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FROM THE EDITOR

aya aya niihkaania!

Aya aya all my SAIL friends and relatives. This issue of SAIL marks our thirtieth anniversary of publication—a tremendous testimony to all of us who participate in the field of American Indian writing and literary studies. While this journal began in the hearts and minds of those who created the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures and the Division on American Indian Literatures at the Modern Language Association, it has been sustained by generations of scholars, writers, and teachers who see the study of Native writing, music, art, film, and performance as significant to all academic endeavors and, more importantly, as central to understanding the creative, intellectual forces that are integral to the lives of millions of Indigenous peoples who claim the American continent as “home.”

The writings selected for this thirtieth anniversary issue are diverse because our field is increasingly diverse. This issue includes critical essays, poems, a short story, and a special section of revised conference papers written by established scholars and writers as well as “new” and upcoming scholars and writers. This spectrum of creation to critique across the generations has wrought this fields into a community; that community has always been, and will continue to be, SAIL’s greatest strength. As many of us enter a larger conversation focused on creating an umbrella organization for American Indian and Indigenous studies over the next few months, I hope that this strength translates outward to other fields and becomes part of
that larger conversation. After all, a community behaves in ways that a loose collection of interested individuals cannot. A community is a homeplace, a support structure, a center; being a member of a community is a responsibility, not a hobby or an entitlement.

I have been privileged to be SAIL’s editor for the last seven years. When I began this endeavor back in 2001, there was no way that I could anticipate the joy, or the pain, that editorship brings. A lot has changed since then. We’ve gone from being locally produced using Microsoft Word and a copy machine to being produced by the University of Nebraska Press; from being searchable only through the MLA index to being abstracted and indexed in Anthological Index, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Bibliography of Native North Americans, Current Abstracts, Current Contents/Arts & Humanities, ERIC Databases, IBR: International Bibliography of Book Reviews, IBS: International Bibliography of Periodical Literature, TOC Premier, as well as the MLA International Bibliography; from being available online only through Bob Nelson’s killer ASAIL Web site to being a Project Muse journal. These are big changes, good changes.

When I agreed to step into the editorship way back at that last Puerto Vallarta conference, I made a lot of promises about quality—both content and production—and about community. I’ve tried my very best to fulfill those promises over the past twenty-seven issues under my editorship. But I haven’t been alone in that work. There are scores of people to thank, and I want to take some space here to do just that. Thanks to the University of Nebraska Press, especially to Gary Dunham and Manjit Kaur, who have been my most steadfast allies over the past five years and to whose credit our impressive scholarly presence (in indexes and in fact) is much indebted. Thanks to all of the editorial assistants who suffered me with such good humor and grace—Daniel Justice, Mark Wojcik, Shadiin Garcia, Rain Cranford, Tina Urbain, Angela Haas, Deb Grace, and Sue Webb—and to Kim Lee who has served as my assistant editor for the past year with equal grace and humor. Thanks to the English Department at the University of Nebraska for providing initial support for SAIL; and enthusiastic thanks to the College of Arts and Letters; the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures; and the Rhetoric and Writing pro-
gram at Michigan State University for providing generous financial and intellectual support for the work of the journal. Thanks, too, to all members of my editorial board—Chad Allen, Dean Rader, Eric G. Anderson, Joe Bruchac, Daniel Justice, Gwen Griffin, Jane Hafen, Janet McAdams, Jim Cox, and Lisa Tatonetti—whose guidance has made SAIL’s content as varied and impressive as it has been. Special thanks must go to Bob Nelson, who held my hand in those early days and guided me step-by-step into being an editor; to LaVonne Ruoff for her encouragement and, um, LaVonne-ness; and to Daniel Justice and James Cox, the new editors who will take SAIL into the future.

And to all of you scholars, teachers, and writers who literally make SAIL possible, my deepest appreciation. You’ve been good to me and it’s because of your encouragement that when I leave SAIL I’ll continue to contribute to our community in my new role as associate national director of the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers. Nee wee, my relations and friends. Safe travels on your journeys.

Nee wee,

Malea Powell
Revitalized and refocused, *AIQ* is building on its reputation as a dominant journal in American Indian studies by presenting the best and most thought-provoking scholarship in the field. Editor Amanda J. Cobb is committed to making *AIQ* a forum for diverse voices and perspectives spanning a variety of academic disciplines. The common thread is *AIQ*’s commitment to publishing work that contributes to the development of American Indian studies as a field and to the sovereignty and continuance of American Indian nations and cultures. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, *AIQ* features reviews of books, films, and exhibits.

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Most of the outstanding Maori artists of today are people who were educated in the Western tradition. Many of them went to Western-type art schools in New Zealand, which taught them much about Western art but little about their traditional art forms. So here were Maori artists more at home with European art forms and techniques than with their own culture. They were educated to become uncomfortable and guilty about their lack of knowledge about themselves. One can see in their innovative work evidence of a struggle to come to terms with their Maori identity.


Let us begin with the premise that, like other contemporary indigenous arts, indigenous literatures written in English—or primarily in English—are products of complicated genealogies, genealogies that include diverse and multiply intersecting lines: political, social, personal, textual, linguistic, aesthetic. The influences that bear upon any particular indigenous text written, say, after World War II are not only manifold but also highly imbricated. Mead’s description of some of the forces that drive the innovative works of contemporary Maori artists is certainly apt as a description of the forces that drive the work of many indigenous writers; but, of course, it cannot capture the actual diversity of twentieth- and twenty-first-century indigenous experience and artistic or literary practice. No single description can. Therefore, in addition to our premise of the genealogical
complexity of contemporary indigenous texts, let us concede at the outset that the project of contemporary indigenous literary studies is both difficult and complicated (in the most positive sense of these words) and that the work of literary studies will not produce simple formulas for understanding indigenous literatures.

What kinds of methodologies, then, might enable us to better understand and to better appreciate how contemporary indigenous literary texts produce not only culturally inflected, historically situated meanings for their several audiences but also various kinds of aesthetic interest and pleasure? And what kinds of methodologies might help us to focus specifically on what is indigenous in contemporary indigenous texts?

Much attention has been devoted to critical methodologies that focus on single works or on groups of works by a single indigenous author; attention also has been devoted to methodologies that arrange works or authors into categories according to some criterion, such as genre, historical period of production, regional or tribal affiliations, gender or sexual orientation, major themes, and so on. Some of these methodologies emphasize the idea of authorial intent through biographical studies or through interviews with living authors or their associates. Other methodologies emphasize various types of literary contextualization that focus on relevant aspects of indigenous and nonindigenous cultures (including literary cultures), history, politics, social movements, or activism. Less attention has been devoted to methodologies that emphasize the possible influences of indigenous languages or indigenous arts traditions other than oral traditions on the production and reception of contemporary texts written in English. And only slight attention has been devoted, thus far, to the specific issue of the physical production and distribution of contemporary indigenous literatures (how texts come to be published or not published and circulated either narrowly or widely) or to the specific issue of their reception (how particular audiences produce meaning through their encounters with specific texts or how these audiences assign to specific texts literary, cultural, or personal value). Not surprisingly, perhaps, relatively little attention has been devoted to methodologies that emphasize the comparison of
specific texts across contemporary indigenous literature traditions, especially across what have become standard indigenous groupings (e.g., New Zealand Maori, North American Indians, or Indigenous Australians).

This essay began as a contribution to the symposium Comparative Approaches to Indigenous Literary Studies held at Auckland University in Aotearoa/New Zealand in August 2006. In the spirit of that international symposium, which brought together scholars and writers from Oceania, Australia, Europe, and North America, I attempt to demonstrate a methodology for analyzing indigenous literary texts comparatively. I trace a series of juxtapositions of contemporary indigenous poems from the continental United States, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Hawai‘i. I focus on poems rather than on prose, in part because of their potential relationships to indigenous customary forms of oral composition, but also, more pragmatically, because of their relative brevity and formal complexity. I highlight the interpretations that result from positioning these brief, complex poems in critical and generative conversation. In other words I pose the question, What do we learn or see differently when we juxtapose diverse indigenous texts?

Immediately, in such an undertaking, we are confronted with the problem of the convenient but fictional “we” of literary criticism. Particular readers of diverse indigenous literary texts will produce specific series of juxtapositions and interpretations based on their particular range of knowledge and interests and based on many other factors, some relatively obvious (such as ethnicity, citizenship, tribal affiliation, gender, class position) and others more obscure. While all interpretive projects are situated in multiple ways, explicitly comparative projects such as this one are perhaps all the more obviously situated because they attempt to bring diverse texts and traditions into a single conversation.

The phrasing of my essay title, “Rere Kē/Moving Differently,” is meant to convey this sense of highly situated interactions created by juxtaposition. Maori artist and art historian Robert Jahnke employs the Maori-language term rereketanga as a rough equivalent to the English term uniqueness (“Maori Art” 42).¹ Rere kē translates into
English as “to move” or, perhaps more precisely, to “flow” or “fly” (rere) “differently” or “strangely” (kē). In what follows I restage juxtapositions that I have found productive among the following texts: “Sad Joke on a Marae,” written by the Maori poet Apirana Taylor; “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919,” written by the U.S. American Indian poet N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa/Cherokee); “Tangata Whenua,” composed by the Maori hip-hop group Upper Hutt Posse; “Blood Quantum,” written by the Hawaiian poet Naomi Losch; and “When I of Fish Eat,” written by the Maori poet Rowley Habib (also known as Rore Hapiipi) and illustrated by the Maori artist Ralph Hotere. The “unique” interpretive movements I trace through these juxtapositions are linked by a focus on analyzing how the presence or absence of indigenous language functions in each text, a focus that emerged over time from the experience of working with the juxtapositions themselves. In the end I argue that this series of juxtapositions, this process of moving differently among several contemporary indigenous texts, enables an analysis of how Habib’s illustrated poem, written entirely in English and augmented by contemporary, “modernist” line drawings, can produce bilingual and bicultural effects for certain audiences. The point, however, is less about the inevitability of any particular analysis and more about the productiveness of a comparative process. While this essay ends with Habib’s poem, the conversation about comparison will have only begun. Further juxtapositions await, undoubtedly, beyond the essay’s horizon.

PRODUCTIVE ABSENCE

I begin with the juxtaposition of “Sad Joke on a Marae” and “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919” because I first encountered Taylor’s poem, published in his 1979 collection *Eyes of the Ruru*, when I was struggling to understand how Momaday’s poem, published in his 1992 collection *In the Presence of the Sun*, produces such concentrated power. “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919” is one of a series of Momaday’s works, produced in several genres, that meditate on the story of how his Kiowa grandfather was honored by the gift of a fine hunting horse during a gourd dance performed near Carnegie, Oklahoma, in 1919.
Reading Momaday’s and Taylor’s poems together, although they are based in distinct indigenous customs and histories and although they were produced in different historical periods, helped me to begin to see that the absence of indigenous language in Momaday’s poem is actually highly productive of both meaning and aesthetic power. This absence is probably especially productive for readers like myself who are familiar with Momaday’s larger body of work and thus familiar with a greater range of details about the historical events to which this brief poem alludes, as well as familiar with a greater range of interpretations of the ongoing significance of these events that Momaday has submitted to public scrutiny since the publication of his poem “The Gourd Dancer” and his memoir *The Names* in 1976.

Taylor’s and Momaday’s poems are related thematically in that each represents and, arguably, each performs a moment of spiritual contact between a contemporary speaker and his ancestors. Each poem operates, in part, by situating its speaker on ceremonial grounds and evoking a paradox of space and time. In the Taylor poem, the speaker, Tu, is explicitly alienated from his indigenous culture and unable to speak his indigenous language fluently. Standing on an unnamed *marae* (Maori ceremonial space) before an unnamed *whare whakairo* (carved meeting house), he participates in a paradox of space and time when the figure of the *tekoteko* (carving of an ancestor) offers Tu his own ancestral tongue with which to speak in the present. In the Momaday poem, the speaker is only implicitly alienated from his indigenous culture and language. Standing on the Kiowa gourd-dancing grounds, however, he similarly participates in a paradox of space and time. This paradox is articulated explicitly in the juxtaposition of the poem’s final lines, “and I am not here, / but, grandfather, father, I am here”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sad Joke on a Marae</th>
<th>Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tihei Mauriora I called</td>
<td>This afternoon is older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kupe Paikea Te Kooti</td>
<td>than the giving of gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewi and Te Rauparaha</td>
<td>and the rhythmic scraping of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw them</td>
<td>the red earth.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
grim death and wooden ghosts
carved on the meeting house wall.

In the only Maori I knew I called
Tihei Mauriora.
Above me the tekoteko raged.
He ripped his tongue from his mouth
and threw it at my feet.

Then I spoke.
My name is Tu the freezing worker.
Ngati D. B. is my tribe.
The pub is my Marae.
My fist is my taiaha.
Jail is my home.

Tihei Mauriora I cried.
They understood the tekoteko and the ghosts though I said nothing but Tihei Mauriora for that's all I knew.

Much can be said about either poem on its own, and each deserves a full explication. When the two poems are juxtaposed, “Sad Joke on a Marae” draws attention, among other things, to the absence of indigenous language in “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919.” Taylor’s first stanza deploys the names of five well-known Maori figures, legendary Polynesian explorers and famous Maori prophets, warriors, and chiefs. The third stanza announces the speaker’s own Maori name, Tu, which can be translated into English as “to stand,” “to fight,” or “to be wounded.” The name can be read as an allusion to the con-
cept of *turangawaewae* (standing place) and/or as an allusion to the war god Tumatauenga. In addition the poem deploys several words from the Maori language that are likely to be known not only to fluent Maori-language speakers but also to many primarily English-language speakers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including *tekoteko* (carved figure), *Ngati* (a term that designates the name of a tribal group), *marae* (ceremonial space in front of the meeting house”), and *taiaha* (fighting staff). Most prominently, the poem repeatedly deploys the formulaic phrase “Tihei Mauriora,” which is likely to be familiar to many readers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, whether or not they can translate it into English. In a specifically Maori context this phrase is often used as a speaker’s opening move during *whaikorero* (oratory) on the marae; it can be paraphrased in English as evoking the idea of “new life.” Through the repetition of this phrase, which appears once in both the first and second stanzas and twice in the concluding fourth stanza, as well as through the use of the ritualized language of formal introductions in the third stanza, Taylor’s poem emphasizes the role of Maori language and public oratory in this representation of an enabling contact with indigenous ancestors.

In marked contrast, Momaday’s poem not only does not deploy any examples of indigenous language or obviously indigenous oratorical conventions, but its use of unusual phrasing and punning in English draws attention to these absences. In lines 4 through 6, the speaker declares that “My father’s father’s name is called, / and the gift horse stutters out, whole, / the whole horizon in its eyes.” The duplicative adjectival phrase “father’s father’s” draws attention to the significant ancestral “name,” but this indigenous name is unnamed and unspoken. The passive verb that follows, “is called,” adds to this effect, since it obscures agency and focuses attention on the disembodied act of calling. Absence is emphasized further in the lines that complete the statement. Although the auspicious act of calling produces “the gift horse,” this gift is immediately associated with the repeated word “whole,” which puns “hole,” another word readily associated with absence. (This pun is later echoed at the beginning of line 9 with the pun Oh/O.) The statement ends with the word “eyes,” linking line 6 with lines 11 and 12, where the repeated “I” of
the speaker declares his paradox of “not here”/“am here.” Moreover, the pun between the plural “eyes” of perception and the repeated “I” of subjectivity draws further attention to those “I”s that are absent in the poem, the father, the father’s father, and the unnamed Kiowa ancestor who calls his name.

Once these absences are made visible, how might we refine our understanding of the ways in which the absence of indigenous language in “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919” is actually productive of meaning and aesthetic power? Let us turn to my second juxtaposition by adding the rap composition “Tangata Whenua” by the Maori hip-hop group Upper Hutt Posse, which I encountered several years after first reading “Sad Joke on a Marae” and “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919.” “Tangata Whenua” appears on Upper Hutt Posse’s 1995 CD Movement in Demand, and I want to argue that this track can be read as a representation of the political and cultural development of the generation of urban Maori youth that followed the generation represented in Taylor’s poem from the 1970s. Building on Tu’s experience in “Sad Joke on a Marae,” the young, unnamed speaker/MC of Upper Hutt Posse’s rap has reconnected with Maori language. Instead of repeating a single formulaic phrase as a plea to the ancestors and as a call for “new life,” this speaker/MC is able to produce whaikorero, formal oratory, and to do so within the enabling structure of community rather than in debilitating isolation. Significantly, he is able to do so completely in the Maori language.

“Tangata Whenua” can be translated into English as “land people” or “people of the land,” and it carries both the more specific connotation of “hosts” as well as the more expansive connotation of “indigenous people.” On the CD, the rap is performed entirely in the Maori language with no translation. Moreover, the track evokes a particularly “tribal” sound in its use of complementary female and male voices, its use of the haka form of vigorous chant, and its use of bass guitar supported by the stirring sound of the purerehua (bull-roarer), conventional drums, Polynesian log drums, and Afro-Cuban congas. The track opens with a female voice performing a brief karanga (call), which is appropriate protocol for beginning any ceremony on the marae. The rap itself begins, as often is the case with
whaikorero on the marae, with the recitation of whakapapa (genealogy). The male rapper says that he is the child of Papatuanuku, the earth mother, and Ranginui, the sky father. In the background, a male voice calls out the formulaic phrase central to Taylor’s poem, “Tihei Mauriora,” another indication that the rap is meant to evoke a speech delivered on the marae. The rapper goes on to say that the “root” (te take) of his genealogy is Io Matua Kore, Io the father of the void, the first principle in some versions of Maori cosmology. Following this brief whakapapa the rap’s hook (chorus) makes bold assertions about what it means to be tangata whenua, people of the land:

Tangata Whenua Te Pake Whakapapa
Tangata Whenua Te Take Me Te Mana
Tangata Whenua Te Hana O Te Haa
Tangata Whenua Te Ahi Kaa

These lines can be translated into English as “Tangata whenua is the persistent genealogy / Tangata whenua is the root and the power / Tangata whenua is the flame of the essence of life / Tangata whenua is the home fire.” Taken together they make strong claims for Maori land rights based in Maori philosophy and Maori customs of land tenure. The other verses of the rap spell out contemporary Maori aspirations for “knowledge” (mātauranga) and “unity” (kotahitanga) and contrast these with the “evil” deeds of the “enemy.” The rap’s closing lines return to the idea of a cosmic genealogy that connects contemporary Maori to the earth and cosmos and asserts, more specifically, “E rere ana te toto o oku Tupuna i roto i toku manawa / E rere ana te wairua o oku Tupuna i roto i toku tinana” (“The blood of my ancestors runs in my heart / The spirit of my ancestors runs in my body”).

Juxtaposed with “Sad Joke on a Marae” and “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919,” “Tangata Whenua” reveals a similar collapsing of distance in space and time, a similar connection of the contemporary with the ancestral, in at least two ways. For audiences who understand Maori language and who understand Maori cultural concepts such as ahi kaa roa (“the long-burning home fires,” a customary claim to land
rights), that connection is evoked in the rap’s specific content, which explicitly links the rapper to Maori ancestors and even to the Maori gods. But the rap potentially evokes this kind of connection even for those listeners who do not possess this level of skill in the Maori language. Similar to Taylor’s use of the formulaic phrase “Tihei Mauriora,” which gains force and meaning through its strategic repetition, the rap’s extensive use of “tribal” sound elements, including Maori language itself but also Maori musical instruments and distinctive Maori vocal traditions such as the karanga and the haka, is evocative of contemporary Maori connection with the ancestral. Even in the absence of a high level of Maori linguistic skill and semantic understanding, these sound elements can be productive of particular kinds of meaning and aesthetic power, at least for certain audiences.

**VISUAL AND AURAL EMPATHY**

How might we conceptualize the potential of “Tangata Whenua” to evoke a contemporary indigenous connection to the ancestral at the level of its sound elements, as opposed to exclusively at the level of its linguistic content? One possible approach is to situate Upper Hutt Posse’s rap within a broader context of contemporary Maori arts production. Maori artist and art historian Robert Jahnke has developed a conceptual model for contemporary Maori visual arts that imagines a continuum running between the poles of “customary” (art created by Maori which maintains “a visual correspondence with historical models”) and “non-customary” (art created by Maori in which “visual correspondence and empathy with historical models [is] absent”) (“Māori Art” 49–50). Between these poles, “trans-customary” Maori art, which Jahnke argues began to be developed in the 1950s, establishes not a strict correspondence with customary forms but rather a “visual empathy with customary practice” through the use of “pattern, form, medium and technique” (48). Upper Hutt Posse’s Maori-language rap appears to operate in a similar position along the continuum between “customary” and “non-customary” Maori music. Their composition fits Jahnke’s cri-
teria for “trans-customary” art in its use of recognizably customary sound elements, patterns, forms, and techniques, only it does so in the aural rather than in the visual medium. Following Jahnke we might describe their techniques as creating “aural empathy” with customary practice.

This possible link between the operations of visual and aural empathy through various types of patterning leads to my fourth juxtaposition. Naomi Losch’s poem “Blood Quantum” was published in the important 2003 anthology Whetu Moana: Contemporary Polynesian Poems in English, and it is powerfully provocative on a number of levels. Of particular interest to this discussion is the poem’s strategic deployment of Hawaiian language and its use of a specific type of complex visual and aural patterning, which, for lack of a more precise term, I will call bilingual punning.

Losch’s poem is written primarily in English. Similar to Taylor’s “Sad Joke on a Marae,” it includes several indigenous names of ancestors and of significant sites in the landscape: “Our ancestors were Liloa, Kuali’i, and Alapa’i. / We fought at Mokuohai, Kepaniwai and Nu’uanu, / And we supported Lili’ulani in her time of need” (2–4). “Blood Quantum” draws additional attention to indigenous language, however, in its deployment of a single line written entirely in Hawaiian. Positioned at line 10 in the 19-line poem, the line of Hawaiian language divides the English language text into two halves. In effect the line forms an indigenous fulcrum, with nine lines of English balanced above the Hawaiian and nine lines of English balanced below. In line 1, Losch’s speaker opens the poem by stating, “We thought we were Hawaiian”; in line 11, which immediately follows the line of Hawaiian language and begins the second half of the poem, the speaker states, “And yet, by definition we are not Hawaiian.” Together these lines describe a paradox created by blood quantum standards that echoes Momaday’s paradox of “not here”/“am here.”

The line of Hawaiian language, moreover, is framed by quotation marks, which draws further attention to its difference: “‘O ko mākou one hānau keʻia.’” The glossary included at the back of the anthology translates this line into English as “This is our birthplace/home-
land (a Hawaiian phrase).” More literally, one hānau can be translated into English as “birthing sands.” As in the Maori language, as a noun, one in Hawaiian refers most specifically to sand; hānau, like the Maori word whānau, refers to both giving birth and being born. Losch’s poem is about how U.S. federal and Hawaiian state governments have worked to divide the Hawaiian community against itself through various policies, such as blood quantum requirements, that limit who can claim official indigenous Hawaiian status and therefore access to Hawaiian resources, such as land. The single line written in Hawaiian language works as an expression of collective Hawaiian anguish over such division and as a defiant assertion of indigenous Hawaiian identity despite the pronouncements of official policies. It literally centers the ancestral, in the form of Hawaiian language, in a text about ongoing colonial practices of domination.

Losch’s line is also striking, however, in how it links visual and aural patterns to create an additional level of meaning and aesthetic power. The Hawaiian word one is located at almost the exact center of the line, which is located at the center of the poem. Its semantic content in Hawaiian thus places sand/land at the center of this meditation on an embattled contemporary Hawaiian identity. But within the otherwise English-language poem, the word one draws attention to itself, as well, as a bilingual pun. On the page, in its visual (alphabetical) representation, the Hawaiian word one looks exactly like the English word one. At the center of the poem, therefore, a bilingual pun joins the idea of land to the idea of unity (one-ness), further supporting the poem’s political message that all Hawaiians, regardless of their official status under imposed rules of blood quantum, are united in their sustaining and regenerative relationship to their homeland (one hānau).

Within conventional English-language literary studies, we are accustomed to think that sound patterning and semantic relationships within poetic structures (including puns) work to “defamiliarize” the ordinary, to make the known world somehow “fresh” and “new,” to emphasize the possible connotations of a given word or set of words over their explicit denotation. Bilingual punning appears to work toward somewhat different ends. More so than those of mono-
lingual punning, its effects are highly dependent on the specific and specialized linguistic skills of particular readers. For readers who are actively bilingual, instances of bilingual punning offer the possibility of a synchral experience of (at least) two distinct language and cultural systems. Bilingual punning is thus a kind of repetition, perhaps a version of repetition with variation. It is also a kind of reiteration, saying the same thing and not saying exactly the same thing (at least) twice. Rather than defamiliarizing “ordinary” language, bilingual punning works to create additional layers of meaning for particular audiences by engaging multiple denotations (both one as “land” and one as “a single entity”) as well as multiple connotations (“birthplace/ homeland” and “unity/lack of division”). Rather than creating an obvious hierarchy of meaning, bilingual punning stresses simultaneity.

Although “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919” contains no obvious bilingual puns, part of the power of the absence of indigenous language in the poem can be described by the concepts of synchral experience and simultaneity. In Momaday’s poem the emphasis placed on the sequences of genealogical terms “father’s father’s” and “grandfather, father, I” is suggestive of these terms’ potential equivalence. All of these subject positions, all of these “I”s, are “beaded” together in the speaker’s experience of apparent paradox (“not here”/“am here”). In the Kiowa language the same word is used for both the first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns, for both “I” and “we” (Boyd 28). Most readers of Momaday’s poem will be unaware of this linguistic fact and semantic potential. Yet the patterning of the poem’s English, its puns on words such as “eyes” and the visual and aural empathy created between “father’s father’s” and “grandfather, father, I,” can produce a similar effect. Along with the speaker, at least some readers can experience not only the “I” understood in the singular but also the “I” understood in the plural.

**CULTURAL SEIZURE**

The idea of a single work creating different kinds of meaning for different audiences through a combination of visual and aural cues brings me to my final juxtaposition. Rowley Habib’s poem “When
I of Fish Eat” was published in the September 1962 issue of the Department of Maori Affairs journal Te Ao Hou, which was then being edited by the Pakeha (New Zealander of European descent) scholar of Maori language and literature Margaret Orbell. Part of Orbell’s contribution to the journal was to improve the overall quality of its production and the aesthetic quality of its layout. Moreover, with the assistance of her husband, the well-known Pakeha artist Gordon Walters, Orbell increased the number and quality of illustrations in the journal. Habib’s poem is accompanied by two illustrations created by the (now) renowned contemporary Maori artist Ralph Hotere. Although I first encountered Habib’s poem and Hotere’s drawings at the same time that I was working with Taylor’s and Momaday’s poems, I did not see them as especially related until after I had encountered Upper Hutt Posse’s Maori-language rap and Losch’s Hawaiian-English bilingual puns.

Similar to “Sad Joke on a Marae” and “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919,” “When I of Fish Eat” stages a scene of spiritual connection between a contemporary speaker and his indigenous ancestors. In Habib’s poem the process of the speaker’s connection to the ancestral is accomplished not through contact with ceremonial grounds but rather through the contemporary act of eating fish “with knife and fork.” Through a series of explicit linguistic associations in English, the poem links the speaker’s “sensual” act of eating fish to the “sacred” experience of “revelation.” The speaker experiences a vision of the past as well as a deep understanding of how the past exists in the present. Although Habib’s poem is written entirely in English, I will argue that it, too, offers the potential of a synchral experience of English and Maori languages and Pakeha (European) and Maori cultural connotations. Hotere’s modernist line drawings, positioned above left and below right of the printed poem, actively contribute to the poem’s ability to provoke bilingual punning for certain readers. More than illustration, Hotere’s pictorial frame offers a visual, perhaps pictographic interpretation of the poem’s dominant theme. For the actively bilingual reader/viewer, these configurations of lines and shadow point toward Maori linguistic puns on the poem’s key English-language words and concepts:

The poem’s distinctive syntax, its careful use of punctuation and
When I of Fish Eat

When I of fish eat; when, with knife and fork,
I break the tender segments of flesh within my plate
I feel the pulling back. Strong I feel it;
Pulling me back to my forefathers,
To shores not yet trodden by white men.
It is, then, not a mere eating of the flesh,
A delighting in the sensual taste.
It is, for me, more than this: it is a revelation.
The sea surges before me, washing upon long shores;
Heaving against jagged rocks; as it did of old.
And this sea holds more than just its beauty,
Its aboundingness. It is something sacred;
It is like a parent to me. For think I then
That the sea was my forefathers' very existence.
Fishermen were they. From the sea came their very life.
This then is what it is when, with knife and fork
I lift a morsel of fish to my mouth.

ROWLEY HABIB

Fig. 1. “When I of Fish Eat” by Rowley Habib, with illustrations by Ralph Hotere. Image of page from Te Ao Hou 40 (Sept. 1962): 4. Republished with the permission of the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa and the Māori Purposes Fund Board.
line endings, and its several internal rhymes, alliterations, and repetitions create a formal rhythm and several kinds of verbal patterning that are suggestive of ritual recitation. Note, for instance, the nearly palindromic sequence created across the poem by the purposeful placement and repetition of the rhyming adverbs of time “when” and “then” and their near rhyme, the comparative conjunction “than”—*when, when, then; than, than; then, then, when*. Notice, too, the strategic placement of the poem’s five semicolons and single colon. The fact that the body of the poem is set in italics only adds to this effect of speech that has been set apart. The poem’s specific content creates a chain of English-language associations that resonate with the particular ritual of the Christian sacrament: “fish” is associated with “flesh,” which in turn is associated with the ideas of “revelation” and the “sacred,” and finally with the idea of a “parent.” The consumption of this flesh made sacred facilitates a communion with the Father. However, at the same time, the poem also resists reduction to a Christian formula. The explicit chain of linguistic associations that begins with “fish” also includes “forefathers,” “shores,” and the “sea.” While the act of eating the flesh of fish is explicitly named a “revelation,” it is the “sea” that is explicitly described as “something sacred,” “like a parent to me,” and “my forefathers’ very existence.” Although these “forefathers” are described as “fishermen,” potentially connecting them with Christ as a “fisher-of-men,” this act of communion appears to connect the speaker with the Polynesian sea god Tangaroa as much as with the Christian Father.

If we look closely at the content of the poem, however, we realize that the poem does not, in fact, describe the speaker’s actual consumption of fish but rather the moments _between_ his act of breaking into segments the flesh “within my plate” “with knife and fork” and his act of “lift[ing] a morsel of fish to my mouth,” also “with knife and fork.” In other words the poem describes and, in a sense, enacts the significant pause between the acts of breaking and consuming flesh. And it is within this significant pause that the speaker experiences his “revelation” of a spiritual connection to the ancestral. Positioning draws attention to the concrete details at the ends of the two opening and two closing lines that describe these acts of breaking and lifting:
the “knife and fork,” which are the instruments of both the breaking and the lifting of the flesh; “my plate,” which is the site of both the breaking of the flesh and its contemplation during the speaker’s revelation; and “my mouth,” the human aperture for ingestion, which is distinctly unlike the inanimate objects that precede it in the poem. Within the colonial context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, knife, fork, and plate can be read as symbols of the European “civilization” brought by settler-invaders. In this reading, local nature, represented by the fish, is subjected to a colonial “civilizing” process that can connote not only the conventions of European-derived table manners but also the conventions of European-derived aesthetic display (the plate suggesting the white space of the gallery wall or museum case) and scientific study (the segmenting of flesh suggesting a form of dissection). Over the course of the poem, this markedly European process of eating/displaying/dissecting is reconfigured as a Maori customary practice, a ritual for remembering history.

The repetition of the phrase “with knife and fork,” which appears at the end of the first line and again at the end of the penultimate line, can also be read as emphasizing the European convention of holding the knife in the right hand and the fork in the left hand; the repeated phrase can be read as “with right and left.” Here we have the potential for bilingual punning. In Maori, right and left, matau and maui, carry multiple cultural connotations, including the idea, on the marae, of taha matau (the right side, usually designated for manuhiri, visitors) and taha maui (the left side, usually designated for tangata whenua, hosts). The emphasis on right and left, in other words, can be suggestive of a marae setting. We can now read the “plate” as suggesting a marae atea, the open space in front of the meeting house that is used during ceremonies where visitors (positioned on the right side) and hosts (positioned on the left side) formally encounter one another and exchange words and song before entering the house. When the connotative potential of the poem’s English-language associations are combined with the connotative potential of these bilingual puns, a recognizably European scene can be reconfigured as a distinctly Maori practice.

This potential reconfiguration of the European plate as a marae
atea resonates with Jahnke’s analysis of contemporary Maori art installations. Jahnke argues that European-derived spaces for the public display of art, such as galleries or museums, are often reconfigured by Maori artists and curators to conform to Maori cultural practices and customary conventions, such as those enacted on the marae or within the meeting house (“Voices” 199). Jahnke names this reconfiguration of significant cultural spaces “the ritual seizure of site” (199). In a different context I have analyzed the indigenous appropriation and redeployment of the conventions of dominant discourses, such as the discourse of treaties, as an “activist occupation of significant sites of colonial discourse” (Allen, Blood Narrative 21). Habib’s poem can be read as operating in this activist vein, as performing what Jahnke calls an “act of cultural seizure” (“Voices” 197), in its movements to realign the mundane act of eating the flesh of fish, first, with the spiritual context of Christian communion and, then, with the customary paradigms of Maori rituals of encounter. In a sense Habib’s associations make the speaker’s act of eating the flesh of fish doubly significant. These connotations of different kinds of ritual encounter also link Habib’s poem to similar encounters in Taylor’s and Momaday’s poems.

Hotere’s illustrations, in their potential to provoke further bilingual punning, advance these kinds of realignments. The first drawing, a skeletal fish positioned above the title of the poem, emphasizes the horizontal line of the dead fish’s spine, which supports a string of intersecting, perpendicular bones, as well as the skeleton’s large, empty head and vacant eye. The second drawing, positioned below the text of the poem, is a representation of a teeming mass of living fish. Each fish in the mass is formed by two intersecting curves or arcs in the familiar style of the fish symbol for Christianity. The mass is divided by a vertical line that suggests the act of fishing; this drawing emphasizes life and abundance, as well as both vertical and horizontal movement. Both drawings emphasize intersections and the crossing of boundaries, again linking “When I of Fish Eat” to “Sad Joke on a Marae” and “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919.” Taken together the drawings are suggestive of the Christian idea of resurrection, and they illustrate a central paradox of Habib’s poem: consumption leads not
to depletion but rather to increase. More specifically, this consumption leads to an increase of knowledge and a spiritual connection to the past. It is a version of the idea that life follows from death in a natural cycle. But Hotere’s visual frame does more than simply illustrate this aspect of Habib’s poem. Potentially, for actively bilingual and bicultural readers/viewers, the drawings also can alert additional attention to specific words and concepts. The juxtaposition of the drawings and these words and concepts can signal specific bilingual puns that can add to the experience of the poem additional meaning and aesthetic power.

The first drawing can alert additional attention to specific words in the first half of Habib’s poem, especially to “fish,” “segments,” and “flesh,” and to associated concepts. The most common Maori word for “fish,” as both a noun and a verb, is ika. As a noun, ika also can be used figuratively to refer to any prized possession. In addition ika is suggestive of the phrase Te Ika a Maui, “The Fish of Maui,” which is commonly used to refer to the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand and also can be used to refer to the group of stars known in English as the Milky Way. In this sense the poem’s “fish” is a prized possession that links the speaker not only with the sea but also with the land and the cosmos. The drawing emphasizes not simply the fish, however, but more precisely the skeletal fish—that is, it emphasizes what is revealed when the poem’s speaker “break[s] the tender segments of flesh within my plate”: it emphasizes the bones. In English this emphasis may support the paradoxical theme of life following death. In Maori the word for “bones” or “skeletal remains” is iwi, which also carries a primary meaning of “people” or “tribe” and, by extension, “nation.” A familiar Maori pun exploits the potential of these multiple meanings: E nga iwi o nga iwi (“The bones of the people,” or “the people of the bones”). Keri Hulme’s 1984 novel The Bone People draws on the connotative power of this Maori pun, which emphasizes the connections between the living community and the ancestors whose remains are buried in the community’s homeland.

In “When I of Fish Eat” the pun on iwi is highly suggestive of additional meaning. When the speaker segments the flesh of the fish he is about to eat, he reveals the iwi, in the sense of the bones of the
ancestors, and he is “pull[ed] back,” similar to the speakers in both Taylor’s and Momaday’s poems, both to the iwi, in the sense of the ancestors, and to the land itself, the whenua—and, in the case of the North Island, the ika, the fish—that holds their remains. (Whenua carries the additional primary meaning of “afterbirth” or “placenta,” linking the land not only to ancestors and to Te Ika a Maui but also to the womb and regeneration.) We may infer that, as a result of this revelation, the speaker is subsequently “pull[ed] back” to the iwi in the sense of the contemporary community. Hotere’s drawing of the skeletal fish emphasizes this particular aspect of iwi in the way its component parts correspond to the parts of a meeting house, which is both the embodiment of the community’s principal ancestor and the contemporary community’s meeting place. The central spine of the drawn fish can be read as the ridgepole (tahuhu) of a house, which represents the backbone of the ancestor and his or her main line of descent; the intersecting bones can be read as the rafters (heke) of a house, which represent the ancestor’s ribs and descent lines; the large head can be read as representing the front porch (mahau) of a house, with the mouth representing the doorway (kuwaha) and the eye the window (matapihi). Through this visual empathy, Hotere’s skeletal fish thus unites the two primary meanings of the word iwi.

“People, tribe, or nation” is not a precise equivalent for one of these primary meanings of iwi, however, since the English-language words carry specific connotations of European-derived political and economic structures and do not convey the genealogical imperatives that underpin Maori customary concepts of social organization. As Robert Jahnke explains,

The holistic union between the body as a critical notion of regeneration and nature as personification of being is often absent from contemporary translations of “iwi.” “Iwi” is more than “people” or “tribe.” It is the essential component of the spine, the fulcrum that articulates the nerve centre of Maori culture. It is the “bone” that protects the marrow of culture. It encompasses hapū [sub-tribe; to be pregnant] and whānau [extended family; to be born] as sustenance for
the regeneration of *iwi*. It exists as a cultural backbone whose strength and durability carry the essential ingredients of culture. The concept of nurture within the womb has been trivialized in the translation of “*hapū*” as sub-tribe. “*Whānau,*” in its colonized translation as “extended family,” is rendered as an economically viable unit. Unfortunately, the erasure of the inseparability of genealogy and birth in the latter translation epitomizes the imposition of Pakeha terms of reference. As such these colonial categories of capture attempt to render the metaphysical as illogical or human potential as capitalist units of production or servitude. (“Voices” 196)

Jahnke’s explanation points up both the inadequacy of these common English translations for key Maori concepts and their potential for colonial distortion and appropriation. For the specific purposes of the present discussion, Jahnke’s explanation also points up the centrality of the theme of regeneration in Habib’s text and Hotere’s drawings, which work together to link the idea of the regeneration of the human body and of the human community to both natural and spiritual worlds. Indeed, as the above juxtapositions demonstrate, complex understandings of regeneration are central not only to the texts produced by Habib and Hotere but also to those produced by Taylor, Momaday, Upper Hutt Posse, and Losch.

Hotere’s second drawing is linked thematically to the first—both evoke ideas related to “fish”—but the second drawing also can alert additional attention to the specific word “aboundingness” that appears in the second half of Habib’s poem. This word already draws attention to itself as a neologism in English.13 In Maori linking “fish” and “aboundingness” is suggestive of an alternative word to *ika*. Among Hotere’s Te Aupouri iwi (tribal group), *ika* is often avoided as a word for “fish,” because Te Aupouri venerate a famous ancestor named Te Ika Nui (The Great Fish). In place of *ika* Te Aupouri will often substitute the word *ngohi*. *Ngohi* carries the connotation of “hundreds” or, more generally, “abundance,” which alludes to the Te Aupouri experience of generous fishing grounds off the coast of their homeland in the far north of the North Island.14 In H. M.
Ngata’s *English-Maori Dictionary*, the first Maori translation given for the English word *abound* is *hāwere* (plentiful, prolific; a variety of kumara [sweet potato]). Ngata gives the following example of its use: *I te ūnga mai o Kupe ki konei, hāwere ana te ika i te moana* (“When Kupe landed here, fish abounded in the sea”). The association of *hāwere* with a variety of kumara, a staple food source, links fishing to horticulture, the abundance of the sea to the abundance of the land, emphasizing the sustenance of the community.

The vertical line that divides the mass of fish in Hotere’s second drawing is suggestive of a fishing line (*hī ika*, to catch fish with a line and hook), although neither the fisherman nor the hook is represented. In other words these absences are productive. Like Momaday’s absent indigenous language in “Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919,” the absences at the ends of Hotere’s vertical line can produce meaning and aesthetic power, but such production is dependent on the specific knowledge of particular audiences, including the knowledge of other texts. Two “other” texts are immediately available to help interpret the absences at the ends of the vertical line, Habib’s poem, which explicitly invokes images of fishermen and fishing, and Hotere’s first drawing, which implicitly emphasizes the horizontal fish spine. The spine of the skeletal fish is suggestive not only of a ridgepole in a meeting house, as discussed above, but also of a horizon line. Note that either end of this line extends beyond the perpendicular lines of the fish bones. Similarly, the vertical line in the second drawing is suggestive of a border that extends beyond the immediate, visible scene. This border is actively crossed by the mass of fish. Their movement is oriented from the right (the side of visitors on the marae) toward the left (the side of hosts). At this point in the analysis, we may suddenly notice as significant that in the first drawing the skeletal fish is oriented facing toward the right.

**Rere Kē**

The spatial arrangements and orientations of Hotere’s line drawings thematize interpretive movement in multiple directions. The draw-
ings potentially signal multiple instances of bilingual punning that can add to our understanding of the written text’s meaning and our experience of the poem’s aesthetic power. I am tempted to argue that Hotere’s drawings can be understood as adding a Maori-language gloss to Habib’s English-language text, although that characterization does not feel fully adequate. Among other things, this gloss can highlight the poem’s participation in an ongoing indigenous negotiation with Christianity. The poem’s explicit Christian symbolism is reconfigured—but not erased—through visual and aural empathy with Maori customary practices. In this way the Christian symbolism becomes multivalent and more complex. Along with the poem’s speaker, bilingual and bicultural readers are provoked to contemplate various “shores”—horizons, borders—“not yet trodden by white men.”

This series of juxtapositions among texts by Taylor, Momaday, Upper Hutt Posse, Losch, Habib, and Hotere highlights the ability of English-language poems to resonate with meaning and aesthetic excellence that can be marked as specifically indigenous. Although radically diverse in many respects, these compositions offer mutually recognizable symbols of indigenous persistence and renewal—Taylor’s ancestral tongue, Momaday’s gift horse, Upper Hutt Posse’s tribal acoustics, Losch’s birthing sands, Habib’s and Hotere’s fish—as well as mutually empowering poetic strategies for articulating their activist claims. These juxtapositions also suggest that comparative studies offer a number of avenues for those of us who seek indigenized methodologies for literary analysis and interpretation. Comparative paradigms, which I have described elsewhere as approaches that are “trans-indigenous” (“Engaging” 48), do not obligate us to force diverse indigenous texts from distinct indigenous traditions into categories of sameness. On the contrary, comparison through juxtaposition can help provoke more complex analyses of specific texts. “Moving differently” will not produce definitive readings of indigenous texts, but it may help us to maintain a more consistent and more productive focus on the intellectual and artistic sovereignty of indigenous writing in English.
I would like to thank Ivonne Garcia, Danielle Dadras, Hugh Karena, and Alice Te Punga Somerville for their comments on drafts of this essay.

1. In a personal communication Jahnke indicated that he is following Hirini Moko Mead in his use of *rereketanga*.

2. I have written about each myself. See *Blood Narrative* and “Engaging the Politics and Pleasures of Indigenous Aesthetics.”

3. Literally, the phrase translates into English as “the sneeze of life”; it refers to the first sound produced by a newborn.

4. Given my specific purposes, I read “Tangata Whenua” in the context of contemporary indigenous composition rather than in the context of global rap and hip-hop cultures.

5. The lyrics are presented exclusively in Maori language in the CD liner notes as well.

6. Upper Hutt Posse released a new version of “Tangata Whenua” as part of their 2002 CD *Te Reo Māori Remixes* (*Maori-language remixes*). The rap has an updated musical and vocal arrangement, and some of the lyrics in the new version have been changed to convey an even more explicitly activist message. The hook (chorus) remains unchanged. On their Web site, Upper Hutt Posse offer this translation of the hook: “People of the land, the durable ancestral connections; People of the land, the root and the authority; People of the land, the glow of the breath; People of the land, the ever burning fire” (http://www.tekupu.com).

7. Robert Sullivan makes a similar point about how the phrase “Tihei Mauriora” accrues meaning through its repetition in Taylor’s poem (16–17).

8. For a detailed discussion of *Te Ao Hou*, see my chapter “A Marae on Paper: Writing a New Maori World in *Te Ao Hou*” in *Blood Narrative*.

9. See also pages 199–206 for Jahnke’s specific analysis. Similar reconfigurations of public spaces also occur in the staging of Maori theater, dance, and other performances.

10. Often referred to as the “Jesus fish” in recent times, the simple fish symbol of two intersecting arcs is thought to have been used as a recognition sign by Christians since the first three centuries of the common era. A quick Google search on the Internet will turn up a large number of sites, Christian, atheist, and neutral, that offer explanations for the symbol’s origins and meanings. Most sources seem to agree that early and contemporary Christians link the symbol to the New Testament’s descriptions of Christ as a “fisher of men.” Many sources also agree that the symbol is linked to the
Greek word for fish, ΙΧΘΥΣ (ixthus or icthus), which can be interpreted as an acronym in Greek for “Jesus Christ God’s Son is Savior.” Some sources, including especially the Web site of the American Atheists organization (http://www.atheists.org/Christianity/fish.html), also link the fish symbol to pre-Christian, pagan spiritual traditions, in which the fish is associated with female deities, reproduction, and the womb.

11. This includes warriors slain in battle or other kinds of victims.

12. Ika also carries meanings of “cluster, band, troop, heap.” The phrase Ika whenua can be used to refer to a main line of hills, and the phrases Te ika o te rangi and Ika whenua o te rangi can be used to refer to the Milky Way.

13. If the reader has knowledge of Maori language, this neologism, which joins the adjective abounding with the noun suffix-ness, can be read as following a pattern for creating new Maori nouns by adding the noun suffix-tanga.

14. I am grateful to Hugh Karena (Te Aupouri) for helping me understand these aspects of the use of the word ngohi.

WORKS CITED


Narrating Nationhood

Indian Time and Ideologies of Progress

JOSEPH BAUERKEMPER

Sunrise.
Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony (4)

Sunrise,
accept this offering,
Sunrise.
Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony (262)

During a recent visit to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven, Connecticut, I spent considerable time sifting through the facility’s substantial collection of Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko’s personal papers. Amid the bounty of telling news clippings, drafts, and ephemera, I came across a pale blue scrap of paper with two notes scribbled on it. One is a reminder about the ferry schedule from Ketchikan, Alaska, and the other reads “last word of the novel—sunrise.” It seems that as she was planning the mundane details of transportation, Silko was struck with the revelation that she must have the narrative structure of her novel Ceremony come full circle to end just as it begins, with the word “sunrise.” The appearance of this simple-yet-evocative note returned my attention to considering the significance of Ceremony’s pervasive penchant for nonlinearity. While I am certainly neither the first reader to notice this tendency nor the first scholar to write about it, the emphasis on nonlinearity in Ceremony—as well as in other native-authored texts—deserves further consideration.
This essay, then, emerges out of a very basic question: what is the significance of the nonlinear histories and chronologies that frequently underlie American Indian literary texts? Many scholars have observed these nonlinear patterns, yet beyond underscoring their presence as markers of cultural-groundedness, the exploration of the social and political significance of nonlinear histories and chronologies in American Indian literatures remains neglected.¹ My primary assertion is that nonlinear understandings of history are key elements of the narrations of indigenous nationhood found in American Indian literary texts.

In accord with the many critics who in recent years have given particular attention to the ways in which native fiction narrates indigenous nationhood, this essay proceeds as an exploration of the narrative structures and detailed representations of history and time in *Ceremony* and in Creek/Cherokee writer Craig Womack’s novel *Drowning in Fire*. I argue that the nonlinear characteristics of these novels are crucial to their narrations of indigenous nationhood. Through readings of Silko’s *Ceremony* and Womack’s *Drowning in Fire*, this essay illuminates how American Indian literatures articulate concepts of indigenous nationhood that fundamentally depart from modern state-nationalism and the underpinning ideologies of progressive, linear history. Through their narrations of nonsequential histories and chronologies, these novels narrate the nonlinear and place-based character of indigenous nationhood.² As this essay begins to explore, it is this nonlinear disposition that distinguishes literary indigenous nationhood from many of the coercive, destructive, exclusionist, and violent tendencies mandated by the terminal investments in linearity made by modern nation-states.

**AMERICAN INDIAN LITERARY CRITICISMS**

In order to explicate the relationship between nonlinearity and indigenous nationhood, this essay employs a theoretical perspective informed by notable scholars of native writing whose works are often associated with either “nationalist” or “dialogic” inclinations—two designations familiar to most serious students and scholars of
native writing. This essay asserts that careful and humble readings of literary and critical works can surmount the oft-perceived distance between tribal nationalists and dialogic critics. Such readings enable the dramatic illumination of indigenous nationhood as narrated in native writing.

Since the late 1980s the dialogic school of criticism that seeks to subvert the colonial impulse through the foregrounding of hybrid, multivalent resistive difference has been prevalent. Represented most effectively by the late Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish scholar Louis Owens and Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor, this dialogic criticism proceeds as an intervention into the colonial discourse of that Eurocentrist invention, “The Indian.” The universal “Indian” serves as the iconographic foil against which the universal “Euroamerican” defines itself. This process, of course, simultaneously and paradoxically depends on the presence and disappearance of “The Indian”—a crucial complex that I will return to momentarily.

The Euroamerican effort to capture varied and complex tribal cultures within the simplistic fiction of “The Indian” is thwarted, according to Owens, when “the Native American novelist plays off of and moves beyond ethnostalgia [. . .] toward an affirmation of a syncretic, dynamic, adaptive identity in contemporary America” (*Other Destinies* 11–12). Furthermore he argues that the American Indian novel “becomes ideally not a territory but a frontier, a space of resistance [. . . in which] the Native American attempts not merely to subvert but to confront the dominant discourse in a clear dialogic. It becomes a place of contact between cultural identities, a bidirectional, dynamic zone of resistance” (*Mixedblood Messages* 47). For Owens, then, American Indian literatures are at their best when they articulate defiance of Euroamerican colonizing narratives by presenting native identities that are neither grasping for some mythic precolonial purity nor falling in lockstep with colonizing monoculture. Similarly for Vizenor, native writing is most effective when it functions as “trickster discourse” that unsettles both the Euroamerican fabrication of the mythic, static “Indian” and colonized/colonizing constructions of tribal identity—blood quantum measures, for instance. Always wary of the possibility that those resisting coloniz-
ing nationalism might reproduce its regulations, he asserts, “The warriors who turn simulations into prohibitions, rather than lib-
eration and survivance, are themselves the treacherous taboos of dominance” (Manifest Manners 20–21). Whereas “The Indian” is an
“occidental invention,” Vizenor’s notion of the “postindian warrior” is the repository of retained and vibrant tribal identity that subverts the invention through story. He explains that “postindian warriors encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses, and they create their stories with a new sense of survivance. The warriors [. . .] counter the manifest manners of domination” (Manifest Manners 4). Ultimately Vizenor argues that, at their best, “Native American literatures are tribal dis-
course. [. . .] The oral and written narratives are language games, comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands or social science theories” (“A Postmodern Introduction” 4).

For the tribal nationalist critics, however, literature is no game. Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Muskogee Creek/Cherokee scholar Craig Womack, Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver, and Osage scholar Robert Warrior stand as the most discernable voices of this approach. They have emerged in many ways in response to what they see as the postmodern and poststructuralist dispositions of dialogic critics that force disengagement from tribal histories, colonial mate-
riality, and tribally specific epistemologies and ideologies.³ Rejecting any emphasis on native identities and cultures as hybrid forms dom-
inated by European influence, critics associated with the nationalist position insist that American Indian literatures remain accountable to specific tribal histories and epistemologies while aggressively con-
fronting colonial injustice.

Cook-Lynn foregrounds land politics and the immediacies of self-determination in her call for American Indian literatures to “examine the meaningfulness of indigenous or tribal sovereignty in the twenty-first century” and to cultivate “the revival of nationalistic paradigms necessary for” the maintenance and assertion of that sov-
ereignty (85–86). Similarly Womack’s interests lie with tribal-specific literary inquiry, what he unashamedly terms “literary separatism.” He argues that “Native literary aesthetics must be politicized and that
autonomy, self-determination, and sovereignty serve as useful literary concepts” and goes on to “seek a literary criticism that emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture” (Red on Red 11). Womack positions himself against what he sees as the failures of dialogic critics to recognize the agency of native writers as tribal narrators, rather than colonized performers of mimicry:

Theorists will argue that simply inverting a power structure where Indians become the new hegemonic center will not suffice. Let us remind them that neither will leaving Indians at the margin. […] It is amazing that the claim that Indians could be the center of, at least, the tribal world, if nowhere else, has met such strong resistance. Someone seems to have us pinned with our arms twisted behind our backs until we cry uncle and admit that we got most of what we know from Europe, and we should not go around claiming we know a thing or two on our own. (Rev. 137)

Unsurprisingly the often strident declarations of these critics and their insistence on aggressive tribal nationalism mark them as targets of substantial criticisms, alleging nationalist ideas as essentialist, reductive, and futilely divisive.4 In response to these criticisms and, more importantly, in order to further articulate their increasingly sophisticated critical positions, Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior recently coauthored a monograph titled American Indian Literary Nationalism. This work has rapidly become a cornerstone in the field of American Indian literary criticism. The central purpose of the text, while taken on in various ways by the three scholars, is to “enliven discussions of what nationalism can and should mean within contemporary scholarship on Native literature” (xv). The correlating central argument of the text is that “being a nationalist is a legitimate perspective from which to approach Native American literature and criticism” (xx–xxi). Throughout the volume Weaver, Womack, and Warrior both effectively counter the rather
unsavory criticisms leveled against them by more recent proponents of hybridist dialogic criticism and offer a vastly enhanced foundation from which to continue productive discussions of what the processual endeavor of American Indian literary nationalism might reveal and enable.

As much as they differ, the assertions of all of these critics—dialogic and nationalist alike—serve to enhance one another when placed in productive conversation. This is especially the case when it comes to my exploration of the relationship between nonlinearity and indigenous nationhood. In a broad sense we might understand the dialogic critics to be describing some of the radical characteristics of indigenous nationhood as pursued by the nationalist tendency. The symbiotic and synthetic framework that I am working to construct through the intermingling of dialogic and nationalist perspectives facilitates readings of Silko and Womack that effectively and simultaneously account for community-centeredness, cultural and historical specificity, and the multivalent adaptability of these works and the communities they recount. These readings explicate notions of nation and community that, rather than depending upon regulations and exclusions, might effectively counter the destructive impulses of empire. By listening with humility to native writers, I strive to discern the ways in which, as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn suggests, “the American Indian voice might [. . .] stir the human community to a moral view which would encompass all of humanity, not just selected parts of it” (64).

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF LINEAR HISTORY**

Before exploring *Ceremony* and *Drowning In Fire*, I must first work to establish the social and political significance of nonlinear histories and chronologies. In order to do this it is necessary to undertake a critique of the other side of the coin: the imperatives of linear history as it relates to and authorizes modern state-nationalism. In his groundbreaking study of “the intimate relationship between the nation-state and nationalism [. . .] and linear, evolutionary history,” Prasenjit Duara illustrates that with the Enlightenment came
the conviction that the nation-state is the only legitimate subject of history (3). Duara underscores both the mutually constitutive nature of linear history and modern nationalism, as well as the regulatory character of history and nationalism necessitated by this union. He articulates both of these crucial observations when he writes,

Nations emerge as the subjects of History just as History emerges as the ground, the mode of being, of the nation. To be sure, nations are not born full-blown out of nothing. [. . .] But for our purposes here it is important to understand that modern nationalism seeks to appropriate these pre-existing representations into the mode of being of the modern nation. (27)

We can gather from Duara’s insightful articulations that “the repres- sive teleology of the History of the [modern] nation” requires the appropriation and/or the suppression of the non-national—that is, the nonprogressive, the local, the indigenous, and so forth (16). Usable pasts are devoured by history, while unusable pasts are excised. Indeed, Duara explains that “the [modern] nation, even where it is manifestly not a recent invention, is hardly the realiza- tion of an original essence, but a historical configuration designed to include certain groups and exclude or marginalize others—often violently” (15).

In order to firmly establish that linear histories of modern nation- states are histories of violent repression and misappropriation, a brief yet incisive look at one of the major genealogical moments that informs such linear histories should be illuminating. This moment is Hegel’s theorizing of the dialectic, which we know as:

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thesis          synthesis          antithesis
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This progressive model of history theorizes the underlying logic of linear narratives that eradicate elements of the past (and of the present) understood to be unusable and carry forth elements that are deemed useful for the progression into a future that will move us one step closer to the end of history and the realization of absolute ratio-
nality and freedom. For Hegel the thesis that has no antithesis—the end of history, the culmination of divine progress—is the emergence of the nation-state. He explains this in his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History:

[W]orld history is the expression of the divine process which is a graduated progression in which the spirit comes to know and realize itself and its own truth. Its various stages are stages in the self-recognition of the spirit; and the essence of the spirit, its supreme imperative, is that it should recognize, know, and realize itself for what it is. It accomplishes this end in the history of the world; it produces itself in a series of determinate forms, and these forms are the nations of world history. (64; emphasis added)

For Hegel those nations that have not achieved statehood are not “of world history”; they are without history. As Ranajit Guha explains, “With all the incipient and weak formations left out as inadequate it is only a fully developed statehood that qualifies nations for their place in World-History” (36).

Moreover, Hegel asserts, “Only in the state does man have a rational existence. [. . .] Man owes his entire existence to the state, and has his being within it alone. Whatever worth and spiritual reality he possesses are his solely by virtue of the state” (94). Only through multiple progressions of the dialectic can a nation come to have a state, and only through the state can a man—and, of course, only a man—come to have worth.

The key element of dialectical synthesis is the process known as “sublation,” a term intended to suggest both negation and preservation. Yet when we look closely at how sublation is taken up by linear national narratives, it actually seems to involve suppression and appropriation. Indeed, in his own selection of terminology, Hegel offers much to be considered. The term used for sublation by Hegel is the German gerund Aufhebung, a common word simply meaning “abolition.” This term is also used for “removal”—which might be its most intriguing translation for native studies—as well as neutralization. In certain circumstances, Aufhebung refers to that which is
“picked up” or “gathered.” This, of course, is the secondary meaning placed by Hegel in opposition to abolition in order to establish the synthesis of negation and preservation. It is also this definition that gives rise to the translation of *Aufhebung* as “sublation,” a term most commonly found in medical discourses that refers to the detachment, lifting, or removal of a body part. Considered fully, the balance of *Aufhebung*’s weight comes down on the repressive/exclusionary side of things. Duara’s own articulation of Hegel’s dialectic reflects this:

For Hegel, the History of the world represented successive stages in the progress of the spirit of self-consciousness which constitutes freedom. The successive stages were not simply a chronological sequence, but a progress of unfolding, of making this spirit explicit. In this way, that history which is not relevant to the realization of spirit is excised and the succession of historical time is sublated into the eternal present. The difference is between the dead past and the living past, the latter being related to what is “essential.” Thus the advent of the modern era of self-consciousness marks its break with history by abolishing what is different from itself in history. (86–87)

While Hegel’s apologists might suggest that this reading of his theory of history is erroneous, Duara’s paraphrase accurately describes the way in which Hegel has been deployed—explicitly or otherwise—by uncritical historians of modern nation-states. Instead of a being a noble process establishing social and historical equilibrium, the etymology and the practices of *Aufhebung* reveal dialectical synthesis to be composed of a rather unsavory complex of historical omission, misappropriation, and even ethnocide. In this framework, for example, we might see James Fenimore Cooper’s protagonist Natty Bumppo as the archetypal sublation of Indian and European—the American. And, of course, this process of sublation necessitates that “Indianness” is seized by the white male and that the Indians are, well, dead. Hegel himself puts little effort into hiding the imperial violence of sublation, writing that “civilized nations” are entitled “to regard and treat as barbarians other nations which are
less advanced than they are in the substantial moments of the state […] in the consciousness that the rights of these other nations are not equal to theirs and that their independence is merely formal” (qtd. in Guha 42). These words likely ring familiar to those acquainted with American Indian legal history. Indeed, with the 1823 invention of “domestic dependent nations,” Chief Justice John Marshall and Hegel seem to be trans-Atlantic kindred souls.

What is it, then, that indigenous intellectuals and epistemologies offer in the face of linear narratives and the accompanying repressions and exclusions? Activist and scholar Vine Deloria Jr.’s work is especially illuminating when trying to grapple intellectually and politically with the imperatives of linear history. In *God Is Red* he forcefully indicts the linear, progressive historical narrative that relentlessly maintains—and is relentlessly maintained by—Euroamerican authority:

We are faced today with a concept of world history that lacks even the most basic appreciation of the experiences of mankind as a whole. […] Indeed, world history as presently conceived […] is the story of the West’s conquest of the remainder of the world and the subsequent rise to technological sophistication. (108)

In simple yet evocative prose Deloria establishes the intimacies shared by linear history and social, cultural, and political violence, continuing on to underscore the trans-Atlantic manifestations of the culture of death propagated at the behest of the ideology of progress when he reminds us that “[t]he peoples of the New World were virtually destroyed by the European invaders at the same time that Europe was being ravaged by witch-hunts, the Inquisition, and religious wars” (108). Through Deloria’s insightful perspective linear history is revealed to be an inherently exclusionist enterprise in that it is capable of accounting only for a singular monodimensional narrative. This does not mean that two things cannot occur at the same time, but rather that—in order to qualify as legitimate participants in a legitimate historical narrative—those two events must be reconcilable as parts of a unified whole.
In the 1994 edition of *God Is Red* Deloria explicitly anticipates how this linear historical ideology might elaborate a linear path toward “unjustifiable woes” and “military adventurism” in the Middle East. Indeed, the fiction that goes by the name of “the war on terror” seems an uncanny manifestation of the imperatives of linearity. There is most certainly a war occurring in Afghanistan, and there is most certainly a war going on in Iraq. Yet linearity demands that these discrete yet simultaneous catastrophes be collapsed into a single—erstwhile popularly palatable—story. This is no more than another in a long line of circumstances that reflect Deloria’s observation that Euroamerican “identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion; further it assumes that at a particular point in the unraveling of this sequence, the peoples of Western Europe became the guardians of the world” (63). He goes on to counter, “The recognition that there is no homogenous sense of time shared by all societies must certainly become apparent to us if it is not already clear. We can and must, therefore, create a new understanding of universal planetary history” (65). It would be all too simple to rebuff this call as incitement to replace one dominant metanarrative with another. An earnest reader of Deloria recognizes that the “new understanding of universal planetary history” that he seeks is made up of any and all stories, dissonant or otherwise, that the place known as Earth has yielded and might yet yield. This is indeed a “new understanding” of history in which the term “universal” is a spatial reference, not a claim to power.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith takes a keen interest in indigenous research that reveals what can be done with the terrain opened up by critiques of linearity like those leveled by Deloria. For Smith the crucial process of decolonization must take on the exclusions of linear history through the articulation of indigenous understandings of the past. She writes, “Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things” (34). In light of linear history, its cultural avarice, and its violences, we can begin to make
explicit some of the ways in which nonlinear histories and chronologies in American Indian literatures are asserting “alternative ways of doing things” when it comes to nationhood. Community imagined outside of linear history—that is, amidst nonlinear concepts of history and chronology—can better account for and include peoples, places, times, events, nations, and so forth that are not acceptable to Enlightenment/linear history and therefore that cannot be tolerated by modern state-nationalism.

“Then they grow away from the earth”: Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremonies

Since its publication in 1977 Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel Ceremonies has remained at the zenith of American Indian literatures. Its ubiquitous presence on high school reading lists and undergraduate syllabi places the book before thousands of new readers each year. Along with Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday’s House Made of Dawn, Silko’s Ceremonies stands as a seminal text in the movement that Kenneth Lincoln famously termed “the Native American Renaissance.” Yet even as it has been the subject of many of the field’s major scholarly works, it remains paradoxically understudied. While many scholars have observed the novel’s cyclical structure and its representation of nonlinear history and chronology, they have not adequately explained the significance of these attributes. Through my exploration of the relationship between nonlinear historical narrative and the narration of indigenous nationhood, I hope to make explicit how the novel’s structure and radical use of tradition serve to narrate concepts of history and nationhood that depart from both ideologies of progress and the correlating tenet that modern nation-states embody the fruition of linear, developmental history. Through its narration of nonlinear histories and chronologies, Ceremonies suggests that there is no place for the coercive, destructive, and violent tendencies of modern states within literary indigenous nationhood.

Ceremonies chronicles the profound struggle of a young Laguna Pueblo veteran of World War II to reorient his troubled mind, body, and soul upon his return to his homeland in the aftermath of the
war. One of the most important scenes in the novel unfolds at its very center. In this scene Betonie—an unconventional medicine man in whose care the ailing protagonist, Tayo, has been placed—explains the origins of white peoples and their relationships with the “witch-ery” and “destruction” that Tayo and his Laguna Pueblo people came to face through the colonial encounter. The story Betonie relates tells of a wicked contest in which witches compete to see who can conjure the most intense destruction. The eventual winner stuns his fellow witches—and the novel’s readers—with this:

“What I have is a story.”
At first they all laughed
but this witch said
Okay
go ahead
laugh if you want to
but as I tell the story
it will begin to happen.

Set in motion now
set in motion by our witchery
to work for us.

Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people
like the belly of a fish
covered with hair.

Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.

They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves. (135)

A close reading of this passage suggests that it conveys the novel’s most forceful and nuanced critique of linear/Enlightenment/evolutionary history. The “problem” in this story is not that these white people with “skin like the belly of a fish” exist but rather that they invest in the exclusionary, destructive, deadly, and ultimately suicidal ideology of progressive, linear history. The spatial arrangements that Silko uses throughout Ceremony cannot be ignored. The entirety of this versed section of the novel is offered in discrete stanzas, each one chronicling the individual events that make up the story of the witchery contest. The line breaks between each stanza quickly compel a particular pace and rhythm in the reader, and in doing so these breaks mark important departures from one stanza to another. The break between the fourth and fifth stanzas reproduced above is a particularly troubling abyss that distinguishes the setting and characters of the witch’s story from its action. The gruesome consequences that unfold in the story are not due to the existence of humans with pale skin; they are due to the progressive history of Euroamerican civilization that unfolds after this key line break. These consequences result because of movement “away from the earth” and the eventual objectification and exploitation that accompanies such a move.

As a stark counterpart to a civilization born of linear historical ideology, indigenous nationhood as narrated in Ceremony takes up the all-encompassing features of the nonlinear historical consciousness embodied within it. Throughout the novel Silko repeatedly offers detailed descriptions of Tayo’s experience of time:

The ride into the mountain had branched into all directions of time. He knew then why the oldtimers could only speak of
yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment: the only certainty; and this present sense of being was qualified with bare hints of yesterday or tomorrow, by saying, “I go up to the mountain yesterday or I go up to the mountain tomorrow.” The ck’o’yo Kaup’a’ta somewhere is stacking his gambling sticks and waiting for a visitor; Rocky and I are walking across the ridge in the moonlight; Josiah and Robert are waiting for us. This night is a single night; and there has never been any other. (192)

In another scene Silko offers a similarly striking articulation of historical convergence that underscores the primacy of spatiality in relation to temporality:

All things seemed to converge there: roads and wagon trails, canyons with springs, cliff paintings and shrines, the memory of Josiah with his cattle; but the other was distinct and strong like the violet-flowered weed that killed the mule, and the black markings on the cliffs, deep caves along the valley the Spaniards followed to their attack on Acoma. (237)

Both of these passages make explicit the nonlinearity and place-based orientation so crucial to Tayo’s emotional and cultural equilibrium. They also strongly suggest that indigenous nationhood as narrated in the novel invests in the simultaneous unity and diversity of time, in convergence, and in the concurrent meaningfulness—and therefore historical legitimacy—of all things past, present, and future. This is a far cry from a restricted nationalism that must relentlessly reject and repress those things that have no place in the authorized national narrative.

As Tayo succumbs to “battle fatigue” and to his befuddled understanding of the vast witchery that assails him both at war and at home, nonlinearity first appears as that which distresses him: “Years and months had become weak, and people could push against them and wander back and forth in time. Maybe it had always been this way and he was only seeing it for the first time” (18). Yet even here Tayo already has a vague sense that this nonlinearity might be far more real than the facts and rationality that his progressive brother Rocky and
Western medicine assure him of. After his departure from institutionalization Tayo immerses himself in a process, with Betonie as his guide, to find equilibrium on his own terms. Significantly, during his first encounter with Betonie, Tayo looks around the healer’s hogan and notes the surprising collection of both traditional wares and unconventional ephemera with which Betonie surrounds himself:

[U]nder the medicine bags and bundles of rawhide on the walls, he saw layers of old calendars, the sequences of years confused and lost as if occasionally the oldest calendars had fallen or been taken out from under the others and then had been replaced on top of the most recent years. A few showed January, as if the months on the underlying pages had no longer been turned or torn away. (120)

While Tayo is not yet prepared to recognize its full implications, Betonie’s seemingly chaotic collection of calendars serves as a crucial marker of his peculiar genius. Clearly Betonie does not use these calendars to keep track of his hectic schedule. Rather he seems to use them to keep abreast of a particular aspect of the colonizing impulse, and in so doing he is able to subvert and convert the standard-bearers of linear time into a means of healing. Linear sequence is disrupted and the distant past is brought to the forefront. Indeed, Tayo sees in this jumbled mass of time the beginning of a pathway out of his suffering: “The chills on his neck followed his eyes: he recognized the pictures for the years 1939 and 1940. [. . .] ‘I remember those two,’ he said. ‘That gives me some place to start,’ old Betonie said” (121).

As the epigraphs to this essay suggest, Silko not only profoundly describes and symbolizes nonlinearity in Ceremony but also embodies it in the structure of the text itself. The “sunrise” theme that appears throughout the text carries its assertion of nonlinearity by highlighting an indefinite cycle of beginnings rather than a determinate progression from beginning to end. The closing of the prosaic section of the novel makes this abundantly clear:

Old Grandma shook her head slowly, and closed her cloudy eyes again. “I guess I must be getting old,” she said, “because
these goings-on around Laguna don’t get me excited any more.” She sighed, and laid her head back on the chair. “It seems like I already heard these stories before […] only thing is, the names sound different.” (260)

Tayo’s Grandma gets the last word in, yet there is no “last” about it. While the names are different, the story is revealed as a familiar cyclical manifestation. History has not ended with the close of the text. Tayo’s healing remains in process, and while the witchery he confronted and successfully resisted is “dead for now,” Silko makes it abundantly clear that it is not dead for all time (261).

As previously noted, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has suggested that “the American Indian voice might […] stir the human community to a moral view which would encompass all of humanity, not just selected parts of it” (64). My reading of Ceremony suggests that Silko is that voice. Through her narration of a notion of indigenous nationhood that arises amidst a nonlinear and therefore inclusivist history and temporal sensibility, Silko articulates an imagined community that radically departs from the exclusions, regulations, repressions, and oppressions of modern state-nationalism. In a documentary film on her life and work, Silko explains the cultural roots of the historical paradigm that informs her fiction:

The impulse of the Pueblo culture and of Pueblo people is to include rather than to exclude, and that’s how we got into so much trouble when the Europeans came. We were ready to include them. We didn’t have that instinctive exclusionary impulse. […] The Pueblo people had survived in the desert country because they were always ready to take in strangers, to take in people. (Leslie M. Silko)

She goes on to contrast this historical and cultural inclusiveness with the exclusive machinations of colonialism:

History was not distant, but all around. And so the sense of time that I learned from those old folks and the way they moved, is time is an ocean. Something that happened five hundred years ago isn’t way off over there. Time is an ocean.
The fact that we're all sitting here now is very dependent on what happened five hundred years ago. You can't just say, “Oh, five hundred years ago, that’s way far in the past.” No. That linearity, that emphasis on making time all strung out on a string, that’s political. That’s what colonialists do. (Leslie M. Silko)

While I am by no means a fundamentalist disciple of authorial intent, Silko’s own explications of what she is trying to do in her literary work remain compelling. Her fiction theorizes both itself and the world in which it exists. Through her narrations of nonlinearity Silko offers her readers a fluid sea of stories that does not actively elide certain identities and experiences in the interests of dominance. Indeed, this is what she strives for:

That’s been one of the challenges with the writing in the novels. How do you take writing and the linearity of the language—especially with the way the novel has developed as a genre? How do you try to do that? Yet that’s what I’m most interested in: letting the reader experience time and narrative and history as something not linear, but instead as something all-encompassing. (Leslie M. Silko)


In his own sophisticated ways Craig Womack joins Silko in the effort to craft fiction that simultaneously comes from and asserts an “all-encompassing,” yet firmly national historical sensibility. His 2001 novel Drowning in Fire tells the story of Josh Henneha, a young man striving to understand his sexual desires and his Creek identity amid the regulations and repressions of racism and fundamentalist Christianity in late-twentieth-century Oklahoma. Through the novel Josh is able to extract himself from the heteronormative and homophobic clutches of colonizing modernity by recognizing himself as a participant in the radical Creek traditions that he comes to know through the stories of his older Creek relatives, especially those of his Great-Aunt Lucy. Inspired by these stories, Josh finds
himself moving fluidly back and forth through time, enabling him to imagine and actualize a sense of himself based on Creek tradition rather than the sexual norms and racial discrimination that fetter his adolescence. Celebrated Creek poet Joy Harjo has described *Drowning in Fire* as a “coming-of-age novel.” While *Ceremony* could undoubtedly be labeled similarly, both novels tell of the “coming of age” of protagonists relative to indigenous identities and communities, which considerably differentiates these texts from the classic *bildungsroman* chronicling the disciplined progress of an individual toward a rationalized and regulated modern-national subjectivity.

As one familiar with his scholarly work would expect, Womack’s *Drowning in Fire* explicitly concerns itself with the assertion of Creek nationhood, and a key component of this endeavor involves the narration of nonlinearity. Like Silko’s *Ceremony*, the structure of *Drowning in Fire* underscores its commitment to nonlinearity. As the chapter headings make abundantly clear, the novel moves non-chronologically from the 1960s, through the 1970s, back to the 1910s and up to the early 1990s, and finally back to the turn of the twentieth century amid the relentless charge toward Oklahoma statehood. Josh’s unique ability to fly—which he casually explains as his “secret”—enables him to move across both time and space and to touch down in decades a half-century before his own birth. This largely unexplained yet thoroughly acceptable phenomenon marks the text as an absolute departure from the temporal constraints of linearity. In one scene Josh finds himself asking about his surroundings with a straight face, “This is, what, seventy-five, eighty years ago?” (181).

Through his deployment of nonlinearity Womack seems to be making at least two related arguments. These involve a broad critique of the colonialist U.S. nation-state and its violent commitment to manifest destiny as well as a correlating assertion that the existence and legitimacy of the Creek Nation depend on nothing outside of the nation itself. Lucy explains this simple yet profound idea to Josh in this way: “They forced us to take these allotments because they’ve always wanted to take away the one thing they hate the most—the fact that we exist as a nation of people, the Creek Nation,
Muskogalki. This is what we always been, before they ever came here, these white peoples. We always been a nation” (7). As Lucy suggests, the existence and survivance of the Creek Nation produces great anxiety for the United States in that it puts the lie to both Oklahoma statehood and the U.S. national narrative more broadly. Moreover, unlike the United States, the Creek Nation is not an end product of linear history; it simply has always been. As represented in Womack’s book, the Creeks do not need to invest in a linear historical narrative in order to rationalize the legitimacy of their nationhood; they need not invest in the limiting epistemological and social paradigms insisted on by linearity.

Early in the novel Lucy articulates the text’s nonlinear concept of history, as it manifests in memory, in this way: “The hardest part of recollecting is that I was to tell it before I was to grasp all its meanings. So much come on me all at onced that each memory I spark touches another one off until it’s all part of the same blaze” (32). Rather than a straightforward chain reaction, Lucy describes her recollecting and telling process through the central nonlinear metaphor employed by the text: a fire. The aspects of her story are not neatly laid out like a fuse leading to a glorious explosion of TNT. Instead they erupt to the surface of her mind in unpredictable succession, sometimes many at once, but always leading to more and more. The structure made up of her memories is a combustible web that depends not on a beginning and end but on all of its mutually constitutive moments. No doubt due to his tutelage in cultural memory while in Lucy’s care, Josh develops his own understanding of the past as something constructed differently by textbooks than by his imaginative mind. “I liked history because it seemed like a dream,” Josh explains. “There was the book, and what everybody agreed happened, and then there were the secrets that no one talked about. Only a few people understood the secrets” (56). Josh’s dreaming—the central mechanism through which he begins to glimpse the dynamic world of Creek tradition and its secrets that “only a few people understood”—is analogous to Lucy’s blaze of memory. Josh’s dreams transcend chronology and enable him to access a history in which the past is as relevant to him as the present.
In a chapter titled “The Colors of Fire,” this same sense of history is articulated yet again by Chitto Harjo in one of the key scenes in the novel. Chitto and several of his radical traditionalist followers—all of whom are Creek nationalists resisting allotment and Oklahoma statehood—attend at a 1906 session of a U.S. Senate committee investigating the state of affairs in Indian Territory. Chitto is afforded an opportunity to address the session and does so with great rhetorical success. Through Chitto’s speech Womack deftly demarcates the stark contrasts between Creek nationhood and U.S. nationhood while simultaneously reminding the reader of what these nations have in common as political and legal counterparts. In his lambasting of the committee Chitto covers four hundred years of history, representing the centuries as a complicated and interactive web of contextual and decisive events rather than—as the bulk of his speech’s audience would have it—a linear narrative marching toward the righteous destiny of Oklahoma statehood (240–42). Through Chitto’s multi-faceted narration of Creek and North American history, Womack offers foundational examples of both the nuanced histories made possible by a nonlinear perspective and the notion of nationhood that arises in relation to such a perspective.

Like the inclusive and “all-encompassing” sense of time that pervades Silko’s Ceremony, Lucy, Josh, and Chitto Harjo all infuse Drowning in Fire with an approach toward history that can accommodate many stories. Lucy explains how her storytelling is intimately wound up in this notion of history in that it is just this type of historical narrative that her stories are aimed at generating. “I been saying everything I know since to throw out the right words, to set words all around me. [...] Slowly closing the circle, moving towards the one story, the truest one of all” (123). In this context “closing the circle” refers to completing the circle rather than arbitrarily barring things from entering it. And while, for Lucy, the “truest story of all” is the story of the Creek Nation, she never forecloses the possibility that there are other “truest” stories and that these might all coexist in a multivocal story-of-stories that recognizes multiple truths. Like Vine Deloria’s “new understanding of universal planetary history,” and like Silko’s “all-encompassing” ocean of time, Lucy’s “one story”
is a multidirectional conflagration of narratives—and therefore of identities and composite communities—that, unlike Hegel’s machinations, need not conform to a monodimensional and monocultural metanarrative in order to survive. Through this lens the nonlinear history in *Drowning in Fire* is revealed to be a fundamental aspect of the nonlinear nationhood that the text narrates—a nationhood that can account for peoples and places that colonizing national narratives must paradoxically appropriate and eradicate.

**CONCLUSION: INDIGENOUS NATIONS AND NATION-STATES**

In *American Indian Literary Nationalism* Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior observe that many scholars deny the legitimacy of nationalist critical positions because they find them “impossible to maintain, theoretically untenable, or simply too confrontational” (xx). It seems that one of the primary issues resistant critics take with American Indian literary nationalism arises out of a rigid assumption regarding what the term “nation” refers to. While academic practitioners of literary and cultural studies would generally have acknowledged the value of anticolonial nationalisms in the mid-twentieth century, this no longer is the case. Many scholars working in these areas seem to imagine that the world has moved far enough along into an era—a fictional era that goes by the name “postcolonial”—in which colonialism is a thing of the past and that therefore has rendered nationalism obsolete. Moreover, while critical theorists critique—appropriately, to my mind—the iniquitous imperatives of modern nation-states, these same critiques become quite damaging when it is assumed that they apply to anything that goes by the name “nation.”

In his recent book *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*, Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice offers an insightful account of the crucial and fundamental differences between indigenous nationhood and modern state-nationalism. His discussion is relevant to this essay in numerous ways, and I quote it at significant length:
Assertions of Indigenous nationhood should not, however, be necessarily conflated with the nationalism that has given birth to industrialized nation-states, for the distinctions are significant. Nation-state nationalism is often dependent upon the erasure of kinship bonds in favor of a code of patriotism that places loyalty to the state above kinship obligations, and emphasizes the assimilative militant history of the nation (generally along a progressivist mythological arc) above the specific geographic, genealogical, and spiritual histories of peoples. Its primary function is to justify the existing economic, military, and political structure—largely through the assimilation of all subject constituencies into the culture of a monolithic and coercive state. (23)

Justice indicates that indigenous nationhood and modern state-nationalism are not to be mistaken as synonyms for a monolithic cultural practice destined for the intellectual incinerator. Moreover, one must take this distinction seriously in order to adequately recognize the substantial narrations of indigenous nationhood offered in Silko’s *Ceremony* and Womack’s *Drowning in Fire*.

As narrated in these and numerous other texts, literary indigenous nationhood arises out of vastly different histories and therefore makes possible vastly different futures than modern state-nationalism. American Indian literatures suggest that modern state-nationalisms—especially that of the colonialist and imperialist U.S. nation-state—are deserving of thorough scrutiny, but the fashionable penchant to reject en masse any and all articulations of nationalism must be intensely scrutinized. When we critically engage with the concept of nationhood, we must recognize the myriad possibilities that might exist under this term, many of which are not simply derivative of Euroamerican epistemology. We must resist the impulse to categorize any form of nationhood as part of an unusable past, and we must recognize that “nation” is not a rigid category. Womack and Silko remember, observe, imagine, and articulate concepts of nationhood that underscore the radical character of indigenous traditions relative to the limiting paradigms of imperial logic. Their works serve as insightful critiques of modern state-nationalism that
are crucially able to acknowledge, illuminate, and promote narratives of autonomous indigenous nations that embrace difference while maintaining community integrity.

Silko and Womack are but two of the many native writers and intellectuals who have in the past and continue in the present to convey, theorize, and activate understandings of history that can account for complexity, contradiction, and multiplicity. In doing so literary indigenous nationhood and its nonlinear historical paradigms serve to reveal that we need not accept the reductive and regulatory modern nation-state as the end of history. Literary indigenous nationhood can, furthermore, serve as the sophisticated and dynamic basis for a multiplicity of anticolonial formations and as an intellectual provenance for improved, enhanced, and expanded recognitions of tribal sovereignties, as well as more just—though certainly not utopian—community formations that can account for and perhaps reconcile (without sublating) multiple and diverse histories.

Silko’s *Ceremony* and Womack’s *Drowning in Fire* substantially serve this endeavor through their narrations of the vital relationship between literary indigenous nationhood and nonlinear, place-based historical perspectives. Both novels convey confrontation, resistance, and resilience in ways that can reveal to native and non-native readers alike what some concepts of nation perpetrate and what others can accomplish. In doing so Silko and Womack continue to make good on Vine Deloria Jr.’s assertion in *Custer Died for Your Sins* that “Indian people today have a chance to re-create a type of society for themselves which can defy, mystify, and educate the rest of American society” (268).

NOTES

1. See, for example, Bell, who reads the novel alongside Diné ceremonial knowledge.

2. In *God Is Red* Vine Deloria Jr. offers an ingeniously paradoxical statement that emphasizes the fundamental interaction between space and time: “Space generates time, but time has little relationship to space” (71). Because of its explanation of nonlinearity as rooted in space and place, *God Is Red*
has been crucial to my understanding of nonlinearity as narrated in native
writing.

3. Cook-Lynn offers this critique in implicit reference to dialogic criti-
cism: “Because of flaws in pedagogy and criticism, much modern fiction
written in English by American Indians is being used as a basis for the cyni-
cal absorption into the ‘melting pot,’ pragmatic inclusion in the canon, and
involuntary unification of an American national literary voice.” She contin-
ues, “Ironically, much of the criticism and fiction published today contrib-
utes to the further domination of modern nations and individualism, all the
while failing its own implied search for sovereignty and tribalism” (96).

4. Among the critics lashing out at nationalist critical assertions is
Elvira Pulitano, who, for example, indicts “Womack’s separatist approach”
(76) and suggests that “his call for a Native American literary separatism
and for a Native perspective ultimately reinscribes colonial definitions of
Indianness and simply reverses the Western binary structure of an us/them
universe through which Native American studies continues to be the Other
of Euramerican discourse” (80). In my view, many of Pulitano’s arguments
arise from two key factors: her inability to accept that legitimate discussions
of legitimately Indigenous concepts can occur in the English language, and
her inability to imagine any other legitimate intellectual tradition than that
of the Western, Eurocentric world. (See Pulitano 68–78.) Womack offers a
thorough response to Pulitano in American Indian Literary Nationalism.

5. Indeed, Jace Weaver suggests the following in his contribution to
American Indian Literary Nationalism: “While we all have specific differ-
ences, there is more that unites critics that Pulitano identifies with the ‘sepa-
ratist’ school with those she places in the ‘dialogic’ box than divides us. We
are all seeking an appropriate language of Native American criticism” (22).

6. While most serious scholars of Hegel would argue that this language
(thesis/antithesis) has no referent in his writings, it is, nevertheless, how
Hegelianism is commonly understood and incorporated into dominant his-
torical and social narratives. The dialectical process through which contra-
dictions arise and become reconciled through the process of Aufhebung does
play a substantial role in Hegel’s work.

7. While Hegel uses the term “nation” to refer to various formations, “the
nations of world history” are those that have achieved statehood.

8. A fiction of devastating and very real consequence, but a fiction
nevertheless.

9. In addition to Lincoln’s Native American Renaissance, substantial dis-
cussions of Ceremony appear in many of the most influential monographs
on contemporary American Indian literature. Among these are Alan Velie’s *Four American Indian Literary Masters*, Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop*, Louis Owens’s *Other Destinies*, Arnold Krupat’s *The Turn to the Native*, and Jace Weaver’s *That the People Might Live*.

10. Harjo offers this in a dust-jacket blurb.

11. I do not, however, mean to suggest that postcolonial theorists universally—or even commonly—contend that colonialism and its legacies are things of the past. At the same time, however, many of these same scholars do seem to gravitate toward 1947 (the official end of the British Raj) as the beginning of an erroneously universalized postcolonial period. Moreover, postcolonial theorists also tend to suggest that anticolonial nationalisms are derivative discourses that do little good. For an interesting dialog on the current state of postcolonial studies that includes discussion of these issues as well as of sovereignty and indigeneity, see Yaeger.

12. Rather than a reference to a nation-state, I read Deloria’s use of the term “American” here as a spatial designator referring to the society that inhabits/occupies a land base named America.

**WORKS CITED**


Remapping Indian Country in Louise Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife*

LAURA M. FURLAN

Gakahbekong. That’s the name our old ones call the city, what it means from ways back when it started as a trading village. Although driveways and houses, concrete parking garages and business stores cover the city’s scape, that same land is hunched underneath. There are times, like now, I get this sense of the temporary. It could all blow off. And yet the sheer land would be left underneath. Sand, rock, the Indian black seashell-bearing earth.

Louise Erdrich, *The Antelope Wife*

Virtually everywhere one looks, the processes of human movement and encounter are long-established and complex. Cultural centers, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contacts, but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things.

James Clifford, *Routes*

In *The Antelope Wife* Louise Erdrich makes a break from writing about the reservation, a setting that has come to define her fiction, in a move that links her work to the forces of globalization. Narrator Cally Roy’s musings about Minneapolis cited above are a reminder that Indian land lies beneath the city, that the urban structures are only temporary. That the land is “hunched” connotes a sense of hiding, of lying in wait. Throughout the novel, Erdrich uncovers and explores multiple layers of history, from precontact into the present.
Characters in the novel gather power—or “survivance,” in Gerald Vizenor’s lexicon—from the knowledge that Ojibwa civilization pre-dates modern history, as they participate in the recuperation of their history. Erdrich emphasizes the continuance of Indian presence in this place, that Indians in the geographical space of Minneapolis are not a new phenomenon. By extending the boundaries of Ojibwa territory beyond the borders of contemporary reservation designations and across contemporary national borders, Erdrich is reclaiming both space and time. The boundary between city and “rez” becomes blurred in this novel as characters move across that “border” frequently. In fact the dichotomy between city and rez becomes obsolete when the Minneapolis gets remapped as Indian land. Erdrich’s novel focuses on movement and exchange—of people, objects (what I am calling “ethnobilia”), and rituals—in a major renarrativizing of the phenomenon of relocation.

The critical project that has been undertaken by scholars in border studies is valuable for theorizing about these relocations. In order to do so, it is necessary to broaden the formulations about the “borderlands” to include all of the spaces of city and reservation, all of which was once Indian land and is now the whole of the Americas. This expansion is made possible by viewing history through what Wai Chee Dimock calls “deep time,” which produces a map that, thanks to its receding horizons, its backward extension into far-flung temporal and spatial coordinates, must depart significantly from a map predicated on the short life of the U.S. For the force of historical depth is such as to suggest a world that predates the adjective American. If we go far enough back in time, and it is not very far, there was no such thing as the U.S. (759)

Using the methodology of border studies and the notion of “deep time,” this reading unhinges the notion of Indians as rooted peoples living on reservations, people with unchanging cultures. As James Clifford argues, the category “tribe,” which was developed in U.S. law to distinguish settled Indians from roving, dangerous “bands,” places a premium on localism and rootedness (x). Erdrich’s novel
demonstrates that it is possible—and perhaps desirable—to be both “tribal” and cosmopolitan. She enacts José David Saldivar’s description of the border as a “paradigm of crossing, circulation, material mixing, and resistance” (13). And finally, in this novel Erdrich interrogates the borders that were meant to separate Indians from mainstream society.

*The Antelope Wife* belongs to a recent wave of urban Indian novels that are certainly a reflection of current population demographics. Loss of land base and high unemployment rates in Indian Country resulted in a steady stream of urban migration throughout the twentieth century. The Bureau of Indian Affairs’ relocation program, begun as an effort to employ returning Native soldiers after World War II, encouraged thousands of reservation Indians to move to urban areas for “a better life.” In *The Urban Indian Experience in America*, Donald Fixico reports that two-thirds of American Indians now live away from the reservations, diasporic peoples who often make pan-Indian ties while at the same time maintaining connections to nascent communities. Beginning perhaps with D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded* (1934), American Indian novels repeatedly have demonstrated an inability of Native peoples to survive in the urban space. Protagonists return to the reservation, broken and disconnected, in a formula that William Bevis has called the “homing plot.” Novels such as N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1969) and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) follow this pattern, as do more recent novels like Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* (1995) and Erdrich’s *The Bingo Palace* (1994). The reservation and thus the “reservation novel” have come to signify the experience of American Indians, and this seems to fulfill the expectations of a mainstream readership. However, the novels that do not take place on the fictional reservation demand our attention and require us to think in new ways about American Indian literature.

The complexity of *The Antelope Wife*, Erdrich’s first foray into urban space, with its shifts between allegory and realism, its multiple narrators (including a talking dog named Almost Soup), its tangled bloodlines and plots, all of which suggest different kinds of “crossing,” elicited unusually tentative responses from reviewers.
Often compared to the Yoknapatawpha novels of William Faulkner, her previous novels have followed the same families throughout several generations in the same fictional place, commonly believed to be based on the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota. Her readers have come to know this place and these characters. In *The Antelope Wife*, however, Erdrich expands this fictional terrain to include new characters in a new place, using new forms to describe (in some ways) new issues. If in *Tracks* Fleur Pillager and Nanapush and Lulu all return to the reservation to escape colonial pressures (among other things) and in *The Bingo Palace* Lipsha Morrissey returns home to be “healed” from the evils of the outside world (Fargo, North Dakota), characters like Frank Shawano and Cally Roy in *The Antelope Wife* make their homes in the city, returning occasionally to the reservation for funerals and family visits, but always going back to Minneapolis to stay. No character in this novel leaves the city to return “home” for good, save for Sweetheart Calico (the antelope wife herself), who is taken against her will. Home continues to exist in memory and imagination—but also as an actual physical place. Community and traditions are maintained in the city, and characters remember their histories. For the first time in her fiction, Erdrich portrays the lives of urban Indians. In so doing she participates in the defamiliarization of Indians, moving them out of the rural spaces and into the modern city. Carol Miller suggests that this movement is a “(re)taking place,” “a double breaking out—both from federally designated boundaries historically intended to isolate and contain Native people and from an equally pervasive confinement within the anachronistic fantasy-wildernesses of the white imagination” (29). Novels like this about the movement of Native people from the reservation into the city are in fact producing a whole new narrative that is not about where and how Native peoples now live in urban spaces and places but about what that space of “the Indian” has always potentially been—even when it was not so understood. The prevailing belief that Indians have a “natural” connection to the land is problematic in many regards. While historically speaking the reservation land is “home,” this land is only a fraction of what was previously Indian land. The reservation represents a moment of
fixity, of fixed identity. It is difficult to justify the desire to reside on
government-appointed property, even if it is “the land.” In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, anthropologist Keith Basso points out that “[l]ong
before the advent of literacy [. . .] places served humankind as durable symbols of distant events and as indispensable aids for remembering and imagining them” (7). The connection between the people and their land, in Basso’s work the Western Apaches, has to do with what historically took place there. History and place are intrinsically connected. Moving away from the homeland potentially jeopardizes the continuity of storytelling (if places equal stories). There is a responsibility in remembering the stories, but this remembering is a rational decision. “Homing” is not a primitivist biological drive to return to a place of origins but a responsibility to stories and to history. As Erdrich’s characters in *The Antelope Wife* demonstrate, it is possible to transport the stories (as well as material objects and cultural practices) into the urban space. In fact Erdrich is interrupting and complicating a more traditional narrative of Native life that put greatest stress on the retention of purity. As participants in the multidirectionality of cultural flows, Erdrich’s Indians challenge the stasis of Indian identities and places.

**CROSSING BORDERS**

More than any other urban Indian novel, *The Antelope Wife* is a narrative of crossings. Characters travel back and forth between the city and reservation, sometimes on the powwow circuit; deceased characters are interred on the reservation; and garbage is transported to the reservation. As James Clifford has suggested, “Tribal groups have, of course, never been simply ‘local’: they have always been rooted and routed in particular landscapes, regional and interregional networks” (254). Such is true for the Ojibwas in this novel. Their traditional lands extend beyond the borders of their reservations, all “north” of Minneapolis. This is contested terrain, what Richard White calls “the middle ground,” territory that was simultaneously claimed by the Dakotas. Historically the Ojibwas followed patterns of seasonal migration. Contact with other tribes, with fur traders
and settlers and missionaries, French and American, and later with the U.S. government makes the Ojibwas more global than many other tribes. This network of interaction denies assumptions about cultural purity. Geographic crossings and intermarriage and trade have long since erased the prevalence of full-bloodedness, especially in and around the trading villages. Historians have even argued that dealings with the French fur traders catalyzed Ojibwa identity. The Pillager clan, to which Erdrich belongs, was once known for attempting to collect tolls from westward voyageurs (Hickerson 62–64). This sort of savvy behavior reveals a global-mindedness more so than an isolated tribal primitivism.

Erdrich’s cosmopolitan Ojibwas strive to maintain connection with the homeland, they recreate an Ojibwa-based community in the city, and they maintain traditional practices away from the reservations. We might describe them as diasporic, “inasmuch as their distinctive sense of themselves is oriented toward a lost or alienated home defined as aboriginal” (Clifford 253). However, the concept of diaspora invokes a sense of exile and definitive citizenship of a nation-state that are not so clearly present in the novel. First of all we need to determine whether relocation (historical or recent) is the equivalent of exile. This is particularly complicated by the frequency of travel to the homeland or reservation—and by the fact that the exile occurs on land that was once formerly ancestral land. Second, there is the question of citizenship and “nation.” Many urban Indians, especially those in the second generation, are not tribally enrolled and do not belong to a “nation.” “Nation” as such is more ephemeral. But while they may not be nationally diasporic, they are certainly ethnically so—if we conflate “Indian” into an ethnic category. Even though governmental and tribal requirements for tribal enrollment are often invoked, Indian identity for many is determined by other factors, namely participation in a Native community and acceptance by tribal members. Identity issues are even more difficult for urban Indians because the communities themselves are very fluid. Thus urban Indians may be more accurately described as a “domestic diaspora.” Indeed some have argued that the attention to place in this work is the direct result of exile (and therefore loss), that con-
cern with “home” and homeland are responses to the postmodern, postcolonial condition (see, for example, Ahokas).

Erdrich uses the first episode in the novel, the massacre and subsequent events, to convey movement. She creates a “contact zone” between the Ojibwas and the U.S. cavalry, and the Ojibwas are on the losing end. The westward travels of Scranton Roy become representative of Manifest Destiny—and they can stand for multiple historical dealings with the U.S. government. White people are not the only ones moving, however. The Ojibwa infant, renamed Matilda Roy, travels for days on the back of a protective and faithful dog. Her mother, Blue Prairie Woman, is renamed “Other Side of the Earth” by her people “for the place toward which she traveled” looking for her lost daughter (14). When Blue Prairie Woman dies and leaves the newly found Matilda alone in the wilderness, the antelope come to raise her. They are “[a]lways on the move” (20). Erdrich uses this antelope motif throughout the novel not only to show the connection between animals and humans but also to convey the sense of movement, free of the borders that define both reservations and cities.

The migratory nature of the Ojibwa people is carried over into the present, and it offers some rebellion against the confines of the reservation borders, determined, of course, by outsiders. The reservation is called “ishkonigan, the leftovers” (239). The characters that exhibit the most freedom of movement, especially between the rez and the city, are Mary and Zosie Roy, the twin grandmothers of Cally. Cally says, “They spend most summers on the reservation homestead, the old allotment that belonged to their mother, a farmed patch of earth and woods and mashkeeg from which they gather their teas and cut bark for baskets” (198). Summer north on the reservation, winter south in the city. When Cally moves to Minneapolis she finds that her cosmopolitan grandmothers “never stop moving” (102). They cannot be confined anywhere: “A funeral here, bingo there, workshop up north or on an exciting Canadian reserve. From traditional to merely ordinary, they are constantly on the move. [. . .] For the past year they have enjoyed sending us postcards from various states, reservations, even cities” (108). They are hard to pin down, but there is no end to the amount of gossip Cally is able to extract from
customers at the bakery: “I hear they live down the street, exactly where though, what address, none can remember. I hear they live in an apartment, an old folks’ high-rise, with their daughter” (108). Or, “They have a craft shop. They live over in the housing development. Teach at an alternative college. Counsel alcoholics. Do drugs themselves. Run ceremonies. Coach the little league. Have between them six Ph.D.s” (119). Not only are these elderly women well-known travelers, but they are also somehow mysterious like the antelope people. They cannot be confined to the reservation space—and they are constantly crossing borders, even the “medicine line,” as some refer to the boundary between the United States and Canada.⁴

Rozin’s movement between the reservation and the city is more pronounced. She and Richard Whiteheart Beads move to the city when their twins are five years old and things become “too political” (a reference perhaps to activities involving the American Indian Movement). Some time later Rozin moves back to the reservation, after the death of their daughter Deanna, who “breathed poison and was spirited off to the other side of the world” (84). Even death involves travel, a point to which I will return later. Rozin stays with her mother(s), the twins, along with Cally and the dog Almost Soup, who narrates the action on the reservation. Almost ten years later Rozin moves back to the city and marries Frank Shawano and studies to become a lawyer. Although Rozin leaves the reservation when it becomes unsafe, she returns to it when she needs a safe haven, and it is where she buries her daughter and visits her often:

Rozin chose to bury her daughter in the old tradition underneath a grave house, built low and long with a shelf at one end where food and tobacco could be placed for her to use. Sometimes Rozin goes up to the reservation on weekends, leaves a coin or two, copper, for some still believe that the water man exacts his price at the red stone gates. (191)⁵

Here there is the potential for a monetary exchange as well as a “final crossing.”

The reservation as “final resting place” is a telling designation. The repatriation or returning home of bodies is a common prac-
tice for some diasporic peoples. As Arjun Appadurai points out, “deterritorialization creates new markets [. . .] which thrive on the need of the deterritorialized population for contact with its homeland” (Modernity at Large 38). In Minneapolis multiple agencies have sprung up to offer services to urban Indians in need of burial. Historian Rachel Buff describes one, the American Indian Hearse Service, which “offers transportation for the dead, at no charge and ‘with dignity,’ back to the reservation of their origin or enrollment” (3). The Office of Indian Ministry also provides space for traditional all-night funerals and wakes, a funeral food shelf, and a hearse that will transport the deceased up to four hundred miles. This program is called Miigeweyon, which in Ojibwa translates to “I am going home.” That the dead are returned to tribal lands with such frequency reveals an underlying connection to tradition and to the homeland. In other words place is as important in the afterlife as it is for the living. Many creation stories explain that Indian people emerged from the earth. In death they must return to the place of their origin. Perhaps the fear is that the deceased will not be able to find his or her ancestors if buried in the city.

In the novel the reservation does not always provide sanctuary. Even though Cally was born on the reservation, it proves to be a dangerous place for her. Her relationship to place is complicated. First she loses her indis (or umbilical cord) on the rez (86). She says, “My mother sewed my birth cord, with dry sage and sweet grass, into a turtle holder of soft white buckskin. [. . .] I was supposed to have it on me all my life, bury it with me on reservation land, but one day I came in from playing and my indis was gone” (101). This loss signifies Cally’s break with her natal place. Even as a child Cally knows that she will be buried on the reservation and that her umbilical cord connects her to the homeland. She blames her desire for the city on the loss of this object:

I thought nothing of it, as first and for many years, but slowly over time the absence [. . .] it will tell. I began to wander from home, first in my thoughts, then my feet took after, so at last at the age of eighteen I walked the road that led from the front of our place [. . .] into the city’s bloody heart. (101–02)
Her drive to be cosmopolitan overpowers any sense of rootedness. For Cally the reservation is not only a place of loss but also a place of illness. One year after the death of her twin sister, Cally becomes seriously ill with a fever while staying at her great-grandmother’s house. Her mother and grandmothers doctor her with slippery elm and sage, but they cannot break her fever (90). A snowstorm traps them in the house, unable to go for help. When the weather finally breaks an ambulance takes her to the Indian Health Service hospital, where she is saved by an IV. This episode, narrated by the dog Almost Soup, would seem to argue for the necessity of modern medicine. Tradition has twice failed Cally, but, as I will later demonstrate, Cally does not give up on tradition—or the homeland. After she moves to Minneapolis, Cally admits, “In spite of how I want to curl up in my city corner, I picture everything back home” (103). Her mother hopes she will miss “the real land” and return to the reservation (103). Even though Cally can go back and forth, and even though she has lost her indis, the rez is still somehow an internalized “home.”

Klaus Shawano, a trader on the powwow circuit at the beginning of the novel, is also a frequent traveler. Klaus is a self-defined urban Indian, a “city-bred guy” (26). Klaus has a dreamlike conversation with Windigo Dog, who tells a joke about an Ojibwa dogcatcher whose dogs do not escape: “mine are Indian dogs. Wherever they are, that’s their rez. Every time one of them tries to sneak off, the others pull him back” (224). Klaus becomes indignant with the dog. He says, “My rez is very special to me. It is my place of authority” (224). Klaus’s point here is key. He has lived in the city for years, he travels to many reservations to the west for powwows, but he knows the importance of home. Even more, he acknowledges the power of the familiar, what Yi-Fu Tuan calls “topophilia,” or “the human love of place” (92). According to Tuan, “The appreciation of landscape is more personal and longer lasting when it is mixed with the memory of human incidents” (95). Thus, for Klaus, the city is not a “place of authority” because that is not where his stories come from. He seems to manage living there for years, though through the course of the novel he rapidly declines. This decline is not solely caused by urban life, however; he also becomes disillusioned with “all that dry space”: 
“It was restful, a comfort to let my brain wander across the mystery where sky meets earth. Now, that line disturbs me with its lie” (Erdrich 21). Klaus recognizes that this line, the horizon, a border, has experienced some deep-rooted change. This resembles the phenomenon in Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* of the “rapture of the wide-open spaces” that occurs when horses or dogs that have been confined are set free (545). They share Klaus’s reliance on boundaries.

Erdrich uses the powwow to portray a hybrid space, a place of exchange. The importance of powwows for urban Indians is discussed in Rachel Buff’s study: the powwow is “a place where a diasporan community meets, catches up, learns the newest songs and dances, and disperses again” (112). It is a time when urban Indians “claim their right to return” to the rez (5). Because these are intertribal powwows, there is even more exchange. The people at the novel’s powwow are from the Plains, for example. The powwow itself is a hybrid creature, “partially created, partially remembered ‘traditional’ festivals. Powwows were a logical place for such invention, because they have been spaces of intercultural meeting and exchange since before Native Americans’ contact with Europeans” (Buff 152). Powwows have changed to reflect this exchange. They are performative spaces: here non-Natives come to “witness” traditional dance and song (though these traditions are not frozen in time), and Native people from diverse traditions come to compete for monetary prizes, to sell “authentic” Indian trinkets, and to see old friends. It is a popular misconception that powwows are places to see old-time Indian stuff. They might be described as what Eric Hobsbawm calls an “invented tradition,” or “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1). Many of the “traditions” of the powwow come out of the Buffalo Bill Wild West shows and are in fact invented. Fancy dancing, for example, and the grand entrance began during this period. Other “traditional” dances have been adapted and are performed by members of other tribal groups.

Another form of exchange between the reservation and the city that
Erdrich contemplates in the novel is that of garbage. Klaus Shawano works with Richard Whiteheart Beads for “the first Native-owned waste disposal company in the whole U.S.” (44). Unfortunately it seems as though the reservation has become a landfill: “Far up north on reservation land, there’s money to be made in garbage. Disposal space” (39–40). Klaus says,

Used to be us Indians had nothing to throw away—we used it all up to the last scrap. Now we have a lot of casino trash, of course, and used diapers, disposable and yet eternal, like the rest of the country. Keep this up and we’ll all one day be a landfill of diapers, living as adults right on top of our own baby shit. Makes sense in some way. (44)

This reflection on the nature of garbage also allows for a gauge of cultural transformation. In some ways life on the reservation is not so different from life in the city. Popular culture (including the use of the disposable diaper) has long permeated reservation life. The rez is not an isolated, pure expression of Native culture. That culture is constantly changing. One might argue, however, that Erdrich portrays this exchange of culture as a poisoning of sorts. While posing as Richard, Klaus is mistakenly arrested “because of dumping practices” (48). “Things get dumped, terrible poisons in endless old wells,” he says (50). This sort of trading is damaging in more than one way. First, it becomes impossible to maintain the “purity” of the reservation space, both culturally and environmentally. In the end garbage becomes another colonial invasion into Indian Territory.

From the fur trade to the modern garbage industry, exchange between peoples and places has occurred in the territory of Minnesota. Since 1541 when Hernando de Soto planted a Spanish flag on the bank of the Mississippi, to 1659 when French Canadians Médard Choart des Groseilliers and Pierre-Esprit Radisson spent the winter in Dakota villages near Mille Lacs, to 1679 when Daniel Greysolon Duluth also spent a winter among Indians in Mille Lacs and “discovered” the St. Croix River, to 1680 when Franciscan priest Louis Hennepin “discovered” the Falls of St. Anthony (the future site of Minneapolis), to 1805 when Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike vis-
ited the falls to expel British traders who had illegally allied with the Indians, to 1821 when the U.S. Army built Fort Snelling at the mouth of the Minnesota River, to 1839 when a large battle between the Dakotas and the Ojibwas occurred near present-day Minneapolis, settlers have been coming to this region. Even so, Erdrich does not portray Indians simply as victims of incursions into Indian Country. Instead she demonstrates how difficult it is to trace the many crossings and exchanges between the cultures of Minnesota. In the novel the “borders” are fluid, characters are mobile, and culture is constantly changing. Erdrich challenges the notion of a fixed Indian identity, rooted in the past, unable to adapt to modern living. As traders, her characters, especially Klaus with his “trader’s smile” (28), pick and choose what is useful. The concept of trade is central to this novel. As Appadurai points out in Modernity at Large, cultural exchange occurs in multiple directions—no one culture is a repository of new information from the outside. By focusing on material culture, or the “things” being exchanged, Erdrich traces these historical crossings.

ETHNOBILIA

What I am calling “ethnobilia” includes both objects and rituals that function as a sort of ethnic memorabilia in the novel. Diasporic peoples, James Clifford argues, “work to maintain community, selectively preserving and recovering traditions, ‘customizing’ and ‘versioning’ them in novel, hybrid, and often antagonistic situations” (263). In this novel Erdrich demonstrates how culture spills over boundaries and how portable culture can be. The traditions and “things” in the novel carry historical importance and enact certain memories in the community of The Antelope Wife. All of these objects and rituals are hybridized or syncretic; they are all somehow evidence of exchange between Native peoples and the colonizers. The traditions that are carried into the city, including the ceremonial use of tobacco and the preparation of food, coupled with the calico and beads prominent in the novel, provide a measure of cultural adaptation that denies any attempts at complete assimilation. They help maintain an Indian
subjectivity in the urban space, but one that is dynamic, not fixed in the historical past.

We see Rozin, Cally’s mother, use tobacco in the ceremonial way when she prepares a meal for the spirits of Richard and Deanna, who seem to be haunting her late in the novel. Rozin sets a table in the yard of her mothers’ home, with two place settings “at the western end because that is the death direction.” They are “[s]pirit plates, with tobacco” (188). Erdrich talks about the Ojibwas’ use of tobacco in Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country:

Spirits like tobacco. Their fondness for the stuff is a given of Ojibwe life. Tobacco offerings are made before every important request, to spirits or to other humans. Tobacco is put down by the root if you pick a plant, in the water when you visit a lake, by the side of the road when starting a journey. Tobacco is handed to anyone with whom you wish to speak in a serious manner. (14)

It is used to appease the spirits, to give thanks to the Creator. That Rozin uses tobacco in the old way, in the city, alone, is a sincere performance of the act. Her dedication comes directly from the elders. At Rozin’s wedding to Frank, “The old people sacrificed a corner of the cake, with tobacco, for the spirits” (179). If we contrast Rozin’s performative act with Richard’s and Klaus’s act, in the scene outside the art museum, we see not only how the commercial use of tobacco has interfered with the ceremonial but also how the offering is changed when used to perform Indianness for outsiders. When a woman gives money to Richard, he tells her that he will put down tobacco for her. “That’s a sacred gesture. We’re still Indians,” he says (93). Klaus immediately responds, “You got cigarettes?” Richard gives him his “last cigarette,” but Klaus does not smoke it. A short time later, Richard takes it back: “He unpeeled the wrapping from the cigarette and began to sprinkle the tobacco on the clipped grass. Klaus and Richard were very quiet, watching the flakes of tobacco fall to the earth” (95). They leave this place and wander around the city until they reach the river:
“We were here a while ago. I remember this place,” said Richard.
“We should put down some tobacco.”
“Or smoke it.”
“We just got two cigarettes left.”
“Let’s smoke it like an offering then.”
“It don’t mix with wine, not for religious purposes.”
“That’s true,” said Richard. He slowly decided, and then he spoke. “This afternoon, let’s just regard our tobacco as a habit-forming drug.” (97)

Erdrich uses humor in this exchange between Klaus and Richard to highlight how tobacco use has changed. Even though they are homeless alcoholics at this point, Klaus and Richard know the guidelines for ceremonial use—and know that it is disrespectful to perform the ritual while drinking alcohol.

Before Rozin sets those spirit plates out in the yard, she spends hours cooking traditional foods for Richard and Deanna: “Into the pot, she pours an inch or so of wild rice. A fine sweet dust rises off the rice like smoke, smelling of the lake bottom, weedy and fresh” (187). This rice was the real stuff, “[k]nocked into the bottom of Zosie’s beat-up aluminum canoe last fall” (187). She will also make a vanilla pudding “from scratch,” stewed turkey, and corn on the cob. We see these traditional foods also at Rozin’s wedding: “the meats of the day were all game acquired by the brothers and uncles and prepared according to their own special methods. The moose was unearthed from a cooking pit in the backyard” (170). Klaus says earlier on, “We are people of simple food straight from the earthen earth and from the lakes and from the woods” (138). At Christmas dinner Zosie proclaims, “There should be no salt on this table! In the early days we had no salt” (202). Colonialism certainly changed the Ojibwa diet, which becomes evident with the wedding menu: along with the moose and the wild rice and the deer sausages, there are “six types of potato salad,” ambrosia, macaroni, Marshmallow Krispy Bars, and a box full of fry bread (170–71). Even fry bread, commonly thought to be a staple of the Indian diet, originated during the times of commodity flour on the reservation. It is a fairly new addition. Yet fry bread appears several times in the novel. Frank
makes it in his bakery to sell alongside the breads and pastries. Cally says, “Frank slips in the little slabs of dough and they bob there, bubbling, reminding me of back home at powwows and sweating ladies at the fry-bread stands laughing and pushing those gold rounds at you” (113). Even health-conscious, cosmopolitan Cecille makes fry bread for the wedding (157). Fry bread is a reminder of the colonial, sure, but it is also the making of something out of almost nothing: flour, salt, powdered milk, oil. It has become a pantribal entity that was borne out of the reservation experience.

Another example of the “white flour, white sugar” influence of colonization comes in the form of a cake—the blitzkuchen. Erdrich incorporates the very story of the intercultural exchange when Klaus narrates the story of how he got his name, of the kidnapped German prisoner whose name was also Klaus and who was supposed to replace a relative lost in the war. The German Klaus is given a chance to save himself if he is able to impress the Shawano family with his baking. And he does, even with meager ingredients, create the finest, most amazing cake. This is the cake Frank Shawano, an unborn child during this episode, will dedicate the rest of his life trying to duplicate. Frank calls it the “cake of peace” (114). The German influence here is not subtle. The recipe that Frank tries to recover is most certainly from Germany directly. He finally succeeds at making the blitzkuchen for his own wedding. The secret ingredient, it seems, is fear. Because Richard suggested that he had poisoned the cake, there is fear for the consumers. The same fear must have existed the first time: why would a prisoner not try to poison his captors? The cake itself is representative of that old story of exchange, and that Frank transports it from the reservation to the city deems it important. It is an acknowledgment of influence.

In The Social Life of Things, Arjun Appadurai suggests that “commodities, like persons, have social lives” and “life histories” (3, 41). He is especially interested in “the diversion of commodities from their predestined paths” (26). In Modernity at Large, Appadurai argues that “objects are constitutive of the social meanings of rites of passage, and not simply markers of these meanings” (70). There seems to be a contemplation of commodities in The Antelope Wife that
begins with the blue beads in the first chapter. Another commodity that can be traced throughout the novel is the calico after which the antelope woman is named. These two objects have long and complex histories. Glass beads first came to the Ojibwas in the 1700s, after the Grand Portage Trading Post was established and trading with the French began (Bial 58, 100). The Ojibwas have long referred to their beads as “little spirit seeds, gift of the Manitou” (58). These trade beads came from all over Europe and as far away as Africa and were incorporated into many articles of jewelry and clothing, including regalia worn for powwows, moccasins, leggings, and headware. In their work on trade beads, historians Christopher Miller and George Hamell argue that “nonutilitarian trade goods were valuable, not for their uniqueness, but for their similarity to native substances” (318). In other words trade beads were curious because they were manufactured but looked like objects in nature. Calico came a bit later to Native peoples. Named after the Indian city of Calcutta, calico became popular in England in the mid-1600s but was not manufactured in America until the early nineteenth century. In 1831 three Massachusetts companies were producing over 20 million yards of calico per year (Rivard 72). Calico was traded widely, and reservation Indians in many geographical regions made dresses from the fabric. Women on the Trail of Tears, for example, wore calico dresses called “tear dresses.” With no implements for cutting the fabric, it had to be torn before assembly. “Beads and calico” might appropriately describe the trade and dress of American Indians during the nineteenth century. Both goods were embraced by Native populations and came to define their public persona.

The novel is framed by mythic episodes of beading, which critic Jonathan Little has argued create “a narrative of overlapping spaces between cultures while also depicting the enduring strength and resiliency of the Ojibwa heritage” (499). The blue beads in the novel, called “northwest trader blue,” are from Czechoslovakia (214). Blue Prairie Woman places them on the cradleboard with Matilda in the commotion of the massacre at the beginning of the novel. When Scranton Roy discovers them, Matilda “stared at them as though mesmerized” (5). She grows up wearing these beads, and she takes them with her when her mother comes for her (16). The beads disap-
pear from the plot until the end of the novel, when Zosie Roy relates the story of how she came to possess those blue beads. When Zosie was a child, she met a Pembina woman who wore the beads.14 Zosie falls in love with them because of the color:

That blue of my beads, I understood was the blueness of time. Perhaps you don’t know that time has a color. You’ve seen that color but you were not watching, you were not aware. Time is blue. Or time is the blue in things. I came to understand that my search for the blueness called northwest trader blue was the search to hold time. (215)

That Zosie equates these beads with time, or the attempt to hold time, is interesting. The desire to stop time—to freeze it at this particular moment in postcontact, reservation-era time—is a desire to slow the process of acculturation, it would seem. This makes sense when Sweetheart Calico’s silence is explained by the fact that she holds the strand of blue trade beads in her mouth. Zosie explains how she gambled with the Pembina woman to obtain those beads but not how Sweetheart Calico came to possess them. They are well-traveled beads. In the end Cally inherits them, which somehow completes transference from Blue Prairie Woman to Blue Prairie Woman, Cally’s traditional name.

Sweetheart Calico is kept silent with the beads, and she is bound by a strip of calico. Klaus uses the cloth to attract her attention at the Montana powwow, on the advice of Jimmy Badger, who tells him that antelope people are curious and will “check anything they don’t understand” (27). Sweetheart Calico and her three daughters are “dressed in pale folds of calico” (25). Klaus puts a piece of calico, “white with little pink roses,” on his trading table, and naturally the women are attracted (27). When he has kidnapped the mother, Klaus ties her wrists to his with a strip of the fabric (30). This is how he takes her to Minneapolis against her will. However, she is not able to escape even when she is not tied to him. Sometimes Klaus sleeps next to her, their wrists tied together. In the end he symbolically ties the strip of cloth to their wrists when he decides to release her. By this time the calico has become a “dirty gray”: 
Sweat and dirt and drunken sleeps, railroad bed, underpass and overpass, dust of the inner-city volleyball courts and frozen snirt and river water were all pressed into the piece of cloth that held the story of his miserableness and which was still—though grit scored, dirt changed, and sun faded—tensile, woven of the same toughness as the old longing. (227)

They travel to the edge of the city, the border, and he unties the cloth. What does it mean to be bound by calico? A commodity, a trade item, an object of colonialism? There is a warning here about the seduction of material possessions, but even more so about the fixity of identity. That the antelope wife cannot survive in the urban space is a demonstration of the danger in perpetuating the image of the Indian as a rural subject. She is held captive by the calico, which in the end becomes a metaphor for the “colonial” Indian.

At the end of the novel, when Sweetheart Calico begins to speak, she tells Cally, “I’m drowning in stuff here in Gakahbekong” (219). Stuff is important in this novel. Both calico and trade beads are reminders of colonialism, that Minneapolis was an early trading village, that border crossing has existed for an extended period of time. The city is a contact zone, a place of exchange, a “global village.” Even the sacred use of tobacco and the preparation of foods have been changed by contact. These objects and rituals are transported across space and time into the city. If beads and calico are representative of the nineteenth-century Indian, what does it mean to carry these things into the present? They exist to abolish the boundary between past and present, reservation and city, rural and urban, Native and colonial. They are enablers in a reclaiming of Indian history and space. These “things” are more than evidence of nostalgia for a lost past or place or identity. They are ethnic markers. In The Antelope Wife, Louise Erdrich uses them to identify and then defamiliarize the stereotypical Indian, in effect rewriting the narrative of conquest and colonization in the territory of Minnesota.

Louise Erdrich’s Ojibwas are travelers and border crossers. They navigate the city, in effect reclaiming that ancestral space as their own. The city is familiar because it is located on Indian land. They
bring with them cultural reminders of life on the reservation, which has long been influenced by mainstream colonial society. Colonial boundaries become meaningless, as they cannot contain a culture. As Mary Magoulick similarly has argued about the novel, “Whatever tangible and intangible symbols and traditional ways may be lost, life and culture survive, just as the land survives even beneath the huge, seething mass of the city” (324). The novel is not only about cultural preservation, however, as critics such as Magoulick and Little claim; it is also about hybridity and exchange and possession. The land, traditions, and objects are all possessed in some way. In fact material culture and place are intrinsically connected. They are about “home” and the familiar. Simon Ortiz has stated that anywhere he travels in the Americas is home because all land is Indian land. Erdrich certainly takes the same tack, although boundaries and dislocations still resonate. In this novel Erdrich challenges many of the master narratives about Indians in general and urban Indians in particular. She describes multiple avenues for survival in the urban space. She demonstrates that the reservation was a global place long before the era of relocation. Gakahbekong is a trading town, a crossroads. By viewing history through a sense of “deep time,” Erdrich redefines relocation, remaps the borders of Ojibwa country, and, as a result, dislodges the very essence of tribal rootedness. In so doing Erdrich participates in the unmaking of the reservation novel.

NOTES

1. In this essay I follow Erdrich’s lead in the spelling of the term Ojibwa, an alternate spelling of Ojibwe or Ojibway. In earlier novels Erdrich uses Chippewa and Anishinaabeg to describe the tribal affiliation of her characters, and in her most recent nonfiction book she uses Ojibwe.

2. Carl Gutiérrez-Jones uses this information to argue that Erdrich is a literary pillager, taking bits and pieces from several traditions (103).

3. For recent work on urban Indian identity, see Jackson’s Our Elders Lived It, Garroutte’s Real Indians, and Lawrence’s “Real” Indians and Others.

4. See LaDow’s The Medicine Line.

5. The “water man” Erdrich refers to is Mishepeshu from Ojibwa cosmology. This water creature is supposed to have saved Lipsha Morrissey from
drowning in Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*. The story is also recounted in *The Bingo Palace*.

6. The Office of Indian Ministry is part of the St. Paul and Minneapolis Catholic archdiocese. See Gibeau, “Drivers Provide Last Trip Home.” In addition, the nonprofit Indian Burial Assistance Project in Minneapolis, affiliated with the All Saints Episcopal Indian Mission, offers low-cost funeral services and hearse transportation.

7. I want to thank poet Esther Belin (Diné) and Linda Murray (Pima) for their ideas about the prevalence of reservation interment.

8. This reminds me of Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer*, in which Pumpkin, a bright, promising, young urban Indian loses her life in a car accident while on the summer powwow trail.

9. A similar practice appears in Luci Tapahonso’s poem “It Has Always Been This Way”; however, the Diné bury the umbilical cord in the yard near the house so that the child does not wander far from home.

10. Erdrich tells a similar joke in *The Bingo Palace*. Lyman Lamartine uses the analogy of a bucket of crawfish to describe how difficult it is to leave the reservation (102).

11. Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places* describes a similar connection to place among the Western Apaches. He writes, “The people’s sense of place, their sense of their tribal past, and their vibrant sense of themselves are inseparably intertwined” (35).

12. Of course, not all powwows take place on reservations. Universities and urban American Indian centers also host annual powwows that are attended by many reservation Indians.

13. For further discussion of “settler foods,” see Brozzo.

14. Pembina is an Ojibwa clan name.

15. Ortiz made this statement during his reading at the Native American Literature Symposium in Mystic Lake, Minnesota, in 2003.

**WORKS CITED**


Wampum as Hypertext
An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice

ANGELA M. HAAS

We do not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.
Chief Seattle of the West Coast Duwamish, 1854

We round the corner of the Many Tribes, Many Trails gallery that maps the U.S. government’s forced removal of other indigenous tribes into the Cherokee Removal gallery at the Cherokee Heritage Center Trail of Tears exhibit.1 The wind is howling; it’s freezing cold. We walk among the ghosts of our ancestors, some clinging to each other, others with walking sticks, others pulling their coats close. We pull each other close alongside the wampum belt record. Surrounded by the white wampum honor beads that lay the path for the continuance of our culture and language, the purple wampum beads remind us of the survival of some but the genocide of thousands. We weep. As you say, Qwo-Li, “We are not the ones who forget. We remember. . . . Our bodies hold everything we are told to forget.”

This essay traces a counterstory to Western claims to the origins of hypertext and multimedia by remembering how American Indian communities have employed wampum belts as hypertextual technologies—as wampum belts have extended human memories of inherited knowledges through interconnected, nonlinear designs and associative storage and retrieval methods—long before the “discovery” of Western hypertext. By forging intellectual trade routes between Tehanetorens, Wallace, Williams, and other wampum his-
torians with the work of Western hypertext theorists, such as Bush, Nelson, Bolter, and Landow, this essay positions American Indians as the first known skilled multimedia workers and intellectuals in the Americas. Thus wampum has the potential to re-vision the intellectual history of technology, hypertext, and multimedia studies, and thereby American Indian studies—and such a re-visioning calls for a responsibility to digital and visual rhetorical sovereignty.

To begin, wampum is a small, short, tubular bead, made from the quahog clam shell. The white beads are made from the inner whorl of the shell, and the purple beads come from the dark spot or “eye” on the shell (fig. 1).

Dating back one thousand years, wampum and other material components (e.g., bark fibers, sinew, hemp fibers, string—or other weaving materials) have been used by Woodlands Indians for ceremony and as records of important civil affairs (e.g., alliances, treaties, marriage proposals, ceremonies, wars, etc.) by stringing the wampum beads together on individual strands or weaving them into belts, as pictured in contemporary contexts in figures 2 and 3. Thus wampum serves as a sign technology that has been used to record hundreds of years of alliances within tribes, between tribes, and between the tribal governments and colonial government.

According to Tehanetorens, the coastal Indians were the first to make and use wampum, but through trade with other tribes, it trav-
Figs. 2 & 3. Wampum string (pictured top) and wampum belt (pictured bottom) as displayed by Six Nations youth Don Fadden and Roger Jock (Tehanetorens).
eled to the interior and western regions of the continent. Postcontact, wampum was also appropriated by American colonists, who used it as their first form of currency in colonial “America.” Further, it was the wampum of the Iroquois Confederacy (Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Senecas, and Cayugas) that influenced the democratic thought that led to the Constitution of the United States (cf. Tehanetorens; Wallace; Williams).

Wampum strings and belts served to engender further diplomatic relations, and their presentation was a gesture that required reciprocity on the part of the recipient. Consequently, accepting a gift of wampum meant that the recipient accepted its implied message and responsibility. Wampum records are maintained by regularly revisiting and re-“reading” them through community memory and performance, as wampum is a living rhetoric that communicates a mutual relationship between two or more parties, despite the failure of one of those parties to live up to that promise (which we know was the result of most wampum treaties with the colonists; see fig. 4). Thus wampum embodies memory, as it extends human memories of inherited knowledges via interconnected, nonlinear designs.
with associative message storage and retrieval methods. And it is this complex rhetorical functioning that first engaged my thoughts on how Indians have always been hypertextual.

THE HISTORY OF WESTERN HYPERTEXT

However, Western hypertext theorists mark Dr. Vannevar Bush as the “grandfather” of the concept of hypertextuality through his concept of the Memex. Interestingly enough, the Memex was described in Bush’s 1945 *Atlantic Monthly* article as an instrument designed to extend human memory by allowing us to associatively store and retrieve memories through nonlinear trails, or a webbed network, of interconnected *scientific* knowledge and data. Distinguished professor of electrical engineering at MIT, cofounder of Raytheon Corporation (a high-tech company), and director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development for the Roosevelt administration (i.e., director of war-related research for the U.S. government during World War II), Bush credited science with providing the swiftest of communication between individuals. However, he grew increasingly concerned that the “growing mountain” of research would be too much for a researcher to manage, as Bush himself admitted that he was “staggered by the findings and conclusions of thousands of other workers—conclusions which he cannot find time to grasp, much less to remember, as they appear.” Therefore Bush calls for a technology that can provide for the “collection of data and observations, the extraction of parallel material from the existing record, and the final insertion of new material into the general body of the common record.” Further he discusses the need for technological development to allow for *compression of information*. Consequently he offers his vision for a future device to make research more efficient: the Memex. Bush describes the Memex as

a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility. It is an enlarged intimate supplement to his memory. [. . .] It affords an immediate step [. . .] to associative indexing, the basic idea
of which is a provision whereby any item may be caused at will to select immediately and automatically another. This is the essential feature of the Memex. The process of tying two items together is the important thing.

Thus the Memex was imagined as a device that would allow for an associative system for indexing, storing, retrieving, and delivering of memories.

Although the Memex was never built, hypertext scholars credit Bush as the first to conceive of the concept of hypertext, while Ted Nelson is recognized by many as the man who coined the term “hypertext” for “non-sequential writing.” Nelson's material vision for hypertext was as Xanadu, a global hypertext network that would “make all published information available to everyone and to enable anyone to freely recombine any and all documents and add their own textual content” (Farkas and Farkas 13). Although Nelson has not finished building Xanadu, his dream of the Xanadu “Docuverse” has been partially fulfilled vis-à-vis the World Wide Web, despite the fact that the Web does not currently make all published information available nor do we currently have a system for ensuring hypertext copyright holders are paid whenever their intellectual property is used. Consequently, even though Bush's and Nelson's visions for hypertexts never materialized, they are most often credited for the origins of hypertext theory and the general perception that hypertext is an interactive system of storing and retrieving images, texts, and other computer files that allows users to directly link to relevant images, texts, sounds, and other data types in a nonlinear environment.

Given the preceding origin story, I posit that the “history” of hypertext is a Western frontier story, a narrative that most often begins with the exploration of the land of Xanadu and the Memex and eventually leads to the trailblazing of the World Wide Web. Few stories have been told of hypertexts that existed in Native American territories long before the land of Memex and Xanadu. Consequently this essay offers a preliminary hypertextual historiographical decolonial narrative that suggests that the concept of hypertext and the rhetorical work it does are not new—nor is it unique to Western cul-
ture, despite the terminology’s Western etymology (hyper + text; see fig. 5). To accomplish this goal, this essay demonstrates how wampum is an example of a pre-Memex, pre-Xanadu, and pre-Internet American Indian technology that was not only imagined but became a reality and that not only works like hypertext but in fact extends those capabilities beyond the current capacity of interconnected hypertexts we see on the “World Wide” Web.

Thus I seek to make a similar move with wampum that Damián Baca makes with his recovery of Aztec codex rhetorics, as this essay will elucidate how wampum hypertext rhetorics, like codex rhetorics, “at once look back to the [...] past while critiquing the present and inventing possible shared futures” (22). To do so, this essay calls for an understanding of the theory of “discovery” (Deloria Jr.; Kehoe) and imperial naming and claiming (King; Pratt; Spurr; Vizenor)—and consequently it invites hypertext scholars to challenge the current dominant “history” of hypertext and re-vision the “history” to include non-Western intellectual traditions that existed prior to Bush’s Memex and encourages American Indian Studies scholars to re-vision how we articulate, study, and teach technology.
Hypertextual Features of Wampum and Western Hypertexts

Digital Rhetoric

To begin, both Western and wampum hypertexts employ digital rhetoric to communicate their nonlinear information. To explain, “digital” refers to our fingers, our digits, one of the primary ways (along with our ears and eyes) through which we make sense of the world and with which we write into the world. All writing is digital—digitalis in Latin, which typically denotes “of or relating to the fingers or toes” or a “coding of information.” Given this, we should be reminded of writing known to us though history that was executed with the use fingers and codes—from the Mesopotamian Cuneiform, to the Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphs, to the Chinese logograms, to the Aztec codices, wampum belts, and Western hypertexts. Wampum, then, codes local knowledges and alliances with wampum shells and sinew (or other stringing devices). Thus the beads and stringing technologies could be represented as 0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0-0, or strands of wampum code that when strung together communicate information to their “readers.”

Similarly, the standard language that Web designers use to create hypermedia documents is the Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML). Web documents are typically digitally written in HTML, and they consist of nothing more than standard text with formatting codes that contain information about font, layout, design, and hyperlinks. When broken down to its simplest form, digital coding for computers is represented as 0|0|0|0|0|0|0|0|0|0|0, or strands of binary code that when strung together communicate information to their “readers.”

Visual Rhetoric

Just as the digital coding dictates the visual rhetoric (i.e., font, layout, information design and display, etc.) of Western hypertexts, so too does the digital coding of wampum hypertexts. To explain, wampum communicates visually via the contrast between the dark
purple and the white beads and the meaning inscribed in the resulting patterns. To illustrate, pictured below is Cayuga Chief Jacob Thomas holding a replica of the Two Row Wampum Treaty Belt (fig. 6), which embodies a treaty between the Iroquois Confederacy and colonists.

Tehanetorens explains that “[t]his belt symbolizes the agreement and conditions under which the Iroquois welcomed the white peoples to this land. [. . .] This wampum belt confirms our words.” The two rows symbolize two paths or two vessels, and though the two parties will travel together side by side, they will do so in their own boat. “Neither of us will make compulsory laws or interfere in the internal affairs of the other. Neither of us will try to steer the other’s vessel” (74). Such everyday practices of digital coding result in culturally saturated visual rhetorics that signify meaning to those who revisit wampum treaties—not to mention the visual mnemonics associated with the subsequent rereading of wampum belts.
Associative Indexing, Storing, Retrieving, and Presenting Information

Besides encoding information, both technologies also employ systems of nodes and links that form information structures vis-à-vis associative indexing. To explain, nodes can be considered points of information and links the pathways that connect them. This centrality of nodes and links to hypertext theory can be explained in the rhetorical work that hypertexts do. As Farkas and Farkas explain,

Hypertext theory considers how various arrangements of nodes and links express meaning and how these arrangements are reflected in the user interface. Hypertext theory classifies these arrangements of nodes and links into various kinds of hierarchical and non-hierarchical structures, often called “information structures.” (123)

Similarly, in wampum belt hypertexts, wampum beads serve as nodes to topics, and the sinew, hemp, tree bark twine, or other stringing devices serve as links or pathways to associated information. To explain further, architectural mnemonic associations are employed as wampum belts and strings are encoded with information. Thus a wampum hypertext constructs an architectural mnemonic system of knowledge making and memory recollection through bead placement, proximity, balance, and color. Like colors are employed in Western visual design to signify certain moods for readers, the color usage of wampum reminds its “reader” how to organize and read the story woven into the material rhetoric (fig. 7).6

In order to retrieve the encoded communication, an individual must be a part of the community with the cultural context for accurate retrieval of that information. The messages are spoken and woven into the wampum, and those messages are repeated each time an individual (re)presents the material rhetoric, or wampum hypertext, to the community. Thus, in this way, wampum hypertext is more similar to Bush’s vision for hypertext, one that is culturally situated among a community. As such, the wampum community can be seen as a community of heritage and cultural knowledge workers. Thus the hypertext is seen more as a cross-community hypertext than as a global or mass communication, like Nelson’s vision of hypertext.
Nonlinear, Webbed Networks of Knowledge

The organization of nodes and links forms a nonlinear, or webbed, network of information in both wampum and Western rhetorics. From Myron Tuman’s work, we can trace some of the key features of hypertext—from a “web of relations” (60), to “a connected system of documents” (61), to “a system without end or center” (63). Further, hypertext theorist Jay David Bolter describes hypertext as a “layered writing and reading” environment, where “[a]ll the individual pages may be of equal importance in the whole text, which becomes a network of interconnected writings” (Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print 27). Thus Bolter conveys the value of nonhierarchical content linked in a hypertext and the capacity for hypertexts to have multiple layers of meaning. Moreover he notes how this layering of information subverts the traditional hier-
archy of information in print and the focus on the associative relationships among and across content.

Wampum similarly offers a layered writing and reading experience, as wampum can communicate more than one story, as meaning is layered in the materials with the technology and digital rhetoric. To illustrate the layers of purpose and meaning, Robert Williams demonstrates how the Guswentah wampum, otherwise known as the Two Row Treaty Wampum, has the capacity to secure trade, alliances, and goodwill and to offer “tribal approaches to the problems of achieving law and peace in a multicultural world” (5) (see fig. 8). This layering is also evident in Williams’s account of how reading and listening to the wampum requires an understanding of the layered messages embodied by the wampum. He writes about the

telling of stories spoken by the [condolence ceremony] wampum: stories of rekindling the fire “to bind us close”; of grave sorrow for the dead chief; of wiping away any bad blood between the two sides; of sharing the same bowl to eat together; of dispelling the clouds and restoring the sun that shines truth on all peoples. (55–56)

Thus these layers of stories are woven together and can be pulled apart by members of that community for a layered “reading” or presentation of the wampum as well, thereby facilitating a hypertext of data representation and interpretation.

Supplemental Memory

As demonstrated in the aforementioned wampum introduction and the Two Row belt example, stories are encoded with digital rhetoric and the technologies of shells and sinew (or other stringing devices) and subsequently stored in the material rhetoric. Thus both wampum and Western hypertexts supplement memory. Vannevar Bush envisioned his Memex as an intimate extension of a man’s memory, while hypertext allows designers to input their memorized knowledge, and wampum strings and belts serve as communal, cultural, and civic memory. According to Tehanetorens, for the Iroquois, every
treaty or law passed by the council was recorded with a particular string or belt of wampum and memorized by certain trained individuals (12). In order to memorize the belt and its story, the trained individual would impress in the mind the visual representation of the belt and subsequently forge mnemonic associations between the visual representation of the belt and the accompanying story. Thus the wampum “reader” or presenter can trace the nodes of information and can link their associated inherited knowledge by tracing the embedded stories “told” by wampum and sinew hypertext.

As discussed briefly earlier in this essay, wampum beads serve as nodes to topics, and the sinew, hemp, tree bark twine, or other stringing devices serve as links or pathways to associated information. Architectural mnemonic associations are employed as wampum belts, and strings are encoded with information. As with classical Roman memoria exercises promoted by Cicero and Quintilian, where mental images (imagines) were placed in an architectural background (loci), purple and white wampum beads are likewise
woven into a meaningful pattern dictated by memoria and purpose onto a background of a stringing material technology.

**Interactive Design**

Farkas and Farkas define “hypertext” as

the original term for interactive content. For this reason, we find it in the phrases “hyperlinks,” “hypertext jumps,” and HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). Because most of the interactive systems of the 1960s, ’70s, and early-to-mid ’80s displayed only text and static graphics, they were referred to as hypertext systems. (10; emphasis added)

According to Bolter, “the key qualities of hypertext are still the creation of a structure of elements and their presentation in interaction with the reader” (*Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* 98). On the other hand, Hypermedia, then, is presented as the linguistic successor to hypertext, as it “includes interactive videodiscs and other technologies that were designed primarily to present dynamic content” (10; emphasis added), where “words, graphics, animation, sound, and video can all be disposed as units in a hypertext” (98). Thus, while hypertext was first seen as a an interaction between static content, and hypermedia is now seen as the interaction between dynamic content, the feature of interactiveness has remained consistent.

With wampum hypertexts interactiveness is achieved both between and across the content and media types and between the “designers” and “presenters” of wampum, the audience for the wampum hypertext, and the material rhetoric itself. Although wampum preserves and communicates the memories of treaties, peace, and alliances, it not only embodies this communication but also presents the memories. Wampum presents a hypertext visually and aurally via an accompanying oral story. Whether it is treaty belt, peace pact, a welcome belt, condolence string, or adoption belt, it is presented to all affected parties, and most are revisited on a regular basis and re-“read.” Thus, not only is the wampum belt crafted with memories, but it is also “read” by memory.
The Oneida Indian Nation explains that wampum was connected to the spoken word. Wampum testified to the truth and importance of the message “read into” the object itself (qtd. in Cousins 158). Thus the act of speaking into the wampum both presents meaning to the material object itself and impresses the experience into the individual’s mind, not to mention for any onlookers as well. For example, the Iroquois women are charged with the task of nominating the chiefs, and they speak and weave their decisions about who to nominate and their recommended tasks and rules for the chieftainship into the “Women’s Nominating Belt” (Tehanetorens 31). Consequently we can assess that there are two layers of interactiveness between the women who speak and weave meaning into the wampum, between those who present the wampum and those who listen, and between all these interactors and the wampum hypertext itself. This interactiveness is also a requirement for negotiating the different technologies and communication modes necessary for the wampum to continue to be rhetorical.

**Multimodal Web of Meaning**

As can be inferred from the section above, wampum is multimodal in its meaning making. After all, in order for wampum to be communicative, a hybridization of the oral tradition and symbolism is woven into the material rhetoric. Furthermore the technologies woven into the belt have communicative agency, as with the colors of the shells and the design patterns. The cultural context and community where the wampum resides is yet another source of meaning that gets encoded into the wampum. Thus wampum is a hypertext of communicative modes—all of which contribute to cultural knowledge production and preservation.

**Extending the Capability of Western Hypertexts**

The study of wampum as hypertext demonstrates that wampum does not communicate exactly like Western hypertext; however, it works similarly. Consequently hypertext theory could learn more about
“traditional” hypertexts via discussions of wampum hypertextuality. As Bolter explains, “We use the computer as hypertext to write with symbols that have both intrinsic and extrinsic significance” (Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print 27), but the same could be said of wampum—as it has been used for centuries to communicate cultural, communal, and civic information of both intrinsic and extrinsic value. However, Bolter restricts hypertext to a phenomenon that only occurs on a computer through electronic writing (Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing 99). Thus further discussions about where hypertextuality can take place are needed for future hypertext theory and revisionist history.

Wampum belts signify a surviving intellectual tradition that communicates living stories of a living culture. The treaties (and other messages woven into the wampum) are renewed by regularly revisiting and re-“reading” wampum vis-à-vis community memory and performance. Although both need to be involved to update the message therein, the message communicated by particular wampum belts do not change; rather, they are remembered and recited. Consequently they are used to remind us of our commitments, and we renew those commitments through reading and performing the wampum hypertext. The same is not true of Western hypertexts, where changes can be made in a moment—or no changes are ever made, and the links therein are broken. Thus while all affected parties need to tend to the links to ensure the alliances survive, tribal memory keeps the wampum rhetoric alive while individuals need to continuously update hypertexts and their content to keep them relevant. Unless the author notes the latest revision date, we cannot be certain when the hypertext is “dead”—until we use it. On the contrary, using the wampum belt in the way it is intended keeps it alive.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this essay, the promise of contemporary hypertexts often rests in their ability to reflect an interactive design in order to encourage interactiveness. With wampum, interactiveness is achieved both between and across the content and media types and between the “designers” and “presenters”
of wampum, the audience for the wampum hypertext, and the material rhetoric itself. Although wampum preserves and communicates the memories of treaties, peace, and alliances, it not only embodies this communication but also presents the memories. Consequently one could argue that wampum is limited in relation to contemporary Western hypertexts in that it requires human intervention to remember the intent and content of the original message; however, one could also posit that such interaction encourages continuous civic involvement instead of an overreliance on technology. Wampum reminds us that duyuktv (a Cherokee concept of judicious balance) between technology and humans is necessary—and that the body’s interaction is also necessary to achieve this balance.

The body remembers the weaving and the performance of wampum. Regular performances of wampum hypertexts suggest that Western hypertexts are relegated to dormancy until the moment we need to recall them. Both conceptions of hypertext require human interaction, but Western hypertext does not require a conscious effort to remember the message encoded in the technology. Thus human memory (physiological, emotional, mental, and bodily) and material memories are connected—in an alliance to foster hypertextual memory.

Finally the study of wampum as hypertext has the potential to reimagine the future of hypertext as more civically responsible. Although the World Wide Web is touted for its democratizing effects on communication, there is still a digital divide between the haves and have-nots, whereas shared responsibility is what links wampum beads. This shared responsibility is lacking in contemporary renditions of Western hypertexts, where some of us are concerned that the Internet is like the “open” frontier, where individual rights take precedent over community benefit and alliance building. Where dead end hyperlinks are plenty. Where messages of violence and racism abound. Where child predators lurk. Unlike Western hypertexts, wampum remembers civic responsibility; in fact, wampum requires it. In contrast, contemporary hypertext does not require responsibility, and the enforcement of it is one of hypertext’s most pressing critiques.
IMPLICATIONS OF WAMPUM AS HYPERTEXT

While there are certainly more implications for the study of wampum as hypertext within hypertext and multimedia studies, what are the implications for this research for American Indian studies? For one, it situates American Indians as techno-savvy, as it demonstrates how American Indians have a long-standing intellectual tradition of multimediated, digital rhetoric theories and practices—or theories and practices of communicating via the encoding of information with our fingers and toes using a variety of media. Thus we must be critical of the stories we tell ourselves about being “technologically advanced.” Whose definition of technologically advanced are you using when evaluating your technological proficiency? (See fig. 9.)

To explain, wampum beads are technologies, just as sinew, hemp, and tree bark twine are—all of the technologies needed to craft wampum belt multimediated stories. Such an argument can be extended to the other sign technologies we build via an assemblage of other technologies, all which come along with their own set of “literacies,” from birch bark scrolls and canoes, winter counts, petroglyphs, star quilts, songs, drums, double-wall and double-woven rivercane baskets, and more to Web sites, blogs, and instant messaging.

Such research also answers Osage literary scholar Robert Warrior’s call to examine “how we can make American Indian discourse more inclusive of contemporary American Indian experiences” (Tribal Secrets 87). And though access to some contemporary Western technologies remains a contentious issue among American Indians, contemporary American Indian experiences include the daily interaction with and shaping of a variety of both indigenous and Western technologies. Thus, while Western society has determined what it means to be technologically advanced, it does not mean we have to buy into that fiction.

After all, as several American Indian scholars have stressed, American Indians have a right to claim our own intellectual sovereignty and to shape what that means. As Warrior contends, we must critically engage with and reflect on struggles for and discussions of intellectual sovereignty (Tribal Secrets 98). Leech Lake Ojibwe Scott
Lyons articulates what that might mean for the rhetoric studies community. He discusses the legacy of colonization based on rhetorical modes of naming and claiming (which have ties to identity and literacy) to promote the importance of rhetorical sovereignty, or the claiming of “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit [of agency, power, and community renewal], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (449–50). Further, Cherokee scholar Daniel Wildcat reminds us of the relationship of intellectual sovereignty to self-determination. He states, “It is essentially a tribal intellectual and moral mandate requiring action, unless we want our current educational system to be like our contemporary political structures and practices, which all too often merely reflect the dominant society’s institutions” (7). Consequently, building on the work of these scholars, I call that we resist the dominant notions of what it means to be technologically “literate” or “advanced” (with roots in manifest destiny) and that we critically reflect on struggles for and engage with discussions about digital and visual rhetori-
cal sovereignty, or the inherent right for indigenous communities to claim and shape their own communication needs (as well as the rhetoric of their identities) in digital and visual spaces.

AN OPENING

Although there are certainly some potential benefits hypertext theory can reap from the study of wampum as hypertext, to be clear, I am not asserting that wampum is the origins of hypertext. After all, if I am suggesting that there are other stories that tell tales of hypertextuality that have gone untold, adding the story of wampum alone will not remedy this absence. But it does make one absent story present in our discussions of hypertext. And the addition of this story may lead us to better understand the theory of discovery. Just as Alice Beck Kehoe admits, “[a] perennial problem in archaeology is to distinguish between local inventions and those imported from other societies—‘independent invention’ versus ‘diffusion’” (62), I venture to say the same is true of information archaeology and hypertext theory, or any other theory dependent on the proliferation of technology.

Just because an individual names a theory, it does not make it an “independent invention.” As Anishnaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor elucidates, “The English language has been the linear tongue of the colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulation of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities” (105). This same language is what was used by Ted Nelson, who named hypertext and claimed to have “discovered” it.

Perhaps if we allow ourselves to listen to this story of wampum as hypertext in accord with the other existing stories about hypertext, we might enjoy what Indiana Miami scholar Malea Powell describes as an emergence of a “new story about ourselves, not a ‘prime’ narrative held together by the sameness of our beliefs, but a gathering of narratives designed to help us adapt and change as is necessary for our survival” (57–58). Thus, let’s treat the history of hypertext as hypertext, recognizing the fruitful relationships between stories, the
benefit of resisting an imposed hierarchy of those stories, and the
dynamic nature of hypertext that allows for endless and centerless
stories. Such a hypertext will facilitate a dynamic discussion between
these stories on hypertext that will destabilize the current hierarchi-
cal information structure in place that insists on stabilizing the ori-
gins of hypertext. As Mvskoke writer Joy Harjo reminds us in her
poem “there’s no such thing as a one-way land bridge,” “The story
depends on who’s telling it” (5).

NOTES

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Citizenship to use their visuals where cited.

1. For photos and more information on the Cherokee Nation’s Trail of Tears

2. My use of this term is based on Osage writer Robert Warrior’s concept
of intellectual trade routes, or loci that allow for the reciprocal exchange of
intellectual goods and where “intellectuals participate in going out from and
coming back to the places from which they came, learning along the way
new ideas that inform the creation of new knowledge” (xxx–xxxi).

3. Wampum has also served as personal adornment in headbands, arm
and leg bands, bracelets, earrings, and so forth.

4. Ted Nelson (1974) is recognized by many as the man who coined the
term “hypertext” for “non-sequential writing,” yet he credits Vannevar Bush
as his main influence and the “grandfather” of hypertext theory.

5. There are other indigenous sign technologies that function similarly to
Western hypertexts and that have the potential to expand its current limita-
tions, such as winter counts, birch bark scrolls, and the Aztec codices, but
for the sake of fully demonstrating a pre-Memex technology that works like
hypertext, I thought it more effective to provide thicker description through
the use of a consistent example for my hypertextual counterstory. For more
on the Aztec codices as rhetorics of resistance, see Damián Baca’s work.
Parallels between wampum and codex rhetorics are plentiful when consid-
ering Baca’s work: entry into the codices can vary from reader to reader and
requires a “complex visual dance”; the codex is an amalgam of typography, typeface, and lettering that weaves between pictographs, bloodstains, and American cultural icons; the codex serves as a hypertextual cultural memory; designers employ various and multiple rhetorics (e.g., visual and alphabetic, different languages, etc.); both serve as annals and rituals; and the reading of the codices as a communal ritualistic and ceremonial event also parallels the “reading” of wampum. And the three principal types of codices could also be used to understand wampum: time-oriented, place-oriented, and event-oriented.

6. As Dubin summarizes, “Beads are tools by which people convey information to other people [. . . and] organize and symbolize their world” (19).

7. Further, Farkas and Farkas claim that what makes hypermedia distinct from physical space is the capability to “jump” from one node to the next instantly (11). Although this may be true for print texts, this does not prove to be the case for wampum hypertexts, where the physicality and corporality are required to jump from one node of information to the next. Perhaps we can learn more about the hypertextuality of non–computer-based hypertexts, then, from the study of wampum.

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Coyote Warnings

INÉS HERNÁNDEZ-ÁVILA

Be wary when you’re traveling with Coyote. Example: The two of you arrive in Mexico City in the evening, and you are still two to three hours away by bus from your point of destination. You are traveling to ceremony.

Be wary when Coyote says, pulling the hairs of his beard, “You know, it’s not good to arrive by nightfall. It makes people think that you’re sneaking around.”

Consequence: Because you are on a slim budget, you get a sparse two-star hotel room for the two of you. One room. One bed. You roll up a blanket and put it between the two of you and you keep your clothes on. You cross your fingers and try to doze off.

After a very short while, you feel some movement on the other side. Coyote is coming closer. “Get back to your side,” you say sternly. There is silence. Be wary when Coyote mumbles, turning over on his back, “My stomach hurts, maybe you could massage it.”

You think to yourself, “I could kill him.” But you answer, sounding especially drowsy and unfazed, saying very firmly, “Go to sleep. You’ll feel better in the morning.”

Silence.
The next morning the two of you leave for the hills of Chalma, where there is a grand dance happening.

Your arrive at the camp of your elders and settle in for the weeklong events. You suddenly see Coyote meet his Uncle. Yes, the older brother of the elder who heads your circle is a Coyote, too. You realize that you hadn’t remembered this. They greet each other, and you can see their ears perk to attention. You can’t help the belly laughs you feel all throughout your body. Now Coyote is wary, Coyote the younger, although not so young. Coyote Uncle is quite at ease.

They smile and the Uncle motions to us both to sit down to eat. Suddenly you discover another important fact. Your elder, the woman you hold up as an exemplary, wise, and passionate leader, is completely smitten. By Coyote. Her eyes are twinkling stars dancing to meet his. Her smiles are constant. Her laughter is sensual. Uncle Coyote takes note. I am watching everything. Be wary, I think.

We are feasting on rice and beans, savoring the juicy meal, the corn tortillas, the salsa. Then Uncle Coyote holds up a fresh Serrano chile and gestures to Coyote to eat it. Coyote pauses, then shakes his head no. Uncle holds up two chiles and again offers them. Coyote tells me to ask in Spanish what he will get if he eats both of them. Uncle laughs and says, “My sister, you will get my sister.” Much laughter from all of us in the camp. The laughter gives Coyote the instant that he needs. Coyote answers, “And if I eat three chiles, will I get the brother, too?” Roaring laughter, the Uncle pouts and shakes his head, saying “Noooo.”

Coyote has won, once again, this time. He has beaten himself. Be wary.
Writing Deeper Maps
Mapmaking, Local Indigenous Knowledges, and Literary Nationalism in Native Women’s Writing

KELLI LYON JOHNSON

In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Louise Erdrich’s great storyteller Nanapush contrasts two mapping traditions: “White people usually name places for men—presidents and generals and entrepreneurs,” he tells Father Damien. “Ojibwe[s] name places for what grows there or what is found” (359). For Erdrich only those who know “what grows there and what is found”—that is, the people, the Anishinaabeg—can correctly map the place because of their relationship to and knowledge of the land. They are “the keepers of the names of the earth” (360). Erdrich insists that mapping requires local, Indigenous knowledge.¹ This turn to the local is reflected in much contemporary Native writing and literary scholarship. I argue that this turn marks a movement away from Western theories that have often been used to determine the social, psychological, or cultural meanings of Native literature from outside Native nations. Poet and critic Kimberly Blaeser raises the possibility that Western literary theories may be as “destructive to the essence of Native Literature as were many boarding school teachings to a Native lifestyle,” suggesting that “we must admit [these current theories] are at certain times and in important ways inhospitable. A full understanding of Native literary traditions cannot flourish when the interpretive theories, the tools of literary analysis, all stem from another/an other cultural and literary aesthetic” (“Like ‘Reeds’” 265–66).

I see this remarkable turn to Indigenous knowledges in Native writing, and the concomitant rapid and exciting development of literary nationalism, as a response both to more than twenty years of
the dominance of European literary and cultural theory and, at least in part, to the rise of globalization. Like Blaeser, a great many Native writers and critics recognize the dominant and “inhospitable” theoretical tools of literary analysis in the academy in general, and they seek theories that emerge from their own knowledge systems. These writers also recognize the assimilative and extirpative powers of globalization from the experiences of Native nations in the Americas that have contended with five hundred years of similar, and violent, programs of assimilation, destruction, and genocide. In the face of globalization and the often universalizing discourse of literary theories that seek to “transcend” cultural difference, many Native writers and critics have responded in three important ways: by rejecting the imposition of European (and Euroamerican) knowledge as a paradigm for reading Native texts; by presenting their own Indigenous cultures as sources of knowledge; and by explaining and using those Indigenous knowledges as a means of asserting sovereignty for Native nations in the United States. As the example from Erdrich’s The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse demonstrates, Indigenous maps function in just these ways in contemporary Native women’s writing.

European maps have long been taken as transparent, scientific, objective, and universal—as if they were merely precise representations of actual space in the world.2 Predicated on European maps and map use, geography is—to use Gillian Rose’s analysis—a masculinist discipline dominated by white men who have traditionally, as Rose writes, decided “what counts as legitimate geographical knowledge and who can produce such knowledge” (2). Geographical knowledge has been founded on “a particular form of masculinist rationality” (6) that “assumes a knower who believes he can separate himself from body, emotions, past and so on, so that he and his thought are autonomous, context free and objective” (7)—in a word, universal. Universality, in turn, “assumes that it is comprehensive, and thus the only knowledge possible” (7). European maps have come to represent the epitome of scientific accuracy, as the explosion of European mapping that is sometimes called the “cartographic revolution” coincided with colonial competition and the rise of science
in the seventeenth century. In *Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers*, David Turnbull suggests that European maps have become inextricable from both science and the modern state (92), arguing that

in order the achieve the kind of “universal” and “accurate” knowledge that constitutes modern science and cartography, local knowledge, personnel, and instrumentation have to be assembled on a national and international scale. This level of organization is only possible when the state, science and cartography become integrated. (121)

It is this integration with the state that puts into relief the significance of maps in current Indigenous nations’ assertions of sovereignty: in the dominant culture, mapping territory can no longer be separated from controlling or owning territory. As many Native nations assert their inherent sovereignty, they insist on controlling their own territory and thus seek to map it through the use of their own nation-specific conventions.

The history of European mapmaking reveals much about the construction, transmission, and preservation of knowledge. During the rise of cartography, European maps were produced, printed, and sold by publishers, businessmen, and sometimes geographers, who had never traveled to the region depicted on the maps they disseminated. Many atlases of the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries carried advertisements, which should probably have been read more as caveats than assurances, such as Emmanuel Bowen’s pledge that his 1747 *Complete System of Geography* was “Extracted from Several Hundred Books of Travels and History” and had preserved “all that is Useful in the Fourth and Last Edition of the Complete Geographer, publish’d under the Name of Herman Moll, &c.” Map publishers frequently redacted others’ maps and writings into what they considered “useful,” and thus knowledge about the Americas and their inhabitants has come down through these kinds of European maps—masculine, universalist, white—so that even twentieth- and twenty-first-century Native women writers are compelled to engage the myth of scientific accuracy and their destructive history in the Americas. Although appearing occasion-
ally in Native men’s writings, maps figure in the poetry and narratives of a number of Native women writers from a variety of nations: Linda Hogan, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Kimberly Blaeser, Deborah Miranda, Leslie Marmon Silko, LeAnne Howe—these writers interrogate European mapmaking as a colonial enterprise, exposing the wholesale theft of land that began in the Americas in the fifteenth century and that continues today. Because they are so closely linked to definitions of and claims to Native lands, European maps iterate, instigate, and justify violence against the people to whom those lands belong. As Andrea Smith has persuasively argued,

Native peoples have become marked as inherently violable through a process of sexual colonization. By extension, their lands and territories have become marked as violable as well. The connection between the colonization of Native people’s bodies—particularly Native women’s bodies—and Native lands is not simply metaphorical.

It may be this gendering of colonization that accounts, at least in part, for many Native women writers’ interest in European and Indigenous maps. Hogan, Erdrich, and Miranda, to use just a few examples, repeatedly insist that maps are not metaphors, and they seek Indigenous paradigms for understanding and representing Native lands that are not predicated on possession and violation.

Native maps from different nations share some constant characteristics. Among these characteristics, most common are “round lakes, rivers drawn as straight or curved (not wavy) lines, slashes across the river lines to indicate portages, dots to show campsites and hunting areas, commemorative signs for raids and battles” (Belyea 141). These geographical indicators attest to the significance of both context and history in Native maps; rather than representing the earth to a standard scale—the goal of nearly all European mapmaking—Indigenous North American mapmakers focused on the cultural significance of the topographical features. A lake with cultural significance, for example, may be rendered larger than other bodies of water on the map in order to emphasize its importance; a creek that plays no part in the reason for the creation of a map may
be omitted completely. One of the most common features in Native-made and Native-informed maps is the relatively straight alignment of natural features. This “straight-line mapping” (Fossett 113) or “linear coherence” (Belyea 141) characterizes both Inuit and subarctic North American Native mapmaking and suggests the degree to which *relationships* among geographical features and locations supersede mere representations of their existence on the ground. A full understanding of Native maps relies not on a European understanding of scientific geography but of the context—and the narrative—that accompanied each Native-made map.

The exploration of these kinds of local Indigenous knowledges in Native-made and Native-informed maps may be one step in moving toward a tribally centered criticism of Native American literature, such as that called for by Robert Warrior, Craig S. Womack, Jace Weaver, Daniel Heath Justice, and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. Prior to the advent and rise of literary nationalism, one of the more widely used paradigms in Native literary studies had been called cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes a kind of “mixed-blood” approach focusing on the interactions between Native and non-Native peoples, cultures, and histories. “Mixed-blood” discourses resonate with (often European) theories of cultural exchange and hybridity, which, as I have argued elsewhere, risks rendering invisible the very elements that comprise what is hybrid. The criticism emerging out of the cosmopolitanism framework in Native literary studies has frequently sought to perform cultural translation as the elements embedded in the “mixed-blood” narrative are extricated and explicated, generally for a non-Native audience.

In contrast critics associated with Native literary nationalism see the function of Indigenous literature not as a means of explaining Native cultures to a non-Native audience but as a way of asserting Indigenous sovereignty and serving the Native nations of North America. In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig S. Womack has argued that Native literature “is part of sovereignty: Indian people exercising the right to present images of themselves and to discuss those images. Tribes recognizing their own extant literatures, writing new ones, and asserting the right to explicate them
constitute a move toward nationhood” (14). As many Native women writers value, preserve, and transmit local Indigenous knowledges through their writings, they participate in literary nationalist endeavors to assert Native sovereignty.

Unlike the work of many scholars working in the field of Native literary studies, the privileging of so-called universal, European scientific knowledge has shaped the study of the history of Native cartography. In that field, non-Native scholars have tended to analyze Native-made and Native-informed maps within European scientific frameworks, focusing almost entirely on “translating” Indigenous cartographic information; that is, they look for ground referents, correspondences between the features on Native-made maps and those on modern Euroamerican maps of the same geographical area. This framework is an exercise in translation, which, as Clifford Geertz envisions it, should work not as “a simple recasting of others’ ways of putting things in terms of our own ways of putting them […] but [by] displaying the logic of their ways of putting them in the locutions of ours” (10). This kind of effort to translate one system of representation into another has been fraught with value-laden judgments that fault Indigenous mapmaking, as when G. Malcolm Lewis, one of the most respected scholars of Indigenous cartography, notes the “failure” of Indigenous mapmakers “to conserve distances or direction, or shape” in their representation of their landscapes (17).

In reading Native maps, argues Barbara Belyea, “we must resist the temptation to translate their signs into ours, and accept that these maps constitute a complete and valid cartographic convention without recourse to ‘accuracy’ or explanations in scientific terms. Native maps are not crude attempts to render geometric space” (141–42). Native proponents of literary nationalism have also questioned whether this kind of cultural “translation” is possible or even necessary at all. Such a framework ignores not only some Indigenous nations’ understanding of the social and historical nature of space but also a tribally centered understanding of social and historical representation of space.

These trends and preoccupations with Indigenous knowledges within Native literary criticism find a parallel in Native literature.
In her novel *Solar Storms* Linda Hogan embeds an extended meditation on both European and Native mapmaking within the plot of the book. Hogan immediately undermines European mapmaking of Native land. Angela Jensen’s narration begins with this observation: “I was seventeen when I returned to Adam’s Rib on Tinselman’s Ferry. It was the north country, a place where water was broken apart by land, land split open by water so that the maps showed places both bound and, if you knew the way in, boundless” (21). This passage provides Hogan’s first indication that local Indigenous knowledge surpasses what can be represented on paper by outsiders. *Solar Storms* follows Angel on a journey with three generations of women in her family. They travel by canoe from the northern boundary waters of the United States to eastern Canada to help an unnamed Indigenous nation fight the construction of a massive hydroelectric project, a struggle that closely parallels that of the James Bay Crees against Hydro-Quebec during the 1970s, when the novel is set. In planning their canoe trip to protest the dams, Angel’s grandmother, Bush, pores over maps, which all have “different topographies” (121), Hogan’s way of emphasizing that perspective matters in the making of maps. Rather than scientific or objective representations of the planet, maps are distillations of perspective and experience. Maps are fictions, imaginings. Angel “saw that none of the maps were the same; they were only as accurate as the minds of their makers and those had been men possessed with the spoils of this land, men who believed California was an island” (122). Hogan critiques colonial maps by pointing to these kinds of cartographic errors and geographic misapprehensions as Angel observes that Bush’s maps evinced

incredible topographies, the territories and tricks and lies of history. But of course they were not true, they were not the people or animal lives or the clay of land, the water, the carnage. They didn’t tell those parts of the story. What I liked was that land refused to be shaped by the makers of maps. Land had its own will. The cartographers thought if they mapped it, everything would remain the same, but it didn’t, and I respected it for that. (123)
Comparing the accuracy, reliability, and usefulness of European maps to Native-made maps, Hogan finds European maps lacking. European maps are incapable of representing the movement, rhythms, and ecology of the boundary waters region. Through her critiques of the European maps that Bush studies in *Solar Storms*, Hogan suggests that these maps do not follow the practices and knowledges of Native mapmaking. While studying one map, Bush laughed out loud at the ignorance of Europeans. Out of the blue she said, “Beavers. None of them ever considered how beavers change the land.” She was right. Beavers were the true makers of the land. It was through their dams that the geographies had been laid, meadows created, through their creation that young trees grew, that deer came, and moose. All things had once depended on them. And on these maps, we could read back to how land told the story of the beaver people. It brought back the words of Dora-Rouge. One day she told me that the earth has more than one dimension. The one we see is only the first layer. (123)

According to Hogan, maps must be supplemented with these other dimensions, other layers of local knowledge—history, experience, ecology, story.

Hogan’s recognition of local Indigenous knowledge has significant consequences. Such a valuation of Indigenous practices supports cultural identity and thus cultural survival. As Vine Deloria Jr. points out, “so long as the cultural identity of Indians remains intact no specific political act undertaken by the government can permanently extinguish Indian peoples as sovereign entities” (26). Sovereignty is not only a legal concept; it also hinges on cultural identities, which may be obscured by the totalizing discourse of European maps in the same way that European-influenced literary theories like hybridity may obscure Native knowledges and literatures. In “Reclaiming Our Humanity: Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge,” Angela Cavender Wilson argues for a commitment to Indigenous knowledge recovery, a commitment that “presumes that
there is more to Indigenous survival than physical survival through a high enough blood-quantum and that this survival is linked to traditional forms of knowledge” (75). Recovering and using Natives’ practices of mapping thus promote cultural survival and sovereignty.

Several Native women writers illustrate the ways that non-Native mappings continue to exploit Native lands, to erase Native knowledges, and eliminate Native peoples. In *Solar Storms* Hogan presents a contemporary European map that exposes the worldview responsible, in many ways, for this kind of environmental destruction. On a map of the proposed sites for the dam, “[s]ome areas were outlined in blue, other sections were covered with blue stripes that looked as if they could have been shadows of trees across winter whiteness. The map showed the dried riverbed above us where water has once flowed, where they had diverted the Child River into a bay” (278). What the map does not show is the effect of those blue lines and stripes on the environment:

[T]here would be no fishing camp because the fish were contaminated from the damming of water and mercury had been released from the stones and rotting vegetation. Then a surge of water flooded once-fertile plains. Because of the early thaw and new roads that crossed the migration routes of animals, spring camp next year would not be fruitful, and people were already worried about food. (273–74)

Because these are not depicted on the European map, they are invisible and can then be destroyed all the more easily as their existence is not acknowledged. Hogan carefully illustrates the way that environment and culture are both interrelated and interdependent: environmental destruction is cultural destruction.9

Hogan also highlights the distinction for the non-Native promoters of the project between landscape and people. “For the builders,” Hogan writes, “it was easy and clear-cut. They saw it only on the flat, two-dimensional world of paper” (279). The Fat-Eaters and the visiting members of other Indigenous nations protest the project, and they are called “remnants of the past” (280). To the seventeenth-century invaders who tried to map the “blank” spaces of North America
and to the contemporary invaders with their hydroelectric projects, who were all “new here, we were people who had no history, who lived surrounded by what they saw as nothingness. Their history had been emptied of us, and along with us, of truth” (280). But the protesters do not resign themselves to invisibility, and they continue their defiance because, Angel observes, “not to stand in their way was a greater loss when they were making new geographics, the kind nature would never have dreamed or wanted, ones that would open us into a future we couldn’t yet know” (314). Hogan rejects these new geographics in favor of mapmaking that emerges out of Native knowledges and mapping practices that encode the existence and vitality of Native peoples.

Joy Harjo calls for a new kind of mapping that would counter the non-Native “new geographics” that Hogan describes. In her poem “A Map to the Next World,” she describes a map of destruction for her granddaughter, Desiray Kierra Chee, to whom the poem is dedicated and to whom it is addressed. For Harjo, the map “must be made of sand and can’t be read by ordinary light” (6). She condemns the poisoning of the land through which “monsters are born there of nuclear anger. / Trees of ashes wave good-bye to good-bye and the map appears to disappear” (14–16). Trash accumulates, on the map and on the land: “What I am telling you is real and is printed in a warning on the map. Our for- / getfulness stalks us, walks the earth behind us, leaving a trail of paper diapers, / needles and wasted blood” (20–22). Trash does not serve as a metaphor here; this kind of environmental destruction has taken place around the planet. Harjo explains that for the fifth world, the next world, no map yet exists. The absence of the map, for Harjo, is a sign of hope: the new world has not yet been mapped—that is, poisoned, littered, destroyed. And the hope for a new map that does not record such destruction lies with this next generation, her granddaughter’s. That generation must create a new world, a new home. Harjo concludes the poem with her instructions: “You must make your own map” (51), a second kind of map that, unlike the one she describes in the poem, follows an Indigenous ethic of responsibility for the earth.

In place of these “new geographics,” many Native women writers
turn to another source of knowledge about environment, landscape, and culture: stories. In many Native cultures, knowledges are embedded, preserved, and transmitted through stories. The narratives of these Native women writers similarly embed, preserve, and transmit Indigenous mapping practices through their own stories; they simultaneously recover and illuminate knowledge from the stories they know and create stories of their own from which such knowledge can be gleaned. In “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” celebrated writer Leslie Marmon Silko writes that Pueblo “stories cannot be separated from their geographical locations, from actual physical places on the land” (58). Silko describes not only stories about features of the landscape but also the locations of trails, hunting grounds, and water, information that can be transmitted through narrative. She recounts, as one example, a story that includes an Acoma trail, which “reveals that stories are, in a sense, maps, since even to this day there is little information or material about trails that is passed down in writing” (57). For many Native peoples, then, space is storied space. Native women writers explicate Indigenous mapping practices, thus participating in knowledge recovery and creation that underpins Native sovereignty through cultural survival.

In Solar Storms Hogan locates Indigenous geographical information within the context of local stories. Bush shows Angel a map on which

[t]he waters were linked together like a string of beads connected by a single thread. The rivers and streams all looked wide enough, according to her, to be passed by canoe. It was a replica of an ancient map. Bush turned the blue map over and examined it for a date. There was none. “This had to be made sometime between 1660 and 1720 [. . .] because those years there were no northern lights. There are stories about it. It tells how the people were deserted by the lights from the sky. At the time the lights abandoned the people, the tribe came down with the breathing illness, the spotted disease, and were invaded by the French fur traders.” (122)
Without “the protection of the solar dust,” she explains to a confused Angel, the mapmaker recorded a landscape different from that depicted on other maps. Hogan suggests that those European mapmakers did not understand the stories of the people and thus could not represent on a European map the Native landscape. Bush understands this landscape because she knows—has heard, remembers, and can tell—the stories of the land. The maps are readable only by the light of those stories. Although Angel had been uncertain about Bush’s obsession with maps, what Hogan calls a “deeper map” (123) becomes visible to Angel. The phrase “deeper map,” then, can be read as one kind of Indigenous mapmaking practice, one that recognizes the importance of narratives, especially local narratives, in the history of Indigenous cartographic traditions. Hogan explicitly seeks out the Indigenous framework—the stories—that illuminates Bush’s map, so this “deeper map” is not a hybrid map of European and Native knowledge systems. Instead we can read Hogan’s maps as participating in an emerging literary nationalism that emphasizes Native knowledges in place of Western understandings of place.

My reading of Indigenous geographic knowledges within Native novels like Hogan’s is not without its complications. Hogan, for example, does not situate the mapmaking tradition within a particular (named) nation. Barbara J. Cook has suggested that in Solar Storms, Hogan purposely omits the name of the tribe to which the characters belong in order to avoid this expectation of translation (43) because, as Hogan has said in an interview, she “is fictionalizing the tribes I’m writing about so nobody feels like they’re being invaded once again” (qtd. in Cook 43). Omitting the name of the Native nation risks accusations of what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has called, in describing the work of Michael Dorris, “tribelessness.”10 Considering Indigenousness outside of a national context risks assimilation, as Womack argues in Red on Red: “Radical Native viewpoints, voices of difference rather than commonality, are called for to disrupt the powers of the literary status quo as well as the powers of the state” (5). Native critics and writers negotiate an important tension between nation-specific fiction and cultural translation in their interrogation of whether or not Indigenous knowledges can be
recovered, valued, preserved, or transmitted in fiction that does not emerge out of the experiences of a particular tribe.

The embedded mapping practices in these narratives may also serve Indigenous sovereignty movements by linking those Indigenous practices to contemporary mapping projects that ensure sovereign control of resources. Blaeser advocates for a continuing tradition of Indigenous mapping when she tells a story about a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewas, a fisherman who found himself on the wrong side of the powerful, all-important boundary line on a European map. After the Voight decision that upheld treaty fishing rights for Ojibwes in Wisconsin, “an odd sort of compromise split the waters into parcels with certain sections being tribal waters, certain public, and they were separated by imaginary lines of demarcation” (“On Mapping” 121).11 When the fisherman is chastised by a game warden for fishing “on the wrong side of the line,” the man responds, “Well, god dammit! I imagine it’s over here!” (121). This story may be, Blaeser writes, “just another fish story. Or it may be a parable for our time with lessons about mapping and power.” This lesson “might say that if you are a Native American you will always find yourself on the wrong side of the imaginary line. It might say that it is time for Indian people to begin to imagine clearly their own lines, against all authority” (121). Blaeser’s fish story illuminates the high stakes of mapping projects, such as, in this example, determining fishing rights. The Miami Nation of Oklahoma has recently undertaken the creation of a map of their historical homeland, which stands as an excellent example of contemporary Indigenous cartography by a sovereign nation to create a map that represents their own perspective of their ancestral landscape. This map not only illuminates the Miami nation’s past but also determines, for example, their claims under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act by redefining what must be repatriated according to the homeland of their ancestors. The myaamionki map, the maps these Indigenous women writers describe, and many other Indigenous-made maps allow Native nations to assert sovereign control over their lands and cultures.12

The recovery and illumination of Native mapping ultimately sup-
ports assertions and maintenance of Indigenous sovereignty. Writers like Hogan, Harjo, Silko, Erdrich, and Blaeser ensure cultural survival by first rejecting universalizing discourses compelled by non-Native theories and by then preserving and invigorating Native mapping traditions. As Deloria has pointed out, sovereignty is predicated, at least in part, on cultural survival. The surge in mapping discourses in Native women’s writing constitutes an exciting direction in Native literary studies—an emphasis on local, Indigenous knowledges embedded in literature as a means of asserting, maintaining, and advocating political and cultural sovereignty. Native-made and Native-informed mapping practices constitute a turn toward Indigenous knowledges and practices that dominant literary theories and the mechanisms of globalization have sought to erase and dismantle. Maps in Native women’s writing must be read as part of a continuing and vigorous tradition of Native knowledge production of which both mapmaking and storytelling play an integral, and overlapping, role. Deeper maps must include local Indigenous knowledges—“what grows there and what is found”—and these deeper maps must be read by the light of stories.

NOTES

1. When writing of many Indigenous nations at once, I use the words Native and Indigenous to describe the first peoples of the Americas in order to emphasize the Americas as the place of origin or emergence for many Native peoples. In a study of mapping and place, understandings of origin and emergence are of paramount importance.

2. Because dominant modern mapping practices—including grid projections and North-up orientation—emerged out of Europe, I use the word European to describe both maps made in Europe and maps made by non-Natives in the United States as part of that cartographic tradition.

3. Thomas King, for example, creates a television map in Green Grass, Running Water. In addition to the novels, poems, and essays explored in this article, some examples of Native women’s writing that include maps are Kimberly Blaeser’s Absentee Indians and Other Poems; Louise Erdrich’s Tracks; Linda Hogan’s The Woman Who Watches over the World, Mean Spirit, and The Book of Medicines: Poems; LeAnne Howe’s Evidence of Red; Deborah
Miranda’s *Indian Cartography*; and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*. In “Poems as Maps in American Indian Women’s Writing,” Janice Gould explores the map as metaphor in Native women’s poetry.

4. Renée Fossett borrows the phrase “straight-line mapping” from Heinrich Klutschak, who wrote about the phenomenon in 1881.

5. See, for example, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s “Who Stole Native American Studies?” and “The American Indian Fiction Writer”; Daniel Heath Justice’s “Seeing (and Reading) Red,” “We’re Not There Yet, Kemo Sabe,” and “ Conjuring Marks”; Robert Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets*; Jace Weaver’s *That the People Might Live*; Craig S. Womack’s *Red on Red*.


7. This approach characterizes, for example, Glen Fredlund, Linea Sundstrom, and Rebecca Armstrong’s “Crazy Mule’s Map of the Upper Missouri, 1877–1880” and June Helm’s “Matonabbee’s Map.” Mark Warhus’s *Another America* is more descriptive than analytical as he focuses primarily on providing the historical context of the Native-made maps included in the book and the ground referents represented in them.

8. For a European perspective on the totalizing discourse of the European map, see Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

9. See Winona LaDuke’s *All Our Relations*, a stunning and terrifying examination of the environmental crisis on and near many Native reservations in North America. LaDuke writes about Katsi Cook’s work to expose and alleviate the high concentrations of PCBs that are secreted in the breast milk of nursing mothers of the Mohawk nation in Akwesasne. This story exemplifies the destruction of cultural practices and traditions (and thus identities and nations) because of environmental degradation. Moreover, because of U.S. federal policies and practices that ensure widespread poverty on many North American reservations, available replacements for a traditional diet are not healthy and have led to a dramatic increase in diet-related diseases, such as diabetes, among Indigenous peoples on reservations. See also Devon Abbott Mihesuah’s *Recovering Our Ancestors’ Gardens*.


11. The Voight decision upholding treaty rights was handed down in 1983 in the case *Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians v. Voight*.

12. “The Historical Landscapes of the Miami,” an ongoing mapping project undertaken by the tribe and the Myaamia Project at Miami University in Ohio, is available at http://www.myaamiaproject.org.
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I Learned Irony in Order

MALLY MCGLENNEN

First grade and the nun tells us to sit
*indian-style* in a circle
upon a rust scrap of nylon rug—
children dash to find a spot
that is not stained
drop down playing dead—
then we situate ourselves
negotiating space.
I try to claim my territory
in her blindspot
that way I can wiggle all I want to
make faces at her
safe in my allotment.

She bawls at us
*sit still
keep our hands in our laps
and pay attention
while my mind rides a horse
kicking dust:
I’m no longer in my plaid green jumper
and white pressed shirt
no longer in my itchy socks—
my two braids unravel.
I think of the day he joined our class
when they laughed at his long, thick braid
(while I secretly loved it and mine)
mocked his name
Sol
(while I danced in it)
and sneered the morning he came to the circle
with his hair cut short—
Sister Clairine thought it best he fit in
now a citizen of the group

Order makes us closer to god.

I’m corralled into the present
with her shots to tame down
find myself in Angel of God
he alongside me in unison
each tilling our space
showing her we’re farmers of prayer
planting ever this day be at my side
amidst our shame.

I’ll never know if he cried
when the blade hit
if he knew that I’d give him mine if I could
everyday sitting indian-style
living our parceled lives.
Coming Back Round

MOLLY MCGLENNEN

For Ignatia Broker

Our way of life is changing, and there is much we must accept. But let it be only the good. And we must always remember the old ways. We must pass them onto our children and grandchildren so they too will recognize the good in the new ways.

From Night Flying Woman

I am a woman of mirrors
the full-length on the back of a bathroom door.
Yesterday, I see her again
silver hair, brittle legs, stockings.
Tomorrow at the university
I teach about “story cycles” and “multiple narrators”

And I will wonder:
How many angles does one reflection make?

Young sisters jumping in heaps of leaves
see themselves for the first time in pieces.

The fall I learned to collect leaves
I’d place them between paper
transfer their veins through green crayon
like the ones in my hands
thin and busy
the only part of me I’d study.

My mother would sit me on the rock
comb through my wet hair
weave two braids on either side
so the next day my hair would have waves
all the while
my hands going over and over
the tracings of a leaf.

Daughters, remember your fullness.
Epilogue

MOLLY MCGLENNEN

In order to live we have to make our own mirrors.
Ojibwe poet Marcie Rendon—from her introduction to the collection of poetry by four Anishinaabe writers entitled Nitaawichige

If fish tell you something,
listen.
It’s not often
water speaks;
rarely do we practice lowering
an ear,
catch the business of swimming.
Here, we are
the charging and refraction;
light stabbing deeper
as you slice with thumb
and index,
body aligned to the nests of Northerns
where anything could happen in these lives.
But it’s easier to stand shoreline
throwing ropes out to the drowning
bold, cord-words
absent of song and wild talk.
Instead, tread until your lungs
burn,
you cough and spit water;
scull your hands with the vigor of a river
and never tell anything
but a really good story.
FIDJEY
Or How to Spell “Community”

WILLIAM S. PENN

1.
The short version is “Fidjey.”

The long version starts with my collapsing on my daughter’s seventeenth birthday, substituting the word “collapse” for what really happened: I died.

I didn’t have any near-death experiences, so I’m not about to try and do a Shirley MacLaine and give you tasty pieces of the wisdom I acquired while elsewhere. No, I died. Nonetheless, Miesha C. from Northwest Airlines wrote me to say that NWA was refusing my request for a refund for a flight to Barcelona because my situation was not “extreme” enough.

I tried calling, waiting what seemed like several minutes as the automated call direction played my umpteen choices (none of which came close) and then told me that the service representatives were all busy. I sighed, prepared to wait on hold for several more minutes only to be surprised. The phone line went dead. They hadn’t put me on hold; they’d simply hung up.

I turned to letters. To Miesha C., I wrote,

Dear Miesha C.,

Evidently, I was not clear in my original request for a refund of my family’s airfare to Barcelona. On 30 November, I did not contract the flu. I did not have a heart attack (how I envy the heart attack party!). I died. I am not sure how dying is not extreme enough for Northwest Airlines, and it is true that
by some “miracle” (my doctor’s term) I was brought back to life, which cheered my family and friends (though I suspect it disappointed my enemies some). I am hoping that you will reconsider and decide that dying is, indeed, an extreme way to go about canceling a trip to Barcelona and asking for a refund of the full ticket cost.

Enclosed is a note from my doctor saying that because of dying, I should not travel, at least not as soon as this trip, which was scheduled for February.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Best always,

Bill Penn

After several weeks with no reply, I happened to mention my refund request to another Northwest representative while booking flights for six weeks later than the trip I was canceling. She was very helpful and friendly (I had her laughing about the apparent nonextremity of death) and told me to deal with her and she’d solve the problem. When I called back a week later, of course—of course!—I got a young man who helpfully explained that the woman I was trying to reach did not work in the refund department and therefore couldn’t help me. Transferring me, I got yet another helpful person . . . and so on until I approached giving up.

I think that may be the point of the exercise: if you give up, you don’t deserve a refund.

Anyway, another letter and several phone calls to Bangalore, India (where they speak perfect English), and I was still waiting. All the people were nice; most of them laughed. But I was getting tired of saying that although I had died, it was okay, they didn’t need to feel anything about it. I only wanted a refund. Not sympathy or flowers.

Eight (ten?) weeks after I started the process, the day before my family and I would have departed for Barcelona, I got a letter from Northwest granting me a full refund, which “might take as many as two billing cycles to show up on the appropriate credit card.”

It took two days.

Dying has its privileges.
And they are many, as hard as it is for you and me to think so. When I told my mother-in-law that I’d gotten a full refund, she was upset. After all, she had gotten only a partial refund in the form of rebooking months later for Amalfi, Italy (we’d invited her to Barcelona, as to Amalfi, because we enjoy her).

“I only got three hundred dollars,” she said.
“I’ll trade you,” I replied. “I did have to die to do it.”
“True enough,” she said, apologetic and chagrined. “It’s the least they could do for someone who died.” She laughed, more comfortably than she has laughed before about what happened, about the privileges, as well as about the imp of fear because the cause of my death is genetic and so remains, an imp who likes to show up at odd moments and, well, sort of wreck my sense of humor.

2.

Spelling “community” was as easy as dying. Thinking about it is the hard part. Doing it, especially without thinking about it ahead of time, if you’ll forgive me, seems natural.


My daughter began sitting in on my classes the summer before in London, England. I was part of a two-person team who took forty students to live, study, and play for six weeks at the University of London, and the fact that she wanted to come and listen was a real treat. We had lunch at the local Waterstone’s bookshop beforehand and walked desultorily to the Tube afterwards. Beforehand she’d tell me what she thought about my plans for class and afterward tell me how she thought it went, with not a little astute commentary on the student personalities (she was fifteen, sexually young but philosophically much older, a born watcher and—with no credit to me—a born writer, whose grace and ability writing words I envy). It was a close time, made more delightful by my eleven-year-old son meeting me in the early mornings at “the writing table” where he revised his novel while I wrote and rewrote “My Forgettery,” an essay for Native Peoples. Ah, London, city of possible impossibilities. (Blair for president! Granholm for vice president! Vice-versa!)
Since then I’ve scheduled my advanced class so that she could finish her day at the high school and race across town to meet me at whatever class I happened to be teaching, fiction or nonfiction (the two, these days, aren’t terribly divided, although from Oprah on down there seems to be some confusion about the truth of fiction and nonfiction; fiction, in that it gives context to the possible and probable, is tested only by the “truth” and so is more true than the nonfiction that asserts that such and such happened but is often embellished, altered, augmented in order for it to become interesting and, though accepted as “true,” is untested by the rule of truth).

I’d been feeling out of sorts, sort of. I thought I might be running a low-grade temperature, as though I were fighting off a cold or the flu. I was tired—but this was towards the end of the semester and, well, I always am tired by the semester’s end. My left side felt like it was spread with mayonnaise—but I go to the gym three days a week, take two mile-ish walks on the days between (for which I substitute walking eighteen holes of golf in nicer weathers), so I never considered that mayonnaise was inappropriate and that I should worry that it wasn’t mustard.

I taught. What I taught, I would not remember except for my daughter’s telling me that I liked a couple of student pieces quite a bit—which happens, but as unusually as mayonnaise. Class, according to Rachel, was fine and good (what’s the comparison, high school teachers who’ve grown used to being ignored or college professors more interested in their agendas and themselves?). The students learned something—and as vague as “something” is, it is truthfully all I care about since all things relate and connect to writing. We wrapped class up and called Rachel’s mom to pick us up. Rachel and I left Berkey Hall, managed to cross Grand River Avenue without being run down by some sorority girl stuck to her cell phone, and walked slowly up to where we’d wait for our ride in the parking lot behind the Christian Science Reading Room.

November 30, so it was colder than not, and as I got into the Toyota I commented on how bad I felt. I guess my words were blurred and I seemed “off.” When I collapsed—passed out is fair terminology but began dying is the actuality—Rachel phoned emergency services while Jenny drove. The ambulance met us at our house.
You know what gets me? I dressed up that day. After a semester of denim jeans and plain cotton shirts with white socks and tennis shoes (how I prefer the British word “trainers,” so much more accurate for one who has not played tennis for years), I had decided that morning to wear my best (and only) black Eddie Bauer pants, a good sweater, and one of my favorite shirts. Wouldn’t you know it: emergency services do not undress you. They cut your clothes off. At least the watch band was fine; and the silver chain and scarab that I have worn for over twenty-five years, even beneath a tied tie, survived. But the clothes, which still sit in a hospital bag at the foot of my dresser, were done for.

Rachel, at home, the ambulance shoveling me into its rear, had time to run downstairs and grab one of my weyekin Frogs carved from semiprecious stone by Native hands.

Now Frogs and Scarab Beetles, which I conflate in my way, are sacred to me. They are me. I am them. All the way through school, I laid low, saying little or nothing until I could not hold back any more (and then said way too much). Little wonder, then, that I love the way Frogs bury themselves in the Sonoran Desert mud for months, until the rains release them and they rise to sing briefly but more loudly than even the lover of Frogs remembers or imagines. The sound is discordant, often, and yet beautiful in its straightforwardness: when Gigi Tincher, whose blondish hair and well-developed breasts our old fart of an English teacher admired, whined about too much homework and Mr. Breault thought about reducing it, I’d blurt out, “It’s homework, Gigi. Assigned, not requested. So stop whining.” They were not specialty breasts—unruly large, or perfectly shaped, or expensively implanted.

“Get a life, Gigi,” I’d say.

Mr. Breault stopped class and made me pick up my desk-and-chair combo and carry it outside where I could engage in contemplation of airplanes passing overhead and stew in my frustration at Gigi Tincher’s using her breasts to get Breault to delay yet another due date or exam. And Gigi herself was not pretty, no prettier than Breault was perceptive, though she was blond, but the way she whined so prettily about how much work we all had melted Mr. Breault’s French heart.
I came to respect straightforwardness so much that when Miss Marion MacNamara asked me if I’d done my Latin homework, I’d say “No.”

Not “No, but I had to blah blah and then blah blah happened.”

When she followed that up with, “You understood that I assigned you homework?”

I said, “Yes.” And I accepted my F for the day, which Miss MacNamara wrote with ceremony but not pleasure into her grade book in red ink (why do we remember the most demanding teachers with such respect and affection?).

Frogs mean a directness that is not meant to hurt or be hurt, only to be true, and a personal responsibility that was part and parcel to the directness.

Scarabs, the other half of the Frog feeling in me, mean what writers mean: they eat, take in, ingest the yuck of the world, feeding off dung that they shape into a ball and that they then bury (fertilizer) or lay eggs in (heat and fertilizer). It’s the ingesting and shaping and excreting that makes writers—good writers, not popular ones—useful and necessary. In this unisex homogeny we are coming to live in, there is less shaping. It is as though writers wear muumuus, those baggy cotton gowns that hide everything—except these muumuus are see through. Shapeless but completely revealing of things we don’t want to see. The dung piles up.

Sorry.

Holding my Frog/Scarab, her imagination of the immediate future shaped by her will that is partly faith, Rachel “knew” I was not going to stay dead. So she says. And I believe her. I know what knowing is and have since she was conceived. Though my wife carried high, I knew my first born was a girl named Rachel Antonia; though she carried low the second time around I knew my second born would be a boy named William Anthony Charles after his grandfathers—American Indian, Italian, and English. My wife worried. What if I were wrong? But I knew what I knew and I wasn’t (though had I been, well, who cares?). Rachel knew like that. She knew like Old Joseph knew: “White people are here, Joe,” he said to his futurely famous son. “To stay. Get over it.”
So they cooled me down. They extracted blood and recycled it into transfusable plasma. J. D. Talbot, the surgeon, worked quickly and as precisely as he carves Monopoly figures at home. He finished replacing the dissected aorta (ascending). They discovered an aneurism and he went back in to fix that.

Several days later I was making a sort of sense. When my family entered I held my arms out straight and asked them to pull the tubes and help me sneak out of there.

“Quick. Let’s go,” I whispered.

They said, “No.”

The surgeon came in and I said, “You better not have ruined my golf swing.” I meant it. But he only laughed.

They laughed. At me. They toyed with me (I often think of the Buendia offspring in One Hundred Years of Solitude dressing Ursula up like a plaything when she is old and infirm.) They did not know what else to do. I was happy to be the source of their amusement (humor, in my family, is vital, a way to describe the world as well as a way to survive in it). Somewhere in my confused and drug-laden heart, I knew that laughter was the best medicine—for all of us.

Especially for my son, whose fear at losing his father—a fear that was not alleviated by my being awake—was palpable. It hung in the hospital room like an empty IV bag. Through his fear he managed to play with me by prodding, testing, quizzing, and laughing at my incomprehensibly certain answers.

His favorite, evidently, was to ask me, “How do you spell community, dad?”


I meant it. I was proud. My mental abilities were unimpaired. See? It’s a joke, still, how dad spelled “community” while he was down for the count. Even a year later, now that I’ve made it through my daughter’s and my son’s birthdays—both of which I ruined, last year—and may look forward to Christmas, it comes up. We all laugh together, hardly, in that wonderful forgettery human beings have, remembering the reality.

We laugh.

And for that moment my son is somewhat less afraid.
3.

Do I get afraid?
Yes.
Depressed?
No.

I suppose I am like the radical Islamist about to blow himself up who focuses on the numbered virgins he’s about to bang. Except I am radically opposed to dying. And I don’t want the virgins.

Virgins are simply too much work, too much a waste of time talking, cajoling, convincing, being falsely over-tender and generously doing the dishes. Virgins may not know any better, but I do. I know Milan Kundera is right when he warns young people to be very careful about what they do in the first two weeks of any affair: wash the dishes and you’ll be washing them until the cows come home or you break up; listen to the other complain—Complain! (if you can believe Americans complain)—about anything—their day, for example, and how they had to go to work and their boss is just so, like, unreasonable about all their time on Facebook, or how the TV dinner does not taste up to snuff, or how their usual nine glasses of chardonnay just doesn’t do it anymore, or how their mother keeps calling, calling, calling, or . . . . Anyway, you’ll be hearing complaints until your ears freeze over with the “yes, dear” seal of plastic wrap.

What do I say to complaint?
“It ain’t Kabul.”
“I’m alive. I get to hug my kids.”

There are, in other words, many degrees of alive. I love to stay at home; but I carry home with me whether I’m in Michigan or Amalfi. I love my kids to have a snow day even if all they do is read or write or sleep late before they give and get the expected but meant—oh, so meant—hugs. Even if it doesn’t snow. I don’t like shopping, though I am capable of it. And I dislike the false connections and oppressions of technology—though I like my students well enough, they don’t expect me to read their e-mails, let alone respond (I surprise them. Sometimes).

Is that alive?

I have a “boss” who suspends a portion of himself every day as he
goes to a job he used to enjoy, but no longer. Recently, I went out to my first lunch since the day I died. I watched my salt intake and made sure I did not indulge in stressful topics. We lunched with my film collaborator—I do the dialogue script, she adds the music and edits my camera work, which I am just beginning to understand and leads me to like *Crash* and *Snatch* (oh, all right, *Snatch* because I love Brad Pitt’s Pikey character, and he plays it wonderfully well). My boss was happy, recently returned from a visiting position overseas, where all he had to do was teach and be with family and a few visiting friends. The happiness was beginning to fray with cares and concerns, like a pirate map burnt around the edges makes it look old.

“You’re losing it,” I said. “Definition.” I meant his Self. The clarity he had reverted to in Europe. The personality. The brains. The feeling that he was talking with you and listening, and not just gumming the air. I confess surprising myself by my directness—I’ve never been that blunt before, in part because when he is not himself he is given to misinterpretation. The response is not good. But he took it pretty well, nodding in midsentence as though he heard me.

Is however much he heard a measure of “alive”?

I don’t know.

I wouldn’t have said that before “11/30.” Before I’d have said “yes” with the certainty of too much self-regard. But now I look at people differently. Now I see what I admire in them and not what I don’t.

I admire his taking on this job. There is always the fear that our work is not significant. For significance he may substitute the rescue and rebuilding of a department because he can measure that (how many new colleagues—twenty-one, he told me the other day, and I thought, “and five of them are maybe good”—how much money, how many publications, how many students taught, and how many majors) just as I can substitute e-mails for writing. I most admire his family sense, the love he has for his children (and, lucky man, grandchild), his generosity of heart and pocketbook, and even, grudgingly, the way he ignores the tree right in front of his golf ball and swings away, expressing surprise when the solid ball bounces off the more solid tree. A bowler by nature, a person who knocks over pins, he took up golf to be with friends.
Instead of judging strangers, I ask questions dripping with compassion. For example, when I am waiting for a delayed flight in the airport and four men and one women circle near me to bat the breeze and the woman stands slightly outside the even radius of the circle looking around from time to time with an abstract expression on her face, is it because she’s a woman who feels the maleness of the circle or is it because she’s a woman who is thinking of her children, or home, or . . . just thinking?

When I am welcomed to Wal-Mart by a greeter, should I really feel welcome?

For me, 11/30 was a dividing point, somewhat like 9/11 for the nation, except that I did not need a wake-up call to the possibilities. I knew I carried my death inside of me—everyone does, creating at the extremes either a good death or a bad one—although knowing it did not keep me from assuming I’d live to at least ninety, planning my retirement on that number. I am a planner-ahead, whether it is money or teaching or travel or just my season’s golfing. I like to live in the expectation, and when a planned event passes—when we go and return from Rome or Venice—I enjoy the memory, the making of memories while I start planning something new. Now, with the slow realization that attends the CICU and the ICU and eventual release into the homecare of family, I wasn’t just carrying my death inside me like everyone else. I’d met Death in person. Strange to say that where he was once living parallel to me, ignored and underappreciated, he now was dressed, ready to go, and holding my hand like a parent guiding a toddler across a busy street.

I did three things. I bought plane tickets to Amalfi on Northwest; I bought my wife a new car (a Toyota, figuring then that it might be the last new car I ever purchase), and I revised my goals for retirement to include a trip or two every year until then.

Amalfi, well, it could be called my daughter’s graduation trip from high school (though how many kids get such largesse, I don’t know). Generally I disapprove of these things as too grand, too expensive, too, well, interfering with savings, retirement or otherwise. Too spoiling, if just given. So I labeled it a reward, by way of excuse. Or
partial excuse: my daughter, like my son, is amazing—responsible, intelligent, perceptive—and she, we, have fortunate lives of travel and writing and love. My needs for retirement made me realize that I can probably retire in nine or ten years—at sixty-seven—although my job is such that I’m not sure I see the reason for retiring. What would I do? Sit at home and write? Read? Play golf several days a week? Go to the gym? I do those things now.

And I teach, and often times enjoy the teaching. Though I am on medical leave, I picked eight students who come to my house for “class”—some are writing their theses in creative writing, some are taking the advanced fiction-writing course, and a couple are satisfying a diversity requirement for literature that means they all have to read Salman Rushdie, Ernest Gaines, Elizabeth Bowen, and Yasmina Reza. So even in recovery and on leave I am teaching, though teaching the best of the best.

The new car. As my sister said—she has been fighting cancer for six years and counting—“You do what I do.” Meaning, spend a little now and make sure you enjoy the spending.

And I am. Though within reason. I have terrible trouble un-saving money once saved, and I am a compulsive saver having grown up in the vicissitudes of lower-class life.

I am also enjoying other things. Stupid things. Simple things, like going to the supermarket.

The first day I went with my wife to Shop-Rite, having determined that I had the stamina for a brief shopping trip, halfway through the store she turned, looked at me, smiled, and said, “What?”

“What what?” I replied.

“You’re laughing.”

“How are you doing?” I said to a girl stocking the shelves. She was heavily pretty, and she’d looked at me with the suspicion and hope that lots of pretty girls use to receive and prepare to deflect smiles from strange men. Seeing my grin, which did not fade and did not care about her suspicions (and did not entertain her hopes), she replied to my “How’re you doing?” with “Good.”

“Good,” I said. To my wife, I said, “I am?”

She was right, though. I was grinning broadly, at everyone,
whether they grinned back or not, making old ladies tentative, young girls wary, and the regular men who stocked the shelves curious—and perhaps all of them pleased. Grinning like a madman. Grinning like someone who has a secret and does not know what that secret is—the very way I described the hungry homeless twenty-five years ago in a story. Now I knew what that secret was. It was so simple: it was all about being alive, regardless of time and circumstance. It’s all about hearing your son or daughter laugh (though, entering his teenagery, my son sometimes uses that semiforced, stylized laugh that is too loud, too long for the occasion, giving the moment a false note it doesn’t deserve as he tries out his new, improved laughter). It’s all about recognizing what you do have and not what you don’t. And it’s all about recognizing that you’re recognizing that. Whether Kabul or not, whether you’re a woman or a man standing at the edge of mediocrity, whether your ball hits the tree or somehow flies below it.

Sometimes, now, I stop. For a moment or even several minutes, I find myself inside, in the presence of my family and yet away from them, my thoughts tingled and tinged with a moment’s apprehension that may resemble fear. I have always believed that the awareness of the potential of death gives meaning, value, and depth to the lived moment. Indeed, my first novel had Death as a real character who exists, drives customized vans, answers doors, takes the Grandfather only when it is time. Though I believed all that and lived by it, it was only sort of. No one can live with Death on his mind all the time, especially standing in circles at the airport.

At self-indulgent times I grew weary and could see an end to weariness. I got tired of being poked and prodded. Bringing it closer, turning it over in my palm like a stone, I could imagine an end to it.

Other times I rallied. I made plans to add interest to what seemed daily dull, pushing it farther away. Sometimes I shifted my petty complaints by saying, “It ain’t a coal mine.” (It isn’t. I may not be rich, but I am far from poor and I’ve lucked into work with great security, decent health care, and time to think and meditate, work
that is justifiably rated by one of my financial magazines as the second-best job in the country.)

All the time, I’ve lived in its proximity.

For weeks after I died, I thought I might write little or nothing again. Why bother? I thought. Only a few thousand people ever want to read what I write.

I didn’t have it in me. It was and is work. Hard work where my head sometimes aches, trying to keep everything remembered, close at hand, ready to use. I don’t need to do it, and I definitely don’t need the bad days. I’ll get paid regardless. If I’m only going to live five, ten, fifteen more years (no one really knows), I can teach and spend the best of my time with my family.

But something funny happens when you define yourself not by a product but a process. A baker bakes, after all, like a writer writes. A father loves and enjoys what he may provide for the beloved. Soon enough my mind began to feel empty, tarnished, duller than brass. The love I felt seemed flat. For fun, I started to tinker, odd mornings. I turned on my laptop, and for lack of anything better to do, I slowly finished the film script. Writing picked up pace. Before long I was working every morning, if only for sixty minutes—and half of those may be used up staring into space. The brightness of the love for my family returned.

Two weeks later I was going to bed, reading crap. Crap is what I call entertaining writing. There is good crap and bad crap, and while I’m writing—which is most of the time—I read both. Secretly I admire it all. Even something as weak as *The Da Vinci Code* is more fun than the topical, present-day novels that academics pretend to admire. More fun because it is easier to read, because your brain is hardly disturbed with the waves that come from thoughtful reading. We are all tired by the end of the day.

Yet it is more than just ease. There is a technique, perhaps easiest to handle in the mystery novel or thriller, that creates a forward-looking energy in the reader. It is not only a desire to find out whodunit but also, in the more literary of these novels, a desire to find out the characters, the connections, how this event or feeling relates to that.
The breadth of these connections, say father-teacher or father-writer (which seem similar), offers the sense of weight to the writing. *The Da Vinci Code* either makes few of the connections or else it makes false ones, and that is dissatisfying enough to let it linger in the realm of “bad” crap. *Waterland*, with its elements of a mystery, makes many, connecting the narrator-teacher with writer, history with its resulting unforeseen events, the clearing of the Fens in England with the personality of the people who drink the potent Atkinson Ale, and everything with the fire, actual and personal, that eventually brings the edifice of Atkinson Ale down. It isn’t crap, at all. Though it entertains, the honesty of its connections makes it literature. In between, Henning Mankell’s *Firewall* seems about the right stuff—fairly well-written thriller, with some connections, something to think about, combined with a sense of one chapter hanging with the reader’s desire to move on to the next. Robert Goddard is even better, though sometimes a touch frustrating as he winds and unwinds and winds again, and unwinds. . . . You get the idea—all inside the covers of a single, slightly too-long novel. Donna Leon is a favorite for her family detective (Brunetti’s wife works on Henry James, no less), and Caroline Graham is as good as Muriel Spark, whom she resembles in wit and style.

After three weeks of reading crap (and maybe writing it, though that is always possible for me), I found myself looking forward to getting up the following morning and working. Whether it was good or not mattered, but not a lot. The minutes grew longer. I stared into space less. I taught. I spent time with my family, and the time I spent felt, well, more valuable for its limitation by their schooling and schedules, by my thinking when with them about my writing—my rushing off to make quick notes.

Writing is what defines me. What calms me, after all. I am a better husband and father for it. I’m lucky because I can do my writing at times my family isn’t home, and so the sheer selfishness required by it does not interfere with the unselfishness of being a father. Being a good husband and father are as important to me as writing, especially given my own parents, who were both lousy at it for different reasons. Unlike them I love my family because, well, because I do.
This whole thing—my dying, not my surviving—has been hard on them. My wife manages to displace the latent, ongoing fear by telling me that I will outlive her, despite her being thirteen years younger than I. When I go for a test and the test is not perfect—not bad, just not perfect—I hear her tell her friends that if I do need another procedure it is a minimal one.

“I could die,” I want to say. I don’t want her to pass it off. She isn’t. She is simply finding her way to live through it. So I say nothing.

When my daughter phones from school to find out how things went, I am like my wife, mentioning the possible small procedure. Pooh-poohing it.

When my son overhears my wife on the phone and asks if I might have to go back in the hospital, I say, “Yeah, but only overnight. No big deal.”

When I think about it I suspect my wife is right. I don’t get depressed. But I get a little scared.

I am probably just as selfish as anyone, as capable of being immature and claiming that I have to do X if I am going to be me. The problem is, when you decide to have children (and given my parents, my decision was a long time coming), you decide things that you ought to know but many people don’t: first, your entire life is all at once, in what seems an instant, given over to these peeing, shitting little beings whom you wash clean before you wash yourself; and second, if you are lucky, you will provide your children with a sense of ongoing-ness, of continuity, of them growing into the bridge from the past to the future that you became when they pushed their way out and into the world; and third—and this is the hardest to live by—that if you are lucky enough to keep Death at bay, every minute with them or with their children is a gift.

Sounds trite. Is trite. Sometimes, though, triteness has become trite because it is so true that it gets overused. A gift. The other night I sat at my daughter’s orchestral performance and, hearing her flute solo, I was grateful to be there to hear it, just as I was grateful to have had the privilege of paying for all those flute lessons and recently for the new head joint that offered up such clarity to someone whose
flute is a part of her life, a life that she shares with me in these performances. I felt fortunate for her, as I feel fortunate for my son and his piano, and I knew that she knew in the hospital that “You weren’t going to die, Daddy.” Not yet. Not now. When?

Writing has tried to become work once again. It can’t. It is changed. I do it no longer because I have to. I do it sometimes because I want to, but always because I can.

Like fathering.

Like living.

I plan to be a different golfer this year. If my drive drifts right on the eighth (signature) hole, I think I’ll look at the trees in front of me and try the shot under, over, around them. If I make it, if the ball flies low under the branches and then cuts in a gentle fade to grip the fairway way down near the green, that will be a thrill. If it doesn’t—if it hits the tree and kicks right or left—oh well, there’s always next time. Either way I’ll see the trees as, well, trees. Sixty percent air. Nothing more than wood. It ain’t Kabul. And it isn’t life or death, though like Death, eventually you have to ignore the wood in your way and get on with it.

Still, it takes the apprehension, the hint of the realization that the tree, like Death, is there. That awareness of the tree lets you appreciate the shot; the hint of Death lets enjoy attempting the shot.

I may not change my life, but I sure will change my game. As long as the surgeon did not hurt my swing.

NOTE

1. A battle lost in the physical world, now.
The Emergence and Importance of Queer American Indian Literatures; or, “Help and Stories” in Thirty Years of SAIL

LISA TATONETTI

Scene One. Spring 2002. The newly green leaves glint silver in the evening light as I walk with a friend beside the lake that bounds one end of our Wisconsin town. She recruits, retains, and provides invaluable academic and emotional support for the Native students who leave their home communities to attend our state school, which is an hour away from the closest reservation in our state and at least six or seven hours away from the farthest. A member of one of these communities and a graduate of the state university system, my friend knows what it means to be far from home, to be encountering an entirely new discourse while surrounded by a sea of white faces. Needless to say she strongly supports the inclusion of American Indian studies within the curriculum. As we walk she updates me on how various students are doing—who is new or returning, who has gone home, who might sign up for one of the introductory or advanced American Indian literatures classes. In the course of this conversation, she asks me about my fall Native Lit II. I tell her it will be a course on GLBTQ/Two-Spirit American Indian literatures. Silence falls. Then she asks for the first time, but not the last: Why?

Scene Two. December 2006. Several years later, at another midwestern state university, I sit in a straight-backed, institutional chair talking to the department head about my pretenure review. She is supportive and encouraging as she reads anonymous comments from the tenured faculty about my research, teaching, and service. Most are positive, and
this last meeting of the fall term is, as I anticipated, uneventful, until
one comment in particular takes me aback. The writer questions my
work, my personal ideology, the merit of my field, and especially, my
“ill-advised” research agenda, which focuses on GLBTQ/Two-Spirit
American Indian literatures. The attack is vehement, suggesting that
research on the “margins of the margin” is eminently unimportant, and
worse, that it will lead me to send our English majors out into the field
unversed in the literary canon. Implicit in the comment is the assump-
tion that such work is not a part of that canon. Frustrated, I leave the
meeting with the scathing comments repeating in my head, asking for
the first time, but not the last: Why?

Why? The question frames this essay. Why pay critical attention to
GLBTQ/Two-Spirit American Indian literatures? Why teach them?
Such questions continue to haunt me, however much I would like to
simply and easily dismiss them. These vignettes and the innumerable
scenes like them that I’ve experienced since I began teaching queer
American Indian literature in graduate school at Ohio State in the
mid-1990s suggest that dismissing the question is not the answer.¹
Instead these stories and this question set the stage for the charge
this essay will address: what is the importance of GLBTQ/Two-Spirit
American Indian literatures? This question, albeit in different forms
and from vastly different perspectives, is at the heart of exchanges
such as those above. This question, too, I argue, must be addressed
in this retrospective issue of Studies in American Indian Literatures
(SAIL), which asks us to examine both where the field has come
from in that last thirty years and where the field will go as we move
further into the twenty-first century. In an attempt to answer this
charge, I first provide an overview of the history of queer American
Indian literatures and literary criticism in SAIL before offering an
analysis of Craig Womack’s novel Drowning in Fire (2001) as a means
by which to demonstrate why GLBTQ/Two-Spirit American Indian
literatures have a larger significance within the field of American
Indian literatures.
Rabbit was say, […] “One question we still gotta consider […]—what happens to the Indian gay guy or gal writing today? Will they speak the truth about their lives and places in their tribes? More important than that, even: What’s the future for Indian gay and lesbian readers wanting to read something honest about themselves? With no help and no stories, maybe they will become haunted like Lynn Riggs. Mebeso if writers don’t write about things, they is partly responsible for turning kids into ghosts. If Indian writers write only about straight Indians and not all kinda Indians, what sets them apart from white writers making up Indian romances?”

Big Man was say, “Mebeso it’s not traditional to talk about sex.”

Stijaati was say, “Good god, man, did you ever listen to the oral tradition?”

Craig Womack, Red on Red

At the heart of this essay is the belief that one of the most noteworthy developments in American Indian literatures since the inception of SAIL has been the emergence of queer or Two-Spirit Native literatures. As seen through the lens of SAIL, the rise of Two-Spirit literatures falls into three fairly distinct phases: first, the omission of critical conversations about such literature, which occurs from the time of SAIL’s inception in the late 1970s until the mid-1980s; second, the inclusion of veiled or tangential references to queer or Two-Spirit Native literatures and issues that characterizes SAIL discussions from the mid-1980s through the early 1990s; and finally, the rise of a recognizable body of criticism about GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literatures in SAIL that begins circa 1994.

Chronologically the growth of SAIL has paralleled the rise of queer Native literatures: the inaugural issue of the Association for Studies in American Indian Literatures’ regularly scheduled newsletter was published in 1977, only one year after the publication of Mohawk author Maurice Kenny’s essay “Tinseled Bucks: A Historical Study
of Indian Homosexuality” and poem “Winkte” in *Gay Sunshine.* 3 When Kenny, an already prominent American Indian writer, openly claimed a gay identity in these pieces, his work marked the inception of contemporary queer Native literature (Roscoe, “Native North America Literature” 514). 4 With these two pieces, Kenny also becomes the first of many authors to confront the contemporary reality of homophobia by reasserting the place of gay Native people in the histories of American Indian communities. His landmark poem “Winkte” explains,

> We were special to the Sioux, Cheyenne, Ponca  
> And the Crow who valued our worth and did not spit  
> Names at our lifted skirts nor kicked our nakedness.  
> We had power with the people! (*Living the Spirit* 153–54)

Kenny’s use of the past tense in this groundbreaking piece thus points to the *historical* acceptance of Two-Spirit people within many Native communities while simultaneously recognizing that, for twentieth- and twenty-first-century Two-Spirit people, homophobia is not limited to the realm of dominant culture.

While Kenny was staking a claim for the diverse histories of multiple genders and sexualities in American Indian tribal traditions when *SAIL* debuted, Elaine Jahner was arguing more broadly for critical responsibility in the study of American Indian literatures, saying:

> More and more literary critics are discovering that their most challenging calls are coming from across cultural boundaries and American critics are realizing that the cultural boundaries within the geographical confines of the United States can mark literary terrains that require added critical equipment and revised critical attitudes. (4)

In this, the first-ever critical piece in *SAIL*, Jahner makes important claims for the then-emerging field of American Indian literary studies. I suggest that Jahner’s call for cultural and critical specificities holds doubly true for the study of queer Native literatures, since informed conversations about GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native litera-
ures hinge upon a nuanced understanding of the diverse constructions of genders and sexualities that have historically existed within American Indian communities.

While I focus on literature and literary criticism, conversations about queer or Two-Spirit Native people are by no means limited to the discipline of English or to SAIL as a venue during this period. In fact Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang note that “[t]here is more than a hundred years of writing on this subject (albeit sporadic until the mid-twentieth century)” (2). Especially significant at the time in which a body of contemporary queer Native writing emerges is Bea Medicine’s 1979 paper, “Changing Native American Sex Roles in an Urban Context.” Medicine explains in the introduction to the essay in Two-Spirit People, “[L]ike [Sue-Ellen] Jacobs’s essay (1968) [“Berdache: A Brief Review of the Literature”] it had a life of its own, being copied and distributed among Native American women and men who, at that time and even now, call themselves ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’” (148). The call for expanded understandings of sexual diversity is also the focus of Laguna author Paula Gunn Allen’s groundbreaking 1981 essay, “Beloved Women: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures,” which uses tribal history to reclaim a space for lesbians in American Indian culture. And just as an explosion of Native voices in various genres marked the rise of the so-called American Indian Renaissance in 1969, so too was Allen’s critical work joined by texts from other GLBTQ/Two-Spirit American Indian writers during this key period in the history of queer Native literature. Thus 1981 also marks the year that Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s influential anthology of the creative/theoretical work of women of color, This Bridge Called My Back, brought Hunkpapa writer Barbara Cameron, cofounder of Gay American Indians, and Menominee poet Chrystos into the public eye. In 1983 Bay of Quinte Mohawk poet and short fiction writer Beth Brant published A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women. Notable on a number of levels, A Gathering of Spirit is the first collection of American Indian writing to be edited exclusively by an American Indian. In addition, its importance to the development of queer Native literature cannot be overrated as the anthology includes pieces by eleven Native les-
bians: Barbara Cameron, Chrystos, Paula Gunn Allen, Janice Gould (Koyangk’auwi Maidu), Terri Meyette (Yaqui), Mary Moran (Métis), Kateri Sardella (Micmac), Vickie Sears (Cherokee), Anita Valerio (Blood/Chicana), and Midnight Sun (Anishnaabe). Brant followed her influential anthology with *Mohawk Trail* in 1985, a compilation of fiction, essay, poetry, and memoir that explores the experiences of Native people and powerfully comments on the intersections of class, sexuality, and indigeneity. Three years later Chrystos published *Not Vanishing*, her earliest collection of poetry, which appeared the same year as Will Roscoe’s *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*, the first and only anthology devoted solely to the writing of queer Native people (Roscoe, “Native North American” 514–15).

Although the work of GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native writers was beginning to gain notice during the 1980s, little was being said about alternate genders and sexualities in *SAIL*, which leads me to mark this period as indicative of the sort of silences and omissions referenced by Paula Gunn Allen.

Since the late 1980s, there has been continued publication of work by queer Native writers, and significantly that work has, in the past ten years or so, been accompanied by a more fully developed critical apparatus, as well. As is often the case in the development of an emerging field, the number of critical essays about GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literatures lagged behind the proliferation of creative texts. While early works like Kenny’s “Tinseled Bucks” and Allen’s “Beloved Women” provided a foundation for crafting critical methodologies through which to examine queer Native literatures, they did not necessarily usher in an avalanche of critical analysis. Instead, as I suggest in my introduction, the late 1980s and even much of the early 1990s are characterized by the inclusion of only veiled or tangential references to queer or Two-Spirit Native literatures and issues. In fact, in *SAIL* itself, the first essay that explicitly focused on queer Native literatures would not appear until spring 1994 (*SAIL* 6.1), despite the fact that Allen was key to the journal’s development and writers like both Allen and Kenny not only were publishing in and being written about but also were serving on the journal’s editorial board from its inception. For example, the winter 1983 issue of
SAIL (7.1), which focuses on Kenny’s work, includes a brief biography, a short essay by Kenny himself, and a review of two of Kenny’s books, but no reference to sexuality of any sort. Similarly, in the fall 1983 issue (7.3) on Paula Gunn Allen, LaVonne Ruoff explains in her review of the manuscript version of Allen’s novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows: The Autobiography of Ephanie Atencio* that “The novel contains skillful portraits of feminine relationships. One of the best describes the loving childhood friendship between Ephanie and Elena, inseparable companions until forced apart by Elena’s mother and a school nun who fear the girls’ physical affection for one another” (67). Along with the “physical affection” between Allen’s central character, Ephanie, and Ephanie’s childhood friend, Elena, Ruoff also notes that Allen’s protagonist parallels Thought Woman, the creatrix in Keres cosmology, in her possession of “both male and female characteristics” (68). Outside of these few oblique comments, however, the journal issue on Allen also contains no explicit reference to queer sexuality.8

Thomas King’s 1985 review of the same Allen novel is the first piece in SAIL to directly engage, however briefly, references to queer sexuality in American Indian literatures.9 With his usual grace and humor, King writes of Allen’s text:

[The text’s] constant introspection tempts the critic to refer to the novel as “confessional,” a term that Joanna Russ, in her book *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, argues is misused as a critical term for women’s writing. Taking her cue from critic Julia Penelope, Russ argues that the term suggests a work that is “shameful” and too “personal,” with little value as literature, a work that features rage, accusation, and unacceptable sexuality. Having read Russ (and agreeing with this particular conclusion), I am thus robbed of what is really a fine descriptive term. While *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* does deal with rage and accusation and while it does contain subtle suggestions of “unacceptable sexuality” (lesbianism in this case), these aspects of the novel are, for the most part, handled well and they tend to be strengths rather than weaknesses; they
do not conjure up an image of a coven of sins in search of a priest. Perhaps one might call *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* an “emergence” for it links a Native (tribal) sense of universe and origins with a personal discovery of self and place. (148–49)

King’s commentary is striking in that it explicitly names lesbian sexuality, which not only makes visible the heretofore-repressed recognition of the themes at the heart of Allen’s novel but also recognizes the importance of such work as an emergent approach in the field. Writing almost ten years later, Janice Gould talks specifically about Native lesbian writers in her oft-cited 1994 essay entitled, “Disobedience (in Language) in Texts by Lesbian Native Americans.” Gould explains that such writing is inherently political:

I am aware that in speaking about a lesbian American Indian erotics, and even more in speaking about lesbian love, I am being disloyal and disobedient to the patriarchal injunction that demands our silence and invisibility. If we would only stay politely and passively in the closet, and not flaunt our sexuality, we could be as gay and abnormal as we like. (32)

Gould highlights the fact that silences, absences, and omissions—like those that marked not only the early years of *SAIL* but also so many other academic venues in which writers and critics of American Indian literatures presented and published during this period—demonstrate how dominant ideologies function as often-unrecognized mechanisms of oppression.

The visibility of a cogent body of queer American Indian literatures occurred alongside the rise of a queer Native political body. For example, 1975 saw the organization of the Gay American Indians (GAI) in San Francisco. Cofounded by Barbara Cameron and Randy Burns (Paiute), the GAI was the first organization in the country for GLBTQ American Indians. Fifteen years after the founding of the GAI, American Indian academics and activists came together to challenge the myriad of anthropological accounts that inscribed their histories in the rhetoric of colonization. Thus the term “Two-Spirit” was coined at the 1990 Native American Gay and Lesbian
Conference in Winnipeg as a way to resist the history of colonization and homophobia tied to “berdache,” a derogatory term historically employed by non-Native anthropologists and missionaries to refer to indigenous people whose sexualities did not fit within the dominant heterosexual matrix (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1–6).

The term, which refers to queer Native peoples in the United States and Canada, is meant to invoke the diversity of sex and gender roles within American Indian cultures. While “Two-Spirit” has its limitations, like any other blanket term employed to name particular histories or subject positions, it successfully demarcates the distinctly different traditions that often separate Native and non-Native queer people and histories.10

Like the rise of contemporary queer Native literatures, the rise in queer Native political thought precedes any significant body of literary criticism. Thus while Thomas King’s 1985 review of Allen’s novel represents an important moment in the history of SAIL, it is a moment that in many ways stands alone: it is not until Marie Annharte Baker’s 1990 review of Chrystos’s Not Vanishing that SAIL again revisits queer Native literature.11 The trend of offering brief coverage in reviews, but no significant critical coverage, continues in 1991 when Rhoda Carroll reviews Vickie Sears’s Simple Songs in SAIL 3.3 and Rodney Simard reviews Living the Spirit in SAIL 3.4—though Simard’s review spends more time on issues of the literary canon than on any substantial commentary of the anthology.12 Two more years will lapse before Linda L. Danielson’s review of Beth Brant’s Mohawk Trail and Annette Van Dyke’s review of Brant’s 1991 Food and Spirits appear in SAIL 5.1. Both authors recognize the significance of Brant’s poetry and prose, but Van Dyke, in particular, is the first critic in SAIL to overtly cite a developing tradition of queer Native literatures when she argues that Brant “introduces the concept of same-sex love as sacred, aligning herself with such interpretations as that of scholar and Native American critic Paula Gunn Allen in her Sacred Hoop” (109). Van Dyke’s acknowledgment of a queer Native tradition will be the last commentary in SAIL on queer sexuality until spring 1994.

In spring 1994 Susan Gardner guest edits a special issue of SAIL
entitled “Feminist and Postcolonial Approaches.” This issue marks the first time in the history of the journal that queer Native literatures are engaged in critical essays and thus serves as a turning point for the rise of a recognizable body of criticism about GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literatures. The essays cover a range of topics, and conversations about queer identities arise in a number of pieces. In “Reclaiming the Lineage House: Canadian Native Women Writers,” Agnes Grant cites Chrystos to reinforce her claims about the gaps between mainstream feminism and the concerns of Native women:

Whereas mainstream feminists see the primary cause of their oppression as patriarchal society, Native women are more inclined to see their oppression as arising from racism and colonialism. Chrystos, [...] an unabashed lesbian, [...] stated at a feminist poetry conference in Winnipeg (1992) that homophobia among her own people has never presented the barriers that racism has presented in feminist circles. (45)\

Janet St. Clair’s “Uneasy Ethnocentrism: Recent Works of Allen, Silko, and Hogan” looks briefly at both the queer-positive depictions of Ephanie in Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and the troubling depictions of queer sexuality in Leslie Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*. Without condemnation St. Clair points out that in Silko’s *Almanac* “[v]icious, manipulative homosexuality and injurious—even murderous—sexual perversion become relentless metaphors of the insane self-absorption and phallocentric avarice of god-forsaken Euroamerican culture” (85–86). Most important in terms of my historical mapping of *SAIL*, however, is Vanessa Holford’s article entitled “Re Membering Ephanie: A Woman’s Re-Creation of Self in Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.” Like Thomas King before her, Holford explicitly recognizes the lesbian sensibility of Allen’s central character, Ephanie. Holford’s analysis moves beyond naming when she analyzes the central relationships in the novel and contends that

*Shadows* lifts that blanket of silence, and in doing so it disturbs some readers. Those disturbed by the fact that Ephanie is a lesbian are intimidated by the refusal of mainstream, in
this case heterosexual, confines. But lesbianism in the novel is vitally important because it is representative of woman’s self-love. The characters who forbid Ephanie to love Elena are forbidding her to love herself, to be complete. Distrust of lesbianism is fear of women’s renewed strength, self-value, and unity. (105)

Interestingly Holford also addresses the divisions within the American Indian community about queer Native writing, looking briefly at M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey’s critique of Allen, which suggests that a focus on queer Native ideologies could represent a threat to the “unity” of American Indian people (108–09). Thus this first extended critical conversation about queer Native literature in SAIL speaks not only to the possibilities of GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literatures but also to the resistance toward queer issues that is often present both inside and outside academia. As a whole, though, the special issue “Feminist and Postcolonial Approaches” represents a significant moment for the study of queer Native literatures in SAIL.14

The next round of critical articles in SAIL focuses not on the work of queer Native writers but on alternate gender traditions in American Indian literatures as seen through the work of Louise Erdrich. Of the two essays published—Louise Flavin’s “Gender Construction Amid Family Dissolution in Louise Erdrich’s The Beet Queen” (summer 1995) and Julie Barak’s “Blurs, Blends, Berdaches: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich” (fall 1996)—Barak’s is undoubtedly more sophisticated in terms of its mapping of the history of gender variance within American Indian communities (despite her use of the term “berdache”). Even so, Barak sometimes falls into the same binaristic patterns she attempts to deconstruct in her, at times, unexamined claims about what constitute masculine and feminine behaviors. SAIL returns to the subject of queer Native literatures in spring 1998 with Victoria Brehm’s “Urban Survivor Stories: The Poetry of Chrystos.” This detailed and insightful reading of the body of Chrystos’s work is often overlooked because of its status as a review essay. The winter issue of the same year includes Tara Prince-Hughes’s “Contemporary Two-Spirit Identity in the Fiction
of Paula Gunn Allen and Beth Brant,” which offers by far the most nuanced example yet presented in SAIL of how historically based understandings of sex and gender traditions can be brought to bear on readings of contemporary American Indian literatures. Prince-Hughes argues:

In the work of both authors, issues of gender and cultural identity are closely related; alternative genders and sexualities cross cultural boundaries, and characters help repair fragmentation by forging connections between as well as within cultures. In their insistence on social responsibilities for two-spirit characters, and in their exploration of complex manifestations of gender identity, Allen and Brant suggest definitions of gayness that are not reducible to Western definitions based on sexual object choice; rather, gay and alternative gender people participate in the work, behavior, and spiritual roles that were once accepted by many American Indian societies. (10)

With its sophisticated analysis of queer Native literatures, Prince-Hughes’s reading of Allen and Brant is, in terms of GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literature examined in SAIL, the first fully developed answer to Jahner’s 1977 call for critical responsibility in the field.15 This fulfillment of Jahner’s call is extended as SAIL moves into the twenty-first century with an essay entitled “Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic,” by Two-Spirit poet/critic/activist Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee/African/Irish/Lenape/Lumbee). Appearing in spring 2004, Driskill’s article is a marker of queer American Indian literatures’ transition into a new era of politics and promise, a period in which conversations about sovereignty and sexuality entwine.

**Toward a Queer Aesthetic: Why Queer Native Literatures Matter**

As a field, GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literature has come a long way from the early interventions represented by Kenny’s work in 1976. Speaking of that early period in contemporary queer Native literature, Beth Brant explains,
When I first began to write in 1981, I had no models for being an Indian lesbian, much less one who wrote. I fumbled and wrote in aloneness. And somewhere inside I knew that *alone* did not mean *lonely*. I knew there was a community out there and that we were looking for each other. I think the courage of naming ourselves as lesbian is a significant act of love and community. [. . .] Taking words learned from the enemy, beading them together to make a gift of beauty is a giveaway of last- ing love. ("Giveaway" 945)

I suggest that the giveaway Brant references—the act of breaking the silence, of making community, the act of recognizing the existence and importance of Two-Spirit people, writers, and literatures—has taken the place of the erasures and omissions that characterized the early years of contemporary queer Native literatures. As my mapping of *SAIL* details, such changes are both gradual and incremental. I want to highlight, however, that these shifts—the move from silence and omission to the overt recognition that Brant calls a giveaway—represent more than a simple, linear progression. The move forward is always also an act of reclamation, a return to a more nuanced and historically grounded understanding of gender identities that was *already* an existing part of many American Indian histories. As such, the most current work in GLBTQ/Two-Spirit literatures explicitly refutes the idea that queer American Indian studies is a splinter of a splinter—another post-1980 offshoot of the “American” canon that, inflected by queer studies, introduces yet another “new” field. Instead the work of contemporary GLBTQ/Two-Spirit writers and theorists brings home the point not only that American Indian literature is the trunk rather than a branch of the literary canon but also that complicated understandings of queer identities predate Judith Butler by several hundred years.

Up to this point, I have been offering overview and commentary, but to more effectively make my case for the significance of GLBTQ/Two-Spirit American Indian literatures, I turn here to a close reading of Oklahoma Creek-Cherokee author Craig Womack’s 2001 novel, *Drowning in Fire*, which is one of the first book-length works of
fiction to situate an overtly gay Native character as its central protagonist. This follow-up to Womack’s influential book of literary criticism, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, is most notable not for its status as any “first” but for the nuanced way Womack (re)members Muscogee history to illustrate the inalienable connections between Two-Spirit identities and tribal sovereignty.

*Drowning in Fire* depicts, among a number of stories, Josh Henneha’s coming of age as a gay Creek boy in rural Oklahoma. The novel begins in 1964 Weleetka, Oklahoma, as Josh’s Aunt Lucille—a trumpet-playing, strong-willed Muscogee woman who is a unifying force in the novel—heals his earache while, or perhaps more correctly, *by*, melding Muscogee origin stories with tales of family history. The 1964 opening is followed by a 1972 episode in which Josh explores his feelings for his Creek schoolmate, Jimmy Alexander, while contending with a constant barrage of homophobia from his adolescent peers. The most recent sections, set in 1993, depict Josh and Jimmy’s rediscovery of each other as both friends and lovers. In many cases the narrative transcends the boundaries of linear time entirely. Thus Josh and Jimmy do not merely hear and recall stories of the Muscogees’ fight against U.S. government allotment policies, they physically participate in these significant historical events. Through these nuanced depictions of Muscogee people, Muscogee land, and the fluid and often-cyclical nature of Muscogee history, *Drowning in Fire* brings a story of queer Native sexuality together with a claim for Muscogee autonomy.

In Womack’s novel the fight for tribal sovereignty does not belong to a dusty, inaccessible past; sovereignty, like both Muscogee history and queer Native identities, is a living, ongoing part of tribal life, and herein lies the importance of such work to the field. This focus on contemporary claims to sovereignty is evidenced in the very first scene of the text, in which Josh’s Aunt Lucille heals his earache. The novel opens as Josh’s uncle lifts him and brings him to his aunt, saying, “Don’t worry, son. Your Aunt Lucille knows what to do when it hurts” (3). With Josh on her lap, Lucille lights a cigarette, breathes sacred tobacco smoke into her nephew’s ear, and, in the same breath, begins to narrate a Muscogee origin story: “Mama useta say, *hofónof*,
long time ago, that in the beginning it was so foggy you couldn’t see nowhere, not even anyone around you” (4). Although Josh initially protests—“I don’t want to hear a story [. . .]. You done told me that” (4)—he is soon drawn into the tale. Lucille’s stories are more than mere children’s tales, however; Josh underlines the curative power of her storytelling when he begs, “Please, one more story. It still hurts” (7). Lucille complies with her nephew’s request, and although her second narrative is about Josh’s uncle’s experience as a migrant worker in Dos Palos, California, it, like the earlier origin story, is firmly grounded in a Muscogee sense of place. Lucille explains:

[A] lot of us had to go [to California] and work when our farms went dry. [. . .] That’s the way poor folks, white and Indian, made their living. Our promised allotments slipped through our fingers when Oklahoma figured out ways to cheat us out of them. They forced us to take these allotments because they’ve always wanted to take away the one thing they hate the most—the fact that we exist as a nation of people, the Creek Nation, Muskogalki. This is where we’ve always been, before they ever came here, these white peoples. We always been a nation. This is what we still are. (7)

As this passage demonstrates, Lucille’s stories begin and end with Muscogee land, which she suggests is at the heart of all stories and all understanding for Muscogee people. Her commentary is a direct response to what Womack, in Red on Red, calls one of the most significant crises in Creek national government (36). He explains:

Beginning in the 1890s, the United States government illegally forced the Creeks and other Indian nations to accept individual land allotments, dissolve their nations, and become citizens of Oklahoma. This left millions of acres open for theft by the “sooners,” settlers trying to get into Oklahoma, a criminal act that the state continues to flagrantly and proudly celebrate today. (36)

When read against such historical context, Lucille’s words can be seen to operate on a number of levels: she directly challenges U.S.
government policies about Creek land; she cites a preexisting claim to ancestral Creek land; and she makes a direct correlation between a particular land base and a Creek national identity. In addition she situates Creek nationhood as both historical truth and contemporary reality. Lucille’s, and by logical extension, Womack’s claims for tribal sovereignty could therefore not be made clearer. Thus, by beginning his text with this scene, Womack highlights the central place that Creek sovereignty holds in Josh’s identity formation.

Alongside his claims for sovereignty, Womack maps a historical space for queer identity in *Drowning in Fire*. With the characters of Tarbie and Seborn, who are fictional contemporaries of turn-of-the-century Muscogee activist Chitto Harjo, Womack depicts two men whose love for each other is equaled by their love for the Muscogee Nation. Through these characters Womack illustrates the inherent possibilities of queer Native history, showing that being Native and gay is not a contradiction in terms. Tarbie and Seborn are first introduced in a section of the novel that a young Lucille narrates in 1911. Lucille recalls,

[T]his one time I heard Dave telling [Mama] about a couple of men he seen over at the stomp dance. These two men live together way back in the sand hills, away from everybody, without any women. Dave said, “Mizzus Self [. . .] my Uncle Tarbie comes down to the stomp dances, and he’s always with the same man. The young boys giggle when they see them two in camp, but the old ones always frown and tell them to show respect.” Mama just said, “Dave, those two are good men. Them old folks is right.” (35)

Lucille’s mother’s reaction to Dave’s story works together with the invocation of the elders’ approval to situate the two men’s same-sex relationship as a culturally sanctioned practice. At the same time, Womack demonstrates the infiltration of homophobia into Creek country through the boy’s giggles and Lucille’s subsequent memory of her white father: “Sometimes Daddy grabs up Mama’s broom and pretends to be those fellers doing woman’s work around the house. When he takes to prancing about and making fun of them like that,
Mama gets real scared and says, ‘Ihi, show some respect. You don’t know what you’re doing’” (36). Lucille’s mother’s fear is undoubtedly a response to the power that Two-Spirits were believed to possess within some Native communities. By introducing the twin themes of acceptance and rejection together with a depiction of a Two-Spirit couple, then, this brief glimpse of Tarbie and Seborn sets the stage for Josh’s subsequent coming of age over sixty years later as a queer Creek boy in a now-homophobic community.

While Josh is raised on stories of sovereignty that ground his sense of tribal identity, he is also assailed throughout his youth by narratives of homophobia that cause him to sublimate his queerness beneath a thin veneer of heterosexuality. The narrator explains, “The boys called him faggot. All the time. Every day. It might be summer vacation, but there was no vacation from that, and it had become like a second name; ‘Josh faggot’ was as familiar to him as ‘Josh Henenha’” (14). To bring both his gay and Creek identities into productive conversation, Josh must therefore first overcome the dangerous cultural narratives that situate same-sex desire as aberrant. Thus Josh, like many nonfictional Native GLBTQ/Two-Spirit people, must find his way to a queer Native identity through a morass of contradictions. Josh’s struggle reveals a reality that Chrystos addresses in an interview, where she explains,

The main similarity between being gay and Native [. . .] is the amount of hatred . . . we have to endure. Some . . . is genocidal but all of it is detrimental to our mental and physical health, not to mention our spiritual health. For both groups, this hatred is a result of colonization and Christianity. (qtd. in Anderson-Minshall 37)

The details surrounding Josh’s coming of age provide a powerful fictional example of Chrystos’s claim for the damaging effects of conservative Christian doctrine on many gay Native people. In Womack’s novel this is perhaps best demonstrated before Josh’s first sexual encounter with Jimmy Alexander. When the two high school boys share a bed at a sleepover, Josh remembers the words of the red-faced Baptist preacher at his church: “Men with men, lying together.
Not considering their eternal destiny, the wages of their sin, their inheritance the lake of fire” (64). Josh’s internalization of such homophobic doctrine is evident: “I knew I was a freak, a grotesque, a rampant sinner, and as I lay in Jimmy’s bed, his body against mine, I burned, I burned, I burned” (64). The fact that Josh himself casts same-sex desire as deviant illustrates the effects of both Christianity and colonization on this queer Native boy. While the overt link here is between Christianity and homophobia, as one form of colonialism, less immediately obvious is that Josh’s experience represents a colonially mandated absence. This absence is the elision of positive Two-Spirit role models that Josh’s tribal culture would have historically provided him. I suggest that such an elision mirrors the omission of explicit references to nonheterosexual Native sexualities in the early years of SAIL.

Womack moves beyond a mere recognition of such absences, however. Just as Lucille heals Josh’s earache by relating stories of Muscogee sovereignty, so does Womack offer an antidote to the historical erasures of queer-positive depictions of Native people by first acknowledging the problem—the assimilation of dominant narratives that cast homosexuality as illness or sin—and then providing a counternarrative in the form of Tarbie and Seborn, who serve as a historically grounded example of Two-Spirit men accepted by their tribe. Womack’s depictions of the men, which are framed by Lucille’s stories and Josh’s imaginative historical re-creations, center on their participation in the fight for Muscogee autonomy. Tarbie and Seborn ride with Chitto Harjo in 1901 as part of the “conservatives, those guarding Creek land and traditions, [who] had been branded as ‘Snakes’ throughout Oklahoma because Chitto Harjo’s name meant snake in Creek” (222). Thus, although Tarbie and Seborn eventually serve as Josh’s tribal role models, the text’s focus is not on the two men’s sexuality. The men are Creek nationalists who, stories reveal, just happen to be Two-Spirit. By balancing the men’s racial, cultural, and sexual identities in this way, Womack moves away from an either/or construction, in which either race/culture or sexuality are addressed as singular, isolated facets of queer Native identity, privileging instead a both/and paradigm, which more accurately rep-
resents the dialogic nature of identity formation. Such complexity reflects the possibilities queer Native literature holds for the field of Native studies: rather than representing a narrowed focus, as some fear, Two-Spirit literature embodies a heretofore unrecognized possibility for expansiveness.

Tarbie and Seborn help Josh understand his place in Muscogee culture, showing him that he is not aberrant because of his sexuality, as the rampant homophobia of Christian discourse has led him to believe, but that he is, instead, part of a grounded and culturally specific tribal continuum that includes men who might today call themselves gay or Two-Spirit. In a literary era where queer identity, especially in the case of gay men, is often still cast as “disease” (see texts like Silko’s Almanac of the Dead and James Welch’s The Heartsong of Charging Elk), Craig Womack breaks new ground by depicting queer Native characters whose sexual identities tie them to, rather than separate them from, both their tribal histories and their present-day tribal cultures.

Even while finding Drowning in Fire an impressive text on any number of levels, I initially questioned Womack’s decision to have Jimmy, a central gay character with a promiscuous history, contract HIV/AIDS, given the long literary tradition of gay characters who, if depicted at all, go mad and/or die tragic deaths. While such a death is not represented in the text and is not, by any means, the destiny of all people with HIV, the odds are undoubtedly not in the character’s favor. Reading Womack’s 1998 essay “Politicizing HIV Prevention in Indian County,” however, in which he addresses the importance of bringing positive, tribally specific AIDS-prevention messages into Native communities, sheds light on Womack’s larger project, which includes the hope that “sovereign nations can make part of their concern homophobia and the lack of AIDS services in their own homelands” (“Politicizing” 215). I argue that, when read in this context, Drowning in Fire can be recognized not merely as a groundbreaking novel that depicts the multifaceted nature of Muscogee life but also as an activist text that highlights the connections between tribal sovereignty and sexual identities.

I believe that these connections, in particular, mark Womack’s
contribution to the path that GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literature will take in the future. When analyzing the work of Cherokee author Lynn Riggs in *Red on Red*, Womack himself comments on the importance of depicting gay Native people: “One of the reasons [queer Native writers] may be less out than their white counterparts may have to do with the way that the queer Indian, even more than contemporary Indian culture generally, defies the stereotypes of the stoic warrior, the nature-loving mystic, the vanishing American” (279). He continues,

I would speculate that a queer Indian presence *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner the public will not accept. [. . .] Identifying an Indian as lesbian or gay makes the Native radically resistant to the popular tendency to make Indians artifacts from the past, since no one associates such terms with the warrior days when men were men and buffalo were scared. (280)

In *Drowning in Fire* Womack enacts just such a fundamental challenge with the characters of Tarbie and Seborn and Josh and Jimmy, to name only a few, but the work of his novel doesn’t stop with these depictions. Instead Womack is able to balance a story of queer identities with a concomitant focus on tribal sovereignty, thereby answering Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s now famous call for American Indian nationalism in literature. It is my contention that Womack meets Cook-Lynn’s challenge head-on, offering such nationalism and more, by presenting an important text where queer-positive depictions of Native people are inextricably interconnected with both American Indian history and present-day American Indian politics and where queer Native identities are situated not at the margins but as the very heart of American Indian literatures.

*Scene Three. January 2007. I sit looking out at the Kansas sleet, remembering the experiences of the past December, and thinking, yet again, of the many answers to the question that brought me to write this essay: “Why? The question frames this essay. Why pay critical attention to GLBTQ/Two-Spirit American Indian literatures? Why teach them?”*
I remember my answer to my friend as we walked along the lake: because queer Native literatures and theories relate directly to issues of contemporary sovereignty. Because introducing students to queer Native literatures and to Two-Spirit traditions is the most effective way I know of underlining the vast diversity between and among Native nations and cultures. Because that introduction is also one of the most effective ways I know to get students to actually understand what I mean when I call sexuality and gender “cultural constructs.”

Dropping the curtain on the sleet, I smile, thinking of my comment to my chair after she read the scathing anonymous review: American Indian literatures are the canon. Every one of our students should be required to take a course in American Indian studies because everywhere we stand is Native land. And, besides, it’s the best literature out there.

NOTES

1. I would like to extend my gratitude to my Kansas City writing group and to Debra Moddelmog for introducing me to queer theory, to Living the Spirit, and, particularly, to the work of Beth Brant during my first year of graduate work in 1995.

Secondly, I would like to recognize that this work is necessarily incomplete. In an essay of this length, it is impossible to map the entire history of GLBTQ/Two-Spirit Native literatures or the literary criticism of this important body of work. Because of the focus of this special issue, my commentary centers on the criticism that has appeared within the journal itself. I offer thanks to those who have been part of this conversation long before I entered the field and look forward to reading new work that will extend the outline I present here.

2. “Two-Spirit” is a term coined by Native people in 1990. The term is meant to recognize the different cultural histories of American Indian people who might identify as multiply gendered or gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and/or queer (GLBTQ). I’ll expand on this history later in the essay. I use “queer,” “gay,” and “Two-Spirit” interchangeably in this piece, just as I move between “Native,” “American Indian,” and “Native American.” While I use these terms fluidly, at the same time I recognize the inaccuracy of any blanket appellation used to characterize groups of vastly diverse peoples.
3. See the ASAIL homepage for a detailed explanation of the journal’s publication history: http://oncampus.richmond.edu/faculty/ASAIL/sail-hp.html.

Both “Tinseled Bucks: A Historical Study of Indian Homosexuality” and “Winkte,” are reprinted in Living the Spirit (15–31, 153–54).

4. There are undoubtedly many GLBTQ/Two-Spirit writers before Kenny. What Kenny’s texts mark is the rise of an overt creative and critical body of queer Native literatures in which indigenous North American authors explicitly mark their sexualities as something other than heterosexual. See Craig Womack’s insightful discussion of Oklahoma Cherokee playwright Lynn Rollie Riggs for one example of earlier work (Red on Red 271–303).

5. Gunn Allen’s essay, which was first published in the journal Conditions, was reworked as “Hwame, Koshkalaka, and the Rest: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures” in her landmark collection of essays The Sacred Hoop. She concretely situates her work as a project of reclamation, beginning her essay with the claim that “The lesbian is to the American Indian what the Indian is to American—invisible” (“Hwame” 255) and calling for change by its conclusion, saying, “Under the reign of patriarchy, the medicine-dyke has become anathema; her presence has been hidden under the power-destroying blanket of complete silence. We must not allow this silence to prevent us from discovering and reclaiming who we have been and who we are” (259). While The Sacred Hoop has been criticized for essentialism, its importance in the history of GLTBQ/Two-Spirit Native literatures is unquestioned.


7. In his editorial notes for the 1977–1987 retrospective issue of SAIL, Rodney Simard re-creates the journal’s beginnings, explaining:

ASAIL was founded in 1971, according to Kroeber in order to raise consciousness and extend ‘Red Power,’ by a small group of scholars, spearheaded by Paula Gunn Allen and Robert W. Ackley of Navajo
Community College, who gathered at MLA for the first time in 1972. By the following year, membership had blossomed to 40, and at least five ASAIL Newsletters were published pre-Kroeber. [. . .]

Newsletter of ASAIL (Series 1, or New Series) appeared in the Spring of 1977. [. . .] By 4.1 (Winter 1980), the name shifted to SAIL: ASAIL Newsletter (the final name Studies in American Indian Literatures debutting with 6.1 [Winter 1982]), and an editorial board was identified: Paula Gunn Allen, Gretchen Bataille, Joe Bruchac, Larry Evers, Vine Deloria, Dell Hymes, Maurice Kenny, and Robert Sayre (Gerald Vizenor was added in 11.1 [Winter 1987], the penultimate issue of the Series). (“A Wilderness” 4)


9. Thomas King makes the first direct reference to Native-authored Queer literature; interestingly, though, the first-ever reference to GLBTQ Native identities is in the winter 1979 issue of SAIL (3.4), which published Bea Medicine’s scathing review of white author Ruth Beebe Hill’s historical novel Hanta Yo (1979). Among the novel’s many faults, Medicine decries it for its skewed representation of Lakota sexuality:

Both the ethnographic literature and oral history accounts do not give credence to the graphic descriptions Mrs. Hill presents. [. . .] Ethnographic accounts stress that Lakota (and Cheyenne) Indian societies were sexually repressed. Proscriptions and prescriptions abounded, and still do. This is not to say that Lakota people did not recognize the role of the male “deviant” to use an English term usually ascribed to such persons. We refer to them as winkte (woman-like or “wishes-to-be-a-woman”). Their roles have been described to me as ritualist, artist, specialist in women’s craft production, herbalist, seer, namers of children, rejector of the rigorous warrior role, and homosexual. (54)

10. See Carolyn Epple’s “Coming to Terms with Navajo Nádleehí: A Critique of Berdache, ‘Gay,’ ‘Alternate Gender,’ and ‘Two-spirit,’” for a critique of the term “Two-Spirit.” Situating her work in a specifically Navajo cosmology, Epple attempts to “point out the flaws in the (putatively) cross-cultural and ahistorical categories, while calling for a shift back to culturally relative and specific understandings” (268).
11. The journal does, however, review work by heterosexual Native writers that includes depictions of Queer Native characters, such as Louise Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen*, and work by/about queer Native writers whose texts do not, at least at this point in their careers, explicitly invoke queer sexualities.

12. The first mention of *Living the Spirit* in *SAIL* occurs in Fall 1990’s “Briefly Noted” (*SAIL* 2.3):

*Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* is presented as “Compiled by Gay American Indians” under the coordinating editorship of Will Roscoe (St. Martin’s Press, 1988). The anthology includes fiction, poetry and non-fiction prose by 24 authors; selections are grouped under two headings: “Artists, Healers, and Providers: The Berdache Heritage” and “Gay American Indians Today: Living the Spirit.” The book is also a good example of combining artist-imaginative vision and social consciousness; besides the excellent bibliography there is a list of contacts and resources, including AIDS services. (48)

13. Given that a number of queer Native people feel the need to live off-reservation because of reactions to their sexuality, there are many who would refute such an assertion. Grant uses Chrystos’s statement to make a point about the differences between the aims and focus of feminism—what I would term “mainstream feminism”—and the aims and focus of Canadian Native women writers. Grant offers an excellent overview of the history of such writers, but at the same time, her piece sets up unnecessary poles of opposition. Elsewhere Chrystos herself recognizes the difficulties that can arise for those who straddle multiple categories, such as being feminist, lesbian, Native, poor or any combination of the four. She comments in the afterword to her 1993 collection *In Her I Am*: “Because homophobia is still a part of my community as a First Nations woman, it is very difficult for me to publish this book I’ve decided to weather all possible storms in order to make the book I needed to find [. . .] when I was 17” (87).

14. In fact, the very next issue of *SAIL* (6.4 Winter 1994) contains still another essay that comments on Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, Renae Bredin’s “‘Becoming Minor’: Reading *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.” Bredin argues that “It is precisely within the constitution of a lesbian identity that Ephanie is able to find balance and harmony. She in fact has access to a culturally specific practice, nameable and knowable, which allows her to draw together the disparate parts of a split self. Ephanie understands and names lesbian desire, after falling and landing on Grandmother Turtle/Spider’s back” (47).
In this same journal issue, Prince-Hughes reviews Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang’s *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality*, which has become one of the most influential reference texts of the past decade in the study of queer Native literatures.

Before I move to the next section of the essay, I want to note that I’ve omitted just a few pieces that follow Prince-Hughes’s essay. Among these is Tiffany Midge’s review of *Indian Cartography*, a beautiful collection by queer Esselen/Chumash poet and theorist Deborah Miranda, because the review contains no overt mention of sexuality. The next is Franchot Ballinger’s “Coyote, He/She Was Going There: Sex and Gender in Native American Trickster Stories,” which looks across the genre of trickster narratives examining gender constructions of tricksters across tribal traditions. Ballinger touches briefly on Two-Spirit traditions within this body of literature, but such traditions are clearly not the focus of the piece.

A portion of the following text is drawn from my 2003 review of *Drowning in Fire*, which was published in *Western American Literature* 38.1.

The Muscogees’ original tribal lands were situated in the present states of Alabama and Georgia, where their ties go back hundreds of years. Muscogee creation stories say that the people came out of the earth somewhere in the west, whereupon they moved east “on a quest to discover the origin of the sun” (Womack, *Red on Red* 26), eventually reaching the Atlantic Ocean and turning back to settle near the Chattahoochee River. These detailed oral histories are retold in a number of places, including Craig Womack’s *Red on Red*, Louis Oliver’s *Chasers of the Sun*, Angie Debo’s *The Road to Disappearance*, Michael Green’s *The Politics of Indian Removal* and Martin’s *Sacred Revolt*.

**Works Cited**


Special Section

Volume 19, Number 4
Assessing Native Criticism

STEPHANIE FITZGERALD

The publication of the inaugural issue of *Studies in American Indian Literature* thirty years ago coincides with the flourishing of what has been called the “Native American Renaissance,” a term coined by Kenneth Lincoln to describe the tremendous output of literary endeavors by Native writers beginning with the publication of N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* in 1969. Since its inception *SAIL* has staked out a space for lively debate and intellectual exchange on what was then considered to be a new and emerging field of study. Following closely behind were the earliest book-length treatments of Native literary criticism: Charles R. Larson’s *American Indian Fiction* in 1978; Allen Velie’s *Four American Indian Literary Masters* in 1982; Andrew Wiget’s *Critical Essays on Native American Literature* in 1985; Paula Gunn Allen’s *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs* in 1983 and *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Literature* in 1986; and in 1989, Arnold Krupat’s *Voice in the Margin* and Gerald Vizenor’s *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literature*. These works, and those that followed them, signaled a paradigm shift in the way we think about American Indian literature.

This special section of the thirtieth anniversary issue began as a panel entitled “Assessing Native Criticism” at the 2005 Modern Language Association conference in Washington, DC. Just as *SAIL* assumed thirty years ago that there was in fact a field called American Indian literature, this panel posits the existence of a vibrant field that must be critiqued and examined as part of its growth process. The
essays that follow seek to explore current critical debates in American Indian literary studies. They assume the existence of Native literary criticisms, actively engaging with and challenging current critical models. The authors map out diverse positions on the critical terrain, in what might be considered a snapshot of the current debates.

Christopher B. Teuton examines the reading practices of the Cherokee Nation in order to explore the nexus of relationships between Native communities and the literature that springs from them. Franci Washburn argues that no single critical approach to Native literature is possible; rather, “there can, should, and must be theories.” Drawing from the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Thomas Hove and John M. McKinn advocate a three-point relational model for assessing Native literary and cultural criticism, one that takes into consideration the social dynamics of the field. Finally, Ron Carpenter argues for a transcultural context for teaching American Indian literatures. Collectively these essays encourage future conversations that we hope will serve to broaden our discussions of Native literary criticisms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful to Malea Powell, editor of SAIL, for her support of the original panel and the publication of this special section.
A few years ago at the MLA annual convention, I was discussing with a colleague the writers and works I had written about in my dissertation. I mentioned several of the writers and works, and this colleague seemed very approving of my choice of subjects. But when I mentioned the last writer I was analyzing in my study and began to discuss this writer’s work, my colleague suddenly interjected, “That hack?” Momentarily dismayed and confused by my colleague’s characterization of this writer, I recognized that I was being baited to defend my subject matter and to defend it on aesthetic grounds. That short exchange crystallized for me something I have long known, which is that we in Native literary studies do not have any guidelines for describing what is a “literary” work within the context of our field, nor have we clearly articulated what is aesthetically meaningful within the context of Native literature and how those aesthetics may differ from mainstream notions of Western aesthetics.

My colleague’s comments were particularly disturbing because the writer he called a hack not only was somebody I knew but also was from my home community. By calling this writer a “hack,” my colleague dismissed this writer’s work as un inventive, sloppy, and written only for profit. But the comment did more than this. I knew that people from my home community read and enjoyed this writer, and so by denigrating this writer’s work, my colleague also denigrated the literary aesthetics of those from my home community.

While the story I recount is just an isolated incident, I believe it reflects a real-world example of a growing debate in our field regard-
ing what is aesthetically meaningful and what is “literary” and worthy of study. In reflecting on the aesthetic impasse between my colleague and me, I realized that the definition of aesthetics within which I work assumes a necessary relationship between writings and the communities they serve. So, putting aside whether I liked this writer’s work, the fact that the writer’s work was read in my home community made it aesthetically meaningful. The task for me, the critic, was to offer my interpretation of why and how it was meaningful.

I am not alone in making the claim that Native writing exists within a nexus of relationships that include the various communities they serve and the ones to which they are directed in particular. In fact the most influential works of Native American literary studies in the past ten years or so have as their common denominator their expressed goal of clarifying not just the connections but the responsibilities that Native writers, Native writings, Native communities, and critics of Native literature all share. Terms such as Robert Warrior’s “intellectual sovereignty,” and, recently, “intellectual trade routes”; Jace Weaver’s “communitism”; Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s “Anti-Indianism”; Craig Womack’s “Red Stick” approach; all these terms, which are the markers of literary theoretical concepts, are unintelligible outside of the context of Native community history, politics, and needs (Cook-Lynn x; Warrior, People and the Word 182 and Tribal Secrets 97–98; Weaver xiii; Womack 11–12). They are critical terms used in theorizing the relationships between indigenous people and colonial powers, and as such they may be applicable to the struggles of indigenous communities around the world.

The most pressing critical debates in American Indian literary studies concern how we are theorizing the relationships between literature, culture, and politics, but these questions cannot be dealt with accurately until we have a working definition of what is “theory” in our field. An example of a mainstream definition of theory is as follows:

1. Theory is interdisciplinary—discourse with effects outside an original discipline.

2. Theory is analytical and speculative—an attempt to work out
what is involved in what we call sex or language or writing or meaning or the subject.

3. Theory is a critique of common sense, of concepts taken as natural.

4. Theory is reflexive, thinking about thinking, enquiry into the categories we use in making sense of things, in literature and in other discursive practices. (Culler 14)

Absent from this definition, and what makes it as it stands an inappropriate definition of “theory” as applied to Native literary studies, is a reference to the social existence and cultural obligations of theory. A fifth characteristic would perhaps read: “Theory arises out of the dialectical relationship among artists, arts, critics, and Native communities.” In the above definition, the subject and object of theory is itself. In Native theory the subject is Native experience, the object, Native community.

While a number of critics of Native literature have been building a critical mass of concepts and terms that articulate a relationship between what we study and Native communities, there has been surprisingly little research into the ways in which literature actually functions in Native communities. In my mind one of the most pressing needs in our field is knowledge of the reading practices of Native communities. To my knowledge, research on the reading practices of a particular Native community has never been published. Given that so much has been written about the intricate relationships between Native oral traditions, worldviews, and writings, it strikes me as very odd that Native communities, the folks from which Native knowledge originates and to which Native writing is directed, should be omitted from this epistemological and aesthetic paradigm. American Indian literary criticism, it would seem, either takes for granted that Native readers read Native literature or assumes that it really does not matter if there is an actual connection between Native readers and writers.

So, in the summer of 2004, I began a study of Cherokee Nation readers. I first contacted Chad Smith, the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, who in turn put me in touch with Dr. Richard
Allen, our policy analyst. Allen is the person in the Cherokee Nation government in charge of answering inquiries and monitoring research regarding Cherokee culture. As you can imagine, this is not an easy job. One of his duties is to monitor the literally hundreds of groups who claim to be Cherokee and are attempting to attain U.S. federal recognition as Native nations.

The first question Allen asked me was, “Do we have any Cherokee fiction writers?” I mentioned a few writers, and he asked me if they were tribal citizens, which I did not know. From his point of view, only tribal citizens of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, or the United Keetoowah Band should be recognized as Cherokee writers. I understood Allen’s position regarding identity and tribal citizenship, but my purpose was to derive data on what self-identifying Cherokees are reading.

I shared with Allen my nine survey questions:

1. What do you like to read and what have you been reading lately?

2. Which non-Native American authors of fiction or poetry do you like to read?

3. Which works are your favorites?

4. What books by Native American writers have you read?

5. What are your favorite works of fiction and nonfiction by Native American writers?

6. What books by Cherokee writers have you read?

7. What are your favorite works of fiction and nonfiction by Cherokee writers?

8. What types of creative works about Cherokees would you like to read or see written?

9. How should Cherokee writers be accountable to their Cherokee audiences?

Allen was most interested in my final question, perhaps because it asks respondents to directly address what they see as the respon-
sibility a writer has in relation to his/her audiences. He agreed to support my initial research and put me in contact with Dan Agent, the editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*. Agent agreed to post the survey, and it was published in the September 2004 issue of the *Phoenix*. With a worldwide circulation of over 106,000 (68,000 in Oklahoma), the *Cherokee Phoenix* is the ideal forum for reaching a far-ranging Cherokee readership.

In the introduction to the survey I explained that I would compile the results and share them with the *Phoenix* readers and the Cherokee Nation. With this contemporary study of Cherokee readers, I wanted to at least broach the subject of whether or not Cherokees were reading Cherokee literature as a means of revitalizing Cherokee culture. I hoped that what people were reading would reflect their intellectual and cultural interests.

Twenty-three people took the survey. They represent a wide range of ages (from 16 to 82) and come from many different places (from New York to Hawaii) and many walks of life (one is in high school, one in prison). Many are living in Oklahoma. Most were eager to talk about their reading habits, and many thanked me for my interest in the subject. The following is a summary of the answers to each question and my initial interpretation of the meaning of these answers.

As might be expected, the answers to my first survey question (“What do you like to read and what have you been reading lately?”) varied widely. Many respondents read periodicals and newspapers, such as *Reader’s Digest* and the *Cherokee Phoenix*. Three respondents reported reading history books, and two reported reading political books. One reported reading postcolonial theory, and one the Bible. The data I take away from this question is that Cherokee readers are reading many different kinds of texts, but history seems to be of keen interest.

In response to the question concerning non-Native writers they are reading, once again, the readers had widely varying tastes. Writers included best-selling popular authors such as J. K. Rowling, Dan Brown, John Grisham, and Tom Clancy; canonical American writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, and Harper Lee; regional writers, such as the western novelist Cormac McCarthy
and the southern writer Anne Rivers Siddons; and multicultural authors, such as the Latina writer Sandra Cisneros and Gabriel García Márquez. It is difficult to draw conclusions from such a wide array of authors and literatures, but there does seem to be a focus on reading canonical American literature, popular American writers and regional writers, and Latino/a writers. Only two respondents mentioned reading the same writer: the poet Pablo Neruda. Their favorite works of non-Native fiction were largely drawn from these same authors and included a diversity of texts, including Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*; Homer’s *Odyssey*; and Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Three respondents chose Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* as their favorite non-Native work.

As the survey moves into questions concerning Native writers, the answers become very interesting. First, there appears to be some confusion concerning who is a Native writer. For example, respondents listed Dee Brown and Tony Hillerman as Native writers. Another respondent asked me directly whether or not Barbara Kingsolver was Native. One respondent listed the Arkansas mystery writer Joan Hess, and another listed a New-Age work, *Earthway*, by a writer named Mary Summer Rain. It is difficult to draw conclusions as to why non-Native and “questionably” Native writers were listed. It could be that respondents simply confused works with Native themes with works written by Natives. Another way of understanding the responses reflects the consternation of one respondent: she said she had only read two works by Native writers, and that was because she lived in Arkansas and those types of books were hard to find there. Both her Native books were purchased in Oklahoma. Not only one’s access to good works of Native fiction and nonfiction but also the selection one has to choose from seem to play a part in what is read. As readers of Native literature know, the texts in the Native American sections of corporate bookstores usually contain a significant amount of New-Age material. At the same time, many respondents read works by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Alexander Posey, Jim Northrup, Taiaiake Alfred, Emmett Starr, Rennard Strickland, Robert Warrior, Paula Gunn Allen, Sarah Winnemucca, and Zitkala-Ša. These readers are reading academic works in American Indian studies; they are reading
well-known Native writers like Sherman Alexie, N. Scott Momaday, and Leslie Marmon Silko, but they are also reading Cherokee writers. Two had read Wilma Mankiller’s first book, and three respondents have read works by the contemporary United Keetoowah Band novelist Robert Conley (the greatest number of responses for a single author). Similarly, their favorite texts included votes for well-known works by Alexie, Momaday, Silko, and Louise Erdrich. However, two respondents chose works by Thomas King, and two (the most for one writer) chose Robert Conley’s novel *War Woman* as their favorite Native text, including both fiction and nonfiction.

As the survey moved into questions concerning Cherokee writers and works, a pattern began to emerge. Respondents had read a wide variety of Cherokee fiction and nonfiction, including John Rollin Ridge’s 1854 novel *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*, works by Grant Foreman, Jace Weaver, Eva Garroutte, and Jack F. and Anna G. Kilpatrick. Of all the writers mentioned, however, the novelist Robert Conley was mentioned the most. Five respondents reported reading Conley works. When listing their favorite works of fiction and nonfiction, once again respondents listed works by Robert Conley as their top choice, followed by Wilma Mankiller, Rennard Strickland, and Thomas King.

Having read Robert Conley’s work, interviewed him, and written about his novels, it’s not surprising to me to find out that other Cherokee readers are reading him. Having published over forty books (including historical fiction, folklore, horror, westerns, poetry, biography and history), Conley is decidedly the most prolific Native writer of his generation. And yet, despite the widespread recognition of his talent by his peers (Conley has won three Spur Awards by the Western Writers of America), his fellow Cherokees (Conley received the 2000 Cherokee Medal of Honor), and even the state of Oklahoma (Conley was inducted into the Oklahoma Professional Writers Hall of Fame), Conley’s literary contributions have been nearly ignored by scholars. To date no critical articles have been published focusing exclusively on Conley’s work.¹

Literary critics may be ignoring Conley’s novels because they are works of popular fiction, full of action, suspense, and usually
at least one love story. His stories are plot driven, accessible, sometimes poignant, and often very funny. Most importantly, they seek to explore Cherokee history through story. And it’s for all these reasons, I believe, that Cherokee readers are reading his novels.

My research into Cherokee reading practices continues, and while twenty-three responses cannot realistically offer a summary of the reading practices of the Cherokee Nation citizenry, I do think that these findings point in some interesting directions. Scholars of Native literature need to go beyond theorizing relationships with Native communities and actually create working relationships with communities. If we did that, we might find that the discourses that flow through Native America are, as Robert Warrior argues in *The People and the Word*, not exclusive to fiction but include nonfiction, intertribal Native newspapers and tribal newspapers, tribal Web sites, blogs, community writings projects, self-published works, and newsletters. More community-focused research might compel us to redefine what we understand as “theory” as it relates to Native America. We might reconsider what notions of aesthetics we use in evaluating Native writings, perhaps opting for more open-ended definitions of “literary.” One such definition of “literary” might usefully draw from concepts of “literacy,” such as Paulo Freire’s, which claims “literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as a set of principles that functions either to empower or disempower people” (Freire and Macedo viii). If we were to offer definitions of literature that are contextualized with reference to Native communities and readerships, perhaps we could avoid the cultural myopia that leads to calling some writers “hacks” or to ignoring their work altogether. You may have guessed by now the identity of the writer my colleague referred to. He has published two books recently, one a history of the Cherokee Nation published by the University of New Mexico Press, the other an account of a contemporary Cherokee medicine man, published by the University of Oklahoma Press. He is a writer who until recently has lived and written in his home community of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and he’s the writer most read and favored by my Cherokee readers survey participants. Perhaps they find his writings empowering. His name is Robert Conley. Have you read his work?
NOTES

1. Only three works of criticism have engaged Conley’s writings to any degree. See Susan B. Brill de Ramirez, Jace Weaver, and Ron Welburn.

2. My “Cherokee Nation Readers” research continues. The survey may be accessed through my Web site at http://portfolio.du.edu/cteuton. Please click on the tab marked “Cherokee Nation Readers” and follow the prompts to the survey.

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The Risk of Misunderstanding in Greg Sarris’s *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*

FRANCI WASHBURN

Greg Sarris’s book *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* is a groundbreaking text in that it is, in part, an attempt to incorporate aspects of oral tradition within the written word and to make the tradition and lessons of storytelling understandable for a Euroamerican audience. However, because Sarris does not clearly explain what he is trying to say, there is a risk, perhaps a certainty, that many readers will misunderstand or misinterpret the meaning of the stories that he tells and the points that he attempts to make. Instead of explaining what he means, Sarris follows Mabel MacKay’s example of enigmatically answering a story with another story or ignoring the question until a later related event recalls the original story, and even then he allows the second event to stand as an explanation for the first story or event. It would seem that his point is to invite readers to participate in his narration and storytelling by allowing them to interpret the material through the readers’ own reality filter of experience, knowledge, and emotion. This approach might be appropriate and work well for an audience steeped in oral tradition, particularly the oral tradition of the Pomo people, of whom Sarris is a member, but for the more usual Euroamerican reader, Sarris’s approach does not explicate but only serves to confuse and complicate. Still, most other writers who have attempted to translate oral tradition into literary form have not done much better in accurately recording, translating, and explaining stories from oral tradition. Is such accuracy important? Why?

Stories—spoken or written—are important for two reasons: they
are the means of transferring information, and/or they are valuable for the aesthetics contained within them that are intended to evoke an emotional response. Both information and aesthetic meaning carry the very essence of any group of people: what is necessary for survival, what they value, what they consider as simply beautiful, or, perhaps, what is necessary for the survival of the soul. Cultural groups, of course, vary widely from those that are strikingly similar to those that have almost no common ground, but all groups share this increasingly smaller world, and some basic level of understanding is necessary for all groups to share the space with some degree of peace and cooperation. The risk of misunderstanding can be catastrophic.

Misunderstood words have been the cause of problems ranging from minor rifts between friends on up the scale to devastating wars. And usually the groups that have been decimated, if not completely eliminated, by such misunderstandings have been the indigenous populations of the world. The indigenous groups that have survived have done so by achieving, either by choice or force, at least a minimal understanding of the dominant culture through that culture’s spoken and written words. However, the efforts of dominant cultures to understand colonized peoples have been desultory.

For the most part, their survival has not been in question; they have studied indigenous people primarily for entertainment or curiosity value. Indigenous peoples cannot force dominant cultures into understanding, but writers, both indigenous and nonindigenous, must make every effort to foster cultural understanding in order for indigenous groups not only to survive in the world but also to prosper. Because oral tradition, story, is the basic means of communicating information in traditional societies, it is important that stories be recorded, transmitted, and explained as accurately as possible. While Sarris’s text is interesting and thought provoking, he does not explicate clearly but seems to invite readers to interpret the information for themselves. The invitation without guidelines invites misunderstandings. Further, many readers are not motivated to seek any understanding beyond the superficial, particularly when the text is not read by choice but is only part of a required course in Native
American literature. While it is difficult to translate the spoken story into the written text and to explain material so that it is understandable by a general audience, it is possible. Orality and literacy are not mutually exclusive.

Eric Havelock writes:

The two, orality and literacy, are sharpened and focused against each other, *yet can be seen as still interwoven in our own society*. It is a mistake to polarize these as mutually exclusive. Their relationship is one of mutual, creative tension, one that has both a historical dimension—as literate societies have emerged out of oralist ones—and a contemporary one—as we seek a deeper understanding of what literacy may mean to us as it is superimposed on an orality. (11; emphasis added)

*Keeping Slug Woman Alive* is a weaving of both oral and literary tradition, but without additional input, the weaving is interesting but not understandable. It is similar to a Hopi pot or a Navajo rug, either of which can be interesting, admired for the intrinsic beauty of the object, while at the same time, the process of creating these objects and the cultural symbols or colors employed may be unknown to the observer. Without additional information and explication, a great deal is lost in the translation. Readers of oral storytelling that has been converted to literary work do not have the same input as a live audience listening to the story. The reader cannot see the storyteller’s body language or facial expressions, hand movements, and body posture, nor can the reader hear nuances of voice such as pitch, volume, word emphasis, and silences within the speech act. Further, the physical space within which the story was told—the room where the event took place—can never be duplicated for each reader of a written text; therefore the experienced reality for each reader is necessarily independent of the storytelling act.

Several writers, notably those from the field of anthropology, have addressed the problem of translating oral tradition in various ways. In *Le pensée sauvage*, Claude Levi-Strauss wrote about the necessity of putting orality on the map. He argued that orality should be
considered an important repository of knowledge in its own right and not merely a first evolutionary step towards literacy (245). Levi-Strauss did not address the problems of translating or transposing information from this oral repository to the written text of the library. Franz Boas was one of the earliest pioneers in the attempt to translate oral works to literary form, preceding the ideas of Levi-Strauss by some seventy years.2

Late in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Boas did fieldwork among the Clackamas Indians in Oregon, believing that their cultural practices were on the way to extinction unless someone bothered to record them. Prior to Boas most anthropologists simply observed and wrote field notes that they later organized into a narrative description with little attention to exact renditions of ritual, story, and song. Boas went a step further and attempted more precise translations of these cultural productions into literate form. His method was to script the material first in the Clackamas language and then provide an English translation.

Boas’s methods were adopted and used by others including his student, Ella Cara Deloria, who used this method in her book *Dakota Texts*, in which she translated and interpreted stories that she collected from her own people. Better than not attempting to record the material at all, the Boas method still left much to be desired. The flat words on the page give no indication of the speech production itself; that is, no clues as to the cadence, volume, and so on of the storyteller’s voice. As Arnold Krupat points out, Boas and those followers who used his method were seeking knowledge and not the aesthetics of the information they collected or even a deeper understanding of the people who first produced the stories. Krupat writes:

[T]heir commitment to science led them to prefer the most literal prose translations—which usually obscured completely the dynamics of the Indian performances and made it very difficult for anyone to discover a genuine poetry among Native peoples. The full value of what Boas and his students recorded would only begin to be revealed in the 1950s and after, when developments in anthropological linguistics would permit
their translations to be modified for accuracy and to yield new translations of more apparent poetic value. (109)

One of the developments that assisted in accurate translation that Krupat does not mention is technological and mechanical—the invention and use of recording devices. Previously, as Dennis Tedlock points out, the collection and recording of oral materials was limited by the necessity of using handwritten dictation, which precluded smooth, uninterrupted performances. However, for some time after the invention and widespread use of recording equipment, fieldworkers treated recorders as mere dictation machines, which allowed them to postpone the creation of prose texts and translations until a later occasion (xiv–xv).

The work of Dell Hymes in the mid-1960s provided the beginning of innovations needed for more complete and accurate translation of oral materials to written texts, and Tedlock expanded upon Hymes’s earlier work. Tedlock writes:

Storytelling is a performance art. [. . .] [S]torytellers have at least as much in common with dramatists, actors, orators and poets as they do with writers of prose fiction. [. . .] [T]here is much more to storytelling than assembling vowels and consonants into gray masses of words and sentences. It is not only words that give shape and movement to a story’s characters, but also the ways in which those words are voices. (xi)

With this in mind, Hymes began, and Tedlock further developed, a system of transcribing oral works to more accurately reflect the oral performance. For example, different-sized type fonts indicate volume of speech with (logically) smaller type indicating a softer, lower volume than normal voice, and capital letters in larger type indicate a louder than normal voice. A vowel followed by a long dash indicates that it is to be held, and split lines indicate chanted words with about three half tones of difference in volume between the top line and bottom line. Audience reaction/participation and the body language of the storyteller are indicated in parentheses—stage directions, if you will. Here is the beginning of the Zuni story, “The Boy and the Deer,” as transcribed by Tedlock:
NOW WE TAKE IT UP.

(audience) Ye——s indeed.

LO——NG A

NOW THE ROAD BEGINS. GO.

(audience) Ye——s indeed. (3)

Once these simple rules are learned, this transcription method provides a much more comprehensive understanding of an oral text than does the simple commitment of words to the page. It works quite well in situations where videotaping is not possible or is inappropriate. However, even these methods—innovative transcription or videotaping—are not a substitute for being present at an oral performance. Both video camera and the transcription methods of Hymes and Tedlock have a limitation in common with plain text on a printed page. They freeze the material in time and space. The advantage, of course, is that no matter how many times one returns to the material, it *does* remain the same providing that the videotape or the printed material is properly maintained. Passages can be checked and rechecked for accuracy against the memory of the reader/viewer. However, this very accuracy, this fixing of the event, is very much at odds with the impulse and purpose of storytelling, where the story is always the same but the context is always different.

Storytellers rarely tell a story only once. Stories are repeated over and over to different audiences in different settings for different reasons. The storyteller remembers the thread of the original story, but the word choice the intonation, the parts of the story that are emphasized or diminished, and so on may vary. All of these changes happen for a multitude of reasons. The weather, the number of people in the audience, even what the storyteller (or the audience members) had for dinner can all influence the telling and the eventual perception of the story. Every person experiencing a story takes something different away from the event. The stories are the same, but they are never the same for any two people, or even for the same person hearing the “same” story at a different time. Stories are like colors. Some stories
may be basically blue, but under differing circumstances they may be turquoise or cobalt blue or baby blue.

Of course, it can be argued that there are changes in setting, circumstance, and sometimes audience for the fixed, prerecorded stories as well, so that even these book reading or video storytelling experiences are myriad and varied. However, if the performance is considered half of the storytelling act and the audience reaction the other half, then the frozen version of a story is still only half of the experience, although it should be realized that assigning equal value to each part of the experience is an arbitrary assessment. It is quite likely that the values are never equal but vary along a continuum for each story, for each storyteller, and for each audience participant/observer. It may be useful to consider the storytelling act and the audience as hail and response, very much as Judith Butler describes:

Positioned as both addressed and addressing, taking its bearing within that crossed vector of power, the subject [audience in storytelling] is not only founded by the other, requiring an address in order to be, but is power is derived from the structure of address as both linguistic vulnerability and exercise. If one comes to be through address, can we imagine a subject apart from his or her linguistic bearing? (30)

The hail—the storytelling act—involves the response—the audience reaction—into being. Perhaps then the storytelling act should be given a greater weight of importance because without this hail the audience response could not exist. But without the audience response does the storytelling act exist? If a storyteller speaks to an empty room, or if a text is written but never read by anyone other than the author, is he or she still telling a story? Recall the classic question regarding a tree that falls in the woods with no one to hear it. Does it still make a sound? The answer to both questions is similar. Of course the falling tree makes a sound; of course the storytelling act exists. It is the response that is missing. The falling tree has consequences; it may destroy or damage other vegetation or animal habitats, for example. The storytelling act exists, but it is no longer a complete storytelling experience. For instance, it could be a rehearsal
or a first draft. However one assigns the relative importance of the storytelling and the reaction of the audience, it remains that there is much more room for variety of experience within a live performance than within a fixed text.

But it is the lack of fixity of meaning that may be frustrating and confusing to readers of *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*. Sarris’s readers are expected to extrapolate meaning as if they were a live audience hearing, seeing, feeling, and experiencing the stories within the text. The reader is frustrated because they are invited to construct meanings for themselves, not only without sufficient information but also without any guideline—any fixed meaning with which to compare their understanding. Most readers are conditioned in the Euroamerican literary tradition; that is, most readers expect texts to provide at least a modicum of explanation within the educational level for which they were written. What is the reader supposed to get from these stories? Sarris offers few clues.

As the reader you get what you get, and what you get depends on everything else you have ever read and what the people who wrote what you read had read themselves, and so on back to the beginning of the written word. You get what you get, depending on all the words you have ever heard and what those speakers heard and what their predecessor heard and so on all the way back to the beginning of the spoken word. Every reading or speaking body is the sum of the reading and speaking experience of all their personal predecessors. Those works or utterances that a person has not read or heard but that have been read or heard by someone else whom a body has read or heard, and all of these texts, oral or literary, whether actually read by the individual or filtered by previous readers, are woven into the body of knowledge that creates understanding and meaning for each individual.

This polyphony of voices—sometimes cacophony of voices—has sound theoretical echoes in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Interpreting Bakhtin in relation to Native American literature, Krupat writes: “it is what Bakhtin calls the novel which more fully testified to its own (inevitable) indebtedness to the discourse of others; the novel, for Bakhtin, is the prime literary instance of dialogized speech” (136; see
also Bakhtin). While Bakhtin addresses his theory to the specialized writing form of the novel, Krupat argues that the stories of oral tradition are akin to the novel, sharing many of the same aspects—plot and plot devices such as the flashback, flash forward, description, inner thought of characters, action, and varying points of view, but perhaps most importantly, dialogic construction. That is, the internal “conversation” between the writer and the reader, the hail and response described by Judith Butler, or the interaction between storyteller and audience. It must be pointed out that the dialogue between storyteller and audience is different for every member of the audience because each person has his or her own personal canon of texts read or heard, and no two persons’ canons are likely to be exactly the same; thus a multiplicity of meanings can be constructed from the same storytelling experience. Without guidance and some fixity of meaning, the understanding arrived at by individual readers of Sarris’s work is unlikely to be the meaning intended by Sarris or by Mabel MacKay.

Let’s examine two stories from Sarris’s text: the potato-peeling story and Sarris’s story (about Mabel MacKay’s story) of the woman who loved a snake (1–3, 35–57).

In the potato-peeling story Sarris tells the reader that his product—the peeled potatoes—are different from the potatoes peeled by the two women in the story. He is embarrassed by the difference, but he doesn’t explain that the difference lies in the different experiences among Sarris and the two women. When Sarris peeled potatoes at MacKay’s kitchen table, thousands of people’s hands—all of the people he had seen or emulated in the same task—contemplated the task, decided how to proceed, and made the cuts. The product of his work could not possibly be the same as that of the two women and their polyphonic experience, nor is it possible that the product of the women’s potato peeling was exactly the same. Surely one of the women peeled deeper or slower, because no matter how much alike these two women may have been in experience, there were almost certainly differences as well. All three batches of peeled potatoes came from differently perceived and interpreted experiences, so the potato-peeling experience is as much of a text as the story describing it.
The story of the woman who loved a snake is a verbal example of the potato-peeling experience. The main difference is that the story (of MacKay’s story) did not involve an action but reactions to the presentations of words that speak of thought, action, dialogue, and description within the story. We have Sarris’s reaction, which is that of the privileged insider, and we have the reaction of Sarris’s outsider friend, Jenny, but there is also a third response here. That is MacKay’s re-reaction to Jenny’s reaction. These responses are what might be termed the primary responses, but beneath these there are the uncountable number of internalized responses from the preconceived predecessors within each of the three individual canons of knowledge and experience. It seems that none of the three—Sarris, Jenny, or MacKay—is connecting with any one of the others in understanding the story. Each has his or her own interpretation, and the understanding of the meaning of the story is likely to have multiple different meanings for the people reading this story in Sarris’s text. When this story and the potato-peeling story are discussed in a classroom setting, information from all those readers present comes not just from the individuals present but also from the exponential additive of their total experience. Within this setting the reading of the fixed text approaches, at least within the audience response component, the oral storytelling experience, and the people present may come to some consensus about the meaning of the stories. However, consensus on meaning does not necessarily guarantee that these people have understood the meaning that the storyteller—Sarris or MacKay—meant to impart. It would appear that Sarris is attempting to replicate the methods of Pomo (and most other Native American) storytellers by not explaining, by allowing each reader to construct his or her own meaning.

Native American storytellers do not usually explain the meaning of the story, particularly when their audience members are also members of their own particular tribe or nation, because such an audience would understand the particular cultural information embedded within the story. They would be able to take that information along with the plot of the story and construct meaning that is close to the storyteller’s intent. Sarris has not recognized that the majority of
his reading audience is not Pomo, not even Native American; therefore his readers are unlikely to understand the stories in any manner close to what Sarris intends. The story of the woman who loved a snake is particularly complex and difficult to understand. What is the significance of the snake, for example? For many Euroamerican readers steeped in Judeo-Christian ethics, the snake may be seen as a symbol of evil, an echo of the snake in the biblical Garden of Eden. Using this reference for analysis, it is easy to assume that the snake represents the devil who tempted Eve, or possibly, the treachery of women. In MacKay’s story, because the husband discovers the snake, it could be seen as a messenger of evil, a natural or spiritual tattletale that is warning the husband of the wife’s infidelity. It is doubtful that any of these interpretations would be applicable from the standpoint of the Pomo people, whose story this is. The story is an old one, pre-dating colonial Christian influence for one thing, and further, it springs from a culture where animals, including snakes, are not considered as apart from or inferior to humans. Even Native Americans who are Christians have trouble accepting the Christian hierarchy of being that places animals beneath humans. Stan MacKay has written about the objection of Native Americans to this aspect of Christian theology. He writes:

The comparisons with the spirituality of indigenous peoples around the world may be centered on the notion of relationship to the whole creation. We may call the earth “our Mother” and the animals “our brothers and sisters.” Even what biologists describe as inanimate, we call our relatives. [. . .] This unity as creatures in the creation cannot be expressed exclusively since it is related to the interdependence and the connectedness of all life. (53)

In Pomo thought the snake is not a symbol of anything. The snake is the man that the woman in the story loved. MacKay’s listener, Jenny, with her Euroamerican intellect and knowledge, does not understand that concept. She also exhibits a common Euroamerican lack of regard for nonhuman life (and antipathy for snakes) when she asks why the husband did not simply take the snake out and kill it.
Nor does Mabel MacKay understand Jenny’s point of view. MacKay, with her Pomo intellectual understanding, reacts with incredulity. She says, “Well, how could he [take the snake out and kill it]? This is white man days. There’s laws against killing people” (Sarris 37). As the warden says to Cool Hand Luke in the movie of the same name, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

The lack of understanding of stories from oral tradition by Euroamericans is largely because few of them have the voices of oral tradition—Native American or any other—within their personal canons of experience and knowledge. This is due in part, as stated earlier, to the difficulty of translating oral story into literary form, but it is also partly due to the privileging of literacy over orality. Most people are read to or told stories only as children, as a matter of convenience until they are taught to read for themselves, and then storytelling, for all practical purpose, is discontinued. Eric Havelock urges a revival of appreciation for orality and a return to teaching orality as a prelude to and in conjunction with literacy. He writes that “The natural human being is not a writer or a reader but a speaker and a listener.” Further, he believes that children should be expected to “relive the conditions of this inheritance [. . .] and that is to be accompanied by continual instruction in these oral arts” (20–21).

However, unless and until such “continuous instruction in the oral arts” comes to pass, it is incumbent upon those who attempt to translate and explain oral tradition to do so in a manner that is more easily understood by the dominant majority. Keeping Slug Woman Alive is an engaging text that is understandable for most people coming from a background steeped in oral tradition, but for the more usual readership, it is not. Much more can and must be done before Havelock’s interwoven tapestry of orality and literacy can be seen for more than just the obvious tapestry. Oral tradition must be translated and explicaded so that readers see beyond just the tapestry itself to an understanding of the cultural impulses that make up the weaving.

NOTES

1. The central theme of Sarris’s book is the life and storytelling of Pomo elder Mabel McKay, a relative of Sarris.
2. Kwakiutl Texts and Kathlamet Texts are two of Boas’s books that record oral traditions in literary form; although these and others by Boas have been reprinted, all editions are out of print.

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THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY

One of the central debates in Native criticism concerns the difficulty of resolving conflicts between ethnic identification and literary judgment. Approaching this problem from a sociological perspective, we suggest a way to rethink critical treatments of Native American identity and authenticity. Specifically, the following proposal outlines a model for discussing the concept of ethnic authenticity in terms of the social relations that influence the field of Native American literary production. We focus on two pragmatic issues: first, how members of the field put judgments of authenticity to social use; second, how critics and authors perceive these judgments as either legitimate or illegitimate. We believe that questions about the grounds of authenticity cannot be answered by reconstructing the purportedly distinct contents of Native and non-Native epistemologies. Instead of evaluating authenticity’s epistemological dimensions, we claim that its rhetorical and sociological dimensions take greater precedence. Accordingly, we recommend reframing the problem of authenticity as follows: in what institutional, cultural, and social relations do the meanings of authenticity matter, and how do different members of the field use these meanings for either cooperative or competitive purposes?

If critics focus on the social foundations and strategic uses of identity concepts, they can simply assume that contradictions and ambivalences will inevitably accompany discussions of ethnic authenticity. From a relational perspective, these contradictions and
ambivalences don’t originate in critical discourse itself. Instead they
grow out of the dynamics of social struggles for domination—even
when those struggles have altruistic and solidaristic goals. As Pierre
Bourdieu’s sociological studies have vividly illustrated, struggles for
domination take place in various fields of power that intersect with
and nest within one another. With respect to Native criticism, the
fields of power that influence it obey their own unique evaluative
logics. At stake in these different logics are either institutional rank,
cultural expertise, or ethnic identification.

Efforts to assess the Native American literary field would benefit
from Bourdieu’s relational approach to cultural production for three
reasons. First, it shifts focus to the social foundations of identity
concepts. Second, as a result, it promises to take critical discussion
beyond the often pointless quest for epistemological foundations.
Third, its assumption that different forms of capital circulate within
and among different fields of power helps identify various social
uses of identity concepts. We set aside questions about whether the
concept of authenticity has identifiable ontological or epistemologi-
cal referents. Instead we treat authenticity as a form of “ethnic capi-
tal” that acquires its value from power struggles within the field of
Native criticism.

Bourdieu describes fields as hierarchical “social spaces” in which
people occupy different status positions. Just as importantly, people
perceive one another to occupy these positions, sometimes accu-
rately and sometimes inaccurately (Distinction 99–125; Bourdieu
and Wacquant, Invitation 94–115). Like the broader field of cultural
production, Native criticism is a relatively autonomous social space
that operates according to its own rules and power dynamics. In turn
these operations predetermine how critics will be able to use certain
terms and concepts. They also predetermine what kinds of politi-
cal, cultural, and aesthetic judgments critics can make about either
authors or other critics. In outlining a map of the field’s relational
dynamics, we call attention to some of its social and emotional stakes.
Since these stakes can often be overlooked in strictly epistemological
or normative discussions, we hope that our extension of Bourdieu’s
model of cultural production can bring to light some of the field’s
elusive laws of classification, judgment, and “symbolic consecration” (see Field 112–41; Rules 141–73).

**Identity and Authenticity**

Ever since publications like Charles Larson’s *American Indian Fiction* and Paula Gunn Allen’s *Studies in American Indian Literature*, Native American literary criticism has wrestled with the problem of authenticity. In recent political philosophy, many complex and interesting debates have arisen concerning the recognition and legitimacy of cultural and ethnic authenticity (see Benhabib; Habermas, *Inclusion*; Taylor; Turner; Young). These debates are particularly relevant to discussions about resolving cross-cultural conflicts. But to simplify the concept in sociological terms, we define “authenticity” in regard to Native American identity as *whatever anyone considers to be truly, purely, or naturally Indian*. Some schools of thought assume that certain traits and attributes are what qualify a person or a cultural text as authentic, and they conceive of these traits as personal possessions. But from a relational perspective, what is more important than assumed intrinsic traits are the social positions from which critics or authors make authenticity judgments. Accordingly concepts like “the authentic” and “the inauthentic” do not refer to ontological features of identity that can be defined once and for all by means of observation and logical proof. Nor can these concepts be decisively pinned down by reconstructing a given social group’s collective epistemology—as in the dubious but persistent notion that Native epistemology is somehow more “dialogic” than Euroamerican epistemology. Sidestepping this essentialist approach, the sociological perspective treats identity concepts more as cognitive tools and cultural symbols that have specific rhetorical and social uses (see Alexander; Brubaker and Cooper; Emirbayer; Fuchs; Somers; White).

The aim of our relational approach is to map the Native critical field’s social dynamics. This aim should be distinguished from efforts either to evaluate the field’s moral and political norms or to affirm its aesthetic values. In criticism that takes a normative or ethical approach, a central goal is to unmask how essentialist notions
of identity can lead to what Bourdieu calls “symbolic violence”—for example, inaccurate stereotyping, cultural condescension, and ethnocentric projection (Bourdieu, *Language* 163–70). In aesthetically oriented criticism, the basic task is to define and consecrate the literary techniques and effects that members of the field ought to value most—for example, narrating from multiple perspectives, leaving ambiguities and ambivalences unresolved, privileging orality, or highlighting the difference between spoken and written languages. Rather than taking up those tasks, we aim only to classify certain “position-taking strategies” that critics can and typically do use (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 125–68; *Rules*, 231–42). Whether critics deploy these strategies consciously or not is a complex question best left to psychological speculation. But our model starts with the assumption that critics deploy these strategies either to preserve or to improve their self-perceived positions within the field of Native American literary production.

**FIELDS, CAPITALS, AND STRATEGIES**

Concerning cultural as opposed to economic fields of production, no one has analyzed their uniquely dynamic flows of power as exhaustively and perceptively as Bourdieu. In works like *Distinction, The Rules of Art*, and *The Field of Cultural Production*, he provides multidimensional and empirically dense analyses of the complex relations among artistic traditions, popular culture, class distinctions, politics, and economics. Similarly, in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, he attempts to show how Heidegger’s philosophical style grew out of the interactions between the German academic field and the field of Nazi political power. Building on the insights of these works, recent studies have extended Bourdieu’s approach to other literary and cultural fields—for example, Richard H. Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters*, Gisèle Sapiro’s *La Guerre des Écrivains: 1940–1953*, Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters*, and James F. English’s *The Economy of Prestige*. Since Native criticism occupies a unique position within both the mainstream literary field and the broader field of power, we think it would benefit from a similar extension of Bourdieu’s approach.
This approach rests on two macrosocial assumptions: first, that the social world consists of different fields of power; second, that various forms of capital circulate and transform into one another both within and between these fields (“Forms” 183–98; Rules 214–77; Sociology 72–77). Bourdieu characterizes fields as structures of relations in which people struggle for dominance and control. These struggles take place between those more endowed and those less endowed with the form, or sometimes multiple forms, of capital that members of the field happen to value at particular historical moments. Members more endowed with the valued forms of capital tend to follow “conservation strategies.” In Native criticism, such strategies would include symbolic actions like insisting on critical orthodoxy, endorsing the institutional status quo, or asserting the priority of academic rank. By contrast, members less endowed with the valued forms of capital are more inclined to pursue “subversion strategies.” These would include symbolic actions like rejecting disciplinary boundaries, questioning academic status hierarchies, or proposing either unorthodox critical methods or alternative canons of taste.

If Native American literary criticism is a field of social struggle, at stake in it are three basic forms of capital. Critics determine one another’s status within the field according to the amounts and proportions of either institutional, cultural, or ethnic capital they possess. Whether a critic possesses these forms of capital is not a brute natural fact but a relational social fact. That distinction is important because other members of the field must perceive a critic or author to possess a form of capital that is appropriate to his or her position in the Native literary field as it is both collectively and individually imagined.

Institutional capital refers to the rank, the official title, or the economic status of a critic within the hierarchies of either the academy or the publishing industry. If we assume that the academy and the publishing industry must ultimately adapt to the constraints of the field of power (i.e., the state and the economy), institutional capital usually trumps the relatively weak forms of cultural and ethnic capital.
Cultural capital refers to the degrees of erudition, intelligence, insight, and stylistic virtuosity that members of the field attribute to critics and authors in either their public personas or their written work. Institutional capital ultimately overrides cultural capital because, in global and national social systems, the fields of economic and political power dominate the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, *Rules* 121–25; *State Nobility* 264–72; Habermas, *Between* 341–87). Nevertheless, members of literary fields assert the superior, field-specific value of cultural capital whenever they perform symbolic actions like celebrating avant-garde achievements or accusing other authors and critics of “selling out.”

Finally, ethnic capital refers to perceptions and judgments of an author or critic as either legitimately or illegitimately Native. Ethnic capital becomes important when members of the field invest legitimate Natives with certain forms of moral, aesthetic, or cultural authority—particularly when they perceive these forms of authority as deriving from authentic Native identity. If members believe that a non-Native critic is failing to acknowledge these forms of authority, or challenging them, or trying to co-opt them, the question of who possesses legitimate ethnic capital becomes the central issue in struggles for dominance.

**Transformation within the Field**

Within any field one form of capital can transform into another for a variety of reasons. In some cases social actors who want to participate and succeed in a new field may be able to exchange a form of capital for another form that they do not already possess. But if these potential members want to succeed in the new field, this other form of capital must be one that members of the target field value more. For example, non-Native critics known for their work on canonical authors like William Faulkner or Toni Morrison can use their existing reputations to help draw attention to Native authors who remain excluded from the canon. In such cases the cultural capital of critical reputation transforms into the ethnic capital of minority solidarity. In other cases social actors may renounce the capital
they already possess so that they can either take up a different position within their present field or enter a different field altogether. For example, legitimately Native critics may want other members of the mainstream literary field to disregard their ethnic capital so that they can be free to study canonical authors like John Milton, Virginia Woolf, or Franz Kafka. Simultaneously, they might also feel institutional pressure from administrators and colleagues who want them to focus only on Native American subjects. Other permutations of capital conflict abound, and these examples represent only a few of the possible dilemmas that Native and non-Native critics are likely to face. But our general point is that dilemmas like these will inevitably arise because Native criticism is a field in which institutional, cultural, and ethnic capital acquire different values under different social circumstances and perceptions.

As a preliminary outline for analyzing the field’s complex array of perceptions and judgments, we identify three ideal-typical practices that define critics’ positions. First, non-Indian critics can write about Indian literature. Adopting Jeffrey Alexander’s term, we call these critics “solidaristic” because they participate in the Native literary field to help promote broader cultural respect and recognition for Indians. Second, Indians can claim that Indian critics should write only about Indian literature. For simplicity’s sake, we call these critics “nationalist” because they advocate preserving Native culture from colonizing, assimilating, or corrupting external influences. Third, both Indians and non-Indians can write criticism that advocates a respect for cultural pluralism and diversity. We call these critics “cosmopolitan” because, while they advocate cultural respect, they reject notions of cultural and ethnic purity, and they criticize the legacies of hostility and oppression that have historically accompanied those notions.

These ideal types might seem to represent a restrictive or unconditional view of the field. But note that complexities and indeterminacies arise when we recognize how the forms of institutional, cultural, and ethnic capital constantly circulate through a wide variety of symbolic struggles. This typology is intended not to establish rigid categories but rather to lay out parameters, and we realize
that the complexities of critical practice will always cut across these parameters. But as we chart some typical practices within the field of Native criticism, the question of capital always returns us to the constantly shifting relations among institutional rank, cultural expertise, and ethnic identification. These shifting relations are precisely what define the symbolic struggles in which critics compete for different kinds of dominance.

Regarding the first ideal-typical practice, non-Indians who write about Indian literature can view their own critical practice as a legitimate effort to establish solidarity with Native minorities. By opposing the institutional and cultural dominance of the traditional literary canon, solidaristic critics pursue a subversion strategy. They champion Indians who have been denied access to the fields of institutional and cultural power, and they try to question and challenge the exclusionary practices that define existing canons of taste. Conversely, those who want to preserve a traditional idea of the canon charge these critics with importing irrelevant considerations of ethnic capital into fields that should be dominated by cultural capital. This perspective has mostly fallen out of favor within the academy, but notable recent examples of it include Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon* and its more penetrating and level-headed counterparts, Robert Alter’s *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* and William H. Gass’s *Tests of Time*. By contrast, from the very different perspective of nationalist critics, non-Indian solidaristic critics might be seen as complicit with the dominant mainstream in spite of themselves. Instead of promoting cultural recognition, solidaristic critics can seem to be co-opting Native ethnic capital for their own institutional interests. Whether such charges are valid is difficult to prove. More importantly, though, they circulate in the field quite frequently because of discrepancies between judgments based on ethnic as opposed to cultural capital.

An example of the second ideal-typical practice is the group that could be labeled Indigenous Literary Nationalists. These nationalists claim that Native critics should write about Native authors to privilege Indian cultural traditions. In their literary judgments they
assert the priority, if not the absolutism, of Native American ethnic
capital. One aim of their practice is to protect ethnic capital (i.e.,
Native authenticity) from the corrupting or assimilating influence of
dominant Western traditions and institutions. Moreover, from the
nationalist perspective, critics who call for Native intellectual sover-
eignty are engaging in subversion strategies that are intended to pre-
serve the autonomy of Native American literature and to prevent it
from being co-opted by either the academic mainstream or the mass
media. But if nationalist critics happen to be dominant in a given
field (e.g., within a specific American Indian studies program), their
promotion of Native cultural authenticity also functions as a conserv-
ation strategy that preserves existing local distributions of ethnic
capital. Those who adopt this strategy would presumably have the
highest degrees of ethnic capital and would therefore want to protect
it as a rare and valuable possession, much like the symbolic capital of
honor. By contrast, non-Native or cosmopolitan critics might view
this protectionist stance as ethnocentric or even self-serving. If, how-
ever, it is judged from within the nationalist perspective, it has an
entirely different moral and political meaning.

Finally, in the third, cosmopolitan type of criticism, critics try to
avoid asserting the priority of ethnic capital. By questioning notions
of ethnic and cultural purity and their relevance to literary criti-
cism, cosmopolitans might be seen as subverting the ethnic capi-
tal that nationalists privilege. From cosmopolitans’ standpoint, they
are questioning the assumption that ethnic capital in its own right
deserves this privileged status in the literary field. At the same time,
they express their unease with the historical legacies of ethnic purity
enforcement—for example, racism, imperialism, and colonialism.
But from the nationalists’ contrasting perspective, cosmopolitan
critics can seem to be interloping or colonizing outsiders who can’t
help but serve Western cultural, economic, and political hegemony.
Similarly, when cosmopolitan critics question specific assertions of
Native cultural purity, nationalists can dismiss them as being com-
plicit with the legacies of Western domination and colonialism.

These and many other patterns of social judgment circulate
throughout the Native critical field, and many critics seem to have internalized them to the point of naturalization. But we call attention to these patterns because we believe that they should be analyzed as the social relations that they are rather than as the paths to epistemological certainty or moral superiority that many critics mistake them to be.

CONCLUSION

A broad, speculative model like the one we describe here cannot characterize this or any field once and for all time. Instead we propose it as a preliminary attempt to map out the field’s present social dynamics. Lest the model seem too simplistic, keep in mind that we call it “relational” for three reasons. First, because it assumes that Native authenticity can only be determined by the perceptions and judgments of the critics whose claims are recognized as legitimate by other members of the field. Second, because it also assumes that critics’ perceptions and judgments will vary according to the positions within the field that they themselves occupy. Third, just as importantly, because these perceptions and judgments will also vary according to the positions members of the field perceive other authors and critics to occupy. If we take all these complexities of position and perception into account, adequately mapping the field would require much more detailed interpretive analysis and empirical documentation.

At the very least we hope that this model of the Native American literary field calls attention to the various ways in which social interactions can determine specific meanings and uses of authenticity judgments. From one sociohistorical context to another, these meanings and uses will vary because the memberships of institutions and social relations constantly change and intermingle. But a fully developed analysis of the field’s social dynamics would be a useful supplement to the epistemological and normative discussions of authenticity and identity that constitute much of the field’s current discourse.
WORKS CITED


Since this essay may be read as a complaint, I want to begin by acknowledging the necessity of teaching Native American and other indigenous literatures both alongside and independent of Western texts. Instructors should teach these works by listening to the Native authors’ worldviews and literary traditions. I’m sure many of us would like to see more literature professors able to integrate Native works into their reading lists and to do so competently—that is, in a culturally sensitive manner that allows students to recognize tribal influences. As Paula Gunn Allen’s 1983 handbook for teaching Native literature asserts, “context and continuity are two of the most important areas to be taken into account in the study and teaching of American Indian literature” (xi). We who are teachers of Native literature occupy a critical role in contextualization because we are introducing many non-Native students to Native American peoples and literatures. We are responsible for teaching students to listen to Native voices in Natives’ own tongues. If we are successful, “non-Indian students are forced to consider a culture alien to their own: a view of the world that is holistic rather than pluralistic and one to which writers and thinkers have continually turned for inspiration” (275).

In my experience teaching college English courses to non-Natives, students usually possess neither the analytical framework nor the historical context to evaluate Native expressions. Most English professors can assign novels like Uncle Tom’s Cabin or The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass without a long lecture about slavery, African
American stereotypes, nineteenth-century American culture, and the duality of Christian morality. American college students generally possess some knowledge of slavery and the Civil War. But teachers of Native expressions cannot assume that students have prior knowledge about Native tribes and peoples. When we try to teach Native literatures conscientiously, we find ourselves in the challenging position of teaching a complex weave of subjects: we discuss aspects of history, law, federal and tribal politics, and clan/social relations before opening the first novel. We also have to explain the individual tribe’s oral and written storytelling traditions to show the continuity of contemporary works.

This paper points out several problems instructors may encounter when including Native-authored materials and trying to interpret them appropriately. The problems of bringing tribal specificity to the classroom are manifold, and while we often review how best to approach teaching Native subjects, the applicability of our pedagogies have avoided critical scrutiny. There are four areas where teachers should be forewarned when incorporating Native literature into their teaching platforms: context selection, accessibility, time, and assessment.

Perhaps the most daunting issue facing our field is that we do not have a general consensus on what constitutes the tribal context for each tribe and how it should be applied effectively in the classroom. What is commonly called the Native American Renaissance is wonderful, in no small part because it shows the continuity of people and tribes surviving. As critics, we have been able to move away from pan-Indian generalizations, but it has confronted us with an old structural dilemma when it comes to devising syllabi—breadth versus depth. What are the salient cultural resources of each tribe all instructors need to include? Dorothea Susag’s supplemental bibliographies in *Roots and Branches* are a good start, but currently our field lacks a respectable bibliography attentive to individual tribal nations or literatures.

There are at least four areas instructors should consider when reviewing context selection for a Native author: the tribe’s spiritual perspective underpinning social actions like gender or clan rela-
tions and conveyed through a specific language; the traditions and resources of the tribe as represented by themselves, including the oral and written forms of event keeping, ceremony, art, and self-expression; the legal relationships of the tribe, specifically, its treaties with governments and regional tribes; the contemporary tribal traditions, politics, economies, and political actions. Granted, non-stereotypical representations of specific tribes, sometimes authorized by tribal elders or citizens, are more available now than in the twentieth century. These written or visual texts can aid students in understanding a tribal context as well as in seeing the necessity of producing culturally sensitive readings. Nevertheless, this is a significant amount of preparatory material at an introductory as well as a tribal-specific level.

Furthermore, while illuminating this complex weave is the ideal objective, the methods for doing so remain obscured to most instructors. The rapid increase in Native-authored texts has been met incompletely by publishers, who are responsible for the paucity of available teacher’s guides to teaching Native literature. Allen’s handbook *Studies in American Indian Literature* and Susag’s *Roots and Branches* are the two most widely used, but they are hardly to be found in every college library. Smaller, more narrowed guides, such as Melody Graulich’s anthology of essays on Silko’s *Yellow Woman*, which focus on a genre or an individual author, are even scantier. For English professors teaching now who attended graduate school before Native literature was commonly taught or before there were Native or Indian studies programs, this dearth of preparatory materials stymies the effective inclusion of Native texts in the classroom.

The second pitfall is accessibility, by which I refer to who is permitted to speak or learn about certain cultural knowledge. The balance we must strike here—encouraging non-Native students to access and comprehend Native literature without simultaneously reinforcing the implicit white privilege to penetrate—can be difficult. We work to prevent condoning what James Cox has coined “poachers” and their random acts of poaching Native resources, while getting students, in a limited amount of time, to attend to cultural differences (qtd. in Justice 248n3). Yet how does one spend only
two weeks exploring the edges of a magnificent tribal weave and not trivialize culture? If students only experience Native ways inside the classroom, I am not sure they are anything more than tourists with me as the reluctant bus driver pointing out landmarks.

Often critical race readings reinforce to students the inescapable ethno-tourism of their classroom acts. In doing so, those voices may undermine the fundamental objectives of teaching such literatures to non-Natives. When discussing issues of exploitation and white privilege to University of Utah students, for example, we spent the majority of class time trying to understand indigenous expressions; one could sense students’ frustration when they were exposed to some of the critical theories that assert that most students should not presume to understand because their skin color delineates their comprehension as a form of intellectual piracy.

As instructors we need to be careful about disseminating certain tribal knowledge. Most of us understand that not anyone may expose tribal context or ceremony. Who feels secure discussing the Sun Dance in class? Can we teach about a tribal author whose language we do not speak? How many feel confident we know enough about related fields that students are likely to ask about? Or that we educate our students about a specific tribe with the complexity that it merits? Whenever possible, instructors should turn to tribal elders for both course development issues and guest lectures, especially when the topics involve ceremony.

On the other hand, although we want more people to teach Native literature, because of the demands of tribal specificity, we are on the verge of erecting criteria that allow only a handful of people to teach it. I refer, in part, to those seeking Native American literary separatism but also to the general consensus that we need to contextualize materials in greater depth. I have never met a person who argued that only Hopis should teach Hopi poetry: such hiring policies would virtually end the inclusion of Native literature in academia. But it is fair to assume that a Hopi will usually be more knowledgeable than a non-Hopi about it. There clearly have been teachers unqualified to represent Natives and their cultures. Not everyone should try to teach Hopi poetry.
Many Native intellectuals and elders, including Allen and Susag, have advised us how to instruct with respect: through asserting tribal specificity, through refuting stereotypes, and through personal responsibility to the tribe and the community in question. One should generally refrain from attempting to teach authors from distant tribes, for example, because one will be unlikely to have much access to elders or others with appropriate knowledge. Library resources will also be thin. Academic freedom is one thing, but to imply that there are no consequences for pursuing certain scholarly avenues is irresponsible. Non-Natives who teach Native literature should be accountable to the tribes they study. If possible, we need to initiate contact and offer something in return for the gift of knowledge that we have been permitted; this reciprocal gift may be many things, tobacco, a song, food, a kind act, or word of thanks. Since we all answer to the Great Spirit, there will be consequences, whether acknowledged or not, if we poach.

The most practical issue in the class is time: how much time does one spend providing background information about the author’s tribe? We must first ignore literary theorists’ declamations against the author and her relevancy in interpreting texts—no small feat given the prevalence of Barthes, Derrida, and Foucault in the graduate English curricula. But their well-known arguments don’t really take into account the cultural differences of readers from authors. Each one tends to assume a shared frame of reference between readers and authors—or, at least, minimizes the differences as beyond the realm of cultural exploitation. But the Native author represents a unique case when it comes to questions of authorial intention because of cultural difference. Regardless of what they “intended,” these writers tend to speak from a cultural context and have an understanding of the Word different from our non-Native students.

In literature courses we usually devote a couple of weeks (a month at most) to contextualize the author’s tribal connections and read their work. How can any teacher convey the richness and depth of any Native culture and read a book in a fortnight without reinforcing white privilege or ethno-tourism? This is a sincere struggle for
someone who wants to illuminate some amazing indigenous cultures without intentionally or inadvertently exploiting tribal nations or their intellectual resources. This is true especially if we want our students to be able to write credible papers and not become poachers. My pedagogical strategies have left me feeling *mas y menos*, and I gaze hopefully upon readers for assistance.

The final pitfall is assessing student learning, a Trickster’s task, especially if students are resistant to alternative perspectives. That is, it is impossible to assess whether or not a person has become holistic in his or her thinking or sincere in all his or her relations. What we can reasonably assess is not just students’ ability to understand when Natives voice their positions but their ability to produce tribal-sensitive forms of contextualization and continuity. The main challenge I have encountered is student papers: they are perpetually in-credible. There are three impediments: first, students have Internet-limited access to the cultural resources of Native American tribes. Most Native authors recognize this disinformation gap since their works often inculcate in the students the precise reading strategies that attend to a tribal worldview or interpretive model, but these strategies are not always successful and never quantifiable.

Second, assigned secondary readings by intellectuals like Craig Womack, Barre Toelken, Susan Brill De Ramirez, or even Arnold Krupat that suggest how students might acquire a tribal-sensitive perspective are helpful in a general sense as they address how readers must perceive Native texts differently. But they are insufficient for instructing students as to the specifics of how and when individual texts should be placed in their respective literary traditions, and they do not address the role of the nonliterary resources that have influenced the original literary production. If students do not know any Yellow Woman tales, for instance, it is harder for them to interpret Silko’s *Storyteller*. As helpful as Allen and Susag’s books are, they each fall short on this matter. Guest speakers from the tribe in question may or may not resolve this issue, depending both on what they know and what they are willing to share.
Third, our method of assigning criticism on a specific text clearly is the most common solution that teachers use for conditioning students to grasp the oral traditions and tribal perspectives at play in a text. The danger here becomes one of privileging a fictional Native reader or a single interpretation of any text that is more authentic than another. Rather than opening up students’ discussions, introducing tribal-sensitive readings can tend to foreclose the students’ ability to negotiate the text and its differences. Assigned criticism seems to dictate the only right way to view a text. If students do know about Yellow Woman, then applying their perhaps limited knowledge becomes the sum total of how they read Storyteller. Basically students’ papers represent more what students don’t know rather than what they have learned.

My bread to fry then is not that tribal specificity is inappropriate or should not be deployed as a primary frame of reference for interpreting literature produced by Native peoples. It is just that, given the time restraints, it will often be impractical for many English classrooms to contextualize Native literatures fully while keeping to course objectives, tribal expectations, and professional responsibilities.

As much as tribal specificity is lauded for its interpretive hermeneutics, the recent calls for a Native American literary separatism seem a bit cavalier. Besides establishing an impossible standard for most reading audiences, focusing on the tribal exclusively as an interpretive framework would not only be incomplete but also short-sighted since it is likely to resegregate Native literature from the mainstream classroom. One clear consequence would be the continued public ignorance of American Indians and their art as well as misguided racism. In order for Native textual productions to be contextualized fully, a study of the literature needs to be done in conjunction with evaluating how the author both draws from non-Native resources and speaks to non-Native audiences. Anglo, African, Russian, and European cultures constitute a vital part of any Native American context in the past two centuries. Personally I am committed to establishing a transcultural context and continuity when bringing these literatures to students. Me’gwich.
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Contributor Biographies

Chadwick Allen is Associate Professor of English at The Ohio State University and, in 2007–2008, the Moore Distinguished Visiting Professor in ethnic literatures at the University of Oregon. He is the author of Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts and articles on comparative indigenous literary studies, post-colonial theory, and popular representations of U.S. western frontiers.

Joseph Bauerkemper, a PhD candidate in American studies at the University of Minnesota, is currently completing a doctoral dissertation titled “Narrating Nationhood: Radical Traditions in Native Fiction.” The project explores the critiques of state-nationalism and market-globalism that several native writers convey in their literary works and makes explicit the ways in which these same texts narrate notions of nationhood neither derivative of nor beholden to colonizing paradigms.

Ron Carpenter currently teaches writing and English at the beautiful Turtle Mountain Community College in North Dakota. He received his PhD from the University of Utah in 2005. He and his fiancée Susie Laducer are expecting a baby boy in January.

Stephanie Fitzgerald (Cree) holds a joint appointment in English and Indigenous Nations Studies at the University of Kansas. Her essay on the textual iconography of Native basketry is forthcoming in Early Native Literacies: A Documentary and Critical Anthology. She recently coedited a special issue on American Indian autobiography for the American Indian Culture and Research Journal.
Laura M. Furlan (Apache/Osage/Cherokee) is Assistant Professor of English at the University of South Dakota. She coedited the volume Crossing Lines: Race and Mixed Race across the Geohistorical Divide (2003) and is currently at work on a book about urban Indian fiction.

Angela M. Haas is a mixed-blood of Eastern Cherokee, German, and other Euroamerican ancestry. She is a PhD candidate in the Rhetoric and Writing Graduate Program at Michigan State University. Her recent research includes the investigation of digital writing practices of women and American Indians and the cultural and political contexts that shape those practices, as evidenced by her publications in Computers & Composition, Computers & Composition Online, and the forthcoming edited collection Webbing Cyberfeminist Practices. She is pursuing a concentration in digital cultural rhetorics, and her current research is concerned with revisioning the history of digital and visual rhetoric through the recovery of indigenous rhetorics.

Inés Hernández-Ávila (Nez Perce and Tejana) is Professor of Native American Studies at the University of California, Davis. She is one of the six-member national steering committee that organized the meeting “What’s Next for Native American/Indigenous Studies” at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, in May 2007. She continues on the steering committee as one of the organizers for the April 2008 meeting that will be held in Athens, Georgia. She is the editor of Reading Native American Women: Critical/Creative Representations. She is coeditor, with Gail Tremblay, of a special issue on indigenous women, for Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies, and coeditor, with Domino Renee Perez, of a special issue on the intersections between American Indian and Chicana/o literature for SAIL.

Thomas Hove has published articles on Herman Melville, postmodern fiction, and social theories of the mass media. He currently teaches in the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Georgia.

Kelli Lyon Johnson is Assistant Professor of English at Miami University Hamilton, where she teaches Native literature, Latina/o literature, women’s literature, and writing. Her publications include a book on Julia Alvarez and several essays on place, memory, mapping, and human rights in the works of Ana Castillo, Edwidge Danticat, Demetria Martínez, and other Chicana, Caribbean, and Native women writers. She is currently writing a book about literature and human rights.
MOLLY MCGLENNEN is mixed-blood (Anishinaabe, French, Irish), born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is presently the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Native American Studies at Vassar College; in fall 2008, she will begin her position as Assistant Professor of English at Vassar. She received her PhD in Native American studies from University of California, Davis, in 2005, with her dissertation work on contemporary indigenous women’s poetry. She also earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Mills College in 1998. Her poetry has appeared in such journals as Frontiers, Shenandoah, and Atlantis and in the anthology Genocide of the Mind: New Native American Writing.

JOHN M. MCKINN (Maricopa) is an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Community and the assistant director of American Indian studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

WILLIAM S. PENN (Nez Perce) is the author of the novels The Absence of Angels and Killing Time with Strangers (winner of the American Book Award). His collection of narrative essays, All My Sins Are Relatives, won The North American Indian Prose Award. His collection of short stories, This Is the World, is a finalist for the Iowa Prize for Short Fiction, and individual stories from that collection have won the Stephen Crane Prize for Fiction. Previously the director of the creative writing program at Michigan State University, he is currently circulating Hazing (a novel) and The Absence of Angels (a film script) and working on a literary mystery novel and a new collection of essays. He is a member of the of the American Indian studies faculty at MSU.

LISA TATONETTI is Assistant Professor of English and American Ethnic Studies at Kansas State University. She studies, teaches, and publishes on American Indian literatures, multiethnic American literatures, GLBTQ/Two-Spirit literatures, and cultural studies.

CHRISTOPHER B. TEUTON (Cherokee) is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Denver, where he teaches American Indian literature, multicultural literature, and American literature. His recent work includes coediting with Craig S. Womack and Daniel Heath Justice Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective, forthcoming in January 2008 from the University of Oklahoma Press; and authoring “Interpreting Our World: Authority and the Written Word in Robert J. Conley’s Real People Series,” which recently appeared in MFS: Modern Fiction Studies.
Franci Washburn is an assistant professor at the University of Arizona with a dual appointment in the American Indian Studies Program and the Department of English. She teaches classes in American Indian literature and critical theory. She has published articles in Indigenous Nations Studies Journal, American Indian Culture and Research Journal, and American Indian Quarterly as well as in SAIL. Her latest article appears in the fall 2007 issue of Wicazo Sa. In addition to academic writing, she also publishes creative works. Her novel Elsie’s Business was published by University of Nebraska Press in 2006.
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