional Native peoples, we generally have no idea where the materials come from that went into the building that shelters us as we learn. Just outside Tucson, for example, one of two adjacent mountains that used to be called the Twin Peaks has been completely leveled to make Arizona Portland cement, and they are working pretty hard on the second twin. Is some of that mountain in the concrete blocks and mortar we are surrounded by here in Arkansas? We generally do not know where the electricity comes from either, or who has been affected by its presence in our classroom. Was the uranium in the local nuclear plant mined on Pueblo or Navajo land by workers who might have developed cancer from exposure to the ore? Or does the power come from coal mined by the Peabody Company, which is rapidly depleting Navajo and Hopi water supplies? That is not part of what we study. The way in which the room might be connected to the land is not a conscious part of the curriculum, though its disconnection does communicate information about what we consider important.

But the classroom is not simply separated from place; it is designed to separate students from the places they come from and the places they live in. In American culture the classroom is generally seen as a kind of conduit—we step into it and become qualified to leave behind our former lives and embrace a success that rewards mobility, that is, the ability and willingness to move anywhere to engage in our newly developed specialty. My own experience of leaving a farm outside Tucson to enter the University of Arizona and, after graduate school in Los Angeles, find a job in Arkansas is fairly typical of the kind of “success” the classroom works for. In many ways, to enter the classroom is to embrace a way of seeing in which place becomes irrelevant. It educates us in the ability to live anywhere, which really

means no place. Sunny Dooley, a Navajo storyteller, told me that she explained to her niece that there is a “strip monster,” a mischief-making *yeyi* who goes from city to city with a long bundle like a rolled-up carpet containing all the fast-food outlets and strip malls that we see everywhere. He rolls out a certain length of his bundle in each city, and that is the reason they all look the same. That is the no place we learn to live in.

Since American Indian cultures are so fully rooted in place, it is little wonder that European education with its system of boarding schools was seen as an excellent way to destroy those cultures. Leaders such as the Hopi Yukiuma, who resisted white education even at the cost of long prison sentences, saw that educators, however well intentioned, were working for the destruction of a way of life based on connections to the land and the beings on it. In Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, teachers tell the Pueblo children, “don’t let the people at home hold you back” (51). The message is clear and terribly destructive: to succeed, American culture demands the separation of the individual from the land and the traditions that have grown from it. Simon Ortiz calls American public school education “a severe and traumatic form of brainwashing” (*Woven Stone* 8), and in his introduction to *Speaking for the Generations*, he is particularly emphatic about the importance of land when it comes to identity, and not just the identity of American Indian peoples: “Land and people are interdependent. . . . They cannot be separated and delineated into singular entities” (xii).

So to bring American Indian literature into the space of the classroom is to create a disjunction. As David Orr points out in *The Nature of Design*, “The curriculum embedded into a building instructs as fully and as powerfully as any course taught in it.” And the university classroom teaches that “locality, knowing where you are, is unimportant.” The ultimate result, Orr concludes, is “mindlessness,” the assumption that place does not even need to be considered (128).

This situation is further aggravated by our emphasis on wireless technology. It is not unusual to see students walking together across campus or sitting together in a classroom, each of them engaged in a conversation with people who are not present. Most teachers, I

expect, have had to add a warning to their syllabi about using cell phones in class. And the increasingly common use of cell phones in restrooms sometimes creates a rather striking illustration of the disjunction between conversation and place, the extent to which we are not where we are. Now, having made the whole campus “wireless,” my university is determined to ensure that every freshman student has a laptop and uses it in class. Having had a few students bring their computers to class, I can see that this “laptop initiative” will create an interesting situation when it has been fully implemented. Students do not want to bring books to class, since there is not room on the desk for an open book and a computer, and books are an added burden to a student who is lugging a laptop. Since the computer is made for calling up and storing information (or communicating with people who are not in the place you are), laptop-equipped students tend to type whatever I say instead of participating in discussion. When what you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. On the other hand, it gives them an excellent way to “instant message” other students, both in and out of class. Some instructors insist that class discussions *should* take place in cyberspace, since that is what students are becoming accustomed to, and we are being offered stipends to change our classes to online courses. The computer thus enables us to be in the same room yet communicate as if we were miles apart or to move the discussion out of a place entirely, so even the relatively isolated space of the classroom itself becomes irrelevant, and we are seemingly separated from any place at all.

A friend of mine gave to her composition class an article presenting evidence that the use of computers and the Internet makes students more isolated, instead of “connecting” them. She expected to have a lively debate about the accuracy of the article, but to her surprise, her students agreed completely with the writer’s premise. One student added that it was not just the Internet: the whole college experience—the need to work to afford tuition, cell phones, computers, and so on, the lack of interaction in and around classrooms, the homework done in solitude—was in itself isolating. Students apparently have little time to interact with one another, let alone to experience life outside the made environment of the city.

The result of this distance, as Silko suggests in *Ceremony*, is fear. Those who “grow away from the earth” fear the world, and “they destroy what they fear” (135). Most of my students, it seems, are afraid of snakes, spiders, bees, and other insects, the woods, germs, sitting on the grass, strangers, students of other races, one another, and so on. The Quaker educator Parker Palmer says that much of what passes for education in our schools is “death-dealing”—“a process that dissects life and distances us from the world because it is so deeply rooted in fear” (17). In short, discussing American Indian literature in the educational space created by our culture is a bit like discussing the value of silence with the stereo blasting away—it can be done, but you have to wonder if there is a better way.

#### BEYOND THE RECTANGLE

For David Orr the solution lies in redesigning buildings to demonstrate and honor their connectedness with place. And no doubt, students would be more open to the values of American Indian literature if the buildings in which they attended class were consciously and visibly designed with their connection to the local area in mind. But having grown up in Arizona, I have come to believe that students could be missing much of what is at stake in the works of writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko, Simon Ortiz, Ofelia Zepeda, and Luci Tapahonso if they stayed in an Arkansas classroom, no matter how well designed. One glimpse of Mount Taylor from the Laguna or Acoma Pueblo, within the right context, might do more to promote understanding, it seems to me, than hours of classroom lecture or discussion ever could.

But “the right context” is not a simple thing. To take a tour of Sky City, visit some ruins, or hike or ride into Canyon De Chelly might just be exchanging the box of the classroom experience for a boxful of tourist experiences—a collection of postcards and pictures, a pot, nice vistas, a kachina doll. I think we need to highlight and challenge more directly students’ assumptions about place, connectedness, and education. So as I set up a travel seminar for the first time I decided to begin with an examination of our way of living

in a context that would throw students off balance and make them discover their own assumptions in a basic way. We go to the educational center run by an organization called Heifer International and began with the “global village experience” in which students spend an afternoon working in an organic garden and then have to live for the evening and night in the kind of dwelling space they would find in Guatemala, Africa, Thailand, the Appalachians, or a Mexico City barrio. They have to figure out a way to get water and firewood, to enhance their meager allowance of food by trading materials or labor with neighbors, and to cook using a wood stove if they were “rich” by world standards or an open fire and an automobile grill if they were less prosperous. Coming off that experience, students have a clearer sense of the meaning of shelter, food, fuel, and water as elements of a place, and they are ready to discuss our way of life more intensely. We raise questions about what it means to define ourselves as “consumers,” the effect we have on other cultures because of that definition, and the effect of our actions on the land and the beings we share it with. In 2006 Sara Groe, a UCA instructor who has studied problems associated with diet and the loss of traditional foods, raised questions about those connections as part of the course. To show that there really are alternative and well-developed views around, we look at different ways of defining our relationship to the land—Christian, Buddhist, and, of course, American Indian.

Meanwhile, students read literature and works about American Indian cultures. I developed the course with the help of Elaine Fox, a sociology professor who has spent significant time as a nurse on the Navajo Reservation, and she contributes to the pretrip discussions so that we can get beyond the boxes of the “disciplines” as well, to show that literature and culture are connected and have to be understood together. She gives presentations on Navajo and Hopi cultures before the global village experience, so our discussions have an intellectual foundation as well as the hands-on component. Chapter 6, “The Circle and the Square,” from *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions*, by John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, gives students an introduction to some important aspects of American Indian culture, and, just as important, an engaging and challenging critique

of Euroamerican culture. Then we focus more specifically on the cultures of the peoples who live in the places we will visit. We have read Simon Ortiz's *Men on the Moon, Blue Horses Rush In*, by Lucy Tapahonso, George Webb's *A Pima Remembers*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. I have recently added the Tohono O'odham poet Ofelia Zepeda's *Ocean Power* and the Hopi artist and poet Michael Kabotie's *Migration Tears* to our reading list. We also look at selected works that comment on the cultures and the issues involved in cultural conflict—John Loftin's introduction to Hopi religion, "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories" by Silko, and "Our Homeland, a National Sacrifice Area" from *Woven Stone* by Ortiz. We also have also reviewed different perspectives on the Navajo-Hopi land dispute, which can be found online (e.g., "Beyond the Sacred Mountains: Effects of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute"; Paula Giese, "Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute"; and "The Hopi Tribe: Tutsqua Ancestral Land). We wait to do the discussion of specific texts until we are on site, but the literature serves as a background for our discussion of cultural perspectives. And we talk about the difference between being a tourist and being an informed guest or maybe even a pilgrim. I try to show students that we are not going as consumers—the trip is not about collecting experiences and souvenirs. I especially stress that we are going to give as well as receive: our money to help a Navajo guide, a Hopi educator, an Acoma family living on the reservation, our informed listening, our respect and willingness to learn, and our labor.

Then, after a day spent learning about tents, camp stoves, and camping skills in general, we head west. The first trip lasted ten days; the second year it was expanded to thirteen days; in 2004 we took fifteen days, which seems about right. We sleep in the tent or outside and cook our own meals, reflecting on where the food comes from and the significance of our use of it. We tour Acoma Sky City—our one "touristy" activity—since it serves as a good introduction not only to the Pueblo country and the setting of *Ceremony* but also to the dilemma that faces those Native peoples who want to live in traditional ways in a world that makes that difficult. Our presence as visitors to the Acoma community clearly makes some of the

people who live there uncomfortable—the students are acutely aware of the faces watching them from behind curtains as we go by—but our presence also helps the Acoma people live there instead of having to look for employment in the hostile world of Gallup or Grants, and our respectful appreciation of their way of life can perhaps help to alleviate the discomfort we bring. We make connections to *Ceremony*, discussing the importance of the speckled cattle as a way for Tayo to survive on the land and avoid the fate of the lost ones in Gallup, and to Simon Ortiz's poems in *Woven Stone* dealing with the way the loss of the land drove Acoma men to work for the railroad and the mines. We talk about the ways in which American Indian cultures have to adapt to the world we have brought and connect it to Betonie's views of change in *Ceremony*.

After Acoma we hike into Canyon De Chelly with Dave Wilson, a Navajo guide who can discuss the historical and spiritual significance of the place; we meet with Sunny Dooley, a Navajo storyteller who tells us about her culture and the role of stories in that culture and takes us on a walk along the rim of the canyon so we can see how stories arise from features of the landscape and are inseparable from places such as Spider Rock. I was able to contact both of these educators through the Museum of Northern Arizona, whose services have been invaluable in setting up the trips. We tour the Indian Health Services hospital in Chinle, which includes a hogan as part of its healing facilities, and if possible we meet with Johnson Dennison, the Navajo singer who is on staff at the hospital. The hospital staff is very helpful in setting up such meetings. Our experience at the hospital leads to an informed discussion of such things as the character of Betonie in *Ceremony* and Luci Tapahonso's poems.

The next phase of the trip takes us to the Hopi Reservation, where we meet with a Hopi potter, discuss such things as the significance of migration petroglyphs and pictographs, the fate of Awatovi, and the Hopi view of who they are and where they come from with our Hopi guide. We have a traditional meal with a family. Most important, we do a work project that enables us to give something back to our hosts. One time we plastered a house in the traditional Hopi way—using mud and our hands—so it could serve as part of a ceremony.

Ray Coin, our Hopi guide that year, had already told us that the Hopi do their ceremonies for the healing of all people, not just the Hopi, and to participate in the coming ceremony in that way was particularly significant. In 2004 we worked on an orchard with a Hopi cultural educator and her mother (Susan and Dorothy Secakuku), pruning ancient trees that had been brought by the Spaniards and helping to clear the road to a spring that waters the orchard and the gardens where they are establishing native crops. We have also met with Michael Kabotie, a Hopi artist and poet who is using the style of traditional *kiva* art to tell his own stories about the American experience, and with Hopi elders who discussed their attempts to preserve tradition in the face of encroachment by mainstream American values. In 2004 we were fortunate enough to be on the Hopi Reservation when a Corn Dance took place, so we attended with the Secakukus as our guides to the ceremony. Once again, these experiences were arranged with the help of the Museum of Northern Arizona.

Moving from the Colorado Plateau to the desert valleys, we meet with Ramona Button, a Pima (Akimel O'odham) woman who raises traditional crops, including corn, for Hopi people who need to ensure the survival of their traditional varieties in the face of persistent drought. She and her husband, Terry, have brought together large numbers of the unworkable allotments created by the Dawes Act, and they farm them very successfully and share the proceeds with the heirs of the original owners of the plots—sometimes over one hundred to a single plot. Ramona joins us in a traditional Pima meal and talks to us about the significance of the corn, tepary beans, saguaro fruit, and squash we eat. In 2004 we met with Robert Stone, the manager of the community-owned Gila River Farms, and we discussed the Pima people's efforts to preserve and adapt their agricultural values; then we watched and listened as Robert sang for traditional dancers at the Gila River Cultural Center. I was able to set up these experiences through family connections in Arizona—my father and brother both live near the Gila River Reservation, and we have all worked on construction jobs with Pima people, who are generally very willing to share information about their efforts to preserve their land and traditional ways.

As we have these experiences we are also discussing the literature, talking about *Ceremony* in the shadow of Mount Taylor and with an awareness of the difficulty facing people whose culture is under constant pressure to become “American”; stopping to read Luci Tapahonso’s poem about the sacred mountains, “This Is How They Were Placed for Us” (*Blue Horses* 39–42), as we approach the San Francisco Peaks; looking at the story of George Webb’s life after we drive along the dry wash that the Gila River has become; exploring Simon Ortiz’s depiction of “Mericanos” who learn from Pueblo people to see “the meaning of something” (“Hiding” 196), as we reflect on what our experiences have taught us. Though I have taught *Ceremony* more than a dozen times, no classroom discussion that I have ever led comes close to the talk we had under the cottonwood trees near Canyon De Chelly the day after we drove past Pagate and Cubero, talked to a jewelry maker near Old Laguna, visited the Acoma pueblo, and saw Enchanted Mesa from the desert near the place where the novel begins. Issues of cultural tension, land destruction, healing, and stories were alive for those students in ways they can never be in the classroom.

Just as important, the students are visibly changing along the way. On the second trip, for example, our big tent went up every night at first because the students were frightened of the desert—those snakes, spiders, and scorpions and all that open space. Then one night the tent crew asked if they had to put it up. It stayed packed for the rest of the trip, as the students realized that their fears were groundless (pun intended). The importance and significance of water becomes very real to students who have to carry and heat it to wash dishes, who go several days without the luxury of a shower, and who sometimes have to learn firsthand what happens to hikers in the desert who do not drink enough. And food takes on new significance: when I offered to stop at a restaurant near the end of the second trip there was rebellion—cooking food together was no longer a chore; it had become a ceremony that the students did not want to miss. The view of shelter also changed. We spent a night at my father’s house on the edge of the Gila River Reservation south of Phoenix, and everyone quickly moved outside without even dis-

cussing it, no longer quite as comfortable within the air-conditioned space that used to be home. The students develop a deeper understanding of and respect for the cultures and the people they encounter and a deeper awareness about their own lives and assumptions.

Of course, the road is not completely smooth. Our adventures with water might help to illustrate the kinds of tension that can arise. On the first trip I noticed that there was a huge collection of plastic water bottles, as students felt they had to buy something at every stop and could not do without the familiar taste and coldness of bottled water. They thought that recycling the bottles made it just fine, but recycling bins are few and far between in the Arizona desert, so we quickly had bottles taking up nearly as much space as people in the vans. Moreover, the Hopis are proud of their water and have had to fight against those who want to bottle and sell it, and the students' suspicion of its slightly effervescent qualities and their insistence on finding sources of bottled water led to some tension. The water situation resulted in a fruitful discussion, though, and before the second trip I talked about water and the significance and cost to the land of drinking it refrigerated from plastic bottles as opposed to drinking the water that our hosts drink.

On the other hand, it is also hard to convince some students that they really do need to drink that much water and eat that many salty snacks when we hike in the desert. It sometimes takes the first bout of nausea and headache to make them respect the sun and the six-to-seven-thousand-foot altitude—very different from the air-conditioned classroom. There have been minor squabbles, people who do not quite get along at first, but those seem to smooth out. It is often hard to work enough discussion time and time for reflection into the schedule, and students affected by altitude and sun can get tired and cranky as we move from place to place.

Then there is the trip home. I have come to realize that the interstate system is a powerful cultural corridor. Students who have begun taking time for things and bringing awareness to eating, drinking, and buying can suddenly become impatient, full-fledged consumers when we hit I-40. Hamburgers, fries, ice cream, Coke, and cries of "Let's just get home" can threaten to smother the discussion. So we get together and talk about how to bring the journey home.

## COMPLETING THE CIRCLE

The classic journey story—present in so many cultures—begins with the traveler living an ordinary life in the terms of society until some circumstance propels him or her into an alternate world. In this world things have heightened significance, and the traveler is transformed in the encounter with this new significance. The return to the everyday world is usually perilous: The transformation has made it difficult for the traveler to come back to the old life and incorporate the newly gained knowledge. The traveler must acknowledge and embody his or her transformation—the real story of the journey—and yet also come back to live in the world she or he left. And it is hard to come back after the transformation the journey demands without either abandoning the new knowledge or finding oneself cut off from what used to be home.

The students who go on the Southwest seminar trip face related difficulties. Some of them are minor—several students say they have a hard time sleeping in a bed again. There are tearful farewells as the bonds created on the trip are broken by the return to student life and its demands on time. Participants complain that they cannot talk about the trip to their friends because they cannot communicate what it was like to anyone who has not been there. But the hardest question is how to bring what we have learned back to Conway, Arkansas. Students have responded in different ways: Some have decided on career changes, and others seem to return to the old life without great difficulty, though they often tell me that they think of the trip nearly every day.

After one trip, a “nontraditional” student asked me for ways of doing something different in Conway, and, since I had recently read a couple of articles on community gardens, I suggested that she look into that possibility. She was the kind of student to whom one should not make casual remarks. Within two weeks we had an appointment with the mayor of Conway, and, to make a long story short, we soon had land, water, and the help of the city director of parks and recreation. The garden has grown slowly and not always smoothly, but it has become an outdoor classroom as well as a place for local

people to grow vegetables. Another student who went on the trip got the honors college to sponsor an organic gardening class that was offered unofficially at first but now can be taken for credit. Students discuss theory and practice in the classroom, but they also spend several afternoons and weekends with their hands in the soil. Among the works they read are descriptions of planting from an American Indian perspective, of course. I have also had several interns from Hendrix College, a private liberal arts college across town, who have worked with me in the garden and gotten grants to help develop it, an arrangement that began when some Hendrix students went on the Southwest trip.

On the face of it, it seems a long way from Canyon De Chelly to a garden in Conway. And yet it all fits together, I think. Contemporary American Indian literature calls not just for literary appreciation but for action—new ways of connecting. If we simply become indignant about the treatment of the people and the land without changing the way we relate to them and to the land, then our education, I think, has been largely futile. Ultimately, although we can learn from the Pueblos, the Navajos, the Hopis, and the Pimas, we cannot look to them to solve the problem of our disconnectedness. Getting beyond the classroom means finding alternative ways of connecting where we are. We have to learn how to live in and with the places where we find ourselves. And once students do get out, they do not go back in all that easily. It is quite fitting, I think, that students who come back from visiting the canyons have helped other students get out of the classroom and into the garden.

#### NUTS AND BOLTS

Anyone who wants to plan a travel course such as the one I have described first needs to establish connections, of course. Without a lot of work ahead of time, a group may run the risk of offending local people or being relegated to tourist spots. As I mentioned earlier, I have been fortunate in having a colleague, Dr. Elaine Fox, who has worked as both sociologist and nurse on the Navajo Reservation and is informed about and appreciative of Navajo and Hopi traditions.

It was her experience that encouraged me to make the attempt. We made an exploratory trip nearly a year before the first travel seminar took place. I had contacted faculty at Northern Arizona University as well, and they recommended talking to the Museum of Northern Arizona. The museum staff was my second stroke of good fortune: Tracy Anderson, who was head of the head of the Ventures program and has since been promoted to director of educational programs, is knowledgeable, resourceful, very sensitive to cultural issues, and extremely adept at keeping students going under difficult conditions during the Colorado Plateau part of the trip. Her replacement in the Ventures program, Lisa Lamberson, is similarly competent and helpful. The other staff the museum has provided have been highly qualified. Now that I have established friendships among the Hopi and Navajo guides we meet with, I have thought of setting up that part of the trip on my own, but I have decided against it because Tracy and the museum staff do such a competent and thoughtful job that the money they get is more than a bargain, and it goes to help an institution that does excellent work, supporting Native artists, bringing together representatives of the peoples of the Colorado Plateau, and educating the public about cultural issues.

Funding is also a tricky consideration, since student budgets are limited. Fortunately, the nature of the course contributes to keeping expenses down. Since we camp every night, our expenses range from a high of \$24 for the whole group (Palo Duro Canyon State Park) to free (Canyon De Chelly, the Hopi Reservation, the grounds at the Museum of Northern Arizona.) By doing our own cooking we save lots of money as well. I ask each student to give me \$150 for food, camping, and other expenses, and usually I am able to return some of it at the end of the trip. As I mentioned before, the Museum of Northern Arizona contracts with our Navajo and Hopi educators, and the museum staff will work within the budget I give them. Grand Canyon National Park—and other parks—will grant a fee waiver to groups visiting for educational purposes. We take university vans and divide the rental and gas costs. To make a long story short, students going on the trip in the summer of 2006 paid about \$1,700 for all expenses—tuition and fees for three hours' course

credit, travel, food, and camping, and all programming. This compares quite favorably with other travel courses, which usually involve airline fares and motel charges. Of course, the success of the course depends on finding enough students who are willing to “rough it,” but that is what the experience is all about anyway—getting back in touch with the land, with the real source of food, shelter, and life.

To be blunt, I wish we could get more real support from the university administration for this kind of course. Students have to rely on the usual sources of financial aid, and though the dean of Liberal Arts encourages me to continue offering the course, there is not much the system allows him to do in the way of helping students find extra funding—the greatest need I run into. But that, I think, comes along with the nature of the course: if you want to get out of the box, you cannot expect the box makers to be a major source of support. The exception has been the Honors College, which does provide honors students with Travel Abroad grants for the course and has been very helpful in many other areas. But I find that students who really want to go find ways. In 2004, for instance, I did not have a single student who was receiving extra funding.

I have not had problems with liability, since the university’s insurance coverage extends to students participating in official university activities. As long as the proper papers are filled out at the right time, I am assured that we are covered in that area. Of course, I think it is important to be reasonably well versed in the kind of terrain to which we are going. My own experience hiking and camping in the Southwest has taught me to be attentive to students’ physical condition and to keep both eyes open for signs of dehydration or altitude sickness. The students joke that I know only one response to any situation—“drink some water; eat some salt.”

This course takes much more work than anything else I do. I am still dealing with some problems and issues—I want to connect with Navajo students at Diné College in Tsaile and possibly meet with Ofelia Zepeda in Tucson, for example, and I have not entirely figured out how to make the road home something other than an endurance test. As I write this, I am once again preparing to travel to Arizona to set up the activities we will participate in when we go on

our next trip and I am working to bring Sunny Dooley to campus once again, so students can get a sense of the Navajo people, stories, and culture. By May I know I will be questioning my sanity, having struggled with the university administration over details that do not fit in their administrative boxes, having had students drop out at the last minute, thinking about the planning and grocery shopping and possibilities for disaster I have left to face. But I also know that when we return in June I will be ready to go again. It is that kind of experience.

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# “Interpretation Is a Perilous Venture”

Petroglyphs, Maps, and DNA

REGINALD DYCK

We in Ohio also live in Indian Country, I want to remind students. Most works we read in our introductory Native American literature course are set in the West, but I want to start close to home. Mound Street runs through our campus, a reference to the early mound building cultures that thrived here. Petroglyphs seventy miles away also make this point.

Along with reminding us that this is Indian Country, petroglyphs can also help students confront the challenges of cross-cultural interpretation, the “perilous venture” (Swauger, *Petroglyphs* 257) we will face in this course. Cultural artifacts, carved in rock or printed on paper, are a part of particular discursive systems. I want students to recognize that Indian texts, even contemporary ones, are grounded in systems of meaning quite different from our own (I and almost all my students are non-Native). Interpreting these works is difficult, but the problem is ours. We must make the effort but should recognize the limits to our understanding. Boundaries between cultures are only partially permeable.

We must also take care not to project our own ways of making sense of the world onto other peoples’ artifacts by claiming universal meanings. “What is needed,” Immanuel Wallerstein notes, “is not to learn that we are citizens of the world, but that we occupy particular niches in an unequal world” (qtd. in Krupat 19). As students confront the challenges of interpreting texts from other cultures, they may come to recognize that our own beliefs and assumptions, our ideologies, are also grounded in socially constructed systems of meaning.

The lessons gained from looking at petroglyphs can be reinforced and extended by considering other interpretive challenges: a historical map and a newspaper article about DNA tests of two-thousand-year-old Indian remains.

### READING PETROGLYPHS

Our present knowledge of petroglyphs is somewhat hit and miss.<sup>1</sup> Because many sites have been discovered by amateur archeologists working close to home, we can assume other sites are yet to be discovered (Swauger, *Petroglyphs* 250). So far thirty-five Native American Indian petroglyph sites have been found in Ohio (Swauger, *Petroglyphs* 249). The Leo site, from which my examples are taken, is a large rock with a considerable number of petroglyphs carved on it.

I hand out a set of my own photographs of specific petroglyphs and ask students for possible interpretations of what the images represent as well as signify.<sup>2</sup> We quickly run into difficulties:

- How can we account for the fish on a hillside away from water?
- The round figure with horns could be “a humanized owl,” a mask, or “a mythological creature . . . [with] horns that signify a superior spirit or being” (Swauger, *Petroglyphs* 264).

After some discussion that leads to no definite conclusions, I show them another example photographed a few feet from the others: “Bob T. + Heather R.” Students laugh, but I assure them that it is a petroglyph, a contemporary one. They quickly hypothesize a fairly detailed description of the couple and their relationship, based on these few markings on a rock. I ask them why we can so readily interpret the last petroglyph but are baffled by the others. Students recognize that the last example invokes a system of meaning quite familiar to us. We sense that the other rock carvings have meaning, but we do not know the cultural systems that would allow us to understand them.

I found the Leo petroglyphs using James L. Swauger’s *Petroglyphs of Ohio*, a book I bring to class. He provides maps and diagrams

as well as useful generalizations about designs and distributions. Swauger warns us, "Interpretation is a perilous venture" (257), and acknowledges, "Logic does not necessarily lead to truth, but it is the only tool available to explain data from Eastern petroglyph sites" (267). This caution requires some exploration and explanation.

Swauger and others have done amazing detective work. He explains the process of deduction that leads to his conclusion about the creators of these artifacts.

- Because Ohio petroglyphs have a homogeneous style, they were probably all carved within a specific chronological and cultural period.
- No designs suggest European contact, so they must be before 1750.
- Because they are carved in sandstone, a comparatively soft stone that deteriorates, they cannot have been carved before 1000 BCE (the Paleo-Indian or Archaic eras), or they would have disappeared.
- We do have information about two groups indigenous to Ohio: the Adena, 1000 BCE–100 CE, and the Hopewell, 100–900 CE. Since the Ohio rock carvings do not show these peoples' design style or "high artistic talent," the petroglyphs seem to be from a different era. (I show examples in the classroom to illustrate the point.)
- All this (plus rates of deterioration determined through comparative analysis) suggests that the petroglyphs were carved between 1200 and 1750 CE, the Late Prehistoric period.
- Since few figures have weapons and there are no scenes of warfare, the carvings were probably created by peaceful people. During the last two hundred years or so of this period, war was a primary concern, as indicated by stockaded villages. Thus the carvings were likely created earlier than the later part of the Late Prehistoric period (*Petroglyphs* 267–69, 273).

Swauger continues the process to develop further hypotheses about these rock carvers. He reaches the conclusion that

The petroglyphs were carved by Algonquian-speaking Late Prehistoric Period, very likely proto-Shawnee, people living in Ohio sometime between A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1750. These people shared a set of symbols and perhaps mystic concepts with Ojibwa and other groups, chiefly Algonquian speakers, but did not share the *Midewiwin* concept. (*Petroglyphs* 273)

I ask students what we can learn from our first effort at reading in this Native American literature course. Hopefully they have begun to see the challenges of interpreting works from a culture different from our own. I want students to recognize that we should not assume too quickly that we understand other cultures' artifacts. Interpretation is a difficult, uncertain process, often limited but still possible and rewarding. We need to proceed with caution and respect.

I end this discussion with Swauger's amazing conclusion. In the book's final section, "Why Were They Carved?" Swauger answers, "I can say only that I still do not know" (274). Swauger's thoroughness (much more evident in his text than my summary), cautiousness, and honesty provide us a useful model. Not everyone who has thought about petroglyphs has been willing to reach his humbling conclusion. In an earlier work Swauger notes that a particular site in Massachusetts "has been interpreted as Carthaginian, Hebrew, Viking, and Portuguese, as well as American Indian, each interpretation being soberly advanced as the product of sound scholarly work" (*Rock Art* 17). The last phrase should be soberly considered. Swauger's conclusion makes an important point at the beginning of the course. The Ohio petroglyphs offer a lesson we come back to throughout the semester.

Even though he cannot read them, Swauger is confident that many petroglyphs do have meaning. The carvers did intend them to communicate (*Petroglyphs* 1–2).<sup>3</sup> Germaine Warkentin's engaging and provocative essay "In Search of 'The Word of the Other': Aboriginal Sign Systems and the History of the Book in Canada" challenges us to consider another interpretive issue in relation to Native American sign systems. Because Indians created petroglyphs, wampum, ledger book art, birch bark scrolls, totem poles, and other material forms

of communication, Warkentin suggests the inadequacy of designating traditional Native cultures as oral: "Native peoples of North American possess a rich legacy of material sign making" (3). She then explains the hierarchical power structure that is at stake in this characterization:

The customary distinction has been the sharp one (often continued into the present day) between orality and literacy, with its imperial assumption that the difference between European and indigenous cultures . . . is one between a primitive culture of orality and an evolved culture of the written. (4)

Warkentin extends this by questioning the distinction between "pre-history" and "history" which has been as destructive to the lives of the survivors of colonization as colonization was of their ancestors" (10).

Since this claim may not be immediately evident to students, we need to help them see that destruction can take many forms. It is inflicted not only on battlefields and reservations but also in popular culture and the academy. Conceptual boundaries have political implications. Writing, as privileged in Western culture, is generally quite narrowly defined. Petroglyphs, by challenging our assumptions, can give us a richer understanding and different evaluation of cultures that write differently.

I add a coda to this section by showing students photographs of petroglyphs I took while hiking near Tucson, Arizona. I ask why scholars are much more specific and confident in interpreting these examples. Again the point is that knowledge is contextual. For many petroglyphs in western North America, contemporary Indians have knowledge important for interpreting these carvings. There are contemporary Indians in Ohio, I emphasize. They cannot offer interpretive clues, however, because as far as we know direct cultural continuity has been broken.

Ohio rock carvings challenge us. Their meanings tantalize, and yet we find ourselves being outsiders. We look at the petroglyphs with more wonder than understanding. At the semester's beginning, this standpoint emphasizes the problematic of inadequate knowl-

edge about a culture. Extending the lesson with my next two examples will require more time. They challenge us further by shifting the focus to the more difficult problem of conflicting systems of meaning. We may find it easier to acknowledge our ignorance, as the petroglyphs require, than to recognize the power dynamics in the debate over what counts as knowledge.

### READING MAPS

Why are there comparatively few contemporary Indians and no reservations in Ohio? Students who have studied Native American history may provide ideas. Others may have had an internship at the Columbus Native American Center or participated in protests on Columbus/Native Americans Day at the city of Columbus's replica of the *Santa Maria*. This is an opportunity for them to tell their stories. I can add a quick history of early Indians if there is time.<sup>4</sup> With cultural contact and later conquest, systems of meaning quickly and continuously came into conflict. An Ohio Historical Society map, for sale in its gift shop, provides an entry into this problematic.

The title itself, *Indians in Ohio History*, indicates the particular conceptual framework used in constructing this map. Although it is crisscrossed with Indian trails, dotted with Indian towns, and marked by tribal names, the map's boundaries literally and conceptually mark the state of Ohio, a political construct imposed on a story of Indians beginning long before contact or statehood. With some questioning, students will come to see the implications of the map's boundaries. These are the spoils that belong to the winners of a conflict stretching back, as the accompanying chronology states, to 1669.

What counts within this particular system of meaning is made clear by the chronology. History begins with Joliet on Lake Erie, the first entry. Next comes La Salle, and then the third entry brings in the fur traders. Indians only enter this Ohio history when western tribes began bringing furs to various trading points. Indian history ends for this chronology when Indians no longer hold any land in the state: "The Wyandot reservation at Upper Sandusky was abandoned

marking the end of organized tribal life in Ohio." The term "abandoned" could be interrogated to help clarify the ideology embedded in the map's boundaries and title.

While it seems to be about Indians, this map is actually about Ohio identity. The chronology mainly lists Indian conflicts with settlers, government edicts, and military interventions. However, rather than illuminating a shared history, the map and chronology tell a one-sided story about the establishment of a state. Jeffrey Sissons explains that European settlers, in establishing nationhood, have often used indigenous artifacts and "a quasi-indigenous identity" to create an identity separate from the nation they left. "Public displays of indigenous 'tradition' combined with policies of forced assimilation were, therefore characteristic of this form of nationhood" (20). Suzanne J. Crawford finds the same conceptual appropriation in many archaeological studies of Native remains: "Again and again . . . [they] are referred to as 'national treasures' . . . for the benefit of all Americans" (216). The Ohio Historical Society map works similarly for Ohio and the United States. Indian history, embodied in Indian trails and scattered towns, is contained within the framework of state boundaries and a postcontact chronology that concludes with Indian removal. The map recognizes no Indian presence in the state from 1842 to the present. Students need to see the implications of excluding contemporary Indians and the earlier mound building peoples. The latter are the focus of the next section. And there too interpretation is a perilous venture into conflicted conceptual territory.

#### READING DNA

The Science section of *The Columbus Dispatch* ran an article a couple of years ago titled "Tribal links: 2,000-year-old DNA Connects Hopewell Indians, Asian Races, Researcher Says" (Lafferty 4A). The first few paragraphs explain an epistemological conflict:

According to Indian folklore, the Cherokee are distant relatives of the ancient Hopewell Indians, the mysterious race of Mound Builders who constructed huge geometric earthen monuments in central and southern Ohio.

Genetic evidence, however, doesn't back up the stories, a researcher says.

Studying DNA from 2,000-year-old Hopewell remains recovered 80 years ago near Chillicothe in Ross County, Lisa Mills found connections between the Mound Builders and Koreans, Mongolians and other Asian races.

For most students a conflict between Native oral tradition and DNA testing is not much of a fight, at least initially. In a culture that valorizes science, oral tradition is given little recognition as valid knowledge. This is especially true when it seems to be contradicted by as prestigious a tool as DNA, with its link to the legal system as seemingly indisputable evidence.

Because students are used to thinking of scientific systems of meaning as facts rather than as constructions and oral tradition as quaint stories, they need an explanation of Native systems of meaning based on oral tradition. Vine Deloria Jr. defines oral tradition in relation to Western science:

The non-Western, tribal equivalent of science is the oral tradition, the teachings that have been passed down from one generation to the next over uncounted centuries. The oral tradition is a loosely held collection of anecdotal material that, taken together, explains the nature of the physical world as people have experienced it and the important events of their historical journey. (36)

He goes on to explain that "people believed that each tribe had its own special relationship with the superior spiritual forces that governed the universe. The task of each tribe was to remain true to its special calling without worrying about what others were doing" (36).

"Indigenous knowledge" (IK) is a commonly used term for Native traditional knowledge. Rather than being abstract, distant, and objective (i.e., positivist), IK must be lived (Simpson 381). It unifies rather than dissects life:

Perhaps the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous Knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other

living beings and spirits that share their lands. . . . All aspects of knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned. (Marie Battiste and James Henderson, qtd. in McGregor 390)

Out of this unity comes specific goals for pursuing IK. Leanne R. Simpson makes clear that IK is an activist strategy: "Recovering and maintaining Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, and ways of knowing and applying those teachings in a contemporary context represents a web of liberation strategies" (373). And according to Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, "It is about regaining the ways of being that allowed our peoples to live a spiritually balanced, sustainable existence within our ancient homelands for thousands of years" (359).

This background should help prepare students for considering what is at stake in the epistemological conflict over Native origins. DNA testing, which connects Native Americans with Asia, is used as evidence for the Bering Strait theory of migration, an academically accepted explanation for Indians' presence in the Western Hemisphere. Historian George H. Knepper, in *Ohio and Its People*, explains:

Perhaps as long as 20,000 years ago during the last Ice Age, peoples from northeastern Asia crossed into Alaska on a land or ice bridge where today the waters of the Bering Strait flow. Recent evidence appears to confirm the likelihood that, while many descendants of these first American *immigrants* moved southward toward Mexico and South America, others fanned out in an easterly direction toward the Mississippi. Among the latter were the first people known to have reached Ohio. (9, emphasis added)

Knepper, past president of the Ohio Historical Society, does suggest interpretive caution with "perhaps" and "appears to confirm the likelihood," yet he creates no room for doubt about the basic theory. Consequently, he gives no recognition to the alternative explanation stated in the newspaper article that Native oral tradition links the Cherokees in Ohio not to Asians but to the Mound Builders (and to origins in the American continent itself; see note 6).

These observations should lead students to the question of why it matters whether Indians crossed the Bering Strait or descended from indigenous mound building people. Knepper offers a clue in calling Indians “immigrants.” This powerful term in the story the United States tells about itself has important ideological implications. The Bering Strait theory defines Indians not as original inhabitants but as “latecomers who had barely unpacked before Columbus came knocking on the door” (Deloria 68). If Indians arrived only a few centuries earlier than Europeans, Deloria explains, “they had no *real* claim to the land that could not be swept away by European discovery” (68, emphasis in original). James Wilson, in *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America*, also recognizes “an important legal and political dimension” to this interpretive conflict:

If, as archeology suggests, Native Americans arrived in America at a specific date and then moved around more or less incessantly, nudging and modifying and displacing each other as they went, then their claim to an absolute relationship with a particular landscape is undermined. They are reduced, more or less, to the same immigrant status as other North Americans. (13)

Native land claims are linked to Native sovereignty, the right to self-determination. Part of self-determination is the right to tell one’s own story and have it accepted as a valid form of knowledge. Crawford calls this the “semiotic sovereignty to speak for themselves, as subjects and not objects; to provide their own equally valued notion of history, time, space, and ancestry” (232). Many American Indians have not accepted the Bering Strait theory because it contradicts their traditional stories. Some of these include voyages across oceans; others describe a creation or migrations from other planets. Tribal stories refer to journeys north to places of constant ice and snow, give accounts of floods, and describe migrations around the hemisphere (Deloria 81–84). None, however, suggests a migration across the Bering Strait.

While some see Native and scientific systems of meaning as inherently contradictory, others find a more complex relationship between

them. Deloria is an example of the former. In *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*, he asserts that "the scientific view of Earth history is a rather simple thing depending more on the status of secular science than on the validity of its tenets" (39). In his chapter "Low Bridge—Everybody Cross," Deloria also argues for the scientific implausibility of the Bering Strait theory. He states, "American Indians, as a general rule, have aggressively opposed the Bering Strait migration doctrine because it does not reflect any of the memories or traditions passed down by the ancestors over many generations" (97). For Deloria, information about the pre-Columbian past depends on traditional knowledge provided tribal elders (11).<sup>5</sup>

In a *New York Times* op-ed piece worth discussing with students, N. Scott Momaday challenges Deloria's views: "Indian creationists, like creationist in general, assume unreasonable attitudes." Asserting that there is "solid evidence" for the Bering Strait theory, Momaday then argues for the legitimacy of scientific study: "Science has unlocked countless doors, has allowed human beings to see themselves with a clarity not available to our forebears." For Momaday and others, the root of the conflict is not actually scientific knowledge but scientific practice, the "shameful and unprofessional" violations of sacred sites and objects and the desecration of human remains. The issue here is respect rather than epistemology. Because of this legacy of "disrespect," Momaday explains, opposition arises among Native people against scientific intrusions. He sympathizes: "Because the scientific scrutiny of human remains once interred in sacred ground is indelibly associated with this painful history, Native Americans will resist. . . . At stake is their identity, their dignity and their spirit."

We need to bring this historical and cultural context to our discussion of the newspaper article that, in simplified fashion, pits DNA research against Native oral tradition. In his history of Native America, James Wilson offers a similar explanation for Native resistance to scientific explanations like the Bering Strait theory: "To understand this, you have to see it in the context of the Indian's recent historical experience: generations in which native beliefs,

languages and practices have been ridiculed and often brutally suppressed” (12–13).

Yet Momaday and others argue for a productive engagement between the two systems of meaning. His op-ed piece responds to a contemporary controversy that has received considerable attention: the finding of the ancient remains of what has been called Kennewick Man. Five tribes and a group of anthropologists have fought in the courts, government agencies, and the press over what should be done with the remains. Not surprisingly, the former argued for immediate reburial as an act of respect, the latter for scientific study before that happens. Writing about the Kennewick Man controversy, Crawford clarifies the scientific story by recognizing that through it “only a small fragment of the ‘real’ can be seen, and it is necessarily viewed through very embodied, very particularly situated lenses” (232). Along with emphasizing the limits of scientific inquiry, Crawford notes its cultural power. She argues that our culture’s tendency to accept scientific explanations rather than Native people’s own stories of their history indicates “the power differential inherent in colonial relations” (229). Crawford insists that we must accept the right of contemporary Native peoples to tell their own stories (232). Similarly, Wilson argues that to understand Native American experience, we will need to challenge the dominance in our minds of the scientific perspective (15). Recognizing that power is knowledge, we need to encourage students to reconsider the relationship between scientific explanations and the oral traditions that have sustained Native peoples for centuries.

This brings us back to the newspaper article and the significance of conflicting origin stories about Ohio Indians. The point of this lesson is not for students to reject their culture’s scientific stories. Rather, I hope they will question the tyranny of exclusively accepting scientific explanations and recognize the Native stories they will be reading as embodying valid systems of meaning, even as they struggle to understand them and their relationship to other explanations.

Origin stories, both Native and Western, matter because they help us understand who we are, and they teach us values and strategies for living. Wilson begins his history of Native North America with a use-

ful contrast between these types of origin stories. The opening chapter, "This Is How It Was: Two Views of History," could be the basis for an effective, class-length discussion. After opening with a Shastika creation account, he then uses Ronald Wright's definition of myths to dispel the idea that they are falsehoods or fantasies. Wilson then explains the importance of myths to a culture:

Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations. Myths create and reinforce archetypes so taken for granted, so seemingly axiomatic, that they go unchallenged. Myths are so fraught with meaning that we live and die by them. They are the maps by which cultures navigate through times. (4)

Wilson makes a similar claim for history: "The function of history is to provide not a linear record, but a blueprint for living, specific to a particular people in a particular place" (8). This parallel between oral tradition and modern historical writing is significant. Whatever a culture calls its stories, they are maps that illuminate and instruct the present.<sup>6</sup>

The newspaper article's conclusion suggests a way that knowledge of the past derived from DNA can usefully provide a fuller understanding of the present. Researcher Lisa Mills found that the Mound Builders are related to quite a number of modern Indian peoples. "If they're trading items," she notes, "they were also trading genes" (qtd. in Lafferty). This connection between past and present needs continual emphasis in our teaching.

#### PEDAGOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

All this, of course, is quite a bit to cover, both temporally and conceptually. In deciding what to include and how much time to take with it, I try to keep in mind my teaching goals as well as the background of the students. I want to be careful not to overwhelm them at the beginning of the course. Some material, particularly the discussion of DNA, might best be postponed until later in the semester,

maybe on a day when students need time to finish reading *Almanac of the Dead*.

If they are to become more self-reflexive in their interpretive efforts, students will need guided practice and models to follow. These three approaches offer starting points. If the lessons make an impression, they can be touchstones for the rest of the semester. Lessons on interpretation will have relevance not only for reading early Indian texts but also for the twentieth-century Native American literature that will follow.

These examples have particular interest for my students because of the regional connections. However, I think they have wider than local relevance and thus are useable beyond Ohio. The interpretive principles related to petroglyphs can be explored with other artifacts as well. As mentioned earlier, Warkentin's essay on sign systems includes ledger books and totem poles; the essay opens with a fascinating and quite useable story of a particular scene of communication involving wampum. One might consider which Native nations will be represented in upcoming texts and use artifacts from them. For example, if Greg Sarris's *Grand Avenue* will be used, photos of Pomo baskets, the beautiful feathered ones or others the size of a pencil eraser, could be examined. Sarris's essay "A Culture under Glass: The Pomo Basket" provides valuable background as well as provocative considerations for the discussion of any Native artifacts.

The ideologies embedded in the Ohio map can likely be found in other states' maps as well. An alternative I have used is the opening pages of an U.S. history textbook. One can often find there the same Eurocentric ideologies although recently published texts may be different. A comparison of an older and newer text can be quite revealing for students. State history texts might be even more useful.

An alternative entry point for considering Native and scientific systems of meaning is the Kennewick Man controversy mentioned earlier. An electronic search of *The New York Times* using "Kennewick Man" as a keyword will bring up articles that tell an engaging ten-year story of this controversy, beginning with the discovery in 1996. While Native individuals are quoted in many articles, the underlying point of view is Western. Essays in *The Repatriation Reader*, edited by

Devon A. Mihesuah, offer a range of perspectives on this controversy and the broader issues involved. Particularly relevant are the essays by Suzanne J. Crawford and Larry J. Zimmerman. I like using newspaper articles and contemporary controversies because they remind us that Indians are not just in our textbooks.

Interpretation is at the heart of almost everything we do in our teaching. While I want to familiarize students with new bodies of literature and the different cultures that produced them, I begin with defamiliarization or estrangement. Native American writers "demand that non-Indian readers acknowledge differing epistemologies, that they venture across a new 'conceptual horizon' and learn to read in new ways," Louis Owens explains (4). Recognizing differences is an important step toward the self-reflexive reading that I hope students will develop. It can be a safeguard against the comfortable trap of "literary tourism" (Owens 43).

#### NOTES

1. Petroglyphs are created by "sculpturing: carving, pecking, rubbing, or a combination of these techniques." Pictographs are paintings on rocks. James L. Swauger has no knowledge of pictographs in Ohio (*Petroglyphs* 1).

2. I am happy to send as attachments the six photographs I use. They reproduce fairly well on plain paper (e-mail: rdyck@capital.edu).

3. Swauger concludes, "Were a design often repeated, it might signify that it had meaning for the carvers and in all probability for the cultural groups to which they belonged. It might also mean only that it was a design aesthetically pleasing to the carvers or one easily engraved. If a design is repeated in a recurrent pattern in relation to another design or to a group of designs then surely there must be a commonly understood meaning in the designs" (*Petroglyphs* 2).

4. Barbara Alice Mann's essay on the Greenville Treaty provides a detailed account of how the treaty process was used to dispossess Indians of their land in the Old Northwest. O'Donnell's *Ohio's First Peoples* provides a broader history.

5. In the introduction to *Red Earth, White Lies*, Deloria states, "I do believe that perhaps only 10 percent of the information that Indians possess is presently in print and available for discussion. . . . But I do hope that

this book encourages elders to give us some of their knowledge before they pass on" (11).

6. Wilson then draws out the quite different conceptual maps provided by the biblical Genesis story and Indian origin stories, which emphasize belonging rather than alienation. Native stories "confirm that (unless they have been displaced by European contact and settlement) they still live in the place for which they were made: either the site of their own emergence or creation, or a 'Promised Land' which they have attained after a long migration" (9). The Genesis account of migration, like our scientific stories, "reinforces our basic perception of reality . . . meaning comes from change: as we move further and further from our own beginnings, we also move upwards, progressively conquering both an alien world and our own ignorance an irrationality. In the process, we leave behind other, less 'developed' peoples" (13–14).

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## “I Liked It So Much I E-mailed Him and Told Him”

Teaching *The Lesser Blessed* at the University of California

JANE HALADAY

### MY STORY IS NOT MINE ALONE

Class ends like a scene from the novel itself. “Okay, when we meet next week we’ll be into our second novel, Richard Van Camp’s *The Lesser Blessed*,” I announce.

From the back corner of the room Luana, a Tongan student, is scrutinizing Van Camp’s moody book flap photo. “He’s hot!” she proclaims. The class—seventeen women and three men—laughs.

“Yeah,” I concede, “he’s a good looking man.” I pause. “But he looks even better in person.” They perk up, watching me in anticipation. “He’s a bit young for me, though,” I finally say. More laughter.

“Do you know him?” Luana asks.

“Yes, I met him at a conference last fall. If you *ever* get a chance to hear him read his stuff, *go!* He’s an incredible storyteller.”

“Where’s he at again?” Luana asks.

“Vancouver,” I tell her.

“Vancouver . . .” she echoes dreamily.

“Is that in Washington?” somebody else asks.

“It’s in *Canada*,” Luana answers.

“I guess you could transfer up there,” I say to Luana, “but I hear it gets pretty cold.” Not long after this, Luana dropped my class with no explanation. I still wonder if she transferred.

This essay is just one story in the ongoing conversation of how to approach teaching indigenous literatures in colonial educational

institutions. My pedagogy stresses sharing an interactive process of reading and reflection with my students, what black feminist scholar bell hooks terms "engaged pedagogy" in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Hooks's description of engaged pedagogy insists that discomfort, confusion, pleasure, risk-taking, and revelation are not only acceptable but are necessary in the process of acquiring knowledge. While all ethical educators encourage their students to view texts as the ultimate authorities about their own stories' meanings, the complex cultural content of Native texts pushes me and my students even further in recognizing that none of us, sometimes not even the authors themselves, may fully understand what and how the stories "mean"—and that their meanings are multiple. Through sharing my experiences teaching Richard Van Camp's *The Lesser Blessed*, I hope to reveal the power of this particular text and the way its effects on students who willingly engage it can create a collaborative learning atmosphere that is transformative. This environment requires me to relinquish primary authority (not always easy) to open a space for student vulnerability and voice, while simultaneously remaining an active moderator and guide shaping the direction of the class. In such a space, students, author, and educator share power in the discussion and comprehension of culture and story.

Students' and my own interactions with the novel's author, Richard Van Camp, a member of the Tlicho, or Dogrib, Nation, have become another strand braided into the collaborative process of teaching *The Lesser Blessed*.<sup>1</sup> I am sharing these interwoven stories to outline the possible ways in which both educators and authors may interact with and be inspired by the "consumers" of their textual productions, those hungry readers of and listeners to their stories. *The Lesser Blessed* is now taught in only a smattering of U.S. and Canadian high schools, colleges, and universities, and to date there is a dearth of literary criticism on the novel.<sup>2</sup> It is my hope that this essay may add to a growing body of discussion around this vital text and encourage other educators to include it in their aboriginal/Native and other literature curricula.

*The Lesser Blessed* is a complex, painful, hilarious story informed

by raw poetics and deep humanity. The novel describes “the north’s social ills,” as a book review in the newspaper *Wind Speaker* puts it, replete with “the alcoholism, violence, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and other pains that accompany people who have been colonized” (11). At the same time, *The Lesser Blessed* is ignited not only by Van Camp’s recurring motif of fire as a purgative and a force of destruction but with the author’s unflagging optimism in the face of harsh reality, his belief in restoration and redemption. This optimism is expressed through seventeen-year-old protagonist Larry Sole. In equally exuberant language, Larry lambastes the irrelevance of his dysfunctional high school system that creates students “who were baby birds falling to their deaths while the school was guilty of failure to breathe” (8) and rhapsodizes over the beauty of his initially unattainable heart’s desire, Juliet Hope, who “had the face of angel, with dark green eyes the colour of grass on a rainy day. . . . And I adored her seven dreams deep” (27).

Larry’s eleventh grade high schooler perspective makes *The Lesser Blessed* eminently teachable, and students respond powerfully to Larry’s voice. Because the novel speaks so well for itself, I have found my role in teaching *The Lesser Blessed* to be primarily a guide in negotiating the particular historical and cultural information infusing the text. This too is a collaboration, since I choose not to lecture extensively on aboriginal/Native literary texts but require my students to do research presentations on issues related to them, after which we question, clarify, and discuss the material presented. I help fill in gaps where I can, readily acknowledging when I cannot. Because so much class time is spent in dialogue with my students, I am including their voices here through excerpts from the written responses I solicited from them about the novel, all of which are used with the students’ permission. I ask the following four very basic questions on the Novel Evaluation Forms (which are not graded but receive class credit) given to students after finishing each novel in the course:

1. Did you like this novel? If “yes,” what specifically did you enjoy? Be as detailed as possible.

2. If "no," what specifically didn't you like? Be as detailed as possible.
3. Were there particular challenges for you in reading this text? What were they? Were they resolved?
4. What, if anything, do you believe you will remember or take away from reading this novel?

#### WHAT STUDENTS SAID

I enjoyed this novel because it was so different from anything I have ever read. I especially liked the storytelling element, either when Larry is telling his stories or when he is listening.

—Pam, anthropology major, Native American studies minor

I loved how realistic the novel was. As a reader I never doubted the possibility of this story in that place. I liked that his writing from a high school boy was very believable; at times he seemed like every guy I knew in high school.

—Michelle, plant biology major, Native American studies minor

I love this book. I loved how it draws you in and keeps you there with the characters. I also enjoyed how while reading it I could almost hear the music and the characters talk.

—Linda, history major

I liked the novel for its raw language and style because it fit perfectly with the nature of the main character. I liked the constant presence of music—this provided a reality check and an escape from the real world at the same time.

—Karyn, Native American studies major

While a number of the students in the two upper-division Native American literature classes in which I taught *The Lesser Blessed* were Native American studies majors, the majority were not. Some had read aboriginal/Native fiction before; most had not. Discussion of the nonsequential organizational style in which many aboriginal/

Native authors choose to write and its relationship to oral storytelling traditions is an ongoing conversation that takes place with each individual text in all my aboriginal/Native literature classes, the issues and ideas on this theme weaving themselves together more strongly over time. Fragmentation in Van Camp's novel has additional dimensions relating to the sexual trauma Larry has experienced and the indirect way he must narrate his story—on his own terms and in his own time—to disclose to readers the painful core of his experience.

#### WHAT STUDENTS SAID

The only challenge was that the story was not told straight out. We had to read the whole book to truly understand what was going on. It wasn't until I looked over the book a second time [that] I really understood what was really going on.

—Katie, sociology major, Native American studies minor

I had a hard time in the beginning because I really wanted to know what happened with his father, but this ignorance kept me intrigued and I couldn't put the novel down. Looking back, I would not have wanted it any other way—it works perfectly.

—Lauren, Native American Studies major

The fragmentation and non-sequential chronology made it difficult to sort out the plotline, especially when Larry was having flashbacks in the middle of a scene. However, this difficulty only added to the novel's effectiveness. This fragmentation is really how one who has gone through something traumatic can begin to come to terms with it.

—Ben, English major

I love the voice the author uses, it really seems like a teenage kid talking to you. I like the circular patterning because it adds depth to the book. It was very difficult and depressing to read, so the initial reading was not very enjoyable. But after discussion and writing the response paper the genius of the way the

book is put together caused me to respect it even more. [I will remember] [t]he difficulty of this kid's life and how well the book was constructed and written.

—Jennifer, community and regional development major

How to tackle issues of style, content, and voice with my particular student population? How to teach Van Camp's novel to mostly upper-middle class, nonaboriginal/non-Native students at the University of California, Davis, a "tier-one" research institution that is geographically and ideologically remote from Van Camp's Dogrib Nation and culture? The thirty-one total students in these two Native American studies upper-division fiction classes were mostly white, with several Latina/o and Asian American students, one Pomo student (during winter quarter), one Inupiaq student (during summer session), and no African American students. As usual in our Native studies classes, most students were women; most were juniors and seniors; none were international students. Not only geographically distant, my students were, except for the few Native studies majors and two Native students, also ideologically removed from the concerns of the aboriginal peoples whose lives are the focus of *The Lesser Blessed*.

The identity politics involved in teaching Native literatures at the college and university level (and all levels) requires an ongoing understanding of who my students are, who I am in relation to the texts I teach, and my articulation of this relationship (which continues to develop) with my students when I teach. Teaching aboriginal/Native texts as a non-Native has a particular value that needs to be faced and continues to be debated. Yet while I believe I am responsible for representing myself honestly to my students, I do not feel compelled to foreground my own identity in my teaching; the focus of my courses is the literature, not myself. Non-Native allies and educators have a place in the decolonizing project of Native studies education alongside Native educators, who ought not to be forced to bear this burden alone. As an educator of others, I am also continually educating myself. Although I bring academic qualifications and intellectual ability to the study of aboriginal/Native texts, I do not bring embodied autobiography and do not presume to speak with the authority of experience, which some of my students have. In the

collaborative process of teaching texts from cultural communities outside my own, I keep in mind hooks's belief that

if I bring to the class only analytical ways of knowing and someone else brings personal experience, I welcome that knowledge because it will enhance our learning. Also, I share with the class my conviction that if my knowledge is limited, and if someone else brings a combination of facts and experience, then I humble myself and respectfully learn from those who bring this great gift. I can do this without negating the position of authority professors have, since fundamentally I believe that combining the analytical and the experiential is a richer way of knowing. (89)

While engaged pedagogy (which may merely be another way of describing many of the longstanding practices of indigenous education) is my preferred approach to teaching, I have come to believe it may be especially necessary when educators feel most vulnerable, when they are teaching an unfamiliar text or topic and so may feel inclined (as I have) to mask their insecurities by cramming themselves and their students with facts and resorting to lengthy lectures. This "banking system of education" (hooks 5) is safe for instructors and familiar to University of California students but does little to nurture collaborative inquiry or foster meaningful classroom relationships. In sharing with students the process of teaching an unfamiliar text, educators model to students that educators are also still students, eager to learn new things and open themselves to new voices and experiences. This example has the potential to create a lively classroom atmosphere of shared authority that invites open-ended questioning and encourages students to continue seeking out literatures and worldviews from within and beyond their immediate communities.

#### WHAT STUDENTS SAID

Specifically, I liked the pace of the book and its structure. I thought Van Camp's characters were dynamic and believable.

And I liked that despite the seriousness of the topics in the story, often it was full of hilarious moments, which allowed me to care more about the characters and better identify with them.

—Candace, women and gender studies major

I thought this novel painted a very detailed and authentic portrait of what it would be like to be a young Native living in a very isolated and small town. So I will take that reality of what it would be like to be in that situation away from reading this. I also will remember Van Camp's emphasis on the importance of storytelling as a way to come to terms with oneself and be able to re-examine an event that would be too difficult to recount normally. The story can be a powerful medium to be able to look at one's life in a much different way.

—Ben, English major

I selected six novels for the ten-week quarter and chose First Nations and Native American writers (three female and three male). I tried to pair the texts very loosely by region or theme. Our first book was Jeannette Armstrong's *whispering in shadows*, which I chose as a companion to *The Lesser Blessed* because of its interconnecting themes around storytelling, its similar patchwork structure, and because of Armstrong (who is Okanagan) and Van Camp's relationship through the En'owkin Writing Centre, which Armstrong helped found and of which Van Camp is a graduate. Together, these two novels and their authors enact the ideas of the community they represent and emphasize the type of literary mentoring and legacies that aboriginal and Native authors often share: Van Camp has been one of Armstrong's writing students and is now himself a creative writing teacher at the University of British Columbia.

My approach to providing cultural and historical background to the novels in this class, as it is in my lower-division general education classes, was to have students prepare individual research presentations on topics I assign. "Culture" in *The Lesser Blessed* is multidimensional, however, and includes characters who are Dogrib, Métis, Slavey, and Eurocanadian/white. In addition, the novel not only

includes aspects of traditional aboriginal cultures (through stories and cultural practices); also represented are the contemporary, multiethnic high school culture of Fort Simmer and youth drug, alcohol, and music cultures. This ethnic-and-otherwise “multiculturalism” was perfectly comprehensible to Native students. Meanwhile, non-Native students unfamiliar with aboriginal cultural practices and experiences as they appear in this text—for example, subsistence hunting, storytelling, the residential school experience—were nevertheless quite familiar with the metal music culture of AC/DC, Iron Maiden, and Van Halen; illicit parties in friends’ living rooms; and the ritual of “hot-knifing.” Thus, while I do strive to foreground certain cultural and historical information in connection with this text, I also believe that the immediate, visceral representation of youth culture, its languages, losses, and loves, makes *The Lesser Blessed* accessible to all types of students without extensive prereading research.

In the winter class, a regular UCD quarter of six rapid-fire weeks, we spent about a week and a half on each novel, which meant three hour-and-fifty-minute classes. On the first and second days of both classes, I assigned individual research presentation topics relevant to each novel and assigned pairs of student facilitators for each class period to guide discussion on the texts. This immediately underscores my goal that students are responsible for creating the tone of our class, which will not be built around the sort of professorial lecture style they have become well trained to passively expect and accept at the University of California. Although some came to the class with prior knowledge of certain topics or novels, most students signed up for both individual presentations and pair facilitations knowing little or nothing about their subjects. Guidelines for student presentations were printed and specific, because I have assigned research presentations in my Native studies classes for the past six years (see appendix). By contrast, my guidelines for student facilitations were verbal, minimal, and open: “Just come up with something to get the class engaged and talking” was my basic mandate, and I suggested and modeled possibilities of how to do this. This informality proved too casual for some students, whose facilitations

suffered from their inability to spark class discussion because their questions to the class were overly broad, or they had not developed alternative strategies to engage the class when they discovered (as we often do) that many had not completed the readings. Cultivating these skills takes years of consistent practice in the classroom, and I fault myself for many of the weaknesses in student facilitations.

While some of the facilitations on *The Lesser Blessed* were lively, my nonchalant instruction on creating dynamic facilitations in winter quarter led me to provide more concrete guidelines during summer session. These were still verbal, but together my students and I discussed specific pointers (such as interactive activities rather than passive, instructor-focused lecture) that would create a dynamic facilitation on the text. Further, I added short, weekly written response papers (rather than less frequent longer essays) on the texts in the summer class, along with a course reader with author interviews and aboriginal/Native literary critical and cultural material.<sup>3</sup> Both of these additions enhanced students' comprehension of and insight into the text.

In the winter class, I divided the reading of *The Lesser Blessed* between two Tuesday/Thursday classes within the same week, which proved to be another mistake. The division made it difficult for the first pair of student facilitators (both of whom had devoured the whole book by then, as had many others) to focus only on the first half of the text. Knowing how the story ended, they now had deeper insight into meanings and references in the first half of the novel and naturally wanted to include these in their discussion but felt constrained because not everyone had read the ending. I had students read the entire novel in the summer class, both because the book is short (119 pages) and because I agreed with my winter students' suggestion that a more holistic discussion of the novel's early portion can take place when we know the story's outcome.

Student research presentations on aboriginal/Native histories and cultures are always productive, I believe, even when they contain completely ridiculous, irrelevant, and/or racist information. I say this because the presentations at once provide helpful supplemental material (when it is accurate) to the literary texts under discus-

sion along with opportunities to critique cultural biases in research practices and content (when these are bogus). I challenge students to interrogate their cultural assumptions in these areas and to consider the language they use when they present: to refrain, for example, from calling something “weird” when they simply mean it is unfamiliar to them. In the University of California classroom, presentations by non-indigenous students of any ethnicity are likely to reveal stereotypical attitudes both subtle and blatant. The colonial dichotomies manifested in these perceptions range from students who have been born and raised in California not having realized that there are living California Indian people to others believing that all Native Californians—and by extension, all Indians—are now rich from casino income.

Requiring student research presentations on aboriginal/Native topics also frequently reveals the limitations of archival or printed information on certain aspects of Native life that are written from an indigenous perspective—one of my specific requirements for presentation source material—and I have had many students begin their presentations with feeble disclaimers along the lines of, “Um, it was *really hard* to find any information from a Native source on this topic . . . sorry.” While I am chronically annoyed by students who begin their presentations in this manner, I nevertheless relish the opportunity to explore with them *why* it might be that they had such difficulty finding written source material by indigenous people on particular topics (e.g., information that non-Native students may perceive as “factual” that is actually sacred and thus not to be discussed in print), as this leads to discussions of outsider expropriations of tribal information and erasure of Native voices, as well as indigenous efforts to protect certain community information from the general public.

Presentations on *The Lesser Blessed* for both classes included an author biography, the history and culture of the Dogrib Nation, and the history of the En’owkin Centre, a school dedicated to and established by aboriginal people on the Penticton Reserve for the perpetuation of indigenous knowledge in education.<sup>4</sup> I chose to include a presentation on the history of federal Indian boarding schools with another novel, Debra Magpie Earling’s *Perma Red*, later in the winter

course; in the interest of time, I did not also assign a presentation on residential school experience, although we discussed these issues while discussing *The Lesser Blessed*. In the summer course, I did add a student presentation on residential school experiences for aboriginal students. I decided to foreground the issues of colonial education earlier in summer the course to highlight these histories, and I also wanted to discuss differences as well as similarities between Canadian residential and U.S. federal boarding schools for indigenous students.<sup>5</sup> The legacy of residential school trauma represented in *The Lesser Blessed* is without question one of the fundamental themes of Larry's story.

Students in both classes did very well in presenting their author biographies on Van Camp, which requires creativity since little published biographical information exists about this young author beyond a few interviews and his own Web site.<sup>6</sup> But Richard's dynamic, accessible Web site provides a rich source of information and an ideal venue through which to emphasize to students the value of aboriginal/Native self-representation. As a class, we knew that the biographical information we received was reliable and accurate because it was primarily in Van Camp's own words and was created by him. This Web site is also valuable, I feel, in providing students with a type of immediate access to an author that translates into students' increased buy-in to what they are reading (not that they need much with this book). They can "get to know" Richard through reading about his favorite aboriginal and Native authors; the "20 Music Videos that Changed [His] World Forever" (Michael Jackson's *Thriller* is number one); reading book reviews and interviews; and downloading and listening to readings of his short stories by the author himself and by Cree actor Ben Cardinal. Students can also check out Richard's blog and e-mail him directly, as a number of students did. And, to their delight, Richard wrote back.

#### WHAT STUDENTS SAID

Great novel, so honest and believable. I felt the characters were members of my family or neighbors. As a native I under-

stand many of the violent, brutal descriptions like rape, fights, domestic disputes. . . . [The book made me remember] my wicked teen years!! And this book reminded me of my first love! . . . I liked this book so much I e-mailed Van Camp and told him.

—Elsie, economics major, Native American studies minor

I loved the novel. The way in which it was written just astonished me. It was a sad novel. But I felt somewhat connected [to] the character Larry. It was easy for me to feel for Larry. The book really came to life for me. . . . Despite hardships there is hope. A person doesn't have to define themselves by their hardships. These things happened, but they don't have to consume my identity.

—Katie, sociology major, Native American studies minor

Most of the presentations on *The Lesser Blessed* were well researched and respectfully presented. Rachel's presentation on the Dogrib Nation and culture was more problematic and is emblematic of some of the commonly held attitudes of many of UC Davis's privileged white students. Rachel presented her information from the perspective of a well-intended, young, white, liberal American female who finds the *idea* of Native cultures fascinating (her mother had once dated a man from Taos Pueblo, she happily informed me) but is disturbed when the realities of Native experience do not fit comfortably within her own sensibilities and worldview. In discussing Dogrib lifeways, for example, Rachel showed us a PowerPoint image of a smiling Dogrib man standing with his rifle beside a huge caribou buck he had killed. Hunting is a powerful motif in *The Lesser Blessed*, and imagery of literal subsistence hunting as well as metaphorical hunts abounds in the text. As Rachel clicked up the image of the proud Dogrib hunter she said, "I'm sorry about this picture." She then proceeded with her presentation.

After Rachel was finished, there was the usual question-and-answer period, during which I notoriously ask more questions than my students, despite my pedagogical ideal of student-centered discourse. I asked Rachel, "Why did you apologize for the image of the

hunter with his kill?" She replied, "Well, personally I don't believe in hunting." I then asked her, and the entire class, to consider reading the image she had chosen—the hunter's broad smile, the beautiful beefy caribou—from the perspective of a Dogrib person whose traditional and perhaps immediate survival, as well as spiritual beliefs and community consolidation, incorporate hunting practices that honor relationship with animal relatives. A conversation followed on reading aboriginal literatures from a cultural perspective as much as possible and on the importance of identifying the cultural biases in one's personal beliefs to be conscious of them while engaging aboriginal/Native texts. This is not the same as abandoning one's own beliefs, I explain, but is a necessary move in recognizing that there is more than one cultural perspective that is true. "You don't have to believe these things yourself," I often say to students. "But can you accept that *others* believe them?" At the same time, I have had many white students at UC Davis who have grown up in central California and whose middle-class families are working ranchers and farmers who also hunt. These students often make passionate, positive connections with indigenous worldviews around the sacredness of animals and earth and the proper attitude required when taking an animal's life, in ways that many of the more affluent or urban students (and not only whites) may not.

Rachel's remarks about hunting contrasted sharply with Arnie's, a nineteen-year-old Inupiaq student in the summer class. Arnie, who came from the far northern community of Unalakleet, Alaska, was revolutionized by Richard's novel and related to everything from community dysfunction and empty Lysol bottles to eating *muktuk* (whale) and not dropping your jacket on the floor indoors because of the bad luck it will bring (*The Lesser Blessed* 32). Subsistence and ceremonial hunting were natural and cherished parts of life for Arnie, who responded to Richard's novel not only as a Native student from the wintry northlands but as a young gay Native reader. One day during the week we were reading and discussing the novel, Arnie came to class and slapped his hand down on the desk.

"Johnny Beck is gay!" Arnie declared to our close-knit group of eleven.

Johnny Beck is the novel's antihero, the macho Métis newcomer to Fort Simmer who defends and befriends Larry, the out-of-towner who initially breathes new life into the excruciating monotony of the Fort Simmer high school scene and hooks up with Juliet Hope, only to ultimately reveal his own set of wounds, flaws, and failures by the end of the story.

"He is?" I asked Arnie. I enjoyed how in this class we talked about the characters as if they were people we knew that we had just heard some juicy gossip about. "Why do you think so?"

"Okay, look, on page 22," Arnie said, flipping his book open. "Johnny calls Larry to meet for coffee, like a date, you know? And when Larry says, 'How come you decided to call?,' Johnny says, 'Well, Lare, if you must know, the Big Kahoona has the strangest urge to hump the skinniest boy in town!' Come on now! He's gay!"

Our class started to chatter, and although I had not previously read Johnny Beck as gay, Arnie's examples were solid and persuasive. From my stories, the class knew Richard and I were acquainted; I had by this time met up with Richard at a second conference, the Wordcraft Circle "Returning the Gift XIII—Celebrating Our Words" Conference at the University of Lethbridge (May 11–14, 2005), where I chaired a pedagogical panel on *The Lesser Blessed* that Richard himself attended.

Eventually, Arnie said to me, "Ask him! Ask Richard Van Camp!"

"Why don't you ask him?" I told him. "You know you can e-mail him from his Web site."

Arnie said, "But you know him."

"All right," I said, "I'll ask him." I e-mailed Richard after class, and he got back to me the next day:

Jane, thank you for your e-mail. Johnny Beck is not gay. He's hetero all the way. I do believe that there is a quiet love and admiration that happens between men that they never talk about. We light up when our brothers walk into the room. That's what Larry and Johnny have, nothing more. But that's me talking. If your student sees it and can back it up, who's to say he's not right? It's all about interpretation, right?

I forwarded Richard's response to Arnie, who seemed crestfallen about the news of Johnny's heteronormativity when I saw him the next day.

"Hey look," I told Arnie. "Just because Richard says he's straight doesn't mean he is. Like he said, these things are open to interpretation. And personally, I don't always think authors know everything about their characters even when they think they do. Who knows what these guys are up to behind Richard's back!" Arnie just grinned.

I include the details of this particular collaboration around *The Lesser Blessed* because I appreciate the way an issue arose for one student that resulted in a dialogue between author, student, and educator. Part of what is so powerful about Van Camp's novel is that it positively and honestly invites us to see ourselves, and people very familiar to us, in the characters, something especially valuable for young aboriginal/Native readers like Arnie. Arnie recognized facets of himself and his community in *The Lesser Blessed* and was encouraged by both the author and his teacher to pursue a new interpretation of the text through close reading, analysis, and honoring his own life experience. In his weekly response paper that week, titled "Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner—A Gay Marathon," Arnie wrote about Johnny Beck's queer identity:

It is evident that Johnny, much to the despair of the ladies, is an "in-the-closet" homosexual that uses violence to disguise it. Many homosexuals in a highly conservative environment often use the techniques Johnny does to reinforce their power and dignity while deep down inside themselves they are yelling songs of freedom, trying to escape the torture of being a homosexual in an unsympathetic social milieu. . . .

What do you make of the interactions between the boys [Larry and Johnny]? Do you find it just a sense of brotherly love? It can't be. The book is purposely descriptive to create a sense of homoeroticism to subtly acknowledge Johnny's sexuality. Its author, Richard Van Camp, fills this book with "unavoidable truth," yelling to its readers: You must break

from the social stereotypes of homosexuality! It's around us! Get used to it! . . .

This is the true reality of homosexuality in native communities: The constant force urging you to kick the ass of someone not expecting it to gain your pride and dignity; to beat the ass of some poor fuck you really don't know and really don't care about to gain your pride and dignity. I know. I was almost among these people. But I ran. I won my race.

Not only issues of sexual identity but graphic sexual violence permeate the lives of the characters in *The Lesser Blessed*. I had initially wondered whether to prepare students in any way for the graphic content of the novel around issues of violent sexual abuse. If I were to do so, how would I do it and to what extent? This question may or may not arise in other teaching situations where instructors are more aware of the personal biographies or experiences of their students. The first time I taught *The Lesser Blessed*, I did not provide any preliminary discussion around the content beforehand because I prefer allowing students to dive into a text with no preconceptions shaped by me. Yet I wondered during the winter class if students who may themselves have been victims of sexual violence or physical abuse ought to have been cautioned about this theme. These scenes did prove to be the biggest challenge some students had in reading *The Lesser Blessed*.

"I didn't like how graphic the story was, especially relating to sexual behavior and acts. It was very gruesome and depressing," wrote Shaunna, a Native American studies major. "The violence and the shocking brutal imagery was hard for me to read at times," Michelle stated in her Novel Evaluation. "I'm a very emotional and visual person so the rape/molestation moments almost made me physically sick and really gave me the shakes." A nonmajor who preferred not to be named wrote, "What I did not like were the sexually graphic scenes and connotations. Yes it fit in with the book and was necessary, but I kept thinking, 'they let us read this for school?'" Along similar lines, Crystal, an American studies major in the summer class, wrote:

I both liked and sort of disliked this novel. I thought the author did a nice job of telling the story but I feel like we could have

read something else with more content. I realize it presented a view of a particular native experience but I feel like the story was mostly focused on a youth's troubled childhood. I think it's a good read but would have chosen another novel for this class.

The ambivalence in Crystal's words—that the novel is “a good read” yet its “content” focusing on “a youth's troubled childhood” is somehow lacking and not the best choice for a university Native literature course—reveals how some may read Van Camp's text as “simple,” because it is short and full of high school slang and teenage hijinks that appear deceptively superficial. It is clear that some students' discomfort with the novel arises from feelings and memories around similar painful experiences that they do not want to feel or face. Yet these same unsettling feelings prove valuable to other students. Janice, a Native American studies major in the summer class, wrote that “sometimes the violence brought out issues from my childhood but it was another release. It was good for my healing.” This response—using story power to confront pain, release it, and begin healing—is one of the primary messages of *The Lesser Blessed*. By practicing collaborative classroom pedagogy, then, reading Van Camp's novel not only offers a fictional character's story of pain and healing but allows students to enact a similar process through the transformative force of the text. In his essay on the novel, David, an English major from winter quarter, wrote:

Ultimately, Larry's stories are medicine, healing Larry emotionally; they are a means of finally confronting his past, even if that confrontation is somewhat indirect, and moving on in his life. Larry's character is infused with storytelling, and is a powerful example of the necessity of storytelling in the human experience.

I now feel that since Van Camp's technique in *The Lesser Blessed* is to layer stories and meaning, braiding them together gradually, only doling out specific bits of information at certain points in the narrative when Larry is ready to reveal them or when we as readers are ready to receive them, it would be a disservice to his storytell-

ing process to single out the theme of sexual violence for prereading discussion. The shock of reading these explicit moments as Van Camp renders them makes their effect that much more meaningful and may be part of what he intends by interspersing them in small, sharp stabs throughout the novel. So although Larry's sexual trauma is indeed a central feature of his story, forewarning students about this event, mediating their experience of it, may direct their focus too narrowly to this one aspect of the text at the expense of other important themes such as the novel's consistent humor; multiple love stories; family, friend, and community relationships; and the fierce survivor spirit that is the heart of Larry's story.

#### WHAT THE STUDENTS SAID

I will remember how artfully Van Camp used dreams, stories and flashbacks to create his characters' identities. I will also remember my favorite part when Larry writes the letters T.I.D. in the snow heart with his and Juliet's initials which meant, "true if destroyed." It reminded me of something sentimental and silly that I'd secretly do.

—Candace, women and gender studies major

I wish it wouldn't end so soon—I don't know if he has other books like this one, but it would be great if he had others—I'm upset that this novel's not more well known & required for other classes & more importantly—it should be used in youth groups as part of a curriculum of activism. . . . Overall, he reminded me that all minority students have the same struggle, we must work together. . . . In fact, I would love to meet him and have a chance to work with him.

—Erin, women and gender studies major, theater minor

Our relationship to Larry is like his relationship to Juliet: we know little of him when we first meet him, but gradually we learn more and more, discovering that he is not who we thought he was. We come to be trusted more than Johnny,

become more intimate and will ultimately be unable to forget him; he will be part of stories we share, our discussions, always in our thoughts, like the "first love," the "one that got away."

—David, English major

I will teach *The Lesser Blessed* at every opportunity, and now, after the national and electronic border crossings of my students, Richard, and myself to connect with one another, when I read the novel the next time I will also read the stories of these collaborations into Larry's ongoing story. I often think of Richard working on his novel-in-progress, whose wonderful protagonist, Torchy, has developed from the short story "Mermaids" published in *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, Richard's second book. Sometimes when I e-mail him about something I will ask, "How's Torchy?" This is my less-than-subtle way of letting Richard know I cannot wait to read his next novel.

"He broke his arm," Richard once replied. "He's having a terrible time."

Van Camp has stated in an interview that "what Aboriginal authors bring to world literature is our ability to braid our oral traditions with the written word and tell stories about ourselves and our nations and our communities in a way that no one else can" ("Miracles" 2). These authors, these characters, these stories forge powerful connections with readers from their home communities, many of whom, as was true for Van Camp himself as a younger reader, grow "tired of reading novels and stories that [do not] reflect [their] own reality" (*Wind Speaker* 11). This certainly proved to be the case for Arnie from Unalakleet, who was moved by *The Lesser Blessed* to both speak about his experiences and dedicate himself to his own future creative writing. "I liked how this novel reveals the struggles of growing up in a native community," Arnie wrote in his Novel Evaluation. "Writing truth is the hardest part of any type of writing. Van Camp, in this sense, is master of the literary world. I am inspired to write with such truth and conviction, however will find it difficult. Truth is hard to write . . . let alone read."

The dynamic quality of *The Lesser Blessed*, like the perpetual

emergence of first love, invites students and educators into its talking circle through printed text in global classrooms far from the Dogrib Nation. As mentioned previously, the positive response by students to Van Camp's novel led me to form a pedagogy panel on teaching *The Lesser Blessed*, at which Richard was present. Later that night, when a bunch of us went out on the town in Lethbridge to talk about the conference, I asked Richard, "Okay, tell me honestly. Was it weird to sit and listen to us talk about your book like that?" Chronically positive, Richard responded, "No, it was great! You made me want to go back home and write."

My pedagogical approach to teaching *The Lesser Blessed* is entirely unoriginal, as many experienced and successful educators reading this essay by now will have concluded. What I hope to highlight anew by sharing my story is the powerful exchange that can take place around a text when teaching becomes a true collaboration in which author, students, and teacher allow themselves to be moved. When educators work to open up the space of the classroom to empower student voice, encourage exchange, and share pedagogical practices and results around aboriginal/Native texts with the authors of those texts, we offer reciprocity to students by validating their experience and intellectualism and to authors by supporting their artistic undertakings. Sharing our pedagogical experiences in public venues is also a way that we might make ourselves vulnerable to critique about our teaching so that we continue to approach aboriginal/Native literatures in respectful and appropriate ways and to understand that we too are part of the stories' continuous tellings. In this role there is deep responsibility, and deep joy.

#### NOTES

I would like to thank the students in both UC Davis NAS 181A classes (winter quarter 2005 and summer session II 2005) for their heart and spirit in discussing literature with me and for permission to reproduce their written comments in this essay under pseudonyms. I would also like to thank Richard Van Camp for both inspiring and supporting me in the teaching of *The Lesser Blessed* and for his input into the writing and presentation of this

paper. Many thanks also to Kimberly Roppolo, organizer of the Wordcraft Circle "Returning the Gift XIII—Celebrating Our Words" American Indian and First Nations Literature/Writing Conference at the University of Lethbridge, May 11–14, 2005, for encouraging me to organize the conference's pedagogical panel on *The Lesser Blessed*.

1. I use "Dogrib" throughout this essay because this is the name Van Camp uses to identify himself and his nation in the novel and its biographical notes.

2. Van Camp has recently (spring 2006) sold the movie option on *The Lesser Blessed*, which he hopes will increase the novel's readership both in and out of the classroom.

3. The course reader material I included in relation to *The Lesser Blessed* during summer session was Jeannette Armstrong, "Land Speaking," *Speaking for the Generations*, ed. Simon Ortiz (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1998): 174–94; "The Big Snow and the Northland," "The Creation of the Northern Rocky Mountains," and "The Meaning of the Northern Lights," *Indian Legends of Canada*, ed. Ella Elizabeth Clark (1960; repr., Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991): 17–19, 99–103; Richard Van Camp, "25 Albums That Saved My Life," *Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction*, ed. Rasunah Mardsen (Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 2000): 199–208 (this piece can also be found on Van Camp's Web site); and Kimberly M. Blaeser, "Like 'Reeds through the Ribs of a Basket': Native Women Weaving Stories," *Other Sisterhoods: Literary Theory and U.S. Women of Color*, ed. Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1998): 265–76. The students found Armstrong's and Blaeser's essays particularly helpful in framing indigenous literary aesthetics.

4. Detailed information about the En'owkin Centre may be found on the Centre's Web site at <http://enowkin.tripod.com/>.

5. The Canadian residential school and the U.S. boarding school systems shared the overarching genocidal goals of separating aboriginal and Native youth from their home communities, original languages, spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and tribal worldviews. Details around how the two colonial nations attempted to achieve these goals through both religious and secular government schools requires more particular study than I am able to provide in this essay. I have not found specific scholarly work that offers a detailed comparison of the Canadian and U.S. systems, and I look forward to future scholars to generate such studies. In the meantime, one significant difference between the systems is that while both colonial governments funded residential/boarding schools for aboriginal and Native youth from roughly the late 1800s through the mid- to late 1900s (with a variety

of changes in policies and practices during this time), Canadian residential schools were run entirely by church groups, primarily the Roman Catholic Church, under the oversight of the Canadian government. By contrast, while the United States initially funded mission boarding schools for Native youth, federal aid to mission schools was eliminated around 1917 because of strong anti-Catholic sentiments by a powerful eastern political establishment. Another major difference between the U.S. and Canadian systems has been the remarkable contemporary efforts being made by the Canadian government and Canadian religious institutions to acknowledge their responsibility for the traumatic legacy of residential schools for aboriginal peoples and these institutions' work with communities toward restorative justice and reparations. Most recently, this includes the government's approval on May 10, 2006, of the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The U.S. government and religious institutions, not surprisingly, have made no comparable public efforts to acknowledge their role in the negative legacy of federal Indian boarding schools upon Native individuals and communities or to work toward any meaningful forms of restorative justice. (I thank K. Tsianina Lomawaima at the University of Arizona and Tania Big Throat, a graduate student at the University of Lethbridge whose work focuses on Canadian residential schools, for providing clarification on some of the information included in this note.)

6. Richard Van Camp's Web site may be accessed at <http://www.richardvancamp.org>.

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# Appendix

## PRESENTATION GUIDELINES FOR 181A: MAKING A STRONG PRESENTATION

To receive maximum credit for your presentation, you must prepare in advance. I will be evaluating your presentation on its clarity, organization, depth and accuracy of information, and on the strength of your delivery. You will need to work on each of the following areas to generate an effective presentation:

1. *Timing.* Presentations should be between 10 and 15 minutes in length. You need to *practice* your delivery orally to get a sense of your timing. This also helps alleviate nervousness on presentation day, because you have already reviewed your material.
2. *Typed Outline.* You must prepare a general outline of approximately two pages to turn in to me before you begin your presentation. If you need a copy for yourself to present from, make one. If you prefer presenting from note cards, that's fine. The outline you turn in to me for evaluation, however, must be typed, stapled, and paginated according to the syllabus guidelines, and include both students' name plus your topic.

Source citations must be included as the final page of your outline. You will need to consult a minimum of three sources, and *at least* one Native source is required. If you have difficulty locating or identifying a Native source, please talk to me so I can help. Make sure you consult a style book to correctly format your citations.

While internet sources are fine, it is easier in some cases to begin with a printed text source for this presentation. A good first source for many of these topics is *The Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, edited by Frederick Hoxie.

3. *Audio, Visual, or other Supplemental Material.* Include an audio, visual, or other supplemental material in your presentation. If you plan on using PowerPoint, please speak to me in advance. Posters are ineffective for large group presentations because they

are difficult to see from a distance; don't use them. Also, passing around individual books or photos distracts from the speaker, so either make multiple packets of copies photos, or prepare overheads of book images you would like to share.

4. *Overall Delivery.* Powerful, effective public speakers do the following: *speak* more than *read* their papers to an audience (even if they do read, they practice expressive inflections so that an audience remains engaged); make eye contact with the audience; do not look terrified; do not apologize for the perceived shortcomings of their presentations; do not chew gum; dress appropriately (take your hat off and don't show too much skin—this ain't the Grammys); stand up straight; and review the pronunciation of new words *in advance*. It is very poor form to stand in front of the class and ask the professor, "How do you say 'Métis'?"

Take a deep breath, relax, and enjoy! It will be over before you know it.

#### RESEARCH PRESENTATION EVALUATION SHEET

Students:

Topic:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Was 10–15 minutes in length.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Correctly prepared a general outline.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Consulted a minimum of three sources, including at least one Native source.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Included source citations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Included audio, visual, or other supplemental materials in presentation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ *Did not merely READ entire paper*, but made eye contact and engaged with the audience.

Grade:

Points: /30

Comments:

# Decolonizing Pedagogy

Teaching Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*

MARGARET A. TOTH

In the October 2005 issue of *PMLA*, Shari Huhndorf provides a brief survey of the primary challenges facing American Indian studies at the start of the twenty-first century. While she raises a number of significant issues in the article, "Literature and the Politics of Native American Studies," Huhndorf underscores the question of control over representation: who holds—and who in the future will hold—the power to speak about, publish on, and teach in the discipline? As Huhndorf suggests, "ongoing colonization is an essential framework for understanding Native texts" (1619). Moreover, a dichotomous bind exists in the academic setting: the struggle for "intellectual sovereignty," as Robert Warrior puts it (qtd. in Huhndorf 1618), consistently comes up against the threat of "intellectual imperialism" (Philip Deloria qtd. in Huhndorf 1619). Certainly this is not a new issue, especially in the field of American Indian literary studies. For instance, many scholars have argued that the best way for nonindigenous literary critics to be allies is to approach the study of American Indian literature—if they approach it at all—with caution and humility. Otherwise, they risk committing a form of critical violence that perpetuates colonialist ideology. The study of American Indian literature, then, effectively demands a new, non-Eurocentric model.

But this concern about colonialist academia extends beyond the publishing world to the classroom as well. What sorts of problems arise when the nonindigenous educator teaches indigenous-authored texts? How can we teach American Indian literature without "colonizing" it? How might we, in other words, develop and apply an ethi-

cal pedagogy? In this article, I propose a model educators can apply when teaching one text, Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*; while I emphasize the particular concerns this text raises, I aim, simultaneously, to offer a more general approach to teaching American Indian literature responsibly. In an increasingly multicultural academic setting, both in terms of the student body and the material we teach, this responsibility must be acknowledged and embraced.

Before turning to the novel, however, I want to spend some time problematizing and, ultimately, situating my own position as a white educator teaching indigenous-authored texts. In the first section, then, I will argue that to teach American Indian texts responsibly, we must contextualize them within a cultural framework and include ourselves and our own complicity in that framework. I will then turn to *The Bingo Palace* to identify some pieces of the Ojibwe narrative that are often overlooked by critics, issues that should take center stage in the classroom. I begin by addressing at length how the novel participates in the oral narrative tradition. I then turn to focus solely on the characterization of Fleur, a figure tied to two important Ojibwe nonhuman beings: bears and Misshepesu, the underwater manitou. Following the body of the article is an appendix of possible pedagogical tools for the classroom that use the findings of my research.

In offering this structure, I do not pretend to have fashioned an innovative critical model. But I do hope that this article reflects both a willingness to decenter my Euroamerican analytical power and my commitment to a pedagogy of social change. Moreover, while I emphasize particular issues facing white educators of Native-authored texts, I anticipate that this model—and the theoretical and political convictions it is predicated on—will be useful to all pedagogues.

#### WHAT IS COLONIALIST PEDAGOGY?

How does a white educator teach American Indian literature responsibly? While instructors should always think carefully about how they teach texts by authors outside their own racial identity location, the

pairing of white teacher with indigenous-authored texts is particularly fraught, given the history—and ongoing practice—of culture appropriation and imperialism perpetrated on American Indians by whites. Academia—in the name of “knowledge,” “ethical progress,” or “moral duty” (Whitt 171)—has contributed significantly to this country’s long history of misrepresentation of American Indians and appropriation of indigenous culture. Laurie Anne Whitt, in “Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America,” cautions her readers to maintain a hyperawareness when exploring American Indian culture in the realm of academia. “Some forms of cultural imperialism,” she explains, “are the product of academic privilege and opportunism. The ‘name of Truth or Scholarship’ may be invoked, the cause of scholarly progress, of advancing knowledge” (171). Whitt also cites Gerald Vizenor’s assertion that a white academic’s “obsession” with American Indian culture is a far cry from “innocent” but is “rather a statement of academic power and control over tribal images” (171).

Teaching American Indian literature, then, involves difficult self-reflection and careful negotiation on the part of the white educator: she must relinquish the “academic power and control” Whitt describes while maintaining the authority required to teach the texts effectively to students. This is no easy task, since, as Renée Hulan points out in “Some Thoughts on ‘Integrity and Intent’ and Teaching Native Literature,” many educators believe that “teaching and criticism are ways of ‘owning’ texts or at least of claiming them as one’s own” (220). “On these terms,” Hulan claims, “it is difficult to envision teachers ever teaching anything at all without committing appropriation” (220). Ultimately, the crux of this issue, many argue, is one of “integrity and intent” (Rose 416). Is the white scholar able to or, perhaps more pointedly, does she *care to* “distinguish between ‘knowing’ and ‘appropriating’?” (Hulan 220). As Hulan suggests, the answer is not to retreat from the work and instead practice silence, which, she argues, is an active stance that shows complicity with and “support for the status quo” (220). Rather, white educators need to analyze carefully their motives and seriously think through how they will approach and teach indigenous-authored texts.

Granting that a teacher has good intentions, other issues often arise when a white instructor teaches American Indian literature. Many nonindigenous educators lack the background knowledge needed to place a work within its cultural context, and, without such information, they may distort or altogether erase meaningful parts of any given text. But the erasure of this particular material is not the only problem: the emptied out space is often then filled in by the dominant culture's own interpretation so that the critical performance becomes a colonizing act. Hulan argues that often American Indian texts are critically rejected because readers have failed to equip themselves with knowledge outside Western parameters. She claims that

most literary critics are not sufficiently prepared to analyse the cultural differences that prevent them from understanding it. Naturally, critics look for the innovations and allusions that they can recognize based on knowledge of their own cultural heritage, but that they cannot go beyond that knowledge is a great shame (216).

I would add that in many cases it is not simply a "shame" but unarguably racist. That is, the critical act devalues indigenous culture while reasserting white power and authority. Although here Hulan is discussing literary criticism, one can easily see how her points translate into the realm of pedagogy. It becomes, then, the instructor's job to bring a cultural framework to the literature she teaches and thereby help her students to appreciate and value the works. Anything less not only suggests an unwillingness to engage rigorously with the complexities the texts pose but also, by extension, remarginalizes the works.<sup>1</sup>

Louise Erdrich's works are appropriate to turn to as we keep in mind this issue of cultural context. Erdrich is an author who has begun to carve a space for herself in the contemporary canon; problematically, however, as she becomes increasingly accepted in both mainstream venues and academia, her Ojibwe heritage—and its influence on her writing—is often deemphasized or altogether dismissed by readers and critics.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in the rush to compare

Erdrich's carefully constructed fictional reservation—a community inhabited by quirky characters that appears in at least five Erdrich novels—to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County or in the movement to co-opt her into postmodern studies, critics often overlook her novels' reworking of and reliance upon Ojibwe cultural traditions.<sup>3</sup> While it would be equally problematic *not* to consider Erdrich in such postmodern projects—indeed, this would only reproduce another form of marginalization and colonization—we must ask ourselves what gets lost in this type of scholarship and *why* such information gets left out.<sup>4</sup> What social message gets sent when nonindigenous scholars only read Erdrich's texts through a Western critical lens? Does this not, in many ways, serve to uphold the status quo that Hulan would have us work against?

Let me give one brief, but telling, example. Western critics are typically adept at tracing Christian motifs in Erdrich's writing. But this can open the door to gross misinterpretations that carry hefty symbolic weight. What happens, for instance, when one writes about the flood in *Tracks* only as a biblical allusion, not knowing—or knowing but not acknowledging—that one of the most important Ojibwe creation stories involves Nanabozho (a common trickster figure) and a muskrat recreating the Ojibwe land-base out of a near-destructive deluge?<sup>5</sup> Even the most “innocent” scholar perpetrates a type of critical and cultural violence by erasing—in favor of Christianity—this foundational, sacred story that details both the roots and the miraculous survival of the Ojibwe people. “But I didn't know about this,” a Western scholar might argue. This may be true. But such a response only reinforces my earlier claim: ethical reading and teaching of indigenous-authored texts involves intensive, demanding background research. Otherwise, we persist in misinterpretations that, in this example, amount to participation in cultural genocide; in other words, whether intentional or not, such critical work reveals a complicity with colonialist ideology.

*The Bingo Palace*, to me, seems to be the most germane Erdrich text to engage with for this project, not only because it is often taught, but also precisely because it is so easy for readers to miss its reliance on Ojibwe culture. Readers may have a sense that something is going

on or that, as Catherine Rainwater puts it in her essay “Ethnic Signs in Erdrich’s *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace*,” there is a “disturbance” in their typical reading habits; in general, however, they are not able to put language to their reading experience. Rainwater asserts that “such ‘disturbance’ registers subtly as an event in the reading process, and it may be overlooked or screened out altogether by a careless reader” (145). But it is not only the careless reader who misses important points. Even Tom Matchie’s “Building on the Myth: Recovering Native American Culture in Louise Erdrich’s *The Bingo Palace*”—an essay written for college students with the explicit intention of unlocking the novel’s reliance upon “Native American thinking”—fails to acknowledge many of the specific Ojibwe traditions upon which Erdrich draws and, instead, forces it into a rigid Western paradigm.<sup>6</sup> This is the sort of colonialist approach to reading and teaching the novel that I seek to counter in the following sections.

#### THE BINGO PALACE AND ORAL NARRATION

When teaching *The Bingo Palace*, it seems appropriate to begin with how the novel employs strategies of Ojibwe oral narration.<sup>7</sup> Although students might not be familiar with oral narratives, analyzing the structure of the novel—to see how it conforms to or perhaps reworks oral tradition—calls upon literary analysis skills with which students will most likely feel comfortable. In addition, opening with an exercise that demands rigorous analysis of form immediately sends a message to students: studying this text demands serious thinking. As Roger Spielmann explains in “*You’re So Fat!*”: *Exploring Ojibwe Discourse*, “one of the keys to understanding storytelling in its proper context is knowing that it comes with an often complex set of rules” (184). Beginning with an overview of such rules will set the tone, expose students to new knowledge, and open up intricacies of the text that might otherwise go unnoticed.

One way in which the novel participates in oral tradition is through its performative language. In particular, the collectively narrated passages—the opening, middle, and final chapters in the novel—attempt to engage readers in a speaker-listener dialectic

that replicates patterns of oral storytelling. The novel opens with a (seemingly) omniscient description of Lulu waking up: “On most winter days, Lulu Lamartine did not stir until the sun cast a patch of warmth for her to bask in and purr” (1). After a few more sentences from the same point of view, Erdrich makes an almost jarring transition: “We know her routine—*many of us* even shared it—so when she [Lulu] was sighted before her normal get-up time . . . *we* called on others to look” (1, emphasis added). Suddenly the reader realizes that what she thought was a disembodied, faceless third-person narrator is actually part of the novel, an as-yet nameless “we” (later we learn they are elders of the community, perhaps living, perhaps deceased) who have witnessed events and are now relating them to the reader. Outside of these three collectively narrated chapters, the novel retains a sense of polyvocality throughout, exposing readers to the thoughts, actions, and voices of a number of different characters. By providing varying viewpoints, Erdrich achieves an effect similar to the one produced by the dually narrated *Tracks*, wherein the “storytelling strategy creates distance from certainty and asserts that there is never ‘one true telling’ of a story, but only differing versions. In this way, Erdrich narrates her novel through ‘play’ and undercuts any monologic position she might take as storyteller” (Clarke 37).

Significantly, in the collectively narrated passages—and, in fact, throughout the entire novel—Erdrich exhibits many of the rules that Spielmann identifies in his book on Ojibwe oral discourse. Spielmann analyzes patterns in both verb tense shifts and asides in oral narration, classifying these markers as ways in which a narrator attempts to engage an audience. Analyzing a particular story’s varying verb tenses, Spielmann states that “insofar as the whole story takes place in the past, the telling could have been organized by employing a simple past tense format”; the fact that it does not, he argues, is because the “organization is recipient-designed” (94). According to Spielmann, shifting tenses is a conscious strategy, employed by a speaker for the express purpose of relating to her listeners and acknowledging their presence. The collectively narrated chapters in *The Bingo Palace* alternate tenses quite often. For instance, while most of the first chapter uses past perfect (“Day Twin Horse watched

her” [2], “we tried to keep a close eye upon her doings” [4], etc.), it also often slips into present tense (“We see Albertine dancing,” [6]), “We shake our heads” [6]). Such tense-shifting, Spielmann argues, produces an atmosphere akin to oral narrative: “verb tense switching (from past to present to past)” performs “some important interactional work for the storyteller” (99). Moreover, shifting tenses helps set up an instructive dialectic between the speaker and listener. The first chapter of *The Bingo Palace* adopts this sort of didactic tone, particularly when the collective narrator uses verbal directives, telling us, for instance, to “keep a hand on the frail rope” (5). Essentially, through such fluctuation of verb tense, the collective narrator is guiding and teaching: advising us to hold on, to keep listening, and to try to pull together all the information being imparted to us.

The novel also replicates the tendency in most Ojibwe oral narratives to resist determinacy or fixity. The ending of the novel, in particular, remains open to interpretation, a fact that becomes apparent when comparing critics’ vastly different readings of the last few chapters. For instance, many believe that Fleur “give[s] herself up to save Lipsha” (Brehm 697), while others argue that Lipsha “freez[es] to death at the end of his trek with Gerry” (Rainwater 156). In other words, as with *Tracks*, a novel that “offers multiple narrative possibilities which can be employed to defy any fixed pronouncement” (Clarke 43), *The Bingo Palace* displays a strategic narrative mobility or fluidity, not unlike that employed in oral narration.

The polyvocality of the novel also works against fixity. Because the story is filtered through several points of view, the reader finds it difficult to pin down one, monolithic interpretation. This is particularly true in the collectively narrated chapters, Rainwater argues, because the narrators are depicted as fallible: “Erdrich fashions a collective narrative voice composed of tribal elders who, like a traditional oral storyteller, combine authority and humility. For example, they admit that, like the audience, they cannot always ‘grasp the whole’ . . . of the story being told” (152). Thus our instructors and guides in the novel acknowledge and embrace uncertainty.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, however—and this is a point instructors should make clear to students—the indeterminacy of the novel does *not* imply

that the narrative completely lacks order, structure, or meaning. In fact, from the beginning of the novel, Erdrich lets her readers know that there is a larger design at work, underscoring the ways in which both Zelda and Lulu govern the action of the story. Zelda weaves her web around Lipsha, Shawnee Ray, and Lyman, a fact of which the characters are, to some extent, aware: at the powwow, Lyman senses the “invisible string guide ropes” that “have been erected” by Zelda to “assist his approach” to Shawnee (21), while Lipsha—feeling Zelda “scan” his “brain with the sudden zero-gaze of medical machines” (18)—is conscious that “he will always be the subject of a plan greater than” himself, “an order that works mechanically” (21). Similarly, in the first chapter of the novel, Lulu sets in motion a “deliberate design” when she steals Gerry’s picture at the post office. As we learn by the end of the novel, Lulu’s carefully woven web has worked triumphantly: Gerry is free. And there is no question that perhaps Lulu has achieved her goal only through chance or luck; the collective narrator recognizes that Lulu, dressed in victorious powwow attire when the authorities arrive, “has planned it. And all so perfectly!” (264). Thus while the novel does resist fixity, leaving open interpretive possibilities, we should not confuse this strategy with narrative disorder or conceptual meaninglessness; clearly, as with oral narratives, there is a careful design at work in the text.

#### BEARS AND BEARWALKING

Having discussed with the class the structure of the novel and how it replicates or revises patterns of oral narrative, it makes sense to turn to the ways in which the Ojibwe cosmos is alive in *The Bingo Palace*. Looking carefully at Fleur Pillager’s characterization is a good segue into this discussion, because students most likely will recognize that she is less a fully developed character and more like a narrative device. Emptied out of the complexities of her identity (which are explored in *Tracks*), Fleur is akin to a stock character. As Lipsha states, “She’s so old that people don’t use her name anymore. She’s just the Old Lady, Mindemoya” (126). However, this flattening out of Fleur’s personality allows Erdrich to connect her intimately to

two prominent, powerful Ojibwe figures: bears and the underwater manitou, Misshepeshu. While Fleur appears to take Misshepeshu as *pawagan*, or spirit guide—a relationship that I will examine in the next section—she actually shape-shifts into a bear and is clearly represented as a bearwalker.

In Ojibwe tradition, a distinction is often made between bears and bearwalkers; however, as with many other figures in Ojibwe tradition, both collapse the good-evil binary that pervades Western thought.<sup>9</sup> Joni Adamson Clarke, in “Why Bears are Good to Think and Theory Doesn’t Have to be Murder: Transformation and Oral Tradition in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*,” explains that bears “were highly respected among traditional Chippewa” (33). In part, this respect stems from bears’ quasihuman status: bears’ “erect carriage, cradling of young with the forearms, enjoyment of sweets and liquors, manner of drinking liquid,” and “shows of intelligence” incline many Ojibwe to treat bears as “honored guests” (Ruth Landes qtd. in Clarke 33). Theresa S. Smith also points out that bears appear as a positive life-force in the Ojibwe cosmos. In *The Island of the Anishnaabeg*, she analyzes representations of bears in archaic Ojibwe scrolls, observing that they often appear as “helpful, enabling agents” for the Ojibwes (107). At the same time, however, bears inspire awe and fear, particularly because, due to their patterns of hibernation—“moving from hibernation in winter to reemergence in spring” (Clarke 33–34)—they symbolically occupy a liminal space between life and death. Bears, then, are associated with both beneficent and awful powers; they have the ability to guide and help the people, but, because they are situated in an interstitial site—between the living and dead worlds—they command a respect that borders on fear.

Bearwalking, on the other hand, carries a much more threatening valence in Ojibwe tradition. According to Smith, bearwalking is strictly a human practice, whereby a shaman takes the form of a bear to exercise a menacing power over an individual or community. “Bearwalking shamans,” she states, often “change their forms in order to attack their victims. . . . [M]etamorphosis is both an exhibition of power and the means whereby that power is directed” (55). Clarke also emphasizes the dangerous skills of bearwalkers, explain-

ing that they often “manifest their evil power by appearing as bright lights at night, stealing the fingers and tongues of the dead, and causing the dreaded ‘twisted mouth’” (34–35). Thus the concept of bear-ness occupies a complicated position in Ojibwe cosmology; as with many other Ojibwe figures, bears—whether the actual animal or a bearwalker qua bear—are at once helpful and a force to be feared.

Erdrich aligns Fleur with bears in a number of ways throughout the novel. When Lipsha visits Fleur in hopes of receiving a love medicine, he witnesses her actual metamorphosis into a bear. After asking her for the medicine, he closes his eyes: “When I open my eyes again, she broadens, blurs beyond my reach, beyond belief. Her face spreads out on the bones and goes on darkening and darkening. Her nose tilts up into a black snout and her eyes sink” (136–37). Fleur—as bear—then speaks to Lipsha in a “hot rasp” (137), not unlike the “chuffing noise” of her “bear voice” (274) that we hear through the collective narrator at the end of the novel. Lyman too attends to “the hot rasp of her [Fleur’s] bear voice” in his dream (148). Clarke points out that Fleur’s bear powers are instilled at birth; she “belongs to the Pillager family, members of the bear clan” (33), a fact that Erdrich makes clear in *Tracks*.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Fleur is connected explicitly to bearwalking. The collective narrator describes how people “claimed they found her tracks and followed to see where they changed, the pad broadened, the claw pressed into the snow” (273). Fleur is accused of using her bearwalking powers to inflict harm on others, deeds similar to the ones Clarke describes: “They say that strange things happen when the old lady is around. A dog falls over dead and all of its hair drops out. Gossiping mouths twist to one side and stick that way” (Erdrich *BP* 126). Indeed, Fleur’s powers are so strong that people run when they see her; they “rush indoors to punch their time cards, swing their cars toward parking lots. Some fade back into the bars and shadows of the post office, those who can’t cross their breasts or touch the holy medal of a saint” (125).

However, in keeping with Ojibwe representations of bears and bearwalking, Fleur, while able to inflict serious injury on her victims, also acts as guide to her people. Lipsha, after describing a series

of circumstances that detail Fleur's destructive capabilities, says, "These things happened, frightful incidents, but also there is good. People forget the good, because the bad has more punch. The old lady cures fevers, splints bones, has brought half the old-timers in the Senior's Lounge into this world" (126). In addition, it is Fleur who keeps watch over the tribal land, which, as she tells Lyman, is the life-blood of the people. When she admonishes Lyman in his dream, her main point is that "land is the only thing that lasts life to life" (148). This passage is particularly important, given that, in Ojibwe tradition, dreaming of bears is considered a grave warning. Spielmann explains that many "elders believe that the bear is sent as a dream visitor to warn people about possible misfortune" (167). It is no surprise, then, that Fleur-as-bear, in Lyman's dream, is cautioning him to consider carefully his plan to build a casino on tribal lands, a prospect that carries with it the potential for both prosperity and destruction. Fleur also uses bearwalking, then, in an attempt to effect social change and protect the people.

#### UNDERWATER MANITOU

Fleur is tied to another important nonhuman living being in Ojibwe tradition: Misshepesu, the underwater manitou. And, as with bears and bearwalking, this information is crucial to students' understanding of both Fleur as a character and the novel as a whole. As with bears, Misshepesu possesses both destructive and life-giving powers. Manitous, in general, are "power beings of the Ojibwe cosmos understood to be other-than-human persons upon whom less powerful human persons (Anishnaabeg) depend" (Smith 200).<sup>11</sup> Misshepesu is one type of manitou; the name means, "literally, Great Lynx and may be used as 'both a generic word for a class of malignant aquatic feline beings, and the proper name for the ruler of the species'" (Smith 97). Misshepesu is commonly referred to as a "great horned cat," an "underwater lion," a "night panther" (Brehm 677), a "water monster," or a "great horned snake" (Brehm 680). Smith explains that the

Ojibwe have a profound fear of this manitou(k) [Misshepeshu], an attitude which is wholly unlike the caution and respect accorded the Thunderers [another type of manitou]. . . . The Underwater manitouk, in contrast [to the Thunderers], hide themselves and act in unpredictable ways (100).

Misshepeshu most often strikes out by drowning his victims (Clarke 33).

Significantly, though, often Misshepeshu will appear to an individual in a dream or a vision quest as a *pawagan*, or spirit guide, an event that, while it warrants extreme caution (Smith 109), might also suggest great fortune. Most people avoid such visitations from Misshepeshu, but he “could be courted by shamans eager to share in his great power” (Smith 109). “Such alliances,” Smith asserts, “carried great risks for human beings” (109). At the same time, however, “those humans who sought Micipijiu as a *pawagan* would be granted great powers to do both good and evil” (Brehm 680).

In *The Bingo Palace*, Erdrich suggests that Fleur has taken Misshepeshu as her *pawagan*, a point that will have to be worked through in the classroom, since students will likely miss the reference.<sup>12</sup> We learn from Lipsha that Misshepeshu inhabits the depths of Matchimanito Lake; Lipsha refers to Misshepeshu as “the horned thing, the grappling black thing that lives down there” (195). And we also know that Fleur has an uncanny resistance to drowning in Matchimanito—“in Matchimanito Fleur Pillager drowned and came back to life” (195)—indicating that she has met Misshepeshu and survived the encounter. Erdrich suggests that Fleur’s failed drownings, and her subsequent relationship with Misshepeshu, endow Fleur with the power to inflict death by drowning on others. As Lipsha states, “three times she was cast in the lake, and men were taken by the spirits each instance when she came to life, as if she put their name on the list to the death road, replacing hers” (126). Fleur’s ostracism from the community is yet another indicator that Misshepeshu is her spirit guide; as Victoria Brehm points out, in Ojibwe communities, being an outcast is “a predictable result for someone who takes Micipijiu as *pawagan*” (693), since he or she has the capacity to perform dreadful deeds.

As with Fleur's relationship to beariness, though, her connection to Misshepeshu also confers to her the power to guide her people, a fact that becomes clearer when we look carefully at Misshepeshu's role in the Ojibwe cosmos. Misshepeshu—while certainly inspiring dread and fear in the Ojibwes—also carries a specific function in society; Brehm, analyzing Misshepeshu's appearance in a cross-section of texts and oral narratives, explains that most often “he functions as a response to cultural conflicts. As arbiter, or master of the game, who controls the supply of food or determines access to the healing rites of the Midéwiwin, he enforces cultural conceptions of power and value” (680). She goes on to explain that this role of Misshepeshu has adapted over the years, depending on the particular economic difficulties the Ojibwes have been up against. But always, Brehm argues, his role is “to enforce wise use of renewable resources and to prevent their exhaustion” (682), to “control the most valuable commodity in Ojibwa culture” (698).

Misshepeshu's propensity to drown humans and other animals, then, can be seen as an attempt to preserve natural order, since—as Brehm argues—he most often strikes down those who are greedy.<sup>13</sup> For example, Brehm looks closely at one version of the deluge-creation myth, in which Misshepeshu orders his “guardian snakes” to drown the wolf because the wolf's hunting skills are overly accomplished. Misshepeshu “fears the game will be depleted,” imperiling the natural order (683). Therefore, his act of violence is “revenge as a means of maintaining social equilibrium”: “Micijiu had the wolf killed not simply because he was successful but because his greed risked destroying a common commodity” (683). Thus Brehm's argument forces a reconsideration of Misshepeshu's—and, I would argue, Fleur's—violent acts.

For clearly we see this role—guardian of resources, disciplinarian of greed—echoed in Fleur in *The Bingo Palace*. Fleur, with her Misshepeshulike powers, is a dreadful character, but she also actively protects the tribe's most precious resource: land. It becomes important to look at gambling as an economic strategy alongside this particular part of Ojibwe culture. Fleur—as mouthpiece of Misshepeshu—is not ordering Lyman and others to give up the dream of the bingo

palace or to stop gambling. Rather, she is warning them to negotiate carefully when entering this terrain, because she knows that gambling involves grave dangers. For instance, we see Lyman lose all of his money, the loan from the BIA, and Nector's pipe because he is desperate to gamble, an act that precipitates Fleur's visit to him (in his dream). In this scene, Fleur attempts to discipline Lyman's greed and restore economic control. But she does not "drown" Lyman, because she recognizes what he can do for the tribe: "Put your winnings and earnings in a land-acquiring account," she tells him. "Take the quick new money. Use it to purchase the fast old ground" (149). Ideally, Lyman will use gambling as a subversive tactic to gain back the land, not unlike Fleur's act of winning back her property from the agent through a game of cards.<sup>14</sup>

Approaching *The Bingo Palace* as oral narrative gives students the opportunity to learn more about the genre and to engage actively with the novel's structure. Analyzing Fleur, on the other hand, propels students right into the heart of the Ojibwe life-world. This is key, for students, ideally, will leave the book understanding that Ojibwe traditions are *not* mythology and that figures such as Misshepeshu and bearwalkers are *not* relegated to the past—on the contrary, they are *living* in Erdrich's book, and they are *alive* in the twenty-first century. This, I believe, is one of the most important lessons for students to acquire from *The Bingo Palace*. Brehm eloquently makes a similar point in her essay on manitous. Although here she refers specifically to Misshepeshu, her statement can be applied to all the Ojibwe figures and traditions appearing in Erdrich's novel:

Throughout history his role has been redefined by various storytellers. . . . He is immortal, having survived the devastation American culture and capitalism wreaked on American Indian life to be recreated by a contemporary storyteller attempting to protect what is valuable in this historical moment. His presence is witness to the strength of American Indian culture. (698)

In other words, drawing on such cultural material will emphasize the fact of *survival* in the face of colonization and genocide.

Finally, I want to underscore this last point on survival and resis-

tance to colonization. In my opinion, our teaching of the novel fails if we do not use it to open up a dialogue in the classroom about the history and ongoing realities of oppression. That is, the approach I have laid out—bringing cultural material to bear on Erdrich’s novel, what Huhndorf might identify as a form of “cultural translation” (1621)—risks devolving into “feel-good” cultural tourism for nonindigenous students: they learn about a culture other than their own, pack up, and move on to the next literature course. An ethical pedagogy should, quite contrarily, discomfort and shake up the students. For instance, the instructor can introduce, through a conversation on Misshepeshu and economic balance, issues surrounding the current struggle for economic sovereignty. Of course, in keeping with the strategy I have adopted thus far, this topic will need to be contextualized within a framework of genocide, land theft, and economic oppression, subjects that often raise the hackles of students. But while it is undoubtedly the case that some students will be angered by the uneasiness this discussion produces—and guilty resistance is a reaction instructors should anticipate and prepare for—others will want to use that discomfort productively. It is our job as instructors, then, to be just as prepared to help students put this energy to use. For, finally, a responsible pedagogy is not simply one that does “justice” to the text but one that works toward civic justice. That is, such pedagogy produces not only careful and informed readers but also active allies.

#### NOTES

1. The need to situate indigenous-authored texts in a cultural context is particularly important in an American literature survey course. Often, students will translate the one or two American Indian texts on the syllabus as the token minority works. Chris LaLonde examines this issue in the essay “New Stories and Broken Necks: Incorporating Native American Texts in the American Literature Survey,” posing what he deems a “fundamental pedagogical problem”: “How do we situate Native American texts within a disciplinary narrative from which they have been so long excluded without either relegating them to marginal and marginalized status or diminishing their intrinsic aesthetic merit?” (7). Certainly LaLonde raises a significant ques-

tion. However, if teachers approach American Indian texts with the same respect as those authored by members of the dominant culture, recognizing the complexities located within the narratives, they will be able to counter—to a great extent—such marginalizing tendencies. Louis Owens poses this challenge to scholars and teachers of American literature: “Just as the major figures of modernism—T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, et al.—demanded that readers know Greek and Roman mythology and the literary history of their western culture, Indian writers today have come to expect, even demand, that readers learn something about the mythology and literary (oral) history of Native Americans” (qtd. in Hulan 213). Filling out such cultural context for students will no doubt be more difficult for nonindigenous instructors; it will require more research and perhaps even different classroom activities. But the outcome, ideally, will be that students will grasp that American Indian writing is just as complex and valuable as canonical Western texts authored by dominant-culture individuals.

2. Louise Erdrich is a member of the Turtle Mountain band of the Ojibwes. Ojibwe “generally refers to a large group of Algonquian people . . . whose territory extends east to west from Lake Ontario to Lake Winnipeg and north to south from the Seven River Basin to Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. They are commonly divided into four groups: the Southeastern, Southwestern, Northern (or Salteaux), and Plains (or Bungi) Ojibwe” (Smith 3–4). As for terminology, there are many different spellings of Ojibwe, as Smith points out: “Ojibwa, Ojibway, Ojebway, and Ochipwe. The last spelling led to the label most familiar in the United States—the Chippewa—which became the official designation adopted by the Bureau of American Ethnology” (3). While Anishinaabeg is perhaps the most preferable term to use—since it lacks the colonialist overtones that both Chippewa and Ojibwe carry—I am opting to use Ojibwe, since this is the word Erdrich uses in interviews and elsewhere to describe herself and her culture.

3. Victoria Brehm makes this point in “Metamorphoses of an Ojibwa *Manido*,” stating that “since Erdrich’s work conforms to late-twentieth-century, postmodern fictional conventions, and since she acknowledges her debt to writers such as Faulkner, few critics have systematically investigated her debt to American Indian myths beyond acknowledging her use of ‘traditional’ Native materials” (679).

4. This form of colonization would segregate indigenous-authored texts, keeping them in the “colony” of the “primitive,” “natural,” “Other,” etc.

5. For different versions of this story, see Basil Johnston’s *The Manitous* (10–13), Theresa Smith’s *The Island of the Anishinaabeg* (156–8), and Victor Barnouw’s *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and Tales* (38–41).

6. Matchie's essay serves as an excellent example of, in my opinion, misguided scholarship on American Indian literature. Rather than emphasizing the Ojibwe influences on the novel (as he purports to do), he describes, in an extremely reductive way, the novel's "universal" message about the "essential dilemma of the human condition" (303) that we all can relate to "at the close of the twentieth century" (301). He then proceeds, after a nod to oral narrative tradition, to expose the novel's debt to the Bible and Greek drama, all the while arguing that Lipsha is the "Native American Huck Finn" (301). While it could be fruitful to look at Erdrich and Twain in tandem, there is a problem when a critic can *only* value American Indian texts by making such equations (i.e., Lipsha=Huck, Zelda=Miss Watson [309]), especially in an essay that seeks to place American Indian concerns at its center.

7. In the following sections of this article, I have geared my thinking toward a particular class: an upper-level, post-1945 American literature course with a mix of majors and nonmajors with little to no background in American Indian studies. However, I think that most of the activities in the appendix could be used, perhaps in a slightly altered format, in an introductory literature course or perhaps even in composition.

8. This acknowledgment also generates an atmosphere of active storytelling, Rainwater argues, a feeling that "we are all in this together": "Through such proclaimed doubt, hesitancy, and overt interpretive struggles, Erdrich's collective narrator aligns itself with the audience and elicits creative audience participation in storytelling. As in oral literature, narrator and audience alike face interpretive problems and share responsibility for the story's effects" (152).

9. When discussing both beariness and Misshepesu with students, it will be important to provide background on Ojibwe cosmology, emphasizing the difference between Western and Ojibwe notions of good and evil. As Theresa S. Smith points out, these attributes are not dichotomized in Ojibwe thought, a concept that might at first be difficult for students to grasp.

10. In *Tracks*, Nanapush says that the Pillager clan markers are "four crosshatched bears and a marten" (5).

11. Other manitous include Kitche Manitou, the "traditional ruler of the heavens and Creator of the world prior to the deluge," and matchi-manitou, "a shadowy underworld figure who . . . stands in contrast to Kitche Manitou" (Smith 200). While there is only one Kitche Manitou, matchi-manitous can take different forms. E.g., according to Smith, Windigo (the giant ice cannibal) is a matchi-manitou (201). (Note that the lake in Erdrich's novels is called Matchimanito, linking it, therefore, not only to Misshepesu

but to Windigo as well.) The plural of “manitou” is referred to, variously, as manitous (Johnston xxi), manitouk (Smith 200), and manidog (Brehm 677). “Manido” is an alternate form of the singular “manitou” (Brehm 677). Alternate spellings of Misshepesu include Mishebesu (Smith 97) and Micipijiu (Brehm 677). I will use Misshepesu, since this is how Erdrich herself refers to the underwater manitou (see *Tracks*).

12. There is a clear difference between Fleur *being* Misshepesu and Fleur taking Misshepesu as a spirit guide, and I think that the latter is more plausible in *The Bingo Palace* and in general in the Ojibwe life-world. While I found a great deal of information about humans becoming bears (i.e., bearwalking), there is no evidence to suggest that a human can become Misshepesu, only that one can be protected by him. However, the powers given to humans who have Misshepesu as their spirit guide closely resemble those of Misshepesu himself.

13. This is true of Fleur’s and Misshepesu’s victims in *Tracks*.

14. Whether or not Lyman understands Fleur’s advice is debatable. It does seem that he misreads her warnings. After Fleur visits his dream, Lyman envisions putting his money into “land-based operations” (149) and developing real estate on Fleur’s land, clearly not what Fleur had in mind. It then becomes Lipsha’s job to divert the scheme. On his vision quest, Lipsha looks out over Matchimanito Lake, thinking, “for the purposes of his [Lyman’s] plan, this is a spot like none other: lake view, perfect for a large-scale resort” (199). As if Fleur hears his thoughts, Lipsha suddenly has his vision: a skunk who can only say, “This ain’t real estate” (200).

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## Appendix

### HANDOUT OF OJIBWE TERMS/ITEMS/IDEAS THAT APPEAR IN *THE BINGO PALACE*

Bearwalking—A human practice, whereby a shaman takes the form of a bear in order to exercise a menacing power over an individual or community. See references to Fleur’s beariness and bearwalking in *BP* (e.g., pp. 136–37, 273, 274, etc.).

Manitou—“Power beings of the Ojibwe cosmos understood to be other-than-human persons upon whom less powerful human persons (Anishnaabeg) depend (Smith 200).

Matchi-Manitou—“Sometimes a shadowy underworld figure who, like the Christian devil, stands in contrast to Kitche Manitou. Properly and more commonly generic term for group of malevolent beings that includes Mishebeshu and the windigo” (Smith 200). Note the Matchimanito Lake in *BP*.

Medicine Stones/Spirit Rocks—See, for instance, p. 136 in *BP*. Theresa Smith explains that “Underwater manitouk . . . provided medicinal rocks to Anishnaabeg. . . . In their case the stone is a particular mineral—copper garnered from their own horns” (88). If a human possesses these rocks, they “carr[y] a huge responsibility, for in accepting them one entered into a pact with the monster [Missheshu]” (112).

Midewiwin—“Great Medicine Society of the Ojibwe, an institutionalized healing group or the ceremony practiced by the group” (Smith 200). See, in *BP*, Lipsha’s changing relationship to medicine.

Missheshu—See esp. p. 195 of *BP*. Missheshu means, “literally, Great Lynx” (Smith 200). He is an underwater manitou.

Nanabush/Nanabozho—“The culture hero and trickster of Ojibwe” (Smith 200). Both Gerry and Lipsha are connected to Nanabozho

throughout the novel. [We will discuss these connections further in class.]

Pawagan—“Dream visitor, a manitou who comes to Anishnaabeg in vision/dream and/or acts as a guardian” (Smith 200). Both the skunk and Misshepeshu act as pawagan to Lipsha; Fleur too takes Misshepeshu as pawagan.

Sacred Pipes—Nector’s pipe plays an important role in the novel (see p. 39 in particular). Pipes are used for many public and sacred practices, for instance “at the commencement of grand council conferences, at the assemblies of the Medaewaewin [Midewiwin] (Grand Medicine Society), at negotiations for peace, and at the beginning of festivals” (Johnston 4).

Shells/Megis Shell—See Shawnee’s (“Our Miss Little Shell”) special relationship to shells throughout (i.e., pp. 12, 186). The Megis is the “sacred shell of the Midewiwin Society. Term refers both to a manitou, the Great Shell, and to the small shells that mide shamans ritually shoot at members during initiation ceremonies” (Smith 200). In one of the most popular Ojibwe creation stories, the Ojibwe people are born out of a large shell (see Lipsha’s musings, p. 197 of *BP*).

Vision Quests—According to Johnston, “following the example set by Kitchi-Manitou, every person is to seek a dream or vision within the expanse of his or her soul-spirit being and, having attained it, bring it into fulfillment and reality” (3). “Young people began their vision quests with fasting and in isolation sought the attention of manitouk who would become guardians to them” (Smith 55). See both Lipsha’s and Lyman’s vision quests (191–201 and 203–05, respectively).

Wampum/Waupum—“A quilled or beaded sash with symbols woven into it, that served as a historical record to speakers in their references to past events, ideas, and beliefs, and to many aspects of the cultural heritage” (Johnston 246). The novel addresses in various

places the importance of record keeping, although in this case on paper (or on Fleur's walls)—see esp. pp. 128 and 129 (Lulu's records) and 134 and 135 (Fleur's records).

Windigo—"A Matchi-Manitou who is one of the most feared, especially among the northern Ojibwe and Cree. Represented as a giant ice monster and/or cannibal and said to have once been a human who died from starvation or, alternately, who ate his family in order to survive. Windigo may attack Anishnaabeg and both starvation and gluttony can cause one to suffer windigo sickness (i.e., to become windigo)" (Smith 201).

#### OUT OF CLASS ASSIGNMENT

Before passing out the previous handout, have students—in pairs or on their own—sign up to research one of the following items, directing them to specific sources on reserve depending on what item they choose. Because students will also likely use the Internet, you should require that they first read "Techniques for Evaluating American Indian Web Sites" (<http://www.u.arizona.edu/~ecubbins/webcrit.html>).

Medicine stones  
 Sacred pipes  
 Shells/Megis Shell  
 Misshepesu  
 Bears  
 Bearwalking  
 Windigo  
 Vision quests  
 Pawagan

Ask students to prepare a *very* short (five-minute) presentation on their findings and to think about at least one way in which the novel explores their topic. Open the class with their findings.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY ON ORAL NARRATIVE, NO. 1

1. Pass out the following list to students.
2. In groups of three to four, have students use the list to brainstorm ways in which Erdrich might be participating in oral narrative (with pages numbers from the novel).
3. List findings on the board and generate discussion.
4. Follow up on any important connections that students might have missed.

Common features of Ojibwe oral tradition/oral narrative (by no means exhaustive or definitive):

- Episodic or circular (or at least nonlinear) structure
- Performative and communal (depend on an audience listening, participating)
- Not fixed (open to revisions, reinterpretations)
- Animals, humans, deities merge
- Motives/emotions remain unexplained
- Sex described graphically
- Creatures (human, animal, deity) intimately tied to land
- Humor/irony pervasive
- Repetition used (as a narrative device)
- No designated/autonomous protagonist (often a collective protagonist)
- Often about achieving wholeness (from fragmentation to wholeness)
- Have a Function/Purpose

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY ON ORAL NARRATIVE, NO. 2

1. Pass out one or two traditional Ojibwe oral narratives (transcriptions). [“The Lynx and the Marten” or “The Lynx and the Fox” (from Spielmann) would work well, because they are short and provide good examples of structural complexities.]

2. Have students read the stories either to themselves or in groups of three to four.
3. Ask students (in groups of three to four) to chart the speaker's choice of verb tense (particularly shifts), dialogue, asides, and so on. Have them talk about the effects of these choices.
4. Open up to large discussion.
5. Afterward, hand out excerpts from Spielmann's "You're So Fat!": *Exploring Ojibwe Discourse* and provide follow-up notes or mini-lecture on important points not covered.
6. As a follow-up, have students write a directed thought paper on this topic. Thought papers are typically short pieces (1.5–2 pages), a space for students to explore their own ideas while ideally using the text(s) for support. (See next sample.)

#### SAMPLE SHORT PAPER ASSIGNMENT

##### *Thought Paper Assignment: Louise Erdrich and Oral Narrative*

For your thought paper this week, use the Spielmann excerpts to describe the ways in which Erdrich uses language to achieve an “oral narrative” effect. You may want to focus on chapters one, twelve, and/or twenty-seven, but you may find useful examples in other sections of the novel. Feel free to use the handout on features of oral narrative as well.

##### *Thought Paper Assignment: Louise Erdrich and Tricksterism*

Read the excerpts from Smith on Nanabozho. How is Erdrich employing the tradition of tricksterism in *The Bingo Palace*? In what ways is Gerry a trickster figure? Lipsha? Be sure to point to specific passages in the text.

##### *Thought Paper Assignment: Native American Speaker Series*

[This assignment would vary, of course, depending on on-campus and local events. Barry Dana—tribal leader of the Penobscot

Nation—spoke at the Native American Speaker Series at Tufts University in 2005 about sovereignty and environmental activism.]

In this paper, make connections between Barry Dana's talk on sovereignty and *The Bingo Palace's* commentary on land and economic sovereignty. Where do you see points of agreement? Disagreement? (You may want to use the excerpts from Johnson's *Contemporary Native American Political Issues* to fill out your arguments.)

## Contributor Biographies

BARBARA J. COOK is an assistant professor at Mount Aloysius College in Pennsylvania, where she teaches Native American literature as well as American literature and women's studies courses. She edited the collection *From the Center of Tradition: Critical Perspectives on Linda Hogan* (UP of Colorado, 2003), which was the cowinner of the 2003 Colorado Endowment for the Humanities Publications Prize. Her articles have appeared in the *Northwest Review*, *Southwest American Literature*, and *American Indian Quarterly*.

CHELLEYE L. CROW, of Comanche, Choctaw, and Cherokee descent, took her EdD from Baylor University in curriculum and instruction, specializing in multicultural education, in May 2005. She teaches English for McLennan Community College while continuing her research in multicultural education. She is a National Caucus Board Member of Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. Her dissertation, "Multicultural Education: Equity Pedagogy on Perception and Practices of Emerging Secondary Teachers," was a case study/ethnography focusing on one of the five dimensions of multicultural education as conceptualized by James A. Banks and expounded on by using Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. She resides in Waco, Texas.

LYNN DOMINA is the author of a collection of poetry, *Corporal Works*, as well as two reference books. She has written on Leslie Marmon Silko, Zora Neale Hurston, Elizabeth Keckley, Mary McCarthy, N. Scott Momaday, and other writers.

REGINALD DYCK, a professor at Capital University, is also a community activist in Columbus, Ohio. He has an essay forthcoming on socioeconomic structures in *Love Medicine* and is presently writing essays on class and work in *Grand Avenue*.

SUSAN GARDNER is an associate professor of English (American Indian literatures and film) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is completing a biography, *A Vision of Double Woman: Ella Cara Deloria and the Profession of Kinship*. During 2006–07, she is resident advisor for UNCC students at Kingston University, London, England. She is thrilled to be introducing American Indian modules in courses on film and autobiography there.

JANE HALADAY, who is of English, Welsh, and Ruthenian ancestry, is an assistant professor of English at the University of North Carolina, Pembroke. She holds a PhD in Native American studies with an emphasis in feminist theory and research from the University of California, Davis; an MA in American Indian studies from the University of Arizona; and a BA in literature from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She taught high school English in the San Francisco Bay Area for eight years before beginning her career in postsecondary education. An occasional fiction writer, poet, and artist, her scholarship and teaching focus on literary practices of decolonization, indigenous self-determination, and the subversion of ethnic and gender stereotypes in the writings of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Native North American authors.

KIMBERLY ROPPOLO, of Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek descent, took her PhD from Baylor University, specializing in Native American literature, in May 2002. She is an assistant professor in the Native American Studies Department at the University of Lethbridge and is the associate national director of Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. She is also the 2004 recipient of the Native Writers Circle of the Americas First Book Award for prose for her manuscript "Back to the Blanket: Reading, Writing, and Resistance for American Indian Literary Critics." Recent publications include "Morning Star

Song” in *SAIL* 16.4 (2004); “Symbolic Racism, History, and Reality: The Real Problem with Indian Mascots,” in MariJo Moore, ed., *Genocide of the Mind: An Anthology of Urban Indians*; and “The Real Americana,” in Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds., *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. She resides in Lethbridge, Alberta, with her husband and the two youngest of her three children.

CONRAD SHUMAKER is originally from outside Tucson, Arizona, and now teaches courses in American and American Indian literature and cultures at the University of Central Arkansas. His articles have appeared in such journals as *American Literature*, *The New England Quarterly*, and *The Journal of American Culture*. He is currently working on a book on teaching American Indian literature of the Southwest.

MARGARET A. TOTH is a PhD candidate at Tufts University, where she is completing her dissertation on representations of the (raced, sexed, classed) body in early-twentieth-century American literature and visual culture. Her academic interests include nineteenth- and twentieth-century multicultural American literature, film, visual studies, and cultural theory.

## Major Tribal Nations and Bands Mentioned in This Issue

This list is provided as a service to those readers interested in further communications with the tribal communities and governments of American Indian and Native nations. Inclusion of a government in this list does not imply endorsement of or by *SAIL* in any regard, nor does it imply the enrollment or citizenship status of any writer mentioned. Some communities have alternative governments and leadership that are not affiliated with the United States, Canada, or Mexico, while others are not currently recognized by colonial governments. We have limited the list to those most relevant to the essays published in this issue; thus, not all bands, towns, or communities of a particular nation are listed.

We make every effort to provide the most accurate and up-to-date tribal contact information available, a task that is sometimes quite complicated. Please send any corrections or suggestions to *SAIL* Editorial Assistant, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Department of American Thought and Language, 235 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1033, or send an e-mail to [sail2@msu.edu](mailto:sail2@msu.edu).

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<http://www.cheyenne-arapaho.org/>

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<http://www.lagunapueblo.org/>

Navajo Nation (Diné)  
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928-871-6355  
<http://www.navajo.org/>

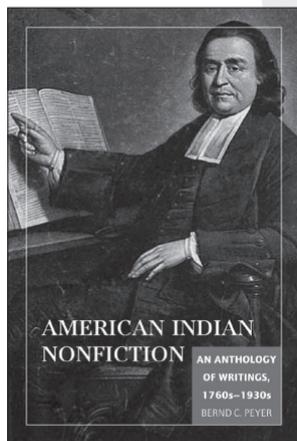
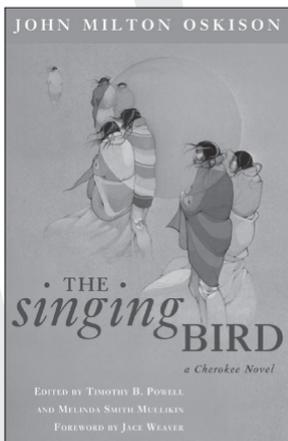
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Canada  
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Fax: 250-707-0166

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480-850-8000  
<http://www.saltriver.pima-maricopa.nsn.us/>

Tonoho O'Odham Tribe  
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