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CONTENTS

vii From the Editors

ARTICLES

- 1 A Narrative of Motives: Solicitation and Confession in
Linda Hogan's *Power*
PASCALE MCCULLOUGH MANNING
- 22 "You can't run away nowadays": Redefining Modernity in
D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*
ALICIA A. KENT

INTERVIEW

- 47 A Conversation with David Treuer
VIRGINIA KENNEDY

POETRY

- 64 Removals; Columbus Day 2092; Dialectic
SCOTT ANDREWS

SPECIAL SECTION: REASONING TOGETHER

- 75 *Reasoning Together*: An Introduction
CRAIG S. WOMACK

77 The Delicate Dance of Reasoning and Togetherness

KRISTINA FAGAN

102 The Past, Present, and Possible Futures of
American Indian Literary Studies

JAMES H. COX

BOOK REVIEWS

113 David Treuer. *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*
and *The Translation of Dr. Apelles: A Love Story*

JOHN D. KALB

117 Suzanne S. Rancourt. *Billboard in the Clouds*

PAT KENNEDY

119 Robin Coffee. *A Scar Upon Our Voice*

MOLLY MCGLENNEN

123 Connie Ann Kirk (Seneca). *Sky Dancers*
EdNah New Rider Weber (Pawnee). *Rattlesnake Mesa:
Stories from a Native American Childhood*
Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.
Beaver Steals Fire, a Salish Coyote Story

BEVERLY SLAPIN

128 Paige Raibmon. *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter
from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*

JEFFREY P. SHEPHERD

131 Contributor Biographies

134 Major Tribal Nations and Bands Mentioned in This Issue

FROM THE EDITORS

The creative and scholarly contributions to this issue exemplify the strong health of contemporary Indigenous literary studies and the energetic conversations between diverse communities, texts, eras, ideas, and methods. The two critical essays take up canonical texts in the field—Linda Hogan’s *Power* and D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*—and locate them not only in the rich critical discourses of Native literature but also in relation to broader social and literary movements. Virginia Kennedy’s interview with Ojibwe writer David Treuer follows on this theme and serves as a provocative extension of ongoing debates in the field about the relationship between culture and the arts of literary expression. Three poems by Scott Andrews (Cherokee) provide a creative complement to these texts and thoughtfully gesture toward some of the more compelling questions raised in the essays and interview.

In addition to our attempt to build stronger coalitions among literary scholars in our field in Canada and the United States, we are introducing in this issue a feature that we hope to use with some frequency: review essays of publications that we believe will have substantial impact on our work. This issue features two review essays—one from a U.S. scholar, the other from a scholar in Canada—on *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, which has just been published by the University of Oklahoma Press. The collection’s twelve coauthors have devoted their energies over the course of several years to contemplating what constitutes an ethical American Indian literary criticism. We look forward to

your thoughts on the review essays and our conversations about *Reasoning Together*, and we hope that you will keep us informed about other forthcoming texts that would be well served by such a forum.

We also wanted to mention the publication of a relatively new journal of American Indian writing called *Yellow Medicine Review: A Journal of Indigenous Literature, Art and Thought*. Four issues of the journal have been published by Southwest Minnesota State University, and each one includes an astonishing group of Indigenous writers. We wish the journal success and hope to hear and see discussions about it at conferences and in the pages of *SAIL*.

Daniel Heath Justice

James H. Cox

A Narrative of Motives

Solicitation and Confession in Linda Hogan's *Power*

PASCALE MCCULLOUGH MANNING

I confess. This is no simple statement. It is a declaration, an illocutionary act, and a technique for the production of truth.¹ It is an ecstatic utterance, outside the usual stasis of statement, residing within what Michel Foucault calls a "ritual of discourse" (61). Confession is not made to the void. It is a discursive exchange between the subject who speaks and the object who listens. Whether the listener is God, a priest, a judge, a doctor, or a psychiatrist, confession always takes an object/listener.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes that "the confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner" who serves a corroborative function to the confession (61). "I confess" simultaneously constitutes an I and a you. The confession constructs an intimacy between both "the one who speaks and what he is speaking about" and the one who speaks and the one who is spoken to (62).

In the act of confessing, the subject/confessor is dramatized while the confession itself is verified, deciphered, and consolidated by the object of the statement, the listener. Thus the confession also constitutes a hierarchy in which the apparent subject of the statement, the confessant, is subjected to the confession that the confessor—the listener—transforms into discourse. In this transformation of confession into discourse, the confessant becomes the object of the listener's discourse, becomes encoded by the laws of

the discourse in which she stages her subjectivity—the discourse in which she becomes discernible. Thus, in accepting the conventions of the confessional contract, the speaking subject repeats a text that has already been written. She repeats rather than expresses a truth about herself. She speaks into the discourse already waiting to receive her. The role of the listener is to knit the speaker's confession into discourse.

Linda Hogan's novel *Power* explores the attempts of three scientific discourses—law, anthropology, and environmentalism, all of which rely on empirical evidence and search for causality in the object of study—to articulate the subjectivity of both the Native American (in this case, the Taigas) and the endangered Florida panther. I will argue that Hogan's narrative stages a rupture whereby the connection cannot be made between confessor and listener and wherein the testimony of the authority is continually confounded and interrupted by the subjects whose testimonies are solicited. More specifically, the connection cannot be made between anthropologist and Taiga Indian, between lawyer and witness, or between environmentalist and panther.

We confess to figures of authority. This relationship between speaker and listener constitutes the confession. The listener serves a corroborative function, holding the power to constitute a discourse of the subject; she contains the subject in language, and it is she who decodes the confession and who possesses the map of the confessor's subjectivity. According to Foucault, our confessions want to be spoken; they want to be drawn out and remembered (71–83). Our confessions give voice to our subjectivity. In the end, "I confess" articulates both the desire of the confessor and that of the listener to express the inexpressible, which is precisely the subjectivity of the self. Confession thus provides a stage for the ritualized production and maintenance of subjectivity. Through ongoing "performances" the human subject finds and exercises discursive existence in the world.

Subjectivity is born of the confessional. Foucault sees the normalization of the process of confession in Western societies as one technique through which we are made known to each other—and

to ourselves—as subjects. The confessor is filtered through the listener, whose own subjectivity is not simply staged through the process of hearing confession but is consolidated by the assimilation and recording of the truth of the other. Confession engenders knowledge and power in the listener, and the confessional is an ephemeral structure whose shape is cast the moment a subject says “I confess” to a listener who bends her ear and assimilates—thus, verifies, deciphers, modifies, records, and, finally, produces—the testimony.²

In exercising discursive existence through the confessional performance, the confessor does not speak in autonomy; instead, she tells the story and speaks the discursive codes of the agent of discourse who listens to and deciphers her confession. The confession is then more the explanatory or causal narrative of the listener than of the confessor. The confession serves to reveal the subjectivity of the *listener*—it tells the story of the power of the agent of discourse, who gathers the narratives of others who, “restrained and loquacious at the same time, endlessly repl[y]” to the solicitations of discourse (Foucault 71). In the ritualized production of discourse, the confession confirms the authority of the agent of discourse who solicits it.

The narrative of *Power* stages discourse attempting to grasp its object and missing it, again and again. This essay will explore the space between confession and validation. This space might be called aspiration, or so it might be called by the authority vested with the power to bestow identity. Hogan’s narrative disrupts this bestowal; it obscures the clear intention of the agent of discourse, whose purpose is to bid the subject speak in order to consolidate her own testimony. Hogan’s narrative interrupts the supposed monologue of science, so named by Native theorist Gerald Vizenor, which assumes that the subject of its inquiry aspires to the identity science is empowered to bestow.

In Hogan’s narrative, a sixteen-year-old Taiga girl named Omishto is questioned as a witness when her mentor, Ama, a woman who lives apart from both the Taiga and white communities, is twice put on trial, first in a state court and later in a tribal court, for the

stalking and killing of a Florida panther. Hogan models Ama's case after the 1983 trial, *United States v. James E. Billie* (1987), in which a Seminole Indian was tried for violating the Endangered Species Act for hunting a Florida panther on the Seminole Indian reservation.³ In this case James E. Billie pleaded innocent, arguing that the Endangered Species Act did not apply to him as a Seminole Indian and that the prohibition against hunting the Florida panther was unconstitutional when applied to a Native American. He claimed that the First Amendment right to freedom of religion granted the Native American absolute autonomy in hunting practices, where hunting specific animals was required for the fulfillment of religious ceremonies. In his testimony Billie claimed that he had not premeditated the hunting of the endangered panther:

He had no thoughts regarding what he would do with the panther carcass after he shot it until the morning on which it was seized. At that time, it occurred to Billie that he could give it as a gift to a medicine man in order to humble himself. In bestowing such a high honor, Billie hoped that he would be able to learn more medicine. (1497)

Billie's testimony is based on an argument that "he could not have had the requisite mens rea [*sic*] to violate the Act because its applicability to on-reservation hunting by Indians was vague or highly debatable" (1493). In other words, Billie's case was based on a point of criminal intent. Billie claimed that he did not "knowingly" break the law and that he had believed his actions to be within his rights according to the First Amendment right of freedom of religion.

In *Power* Ama does not attempt to elude federal jurisdiction by claiming that the Endangered Species Act does not apply to her, a Taiga Indian, for having shot the panther on reservation land.⁴ Nor does she couch her reasons for shooting the panther in a discourse of religious freedom under the First Amendment. Instead, Ama declares that she *knowingly* shot the Florida panther.⁵ "I killed it," she says, as if to cut things short. "I slayed it.' [. . .] 'I knew what it was and I killed it.'" (Hogan 135). After Ama's declaration, Omishto

thinks: “All those sheets of paper and she’s saying it straight out and I can see they are convinced she is not sane. Or that she lies, that maybe she is covering for me or someone else, so they don’t end the day here, don’t listen deep enough” (135). Ama’s confession does not aspire to the verifications and explanatory narratives of the law. Her confession stages a refusal to delineate her motives for shooting an endangered panther, an animal she admits to thinking of as kin. Omishto reports that “The lawyer, the prosecutor, asks her, ‘Do you, do Taiga people, believe you are related to the panther?’ ‘Yes.’ [Ama says,] ‘We are’” (134). Ama’s confession undermines the attempts of the law to pass the test of the confessional. She is not seduced by the solicitations of the law. Accordingly, “they are convinced she is not sane” (135).

What Ama leaves unsaid in her confession is precisely what the relationship between the questioned and the questioner is meant to reveal and consolidate. Her decision to omit a narrative of motives confounds the court’s attempt to organize and shape her testimony into a coherent discourse, and her unwillingness to have her subjectivity consolidated and confirmed by the court makes her incoherent. This incoherence makes Ama insane in the eyes of the law. Her refusal to speak the language of the court renders her testimony incomprehensible. The confirmation of subjectivity that the court wishes to bestow on Ama is a promise to reconstitute her in sanity, but her refusal to be diagnosed and treated—that is, to be made coherent—by the discourse of the law, her anticipation and rejection of the conditions of the confessional contract, make her terrifying to those who are attempting to graph their causal narrative onto her subjectivity.

Ama repeats the text of the law back to the agent of discourse, thus breaching the bond between questioned and questioner, confessor and confession. Omishto observes that “They, the people, are watching Ama, studying her. She’s a curiosity. She is a human being of a different kind. She makes them doubt, I see that. She is not deranged as they want to think” (134). Ama treads the line between sanity and insanity because she refuses to make herself comprehensible to the discourse of law and because she exposes

the layeredness of power by not attempting to excise herself from the organization of power in the courtroom. Ama's testimony is not the kind that is sought by the court, for although she makes a confession, although she admits to a crime, it is not the kind of confession that can be deciphered, verified, and assimilated into the discourse of law. Implicit to her avowal is a declaration that power is not fixed within the parameters of the judiciary.

Both the prosecutor and the defense attorney attempt to fit Ama into an explanatory narrative that will unravel the cause of her transgression against the law. The prosecutor would like to prove that she does not live a traditional Taiga lifestyle. He says,

"Would you say you hold to traditional ways?"

[. . .] "Yes."

"Even though you had a Dutch grandpa?"

"Yes sir."

"Even though you don't live with the traditional people?"

"Yes." (134)

The prosecutor's questions anticipate an argument that might be made in Ama's defense. They work to contain Ama within the range of legal language specific to her case, aiming to discredit her potential claim to special status in relation to the Endangered Species Act and to establish a precedent within the network of her case. The prosecutor attempts to discredit Ama as a traditional Taiga Indian because he knows that the defense will want to appeal to Ama's Native American status and to the hunting and fishing rights accorded to her under treaty to argue her innocence. The prosecutor is establishing a counterargument for the argument he already knows to expect. He is attempting to constitute a science of the subject, a mode of inquiry whose solicitations will be deployed not only by himself but also by Ama's defense lawyer. The prosecutor's questions operate to involve Ama in the labor of confession. His questions aspire to consolidate legal discourse as the questioner—with each side asking the same sorts of questions and speaking in the same vocabulary of inquiry—and Ama as the questioned.

Ama, however, does not care to be defended. Nor does she care

if she is discredited. In response to the prosecutor's questions, and before her defense lawyer has the chance to question her about her traditional religious beliefs, Ama says, "I killed it, [. . .] I slayed it" (135). Ama's declaration ruptures the solidarity of the judiciary, and into the gap produced by her rupture slip new meanings.

Ama does not *reply* to the questions of the law. Instead she declares herself. She does not attempt to stand outside the networking of power; she confesses, but she is her own confessional. It is Ama who stages the trial; she is the one who carries the panther's tracking device out of the woods, knowing that the biologists tracking the animal would notify the police; it is she who prepares Omishto for her role as witness. But Ama does not attempt to elude the law. Instead her confession is a text that subverts its own believability, placing her *outside* the paradigm of the confessional, for she proposes a new language of confession that stands apart from the convention whereby the confessor seeks to have her subjectivity reaffirmed by the authority or the power structure to whom she confesses. A conventional confession cooperates by agreeing that the sin or transgression being confessed can be expressed through the language available to the confessional process. Ama's refusal to speak the language that is agreed upon by the authority of the judiciary, and her refusal to appeal to the right excuses (Native American hunting and fishing rights or religious freedom) to account for her transgression, make her testimonial "I confess" incomprehensible to the power system (which includes both defense and prosecution). As a result, absolution cannot be spoken, and the members of the court are "convinced she is not sane" (Hogan 135).

Ama's confession unseats comprehensibility. The language has not yet been written that can receive it. Her confession is what Jacques Derrida calls a "surplus" in discourse, or whatever cannot be organized and deciphered by the signifying practices of the authority, in this case, the court.⁶ In the eyes of the court, Ama's confession is not fully formed; it is the "as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself" and which is manifested "in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" (Derrida, "Structure" 889).

Her confession confounds the attempts of the “mill of speech” of the law to transform her testimony into discourse (Foucault 21). The schism between confessor and confession is the monstrous space of possibility. The same schism exists in another form, in the breach between the questioned and the questioner. There is a space in discourse, a space of possibility that is as yet unformed. This liminal space figures the process of becoming in discourse, in which the “as yet unnameable” future of discourse proclaims itself (Derrida, “Structure” 889). Ama’s discourse falls into this dangerous space. Her subjectivity is not, and cannot be, presented by her speech act, and the authority of the court cannot be consolidated through her. In the courtroom Ama is the silent other who inhabits the gap in the cultural narrative to which the discourses of law belong. Her incomprehensibility makes her a threat. The confessional contract is built upon a belief that if the speaking subject is given the space to do it, that speaking subject could speak its radical incommensurability, could tell the truth about itself. But Ama is the monstrous other who cannot speak her subjectivity through the authority of the court. Her monstrosity is to expose the blind thrashings of the legal apparatus attempting to grasp its object and missing it, again and again. It is not simply Ama or her testimony that is monstrous. The monstrous resides in the moment when the agent of discourse comes face to face with the other whose face cannot be shown.

Ama confesses, and Omishto observes that Ama’s defense lawyer “looks at her in a way that says she is ruining her chances” (135). Her confession is not the testimony that her lawyer solicits; it is not spoken in a language that the court comprehends. For this reason, Ama’s lawyer speaks on her behalf.

The lawyer—[Ama’s] lawyer—says it’s because she believes in balance in the universe. Those are his very words. She never told him that herself. He found this out on his own, by talking to the anthropologist who studies us. I know this. He was seen going there. He is right, though, in a way. Because in the old story a woman went into the cypress to kill the cat so that the world might return to balance. (135)

Ama's confessions are incomprehensible to the power system; they cannot be heard and understood. Her testimony must be spoken for her. In the court of law, it is the defense attorney's job to speak for his client. In the discourse of law, the defense is the voice of the defendant. In order to speak for Ama, the defense lawyer must construct an explanatory narrative. He must shave Ama down to fit her into a discourse. In the case of a Native American, the court's explanatory narratives abound in anthropological archives. Not only do the defense lawyer's assertions about Ama's beliefs constitute a response to the prosecutor's line of questioning, but they also serve to fit Ama's testimonial into yet another master discourse, whose object is also to bestow subjectivity through the ritual of confession.

Omishto underlines an important problem in anthropological narratives when she says, "I don't like the way the lawyer says 'Their world'—as he calls it—is different than 'ours,' meaning the one he and others like him have been shaped by, have inhabited" (136). Omishto points out the failure of anthropology to pass the test of the confessional. The defense lawyer's speech begins with "she believes" and ends with "Their world" (135–36). The lawyer's testimony is incomplete. He is not able to consolidate his testimonial without Ama's participation, and he remains an outsider, an observer. The truth of Ama's beliefs cannot be revealed wholly formed by the discourse available through anthropology. Ama's lawyer cannot hold up Ama's beliefs for all to see. He can only hold up himself and confess to his own beliefs.

Ama's lawyer speaks the text that is already written and coded by the discourse of the law. The explanatory narrative he provides for Ama's transgression against the law is already deciphered and verified by the codes that make his discourse comprehensible. The lawyer's testimony attempts to fill the space that Ama's confession opens up. He struggles to write over the monstrous formlessness of Ama's confession with the causal narrative supplied by anthropology. Ama's lawyer dreams of a "reassuring foundation," an origin, to Ama's act (Derrida, "Structure" 889). He dreams of a "common ground" upon which he, the agent of discourse, and

Ama, the Taiga Indian, can stand together (Derrida, “Structure” 889). This “common ground,” which he would like to identify as Ama’s desire to restore order (or “balance in the universe”) by killing the panther, would enable Ama’s lawyer to manage her transgression within a system organized by a metaphysics of presence. Ama’s lawyer aspires to a stabilized and verifiable truth that can be said to exist or to be present.

As Foucault observes, however, the “veracity” of a confession is engendered “by the bond, the basic intimacy in discourse, between the one who speaks and what he is speaking about” (62). The lawyer’s testimony fails to create this discursive bond. His testimony, which begins with “she believes” and ends with “Their world,” signals the failure of the lawyer, as the agent of discourse, to construct a coherent confessional narrative on Ama’s behalf. His syntax betrays the incommensurability of Ama’s otherness. The lawyer’s testimony unwittingly articulates the crisis of the agent of discourse who comes face to face with the incommensurability of the other whose face cannot be shown.

In *A Lover’s Discourse*, Roland Barthes writes that the “other is not to be known; his opacity is not a screen around a secret” (134). Yet it is precisely this desire to trace back to the origins of the other that fuels the discourses of law, anthropology, and environmentalism. The quest, however, to unlock and interpret the secrets of the other—and to make the other an object of discourse—is not founded in a desire to know the other from the perspective of the other but occurs, instead, as a desire to locate the origin of the self.⁷ To use Foucault’s language, the questioner’s project to “scientifically validat[e]” the questioned (the confessor) and to enumerate the parts of her subjectivity, in order to map her causality, stems from a desire in the questioner to hold herself up against, and to enunciate, the known (66). The project of exacting confession, which is not only concerned with revealing what is being kept secret from the public but also with what is concealed even from the confessor, is made more urgent and, I would argue, more compelling, when the solicited subject is threatened with extinction.

“I confess” not only operates to reveal the subject in discourse

but also works to renounce the confessing subject. “I confess” means that I give myself up, I abandon myself to the truth that constitutes me as a subject and to the listener who mediates my confession. If by confessing I renounce myself, then my continued existence in discourse depends upon my continued confession. I must continually nullify myself in order to maintain my existence (Foucault 83). If the confessor is threatened with extinction, her confession could be figured as her only discursive legacy.

Hogan’s narrative is structured around a discourse of disappearance. In *Power*, both the Taiga Indians and the Florida panthers are endangered, are threatened with extinction. We are told that thirty Taiga Indians remain, and as many panthers (109). Both the Taigas and the panthers are subjected to the solicitations of science (in the form of law, anthropology, and environmentalism/conservationism), which seek the testimonies of those who are on the verge of disappearing.

Until recently, anthropological texts have often been written in an unself-consciously moralizing discourse of preservation. In the *History of the Ojibway Nation*, William W. Warren begins his account with the following conclusion: “The red race of North America is fast disappearing before the onward resistless tread of the Anglo-Saxon. [. . .] The few tribes and remnants of tribes who still exist on our western frontiers, truly deserve the sympathy and attention of the American people” (23). While Warren’s account was written in 1852, it is not all that different from Sister M. Carolissa Levi’s narrative history of the Ojibwe (Chippewa) Nation, written one hundred years later. Levi writes, “As history moves on, intermingling of Chippewas with other racial groups will continue with further obliteration of racial lines. Chippewa heritage [. . .] needs to be recorded not only for Chippewas but for other Americans as well” (i). What do “other Americans” want with Chippewa heritage? What does the court want with Ama’s testimony? In both cases, the authority—the anthropologist, “other Americans,” or the judiciary—want the Native American to be coded by the power of its discourse. In both cases, the authority bids the confessor speak her confession in the prescribed language that will enable

the authority/listener to transform the speaker/confessant into a word and a name in discourse.⁸ And in both cases, the authority wishes to be the one to record, verify, decipher, and articulate the testimony of the Native American in order to be the one to encode and represent a disappearing voice.

Gerald Vizenor writes that “cultural anthropologies are monologues with science” that record “expiries,” “remains,” “reductions,” and “institutional power” in their search for causal accounts of tribal stories (“Trickster Discourse” 182). For Vizenor, anthropologies are recitations, rehearsed in isolation. Vizenor sees anthropological accounts of Native American belief as systems that are always rehearsing the extinction of Native Americans.

According to Vizenor, life, presence, and continuance are to be found in stories. Stories are not the inert transcriptions preserved in anthropological archives but are the living, breathing narratives that occur in the tricky spoken realm in which the flicker of what he calls the native “storyer” can be perceived (*Fugitive Poses* 15). Vizenor’s Native storyer does not bring listeners into proximity with an essential or self-identical speaking “I.” Stories do not stabilize an expression of the essence of the self, making of the storyteller a site of plenitude and wholeness. Instead, stories in Vizenor’s reading are liberative because they elude epistemic desires in the listener. Stories do not lead to stable knowledge of what they describe because they are continuous. The stories solicited from Ama—like the Taiga creation story attested to by the anthropologist—are sought from a desire to ink them into the inertia of transcription. Ama does not confess as the judiciary commands her because she knows of stories that, as Leslie Marmon Silko has put it:

They aren’t just entertainment.
 Don’t be fooled.
 They are all we have, you see,
 all we have to fight off illness and death. (*Ceremony* 2)

Vizenor’s critique of the social sciences particularly targets a cataloguing impulse he detects in the solicitations directed at Native Americans by agents of ethnography like Warren or Sister

Levi. His response to this impulse has taken many forms, including a historical biography entitled *The People Named the Chippewa*, which takes anthropology as its uneasy dancing partner and brings into relief the intrusions and essentializations of ethnographic practice. The ethnographic text brandishing knowledge of the Chippewa is displaced by Vizenor in favor of a collection of stories that tell, among other things, of the impositions of naming practices in social-science studies. Ama's refusal to confess enacts what Vizenor calls "sovenance," which has been defined by Malea Powell as "survival + resistance" (400). Refusing to be fixed in place by the judiciary, to be made to represent her Native American reasoning for the crime of killing an endangered panther, Ama resists being stabilized and named in the discourse of the agents of power who solicit her testimony.

Anthropologies are confessions, for confessions are always already nullifications. "I confess" enacts a loss. My confession figures my absorption into discourse. My confession is translated into testimony by the authority/listener, for whom I continue to exist. If the confessor is threatened with extinction, then her confessions are not only the remains she leaves behind after death but also testimonials that speak to the power of the authority/listener who solicited and deciphered them.

In the production of master discourses, the social order works to stabilize and preserve truths. If confession is a technique for the production of truth, and truth is preserved in power through the belief system of the social order, which in this case I have called the confessional, then the mastering of subjectivity, through the apparatus of stability (let us call it anthropology or law), is a ritual not only for the production of truth but also for the stabilization of the scientific discourse through which the testimony of the confessor is filtered. The social order that solicits confession from the speaking subject promises not only that the ritual of discourse of the confessional will produce subjectivity but also that the social order will discursively preserve the confession that testifies to its power. The social order requires confessions in order to maintain narratives of truth that corroborate the authority of the discursive system.

In the production of truth, the social order secures itself against the constant threat of new systems attempting to discursively occupy the next stabilized position. The “authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile,” does so in order to consolidate her power and to stabilize the truth of her discourse (Foucault 61). The confession that is verified by the codes of the social order operates to testify to the power that encodes it. Effectively, it is the authority who requires and solicits confession that discourse preserves in the social order. The impulse to name and systematize the other, to bring the other into the history of the social order, and to stabilize her testimony with the signifying practices of the authoritative discourse is especially urgent if the speaking subject is threatened with extinction. As Roland Barthes writes, “someone about to die” is actually “someone for whom I am about to die” (109). In the case of the Taiga Indians, testimonies must be heard before the authority of the listener disappears for the speaking subjects, before the speaking subjects close their eyes to the agents of discourse. Once their confessions are encoded into the social order, the Taigas (as they are made comprehensible by the labor of confession) will never disappear from discourse.

Hogan addresses the desire of the authoritative discourse to incorporate the testimonies of the other into its historical narrative with Omishto’s observation that “They [the audience in the courtroom] believe what we say will give them something, a glimpse into another world, not of their concern. A world that is a crack in the container of their history” (136). Those who expect to hear a testimonial are bewildered by Ama’s confession, which disrupts the coherent paradigm of the confessional by denying the questioner and by refusing to constitute a subjectivity that can be assimilated into the discourse of law. Ama’s confession is unthinkable because she exploits the usual paradigms (the paradigm of the confessional in the court of law) but uses language that is outside the laws of comprehensibility. Ama’s disruption is literally impossible to understand because she speaks an unfamiliar language. “And,” says Omishto, “the jurors study her, a woman so unlike them as to

exist in another world, another time. She is their animal” (136). The jurors, like the lawyers, like the judge, like all the questioners who solicit Ama’s testimony, watch her because they desperately want to imagine a coherence that includes her. Omishto says that Ama “is their animal” (136). She is their panther. To the jurors, Ama and the Florida panther are one and the same; both are endangered, both speak a language that the law solicits but cannot comprehend. In opposition to the evolved beings of the court, who live separate from their natural world, Ama represents the terrifying, encroaching natural world that science works to explain and map.

Hogan’s narrative signals a discourse of conservationism but does not position itself in relation to the question of human intentionality in the natural world. For this reason, I have chosen Jenny Diski’s novel *Rainforest* to elucidate the paradigm of the human who excludes herself from the natural world. Diski’s novel explores the human desire to create a garden called Nature, a partitioned and mapped space that stands apart from the chaotic natural world. This garden is not a threat to the human because it figures nature’s confession and the transformation of chaos into arithmetic.

In *Rainforest* Diski explores a scientist’s desire to inscribe a hermeneutic, or causal narrative, onto a “forest that almost perceptibly crush[es] forward” (24). Diski writes that Mo, a scientist who seeks to uncover biological patterns in the rainforest, sees the forest “as a tailor might see a bolt of cloth” and “want[s] a piece, cut from the whole, on which to chalk her pattern” (24–25). Mo ascribes to a scientific discourse that requires that the scientist be “an observer with a clear intention,” whose purpose is to “stand apart,” to “measure and collect,” and “to count and name” the parts of the forest (25).

In order to make generalizations about the ecosystem of the forest, Mo builds a grid made of wooden pegs that are linked together by nylon string. Altogether Mo’s string measures 135 meters in length, “in her ten 1.5 meter squares” (174). Mo calculates that if “the string was, say, 3 millimeters thick, that would mean [. . .] more than 1 square meter of ground that couldn’t be studied because it was covered with string” (174). This one square meter of ground represents the chaotic unknowable to Mo. It is the space

she cannot account for in her measurements, and it is what ultimately drives her mad. Faced with the incommensurability of the forest, Mo “herself [becomes] a mass of disorganized matter and there [is] no longer any difference between here and there” (175).

Mo enters the forest as a conservationist. She tells the incredulous Native guide, Leloh, that “the forest [is] dying” (23). Mo’s grids are meant to give her “a picture of the whole life of the forest,” but instead they show only herself, roped-in by the parameters of the same garden she intends to study. Mo’s grids include her in Nature. Her hypotheses, her generalizations, and her assertions are sown into the earth. The horror she suffers at the end of the narrative results from her realization that she cannot rope over chaos, neither the forest’s nor her own. Mo realizes that she cannot rope over the missing details, fluctuations, and unpredictabilities of the one square meter of forest floor covered by her string. This one square meter of forest floor, like Ama’s confession, will not speak the prescribed language. The desire to arithmetize both Ama and the panther, like the desire to transform the rainforest into a garden called Nature, is a desire to remove the threat of unpredictability and incoherence from the natural world. The discourse of extinction deployed by law, anthropology, and environmentalism attempts to rope over the recognition that the forest does not die, as the panther does not die, as the Indian does not die *for me*, but that I die *for it*.

The rainforest proves itself unnameable, incomprehensible, beyond mathematics. As Mo realizes that it is she who will die for the forest, as she faces the monstrous, the “as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself” in the rainforest, everything around her, including herself, becomes incomprehensible (Derrida, “Structure” 889).

Mo stood still in the clearing and shook with the terror of disintegration. [. . .] Mo sank to her knees at the threshold of her tent and sobbed in terror as she watched the world around her break up into infinitely small particles, whirling and circling between shafts of light. Closing in on her, moving towards her until her own boundaries were breached. (175)

Mo goes mad when she beholds the monstrosity of possibility in the rainforest. The realization that her system of signs, her ropes and grids, cannot keep comprehensibility in place, that her signifying practices operate to keep only the *appearance* of comprehensibility in place, disintegrates Mo's stable reality into chaos. The boundaries that Mo has imagined between herself and the natural world begin to disintegrate. The "mental picture" she has "of herself walking through the forest" cannot be maintained by the codes of her signifying practices, and she becomes a "mass of disorganized matter" amid the movements, fluctuations, and proclamations of the forest (174–75).

The unmapped space under the nylon string of Mo's grid, the *one* square meter of accumulated space that forms a gap in Mo's explanatory narrative of the rainforest, represents the vitality of meaning—the constant, irrepressible, and continuous reconstitution of meaning at every moment—that Mo would like to rope over with a narrative of stable truths. Mo's horror comes from the realization that she cannot fill the absences of meaning in the forest because they are always already being filled. Nature abhors an absence. There are no empty spaces in the rainforest. Meaning is never absent, but neither is it ever stable. Mo falls into chaos because she is faced with the vitality of meaning, the continual restructuring of meaning, and the instability of truth. Her system of truths, her "mental picture," is confounded by the irrepressible invasions of new meaning (175).

The stabilizing codes through which Mo attempts (and fails) to rearticulate, reimagine, and cultivate the forest become incomprehensible when she comes to face the "formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity" that is not codified by a comprehensible language (Derrida, "Structure" 889). Mo is forced to realize that the system that calls itself the "stable truth" is always at war with new meaning and new language. As everything becomes incomprehensible for Mo in the rainforest, so too does Ama's testimony bring chaos and incomprehensibility to the discursive stability of the courtroom. In the courtroom, Ama is not *withholding* a narrative of motives. Instead, she is mute, in the Derridean sense. Ama cannot speak the language of motivation for the same reasons

that she cannot speak her radical incommensurability, or the “as yet unnameable” form of possibility as it proclaims itself for the Taiga and the panther (Derrida, “Structure” 889). Ama’s testimony brings the language of possibility into the courtroom. She makes it impossible for the court to use her as a mouthpiece for the codification of either the Taiga or the panther.

With Ama’s testimony, the court must accept that the panther—there, existing, but sick—and the Taiga—there, existing, but failing—are both present and absent and cannot be coded by the certain and predictable language of science, in the terms of extinction. Like Ama’s testimony, which figures both a presence and an absence (she makes a confession but does not speak in a language that is comprehensible to the court), the Taiga and the Florida panther elude the grasp of the discourses that would like to consolidate them in a system of comprehensible of signs. Ama’s confession tells of a changing world, where everything (the Taiga and the panther) is dying but where the new, the “as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself,” is not yet present (Derrida, “Structure” 889).

Omishto speaks on Ama’s behalf and says that “[Ama] believes that she killed her guardian, [. . .] for our people to go on, traded its life for our lives, and that it will return, new and healthy, and so will the world of our people” (189). Omishto supplies a causal narrative for Ama’s act that is in keeping with the creation story that Hogan constructs for the Taigas. In this story, a woman has stumbled through a portal, into this world:

What she saw there was rivers on fire, animals dying of sickness, and foreign vines. The world, she saw, was dying. [. . .]

“You have to kill one of us,” the panther, who was dying, told her. “It should be me. I’m not the oldest or the weakest, but I’m the one you know best.”

A sacrifice was called for and if it was done well, all the animals and the panther would come back again and they’d be whole. (111)

Omishto tells the story that is already written. Faced with Ama’s incomprehensible confession, Omishto rearticulates Ama’s act into

a system of discursive signs that maintain the appearance of comprehensibility. Omishto needs to believe that “Ama got lost in this story,” the “Taiga story about Panther Woman,” and that she “was there to refresh our thoughts and renew our acts” (110). Omishto ascribes Ama’s act to the causal narrative that keeps the truth, as she knows it, in place.

Hogan complicates Omishto’s narrative by silencing Ama. Ama’s persistent silence, her unwillingness to speak the reasons for her act either to the state court or to the tribal court held later by the Taiga elders, and the failure of the agents of discourse to provide the space for Ama to speak her radical incommensurability destabilize any explanatory narrative that attempts to encode Ama’s act and her confession with discursive stability.

Hogan’s novel explores how new thinking challenges the paradigms of the law, how precedents determine how the law governs, and how confession is one of the agencies through which order is maintained in the hegemony. Ama’s confession challenges the precepts of the law, defying the ritualized truth telling of the confessional, wherein the confessor is purified, exonerated, redeemed, and liberated by the authority who hears and speaks her testimony. In Ama’s court case, repudiation and punishment do not arrive. Ama is not convicted by law: she is acquitted by the court. The law neither promises Ama’s salvation nor condemns her. Her refusal to confess and repent under the prescribed terms, using the precedents and language of the court, makes her impossible to understand. Ama, like the panther, like Diski’s rainforest, will not be spoken for, will not allow the law—whatever shape its discourse takes, whether it is in the form of anthropology or environmentalism—to step in and speak on her behalf.

NOTES

1. See J. L. Austin’s speech theory and definitions of performative and constative utterances in *How to Do Things With Language*.
2. The 2002 online *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “testimony” as “any form of evidence or proof.”

3. The first Billie trial was held in 1983, under the name *Florida v. James E. Billie*. The records of this trial have not been published internationally. Thus the only records available to the general public in Canada are the files from the 1987 case. It is from these files that I will be citing in this essay.

4. In the 1987 case, Billie argued that as a Seminole Indian, and like certain Alaska Natives who enjoy exemption from the Endangered Species Act, his hunting and fishing rights as delineated in treaty should place him outside the legal jurisdiction of the Endangered Species Act. The court found, however, that the act had anticipated such a demand and had declared, as the 1987 court document notes, that “On-reservation hunting rights are not absolute when a species such as the Florida panther is in danger of extinction” (1492). Furthermore, the court declared that the act “could not have intended that the Indians would have the unfettered right to kill the last handful of Florida panthers” (1492).

5. Each example given is in reference to the 1987 case, *United States v. James E. Billie*. Respectively, my examples cite § II. “Applicability of Endangered Species Act to Seminole Indian Reservation,” § V. “Religious Freedom,” and § III. “Mens Rea.”

6. I have not cited one particular text by Derrida to reference the idea of the surplus of meaning in language, in part because this concept is implied though not named specifically in “Structure, Sign and Play,” in Derrida’s discussion of the supplement in language, as well as in all three of the other texts I have cited for Derrida. I prefer to cite the idea rather than the specific argument Derrida makes for it in any one text. Thus I will simply gesture to the four texts by Jacques Derrida that I have listed in my works cited.

7. It may be helpful, at this time, to consider the intentions of anthropology, and the positivistic function of anthropological discourse, with regard to the desire of the agent of discourse to unlock and interpret the secrets of the other. This article takes into consideration how certain discursive regimes organize and structure reality according to empirical methods of investigation. The view that all valid knowledge must be based on the methods of investigation privileged by the social sciences supports the ambition of the anthropologist, as cultural mediator, to make a claim for a common humanity among the subjects under investigation. It is precisely this sort of positivistic claim that Ama’s testimony confounds. Ama will not allow the questioners to consolidate her testimony into a causal narrative that proves the validity of their method of investigation. Ama’s “identity” does not attend to the material process of empirical investi-

gation. Her identity will not be grounded in their discourse and is not a secret that anthropology can find out and expose.

8. See Michel de Certeau's work on how the discourse of law transforms the individual body into an element in its syntax.

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“You can’t run away nowadays”

Redefining Modernity in D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*

ALICIA A. KENT

When D’Arcy McNickle (1904–77) began work on his first novel in the 1920s, he hoped he would become part of the circle of modernist writers.¹ Inclusion in the American literary canon and incorporation into the greater American culture were not (and still are not) the goals for many Native writers, as Craig Womack argues in *Red on Red*. By contrast, McNickle, an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, longed to publish a novel that would reach “a wider audience than any other form of writing,” as he described in 1934 his goal of writing fiction (Correspondence).² He traveled to Europe as a young man, where he mingled with American expatriates and began work on his first novel. He even called the manuscript “The Hungry Generations”—a title that invokes (with a difference) Gertrude Stein’s “The Lost Generation” (which in turn refers to John Keats’s term). Eventually published as *The Surrounded* (1936), McNickle’s novel about a half-blood’s return home to the reservation engages in an intertextual dialogue with modernist writers and artists of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in the novel’s thematic focus on the disorientation and disjuncture of the modern era.³

While McNickle was not a part of the modernist literary movement nor should his novel be considered a modernist text, understanding his life and his modernist-era novel enables readers to develop a more historically and culturally nuanced portrait of the modern era.⁴ McNickle, who was raised on the Flathead Indian Reservation in northern Montana but lived all of his adult life off

of the reservation, experienced firsthand many of the conditions that led to the modernist demand for new modes of representation, while he also directly experienced the sweeping changes occurring in federal Indian policy in the modern period. Drawing upon but also critiquing modernist concerns, *The Surrounded* illustrates that while many Native Americans experienced the despair that modernists expressed, its cause was the federal policies to rid the modern world of Indian cultures, not the ontological uncertainty of the period, as it was for many modernists. *The Surrounded* insists that Native American experiences of forced dislocation from homelands and the attempted eradication of tribal cultures be considered in understanding the modern experience.⁵

MODERNITY FROM MCNICKLE'S PERSPECTIVE
ON AND OFF THE RESERVATION

Born in the first decade of the twentieth century, McNickle entered a world undergoing dramatic and dizzying transformations on both national and international levels. The advent of modernity meant that people participated in increasingly complicated networks of exchange, occasioned by the spread of capitalism and modernization to a wider range of people globally, accelerating industrialization and its changing modes of production and consumption, rapid technological changes (including electricity, the telephone, movies, automobiles), increased urbanization, and massive immigration and internal migrations.⁶ The United States saw significant changes on economic, cultural, demographic, and political levels. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the nation was experiencing what historical geographer David Harvey has called a "time-space compression" in which it felt as if time were accelerated through the increased organization of production (e.g., Ford's assembly line) and as if space were collapsed with the increasing use of radio and automobiles. The closing of the frontier in 1890, at least in the popular American consciousness, further exacerbated this changing relationship to time and space.⁷

The transformations in the very structures of society led to new

epistemological and ontological understandings of the world, with important developments in theories about the human psyche and the brain, culture and race, economics, religion and god, time and space, and the workings of the universe. Such a fundamental paradigm shift in thinking about the nature of human experience, in the very perception of reality itself, in turn led to radically altered ways of representing that world. For the modernist artists and writers of the early twentieth century, the new experience of reality led to a lack of confidence in an objective, external reality and in the ability of language to mimetically represent that reality (as realist literature of the earlier Victorian period had assumed). To many it seemed that the present held little resemblance to the past; the old ways did not match the new, and “all that is solid melts into air,” as Karl Marx put it (and as Marshall Berman entitles his contemporary book on modernity). Modernity, in this sense, signified a rupture from all that came before, a shattering of the symbolic systems in the modern world.⁸

For McNickle, increased federal efforts in this period to eradicate tribal cultures and force Indian assimilation further intensified the schism between the past and present. After being forcibly removed at the age of ten from his mother’s home on the reservation, McNickle attended an off-reservation boarding school for Indian children. Despite his mother’s repeated petitions to bring him home, McNickle spent three years at a federally funded boarding school in Chemawa, Oregon, part of a larger federal policy to incorporate Indian nations into the larger American nation. As Gen. Richard H. Pratt, the founder of the first federally funded Indian boarding school, so infamously told Congress in 1879, “We accept the watchword, let us by patient effort kill the Indian in him and save the man” (qtd. in O’Brien 76). Besides the obvious assimilationist rhetoric, Pratt’s comment to Congress suggests that while outright physical annihilation of Native Americans was no longer acceptable, cultural extinction, sponsored by the U.S. government, was.

Federal funding for Indian boarding schools increased dramatically from 1880 to 1925, and an increasing number of Indian children were forcibly removed from their families to live at off-reserva-

tion boarding schools around the country.⁹ Without the influence of family and tribe, ridding Indians of their distinct tribal cultures could occur more quickly. As Pratt wrote, he intended to imbue his students with the “courage of civilization which will enable abandonment of the tribe and successful living among civilized people” (42). But being civilized simply meant “be like the white man,” as boarding school student Sun Elk (Taos Pueblo) put it (222).

As McNickle portrays in *The Surrounded* through his characters Mike and Narcisse and as the many first-person accounts reveal, the boarding school experience for many children was devastating.¹⁰ At Carlisle, for example, only about one out of every eight students graduated, and many died prematurely. Denigration of Indian identity inherent in the boarding school project led to self-hatred, shame, and alienation for many. Boarding school attendees often found themselves caught between tribal and Euroamerican cultures but at home in neither, one of the central conflicts McNickle's protagonist Archilde faces.

Undeniably a destructive experience, federal boarding school policy simultaneously and most probably unintentionally provided many attendees with the very skills and experiences that enabled them to resist cultural annihilation. An unprecedented increase in publications by Native writers (and the concomitant increase in non-Indian readers of Native-authored texts) occurred in the early twentieth century. Most of these writers had learned to read and write English at boarding schools. As Gerald Vizenor writes, the ability to write in English became one of the most enduring effects of the boarding school experience: “English, that coercive language of federal boarding schools, has carried some of the best stories of endurance” (106). The boarding school period, a crucial time in which Native writers increasingly interacted with one another, marks the first “coming together” of a generation of Native writers in a shared project, as Robert Allen Warrior notes. These writers appropriated the colonizer's language and used it against the colonizer. As poet Simon Ortiz has suggested, “The indigenous peoples of the Americas have taken the languages of the colonialists and used them for their own purposes” (66).

In a sense enacting Ortiz's notion of creative resistance, McNickle used his boarding school experience, which was intended to assimilate Indians out of existence, to instead write about the survival of Indian peoples in the modern era. He used writing as tool—indeed, his “only tool,” as he put it in a 1934 letter (Correspondence)—not of assimilation but of survival. As McNickle later wrote in *Native American Tribalism*, “The white man's weapon, the written word, was being wielded by the native Americans with enthusiasm, if not always with quality printing” (xxi). After returning to the reservation in Montana, he enrolled in the University of Montana from 1921 to 1925, where he wrote and published his first poetry and fiction.

In 1925 McNickle acted on his dream to pursue a writing career. He sold the land allotted to him under the Dawes Act and used the money to finance a trip to Europe, where he hoped to become part of the literary experientialism flourishing among modernist writers there. This trip, in a sense made possible by the Dawes Act, marked the first step in McNickle's long career devoted to illustrating the continual survival and endurance of Native American cultures. An obituary for McNickle points out the irony: “Senator Dawes, even in his wildest imaginings, would never have envisioned forwarding the career of a man who would spend a lifetime demonstrating the errors in Dawes's contention that, if given private property, Indians would ‘vanish’” (A. Ortiz 632). The Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887, which granted 160-acre allotments of land to individual tribal members, had significantly carved up the Flathead Reservation where McNickle was born and raised. Over half a million acres passed out of tribal ownership through land allotment, which began on the Flathead Reservation in 1904 (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes). The federal government hoped that by dividing tribally held lands into individual plots, capitalism and the veneration of private property would replace tribal communalism and bring Indians in sync with the core American value of individualism. As McNickle described the goal of the Dawes Act in a 1939 speech, “The American Indian Today”: “The Indian might survive physically, but he would be assimilated into the general population. The separate Indian reservation would disappear

from the geography of our states, and the separate Indian problem would disappear from the general social and economic problems of the nation" (2).

But this policy did little to end "the Indian problem" and instead led to radical dislocation for Indian peoples in the modern era. The Dawes Act substantially reduced areas of tribal lands and replaced communally held lands with small, often substandard plots of individually owned land while opening up the majority of Indian lands for non-Indian settlement, leading to tribal disintegration and the loss of over sixty percent of Indian-owned land during the period of allotment (Dippie; McNickle, *Native American Tribalism*). The erosion of the tribal land base significantly exacerbated the dispersal of tribal groups begun decades earlier in the Jacksonian era of forced removals. McNickle himself commented thoroughly on the detrimental effects of the Dawes Act. In his 1973 epic ethnohistory, *Native American Tribalism*, for example, he noted, "The effect of the law in operation was almost exactly what its opponents anticipated—it became an efficient mechanism for separating the Indians from their lands and pauperizing them" (83).

From the perspective of many Native Americans, government-imposed dissolution of tribally held lands and federally funded efforts to rid Indians of their tribal cultures served as the imposed meaning of modernity. The effort to dispossess Native peoples of their lands and cultures was grossly different than the chosen exile of many American expatriates in the period, whose decision to leave the United States was voluntary. For many Native Americans in the modern period, exile from homelands was not a choice but was forced, not a privilege but a federal mandate. The modernists' self-imposed homelessness still contained the possibility of returning home. For many Native Americans, however, the physical return home became an impossibility as a result of federal policy of the period, even as many Native peoples responded to this upheaval and dislocation by forging a diasporic, pantribal movement and recreating a new sense of home on reservations. As McNickle noted, in the wake of the Dawes Act and off-reservation boarding schools, the reservation "became the only friendly haven

for the thousands of Indian children leaving the boarding school” (“The American Indian Today” 7). While Stein’s label of the Lost Generation may have aptly described many modernists, McNickle appropriately called his “a generation of entirely landless Indians” (“The American Indian Today” 7). Even the desire to deny one’s allegiance to the United States that the American expatriate life implied was not applicable to Native Americans, who were not recognized as citizens of the United States until 1924 and thus could not be expatriates to a country that did not even see them as patriots.¹¹ If the project of the modern era is, as Berman defines it, “a struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world” (6), the project for a Native writer such as McNickle—who left the reservation as a young adult and never returned home to live—is markedly incongruous with that of the modernists.

Yet despite the obvious difference in upbringing and historical experience from modernist writers, McNickle had hoped to live the seemingly romantic life of the American expatriate. When McNickle permanently left the reservation in 1925, he attended Oxford University, then lived briefly in Paris alongside modernist writers. When he returned to the United States in 1926, he had with him the first drafts of what was to become *The Surrounded*. Working a variety of odd jobs to support himself, he settled in New York City, an important hub for many modernist and Harlem Renaissance artists, to continue his dream of becoming a writer.¹² During this time he sent publishers several drafts of the novel begun in Europe, but it was repeatedly rejected.

In 1933 he reestablished contact with his mother in Montana when his daughter was born, although he did not return to the reservation he had left as a young man. Occasioned in part by these family changes and in part by his education, McNickle went through a significant personal transformation, during which time he significantly rewrote the manuscript of *The Surrounded*. These changes mirror in part the broader shift in the view of Native Americans from a disappearing race to the existence of multiple cultures living within the United States. McNickle extolled this change in his 1939 speech:

I want first to refer briefly to the fact that Indian culture, Indian institutions, Indian ceremonial life—that which we call his religion—has survived into our day, and more vigorously and on a wider front than perhaps any of us realized. It is coming to light, or we are becoming aware of it, perhaps because we have abolished that old policy of frowning upon it and of actively running it underground. (“The American Indian Today” 3)

Indian cultures became of interest to the general public not because they were extinct but because they had survived the threat of extinction (Oaks 85n2).

This change in public perception was reflected in the dramatic transformations in federal policies toward tribes, most notably in the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which was intended to replace the Dawes Act with the promotion of autonomous tribal governments and economic development (Dippie). McNickle hailed the efforts of the IRA to halt the loss of Indian lands, regain tribal land and economic resources, and allow for Indian self-government. Underlying these changes, he noted, was a changing view of Indian peoples: “Fundamental to the program is a recognition of the right of Indian culture to survive and enrich the daily life of the individual and the group” (“The American Indian Today” 9). The IRA did not, of course, solve all of the problems caused by centuries of colonial policies, and it has been critiqued for relying too heavily on Euroamerican rather than indigenous models of governance, as M. Annette Jaimes argues. Most disastrously, the federal government reversed this policy once again in the Eisenhower years and then again in the 1970s with the policies of termination and relocation. Yet the IRA marked “a fundamental revision,” in McNickle’s words (7), of Indian policies that resulted in significant improvements for Native Americans.

In part out of economic need (a publisher still had not accepted his manuscript, despite his ongoing and repeated submissions) and in part out of a desire to become a part of these changes, McNickle applied for a job in 1934 with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) under John Collier, who spearheaded these reform efforts. In his

BIA application material, McNickle indicated that he could use his writing skills to publish reports, prepare written matter, and help with editorial work (Correspondence). Before finding a position at the BIA, McNickle first took a job in 1935 with the Federal Writers' Project, as did many modernist and other writers of the period. He then joined the BIA in 1936 at about the same time that Dodd, Mead published *The Surrounded*. Despite generally favorable reviews, the novel sold poorly, and the publisher suffered a loss. In his first royalty statement, McNickle received \$8.33 after his \$50 advance and merchandising costs (Owens 78).

While he failed to achieve economic success as a novelist, McNickle soon became a leading figure in the modern pan-Indian movement, which began earlier in the twentieth century, an unintended outcome of the boarding school experience.¹³ At boarding schools Native Americans from all over the country came into contact with one another and formed relationships that crossed tribal lines, perhaps for the first time. The shared experiences of removal from homelands and resistance to assimilation united their efforts (Hertzberg). Using the reading and writing skills learned at boarding schools, they launched a pantribal reform movement for Native rights. Primarily boarding school attendees, the leaders of the pan-Indian effort advocated a model of preserving Native American traditions while recognizing that they were changing, modernizing, and adapting to the modern world, a view McNickle shared and articulated in much of his writing. Believing strongly that Indians "could contribute toward the making of a wiser Indian policy," as he wrote in a 1934 letter to the BIA (Correspondence), McNickle became an advocate for Indian rights through his work at the BIA and then in subsequent positions as a political activist, historian, and anthropologist.¹⁴ In 1944 he helped found the National Congress of American Indians, a leading pan-Indian entity. Most notably he continued to write about the survival of Native Americans in the modern era in a variety of genres. He became a prolific essayist at the BIA and then published several acclaimed ethnohistories while he was an anthropologist. While the modernist literary movement insisted on the inability of lan-

guage to represent reality, McNickle conversely insisted on its ability to articulate Native American adaptations to the modern era.

THE USE OF MODERNIST TECHNIQUES WITH A
DIFFERENCE IN *THE SURROUNDED*

The Surrounded represents McNickle's most significant effort to write such a novel that would advocate the ability of Indians to adapt while still preserving Native ways. *The Surrounded*, a bildungsroman that embeds Salish oral genres with ethnographic material and historical accounts, focuses on a young mixed-blood Salish Indian man, Archilde Leon, a sort of Nick Adams figure (à la Hemingway) in his isolated and alienated wanderings.¹⁵ Although estranged from his Spanish-born father, Archilde returns home to Montana and eventually becomes embroiled in a murder investigation. Wrongly accused of killing a Euroamerican government official, Archilde flees with Elise, a mixed-blood woman, but is caught in the mountains after she kills the sheriff who attempts to arrest them. The novel ends as Archilde surrenders and is handcuffed to return to the town below "the mountains of the surrounded."

Generically categorized as a realist or naturalist novel, both for stylistic and thematic reasons, *The Surrounded* also contains many modernist characteristics in its rendering of its Salish characters' experiences in the modern era.¹⁶ On a thematic level McNickle's novel reflects a kind of modernist despair. In an elegiac lament that is mirrored in many modernist writings that mourn the loss of wholeness in the modern world, Archilde's mother Catharine wonders, "How was it that when one day was like another there should be, at the end of many days, a world of confusion and dread and emptiness?" (22). Catharine evokes similar imagery of emptiness that T. S. Eliot uses in *The Waste Land* (1922) or Ernest Hemingway portrays in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (1926). Similarly, in a moment that perhaps deliberately invokes William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1919) in its apocalyptic depiction, Catharine mourns what has become of the world. The narrative eye travels inside her consciousness, describing Catharine's thoughts: "Now

in old age she looked upon a chaotic world—so many things dead, so many words for which she knew no meaning” (22). The chaos and emptiness here might be understood within the larger context of the then prevalent modernist angst about modernity, but with a difference, one that reflects the paternalistic and destructive federal policies toward Native Americans in this period.

The sense of existential futility of a desolate modern world that Eliot evokes in *The Waste Land* is invoked again in Archilde’s pointless chase of an old mare (236–42).¹⁷ *The Surrounded* depicts the landscape of the Badlands similarly to the landscape in *The Waste Land*, “wild and barren” (236), even more infertile that year because of a drought, the earth so “parched” (240) that the sweat drops from the old mare vanish into the parched dirt. Described in painstaking detail, Archilde’s chase of the old mare foreshadows the chase of Archilde into the mountains, which in turn parallels the entrapment of Indian peoples, an “unaccountable game” (239), a pitiful “mockery” (238) of Archilde’s purportedly good but misguided, and ultimately destructive, intentions. Archilde chases the mare because “he had to show her kindness in spite of herself” and “save” her, even though “she probably knew better than he how to reach water and feed” (240). His failed efforts leave him feeling “limp and ashamed” (240), a bit like Eliot’s impotent J. Alfred Prufrock, who is incapable of acting, for there is “time yet for a hundred indecisions.”

Archilde persists with his attempt to save the mare until she becomes lame from the chase, and “the tormentor had become the tormented” (241). He had taken it upon himself to improve the mare’s condition but fails miserably, invoking not only Prufrock’s paralysis but also the paternalism of federal policy toward Native Americans; just at the moment when Archilde thinks he has saved her and things have come to “a happy conclusion,” she falls over groaning, “a final note of reproach for the ears of the man who had taken it upon himself to improve her condition” (242). Angry and resentful, Archilde blames the victim, deriding the mare for being “perverse” and “ungrateful” (242) as he realizes that he has to shoot and kill the horse that he had driven into becoming lame.

Then, exhibiting the ultimate absurdity at work in the universe, he then has to guard the mare's carcass overnight to protect it from the coyotes (242).

In another concrete representation of modernity, the novel visibly demarcates the modern temporal break with the past in its physical descriptions of the town's architecture. The town is divided into two sections, the "Townsite" or "up- to-date quarter" (35) settled by the Euroamerican newcomers when the Indian reserve was opened up to white settlement under the Dawes Act, and "Indian town" or "old town," which lacks the telltale signs of modernity such as sidewalks, paved streets, and a linear layout. As the text notes, "The mission town of St. Xavier belonged to two ages. A brief sixty years separated its primitive from its modern, but the division was deeper than years" (35). The lines between old and new are sharply drawn in the town's physical layout, highlighting the schism between the past and the present in the modern era.

The text mirrors these modernist symptoms by drawing upon several modernist techniques and themes, yet McNickle adapts these features to fit the very different experience of Native Americans in modernity. The modernists often represented the disruption of the modern world in fragments, collage, parataxis, nonlinear narrative, even rebellion against the tyranny of plot, as Virginia Woolf put it. Among McNickle's use of modernist discursive tools, McNickle draws upon a Hemingway-esque style in his crisp descriptions of the landscape, as several critics have noted.¹⁸ The novel's blend of oral and written forms suggests the use of montage and collage. McNickle also relies largely on free indirect discourse, a narrative technique that was not invented by the modernists but that has come to be associated with modernist writing.

Like the modernists, McNickle disrupts narrative as an organizing technique in *The Surrounded*. At the beginning of the novel, Archilde is the displaced, homeless modernist hero wandering through the exile that is modernity, much like the quintessential (anti)hero in Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Stephen in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Alone and adrift in the world, Archilde returns to the reservation only to realize, "This, his home, was a strange

country” (120). Archilde comes back home to find that the modern has made a claim on the reservation as well, signified by his father’s new blue car, “the gaudiest of the machines which had just opened a new age in the valley” (26). Archilde’s journey parallels Tom Joad’s in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, published three years after *The Surrounded*; Tom, much like Archilde, says upon first seeing his Oklahoma home, “It ain’t the same” (Steinbeck 39). Both Tom and Archilde return home to find that modernity has changed home into a strange country; both are expatriates in their own homeland.

Paralleling the project of many modernist novels that suggest the death of metanarratives in the modern era, *The Surrounded* (as does *The Grapes of Wrath*) illustrates that the Odyssean master narrative, in which the protagonist returns home after a long journey, no longer applies to the modern world. Rather, for Archilde, the return home signifies the familiar being defamiliarized. While Archilde remembers the “pungent odor of smoke” that his mother’s moccasins give off (3), he has forgotten the obligatory feast with his mother and tribal leaders: “That was something he had forgotten to include in his visit—the old lady and her feasts” (4), he remembers with disdain. His father too is unfamiliar; seeing his father’s thin, bony hand for the first time, he looks at it “with some surprise” (5). Upon his return home he realizes that he can no longer do the things he associates with home; he cannot fish because all of the fish have been killed off just as the Joad family farm has been plowed over by the ravages of industrial capitalism. Like many modernist texts, McNickle’s novel focuses on an alienated modern hero and disrupts the universal plot of return to highlight the inability of European and American understandings of narrative to provide meaning in the modern world.¹⁹

Similarly, the ending of *The Surrounded* illustrates that the American version of the bildungsroman plot in the nineteenth century is no longer conceivable in the modern era, at least for Native Americans. One of the most American of all genres, the American bildungsroman focuses on a young hero who leaves home as part of the development process, in search of a better life and bet-

ter opportunities. This plot is exemplified by the ending of Mark Twain's premodernist *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) in which Huck is about to "light out" (245) for the territories to escape the encroachment of modernity (and, ironically, to settle on the very land from which Indian peoples would be displaced under the Dawes Act). Similarly, the Joad family's migration west to freedom and economic opportunity offers the possibility of a new life. But the option of "lighting out" is no longer available to many Native Americans, *The Surrounded* suggests. In a twice-repeated statement, the novel reminds readers of the stasis and confinement modernity has brought for many Native Americans: "You can't run away nowadays" (287). Paralleling the novel's opening, which suggests that the modern individual can't go home anymore, the ending suggests that Native Americans can't run away anymore. But unlike the Joad family, Archilde's family becomes contained, "surrounded," unable to travel elsewhere.

McNickle's attack on this foundational American narrative of journey away from home suggests that the modern plight of many Americans must be rewritten to reflect the experience of many Native Americans in modernity. For the Indians portrayed in McNickle's novel, modernity has meant dislocation from home coupled with confinement to reservations. Before European contact, the Salish Indians followed a seasonal migration route as, Archilde's Indian mother, Catharine, recalls:

In the old way of living one never stayed in one place for very long. One camped wherever there was game and grass and water for the horses. As a matter of fact, there were certain places where one always camped at the same time each season, unless for some reason game failed to appear in the usual way or a fire burned off the pasturage. (172)

Rather than the random wanderings of a dislocated people, these migratory routes were established through an emulation of natural processes. But the advent of modernity meant the end of the migrant culture as many Native Americans knew it. With European appropriation of Indian lands, many Native Americans were forced

to migrate elsewhere and were then confined to reservations with the goal of halting their migratory lifestyle and assimilating them to capitalist values. While the Euroamerican priest Father Grepilloux is able to “come home to die” (36) after a long period away from the valley, McNickle suggests that the younger generation of Salish can never return home because they have been displaced. The modernist journey to fill the void of sterile European culture depicted in Eliot’s *The Waste Land* seems painfully inappropriate to Native American efforts to recover cultures denied by European colonizers. Rather than the aimless journey of *The Waste Land*, McNickle constructs his plot as a “senseless” (240) chase of pursuer and pursued, an image he uses in the horse chase scene but one that embodies the novel’s larger plot structure.

The incongruence between narrative structures available to Native American and modernist writers is perhaps most poignantly exemplified in Archilde’s frustrated desire to go to Europe in the tradition of many American expatriates. In the middle of the novel, Archilde considers the route of the modernist expatriate, to go abroad to travel and escape the confinement of the United States, as did modernist expatriates. He and his Spanish-born father Max make plans for Archilde to go to Europe to study music and escape the confines of reservation life. Max envisions his son going to what he calls “the old country” (160), an ironic choice of words for Archilde who, as a Native American, is already in what might be called the old country for Indians. In an earlier manuscript of *The Surrounded*, “The Hungry Generations,” Archilde participates in this expatriate lifestyle by going to Paris and living among American expatriate musicians and playing his violin before returning to the United States upon the death of his mother (Hans, “D’Arcy McNickle”; “Because I Understand”).

But in the published version of *The Surrounded*, this cultural script is inaccessible to Archilde, who never travels to Europe. He instead remains on the reservation to translate the rapidly encroaching modern world for his mother who, despite her conversion to Christianity and education in Euroamerican ways, “had not been touched deeply” (173) by the changes of the modern world

and has rejected it. This significant plot change allows McNickle to highlight the gap between the modernists' chosen exile from home and Native Americans' forced dislocation from homelands, the discrepancy between those choosing homelessness and those forced into it. Unlike the modernist expatriates, Archilde is never able to go abroad and live the life of an artist, suggesting that the modernist notion of flight to Europe to pursue an artistic calling is not applicable to most Native Americans. And unlike the modernists, Native Americans in modernity did not have to go abroad to be homeless; as Native Americans they already are homeless in their own home. As Catharine pronounces of her Indian sons' fate in modernity, "My sons are scattered" (10). Many of the tribal elders, including Modeste and Catharine herself, who rejects the Catholic and Euroamerican teachings she learned as a young girl, try to recreate a more traditional home and return to tribal values. In McNickle's portrayal, however, the next generation, personified by Archilde, learns the consequences of trying to return home.

Mr. Parker, the Euroamerican government agent who leads Archilde away in handcuffs in the end, reminds the reader that Indians cannot escape the way modernist expatriates did. Mr. Parker repeats Archilde's earlier statement, "It's too damn bad you people never learn that you can't run away" (297). While the government agent's statement is steeped in racist condescension, he repeats Archilde's phrase exactly but with a difference, giving it a more biting meaning in its repetition and emphasizing that it is specifically Indians, "you people," who cannot run away from colonialism.

Confinement becomes the controlling metaphor for modernity in McNickle's novel, most obviously suggested in its title. Like Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* (1927), *The Surrounded* ends in an image of containment, as Archilde "extended his hands to be shackled" (297) and is taken into police custody. In *Cogewea*, however, the picture is more optimistic than the tragic ending of McNickle's novel, as Robert Holton argues. In Mourning Dove's novel, *Cogewea* makes the bittersweet recognition that a "corral" surrounds the half-breed, perhaps suggesting the confinement that Archilde faces. But *Cogewea* goes on to describe the corral as

one of protection, wishing “that the fence could not be scaled by the soulless creatures who have ever preyed upon us” (Mourning Dove 283). She envisions her confined position as one that protects her from the dangers of Euroamericans. McNickle’s novel similarly hints at the possibility of escaping modernity when Mike and Narcisse, Archilde’s young nephews, run away into the mountains. Echoing the description of the old mare earlier in the novel, Mike and Narcisse simply want “to be let alone” (247). While Archilde might think their choice to be foolish, they teach Archilde that his wishes can’t be forced onto others; they “show him how foolish that was” (247), invoking a desire for self-determination and sovereignty rather than the paternalism Archilde had shown earlier in the horse chase scene. When the novel ends the two boys are not surrounded; instead, they have asserted agency through movement.

While the fate of Mike and Narcisse is left open and thus offers the possibility of an escape from modernity by returning to Salish ways, the final image of Archilde at the end of *The Surrounded* is of a silent/silenced man in shackles “surrounded” by Euroamericans. The paternalistic protection of the Dawes Act is literalized; Archilde is taken into “protective” custody by the Euroamerican sheriff, a powerful metacommentary on the conditions Indians have faced in the modern era. Capture and enclosure contrast sharply with the travel and self-imposed exile portrayed and lived by many modernists.

Because dissolution of tribal lands and the attempted eradication of Indian cultures were central historical conditions of modernity for Native Americans, modernity looks different from the vantage point of many Native Americans, for whom the modern effort to break with the past was not chosen but imposed. In drawing upon modernist themes but also in revising the narrative of the modernist expatriate life in his novel, McNickle simultaneously engages in and challenges the modernist project in order to suggest that it does not apply neatly to the situation of most Native Americans in the modern era.

The modernists’ response to the radical changes of modernity

was only one of the many reactions to the “vertigo” (Foucault 39) of the modern era, but it has come to dominate our understanding of modernity. Our current definition of modernity is marred by ethnocentrism, as Paul Gilroy argues in *The Black Atlantic*. Gilroy calls on scholars to broaden their focus: “The time has come for the primal history of modernity to be reconstructed from the slaves’ point of view” (55). Depending on race, class, nationality, ethnicity, gender, personal experience, sexuality, and location, “Modernism looks quite different depending on where one locates oneself and when,” as Harvey puts it (25).

The point here is not to claim that McNickle or other writers outside the modernist circle did not share many of the same concerns about representation that modernists did. Rather, because of significantly different sociohistorical circumstances in the early twentieth century and a different experience in modernity, McNickle and other historically colonized peoples have developed alternative discursive solutions to these challenges in their project to narrate their visions of the modern world. McNickle’s novel both testifies to the survival of Native Americans despite the persistence of the image of the Vanishing American and requires its readers to explore the experiences of Native Americans in the ongoing reinterpretation of the meanings of modernity. Vine Deloria Jr. argues that the American idea of Indian culture has little connection to the lives of Native Americans: “Not even Indians can relate themselves to this type of creature who, to anthropologists, is the ‘real’ Indian” (82). Similarly, understandings of modernity should more closely reflect the lived experiences of Native Americans in the early twentieth century.

NOTES

1. McNickle was born William D’Arcy McNickle in Saint Ignatius, Montana, to an Irish-American father and a mixed-blood mother. His maternal grandfather was a Métis (Cree) of mixed background who fled Canada in 1885 after the failed Riel Rebellion in Saskatchewan. McNickle’s mother, along with McNickle and his siblings, was adopted into the Flat-head tribe, which later became part of the Confederated Salish and Kooten-

nai Tribes, and received land allotments under the Dawes Act of 1887. For biographical information about McNickle, see Hans, "D'Arcy McNickle"; Dorothy Parker; Purdy; Ruppert.

2. Before American expansion westward, the tribes that later became the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes—also known as the Salish and as the Flathead—lived in the Pacific Northwest. The Hellgate Treaty of 1855 established a reservation in northwestern Montana for the Salish, Kootenai, and Upper Pend d'Oreille. The Salish and Kootenai passed a constitution under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and created the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. While the federal government attempted to terminate the confederated tribes in 1954, it failed. Today the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Reservation in northwestern Montana is 1.2 million acres in size (1.317 million, according to the tribes' official Web site), although only fifty-seven percent of the reservation land belongs to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes due to non-Indian settlement following the Dawes Act (Hill). The population on the reservation is 22,000, with 5,400 of Indian descent, of which 3,100 are enrolled members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (Hill). In all, there are approximately 6,000 members enrolled in the confederated tribes (Hill).

3. *The Hungry Generations*, an earlier manuscript of *The Surrounded*, has recently been published as a book, transcribed from the handwritten original by Birgit Hans. For comparisons between the manuscript and published versions of *The Surrounded*, see also Hans, "D'Arcy McNickle" and "'Because I Understand'"; Owens; Dorothy Parker; Purdy.

4. For the purposes of this essay, I am defining "modernity" as a particular historical moment occasioned by the rapid changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I use the term "modernism" to denote the specific early-twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that focused on formalist experimentalism in response to modernity. While McNickle traveled to Europe, he did not directly participate in this literary movement, which included Euroamerican expatriates Gertrude Stein, H. D., T. S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Ezra Pound. For a sampling of definitions of modernism, see also Bradbury and McFarlane; Eysteinnsson; Friedman, "Definitional Excursions"; Nicholls; Perloff; Singal; Williams.

5. While my book *African, Native, and Jewish American Literature and the Reshaping of Modernism* explores the meanings of modernity for Native Americans, it focuses on genre issues and McNickle's portrayal

of Native American culture rather than this article's focus on modernist themes and techniques.

6. For more specific discussions of historical changes in this period, see Berman; Harvey; Painter; Singal; Susman; Trachtenberg.

7. See Dippie for further discussion of the then popularly accepted thesis by Frederick Jackson Turner, who argued that the frontier molded a distinctly American character. As the open spaces of the American West were settled and Indian populations were "removed," America was no longer seen as a land of endless possibilities, and the frontier was no longer seen as an "escape valve" for population growth, urbanization, and increasing immigration. Without an open frontier, some felt a loss of connection to nature while others felt a sense of progress and security with the settlement of the West.

8. For similar understandings of modernity as a break with the past, see also Berman; de Man; Friedman; Harvey.

9. While the number of schools on reservations exceeded the number of off-reservation schools, an increasing number of students were sent off reservation during the 1880s. In 1887 there were eight off-reservation government boarding schools, plus Hampton (not solely an Indian school). After 1890 the focus was on reservation day schools (Hertzberg 15).

10. For examples of first-person oral and narrative accounts of the boarding schools, see Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima; Nabokov. For more in-depth analyses of the impact of boarding schools and responses to the experience, see also Adams; Dippie; Hertzberg; and Hoxie.

11. The 1924 Citizenship Act might also be viewed as an effort to force Indians to assimilate by denying tribal sovereignty and replacing it with American citizenship, as Jaimes has argued.

12. For the collected short stories written in this period (1927–35), see McNickle's *The Hawk is Hungry*.

13. McNickle published only one other novel in his lifetime, *Runner in the Sun: A Story of Indian Maize* (1954), a historical novel for young adults. After this publication he worked on and off for the next twenty-five years on a novel that was published posthumously in 1978 as *Wind from an Enemy Sky*.

14. McNickle left the BIA in 1952 because he could not support the federal policy of termination of tribal recognition. He became the executive director of American Indian Development, a nonprofit organization focused on Indian economic self-development. He later became a professor and chair of the anthropology department at the University of Sas-

katchewan in Regina, Canada, and, although he never finished a degree, he earned an honorary doctorate in 1966 from the University of Colorado for his work in applied anthropology. He then helped create the Newberry Library's Center for the History of the American Indians in 1972 (posthumously named after McNickle), where he served as director until his death in 1977.

15. For analyses of the role of orality and oral stories in the novel, a project that is beyond the scope of my essay, see Brown; Doss; Evans; Robert Dale Parker; and Purdy.

16. Ruppert suggests that the novel finds its roots in the naturalism of Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris. While *The Surrounded* is not as outspoken in its protest of American racial relations as is Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), both texts explore the sociological processes that entrap their protagonists and deny them the opportunity to articulate their situations. For a discussion of Archilde's predicament, see Evans; Owens. *The Surrounded* also invokes Western regional texts of the period in its detailed descriptions of the landscape, such as Willa Cather's portrayal of the American frontier; see Hans's introduction to *The Hawk is Hungry*.

17. My appreciation to one of the anonymous *SAIL* reviewers of this article who made this point to me.

18. See, for example, Purdy, *Word Ways*; Dorothy Parker. Doss argues that the novel's framework of separation-initiation-return is one of its "Modernist characteristics" (231n13).

19. In its use of oral Salish stories, the novel suggests that tribal understandings of narrative might provide meaning. I explore this point in my book, where I consider McNickle's solutions to the dilemmas of Modernist representation.

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INTERVIEW

A Conversation with David Treuer

VIRGINIA KENNEDY

David Treuer is the author of three novels, *Little*, *The Hiawatha*, and most recently *The Translation of Dr. Apelles*. He has also authored a provocative book of critical essays entitled *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*. Treuer won a Washington Post Critics Choice Award in 2006, and in 2007, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for work on a nonfiction book on reservation life.

In November 2004, provoked by his essay, "Reading Culture," an essay that would be expanded to become a part of *User's Manual*, I wrote to David Treuer, and so began a three-year conversation that spanned numerous e-mail letters, phone calls, and a meeting for lunch not quite halfway between Minnesota and Pennsylvania at a little eatery interestingly called "Native," on the Upper West Side of New York City. What follows is the fruit of our wide-ranging exchange between the fall of 2004 and the spring of 2007, edited in order to organize our dialogue into a coherent readable format.

VIRGINIA KENNEDY (VK): I'm bothered by your essay, "Reading Culture." Silko's *Ceremony* and Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife* are resistance novels. They are a mirror. They make me look at belief systems of European/Euroamerican culture and what these belief systems have wrought; to see a different reality or the possibility that other realities exist on equal footing with the one I had always been taught was the only and best. Am I attributing the job of "savior" to these literatures in the "romanticizing Indian culture" way?

DAVID TREUER (DT): I am glad you're "bothered" by the essay, and I hope you're bothered in a good way. I see your point and let

me be clear: *Ceremony* and, to a lesser degree, *The Antelope Wife* are protest novels. You're right. However, "protest" is clearly thematized in the *action* of the story, in the characters' struggle and forces in their lives. Protest (against hegemony, against, colonialism, and so forth) is clearly wrapped up in the plots of these novels. And you can teach that point that way.

vk: I think you say in your essay that the use of language by Silko and Erdrich is caught in a form that makes the language exotic, but not useful or accurate in its ability to communicate specific indigenous cultures to nonindigenous readers who don't know these cultures. Are you saying Silko and Erdrich have made it *too* easy for non-Indian readers?

DT: My point was simple, I think: if Native American literature is taught as culture, the culture and the literature are cheapened, prone to manipulation, misunderstood, and the process is dishonest. Culture is a theme in Native American novels, but it is not a building block. I took great pains to show how these novels are not constructed out of cultural material, that culture is a wrapper, lauded by many, misunderstood by many, in which fairly traditional, mainstream, and conventional novels are wrapped. This is not to say that these novels are bad; on the contrary, they are amazing, beautiful, wonderful works of the imagination. They are as vital and vibrant as all literature. My point is that the wrapper is being mistaken for the contents.

If you want to teach your students this lesson I suggest making them read *The Education of Little Tree* without telling them that it is fiction and was written by a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Tell them that afterward. You will see how much they want to read it as cultural truth, and then you can unpack that desire in class. I think it is amazing that *Little Tree* was considered central to Native American literature *until* the identity of the author was discovered, and then, magically, the *literature* was no longer *Indian*. It proves that the literature itself is not very long or very seriously under the microscope.

vk: Novels like *Ceremony* or *Fools Crow* illuminate for me the nature of oppression and resistance as a narrative of America,

America defined as the geographic space on which my feet and my children's feet are currently planted. As I already told you, the powerful thing for me and these mostly white Catholic students I teach is that *Ceremony* or Simon Ortiz's poetry or Erdrich or Welch focus us on how whiteness and Christian-ness is represented or constructed and what those constructions have to tell us about who we are, were, can be, will be, if we learn to view ourselves through others' eyes. The decentering thing. But I think often and deeply about the notion of tribally specific critical theories or the notion of "insider/outsider" access or lack thereof, to novels defined as Native American. I am a non-Indian teaching Native American literature to non-Indians. I worry about this.

DT: I *strongly* disagree with anyone who says or thinks that only Natives can teach or truly understand Native American literature. Such a position just doesn't make sense. In fact that was one of my major points in "Reading Culture": it doesn't really matter if the myths in *Ceremony* are "authentic" or "Pueblo" or if they were found in the bottom of a box of cereal. Once they have been moved from a cultural or community context to the context of the novel, they become part of the novelistic tradition and are no longer really part of the Pueblo tradition. The myths function differently when written and spliced into the novel, and that function can be analyzed by anyone.

vk: In your view, how much of what gets defined as Native American literature is focused on the DNA of the author?

DT: DNA is absolutely the most important thing to most critics, and that is what is killing our genre. Because Erdrich happens to be Ojibwe her novels are interpreted as expressions of Ojibwe worldview, not as literary creations. *Little Tree* was considered Native until Forrest Carter's identity was discovered, and so his book now is not.

vk: Can you explain definitively what makes a work of fiction Native American fiction? And how do you see the place of Native literature in the academy in general?

DT: I am not concerned with how our work is "silenced" by the academy or by Western hegemony. Nor am I concerned with how

non-Native experts might or might not rule the roost. Rather, I am concerned with how *we* smother our work with our *own* anxieties about identity and authenticity. When we discuss our work only by way of what kind of cultural work it performs or what kind of cultural stance it takes and by who gets to write and interpret it, we create, at best, a new kind of essentialism and, at worst, a crippling kind of textual racism.

I disagree strongly that Native American literature is silenced or devalued in the academy and forced into uncomfortable poses by “Western” critical practices. I believe the opposite, that Native American literature and criticism and Native American studies all rely almost exclusively on *Western* practices and devices and traditions and are, most of the time, because of the subject or some aesthetic or thematic elements, dressed up as Indian. Most potently, and importantly, this irony plays out in the realm of identity politics where simply because people can claim Indian blood, they feel they can claim exclusive intellectual space. But the end product of their thought is as “Western” or as “canonical” as a Marcuse or a Derrida or a Kristeva.

What is Native American literature? I don’t think that can really be defined. And to ask that question is to once again commit ourselves to fruitless discussions of who is and isn’t Indian and what is and isn’t culture. A better question: how do certain books create *convincing portraits* of Indian life? How do certain books explore our *fantasies* about *culture*?

vk: OK, then how do “certain books create *convincing portraits* of Indian life? How do certain books explore *our fantasies about culture*?” And what would you say are “our fantasies about culture” specifically?

DT: All books *convince* the reader in one way or another, or good books do; bad books fail to convince. In Native literature, if we can see the novels as creating *convincing portraits*, we can finally talk about structure and style and image and metaphor without having to raise questions of authenticity. Debating whether or not something is really a certain way is pointless; to debate why it *seems* a certain way is endlessly entertaining. Sadly some books by some

writers simply rely on received fantasies (the ecological Indian, the salt of the earth, the noble decrepitude of the Rez—I am thinking of Alexie here) instead of using the received fantasies (here are a few more: the disappeared Indian, the drunk Indian, the quirky medicine man, the wise matriarch) to bring the reader to some new place.

The greater and greater presence that the concept of *culture* has in literature is a wrong turn. It is a wrong turn because the *concept* of *culture*, as used or created in Native American fiction, is a pitiful fantasy, a made-up thing, that not only threatens to replace or paste over the real cultures that we try to live and that are in the process of dying but also obscures the true dimensions and real work of our literature; what we *can* do if we have the courage to be honest about our sources.

Instead of trying to prove the authenticity of our works and deeds as determined by the relative degree of Indianness they contain, we can relax and admit that our work is a blending of *many* different things. As it is, many literary critics and novelists end up becoming their own worst enemy. Which is to say they end up being their own James Fenimore Cooper: he was kind and sympathetic and not ill-disposed towards his subject, but he was so frightfully nervous about contamination (of white and Indian) he had his main character, at every possible turn, remind all those around him that “I am a man without a cross.” Meaning he was not mixed-blood. The current debates about authenticity and identity have returned us to Cooper’s time and have erased the intervening two hundred years of history. Only we, not Cooper, are now proclaiming that we are thinkers “without a cross.”

vk: So reflect on what literary texts, specifically fiction, *can* do in and for a culture?

DT: Texts are not life and not culture. Culture is lived by people and is in a state of constant transformation. Literature can suggest culture. That is, literature can evoke or hint at or point toward culture as a destination or place off the page, an ideal or idea that is much too large and fluid and lived to be contained in text. So literature can, I think, metonymically stand in for culture, but it is not

culture. Think of how a hand or a headlight when caught on film *suggests* the rest of the car and the rest of a body, respectively.

vk: Is literature itself culture?

dt: I think not. In the sense that culture is lived, it is acted out in lives between people in countless different ways, whereas text “fixes” our understanding and text extracts what might be a *part* of culture and puts it in play with other texts; literature and text in a sense obliterate culture. I am thinking of *Ceremony*: the myths Silko uses *were* a part of Pueblo culture when they were performed in her community for religious/social/cultural reasons. But when she put the myths in her novel, they ceased to be cultural, and we can no longer interpret them as cultural material because once they are *inside* the book they exist solely in relation to the text around them and in relation to *texts* in general.

vk: So then, to Native American writers, writers who claim that identity, you would say that Native literature now needs to stop using language and myths as a way to “label” itself Indian for those of us who are not Indian and don’t have that lived or linguistic experience, that Native American writers are working too hard for that communicability, right? Your perspective is that Native writers like Silko and Erdrich write, communicating bits and pieces of their respective cultures to define their cultural experience for people who have no other way of “knowing” it; they are coming to “us,” rather than making us work harder to come to them, so to speak. Do I have that right?

dt: You’ve got two questions posing as one here. First I need to make clear that Native American *literature* as we are using it here is Native American *fiction*, specifically. Our poetry, our oral stories, our tribal languages, they are something else entirely. So one question seems to be: does Native American *fiction* need to stop using language and myths as a way to define itself as being Native? I think, yes, we need to reevaluate how the genre is defined. This is especially true when we see that the defining elements of Native American fiction aren’t necessarily represented on the “ground” of Native American practices as they are lived.

Maybe a better question is “why do we persist in believing that

Erdrich's and Silko's novels can (and should) communicate culture at all?" Why do we believe that novels can communicate cultural experience? Don't novels take, as their primary task, the job of *imaging experience*? Perhaps we should see Native American fiction as situated in the field of "culture," *if* we define culture not as lived experience but the norms, values, languages, experiences, and structures of *literature*. A culture of texts, as it were.

VK: Leslie Silko said in an interview back in 1980 that she likes to think of herself as a pretty good *American* writer and James Welch as a pretty good *American* writer. She said, "it's ok to have courses that focus on a particular group of writers, but the attitude which the books are dealt with should be the same as with other books" (Arnold 43). I've noticed that the reviews of your novel—*The Hiawatha*, not *Little* so much—alternate between calling it a "great American novel" and a "great Native American novel." How do you react to those characterizations?

DT: I don't really think about this too much. I feel, of course, that I've accomplished something when my work is called "American literature." Not that I get my validation from reviewers; rather, I feel that I was able to create something that forces readers to think about what they mean when they say "American" versus "Native American." That feels like a small triumph.

VK:

Iw ina giwaabandaan, Giwaabandaan ina iw? Endaso-giizhig igo ge-izhi-izhichigeyaan.

Gabe-giizhig, Aaiin ge-izhichiged giwiiw, Giwii-ozhimig ina, Gaa wiikaa, Nashke na, indaanis, Indaga nibinaadin, Aaniin dash igo, Zügisen, Aaniin, Bizaan igo, Mii geget igo bi-dagoshing waa-wiidigemad. (24–27)

These are the phrases from *The Hiawatha* I don't understand. Would you translate?

DT: I fought my editor long and hard because she did not want the Ojibwe in the book, or if it was in the book, she wanted it translated. I said that was impossible, and I would never do it. The reason is this: Betty's life is terrible, for the most part. And when she remembers her early life with her husband it is the one pre-

cious and beautiful and unsullied part of it. So she protects it in her mind from the rest of her life by remembering it in Ojibwe. To translate it in the book would be, in a way, to violate Betty's memory. And second, there is a sense that, of course, Ojibwe speakers will understand it, but that understanding must be earned by the reader. The chance to look into Betty's life completely is a chance that is earned. Does this make sense to you? I am not trying to be coy. But I am reluctant to translate it. Suffice it to say that there are two conversations going on: first, Jacob is being teased about making his marital bed, and then there is a second conversation, which is mostly pillow talk, between Betty and Jacob. I am sorry that I won't translate those passages for you. But I've got to stay true to Betty. That sounds strange, but I hope you understand.

vk: Could you elaborate in a general sense on your use of untranslated Ojibwe language in your novels?

dt: I use Ojibwe sparingly in *Little* and a bit more in *The Hiawatha*. The fact that the Ojibwe is not translated brings up another aspect of the story and fiction in general. For the most part (and this is most obvious in first-person narratives), the story is a confession made to the reader or made in such a way as to explain what might not be obvious or easily available to the reader. Betty, however, is not interested in that. Her consciousness does not permit that kind of spying. She thinks about Jacob *for herself*, and she does not need to explain her memories to herself. So culture, as you can see, is not really a consideration and was not a consideration when I wrote that section. You could see the section more thematically, too. Ojibwe culture (for Simon and for Betty) is something that is not fetishized for them. It is not a mystery. It is merely (represented by language and by place) one thing among many that they *could* activate or live in but chose not to. And that choice (unlike the cultural choices in *House Made of Dawn*, *Ceremony*, or *Love Medicine*) is not weighted. Culture does not have any more *value* than what surrounds it.

vk: I thought the end of *The Hiawatha* mirrored the end of *Beloved*. But that's maybe because I connect you with Toni Morrison and I've read *Beloved* so many times. It struck me, though, Betty

not getting out of bed, like Sethe of course, and One-Two making her live, like Paul D refusing to let Sethe go when he recognized that she might go the way of Baby Suggs. These women face the immeasurable loss of their children, and Paul D tells Sethe, “you your best thing” (273), and One-Two tells Betty, “You’re enough” (306). And they are, both women *are* enough because they gave their love and flesh and blood to their children without reservation, and they were beaten for it and survived because that is what you do, you survive. Simon runs in the end, like *Beloved*, to what or from what, leaves or returns, and readers are left wondering what will be remembered, what will be left behind, what will be forgotten.

DT: You are—surprisingly, I think—one of the few people to make a connection between *Beloved* and *The Hiawatha*, a connection I consciously wanted to evoke. Of course, there *are* differences: One-Two is nothing like Paul D (he has none of Paul’s virility or his pain), and Betty is much more rough, more active, and more cruel than Sethe (she refuses to believe in Simon’s goodness, after all, at least, until it is too late). And their union at the end is also different (the quiet fulfillment of a long promise) because it doesn’t center on Betty’s search for self-worth (like it does for Sethe). Rather they come together in recognition of their mostly silent and unrecognized devotion to one another. This is something that is missing in *Beloved*. Also Simon doesn’t *represent* the relationships that *Beloved* does. And his run at the end signifies something else, and asks for witnesses, asks for the reader to notice what has never been noticed, to see what is rarely seen.

vk: What do you mean by “what is rarely seen”?

DT: What I mean by “rarely seen” is a very simple thing: Simon’s individual humanity in all its terrible glory. More often than not, Native American characters are asked to *represent* rather than *be*. Tayo represents a certain idea about life and culture; he stands in for Indian culture itself. So, too, for Lipsha. I wanted readers to really see Simon as an individual, a human being, and often that is the hardest thing for readers of Native American fiction to do.

vk: I didn’t see Betty as refusing to see Simon’s goodness, not actively, anyway. It seems to me that she just loses the capacity to

look for goodness in him. In Betty there is a certain acceptance of the cruelty in life. She says to One-Two that she “tried so hard with all of them, but it wasn’t ever enough” (306). This way of perceiving her life makes her hard I think, much more so than Sethe, who, now that I think about it, is more like Simon than she is like Betty, but not essentially cruel.

DT: As for Betty and Simon, your instincts are right: Sethe is more like Simon than Betty, bumping up against a life-shape that she is powerless to control or fix. They both are innocent and guilty at the same time. The way the voice changes to second person, coupled with the eyes at the end of the novel, is meant to suggest this: a witnessing. There is an active way in which Indians like Simon (modern, living in cities, not “torn between two worlds”) are purposely *not* seen. They do not fit nicely into the stories made for them; they are not “storied” in the way that is comfortable for most people. The whole book is bent to bearing witness, not understanding necessarily, not empathizing, just bearing witness.

VK: In *Little* and *The Hiawatha* the buildings, the structures, have lives of their own. They are characters in the sense that they contribute to the action of the novel and to the development of the lives of human characters. Both of those novels make geographic place an intimate part of human existence, a partner in human existence and experience.

DT: I agree, but neither book is at all concerned with identity or place, in the sense of “where do Indians belong?” No one here is torn between two worlds, an idea I hate very much. A better way to think of it is that the world, the landscape, is torn between people. I like that much better.

VK: Why is *The Hiawatha* titled *The Hiawatha*? Why did you center the train that way, when it is just one of many defining places, spaces, locations, in the novel?

DT: The train is important as a vestige of history and as a place where Vera and Lester meet. But it is more important in two other ways: First, it is a modern physical object that suggests modernity and progress, but it has an Indian name that suggests an essence that is seen as “antimodern” and “regressive.” So the train is where

the modern city and the “ancient” Indian (in terms of image) meet. Second, the train functions as a tunnel back to Longfellow’s poem. If you remember, Hiawatha was so fast he could outrun an arrow to the target. The questions have always been can Simon outrun his own crime, and where will that leave him?

vk: Could you talk about your third novel a little? How is it like or unlike the other two, for example?

DT: My third novel, *The Translation of Dr. Apelles*, is I think quite a departure from my previous work. It is about a Native translator of Native American texts who finds a document that seems to be the sole document in a language only Dr. Apelles can speak. As he begins translating it he realizes, suddenly, that he has never been in love. And so the book becomes a quest of sorts, the quest to *translate* the document and to fall in love. Even though this is a love story and, as such, has a much sunnier disposition than, say, *The Hiawatha*, it is still a serious book. In many ways it functions as a companion piece (or vice versa) to the book of essays also coming out in the fall.

I first thought of the book when I was overseas, in France, and, while walking down the street (I don’t remember which one) I was suddenly, acutely, even painfully aware that there was no one within thousands of miles who could understand my language. That is, no one who could understand Ojibwe. There I was, in a beautiful city, people all around me, happy, successful, healthy, and I was beset by a strange and crushing kind of loneliness. I felt that, at the very center of myself, that there was no one who could *translate me*; no one who could understand in the original the most vital and important parts of my heart. And I was also beset by the strange sensation that what people *did* recognize or see as *Indian* was only the most universal, widespread, undifferentiated, generic kind of Indianness, the kinds we often see in movies and literature. And that the faulty vision of the people interpreting me and the lack of anyone who shared a language combined to create *ideas* of *me* and of *Indians* that actively obscured and eroded what is unique and strange and special and singular about me and, by extension, about all of us and our patrimony.

The Translation of Dr. Apelles takes up that question and that problem, the double problem of self-regard and the ideas of others, and spins it out in a way, I hope, that will change how we see ourselves and cultures *and*, more importantly, make more difficult the kinds of transmutations that occur when ideas pass the literature/life barrier.

vk: I think in many ways *Dr. Apelles* is a book about the process of learning about love: learning how to love one's self, learning how to risk loving someone else, learning how to discover the courage to take risks in order to love, learning what it takes to recover from the loss of love.

DT: I like that interpretation!

vk: How would you define the point of the presence of Bimaadiz and Eta's story in *Dr. Apelles*? In what ways is their story parallel to the personal story of Apelles? Or is "parallel" the wrong word in terms of defining a relationship between the two plot lines?

DT: Well. It is as a "buyer beware" kind of thing. It looks like Indian myth, and lazy or inattentive readers could read it that way, but if they do, they will miss out on the real meaning and real beauty of the book.

vk: You said *The Translation of Dr. Apelles* functions as a companion piece (or visa versa) to your book of essays, *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*. Were you writing *Dr. Apelles* and *User's Manual* simultaneously?

DT: I did write the essays and the novel at the same time, and they influenced each other a lot. Both books are attempts to remind people of the fictionality of fiction—that is, the "madness" of books is what makes them interesting. As such there are many "traps" and "tricks" in *Dr. Apelles* that continually force the reader to remember that it is made up, constructed, a "novel universe."

vk: How is the process of writing a novel different from the process of writing criticism?

DT: It is different in every way. In the essays you try to make an argument using facts. In a novel you create "facts" through persuasion and seduction.

vk: I was struck by the combination of essays in *A User's Manual*. There are three ("Lonely Wolf," "How to Hate/Love an Indian,"

and “The Spirit Lives On”) that do not deal with analyzing novels. Why did you include them in the book?

DT: These are little intermissions between the big ideas of the book that buttress the larger arguments and show how the issues found in the literature do bleed over into life.

vk: I know you realize since its publication that *User’s Manual* has sparked some spirited debate within the Native literary community. Can you comment on the reception it has received?

DT: Oh. Well. Reception has varied. Many people (including Leech Lakers) have said, “Thanks for doing this. Someone needed to say these things.” So have academics. But then others have felt that I either ignored or undermined their work. Still others think it is one step in saving the field, and others think that I have undone it. I think it’s healthy to have a range of opinions and reactions to any one thing. So I find this encouraging. But many people also tend to forget that it is only one book, with a pretty tight focus; it’s not the beginning or end of anything, and certainly not the only way to skin our collective cat.

vk: Recently there has been more and more analysis and criticism surrounding the notion of “tribally centered” modes of literary criticism that should be generated from “inside” tribal communities. You argue that when it comes to fiction, the novels specifically, these modes of criticism are not possible or even desirable. How would you respond to the suggestion that a debate between your critical perspectives and perspectives that make the identity of Indian authors and/or critics central to analysis might be divisive within the community of Native writers, in ways that are unhealthy for the writers and for Native communities?

DT: I have a lot of skepticism about “tribally centered” modes of criticism, especially when it is advanced without considering the role of Native languages in that work. As for divisiveness, there is already a lot of divisiveness that masquerades as critical thinking, a lot of bashing and dismissing of people based on perceived threat or to consolidate power. My essays I hope will give us a chance to talk about issues and ideas that are vital and important and to leave personal conflicts aside.

vk: How do you feel your book adds to the conversation on Native fiction? How would you place it among other types of critical approaches—postcolonialism; literary nationalism, the new Weaver, Warrior, and Womack book, for example; ethnocriticism, postmodern stuff, and so forth?

DT: This is a larger question for someone like . . . you! I don't think the brand names with which we label theories or literatures are particularly helpful in understanding those theories or literatures, except to make them a little more "ruly" and easier to teach to undergraduates. One critic of mine, however, has coined a great phrase to describe what I do: he calls *User's Manual* a call for *artistic sovereignty*. Which I think brings it into conversation nicely with Womack and Warrior and Weaver. My *User's Manual* is *not* a "New Critical" approach; it is not a direct channeling of the New Critics. I don't privilege individual vision or genius. I don't think the book is the *only* thing in question. Rather I think Native American fiction should be treated as existing in a field of other creations, other texts, and then we can move out from there to tackle questions of authorship and identity. If anything, I find myself appreciating semiotics (à la Charles Sanders Peirce) more than anything else.

vk: Is there anything you would add, remove, or say differently now that you've had a chance to interact with the reading public regarding the book?

DT: Not really. But if I could go back I would distribute more hugs and backslaps to various writers before embarking on the essays about their work.

vk: Congratulations on the Guggenheim. Is this an especially important achievement for you?

DT: Yes, very much so. I felt like it was a validation of a lot of my work, which has sometimes gone unnoticed. It's always nice to be chosen! But more than that, winning a Guggenheim felt like a validation of our field, of our concerns about Native American life and literature. It's a great honor, but I think the honor extends to all of us.

vk: You are working on a nonfiction book about contemporary reservation life. Are you letting fiction go for a while?

DT: I'm hardly letting fiction go! In fact I'm working on three projects at once: a nonfiction book on modern reservation life; a new novel; and I, along with my brother Anton Treuer and the Algonquian linguist John Nichols, am recording, transcribing, and translating Ojibwe oral histories and stories, which will be compiled into the first-ever practical Ojibwe grammar. This project, above and beyond the others, feels like the most important.

vk: What provoked you to undertake the book on reservation life?

DT: After the shootings in Red Lake in March 2005 I was, as many people were, devastated and deeply concerned. Concerned about our lives, and our lives on the reservation in particular. But I was also concerned about *how* we, and others, *understand* and *frame* our lives. Scott Lyons, another Leech Laker, wrote a piece for *Indian Country Today* that described most journalism about Indians as being written as tragedy. Tragedy, he says quoting Aristotle, elicits two reactions from the audience: pity and fear. And pity and fear lead to catharsis, but not necessarily comprehension. I wanted to write a book that moved beyond simple tragedy and recovery, beyond pity and fear, beyond the same old story about the destruction of Indian life: a story that was able to accommodate our successes and victories and the beauty of our lives, too.

vk: What are the commonalities and the differences between writing nonfiction like this and working on a novel?

DT: They are pretty different. Of course you have to provide a plot, themes, a chain of events, a sense of place and atmosphere, and a unique tone. But what counts as detail, how it is included, what counts as information, how it can be used, this is all very different. The one thing that is difficult for me is that I am writing about people and places I love very much, and I want to honor them, do right by them. So writing becomes a careful, slow process.

vk: We've talked about the issue of author identity in terms of how it figures into Native American fiction. You take this on specifically in *User's Manual*. Do you see identity differently in dealing with this book of nonfiction? Let me clarify that. I know we're in the realm of the silly when we say just because a person has Indian

blood they can write a superior nonfiction piece on reservation life, even if they've never lived on a reservation. I don't mean my question that way. I mean experience as identity. Your experiences growing up where and how you did give you an authenticity in writing about reservations that non-reservation dwellers wouldn't have. But there are limitations to that, too; not all reservations are alike. And within individual reservations there are different experiences. So how do you orient yourself as an author in relationship to your text in a project like this?

DT: That's a good question. One way around this for me has been to thematicize that concern. That is, one of the major themes or subjects of the nonfiction book I am writing is that there is no *reservation experience*. There are experiences, there is a vast range of identities and experiences and impressions, even on my reservation. The reservation polyphony has been ignored in favor of single visions, monocular stories, and I think this needs to change.

VK: And in terms of Native fiction, what would be your main hopes for Native writers, critics, and readers of the genre, now and into the future?

DT: I hope we grow. I hope we can see our literature more creatively and less intuitively. That is, I hope we can make the literature transform our ideas instead of buttressing them. I hope that what writers like Silko and Erdrich and Welch and Momaday began can continue to grow in directions unforeseen by any of us. Now.

VK: And finally, you're a dad now. Has being a father changed your orientation to your work?

DT: I'm not sure. Being a father has made me write more quickly and value the time I do have to write. I get up at 3:30 a.m. (usually) to begin writing so I can get a good chunk done before breakfast, which we all take together. I need to do this because after breakfast my daughter Elsiná demands that we dance. She's eighteen months old, so of course she has great taste. Her favorites right now are Barry White, Stevie Wonder, and Al Green. The dancing lasts quite a while, and greatly interferes with writing . . . but it's really impossible to say no to a combination of Stevie Wonder and my daughter. And who would *want* to say no to that? You'd have to be crazy.

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POETRY

Removals

SCOTT ANDREWS

Let facts show how the *benevolent* design has been prosecuted.

—Memorial of Protest of the Cherokee Nation

June 22, 1836

I. VIETNAM

each soldier was assigned a family to “round up”
but Uncle Billy’s was the last
out of the village and, fearing snipers
and Sarge’s ridicule, he reached through
their wailing and snatched up the grandmother
from where she lay on the floor, chanting the names
my uncle did not recognize as names
and crying the tears that burned
his arms as he lifted her easily onto the wooden cart
that was lopsided with their sorrows
and he tried to shout louder than the embarrassment
and shame that roared in his ears and he shouted
for them to get moving because there were snipers
in the treeline and Sarge would be there any second
calling him “Chief”
and flipping his Zippo.

II. OKLAHOMA

one of so many boat people
who washed ashore in Oklahoma

a grandmother

sat on the cool tiles of the Piggly Wiggly
and cradled the papaya in her arms
startled to see this piece
of home so far from home

it seemed out of place among the apples and nectarines
like her own family among these giant, noisy people

like the dark-skinned man who stood above her

who was equally startled to see
this woman from his past
again before him

I am so sorry, Grandmother.

each in tears
they left the store
she frightened by the man
but clutching the papaya
and he following
his arms outstretched

III. A SONG FOR MY UNCLE

when the column of soldiers
and Vietnamese families
with buffalos and chickens
arrived at the new village
built by Army engineers

solid, sterile,
even a new temple
but with no ancestors

you helped the family
unload their cart
but the frail grandmother
you had lifted so easily before
was dead

pick her up again
as light as a sparrow
don't fear the tears
the wailing
of her son
his wife
her grandchildren
don't fear your own fear
your own guilt

turn from the cart
and face the old home
in the distance
where the smoke rises
from the green horizon

ask her to forgive you
and lift her into the air

higher

a little bird
she will fly home

her house is now ashes
but she will alight

in the cemetery
surrounded by flowers
greeted by so many
little birds
singing happily
that she is back

imagine it

Columbus Day 2092

the letters flew
on Columbus Day
little messengers
landing on porches and desks
to tell the Europeans
they must leave
must imitate the salmon
and return to their homes

the Europeans had never heard
of the company on the letterhead:
Wovoka Real Estate Investment Trust
the talking heads on cable networks
were puzzled at first
they thought it was a Polish company

the trust had been hidden beneath
a coat of other names
a coat of papers and papers and papers
layers of shell companies
shells had once served the California natives
so well and had become useful again

the Europeans had been tricked
at their own game, with their own magic
—contracts, signatures, laws, money

hundreds of paper masks were pulled
back to reveal one dancer beneath

fueled by a century of bouncing balls
spinning wheels
thick chips caressed and stacked
by the blue-haired
and the sun-starved
the Wovoka Real Estate Investment Trust
had bought every piece of America
that had been for sale
secretly
patiently
and it was all for sale
eventually

the famous Indian poet and *Hollywood Squares* regular
Sherman Running Jump Shot used his own
personal wealth to buy a bar
called the Crazy Horse
and close its doors on Columbus Day
—and then set it on fire
CNN broadcast his smiling announcement:
“The Happy Hour of American History is over, folks!
We don’t care where you go, but you can’t stay here!”

the Ghost Dance vision was not fully realized
not all the Europeans left
since many were not Europeans anymore
they were husbands, wives, cousins, children
of the joint owners of the trust
many others stayed as well
but they paid rent
they obeyed the rules of the new landlords

everything was different
after that
everything

Dialectic

I. FATHER

Our daughter first felt the heat
of the sun through your skin.

She dreamt in the gentle tides
of your breathing, your blood.

You were her first home.

Your name—"Mom"—will be
among the last words she
speaks in her life

long after we are gone.

Please forgive my jealousy.

This is how the Moon feels,
forever circling the thrumming Earth.

II. MOTHER

Don't you think I would share
this connection with you if I could?

Don't you think I would share
this bounty and this burden?

I am source and captive at the same time,
and perhaps I will never know the freedom
I imagine you possess.

The miracle of our daughter
could not happen
without the miracle
of your body
that so embodies
your desire
for me.

Without the Moon
how would the Earth
know its path?
Without you
she and I would
be lost.

In the tides, we
see the Moon's
desire for the Earth.
Push me.
Pull me.
Let me feel
your power.
I will return it.

Special Section
Reasoning Together

Volume 20, Number 2

Reasoning Together

An Introduction

CRAIG S. WOMACK

In June 2002 we asked tribally affiliated scholars who taught Native literature to “describe an ethical Native literary criticism.” The conversation had actually begun the previous year, and we had tried to identify every Native person who taught the literature. Inevitably we missed a few people, and we apologize, yet we aimed toward inclusivity and those whose views were as often divergent, as much as convergent, with ours. While we certainly invited senior folks just as inclusively, we felt it vital to the collective, in avoiding the status quo, to concentrate on young scholars too, who, at least during that time, were not yet well known, some still in graduate programs. The resulting book, *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, intervenes in the history of *SAIL* conservatism by urging the journal further toward its mission of becoming the study of American Indian literatures rather than the study of American Indian identities, especially through *Reasoning’s* celebration of some alternatives to ethnographic analysis and protagonist studies. We need to also credit *SAIL* for its own efforts at breaking out of these molds as well as to encourage further deviance. As sacred as anything in the book we published is the fact that each of the twelve people who wrote is its author, not its contributor, and each writer is in dialogue with fellow authors in an interactive format by citing fellow essayists in the collective.

In order to launch our book, we have called on two important writers—one north and one south of a problematic border, the one between Canada and the United States—to weigh in on the

result in this issue of *SAIL*. We appreciate the possibility of a different angle of vision than our own that is provided here by Kristina Fagan and James Cox, who were chosen especially because they are not in the collective. We hope the collective will generate debate of a particular kind rooted in the citation of scholarly publications rather than in public venting with few references to ideas, and certainly the work of Kristina and James has demonstrated a commitment to working through controversies. The collective itself is not only passionate about its views—in its best moments it is outrageously *compassionate*. We invite you to join us by reading *Reasoning Together*—as well as by closely following the insights of these two thoughtful scholars who have important things to say about our attempts to envision a literature in relation to the ethics that might best serve it.

The Delicate Dance of Reasoning and Togetherness

KRISTINA FAGAN

Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective, a new collection of essays by Native literary critics, is one of the most important theoretical works to emerge out of the study of Aboriginal literature. I do not know whether the collection's title deliberately recalls a dialogue between David Brumble and Karl Kroeber, also entitled "Reasoning Together," which first appeared in *The Canadian Review of American Studies* in 1981 and later in *Smoothing the Ground: Essays on Native American Oral Literature*, but comparing the two works shows us just how far this field has come. In 1981 Kroeber and Brumble, both non-Native, wrote authoritatively about how "Indians" feel about having their stories and belongings collected and displayed by white scholars. The "Together" of the title did not include Aboriginal people as part of the reasoning process, since Native people from the communities under discussion were neither quoted nor, apparently, consulted. Since then, Aboriginal people have slowly begun to enter the academy and, more specifically, the ranks of literary critics. Particularly in the United States, there has developed an intellectual community of Aboriginal literary critics. Here in Canada, this community is significantly smaller, and so I read *Reasoning Together* with pride, pride at seeing so many Aboriginal people in my field working and writing together with such sophistication and dedication. In recent years there has been an emerging rhetoric within universities on the need to bring indigenous knowledge into the academy. However, too often the attempts to do this have been tokenistic, primarily symbolic, or

restricted to particular courses—and have not truly challenged the dominance of traditional academic ways of learning, knowing, and expressing. In contrast, *Reasoning Together* raises tough questions that go to the core of how we practice Aboriginal literary criticism. How can we work within the “reasoning” mode so valued within the academy while maintaining our responsibilities to our communities and our own experiences? And how will trying to achieve this balance change what our academic work looks like?

These questions are hinted at in the collection’s title. The use of the word “reasoning” resists popular stereotypes of Native people as spiritual and superstitious or as radical and angry. It emphasizes that the contributors are intellectuals, highly trained in the practice of reasoning, a mode that is highly valued in and part of a long tradition in the Western academy. “Reasoning” can be generally defined as “clear, orderly thinking, drawing inferences and reaching conclusions in accordance with logical principles” (Lloyd 298). René Descartes was an influential promoter of this mode in the sixteenth century, contrasting it with what he called the “fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together” (qtd. in Lloyd 298). Taken to its logical conclusion in Descartes’ work, reasoning led to a radical skepticism that left him with only his thinking mind and with no secure connection to the physical world or to other people. The Western university still primarily values a Cartesian reasoning based in logic rather than imagination. We can see this in the profoundly secular and skeptical attitude of contemporary literary theory, where beliefs in religion, gender, nation, tradition, and even the evidence of our senses have been widely deconstructed and destabilized. Some feminist theorists have challenged the primacy of reason in the academy in “an attempt to reclaim emotion and imagination as important to intelligent thinking” (Lloyd 300). But, despite their efforts, the typical literary critical essay is analytical and detached, based in reason without appealing to experience, emotion, or imagination.

The Native literary critics in *Reasoning Together* are well trained in this tradition of detached reasoning. They can see its value, its

ability to break through conventional wisdom and bias. But in an academic world where nations are “imagined communities” (Anderson), where tradition is “invented” (Hobsbawm and Ranger), and where gender is “performance” (Butler), they continue to believe in the importance of “togetherness,” as invoked in the title. As for most Native academics, their lived connections to their families, their home communities, their nations, and other Native people are central to their academic work. Forms of group identity, shaped by things such as traditions, spirituality/religion, shared experience and history, a land base, emotional connections, shared political goals, and family ties, are essential to all the writers in this collection. They know, as Cheryl Suzack writes in *Reasoning Together*, that “[i]n Native America, identity categories mean all the difference between land and dispossession, between restorative justice and continued oppression” (171). Yet academic reasoning (particularly of the postmodern strain) has commonly challenged these kinds of connections as the product of “the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together” (Descartes, qtd. in Lloyd 298), and it has led to criticism of many Aboriginal scholars as “essentialists.” This tension between theoretical reasoning and lived connections is not, however, unique to Aboriginal scholars. Some feminist critics, for example, have reacted with dismay to academic theories that challenge the “togetherness” of the women’s movement. Martha Nussbaum, writing about the postmodern gender theory of Judith Butler, which she says is subversive only on a “symbolic level” (45), contrasts it with the work of academic feminists in India who work from their sense of connection to other women and to material reality: “[They] know that they live in the middle of a fiercely unjust reality; they cannot live with themselves without addressing it more or less daily, in their theoretical writing and in their activities outside the seminar room” (38). In the introduction to *Reasoning Together*, Craig Womack claims that we cannot compare the deconstruction of gender identity with the deconstruction of Native identity: “It is one thing to say gender is not who we are but what we do, as the later gender theorists said; it is quite another to say Indians are not who we are but what we do

(although there are some who make such claims)” (23). In my view Womack is here overstating the uniqueness of Aboriginal scholars’ concerns with postmodern reasoning. Nevertheless, it is true that most Aboriginal scholars, like the feminist scholars in India, are particularly aware we “live in the middle of a fiercely unjust reality” and are therefore especially concerned with the relationship of their scholarship to that reality—that is, with the ethics of their scholarship.

All the contributors to this volume were asked to write an essay in response to the instruction, “Describe an ethical Native literary criticism” (95). The responses that this request generated are diverse, but all of them, at their core, are seeking to find a way to assert and strengthen forms of Native “togetherness” in the face of a mode of “reasoning” that is highly suspicious of claims of collectivity. Native critics have often, as Womack points out, responded to this challenge by retreating to the position that “Western critical theory is the enemy” (90). A strength of this collection is its contributors’ willingness to engage in theoretical debate and to consider the contributions of Western theory, while at the same time drawing on the knowledge of Aboriginal peoples. Postmodernism, Craig Womack admits in the collection’s introduction, gives Native studies “a good strong kick in the butt to move it beyond some of the static clichés that have kept it from addressing difficult issues” (66). In the study of Native literature, these “static clichés” have included uncritical and idealized generalizations about “Native culture” and “Native worldview.” The critics in *Reasoning Together* then are asking: what connects Native people, and particularly Native writers and Native writing, and how can we describe these connections without relying on unconvincing generalizations about Nateness? As Womack writes in the introduction, “The notion of just what makes tribal literature tribal is a vexing problem that ends up a focus, in one way or another, of each essay in our own collection” (23). But rather than retreat before this “vexing problem,” these essays seek new approaches in the field of Native literature, approaches that use theoretical reasoning while at the same time reflecting the authors’ experiences of connection

as Native people. Most of them would agree with Robert Warrior when he writes in *The People and the Word*, “I maintain that the choice between a theoretical sophistication that recognizes the impossibility of sure knowledge and an uncritical reliance on self-knowledge is a false one” (xxv).

Craig Womack makes a foray into balancing “self-knowledge” and “theoretical sophistication” in the long essay that introduces the book, “A Single Decade: Book-Length Native Literary Criticism between 1986 and 1997.” To begin, Womack juxtaposes the emergence of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault (in other words, the emergence of deconstruction and postmodern theory) with important changes in federal Indian legislation in the seventies. “What, if anything,” Womack asks, “do these disparate events have to do with one another?” (5). It is not a question that he explicitly answers. However, I would suggest that one answer is that what connects deconstructionist theory and Indian legislation is Craig Womack himself. As a Native person he is concerned with the legislation that affects him and his people; as an academic he is concerned with major theoretical developments in literary studies. But how to bring the two together? Womack’s response to this challenge is to document the path of Native literary criticism between 1986 and 1997, while attempting to link it to political and cultural events in Indian country. He reviews the book-length works of Native literary criticism over the decade, situating them in relation to each other, to major critical debates, and to developments in related areas such as cultural studies and queer theory. It is an impressive survey that is invaluable in helping us see the field as a whole more clearly. Locating texts in a particular moment, as the result of particular events and forces, allows Womack to avoid the kind of overgeneralizing that has sometimes plagued this field of study. He juxtaposes this critical survey with brief vignettes of contemporaneous political events, events from “Indian country,” and events from his own experience. These vignettes are often highly evocative, and they certainly provoke the reader to ponder how they relate to the critical history that Womack presents. But Womack himself never makes this connec-

tion explicit, leaving the vignettes uncommented on and untheorized. These brief descriptions work on the reader's imagination, rather than fitting into the logical argument of the essay. As I will discuss later, I do think that the realm of the imagination can have value within academic work. However, there is also the danger that the lack of integration between these snippets of "Native experience" and the scholarly history in Womack's essay inadvertently reproduces a disconnect between the academic study of Native literature and the lives of Native people outside the academy. It also problematically suggests that the descriptions of experience are transparent and self-evident, not needing or containing interpretation. The somewhat-fractured form of this essay speaks to the difficult process of bringing material experience and academic reasoning together.

Several essays in the collection explore ways of connecting Native people across tribal or national boundaries, particularly those by Kimberly Roppolo, Suzack, and Warrior. When I began studying Aboriginal literature in the midnineties, literary critics in the field worked almost exclusively with the broad, pantribal category of "Native literature." Since then, both Native nationalists and deconstructionists have argued that the generic "Indian," without specific national or cultural grounding, is largely a construction of colonialism. Nevertheless, as Lisa Brooks points out in her contribution to the collection, "intertribalism" has a long history as a strategy for combating colonialism by creating useful connections between Native peoples (253). Roppolo's essay, "Samson Occom as Writing Instructor: The Search for an Intertribal Rhetoric," can be situated within this intertribal tradition. Roppolo argues for the existence of what she calls an "intertribal rhetoric": a way of speaking and writing that is distinct to Native people but that crosses tribal boundaries. Drawing on examples from a variety of times, regions, and tribes, she describes the characteristics of this rhetoric, including use of personal experience, paradox, indirect discourse, humor, communally made meaning, and repetition. At times, in attempting to describe these characteristics, she falls into romanticized binary oppositions and generalizations:

This rhetoric would use an indirect form of discourse, based on synthesis rather than analysis, and be non-linear/holistic, with meaning-filled gaps. [. . .] Our penumbras, in other words, are the universe, are all of creation, as a Native worldview would posit the criticism as part of the ongoing Story of All Our Relations. (309)

Later in the collection, Womack himself critiques this “Native worldview” approach as tending to homogenize the experiences of millions of individuals: “when we come up with the ‘Indian mind,’ just whose brain are we dealing with?” (360). Indeed, when Roppolo suggests that Native rhetoric is “based on synthesis rather than analysis,” she does not seem to be talking about the many “Indian brains” included in this collection, most of whose thinking is deeply analytical. Despite the weakness of some such generalizations in her essay, however, Roppolo sees this intertribal rhetoric not as an inevitable product of the “Native worldview” but as a strategically used style of communication that can connect scholars across tribes and to Aboriginal communities. “We need,” she writes, “to validate Native ways of constructing arguments in the academy” (320). However, this essay does not appear to use the kind of rhetoric that it describes. It is written in standard academic English, and it is a typically detached, explicit, and linear argument. As in Womack’s introductory essay, there seems to be something of a fracture between the essay’s stated goal and its form—that is, between the goal of togetherness and the standard reasoning form.

Much as Roppolo sees intertribalism as a strategy that can bring Native academics and Native communities together, Cheryl Suzack seeks to claim feminism as a strategic and meaningful term of organization for Native people in her essay, “Land Claims, Identity Claims: Mapping Indigenous Feminism in Literary Criticism and in Winona LaDuke’s *Last Standing Woman*.” The collective womanhood that was proclaimed by the feminist movement of the sixties and seventies has been widely deconstructed, largely due to the critique from women of color who felt excluded from that collective. In response to this critique, Suzack proposes a form of indig-

enous feminism that would recognize the complex intersections of gender identity, racial identity, community/tribal identity, and colonial history. She points out that oversimplified and oppositional identity categories continue to be used against Aboriginal people to deny them land and rights, giving the example of how blood-quantum categories were used to dispossess the White Earth Band of disputed land, so “theorizing identity in Native American literature cannot remain an intellectual exercise divorced from social reality” (171). Her argument is a powerful one, and she supports it with a reading of Winona LaDuke’s novel, *Last Standing Woman*, pointing out the complex and strategic interweaving of various forms of identity in the characters’ lives. It is surprising, however, and a little disappointing, that she does not return to the arena of “social reality” at the end of her essay to suggest how her strategically complex identity categories might be used beyond the realm of literary criticism. As Suzack points out earlier in the essay, LaDuke herself has been criticized by some other feminists for privileging a “Mother Earth” and “earth mother” rhetoric that excludes many women as well as for “dividing the left” by running for vice president on the Green Party’s 2000 U.S. presidential ticket, an act that some feminists feared would lead to a Republican victory and a further erosion of women’s rights. These examples reveal that, in the realm of material politics, people must and do make choices between their various identity affiliations. The simultaneous and equal valuing of various identity factors, leading to “a communal position that envisions a common humanity” (296), is perhaps easier to maintain in literature than in life. And surely if we, as Aboriginal academics, are to prevent our work from becoming an idealistic “intellectual exercise divorced from social reality” (271), then that challenge needs to be recognized.

Like Roppolo’s and Suzack’s, Robert Warrior’s essay seeks new ways of drawing connections among the diverse lives of Native people. His beautifully written “Your Skin is the Map: The Theoretical Challenge of Joy Harjo’s Erotic Poetics” calls for a greater recognition of the “embodiment” of Native people, and especially of our experiences and expressions of the erotic, supporting his argument

with a close reading of Joy Harjo's erotic poetry. Native people's eroticism, he argues, has been ignored and erased by colonialism, and to reclaim it is to reclaim ourselves as fully human. Further, he claims that eroticism is inherently liberatory: "To engage the erotic is to challenge the power of the psychic structures that keep us in our place" (342). Warrior's argument is very similar to one made by the women's movement about the power and subversiveness of women's sexuality, which has so often been objectified and denied. And his argument does indeed have liberatory potential; the acceptance and enjoyment of our own bodies is surely a necessary and basic step toward greater self-care in all aspects of life, and perhaps especially in addressing the many health issues in Native communities, many of which stem from mistreatment of our own bodies. That said, however, we must ask the question of to what extent personal experience (Harjo's or indeed Warrior's own) can be generalized as applicable to "Native people." The erotic may appear to be something basically and universally human, something that connects people beyond the boundaries of society. Indeed, Warrior argues that, in the words of Joy Harjo, sexuality takes us to the "quivering raw essence of humanness" (346), in contrast to and in resistance to "the apparatuses of power" (348). But his essay does not consider the counterargument that we can never access some "essence of humanness" without that experience being mediated by human culture. In the opening pages of the collection, Womack describes the argument of Michel Foucault's *A History of Sexuality*: "sexuality is not an ahistorical universal phenomenon but an idea with a history. Sexuality, including concepts such as heterosexuality and homosexuality, are not innate conditions but socially regulated constructions of identity that are related to systems of power" (5). According to Foucault's argument, erotic experiences, which may feel primal, raw, and natural, are still influenced by our socialization. As such, sexuality can participate in oppression. Warrior dodges this counterargument with the quick assertion that, according to Audre Lorde, the erotic is "never dangerous, brutal, or coercive" (342). But this does not address the fact that, for some people, and some Native people, their experiences

of sexual pleasure are profoundly connected to danger, to power over others, or to oppression. This is a reality that needs to be more fully acknowledged and discussed to prevent Native people's eroticism from becoming an idealized stereotype.

Clearly, to argue for broad, intertribal connections among Native people is a difficult theoretical process, one prone to problematic overgeneralizations. One response to such problems has been what is sometimes called a tribally or a culturally specific approach, focusing on the literature of a particular tribe, First Nation, or Aboriginal group, as seen in Womack's study of Creek literature, *Red on Red*. In *Reasoning Together*, the culturally specific approach is represented by Janice Acoose's "Honoring *Ni'Wahkomakanak*." Acoose clearly states her goal as a literary critic: "I want to suggest that we research our own cultures of origin and, for our respective cultures, initiate cultural restoration projects by building culture-specific literary canons" (219). Thus she draws on her own experiences to situate herself as a *Koochum* (grandmother) and within Nêhiyawak-Métis-Nahkawè cultures, and she goes on to use her knowledge of Nêhiyawak (Cree)-Métis culture to read the works of three writers from that cultural tradition. Acoose's work is an example of the important culturally specific work that still needs to be done in Aboriginal communities across North America. We cannot understand the larger connections among Aboriginal people and communities without first understanding the rich and complex histories and cultures of particular communities. However, Acoose's essay also demonstrates a possible danger in tribally specific criticism—the potential to be resistant to ideas and challenges from outside the tribe. Acoose sets up an oppositional relationship to academic theory, openly admitting to her "skepticism of contemporary theoretical claims from the academy" (218). She is dismissive of any talk from other critics about colonialism, postcolonialism, or postmodernism, and she is critical of any use of theoretical terminology, insisting that the necessary critical language can be found in indigenous philosophies and languages. While I value Acoose's insistence on the integrity and sophistication of Aboriginal ways of knowing, especially in a

university setting where they have often been ignored or undervalued, I would argue that there is also a need for Native scholars to respect and to engage with the contributions and challenges of academic theory. If we as Aboriginal academics want to claim a full place in the academy, we need to show that we are familiar with its traditions, its values, even if we then go on to disagree with them. Once again, then, claims of Native togetherness find themselves in tension with academic reasoning. Perhaps more problematic than Acoose's resistance to academic theory, however, is her comment on works of Native literature that do not seem to fit into her culturally specific ideal:

I turn to contemporary indigenous-Canadian literatures written in English with great expectations. With great expectations, I fervently search the pages for reflections of an author's nation of origin, ancestors, language, and expressions of national sovereignty. Often I am saddened to "discover" Natives, Indians, full-bloods, half-bloods, and aboriginals (to use just a few choice nomenclatures) who have ceded not only vast territories of land, but also the territories of the imagination and of voice. (221)

I do not know which works and writers Acoose is referring to here, though I can imagine. There are indeed Aboriginal writers in Canada who do not, in their writing, focus extensively or exclusively on their First Nation of origin. In some cases this is a creative choice, perhaps driven by a desire not to be boxed in by the "Aboriginal lit" category. In other cases an Aboriginal writer may, because of colonial processes, know little of his or her own Aboriginal language and culture. In either case, I would argue, it is not productive to say that these writers are "out" of the study of tribal or cultural traditions since, as Womack points out, tribal experiences extend beyond tribal traditions; to rephrase him, something can be a Cree idea because a Cree person experiences and values it. We need to be careful that assertions of togetherness do not become unfairly exclusionary.

The essays of Daniel Heath Justice, Tol Foster, and Lisa Brooks

attempt to articulate an alternative to both an overgeneralized pan-tribalism and an overnarrowed tribalism by focusing their analysis on the relationships between Native people and Native nations. In “Go Away, Water!?: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Impulse,” Justice argues for an analysis of “kinship” in our study of Native literatures. Instead of thinking about Native people in terms of race, of a “purity/assimilation binary” (162), or of ungrounded and disembodied theories, he proposes that we focus on “the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the People, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships” (151). Justice acknowledges the presence of large populations of Native people who, because of colonial history and government policies, may “not [be] grounded in an ancestral land base” and who struggle to maintain or reestablish connections to their home communities (160). But instead of blaming these people for “ceding” land, culture, and voice, Justice suggests that we pay attention to how members of Native communities, in the face of such challenges, continue to act in ways that assert “purposeful collectivity” (153). Justice’s argument speaks to me because I experience “Aboriginal identity” as, at its core, about family and family responsibilities. This is an aspect of Native identity that has received little attention in the field, which has focused largely on the effects of colonialism and on the racial and cultural “difference” of Native people. However, I would have liked to have seen a more thorough example of “kinship criticism” in action, revealing specifically how kinship relations are built up (and broken down) in literature and beyond. Instead the essay mainly focuses on critiquing those who are not attentive to kinship rather than modeling how we might use kinship in our analysis of texts. I look forward to more on this topic from Justice.

Tol Foster is, like Justice, interested in the complex web of relationships that constitute Aboriginal communities. In his essay, “Of One Blood: An Argument for Relations and Regionality in Native American Literary Studies,” he argues for the importance of understanding the relationships between groups who inhabit a shared region, an approach he calls “relational regionalism.” He

points out that Native peoples do not construct their identities or their nations in isolation, but in relation to others. To show this, he traces the complex historic relationships that the Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole Nations have had with African Americans and then argues that this history significantly affected the views that Will Rogers expressed of African Americans. Without a regional framework, Foster says, it would be hard to understand Rogers's views of African Americans as related to his Cherokee identity, and, moreover, it would be easy to ignore important figures such as Afro-Creek poet, Melvin Tomson. Though Foster takes pains to assure us that he sees a regional approach to Aboriginal literature as complementary rather than oppositional to a tribal approach, he also sees a regional approach as a potential corrective to conservative or exclusionary impulses in trying to define the borders of the tribal group: "The danger then of the tribally-specific frame is that it too often leads us to close off voices that do not obviously seem to be part of the tribal community" (270).

Though Lisa Brooks does not use the term, her essay also takes a regional focus. In "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism," Brooks grounds her argument for "relationality" in the languages and oral stories of the indigenous nations of the northeastern United States. She points out that in the Iroquois creation story of Sky Woman, "the earth materializes through the interrelated activity of its inhabitants" (238), and even the apparent opposition of the twins in the story can be seen as a necessary "contrapuntal" relationship that helps create the world (241). She also explains that the closest word to "Native" in the Abenaki language is *alnôba*, which "is not a term that is used to separate and distinguish us from other 'races' but is rooted in the recognition of relationship to other humans with whom we share common experience and common bonds. Identity is thus always relational" (241). Out of these thoughtful readings of the Native traditions of her region, she emerges with a theory that resembles Justice's and Foster's in that it works against oppositional notions of Native identity and instead emphasizes the historical and ongoing relationships between Native people.

These “relationality” theories represent a new and emerging approach to Aboriginal literature. By focusing on the ongoing actions and interactions that create “togetherness,” they avoid some of the theoretical pitfalls involved in trying to come up with a generalized and fixed definition of a particular group. I see a great deal of positive potential in these theories, though there is the danger that “relationality” could become an ideal and a stereotype. To prevent this, as these three writers point out, we must situate relationality in particular locations and in history, and we must be willing to talk about less-than-perfect relationships, such as the relationships of Native masters to their slaves. Also, as Foster’s essay recognizes, official tribal memberships and tribal relationships are not the same thing. In Canada, for instance, the strictures of the Indian Act and the rules of land-claim settlements have sometimes left cousins, and even siblings, divided in terms of band membership, land rights, and so forth. And these divisions have sometimes been accepted and entrenched by local Native governments. As nationalist approaches to Native literature often emphasize, such legal-political definitions of the First Nation, Métis group, or tribe are extremely important to assertions of sovereignty. Relational approaches may balance this by reminding us that these legal-political categories are one way of asserting relationship, but they are not the only relevant and grounded ways of thinking about Native lives and identities.

Lisa Brooks, as a literary critic, is particularly interested in tracing “relationality” through the interactions of storytellers, writers, and oral and written texts. In other words, she seeks to research and construct literary histories, thus establishing her own work as part of “an extensive indigenous intellectual tradition” (235). Brooks shares this literary historical project with several other essayists in the collection, including Craig Womack, Phillip Morgan, Sean Teuton, and Christopher Teuton. Such thoroughly researched attention to the literary history of Native peoples is desperately needed, as a basis from which to do our analytical work. Without such a basis we can rely only on vague generalizations to connect Native texts and writers. Too often, however, Aboriginal literary

histories have been somewhat anemic. Little attention has usually been paid to pre-1960s Native writers or to writers who were published locally rather than nationally. There have also been biases in terms of genres; oral stories and songs have often been ignored, as have works that do not fit easily into Western literary genres (such as activist writing, letters, and local histories). And connections between various Native writers have too often been seen as an inevitable consequence of their “Nativity,” with little attention paid to the specific and often regionally focused influences of Native writers on one another. Several of the essayists in this collection are working toward filling some of these holes in Native literary history. Brooks examines the activist writings of Samson Occom and William Apess, pointing out that these texts establish these writers not as assimilated and anomalous but as active and deeply involved members of their communities who also drew on “wider, regional alliances” (247). Similarly, she explores how the extensive writings of Mohawk leader Joseph Brant and Mohican leader Hendrick Aupaumut reveal them as belonging to “a large interrelated network of writing Indians, with whom they interacted and corresponded” (254). Phillip Morgan also focuses on the letter form in “‘Who Shall Gainsay Our Decision?’: Choctaw Literary Criticism in 1830.” Morgan has uncovered a letter from early-nineteenth-century Choctaw writer James L. MacDonald to fellow Choctaw leader Peter Pitchlynn. The piece is a fascinating work of literary criticism, comparing the form and modes of Choctaw oral storytelling with English language and literature. Morgan’s discovery raises the question of how many more of our literary ancestors sit undiscovered and unread in archives. He argues strongly for the need for “primary research in the library, museum, tribal government, and private archives that have in the past been the academic terrain of historians and folklorists but largely ignored by literary critics” (128). Indeed, I believe that we need to push our graduate students toward such labor-intensive but needed work rather than another thematic study of already well-analyzed texts.

Sean Teuton’s essay attempts a literary history on a much larger scale. His essay, “The Callout: Writing American Indian Politics,”

is a sweeping “historical sketch” (113) of the politically engaged writings of Native American intellectuals, from Samson Occom’s eighteenth-century writings to the work of present-day Native scholars. Like Brooks he is exploring the relationships between relatively privileged Native writers and the realities of the Native communities to which they belong, a relationship that he refers to as “immediacy”: the “shared colonial experience among Indians in otherwise different social and economic locations that serves to unite our intellectual work” (107). As evidence of this immediacy, he describes his work teaching Native prison inmates and presents moving examples of the inmates’ political writings. Teuton’s work in prisons is inspiring and challenging—asking us to connect our work as scholars to Native people outside the university and, further, to those Native people who may seem to be our most unlikely audiences and colleagues. Nevertheless, his notion of “immediacy” needs further critical examination. Native scholars do need to be careful about asserting an unproblematic “unity” with those in “different social and economic locations” (107). This was the message that women of color brought to white, middle-class feminists who asserted “unity” based on gender. Those mainstream feminists may have felt that they connected with women of color through a shared experience of sexism, but this feeling of connection was often a one-way street. In the same way, Native scholars need to be aware of the complex blending of connections and disconnections between Native people.

Christopher Teuton’s essay, like Sean Teuton’s, attempts a wide-ranging history of literary criticism of Native literature. In “Theorizing American Indian Literature: Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions,” Christopher Teuton begins by asserting that the beginnings of Native theory can be found in traditionally oral stories. He then moves on to the writing of Native literary criticism, which he divides into three roughly chronological modes: mode one is concerned with cultural identity and authenticity; mode two is concerned with breaking down stereotypes of Aboriginal people; and mode three, which appears to be Teuton’s ideal, is concerned with the empowerment of Native communities

and Native nationalism. While he admits that a single article may contain examples of all three modes, he places individual critics into one of the three camps. His summary is useful in that it reveals some general trends in this changing field. However, there is a danger that such broad groupings of literary critics will oversimplify the field. Teuton divides other critics in terms of whether they are inside or outside of the mode-three category of “criticism as social practice with the potential to impact material reality” (206). As literary critics our work does not always have the kind of immediate impact that may be seen in more applied disciplines, and it is difficult to decide whose work has “potential to impact material reality.” Certainly some would say that no literary critics have an impact on material reality and that we should all go become doctors or lawyers and really help our people. Others might say that all literary criticism contributes to an intellectual discussion that gradually filters into and impacts the world beyond the university. These issues, while very important, need to be addressed with more complexity than can be done with a three-part division. Indeed, Teuton’s own categories are complicated by the fact that the close reading of the concept of vision in N. Scott Momaday’s *The Way to Rainy Mountain* with which he ends his essay seems primarily to be an example of mode one criticism, an “attempt to translate Native cultural thought through analyzing literature” (201).

One thing that all of these literary historians have in common is their attention to the oral stories that both precede and continue to live alongside Aboriginal written texts. This attention is not in itself unique; Aboriginal oral traditions have long been a subject of academic study. However, the scholars in this collection do not regard oral stories simply as ethnographic “objects of study” but rather as sources of knowledge, methodology, and theory that shape and inform their interpretive work. Traditional stories stand at the beginning of the essays by Daniel Heath Justice, Lisa Brooks, and Christopher Teuton. The critics draw on these stories to give depth to their readings of written texts: “Without knowledge and comprehension of oral literary traditions,” Brooks writes, “the criticism and interpretation of Native literature, at best, will tend

away from depth and complexity, and at worst, will be shallow and misleading” (236). They also use the stories to help create their theories of relationality, and it is here that we see a new (to the academy) form of literary criticism emerging, where story can serve as theory. As literary critics we know that creative narratives contain ideas, but we have nevertheless generally separated creative texts from theoretical ones. As Christopher Teuton astutely points out, though, this has not always been the case within Western theory: “Just as Plato’s allegory of the cave is about more than climbing out of a hole to catch some sun, the Cherokee creation story is about more than diving into water to bring mud to the surface” (194). However, though these essays express their belief in the theoretical power of traditional stories, they all go on to explicate the ideas in the stories in academic language, using logical connections rather than the imaginative linkages through which stories function. We see in this “translating” move both a blending and a tension between the academic tradition of reason and the imaginative traditions of oral storytelling.

LeAnne Howe’s “Blind Bread and the Business of Theory-Making, by Embarrassed Grief” is the essay that comes closest to actually working *within* the storytelling mode, not surprisingly since she is primarily a creative writer. A full half of her piece consists of her story of a character named Embarrassed Grief. Taking place in an urban and academic setting, this is not a traditional story, but Howe links her writing with Choctaw storytelling traditions: “I am part of the future stories that will rise up” (336). The story of Embarrassed Grief is a rich one, full of implications about home and travel, theory and the academy, political actions and alliances, empathy and alienation. In the discussion that follows her story, Howe touches on some of these potential meanings, but she does not engage in a full-blown, step-by-step interpretation of her own story. Instead she connects the story to her novel *Shell Shaker* and to her personal experiences in hearing stories from her mother. From an academic perspective the piece is somewhat frustrating—I found myself searching for the “thesis statement” that would tie the various ideas together. But as Howe asserts, it is in

the story itself that her ideas connect: “The Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another becomes a theory about the way American Indians tell stories” (330). I was left mulling over the story of Embarrassed Grief and connecting it to some of my own experiences, which is, of course, how stories work. Howe’s piece is a powerful one, but it draws more strongly on imaginative traditions than on reasoning ones.

Like Howe, the others essayists who draw on stories in their work do not only discuss their view of the stories; they also describe their experiences of those stories. Indeed, many of the essays in this collection contain appeals to the critic’s personal experience, particularly the work of Sean Teuton, Janice Acoose, Craig Womack, Lisa Brooks, and LeAnne Howe (though most of the other writers also refer, more briefly, to their experiences). Though such inclusion of personal experience is not unheard of in academic writing, largely thanks to the insistence of feminist scholars that “the personal is political,” it is still fairly unusual in the formal literary critical essay. This use of experience in the essays reflects the assumption that, as Native people, these scholars have sources of knowledge and understanding that fall outside standard academic research: “On this often-undisclosed understanding of tribal social location, experience, and identity, Indian people reserve an advanced knowledge of a Native world that others are not likely to have,” Sean Teuton writes (113). This seems to me a thoroughly reasonable claim, though I would add, like Womack, the qualification that “not all Indians will always have special insights into Native studies” (406). Moreover, the descriptions of personal experience act as reminders, as Robert Warrior has written in *The People and the Word*, “that Native texts exist in a real world—a real world that real people experience” (xxx). Such claims to experience are, however, theoretically controversial. Questions have been raised about the extent to which it is “reasonable” to generalize from individual experience to group experience and even about the extent to which we can trust our own experiences as accurate. Much of this review has dealt with the first issue—that is, with the ways in which the

critics in this collection have sought to generalize “group experience” without falling into static generalizations. The second issue, the reliability of experience itself, is also a very difficult one, and Craig Womack bravely tackles it in the final essay of the collection.

In this essay, “Theorizing American Indian Experience,” Womack points out that postmodern theory, which asserts that we can only experience the world through the constructions of language and society, can leave us without any firm foundation from which to assert our experiences, identities, and goals. For Native people, he argues, this theory can disempower political claims based in “real-life experience.” Thus, as an alternative to this postmodern stance, Womack sets out to argue for “the possibility that some essences actually exist: that is, some forms of knowledge, experiences, realities, and so on, outside the ones humans ponder in their heads” (356). These “essential” forms of knowledge, according to him, include physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences. With this argument Womack is taking on what may be an impossible task, attempting to prove that there are experiences that exist beyond language, though he can only express them through language. Perhaps because of this contradiction, he struggles with the continuity of his argument, first arguing against a group of theorists who refer to themselves as “postpositivist realists,” then moving to a position that seems the same as theirs. Postpositivist realists attempt to reclaim “identity” as a meaningful and politically useful concept. According to Paula Moya’s introduction to *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, postpositivist realists assume that our experiential perceptions do “refer (in more or less partial and accurate ways) to causal features of a real world”; realists therefore aim for “objectivity as an ideal of inquiry,” while accepting that complete objectivity will never be achieved (12). Womack argues that, because these theorists do not believe that we can access reality in an unmediated way, they are therefore relativists, left without any foundation of truth. I see this as a misreading of the realist position. The realists aim toward an objectivity that, while imagined rather than fully achieved, still constitutes a goal against which to measure the truth of state-

ments. In fact the postpositivist argument sounds very much like Womack's own when he writes, "Reality may exist with or without us, but whatever we can know is affected by our thoughts, no matter how spiritual the message. But we can imagine the places where experiences originate. [. . .] And this imagining is essential" (373–74). Both the postpositivist realists and Womack see imagining the "real world" as a necessary and positive part of claiming the value of experience. The tension arises in Womack's work when he tries to argue that experience can be fully understood through reasoning.

This tension is perhaps most pronounced in what I see as Womack's most challenging and potentially controversial claim, that it is "the inability to deal with spiritual reality that limits theoretical opportunities today" (364). There is no doubt that spiritual beliefs are extremely important to many in Aboriginal communities, but the role of such beliefs in a university context is far from settled. The modern-day university is generally a highly secular environment, though I have noticed that, for instance, prayers by Aboriginal elders are now often included in public events at my home university though the Lord's Prayer is no longer said. One Aboriginal professor told me that one of her Aboriginal students complained that she was not incorporating enough spirituality into her classes. In contrast, another colleague had students complain about having spirituality "imposed on them" when she told them that she expected them to attend events in the local Native community. As far as I can tell, there has been little open discussion or theorization of the sensitive issue of Aboriginal spirituality in the academy, and I commend Womack for taking it on. But spiritual claims sit uncomfortably in the reason-based essay form. We can see this even in the ways in which the other essayists incorporate traditional stories, which are of course deeply spiritual, into their essays. Rather than making claims for the literal, spiritual truth of these stories, they explore them as a source of ideas, an interpretive practice that fits much more comfortably within a scholarly essay. Womack, in his essay, first makes a claim for spiritual truths but then attempts to subject those truths to aca-

demic reasoning. He describes his belief that the Creek medicine makers can, through ceremony, “turn a rather ordinary-looking washtub full of stuff into medicine infused with spirits” (365). This is a claim based in belief, in faith, not in empirical evidence, and he fully admits this: “I cannot somehow ‘prove’ the power of this kind of medicine to the skeptic” (367). Yet, being schooled in the skeptical tradition, he realizes that problems can arise from unproven claims: “In a world of competing claims, in order to make decisions, we have to evaluate how competently those making claims justify them” (396). Thus he attempts to argue that spiritual claims can be evaluated:

If someone says he is an Indian or says he has a spiritual experience or says he is an Indian because he has had a spiritual experience, there are material criteria I can use to evaluate that claim. [. . .] A religious position, in and of itself, is no guarantee of human decency; thus my claim for vision must vigorously insist on a rigorous critique of “vision.” We cannot simply turn traditionalism, in this case in the form of vision, into another sacred cow. (376)

Womack does not give any examples here, and it is not at all clear to me what “material criteria” I would use to evaluate someone’s spiritual experience or how I would critique someone’s religious vision (while maintaining the belief that it was in fact a vision). To demand proof or justification for a spiritual experience is to deny the realm in which it occurred. Perhaps Womack means that spiritual claims can be evaluated within the terms of a particular spiritual belief system, but religious systems generally assume that spiritual experiences and visions can transcend the boundaries of the system (hence the arrival of new prophets and prophecies). While a person can clearly be both spiritual and reasonable, it is difficult for me to see how spiritual claims can live within the reasoning mode. Robert Warrior makes a similar point, in *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, when he argues that criticism is necessarily secular because it reflects “primary allegiance to its own independence of thought and a willingness to take stands that

oppose not just those who hold political power, but also those who wield considerable spiritual power as well” (Weaver, Womack, and Warrior 206).

It appears that Womack comes to realize that reason cannot fully accommodate the claims that he is making, and so he eventually argues for a new mode of criticism, one that uses imagination as well as reason. It is through empathetic imagination, he rightly points out, that we create stories, think about spiritual realities, and connect to our ancestors and to the others with whom we share this world. He argues for a criticism that is imaginative, passionate, and compassionate, and he realizes that this is not a description of most literary criticism: “I worry about criticism that is not funny. I worry about criticism that is not moving. I have, therefore, a good deal to worry about” (395). I see a lot of potential in Womack’s musings on a new kind of criticism. Throughout this review, I have argued that the critics in *Reasoning Together* are trying to bring together truth claims about Native identity with skeptical reasoning, but this is an effort whose results are often what Joan Cocks, writing about the difficulties of nationalism, calls “dilemmatic”: “That is, all paths of thought obscured equally telling contrary thoughts” (2). I have pointed out some of these dilemmas, which I believe are not signs of weakness in the scholars but rather a sign of the difficulty of their task. The problem, perhaps, is that the “togetherness” for which the writers are arguing is as much a matter of imagination as it is of reason. Through imagination Joy Harjo’s poetry really does feel like it is bringing us to the “quivering raw essence of humanness.” Through imagination we connect to those who are different from us. Through imagination we can accept someone else’s spiritual claims as true. Imagination brings things together, reason breaks things apart, and we surely need both. Indeed, the thirty elders and spiritual teachers who collaborated on the book *The Sacred Tree* agreed that the combining of these two forces was one of their twelve principles of Native philosophy: “Everything is in a state of constant change. One season falls on the other. People are born, live, and die. All things change. There are two kinds of change. The com-

ing together of things and the coming apart of things. Both kinds of changes are necessary” (Bopp n. pag.). This need for both reason and imagination is why, I suspect, the authors of *Reasoning Together* frequently turn to story and experience—that is, to the realm of the imagination. Womack seems to be proposing that we go even further in mixing reason and imagination, that we challenge the typical form of a literary critical essay. This is an exciting thought, but it is not necessarily an easy task for young, emerging, and Native scholars, which includes most of the scholars in this collection, to carry out. There is the risk of being seen as not serious enough, not “reasonable” enough, and of not being published, hired, or tenured. Indeed, even Womack does not go far beyond the conventional limits of the scholarly essay. But he does point in an intriguing direction, toward a new way of bringing “reasoning” and “togetherness” closer together.

I study and teach Aboriginal literature in Canada. For many reasons, the study of Aboriginal literature in this country has taken a different path than in the United States, as evidenced by a look at *Looking at the Words of Our People* and *(Ad)dressing Our Words*, the two collections of literary criticism by Aboriginal people published in Canada. As those collections show, there are far fewer Aboriginal literary critics in Canada with PhDs, and many Aboriginal literary critics here are primarily creative writers, teachers, or cultural workers. As a result, Aboriginal literary criticism in Canada has been less theory driven than the work in the United States, more “grassroots.” This has brought its own set of weaknesses to the criticism, but also strengths. In any case this situation is changing. There are more and more Aboriginal graduate students studying Aboriginal literature in Canada and seeking ways to succeed in the academy while holding on to the kinds of “togetherness” that are important to them. I am glad that I will be able to tell them to read *Reasoning Together*, to show them that to engage ethically with both their home community and academic community is a challenging but possible road, and that they do not have to travel it alone.

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The Past, Present, and Possible Futures of American Indian Literary Studies

JAMES H. COX

SAIL has now celebrated its thirtieth anniversary publishing scholars and creative writers in the field of American Indian literary studies. The celebration and reflection in which many of us participated at the 2007 MLA annual convention in Chicago was part of a recent, much broader discussion of where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going. In her 2005 *PMLA* article "Literature and the Politics of Native American Studies," Shari Huhndorf takes the occasion of a panel with Robert Warrior, Philip Deloria, and Jean O'Brien at the 2002 American Studies Association conference to reflect on the field since the 1960s and to assess its current state. Huhndorf traces the history through which the field has traveled to this contemporary moment characterized by an explicit political commitment to Native communities and the urgent issues of sovereignty, land reform, civil rights, health, and poverty, for example.¹ More recently, Scott Lyons has commented on the current historical moment in Native American literary studies in "Battle of the Bookworms" in the August 10, 2007, issue of *Indian Country Today*. At this "crucial historical moment," in which an "important and contentious debate" is occurring, Lyons finds hope for the field in the tribally specific literary critical practice of Craig Womack's *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) and in David Treuer's plea for aesthetic or formalist rather than cultural analyses of Native literatures in *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* (2006).² This debate, which Lisa Brooks also identifies as occurring at "a critical juncture in our

discipline" (*Reasoning Together* 234), is currently shaping much of the intellectual work in our communities and classrooms, at conferences, and in the articles, books, and anthologies that we write and edit.³

Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective (2008), edited by Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton, is an exciting and provocative contribution to the particular scholarly, political, and historical moment scrutinized in two of the many spaces where discussions about Native literary production and analysis are now occurring: in a newspaper owned and published by the Oneida Nation of New York and a scholarly journal published by one of the largest academic organizations in the United States.⁴ The book has thirteen chapters by the twelve coauthors: Janice Acoose, Lisa Brooks, Tol Foster, LeAnne Howe, Daniel Heath Justice, Phillip Carroll Morgan, Kimberly Roppolo, Cheryl Suzack, Christopher B. Teuton, Sean Teuton, Robert Warrior, and Craig S. Womack, who contributes two of the essays. The chapters contain a wide range of historical, generic, and theoretical focuses that will give readers a deeply satisfying sense of the breadth and depth of the field. While each chapter warrants an extended review of its own, space constraints require a less ambitious approach. The reflections that follow, therefore, will focus on the way that the coauthors' consistent attention to Native histories, social realities in contemporary American Indian communities, and Native storytelling traditions establishes a mode of critical inquiry that challenges scholars to be rigorously and simultaneously responsible to all three.

Womack's opening essay introduces the collection's critical orientation to specific tribal and intertribal contexts and intellectual histories. While he considers the recent intellectual history that informs *Reasoning Together* in "A Single Decade: Book-Length Native Literary Criticism between 1986 and 1997," Womack also makes transparent the more specific production history of the collection and the methodology that shaped the book. The collection originated in 2002 when a non-Native scholar asked Womack to contribute to an anthology of Native literary criticism. After

declining to participate in a project that would be marketed on the fame of its contributors, Womack began a conversation about an anthology in which all of the contributors would be both “unfamous” and Native: “The idea that Native literary criticism is criticism authored by Native people was to serve as a baseline for the essays” (95). Indeed, Womack explains, the collection is a celebration of the opportunity that we now have to fill a syllabus for a course in American Indian literary criticism exclusively with work by Native scholars.

The editors asked every contributor to develop and demonstrate an ethical American Indian literary criticism. They provided as additional guidance a set of questions about some vexed critical terms and the modes of inquiry with which those terms are associated: essentialism, spirituality, pantribalism, sovereignty, hybridity, and cosmopolitanism, for example. Womack, Justice, and Teuton agreed to act as internal reviewers for all of the essays, though at the beginning of the process each author shared her or his work with every other contributor. Early revisions, then, incorporated the comments and suggestions of the cocontributors, and the final versions of these essays contain frequent references to the responses of the cocontributors as well as specific citations of early drafts and final versions of the other essays. Thus, this editorial process produces an anthology that documents the actual conversation of a community of scholars engaging urgent intellectual and political matters.⁵

Womack focuses his one-hundred-page essay on seven book-length works of literary criticism and theory published between 1986 and 1997 by Paula Gunn Allen, Louis Owens, Greg Sarris, Robert Warrior, Kimberly Blaeser, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Jace Weaver. He identifies compelling connections among the books written by these theorists while also tracing at what critical points their work diverges. He observes, for example, that like Allen in *Sacred Hoops* (1987), Louis Owens in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992) “stays comfortably within cultural rather than legal definitions of Indianness” (44). Their work seeks what is Indian in a text, Womack explains, and contrasts that

Indianness with a generalized non-Indian world. On the other hand, while Owens and Sarris both use the work of non-Native theorists, such as James Clifford and Clifford Geertz, Sarris takes the important critical step of placing these theorists within a tribally specific Pomo context. This assessment situates Sarris's *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* (1993), along with Robert Warrior's *Tribal Secrets* (1995), as two of the contemporary intellectual origin points of *Reasoning Together*. However, Warrior's new historicist critical practice produces literary analysis that contrasts with the work of Sarris, "who does not scrutinize historical periods in terms of how a particular era might affect literary production, instead theorizing the meaning of cross-cultural encounters and readings" (59). The outline of a vibrant field diverse in its methodologies and resistant to easy scholarly generalizations emerges from Womack's nuanced and generous assessment of these scholars. He makes explicit his preferences for Sarris and Cook-Lynn, for example; however, by highlighting both connections between and divergences in the theories and critical practices under his consideration, he also emphasizes the importance of all this intellectual work.

Womack identifies a concern for the social realities of contemporary Native people as the critical interest that most clearly binds the essays in the collection together. Sean Teuton's "The Callout: Writing American Indian Politics," Janice Acoose's "Honoring *Ni'Wahkomakanak*," Robert Warrior's "The Skin Is the Map: The Theoretical Challenge of Joy Harjo's Erotic Poetics," and Womack's "Theorizing American Indian Experience" demonstrate a variety of ways to make literary critical inquiry explicitly relevant to the daily lives of Native people. Teuton grounds his essay in his work with Native prisoners at the Auburn Correctional Facility, a maximum-security state prison in Auburn, New York, "in the heart of Iroquoia": "I begin with this narrative of work with Native prisoners to invoke the centrality of political writing to the liberation of Native America but, more importantly, to consider the influence of political intervention on scholarship" (106). Teuton outlines a history of politically engaged Native writing by Samson Occom and Elias Boudinot and assesses the more covert political work in

the writing of Charles Eastman, John Joseph Mathews, and D'Arcy McNickle, all of whom also participated in local and national political activities. Following a period after World War II in which McNickle was one of the few American Indian intellectuals publishing consistently, intellectuals during the American Indian civil rights movement "realized their commitment to tribal communities by creating art and writing criticism attendant to the social facts of everyday Native existence in the real world" (112). Teuton's history of a particular trajectory in Native writing nicely complements Womack's focus on a single decade in the first essay while also demonstrating how an engaged critical focus on the everyday realities of Native people (in this case, Native prisoners) allows Native intellectuals to "derive an indigenous moral and political criticism with profound anticolonial implications" (118). The essay concludes with his contemplation of the powerful words of several prisoners who indict the long history of oppressive U.S. colonial practices and institutions. Similarly, Native experiences are at the heart of the essays by Acoose and Warrior and in Womack's second contribution to the collection. Like Teuton, these authors persuasively demonstrate that everyday Native realities, Native bodies, and Native experiences should stand at the center of contemporary American Indian literary critical practices.

This concern for social realities also characterizes the recovery work of Lisa Brooks in "Digging at the Roots: Locating an Ethical, Native Criticism" and Phillip Carroll Morgan in "'Who Shall Gainsay Our Decision?': Choctaw Literary Criticism in 1830." In wonderfully illuminating essays, Brooks and Morgan read the archive of Native writing within specific sociohistorical contexts and demonstrate a commitment to tribal and historical specificity. Morgan introduces a work that he calls the "Spectre Essay" by the Choctaw intellectual James L. McDonald. Morgan recovered the essay "amid a lively body of preremoval correspondence between him [McDonald] and his young Choctaw intellectual peers—Peter Pitchlynn, Henry Vose, David Folsom, and others" (127). The essay includes a Choctaw story called "The Spectre and the Hunter, a Legend of the Choctaws," with McDonald's commentary on both

the comparative merits and the interplay of oral and written storytelling practices. Morgan reads the story and commentary within a tribally specific Choctaw prerule history of mission education, treaty negotiations in the 1820s, and removal in the 1830s.

Lisa Brooks also encourages intellectual work that is historically and tribally specific while maintaining a concern for close, intertribal intellectual and political alliances in the Northeast. She recovers an intertribal intellectual network comprised of Samson Occom, Joseph Brant, and Hendrick Aupaumut and reads their work through the lens of the participatory and cooperative thinking modeled in the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) story of Sky Woman. Brooks then situates the essays by her coauthors within this long tradition. Indeed, Brooks asserts at the beginning of her essay that “at this moment, there can be no move more important than establishing that our work, our writing is part of an extensive indigenous intellectual tradition. What we have at stake is not only the recognition of the validity of our knowledge, but the sustenance of indigenous epistemologies” (235). The social and political realities of the Native writers under her consideration resonate powerfully in our contemporary moment, particularly in the debate between Aupaumut and Brant over, respectively, a nationalist or intertribal anticolonial strategy. Brooks observes:

One of the hardest aspects of Robert Warrior’s call for a critical conversation is imagining ways to challenge each other that will not put briars in each others’ paths. The journals of Joseph Brant and Hendrick Aupaumut are particularly valuable in this regard, because they reveal the ways in which Native leaders critiqued and challenged each other. We may have as much to learn from the relations between early Native writers as we do from the writings themselves. (254)

The richly nuanced presentation of this history, and of its ties to oral storytelling traditions and its implications for contemporary intellectuals and Native communities, produces a literary critical model that, if practiced widely, would radically redefine how we think of Native writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The focus on the historical relations among Indigenous nations is at the center of Tol Foster's "Of One Blood: An Argument for Relations and Regionality in Native American Literary Studies," Cheryl Suzack's "Land Claims, Identity Claims: Mapping Indigenous Feminism in Literary Criticism and in Winona LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman*," and Kimberly Roppolo's "Samson Occom as Writing Instructor: The Search for an Intertribal Rhetoric." Roppolo specifically defines the features of a Native literary critical discourse and then uncovers one of these features, indirect discourse, in Occom's writing. Suzack demonstrates gender identity as an analytical category in her exploration of the relationship between Ishkwegaabawikwe, an Anishinaabeg woman, and Situpiwin, a Dakota woman, in LaDuke's novel. In comparison, Tol Foster examines Will Rogers in specifically Cherokee as well as multitribal histories as a way to illustrate the practice of a regionalism embedded firmly in local and tribal nation contexts. This critical practice "traces contributions and collisions between communities as those events and practices become constitutive of the communities themselves" (273). Foster's extraordinary study of African Americans in Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee communities situates Will Rogers's "homegrown" racism in its tribally specific historical context of slave-owning Cherokees removed to Indian Territory, allied with the Confederacy a generation later, and then dispossessed of the title to their land following Oklahoma statehood in 1907.

The primary differences between Morgan's work and that of Brooks, Roppolo, Suzack, and Foster are the origins and scope of their critical practice. Morgan's work, for example, is explicitly tribally specific, while Roppolo's broadly defined Native rhetoric draws from Acoose and Foster in this volume as well as Sarris, Mary Crow Dog, and Womack's *Red on Red*. Brooks and Suzack begin their considerations of intertribalism from tribally specific perspectives—Abenaki language and a White Earth Band of Chippewa land dispute in U.S. district court, respectively—while Foster provides a comparative tribally specific analysis of the history of freedmen in the Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee nations in Indian Territory and Oklahoma.

Brooks's contemplation of the Haudenosaunee story of Sky Woman and Foster's turn to a Creek story about Choffee stealing fire in his discussion of regionalism highlight the third major point of reference in the critical practice developed in *Reasoning Together*: storytelling. Daniel Justice's "'Go Away, Water!': Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative," Christopher Teuton's "Theorizing American Indian Literature: Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions," and LeAnne Howe's "Blind Bread and the Business of Theory Making, by Embarrassed Grief" most explicitly foreground the practice of storytelling as a critical act. Teuton grounds his critical practice in the storytelling traditions of his tribal nation: "I begin this essay concerning an ethical Native literary criticism with the Cherokee creation story because it reminds me what stories and criticism should do: enable us to create our worlds" (194). This creation story is "a constant source of reflection on the responsibilities of being" and an important lesson in "harmonious discussion"; it is also "richly theoretical" (194). Teuton then reads the story "as an allegory concerning the creation and application of knowledge" that also "models criticism as a social practice" (197). This reading of the Cherokee creation story establishes the foundation for a discussion of N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) in which Teuton shows Momaday engaged in both storytelling and theorizing as social practices. Teuton focuses on Momaday's careful development of vision as a critical term embedded in Kiowa histories of creation and migration and in Momaday's retelling and, indeed, reliving of those histories. Vision in the specific context of *Rainy Mountain*, then, helps the narrator to "offer a more culturally integrated Kiowa theory of place" and Momaday to show that "[t]he process of building relationships in a foreign land and transforming it into a homeland requires arduous intellectual and physical work" (212–13). Like Brooks's essay on a northeastern intellectual network of Native leaders and writers, Teuton's brilliant close reading of *Rainy Mountain* weaves together story, land, and literary critical practice into a statement with profound implications for building productive social and intellectual relationships.

Reasoning Together represents a bold and challenging new direc-

tion in Native literary studies, though what might be new in Native literary studies broadly speaking is not necessarily new in the Indigenous worlds that inform the critical work in this anthology. The authors are persuasive in their insistence that what they are doing now is what their ancestors were doing a century, two centuries, three centuries or more ago. Following the examples of Vine Deloria Jr. in *We Talk, You Listen* (1970) and Simon Ortiz, who titles his introduction to *Speaking for the Generations* (1998) with the Acoma Pueblo formal announcement of an intention to speak—“WAH NUHTYUH-YUU DYU NEETAH TYAHSTIH (NOW IT IS MY TURN TO STAND),” the authors of *Reasoning Together* ask for their audience to listen, engage, debate, and criticize.

The collection will influence the field by encouraging more tribally specific book-length studies similar to Womack's *Red on Red* and Justice's *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (2006) and more comparative tribally specific studies of regions where networks of Native writers debate strategies for contesting the invasion of their lands and share ideas about the futures of their nations. The urgency of recovery work is also a consistent refrain in the collection. If the examples of the recovered work in this collection are an indication of the richness of the archives that the majority of scholars have not seen, then heeding this call could significantly reshape what and how we think about Native writing and will hopefully encourage a serious reconsideration of the Native American Renaissance that already needs to be taking place. I expect that we will all eagerly anticipate the responses to “the callout” to make historical and contemporary Native American lives and communities, specifically “real-world Indian struggles,” the foundation of Native American literary critical practice (122). That listening, engaging, debating, and criticizing will have a dramatic influence on where our field goes from here.

NOTES

1. The history that Huhndorf outlines does not imply progress but, rather, describes a contemporary reassessment in the field that draws

strength from the intellectual and activist work of the American Indian civil rights movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as from the recovered political writing of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Native writers such as Samson Occom, Hendrick Aupaumut, Joseph Brant, and William Apess. In *Reasoning Together*, Womack observes, "One is struck by the politicized nonfiction that dominated Native literature in the nineteenth century and its authors' involvements in tribal politics." He compares this political writing to the "relatively conservative fiction that prioritizes issues of personal and cultural recovery over political analysis" and that has consumed the attention of many scholars in the field during the last thirty years (80).

2. Treuer asserts,

Ultimately, the study of Native American fiction should be the study of style. [. . .] If we can force ourselves to read Native American fiction we will find style, not culture. Or, rather, we will find that, as far as literature is concerned, style IS culture; style creates the convincing semblance of culture on the page. (4–5)

He takes the last thirty years as the historical scope of his discussion.

3. These conferences include the annual Native American Literature Symposium, 1999–present; Native American Literature: Nationalism and Beyond, sponsored by the University of Georgia's Institute of Native American Studies, in April 2006; What's Next for Native American and Indigenous Studies?: An International Scholarly Meeting, sponsored by the Native American Studies program at the University of Oklahoma, in May 2007; and Native American and Indigenous Studies: Who Are We? Where Are We Going? at Georgia's INAS, in April 2008. The Native American Literature Symposium began in November 1999 as the American Literature Association's Symposium on Native American Literary Strategies for the New Millennium in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. The ALA sponsored the conference one more year in Puerto Vallarta, after which the conference moved to venues owned by tribal nations in the United States. The last two conferences on this list are the first two in a series of three conferences at which scholars will gather to consider an international Native American and Indigenous studies organization. The third conference in the series will be at the University of Minnesota in 2009.

4. *Indian Country Today* is owned by Four Directions Media, a corporation of the Oneida Nation of New York. The MLA has over thirty thousand members.

5. The collaborative process of *Reasoning Together* is reminiscent of *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America* (1997), which Joy Harjo edited with Gloria Bird. Harjo describes the origins of the anthology in Lee Maracle's kitchen in 1986 following an Indigenous education conference in Vancouver, British Columbia: "It was here the anthology was born. We wished the collection to be as solid as a kitchen table and imagined creating that kind of space within the pages of a book, a place where we could speak across the world intimately to each other" (21).

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Book Reviews

David Treuer. *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*. St. Paul, MN: Graywolf, 2006. 212 pp.

———. *The Translation of Dr. Apelles: A Love Story*. St. Paul, MN: Graywolf, 2006. 315 pp.

John D. Kalb, *Salisbury University*

In 1995 Leech Lake Ojibwe writer David Treuer burst upon the literary scene with the publication of his astonishing first novel *Little* and followed that with *The Hiawatha* (1999), which, although not as well received by a number of critics, is an even superior accomplishment. With the simultaneous publication of his third novel *The Translation of Dr. Apelles* and his nonfiction “user’s manual” *Native American Fiction*, however, Treuer has taken a decidedly unexpected turn.

In the author’s note that opens *Native American Fiction*, Treuer claims his intention is to challenge the assumption that “fiction written by Native Americans” means the same thing as “Native American” fiction and to discourage the reading of literature labeled “Native American” as cultural artifact. He instead encourages its consideration as literary art in the broader category of the ever-increasing American (and even world literature) canon. Indeed, his first novel belongs on the shelf alongside works by Toni Morrison and William Faulkner as well as Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich, while *The Hiawatha* fits ably with the American realists and early modernists as well as alongside N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and James Welch’s first two

novels. Treuer's observation that much is lost "when we interpret Native American fiction with more stress placed on 'Native' than on 'fiction'" makes a valid point (5). Rescuing this literature from the ghettoized segregation of the Native American-exclusive category or classroom is long overdue, although arguably such literature is sometimes best served when studied within the context of other works that reflect a similar worldview and tackle similar thematic concerns.

However, this consideration of the literature within that larger arena isn't the precise argument he presents in these four essays on literary works, interspersed with brief, more personal narratives. Rather, he suggests that the entire canon of Native American/American Indian literature is ostensibly an illusion, and those who produce, teach, or critique it are merely faking or, worse, perpetrating a falsehood. He proffers some fairly harsh assessments, particularly of Sherman Alexie, who comes in for a trashing, but also of Erdrich, Welch, and Silko, whose work he praises while he claims it is not "Native American." One would expect that a text subtitled "a user's manual" would serve any reader interested in Native American fiction, providing guidance for the full appreciation and analysis of the literature. Alas, that is not what this volume offers. What renders this manual less than useful are some egregious errors and substantial misreadings.

The synopsis on the back of the paperback edition of Welch's *Fools Crow* begins "The year is 1870"; however, the novel actually opens in the fall of 1868. Not until page 268 does Welch recreate the meeting at the Four Horns Agency, which occurred on January 1, 1870. However, Treuer opens his essay "Plain Binoculars" with the claim that "*Fools Crow* begins in the year 1870" (77), leaving the reader to wonder whether Treuer has read this novel very carefully (or if he relies upon the back of the book rather than the contents of it). Treuer is perhaps unaware that others have seen Welch's novel as "written from the inside out" (90), rather than, as he claims, from the outside in, because, while the Lone Eaters are a fictional band of Pikunis, the other bands and members are not. Owl Child, son of Mountain Chief, actually did kill Malcolm Clark on August

17, 1869, and the Massacre on the Marias River, in which 173 members of Heavy Runner's band were killed, actually did occur on January 23, 1870. To look at this historical novel and reduce it to a quaint descendant of the nineteenth-century literary imagination, nineteenth-century "Cooperspeak," and Homer's *Odyssey*, rather than address the genius of Welch's creation of what is indeed a translated world for a predominately non-Native readership, is to miss much of the art that Treuer claims to be his focus.

In "The Myth of Myth," Treuer compounds his shallow reading of *Fools Crow* with his equally dismissive reading of Silko's *Ceremony*. In discussing the "myth" of Hummingbird and Fly, which is interspersed in various increments among the narrative prose of the story of Tayo and others, Treuer says, "The myth is actual [. . . and] doesn't mean anything beyond its subject" (135), asserts that "Myth is literal, not metaphorical" (146), and argues that "Beyond plot there is no similarity between the myth and the prose" (149). Treuer completely ignores the metaphoric relationship between the story of Hummingbird and Fly and Tayo's process (ceremony) of recovery. He overlooks entirely Tayo's revelation as Tayo "cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told" (246). To miss the ways in which (1) the time-immemorial stories, (2) Tayo's flashbacks, and (3) Tayo's present ceremony of retrieving the cattle and repairing, in the process, the fragile web of creation all intersect to make a work that is all of one piece and greater than the sum of the fragmentary parts is to reduce *Ceremony*, as Treuer does, to a slick little piece of Freudian talk therapy.

Not only does Treuer miss these interconnections in *Ceremony*, he also disregards their counterpart in Welch's novel *Fools Crow*, where Welch uses the stories of Seco-mo-muckon, Feather Woman and Morning Star, and others to underscore and reiterate the issues of responsibility to one's people. When these oversights are compounded by other textual errors, such as misspelling Ku'oosh's name, his "final thoughts" in this volume—that it "has been written with the narrow conviction that if Native American literature

is worth thinking about at all, it is worth thinking about as literature” (195)—seem not the likely conclusion at which his reader will arrive.

Nevertheless, *The Translation of Dr. Apelles* deserves a consideration of its “worth” as literature; yet, for all Treuer’s complaints about twentieth-century Native writers recapitulating the romantic views of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his “story within a story” in this novel presents a romantic fable as the Native text that Dr. Apelles is allegedly translating. The translator’s introduction identifies the found manuscript as “*the most amazing tale I’ve ever heard—full of Indians beautiful to look at and also Indians who were treacherous, full also of hunting episodes, of capture and recapture.*” This tale is filled with incredible coincidences, about two foundlings who are lost then found then lost again, an overblown fantasy of beauty and love. It’s more than amazing; it’s preposterous.

Intersected with portions of the “translation”-in-progress are the adventures in fantasy and, eventually, love of poor, lonely, misanthropic Dr. Apelles, whose “real-life” twists and turns are equally implausible. Predictably both stories come together in the end, although not in necessarily foreseeable ways. This may be Treuer’s way of breaking himself from the limiting chains of being identified as a Native American novelist, but this text also calls into question his ability as an artist to visualize and recreate a world beyond our experience yet keep that world anchored in a seeming reality. In *Native American Fiction*, Treuer faulted Welch for his inconsistent use of “literal renderings” of the language of the Pikunis into English. In his *Translation*, his fanciful renderings of Ojibwe characters into Disneyesque and Cooperesque figures leaves the serious reader less than satisfied. His “myth” is clearly the fanciful myth of falsehood. This is perhaps why Treuer fails to recognize the “truths” inherent in the myths *Ceremony* relies upon. Ironically his characterization of Silko’s myths, that they betray a “tribal naiveté that has been the stock and trade of literary representations of Indian myth from the eighteenth century onward” (135), more accurately applies to Treuer’s fanciful rendering of Indians in this novel.

Suzanne S. Rancourt. *Billboard in the Clouds*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone, 2004. 66 pp.

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Suzanne S. Rancourt's collection of poems *Billboard in the Clouds* is a valuable addition to the growing body of poetry produced by Native writers of the Northeast—in particular, those with French Canadian Native roots. Rancourt, an Abenaki from Maine, reminds us that New England was Indian territory not so long ago. Because of the holocaust engendered by English settlement, Native peoples of the Northeast have been largely forgotten by mainstream Americans. Large numbers died as the result of disease, many died at the hands of English settlers, and those who survived either hid or fled to Canada. But that was a long time ago, and the collective American consciousness has a short memory.

Rancourt reminds us that Native communities have always lived below the radar in New England. And they have found ways to survive and pass on traditional values, even if those values simply involve a parent teaching a child to garden or fish. Connection to the ancestors is often a private, hidden thing; even to call oneself Abenaki is almost a transgression of years of denial.

The strength of Rancourt's collection is her power of observation and the meaning and beauty she finds in the tiniest detail of the natural world. And she's great at rendering visual, aural, tactile experience in sharp, specific, illuminating images. These clearly imagined details lead her back to bigger questions of identity and connectedness.

In "When the Air is Dry" (13–14) the speaker remembers her grandfather, "Pepere," who would have known when it was time "to work the fields." She remembers her own experience of baling hay, the way "the sun / burns the nape of [her] neck," her tightening muscles, how the "baling twine cuts [her] hands," and the way hay chaff collects in her pants. Although the speaker claims that she cannot smell the "sweet, sweet, fresh cut hay," the reader certainly can. A moment of quiet in the hay field reveals her yearning after an almost remembered past:

a dragonfly's
 holographic vision coats
 my past and future
 with the iridescence of unexplained knowing. (13–14)

Alone in the field, she hears singing as she tries to “grasp a wisdom / children lose / when language is beaten out of them.” One gets the impression that it is not just the language but also the connection to the past she is straining to recover. It seems that, if she listens closely and notices every detail, she may be able to see a different, partially recoverable world.

This yearning for an almost remembered past inspires the poem “Take From My Hair—Memories of Change” (43–44) as well. A collective “we” is remembered migrating with the seasons and the crops, specifically, blueberries. But the once-stained, overburdened ash baskets are now clean and empty because the tourists prefer them that way. The times have changed, we learn; “our men [are] bent as willows, / our women strapped with foresight.” Again the speaker looks to the past:

i strain to hear my language
 among the leathery leaves
 among the trees and trails that
 my grandmothers and grandfathers walked. (43)

In quiet fields, she says, “i have time to think / and remember what i think / i recall” (43). She describes a blood memory of a collective distant past as well as a childhood memory. But the bear that her ancestors feared meeting in the blueberry patch has been replaced: “a bigger beast / now walks the land” (44).

Images of sky, clouds, wind, breath, and birds in flight permeate the collection. In the poem “Even When the Sky Was Clear” (7–8), the speaker recalls her father talking to the clouds, when she, as a child, “perched amongst and atop [her] White Pine,” watches him. She remembers:

Everything still and listening,
 except for an occasional Crow's caw or Blue Jay,

or the tiniest sound of the first few snowflakes landing
 or the muffled hiss of blanketing fog in its subtle turn to
 pre-rain mist. (7)

As an adult she sometimes misses the sounds of drumming and singing because she is “singing to the clouds” in the language her father taught her.

In “Haunting Fullblood” (25–26) the speaker calls out to “Risbah,” “Grandmother to grandmothers,” who is only recalled by a photograph; her “grave cannot be found” and she stands behind “generations / of crossed out names and altered paperwork.”

The speaker claims to be “breathing proof” that Risbah existed. She sees her relationship to this grandmother as “something hard in [her] cheek bones” that is “sharp like Eagle beaks.” When she breathes something behind her

facial planes
 melts
 into meandering notes of a soprano sax,
 washes
 into droplets,
 trickles down the keyboard, flat ivory,
 gentle rain on river (26)

Rancourt’s poems blossom with each rereading, and her talent for tying microscopic detail to huge, philosophical questions is impressive and illuminating. Her touch is often light, but it is usually resonant. *Billboard in the Clouds* is the winner of the Native Writers’ Circle of the Americas First Book Award.

Robin Coffee. *A Scar Upon Our Voice*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2005. 112 pp.

Molly McGlennen, *Vassar College*

I have to admit that I am very conflicted writing this review. Perhaps this is because of the numerous contradictory issues that

Native writers seem to be confronted with on a regular basis. The politics of identity, tribal sovereignty, and decolonization are always considerations despite the desire to *just create*. The first thing I did when I received *A Scar Upon Our Voice*, embarrassingly to admit, was to find out who the author is, who the sponsor of the poetry series “Mary Burritt Christiansen” is, and who the series editor V. B. Price is. I had never heard of any of them. Right away I felt torn. I was excited to read and assess a new (to me, at least) Cherokee/Creek/Yankton poet, but I was skeptical of the series editor’s comments in the forward when he ends,

This unique and important book will have, I think, a wide and devoted audience all across Indian Country and beyond for many years because it gives voice to not only the secret pain of Native Americans, but of all people oppressed or swept aside by greed, malice, and power madness of others. (xiii)

Did he just lump indigenous Americans into a giant, stereotypical heap of “oppressed people” concealing “secret pain”? Do Native people have the responsibility to speak on behalf of every marginalized person? Will this book only speak to other Native Americans? Well, I thought, maybe Coffee’s poetry will set this guy straight.

But let me start at the beginning. Coffee’s collection takes the reader on a journey to healing, a metaphor that recurs often throughout all six sections aligned in chronological order starting in 1990 to 2003. Seeing himself as a “warrior poet,” Coffee perceives his words as the ultimate weapon against hopelessness, despair, and self-hate. In his preface he highlights this “underlying struggle to be free” when he says, “You can take from me what you will but you cannot touch the words of my heart” (xvi). At this point the reader is ready for some rich and reverberating poems. Instead, I hesitate to argue, the reader is pulled along unable to feel who the speaker is in many of the next ninety-five poems, unable to identify with the voice of the poetry because the language of the poems remains so distant. While I find myself reinvesting interest because of sparse gems lodged in the middle of poems (for

example, in “Sacrifice of Our Silence,” when Coffee says “Put salt on paper / To quiet my hunger” [67]); while I can understand his “journey to heal” is a personal one (for example, in his introduction to “The Eagle and the Cross” section, when he says “It is only when I go into the very depths of the night and shed all my layers that my words are meaningful to me in the daylight” [75]); and while I warmly appreciate the author’s gesture to offer these poems up as an act of kindness to others in need of solace, I cannot trust the voice enough to believe in the healing because few poems made me see something or feel something in a new way.

The best poetry works, I believe, because it surprises or because it articulates a common feeling in a way one has never heard or seen before. The more uniquely detailed an image is, the more universal and connective the thought becomes. And that’s where the poem lures the reader in, where the experience is shared, and where the learning takes place. That’s when poetry can make things change, can allow for healing, can tell the stories. Rather than working and probing language to excavate refreshing images or innovative ideas, Coffee too often relies on abstractions (“There is a sacred echoing / In my blood” [63] from “Searching”) and clichés (“You are distant / Like / A treasured memory” [48] from “Dream #2”).

As I write this I am still hesitant. Here’s a Native poet penning nearly one hundred poems, getting published by a relatively big house, offering his poems to “any other in need.” There is no question the collection is a heartfelt and genuine project intended, I believe, to be a kind of panacea for suffering, “a simple gesture born out of kindness” (xvii). For that alone, I applaud Coffee’s efforts. Indeed I feel uncomfortable scrutinizing and finding fault with work that carries such a mission. But, as lovers of Native literature, we all know that our field constantly demands its respect in broader literary scholarship and artistry and we constantly fight for the “right to be heard” even though some of the most innovative, exciting, and intellectual work today is being produced by Native writers and scholars. And so we demand integrity and excellence. But throughout Coffee’s collection, I often end up feel-

ing disappointed. Where I believe a reader would gain from a concrete detail, a visual image, Coffee offers up a vague, heavy-handed series of lines, as in this example from “To Touch the Wind”:

Segregation
 Indian reservation
 Assimilation
 Boarding school education
 Relocation
 Scattered population
 Termination
 Defiles creation (84)

Additionally, where I believe a reader would connect with the poetry from fresh syntax or surprising phrasing, Coffee writes formulaic lines, as in this passage from “Dream”: “I see you in the barren landscape / Of the shore / Silver shadows fluid in the moonlight” (44). The articulation of Native realities in the form of empty phrasing and generalities is, in the long run, harmful.

Nevertheless, I find myself going back to some of his poems because of how they appear on the page. What’s most apparent visually in this collection is Coffee’s use of line, line break, and spacing. At first glance, the thin, centered lines cascading down the page appear to be at times crosses, or arrowheads, or even the gouging scars his title references. But with a deeper look, I find the form of his poems, often two columns per page, with no space to breathe or contemplate, making me wonder if the author or editor thought about form at all. But then again the crammed pages do emulate a journal-like form, in which a page is often “used up,” exhausted, and perhaps this is the message Coffee sends as his gift to future generations: *Write. Write as much as you can. Words are sometimes all we have to heal.* And while I believe this, and while I see many Native writers embracing this concept (that words on the page, just as they are uttered in story, have infinite ability to heal), I still wonder which stories *A Scar Upon Our Voice* is trying to tell.

Connie Ann Kirk (Seneca). Illustrations by Christy Hale. *Sky Dancers*. New York: Lee and Low, 2004. N pag.

EdNah New Rider Weber (Pawnee). Photographs by Richela Renkun. *Rattlesnake Mesa: Stories from a Native American Childhood*. New York: Lee and Low, 2004. 132 pp.

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Told by Johnny Arlee (Salish). Illustrations by Sam Sandoval (Salish). *Beaver Steals Fire, a Salish Coyote Story*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2005. 64 pp.

Beverly Slapin, *Oyate*

For generations Mohawk steelworkers have “boomed out” from the reservations in upstate New York and Canada to work construction sites in New York City, the Northeast, and Canada. *Sky Dancers* is set in the 1930s, as a Mohawk child named John Cloud and his mother visit New York City, where his dad and uncle work on high cross beams on what will become the Empire State Building. John is afraid of heights, but his pride at seeing his father dance across the beams gives the boy the courage to climb an oak tree in his backyard.

Sky Dancers is flawed in a number of ways. For one thing, Mohawks who work the high steel call themselves “steelworkers,” “ironworkers,” and sometimes “cloudwalkers,” but not “sky dancers”; and it seems the author gave her protagonist an “Indian” name that references the story rather than the reality—“Cloud” is not a typical Mohawk surname.

In Kirk’s self-conscious attempt to make this an “Indian” story, the narrative is contrived (“He thought he could hear the wise old tree’s heart beating like a drum”) and the dialogue is forced:

“How do you do it, Papa?” John Cloud asked. “How do you walk across the sky?”

“Some people say anybody with courage can do it,” Papa said. “But I listen to Mother Earth and Father Sky. If you trust them, they will hold you in their embrace just as they did our ancestors who built the bridge over the Great River years ago.” (n. pag.)

Compare this passage with Joel Monture's superior story in his excellent book of short stories, *Cloudwalker* (Fulcrum, 1996). Here, the conversation between Virgil and his dad is much more natural. Virgil asks his dad,

“Do you ever get scared going up so high?”

“Everybody gets a little scared,” laughed his dad. “But that helps you remember to be extra careful and look out for your buddies. We work together to be safe.” (7)

Hale's artwork in *Sky Dancers* isn't very good, either: she has Mama doing beadwork in her lap in the dark, a train that is way too modern for the 1930s, the sun rising in the south, a steelworker literally dancing on a crossbeam, and an oak tree that looks really easy to climb.

Finally, there's this atrocious writing:

John Cloud leaned back against the tree trunk and felt its strength and wisdom. It was an old tree that had held many moons between its branches. The tree and Mother Earth and Father Sky would let him know when it was time to go higher. (n. pag.)

Relying on “Indian” clichés such as “many moons,” “Mother Earth,” and “Father Sky” does not make a thing an Indian story. And working on the high beams—and risking your life to do so—is not the same as climbing a tree. It would have been good if Kirk had written about real people and real events rather than sacrificing the story to the message.

Rattlesnake Mesa is EdNah New Rider Weber's recollections of growing up in the early 1900s. After the death of her grandmother, young EdNah is sent to live with her father at Crown Point Indian Agency on the Navajo reservation and attend the Crown Point Indian School as a day student. Just as EdNah is starting to feel at home, her sense of herself and the world is shattered when she witnesses some children being whipped. “I carried a mortal shame, fear, and hurt away with me. [. . .] I was just eight years old,” she writes (49). At the end of the school year, EdNah is uprooted once more and sent

to the government-run Phoenix Indian School. Here she finds rigid military discipline and the attempted eradication of everything she is. Despite the loneliness, despite the arbitrary punishment, there is more than a little subversiveness and outright rebellion—mocking the teachers behind their backs, underground games and songs. The children “learned early—laughing was best” (73).

EdNah New Rider Weber is an awesome storyteller; her words will bring young readers into her world. But several things about *Rattlesnake Mesa* are very, well, odd. For one thing, the voice shifts throughout the book from Weber’s conversational storytelling cadence to a strange, detached, “objective” outsider rhythm. This happens too often not to be noticed. In a piece about boarding school, Weber recounts how a little girl the students nicknamed “Old Thunder” had an unbelievable talent—a natural ability to pass her stomach gases as she pleased. Complete control! And in another section, there is an odd, outsider overemphasis on what people are wearing: “The Zuni women were richly clad in black mantas and white buckskin-wrapped moccasins. Navajo ladies wore velvet shirts, studded with old coins from the 1800s, and exquisite turquoise jewelry” (124). And there is an odd description of a ceremony that wouldn’t have happened quite that way.

Another oddity is the black-and-white photos that illustrate the book. The endnotes say that in 1998

[Weber and Renkun] set out to revisit the landscape of Weber’s childhood in New Mexico—searching for old memories and creating new images to recapture them. [. . .] They searched for faces of children and elders who were part of the land, faces that helped Weber remember the people she had known in her youth. (132)

It’s an interesting project for a photographer to visualize an elderly person’s stories. But there seems to be an unstated assumption that Weber *had no memories* until she saw these “faces of children and elders who were part of the land.” Otherwise, why would Renkun pose unhappy-looking children dressed in 1950s-style clothing, to represent the boarding-school experience? And what relevance is

there for a shawl dancer, wearing moccasins, dancing alone, on hard rocky ground?

Questions remain: Why was it seen as necessary for Weber's evocative recollections of her childhood to be contaminated with Renkun's New Agey photographs and perhaps someone else's writing? Why does Renkun, her husband, and her son have wannabe-sounding Lakota names? And why does Renkun dedicate the book to her "Uncle Pete Rock (Che Nodin) full-blood Obijwa [*sic*], naval commander, athlete, and alumnus of the Carlisle Indian School (1918–1990)"? Carlisle was in operation from 1879–1918.

Rattlesnake Mesa is a very disquieting book. I would like to have seen EdNah New Rider Weber's stories as she told them, without the "fixing up."

It's almost unfair to place a review of *Beaver Steals Fire* alongside these other two; in truth, there is no comparison. "This story," as Germaine White writes, "represents thousands of years of oral tradition. We have tried to remain faithful to our elders in our interpretation" (n. pag.).

Like water, fire is fundamental. Fire is life. For millennia before contact—before the concept of the "fires of hell" arrived on these shores and long before the advent of Smokey the forest-fire-fighting bear ("Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires")—indigenous peoples managed this land, in part with controlled burnings that cleared campsites, improved forage for game animals, encouraged the growth of food and medicine plants—that created, as White says, "a cultural landscape" (n. pag.). Besides heating food and providing warmth in winter, fire helped to shape complex ecosystems and enhance biodiversity.

As *Beaver Steals Fire* begins, the Salish and Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee reminds us that "the elders usually bring out the stories in November and put them away again when the snow is gone" (n. pag.). The stories are real and alive. They are a treasure to be treated carefully and lovingly, taken out at the right time and then put away to rest until it is time to take them out again.

Coyote is appointed the leader of an all-animal-being raiding party to the sky world, to steal fire for themselves and the humans,

who have not yet arrived. After devising a clever plan, Coyote, Grizzly Bear, Wren, Snake, Frog, Eagle, and Beaver bravely and resourcefully respond to the many dangers hurled their way. “This story,” White says, “teaches our children how difficult it was to bring fire from the sky world and how important it was to animals and humans. Now it is time for humans to return the gift of fire to the animals” (n. pag.).

With Johnny Arlee’s spare telling and Sam Sandoval’s luminous watercolor art, *Beaver Steals Fire* will appeal to the youngest readers and listeners. Yet repeated readings uncover layer after layer of meaning, and the many subtleties will become apparent to older readers as well. For instance, most of the animals have hands with opposable thumbs, wear clothing, hunt with bows and arrows, and play drums, because, of course, they are the first people. The inhabitants of the sky world, of course, live in lodges, as do the animals on earth. This kind of caring and detail in the telling of the earliest tribal history are precisely what is lacking in the many traditional stories “retold” by cultural outsiders. See, for instance, Jonathan London’s boring verbosity in *Fire Race: A Karuk Coyote Story*: “Long ago, the animal people had no fire. Day and night, they huddled in their houses in the dark, and ate their food uncooked. In the winter, they were so cold, icicles hung from their fur. Oh, they were miserable! Then one day, Wise Old Coyote” (n. pag.).

Beaver Steals Fire is the first part of a fire-education project created by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes to teach children about the history and tradition of fire in shaping the natural environment. Educational materials, released in 2006, include a DVD version of the story, an interactive DVD, a series of lesson plans, and a Web site. In the DVD of *Beaver Steals Fire*, Johnny Arlee tells the story in both Salish and English, accompanied again by Sam Sandoval’s beautiful artwork and, this time, by interviews with elders who look at both traditional and contemporary understandings of fire and forestry.

That *Beaver Steals Fire* turned out so well is testament to the loving relationship of tellers to story and the genuine respect between the publisher and tribal elders.

Paige Raibmon. *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. 295 pp.

Jeffrey P. Shepherd, *University of Texas at El Paso*

Paige Raibmon has written a path-breaking book that investigates one of the most controversial topics in Native studies and American Indian history: cultural authenticity. Raibmon's approach to this mercurial issue may well serve as a benchmark for how scholars address other facets of Indigenous identity. She argues that authenticity is a discursive construct situated within specific places, eras, and contexts rather than an "objective" term transcending time and space. Rooting her analysis in the culturally diverse Pacific Northwest coast, Raibmon looks at the ways in which groups such as the Kwakwaka'wakw, Tlingit, and others encountered outsiders; engaged foreign notions such as modernity, progress, tradition, and civilization; and reshaped those concepts to fit their culturally defined goals and efforts at survival.

Authentic Indians has a multilayered agenda that draws from the fields of cultural anthropology, Native American studies, post-colonial criticism, and ethnohistory. Her emphasis on encounters between Indigenous peoples and the settler societies that invade their lands delineates how non-Native policymakers, religious groups, anthropologists, bureaucrats, artists, and others constructed a false baseline for Native culture against which all changes would be defined as cultural loss. But this is more than a book about "Indian-White relations." Emphasizing the rich matrix of mid to late-nineteenth-century cross-cultural interaction, the discourse of authenticity became a hegemonic notion that worked hand in hand with dichotomies such as future-past, pagan-Christian, static-dynamic, masculine-feminine, rational-irrational, and others that non-Natives used to define, order, and control Native peoples. Native peoples participated in and frequently challenged these "tensions of empire" by exploiting stereotypes for tribal advantage or by directly participating in activities labeled "modern," such as picking hops, driving automobiles, and accumulating cash.

Raibmon divides the book into three sections, each focusing on different encounters between Indians and non-Indians. Chapters 1 through 3 address local politics and colonial relations as manifested in trade relationships, land conflicts, and assimilation policies. In particular, potlatches held by the Kwakwaka'wakw and other groups reflected the debates over authenticity, tradition, and progress because non-Indians viewed the practice as retrogressive and emblematic of cultures trapped in the past, while Indigenous peoples used them to maintain social obligations and kinship networks. The Chicago World's Fair and Exposition of 1893 also plays a central role in Raibmon's analysis. As staging grounds for nationalism, imperialism, and modernity, the fairs are seen by Raibmon as sites where authenticity was constructed by both the architects of the fair and the attending Native peoples. Kwakwaka'wakws attended the fair and participated in dances and performances that reflected their common beliefs about gender relations and leadership roles by refusing to follow a script devised by non-Indians. Although dances were spatially and culturally decontextualized, they nonetheless allowed participants to work within the context of modernity and simultaneously reinscribe their humanity and identity.

Chapters 4 through 7 focus on the intersection of cultural adaptation, movement, and transborder migrant labor. Set against the dual images of Native peoples as culturally static because they are fixed in space, or in contrast, because they seemingly wander without purpose, authenticity plays out in contradictory ways around Puget Sound. Native workers in hops fields constituted a significant portion of the labor force of an important regional industry that tribal members ironically used to maintain kinship networks and cultural ties to historically important places. Ironically their work in a modern industry marked by capitalism contributed to non-Indians' perceptions that Native people were aimless wanderers. The participation of Aboriginal people in the hop industry also spawned a tourist industry steeped in stereotypical notions of Indians as antimodern and primitive peoples. This curious situation of a capitalist tourist industry based on the alleged premodern

actions of tribal peoples eventually contributed to a larger regional economy linked to land development and the growth of a non-Native population that in turn called for greater controls on and alterations to Aboriginal life. Colonial ideology, then, offered few spaces for Aboriginal people to express themselves culturally and to make a living, without the damaging consequences of empire.

The final chapters cover other sites of colonial contestation: missionaries, schools, and a court proceeding in which authenticity stood on trial. Missionary work highlighted a conundrum of colonial interlopers because reformers depended on financial and institutional support from philanthropic groups enthralled with notions of authenticity, when reformers tried eradicating that very same authentic culture. In addition to the schools, reformers constructed a series of cottages to showcase, much like the Chicago World's Fair, the cultural progress of Aboriginal youth. Youth who attended the schools represented the "future" that their Aboriginal ancestors never could attain, but when Natives Rudolph and Mary Walton sent their daughters, Dora and Tillie, to a public school in Sitka, their ability to attend a "white" school ignited a debate over the racial fitness and authenticity of Aboriginal people in a modern context. Raibmon's analysis of the court proceedings highlights the "tensions of empire" referred to in the opening pages of the book, but it also reveals tremendous analytical capabilities that should serve as a model for scholars to follow.

Raibmon's analysis of colonialism, ethnicity, and modernity in the Pacific Northwest region accomplishes what few, if any, books accomplish. It brings together the best work in ethnohistory, Native studies, and Indian history, yet it employs the ideas and arguments of postcolonialism and subaltern studies with unparalleled success. This book will appeal to the aforementioned fields and should become popular in graduate courses across the United States and Canada. But beyond this, Raibmon has managed to write an intellectually stimulating book that is also a wonderful story filled with engaging characters set against a backdrop of empire and resistance in a complex region of the world.

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Workbook and an alternative version of a beloved-by-some children's counting rhyme, "10 Little Whitepeople."

CRAIG S. WOMACK is author of *Drowning in Fire* and *Red on Red* and co-author of *Reasoning Together*. His next book is called *The Song of Roe Nald: Reflections on Aesthetics* and is about the relationship between visual and written art. He teaches American Indian literature at Emory University.

Major Tribal Nations and Bands Mentioned in This Issue

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

We make every effort to provide the most accurate and up-to-date tribal contact information available, a task that is sometimes quite complicated. Please send any corrections or suggestions to *SAIL* Editorial Assistant, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Department of English, 1 University Station B5000, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712, or send an e-mail to capone@mail.utexas.edu.

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