

VOLUME 22 · NUMBER 1 · SPRING 2010

Studies in American Indian Literatures

EDITORS

JAMES H. COX, University of Texas at Austin

DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE, University of Toronto

Published by the University of Nebraska Press

The editors thank the Centre for Aboriginal Initiatives at the University of Toronto and the College of Liberal Arts and the Department of English at the University of Texas for their financial support.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Studies in American Indian Literatures (SAIL ISSN 0730-3238) is the only scholarly journal in the United States that focuses exclusively on American Indian literatures. SAIL is published quarterly by the University of Nebraska Press for the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures (ASAIL). Subscription rates are \$38 for individuals and \$95 for institutions. Single issues are available for \$22. For subscriptions outside the United States, please add \$30. Canadian subscribers please add appropriate GST or HST. Residents of Nebraska, please add the appropriate Nebraska sales tax. To subscribe, please contact the University of Nebraska Press. Payment must accompany order. Make checks payable to the University of Nebraska Press and mail to

The University of Nebraska Press
1111 Lincoln Mall
Lincoln, NE 68588-0630
Phone: 402-472-8536
Web site: <http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu>

All inquiries on subscription, change of address, advertising, and other business communications should be addressed to the University of Nebraska Press at 1111 Lincoln Mall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0630.

A subscription to SAIL is a benefit of membership in ASAIL. For membership information please contact

R. M. Nelson
2421 Birchwood Road
Henrico, VA 23294-3513
Phone: 804-672-0101
E-mail: rnelson@richmond.edu

SUBMISSIONS

The editorial board of SAIL invites the submission of scholarly manuscripts focused on all aspects of American Indian literatures as well as the submission of poetry and short fiction, bibliographical essays, review essays, and interviews. We define "literatures" broadly to include all written, spoken, and visual texts created by Native peoples.

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the most recent edition

of the *MLA Style Manual*. *SAIL* only accepts electronic submissions. Please submit your manuscript by e-mail as an attachment (preferably in Rich Text Format [RTF]).

SAIL observes a “blind reading” policy, so please do not include an author name on the title, first page, or anywhere else in the article. Do include your contact information, such as address, phone number, and e-mail address, with your submission. All submissions are read by outside reviewers. Submissions should be sent directly to Daniel Heath Justice at

sail@chass.utoronto.ca

Rights to the articles are held by the individual contributors.

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America

Excerpts from *The Business of Fancydancing* by Sherman Alexie, © 1992 Sherman Alexie, are reprinted here by permission of Hanging Loose Press.

Excerpts from *A Radiant Curve* by Luci Tapahonso, © 2008 Luci Tapahonso, are reprinted by permission of the University of Arizona Press.

If you would like to reprint material from *SAIL*, please query for permission using our online form located under the journals menu heading on our Web site: www.nebraskapress.unl.edu.

SAIL is available online through *Project MUSE* at <http://muse.jhu.edu>.

Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Anthropological Index*, *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, *Bibliography of Native North Americans*, *Current Abstracts*, *Current Contents/Arts & Humanities*, *ERIC Databases*, *IBR: International Bibliography of Book Reviews*, *IBZ: International Bibliography of Periodical Literature*, *MLA International Bibliography*, and *TOC Premier*.

Cover: Photo courtesy of Bonita Bent-Nelson © 2003, design by Kimberly Hermsen

Interior: Kimberly Hermsen

GENERAL EDITORS

James H. Cox (Production) and Daniel Heath Justice (Submissions)

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

P. Jane Hafen

CREATIVE WORKS EDITORS

Joseph Bruchac and LeAnne Howe

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chad Allen, Lisa Brooks, Robin Riley Fast, Susan Gardner, Patrice Hollrah,
Molly McGlennen, Margaret Noori, Kenneth Roemer, Lisa Tatonetti,
Christopher Teuton, and Jace Weaver

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Bryan Russell and Kyle Carsten Wyatt

EDITORS EMERITUS

Helen Jaskoski, Karl Kroeber, Robert M. Nelson, Malea Powell, John Purdy,
and Rodney Simard

CONTENTS

vii From the Editors

ARTICLES

- 1 A Necessary Inclusion: Native Literature in Native Studies
RENATE EIGENBROD
- 20 The Marriage of Mother and Father: Michif Influences as
Expressions of Métis Intellectual Sovereignty in
Stories of the Road Allowance People
MAREIKE NEUHAUS
- 49 The Politics of the Camera: Visual Storytelling and
Sovereignty in Victor Masayesva's *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*
CHANNETTE ROMERO
- 76 Alexie's Nutshell: Mousetraps and Interpenetrations of
The Business of Fancydancing and *Hamlet*
BLAKE M. HAUSMAN

POETRY

- 113 romanticizing warriorhood
KEITH L. CAMACHO

BOOK REVIEWS

- 118 Kirstin C. Erickson. *Yaqui Homeland and Homeplace: The Everyday Production of Ethnic Identity*
DAVID MARTÍNEZ
- 121 Eric Gansworth. *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function: Poems and Paintings*
SUSAN BERNARDIN
- 125 Luci Tapahonso. *A Radiant Curve: Poems and Stories*
ESTHER BELIN
- 128 Jacqueline Shea Murphy. *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*
PATRICE HOLLRAH
- 132 Jordana Finnegan. *Narrating the American West: New Forms of Historical Memory*
GREGORY WRIGHT
- 135 Contributor Biographies
- 137 Major Tribal Nations and Bands

FROM THE EDITORS

It is my good fortune to have as a colleague at the University of Texas at Austin Professor Lorienne Roy. Professor Roy teaches in UT's School of Information and recently completed a term as president of the American Library Association. She also runs "If I Can I Read, I Can Do Anything," a reading club for Native American children (<http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~ifican/>). On April 15, 2010, representatives of "If I Can Read, I Can Do Anything" and *readergirlz*, *GuysLitWire*, and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) will deliver thousands of donated books to Native American teens at reservation schools. "Operation Book Drop 2010" is spotlighting sixteen Native American authors, including some of ASAIL's favorites: Sherman Alexie, Joseph Bruchac, Louise Erdrich, Patricia Grace, Joy Harjo, Winona LaDuke, Larry Loyie, Dimi Macheras, Lurline Wailana McGregor, Joseph Medicine Crow, Simon Ortiz, Cynthia Leitich Smith, Chad Solomon, Robert Sullivan, Luci Tapahonso, and Tim Tingle. For information about the event, please go to http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~ifican/otbd_index.html. The Web site lists the schools that are already enrolled in the program and, at the bottom, provides instructions for nominating other schools.

This issue again brings together a rich collection of texts from multiple Indigenous worlds. These worlds are geographically distant but united by the creative writers and scholars who honor the Indigenous artistic and political expression that emerge from each one. Keith Camacho brings us a Chamorro voice from 1521 in his poem "romanticizing warriorhood." This eyewitness to the arrival

of Magellan watches as Antonio Pigafetta, a member of Magellan's crew, walks away assuming, incorrectly, that the poem's narrator and his family and friends have suffered fatal spear wounds. Renate Eigenbrod argues in her essay that Aboriginal literatures must have a place in Native Studies programs in Canada. Native Studies disciplinary perspectives, in turn, have much to teach about methodology and pedagogy to departments of English. Chanette Romero's article on Hopi photographer Victor Masayesva's film takes us to the Hopi Nation. Romero considers Masayesva's ambivalence about, his desire for but suspicion of, filmic representations of the Hopis as well as his reclamation and recontextualization of non-Native images of the Hopis. Mareike Neuhaus discusses ancestral languages and discourse conventions in Indigenous writing in English with a specific focus on Maria Campbell's Michif (Cree and French) English, while Blake M. Hausman responds to Quentin Youngberg's recent *SAIL* essay on Sherman Alexie's interpenetration of queer and Native spheres in his film *The Business of Fancydancing* by reading the film's additional interpenetration of the Shakespearean sphere. Hausman describes specifically how Alexie's riffs on *Hamlet* catch the conscience of the film's audience.

We hope, as always, that you enjoy the articles and creative work in your new issue of *SAIL*.

James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice

A Necessary Inclusion

Native Literature in Native Studies

RENATE EIGENBROD

I must emphasize that a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scholarship gained in fields such as Native Studies can only enhance the study of Aboriginal Literatures.

Emma LaRocque, "Teaching Aboriginal Literature:
The Discourse of Margins and Mainstream"

Native writers of poetry, prose fiction, and nonfiction speak to the living realities of struggle and possibility among Indigenous peoples; they challenge both Natives and non-Natives to surrender stereotypes, committing ourselves instead to untangling colonialism from our minds, spirits, and bodies.

Daniel Heath Justice, "Conjuring Marks: Furthering Indigenous
Empowerment through Literature"

The two epigraphs to this article highlight two main arguments made in my discussion: teaching and researching Native literatures within the disciplinary context of Native Studies enhances the understanding of these texts; vice versa, Native writers address topics that are intrinsic components in epistemological processes of decolonization promoted in a Native Studies curriculum; therefore, an inclusion of Native literatures in this department strengthens its objectives. Interestingly, the two scholars, whose statements complement each other, speak from different disciplinary perspectives: Emma LaRocque is a Cree-Métis scholar in the Department of

Native Studies at the University of Manitoba, and Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice is on faculty with the Department of English at the University of Toronto and only affiliated with Aboriginal studies; he uses a small *s* when he talks about Native Studies as, for him, “empowerment through literature,” the subtitle of the special journal issue he edited, may happen in a wide range of approaches crossing departmental boundaries.

In Canada, students who want to study Native literatures mostly enroll in English departments, as it is through them that they will have easy access to presenting their work at conferences; are, as graduate students, in the “right” departmental box for research grants from the social sciences and humanities (which categorizes Native Studies under “other”); and, last not least, learn theoretical approaches that, generally speaking, adhere to literary analysis more narrowly than taking courses in Native or Indigenous Studies, which requires community-linked scholarship with an ethical orientation.¹ Further, only a few Native Studies departments in Canada include (a few) literature courses in their curriculum, and there is no Association of Canadian Aboriginal Literatures that could promote scholarship on literature. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies (CJNS)* out of Brandon University published one literature issue in 1985 and added only very recently another special issue of this kind. The fact that there is a (hidden) debate about disciplinary contexts for Native literature became more obvious when Gail MacKay organized a panel at the Canadian Indigenous and Native Studies Association (CINSA) conference in 2007 at the University of Saskatchewan on “Indigenous Literature in Native Studies”; with this panel she addressed the marginalization of the field in Canadian Native Studies associations and departments. The paper that I contributed to the panel, titled “What Does Literature have to Do with This?,” constitutes the first draft for the present article. The title goes back to a question by one of our Native Studies students evoking the issue of “relevance” of literature within a Native Studies department. As graduate program chair of the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba, I often encounter in particular Aboriginal students’ dilemma—or what they perceive as a

dilemma—that they enjoy creative writing and literature but feel the pressure of having to take courses that seem to relate more directly to finding solutions for the myriad social problems in Aboriginal communities. On the other hand, I hear from students interested in literature who prefer to enroll in English departments that do not demand anything “extra” from them. In my own career path I have come to Native literatures as a non-Native scholar (as I outlined in the introduction to my book *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*) and have gone through a disciplinary shift from teaching this field in English departments to being employed in Native Studies departments. In this article I therefore want to discuss interpretations of Native literatures that speak to their significance as literature and beyond by addressing hermeneutical and pedagogical implications of institutional contexts. I hope to exemplify the richness of Native-authored texts that lend themselves to multiple interpretations in defiance of either/or approaches. At the same time I want to illuminate their special role within a department that works toward decolonization, transformation, and rebuilding. Although Craig Womack pointed to a similar discussion in the United States in an essay in *American Literary Nationalism* (as quoted by Sam McKegney in the collaborative article “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?”), my essay will focus on the Canadian context and will privilege Aboriginal authors living in Canada since institutional contexts in *this* country generated the topic for my paper in the first place.

Story constitutes the basis of Native Studies, a discipline defined by Peter Kulchyski as “a *storytelling practice*” that comes “to resemble forms of narrative knowledge” (23), inasmuch as it constitutes the basis of Native cultures. So-called creation stories, for example, play a crucial role in spiritually based political and historical identifications of Aboriginal peoples, as highlighted in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* and, revealingly, in the Native Studies textbook *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies*. It is because of the cultural-political significance of stories, constituting collective identity, that Anishinabe poet Lenore Keeshig-Tobias argued vehemently in her seminal article in Canada’s national news-

paper, *The Globe and Mail*, in 1990 against the appropriation of stories: “Stories, you see, are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. Such wonderful offerings are seldom reproduced by outsiders.” The stealing of Indigenous stories, she argues, is as damaging as the stealing of spirituality, language, and land.

Aboriginal literatures belong to a whole range of Aboriginal cultural practices, and as such they have been attacked by colonization in the same way as all other aspects of Aboriginal lives. Indigenous peoples of North America share this experience with colonized peoples from other continents. Kikuyu writer and scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, for example, asserts: “Cultural imperialism was an integral part of the thorough system of economic exploitation and political oppression of colonized peoples. Literature as one of the central elements of culture was used in the same way as language and religion” (10). A re-visioning of literature should therefore be part of the process of laying “the foundation for a genuinely post-colonial society” (Huhndorf 32), which is intrinsic to a Native Studies curriculum. According to postcolonial scholar Edward Said, “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (113). Indigenous narratives were blocked from forming and emerging in a variety of ways. The resulting “silence” up to the second half of the twentieth century, a period usually cited as the beginning of Native literature in English in this country, should be interpreted with Anishinabe author and publisher Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm: “we were ‘silent’ not because we had not yet learned how to write ‘literature’ or to use foreign art forms, but because our own artistic traditions had been banned, denigrated, and even outlawed. . . . We were prevented from and discouraged from . . . telling our own stories” (170). The colonial politics of reading, interpreting, and marketing Aboriginal cultural practices as one example of “cultural imperialism,” according to Jeannette Armstrong (“The Disempowerment” 243), goes hand-in-hand with the “linguistic imperialism” (Adams 127) of imposing

standard English on Aboriginal verbal media of expression. Both forms of imperialism contributed to the blocking of Indigenous arts, but they eventually generated a resistance response from Indigenous writers “writing back” to dominant society as well as “writing home” to their own communities. However, as the power of the written word has been used as an effective tool by the colonizer against the colonized, “home” communities still view literature/writing with suspicion—one reason why Native Studies (at least in Canada) opens up only slowly to the integration of literature in its curriculum (and its professional associations) facing the challenge of unraveling layers of colonization around the very notion of literature. In her fictionalized residential school narrative, *My Name is Seepeetza*, Shirley Sterling from the Nlaka’pamux First Nation concludes with “wrapping up” the journal in which her young character wrote about the school in a buckskin cover with beaded fireweed flowers—a symbolic, or ceremonial, gesture trying to undo the harm caused by the oppressive and brutalizing environment in which writing in English was taught. The poetic inclusion of the Coyote transformer character in Sterling’s dedication at the outset of the book suggests as well the author’s hopes for the transformative potential of her work, but it will take time until a larger number of readers from Aboriginal communities faced with the legacy from these schools in the form of addiction, illness, and violence are able to de-traumatize their associations with books in the English language. (The use of narratives in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, which started in Canada just recently, may aid the process.)

So-called creation and trickster stories underlie the meaning of “literature” for Anishinabe author Basil Johnston when he states, “were you to be asked ‘What is your culture? Would you explain it?’ I would expect you to reply, ‘Read my literature, and you will get to know something of my thoughts, my convictions, my aspirations, my feelings, sentiments, expectations, whatever I cherish or abominate’” (“Is That All There Is?” 100). In the context of his article, *literature* is defined as *tribal literature*, otherwise called oral literature, orature, or the oral traditions. Johnston clearly validates this form of litera-

ture, if only because those narratives are intricately linked to the use of the respective Aboriginal language that he considers indispensable for any expression of Indigeness. Nonetheless, although he sees orally passed down narratives as central to Anishinabe culture, he does embrace a whole range of writing in all forms: “words are medicine that can heal or injure,” he maintains (“One Generation” 95). Also, he uses writing in English as a tool to educate about tribal literature. He demonstrates how those oral narratives passed down from one generation to the next for centuries, in spite of being dismissed by European scholars as “pre-literate,” have the same value as the European literary tradition taught in schools as classics. When he makes the point that the story “The Weeping Pine” evokes as much the power of love as Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s canonized poem “How do I Love Thee,” he takes the story out of the nonliterary category of etiological tales (about the origin of pine trees) and reclaims its value as a story about human sentiments—the material of literature universally (“Is That All There Is?”). In doing this, he asserts the place of Aboriginal peoples within their homeland Canada “not only politically and geographically, but artistically as well.” Together with Johnston, Akiwenzie-Damm, also from Cape Croker, claims this to be necessary (171). Aboriginal literature, then, is more than a teaching tool; it makes a contribution to society in its own right and on its own (aesthetic) terms.

Johnston’s use of the term *literature* is inclusive: it does not underscore a rigid divide between orature and literature. By doing this he implicitly argues for a continuation of a literary tradition beginning in precontact times. Other Native authors like Akiwenzie-Damm and Beth Brant also support this idea that Aboriginal literatures are not exclusively rooted in European traditions. Akiwenzie-Damm argues, “Literature is a creative art. The creativity that infuses literature has always been a part of our cultures, and we have always expressed it in various ways. Whether we sing it, speak it, or write it, that creative voice is ever present and unique” (170). Similarly, Mohawk author Beth Brant asserts that “the writing is *not* a reaction to colonialism, it is an active and new way to tell the stories we have always told” (40).² The emphasis on a disrupted yet con-

tinuous Aboriginal creative/intellectual tradition can be significant for a Native Studies curriculum that aims at reclaiming Aboriginal agency, resilience, and contributions to society all through Native peoples' encounters with Europeans. Some of today's Native writers in Canada, all fluent in English and versed in the European literary genres, like to emphasize the written tradition, but many others highlight "our significant *oral* traditional *literary* contributions" (Baker 61).³ Anishinabe poet Annharte Baker does not see a contradiction in her wording and adds in a further statement, "to me, a pictograph is a novel" (62). Anishinabe author Louise Erdrich from North Dakota explains the cultural continuum from a different perspective. She points out that in the Ojibway language (Anishinabemowin) "*mazina'iganan* is the word for 'books'. . . [a]nd *mazinapikiniganan* is the word for 'rock paintings,'" *mazina* being "the root for dozens of words all concerned with made images and with the substances upon which the images are put, mainly paper or screens" (5). It is also the root word for dental pictographs made on birch bark—"perhaps," Erdrich comments, "the first books made in North America. . . . Books are nothing new at all. . . . Or painting islands. You could think of the lakes as libraries" (5).⁴ Students in my Ojibway Literature course found the revisioning of the concept of literacy as inclusive of so-called pre-literate Anishinabe forms of expression inspiring and empowering. Literacy and the literary represented in the discipline of English taught at all different levels of the Canadian education system strongly influence society's values. After all, according to Daniel Coleman, what has become known as English Canada and its so-called civility is largely "a literary endeavour" (5). Erdrich, the author of many books and the owner of a bookstore, contends that the *concept* of writing, telling stories in images and "books," has always been part of the Anishinabe intellectual tradition and was not only invented by Europeans. Using her writing as "righting," she subverts superficial and stereotypical notions of Native cultures as oral and reinscribes precontact Aboriginal literatures into the mainstream literary discourse. It should be noted here that, although my course context for teaching Erdrich (and other Anishinabe authors) was language based, the students were as inter-

ested in *the ideas* conveyed through either Ojibway or English as in the language itself. What seems most important in Indigenous writing for Indigenous readers/students is the author's ability "to put a framework around thinking that is good and healthy for our people," as Jeannette Armstrong argues, herself using both English and Okanagan to that effect ("Words" 29). On the other hand, it is precisely in a bilingual class (which I taught together with an Ojibway-language instructor) where students get the opportunity to theorize the depth of culture-specific, instead of homogenized, "Native" intellectual traditions, and Native Studies provides the interdisciplinary context for that.

Aboriginal authors write against the colonial imaginary by telling the story and the history from *their* perspective often with the use of subversive strategies like irony and sarcasm. Armstrong maintains that the "purpose [of Aboriginal literatures] is to tell a better story than the one being told about us" ("Aboriginal Literatures" 186). Among others, they write against what Métis author Marilyn Dumont calls "internalized colonialism" ("Popular Images" 49), which perpetuates colonial categorizations of who belongs and who does not and is often directed against Aboriginal people of mixed ancestry and the urban population. Because any creative writing in all its genres is suggestive and evocative, open-ended, and fluid and does not draw fixed boundaries of right or wrong, it is well suited to engage readers (or, in the classroom context, students and teachers) in a conversation. Marilyn Dumont's prose poem "Circle the Wagons," for example, is a text that provokes critical engagement with the subject matter of "Nativity," both as a qualifier of identity and as a marker of literature. Is there a prescribed way of life or of creating literature that makes it "Native"? The text speaks to the absurdity of this assumption, but in its circular structure it also exposes the dilemma and the lack of choice and freedom an Aboriginal writer faces due to Indian Act divisions, internalized colonialism, and market expectations.

CIRCLE THE WAGONS

There it is again, the circle, that goddamned circle, as if we thought in circles, judged things on the merit of their circu-

larity, as if all we ate was bologna and bannock, drank Tetley tea, so many times “we are” the circle, the medicine wheel, the moon, the womb, and sacred hoops, you’d think we were one big tribe, is there nothing more than the circle in the deep structure of native literature? Are my eyes circles yet? Yet I feel compelled to incorporate something circular into the text, plot, or narrative structure because if it’s linear then that proves that I’m a ghost and that native culture really has vanished and what is all this fuss about appropriation anyway? Are my eyes round yet? There are times when I feel that if I don’t have a circle or the number four or legend in my poetry, I am lost, just a fading urban Indian caught in all the trappings of Doc Martens, cappuccinos and foreign films but there it is again orbiting, lunar, hoops encompassing your thoughts and canonizing mine, there it is again, circle the wagons. . . .

In this short text, sentences are structured by commas and question marks but not by periods; yet, their fluidity and open-endedness is interrupted, stopped at the end of each line made to fit the visual arrangement of a square. As well, the thematic circular structure beginning and ending with the phrase *circle the wagons* is also contained within the visual image of a box. Academic institutions are often accused of “squaring the circle” in their scholarship on non-linear Native epistemologies and worldviews and, for that matter, literary expressions. This association with Dumont’s text could provide a possible entry point into a discussion with students. Further reading makes it clear, however, that the author takes the idea of the circle into a critique of stereotypes about Native people and Native literature. As the visual arrangement suggests, the speaker of the poem seems to feel confined, boxed in, by preconceived notions of both. While the phrase *circle the wagons* evokes racist stereotyping—protection from “savage Indians”—her deconstructive use of the phrase suggests a need for protection of an individual’s freedom of choice. A discussion of Dumont’s text may include the author’s Métis ancestry as an influencing factor, a query that may in itself be based on preconceived notions of what it means to be Métis. Dumont’s prose poem does not espouse a dogma, but it asks, evokes,

and provokes important questions and therefore leads toward critical inquiry—in the context of a Native Studies classroom, to a discussion about the challenges of decolonization for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people/students. Because a literary piece like this draws a reader into a questioning process that is ongoing—as suggested by the ellipsis at the end of the poem—it exemplifies how creative writing helps “to *transform* consciousness, not merely to impose consciousness” (37), as Cree scholar and poet Neal McLeod, teaching in a Native Studies department, assesses the significance of literature. Engaging readers or listeners of stories in a way that they draw their own conclusions is an age-old practice in Aboriginal societies based on “an oral aesthetic” (Blaeser) that does not cater to a consumerist reception of stories. Instead, Stó:lō/Métis author Lee Maracle argues, as “listener/reader you become . . . the architect of great social transformation” (3). It is that kind of transformation that Native Studies aims at as it incorporates an activist strand and is working toward reconciliation, a goal that requires a paradigm shift in *all of* society.

In the text “Circle the Wagons,” Dumont undermines simplified notions of the construction of Native identity. Similarly, Anishinabe author Richard Wagamese writes against assumptions of what it means to be “traditional” and what it means to be Anishinabe when he adapts the traditional role of a father introducing his son to his environment (in the old ways, to the natural environment) to writing a book about it. In his autobiography *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son*, he tells his son that “this book is my way of performing that traditional duty” (9). In Native Studies we often teach Aboriginal students who, alienated from their respective Aboriginal home environment for various reasons, learn about their people’s history and culture through books, including novels about displacements through foster care and adoption like the ones that Wagamese himself wrote (*Keeper ‘N Me* and *A Quality of Light*). Although books in the Roman alphabet are nontraditional, imaginative writing published as novels, for example, has the potential of playing a particularly significant role for students who have gone through experiences similar to those of a certain story character

because a novel, somebody else's story in a fictive setting, is distant enough to be nonthreatening but close enough to leave an impact, to effect change and to heal.⁵

The study and research of literature written by survivors (as, arguably, all Indigenous authors are) forms an important component in the mandate of a department that “represents a working through of historical trauma” (Kulchyski 20). According to Anishinabe poet and critic Armand Ruffo, Indigenous literatures have two influences or branches: “the mythic/sacred and the historical/secular” or political (119). This duality calls for a form of literary criticism that is both “critical and constructive,” echoing the Marxist notion of “a negative and a positive hermeneutic” (Huhndorf 32). Critics have to understand the social and cultural impacts of centuries of colonialism and the cultural continuum that persisted in spite of it all. An approach that applies the seemingly objective notion of “literary merit” (Armstrong, “Aboriginal Literatures” 183) denies implicit ideological biases and will not do justice to Aboriginal literature. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o rightly points out that “the whole body of critical appreciation, interpretations, theories, commentaries often carries within itself an entire set of ideological assumptions about society and relations between human beings. Criticism and theories of literature are not themselves neutral entities” (23). Claiming ownership of Aboriginal literatures in Native Studies no longer leaves the politics of interpretation exclusively to English departments, with their strong roots in European traditions and colonial ideology, but asserts an informed position in relation to Aboriginal pre- and post-contact history and cultures. From that position of strength, it may forge “new alliances between English literary studies and Indigenous studies” in a transdisciplinary reading of Aboriginal literature (Len Findlay, qtd. in Huhndorf 32). The use of an appropriate epistemology is central to scholarly debates in Native Studies departments; it is no different with regard to Aboriginal literatures. Métis scholar Emma LaRocque demands that scholars in this field “bring to their teaching and research an Aboriginal epistemological ethos *in addition* to their Western academic training and credentials” (“Teaching” 225). Such an ethos results in a methodology and pedagogy that makes connections with the realities of Aboriginal societies today.

Literature, as commonly understood, is associated with high culture; to a large extent, in the view of dominant society, Aboriginal cultures are associated with popular rather than high culture. However, Native Studies includes all strands of cultural studies in its research and teaching and therefore should also include the “high culture” of literature. According to Peter Kulchyski, high culture, as opposed to elite culture, comprises “the cultural products that gain a venerated status usually because of the strength, vitality, complexity, or richness of the cultural text. Any of these can be of concern to Native Studies” (19). However, in Canadian society both Aboriginal literature and orature are overtly marginalized and too rarely gain a venerated status, and if they do, Howard Adams’s note of caution should be remembered: “Enthusiastic reception by white middle class public is not necessarily a measure of literary or artistic success for Aboriginal literary artists. Popularity likely means that the Aboriginal story or creation harmonizes with the archaic racial stereotypes of Eurocentric society” (131). The enthusiastic reception of Joseph Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, for example, very quickly catalogued and shelved in bookstores as “literature” and not under “Aboriginal Issues,” may be a case in point here. Although the novel is very well written, its theme of “savage” Windigo killings may indeed appeal to archaic racial stereotypes and account at least as much for the book’s success in mainstream reception as its literary qualities. Instead of working with assumptions about “Native-ness,” as Marilyn Dumont questions in her poem, an uncensored inclusion of Aboriginal verbal arts is needed on all levels. In his article “The Heritage of Storytelling” in the November 1998 issue of *MacLean’s*, Canadian author Robert Fulford praises the art of storytelling because it “connects us to our past and to our descendants in the next millennium.” “Us” does not include Aboriginal peoples and their stories. Fulford centers his essay on the theme of story deprivation in the canonized children’s classic *Peter Pan*, but he fails to mention the real story deprivation suffered by Aboriginal children in residential schools. The children in those schools will have heard stories, but these were European fairy tales, biblical tales and stories about Dick and Jane, not the stories of their cultures, communities,

and histories. Native Studies has to draw attention to this particular deprivation—among the many others—and to how it very effectively added to the loss of identity. Anishinabe writer Ruby Slipperjack is one of many Aboriginal writers in Canada who pointed out that she started to write because there were no stories relevant to her background, no stories she could relate to when she grew up (Lutz 213).⁶ Fulford perpetuates the sentiment of nineteenth-century settler literature about a land without stories. Catherine Parr Trail wrote in 1836 that “there are no historical associations, no legendary tales of those that come before us” (128). In his exclusionary discourse about the importance of storytelling, Fulford practices a continued story deprivation for Aboriginal people, who rarely see themselves and their literature included in mainstream literary reviews and award ceremonies (and if they do, often for the wrong reasons, as mentioned above). Although Aboriginal authors acknowledge their own communities as their primary audience—and narratives like Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton-Mosionier’s *In Search of April Raintree* gained a venerated status with them—they can only thrive and contribute to better cross-cultural communications if “others are willing to listen,” as Anishinabe elder Art Solomon states (qtd. in Ruffo 120). The reluctance of mainstream audiences to listen may be a reaction to “the Uncomfortable Mirrors” that Aboriginal writers are holding up to Canadian society at large (LaRocque, “Preface” xxvii). However, departments of Native Studies in Canada were created in order to help lift the denial that this nation was built on stolen land; the inclusion of the nonthreatening, yet eye-opening medium of the verbal arts—both oral and written—will strengthen this educational mandate and grant Aboriginal peoples greater visibility.

The Aboriginal student who, after seeing my Environment, Economy, and Aboriginal Peoples course outline and noting its inclusion of stories and Armstrong’s novel *Whispering in Shadows*, asked “What does literature have to do with this?” argued with the understanding that literature is a luxury, an add-on, derived from a social position of privilege. However, in Aboriginal societies the verbal arts have always been multilayered, multipurposed, and intrinsi-

cally interdisciplinary. For example, so-called traditional narratives may be read not only for their ecological worldview and their environmental ethics (as in the case of Overholt and Callicott's *Clothed-In-Fur and Other Tales*) but also for their powerful impact as imaginative narratives. As outlined above, Basil Johnston recontextualizes the story of "The Weeping Pine" as literature. This does not mean that the narrative is *not* about the origin of pine trees but that it has more than one layer of meaning. Similarly, in her novel *Whispering in Shadows*, Armstrong addresses issues of poverty, illness, racism, environmental destruction, food issues, and reserve and urban life. She is weaving together the many different strands of being an Indigenous person today in the form of a story that follows the life of a main character. Although Armstrong wrote many nonfiction articles, in particular about environmental issues, here she expresses her anticolonial, anticapitalist, and antiglobalization views through story. A character whom we get to know as lover, a parent, a poorly treated worker, a student, an artist, an activist, and a person dying from cancer touches us as human beings, quite different from the textbook Aboriginal identified by statistics or the media image of the blockade warrior. Creative writing produces for the reader an emotional investment, an intimacy of experience that does not translate into fixed knowledge, categories, or labels—one of the reasons why Dumont may have chosen the poem form for the articulation of her desire to simply be, free from preconceived notions. As social science research tends to dehumanize the "objects" it studies, and as this discourse has been very powerful in Aboriginal contexts generally and in Native Studies specifically, it is time to turn to narratives that reinstate humanity. Emma LaRocque therefore explains, "One of the reasons I like and teach literature is because it may be one of the most effective ways to shed light on Native humanity" ("Teaching" 217).

I attempted to explain and illustrate in this essay that Native literature is an expression of a cultural continuum contributing to Indigenous intellectual traditions and also a form of re-writing, a "dispelling of lies" (Armstrong, "The Disempowerment" 244), and therefore an articulation of empowerment. Adding to both these

characteristics, which already make literature a suitable subject in Native Studies, I want to emphasize in my conclusion that, although Aboriginal literature addresses multiple sites of dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and the subsequent tragedies occurring in Aboriginal communities, the stories, written and spoken, as poems or prose or plays, never simply, unproblematically reflect Aboriginal reality. "Literature," theorist Simon Gikandi suggests, "problematizes experiences which might appear to us to be easily accessible and consumable" (qtd. in Brydon 990). Due to the colonial legacy of labeling Aboriginal peoples as primitive and childlike, there is still a perception in dominant society that they and their cultural expressions are simple, easy to understand. Aboriginal verbal arts draw attention to complexities, and it is exactly because of their lack of transparency; their suggestive, allusive, but not prescriptive characteristics; their avoidance of closure and easy solutions; their shifts and gaps and open-endedness that Aboriginal literatures should become an intrinsic component in the discipline of Native Studies, which, with its mandate to further the struggle toward decolonization, continuously engages in critical inquiry.

NOTES

1. For the purpose of this article I will use *Native*, *Aboriginal*, and *Indigenous* interchangeably.

2. Her reasoning echoes Thomas King's often-cited concerns about classifying Native literatures as "postcolonial." One of his arguments against this academic categorization is his contention that they did not only start after the onslaught of colonization but built onto precontact traditions ("Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial").

3. Cree author Tomson Highway, for example, started a project in 2008 with the Negahneewin College at Confederation College in Thunder Bay, which he titles *The Written Tradition: Literature, Literacy and Aboriginal Identity*.

4. "Birchbark Bitings" is the title of a column on Aboriginal literatures that Sinclair writes regularly for the Winnipeg-based newspaper *Urban NDN*; his choice of title alludes to his perception of a continuum between precontact cultures and contemporary Aboriginal, or rather, Anishinabe literature.

5. Just recently Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew published a book-length study of Aboriginal literature in Canada on this particular topic: *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*.

6. In her landmark text on Canadian Literature, *Survival*, Margaret Atwood points out the need for a national literature because it functions as a mirror:

If a country or a culture lacks such mirrors it has no way of knowing what it looks like; it must travel blind. If . . . the viewer is given a mirror that reflects not him but someone else, and told at the same time that the reflection he sees is himself, he will get a very distorted idea of what he is really like. (15–16)

Quite ironically, Atwood did not wonder about the mirror effect of the distorted images of Native people in Canadian literature on those people; however, a year after *Survival*, Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* was published.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Howard. *A Tortured People*. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1995. Print.
- Akiwenzie-Damm, Kateri. "First Peoples Literature in Canada." *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture*. Ed. David Newhouse, Cora Voyageur, and Daniel Beavon. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. 169–76. Print.
- Armstrong, Jeannette. "Aboriginal Literatures: A Distinctive Genre within Canadian Literature." *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture*. Ed. David Newhouse, Cora Voyageur, and Daniel Beavon. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005. 180–86. Print.
- . "The Disempowerment of First North American Native Peoples and Empowerment through Their Writing." *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2005. 242–45. Print.
- . *Whispering in Shadows*. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 2000. Print.
- . "Words." *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*. Ed. Sky Lee, Lee Maracle, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990. 23–29. Print.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 1972. Print.
- Baker, Annharte. "Borrowing Enemy Language: A First Nation Woman Use of English." *West Coast Line* 10.27/1 (Spring 1993): 59–66. Print.

- Blaeser, Kimberly. "Writing Voices Speaking: Native Authors and an Oral Aesthetic." *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*. Ed. Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 53–68. Print.
- Boyden, Joseph. *Three Day Road*. Toronto: Viking, 2005. Print.
- Brant, Beth. *Writing as Witness*. Toronto: Women's, 1994. Print.
- Brydon, Dianna. "Dionne Brand's Global Intimacies: Practising Affective Citizenship." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.3 (Summer 2007): 990–1006. Print.
- Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973. Print.
- Coleman, Daniel. *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006. Print.
- Culleton-Mosionier, Beatrice. *In Search of April Raintree*. Winnipeg: Pemmican, 1983. Print.
- Dumont, Marilyn. *A Really Good Brown Girl*. London, ON: Bricks, 1993. Print.
- . "Popular Images of Nativeness." *Looking at the Words of our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature*. Ed. Jeannette Armstrong. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1993. 45–49. Print.
- Eigenbrod, Renate. *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2005. Print.
- Episkenew, Jo-Ann. *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2009. Print.
- Erdrich, Louise. *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*. Washington: National Geographic, 2003.
- Fagan, Kristina, Daniel Heath Justice, Keary Martin, Sam McKegey, Deanna Rider, and Niigonwedom James Sinclair. "Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism? Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Contexts—A Collaborative Interlogue." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 29.1–2 (Fall 2009): 19–44. Print.
- Fulford, Robert. "The Heritage of Storytelling." *MacLean's*, Nov. 2, 1998. 80–85. Print.
- Huhndorf, Shari. "Indigeneity, Colonialism and Literary Studies: A 'Trans-disciplinary,' Oppositional Politics of Reading." *ESC* 30.2 (June 2004): 29–38. Print.
- Johnston, Basil. "Is That All There Is? Tribal Literature." *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2005. 98–105. Print.

- . "One Generation from Extinction." *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2005. 92–97. Print.
- Justice, Daniel. "Conjuring Marks: Furthering Indigenous Empowerment through Literature." *Empowerment through Literature*. Spec. issue of *American Indian Quarterly* 28.1–2 (Spring 2004): 3–11.
- Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. "Stop Stealing Native Stories." *The Globe and Mail*, Jan. 26, 1990. Print.
- King, Thomas. "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial." *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Ed. Ajay Heble, Donna Palmateer Pennee, and J. R. (Tim) Struthers. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1997. 241–48. Print.
- Kulchyski, Peter. "What is Native Studies?" *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies*. Ed. Ron F. Laliberte et al. Saskatoon: University Extension, 2000. 13–26. Print.
- LaRocque, Emma. "Teaching Aboriginal Literature: The Discourse of Margins and Mainstreams." *Creating Community: A Roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal Literature*. Ed. Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episkenew. Penticton, BC: Theytus; Brandon, MB: Bearpaw, 2002. 209–34. Print.
- . "Preface—or Here Are Our Voices—Who Will Hear?" *Writing the Circle*. Ed. Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance. Edmonton: NeWest, 1990. Print.
- Lutz, Hartmut. *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991. Print.
- Maracle, Lee. *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990. Print.
- McLeod, Neal. "Indigenous Studies: Negotiating the Space between Tribal Communities and Academia." *Expressions in Canadian Native Studies*. Ed. F. Ron Laliberte et al. Saskatoon: University Extension, 2000. 27–39. Print.
- Overholt, Thomas W., and J. Baird Callicott. *Clothed-In-Fur And Other Tales: An Introduction to an Ojibwa World View*. London, England: UP of America, 1982. Print.
- Parr Trail, Catherine. *The Backwoods of Canada*. 1836. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989. Print.
- Ruffo, Armand. "Why Native Literature?" *Native North America*. Ed. Renee Hulan. Toronto: ECW, 1999. 109–21. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993. Print.
- Sterling, Shirley. *My Name is Seepeetza*. Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992. Print.

- Wagamese, Richard. *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches his Son*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2002. Print.
- . *A Quality of Light*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1997. Print.
- . *Keeper 'N Me*. Toronto: Doubleday, 1994. Print.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi. *Writers in Politics: Essays*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1981. Print.

The Marriage of Mother and Father

Michif Influences as Expressions of Métis Intellectual
Sovereignty in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*

MAREIKE NEUHAUS

In an article discussing the textualization of performance, J. Edward Chamberlin has noted with reference to the work of Renato Rosaldo and Julie Cruikshank that “we need to get back to that simple discipline of looking at (and listening to) texts, rather than always looking through or around or behind or underneath them” (86). I agree; as literary critics, we need to reexamine the question of language and language use in Indigenous literatures—for a number of reasons. Firstly, even if, as Lee Maracle (Stó:lō) has argued, language “is not the main” but “*one* means of expression of culture” (“Ramparts” 169; emphasis added), the way in which language is *used* creates meaning and implicates modes of being and thinking. Secondly, to echo what Margery Fee observed in the 1990s (31), ancestral languages and discourse conventions are far more central in Indigenous writing and storytelling than is generally assumed or acknowledged by Euroamerican academics.

As Andrea Bear Nicholas (Maliseet) observes in “The Assault on Aboriginal Oral Traditions,” the colonization of North America not only implied the theft of land and resources from Indigenous peoples but also involved breaking these peoples’ connections to the land. Since these connections were ultimately expressed in and performed through the oral traditions, Bear Nichols writes, it is the latter that needed to be eradicated; hence the establishment of the residential and boarding school systems in Canada and the United States. There is thus, according to Bear Nicholas, a direct “correlation between the destruction of oral traditions and the colonial project

of dispossession” and consequently also between the destruction of the land and that of Indigenous languages (19). Indigenous mother tongues in North America have suffered immensely through colonialism; many of these languages have become extinct in the past five hundred years, and many others are threatened to become extinct in the very near future. Thus, English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese have become the first languages for most Indigenous people living in North America today.¹ When, in the face of this vast linguistic loss, Craig Womack (Creek/Cherokee) argues that English is “an Indian language,” this observation makes sense when seen from the point of view of *parole*. For, as Womack rightly points out, English is used by many Indigenous people in large parts of Canada and the United States (404). In their use of this language, however, Indigenous people have “Indigenized” English more than it has altered Indigenous ways of expression. In fact, as I will argue here, Indigenous uses of the English language mark one of the means available to Indigenous storytellers and writers to preserve and celebrate their tribe’s intellectual sovereignty, a prerequisite for other kinds of sovereignty.

For this purpose, I will discuss the use of language in Maria Campbell’s *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, which—to apply Pamela Sing’s description of Michif to the Métis variant of English used in this collection—is all of the following: “non-normative, anti-institutional, perhaps anti-State, interrelational and relativizing” (“Intersections”). In *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, Maria Campbell marries Mother (symbolizing land and grammar) and Father (symbolizing story and lexicon) to weave a narrative that reflects not only the genesis of the Métis People and their language but also the importance of “membering” as a performance of Métis peoplehood. Campbell’s motivation for translating the stories of her own Métis community in northern Saskatchewan into a Michif English code may not originally have been to create and claim intellectual sovereignty. Instead, she seems to have followed mainly her feelings, her sense of community, and her ear for her people’s storytelling when working on this collection. And yet, every single reading of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is ultimately a “performance” of stories that create meaning and function out-

side the norms of standard English and Euroamerican thought, and may thus be regarded as an expression of intellectual sovereignty. I believe, therefore, that the manner in which the voices of the Road Allowance People have found their way onto the printed page also deserves to be discussed in a political context.

LANGUAGE, LAND, AND PEOPLEHOOD

According to Charles Taylor, “we become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of *expression*” (32; emphasis added). Language as verbal expression (i.e., *parole* rather than *langue*) helps define an individual’s self as much as that of a nation. One recent development in Indigenous literary criticism is a tribal-specific approach that focuses on “the intellectual and political sovereignty of the People” (Justice 210). Arguing that a nationalist approach “is a legitimate perspective from which to approach Native American literature and criticism” (Weaver, Womack, and Warrior xx–xxi), nationalist Indigenous critics perceive nation not in terms of Western models of the nation-state but as focused on *peoplehood*. Hence, “Indigenous nationhood,” according to Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee),

is also an understanding of a common social interdependence within the community, 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. At its best, it extends beyond the human to encompass other peoples, from the plants and animals to the sun, moon, thunder, and other elemental forces. (Justice 24)

One integral component of Indigenous nationhood is thus the people’s relationship to the land. “[W]e are earth,” the Muscogee poet Joy Harjo writes in her poem “Remember.” Land, for Indigenous peoples, is not just soil, rocks, and minerals but a whole environment that sustains the people physically and spiritually.

Indigenous connections to the land are expressed in songs, poems, histories, short stories, ceremonies, novels, letters, autobiographies, and other texts, but as various Indigenous thinkers suggest, these connections are ultimately generated by *language* itself. “Through stories and words,” Cree poet Neal McLeod writes,

we [the Cree people] hold the echo of generational experience, and the engagement with land and territory. *nêhiyawêwin*, Cree language—perhaps more poetically rendered as “the process of making Cree sound”—grounds us, and binds us with other living beings, and marks these relationships. (6)

Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan) makes similar observations when she argues that her ancestral Okanagan retells to future generations the stories originally spoken by the land (176). She further explains:

all indigenous peoples’ languages are generated by a precise geography and arise from it. Over time and many generations of their people, it is their distinctive interaction with a precise geography which forms the way indigenous language is shaped and subsequently how the world is viewed, approached, and expressed verbally by its speakers. (178–79)

Thus, the last section in Armstrong’s seminal “Land Speaking” discusses her attempts to recreate in her English writing the action, movement, and connectedness implicated in her Okanagan mother tongue (see Armstrong 190–94).

When Métis writer Maria Campbell worked with the narratives that were to become *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, she was faced with a similar task: to textualize in English the stories of her people as told to her in her elders’ ancestral Michif. Campbell ended up translating the stories not into standard English but into what she has referred to as “the dialect and rhythm of my village and my father’s generation” (Campbell, *Stories* 2), a “very broken English” (qtd. in Lutz and Gross 48); and to do so was a very deliberate decision. After having translated the stories into standard English, Campbell felt there was something missing. When she approached one of her teachers about this, he told her that her problem was that

English “lost its Mother a long time ago, and what you have to do is, put the Mother back in the language” (Campbell qtd. in Lutz and Gross 49). As Campbell further explains:

[Peter] said [putting the Mother back in the language] was not possible if I wasn't grounded in my own place and understood that my language came from that place. Knowing it, he said, meant knowing the Cree-Michif history of my homeland, which included the names of lakes, creeks, and hills. All the places where my people lived out their lives. (Campbell qtd. in Gingell, “One Small Medicine” 188–89; emphasis added)

Yet, it was not until Campbell heard her father tell her children a story in his village English, and she recreated this voice in one of the stories, that Campbell realized what her teacher had meant about putting the Mother back in the language. “I had the story in my father's voice,” she says, “or somebody's voice. It was all there. I could smell the community, I could smell the old people, all those familiar things were there” (qtd. in Lutz and Gross 49).

What eventually became *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is, then, a collection of stories from Maria Campbell's own community of Métis in northern Saskatchewan. As such, the collection is very much rooted in this particular place. When I argue for reading Michif influences in Campbell's *Stories of the Road Allowance People* as an expression of Métis intellectual sovereignty, this observation applies primarily to the Métis community that gave birth to these stories. However, I believe that, despite the fact that the Métis are not a monolithic group but show cultural and linguistic variation, the performance of peoplehood enacted in Campbell's collection may also speak to other Métis communities in Canada and the United States.

I will discuss Campbell's recreation of Michif in the English-language text further below. For now, and to summarize this discussion, I want to emphasize that for Indigenous peoples, language is the bridge between the land and the people, as much as it connects individuals by expressing kinship relationships. Language thus points to the foundation of Indigenous conceptions of nation as focused on

peoplehood, as much as it forms one of the various features that make one particular Indigenous culture distinct from others.

As Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) notes, “‘traditional’ indigenous nationhood is commonly defined *relationally*, in contrast to the dominant formulation of the state: there is no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy, and no separate ruling entity” (“Sovereignty” 42; emphasis added). Sovereignty—a concept born and developed in Euroamerican thought and societies that is based on such notions as absolute authority and hierarchies—thus contradicts Indigenous notions of nationhood and, so Alfred argues in *Peace, Power, and Righteousness*, is ill suited in Indigenous political contexts. While this is not the place to discuss the appropriateness of the term in Indigenous contexts, I need to explain how I understand intellectual sovereignty in the context of this article.

Sheri Tatsch (Cherokee) defines “[i]ntellectual sovereignty as the right to create, interpret, evaluate, and conceive, without the willful assault of Euro-American languages, values, and social norms” (258). What Tatsch calls intellectual sovereignty is very similar to what Scott Richard Lyons (Ojibwe/Mdewakanton Dakota) has described as *rhetorical sovereignty*, “the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (449–50). Although rhetorical sovereignty aptly describes the use of language in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, I prefer to refer to Campbell’s translations of her people’s stories as an act of *intellectual* sovereignty. Coined by Robert Allen Warrior (Osage), intellectual sovereignty describes Indigenous scholarship that is grounded in the intellectual traditions of Indigenous communities. As Warrior writes in *Tribal Secrets*, “In developing American Indian critical studies, we need to practice the same sort of intellectual sovereignty that many Native poets practice” (117). Thus, just like Tatsch, Warrior links the production and reception of ideas and thought as equal parts of a larger whole, thereby deconstructing the Euroamerican binary of story and theory. My choice to describe the use of language in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* as an act

of intellectual sovereignty is hence also informed by the desire to emphasize the interconnectedness of story and theory in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. For, as Lee Maracle writes, “Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thought and values of a people” (*Oratory* 3).

MICHIF AND MÉTIS INTELLECTUAL SOVEREIGNTY

If expressions of intellectual self-determination exclude the “willful assault of Euro-American languages,” as Tatsch argues, and we assume that intellectual self-determination for Indigenous peoples is possible using the English language, then Indigenous forms of intellectual sovereignty imply Indigenous uses of English that are “inflected” by Indigenous mother tongues. To illustrate the re-creation of Indigenous languages in English I could have turned to many other texts, but Maria Campbell’s *Stories of the Road Allowance People* lends itself particularly well to such a task, primarily because of its history of composition.

In order to situate *Stories of the Road Allowance People* in the larger context of Indigenous literatures, it is helpful to compare it with Maria Campbell’s debut work in print, her 1973 *Halfbreed*, a watershed publication that “intervened in the canadian [*sic*] literary tradition” by challenging existing stereotypes about Indigenous women (Acoose, *Iskwewak* 90–91). Campbell begins her autobiography by telling the story of her people, from the Red River Resistance of 1869–70 to the Northwest Resistance of 1885 and its aftermath of forced homesteading that turned many Métis families into “squatters on their own land.” When their homesteads were reclaimed by the government, many Métis families were forced to move to the road allowances (crown land on either side of road lines and roads reserved for road-building purposes) and became known as the Road Allowance People (9–13), one of “Canada’s forgotten people” (Sealey and Lussier) who have been left with less than “left-over land” (*iskonikan*, Cree for *reserve*; see Wolvengrey 1:39). *Halfbreed* tells the story of the first thirty-three years of Campbell’s life, par-

ticularly about growing up in the Road Allowance community in northern Saskatchewan that she was born into. At the same time, however—and maybe even foremost—*Halfbreed* is a story about “what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” (*Halfbreed* 8). Thus, autobiography becomes more than the telling of an individual’s life story; it becomes collective autobiography.

Bringing together eight stories by northern Saskatchewan Métis elders to pass on Métis cultural memory as “membering” (*Stories* 88)—that is, as both *remembering* and *membering* (for a discussion, see below)—*Stories of the Road Allowance People* continues, if in a different form and language, the work Campbell started with *Halfbreed*. The collection is an example of textualized orature, oral narratives and traditions that, for one reason or another, are put into print and thus become accessible to a larger audience, although this growth in audience is usually not the main incentive for textualizations of oratures. In the case of *Stories*, for example, Campbell’s motivation was to make her community’s stories accessible in English to the next generation of her people who, unlike herself, speak neither Michif nor Cree or Saulteaux (Campbell qtd. in Gingell, “One Small Medicine” 188; Campbell qtd. in Lutz and Gross 48). Campbell’s role in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is thus not so much that of author or editor as that of mediator and translator of her people’s cultural memory (see Gingell, “One Small Medicine” 200).

THE USE OF VILLAGE ENGLISH IN
STORIES OF THE ROAD ALLOWANCE PEOPLE

One of the more obvious differences between *Halfbreed* and *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is the language of composition. While “[e]lements of the author’s ancestral Métis French are largely expunged from the edited version” of *Halfbreed* (Sing, “Intersections”), the stories of the Road Allowance People are composed in a variant of English that has traditionally been viewed as a communication tool much inferior to standard English and whose use has had profound implications for its speakers, as Maria Campbell and her siblings had to learn the hard way when they were growing up. The

following passage is one of the few examples in *Halfbreed* in which Campbell comments on the use of English in her family/community:

Peggie was in the first grade, a very small six year old, timid and shy. Because we used a mixture of Cree and English at home, her pronunciation was poor. The teacher would shake her and say to the class, “Look at her! She is so stupid she can’t even say ‘this’, instead of ‘dis.’” She would make Peggie stand up at the front of the room for an hour, without moving. She grew so afraid of school that she would cry and wet her bed at night. (77; emphasis added)

Susan Gingell has argued with reference to Braj Krachu that we cannot evaluate Creenglish, a Cree variant of English, without considering the *functions* to which it is put in the respective sociolinguistic contexts (“Lips’ Inking” 4).² It is this belief in the empowering force to which language can be put that makes Gloria Bird express her hope “that in ‘reinventing’ the English language we will turn the process of colonization around, and that our literature will be viewed and read as a process of *decolonization*” (qtd. in Harjo and Bird 25). In the case of *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, village English proves to be “the superior lect” (Gingell, “Lips’ Inking” 17) because, avoiding “the willful assault of Euro-American languages” (Tatsch 258), this collection presents the people’s stories in the most legitimate and sincere way, linguistically speaking.

Well *dat man* he was glad to be home
 an *he start* right away to *boder hees* woman.
 When *dey start dere* business
dey bump me
 “Whats *dat*?”
Dah man he ask *hees* woman.

“Oh *dats* your dog Bob” *Dah woman* he say.
 “He always sleep under *dere* when your gone.”
Dah man he put *hees* han on *dah* floor an he say
 “Astum Bob.”
 Well *me* I gots to *preten* I was Bob

so I tap *dah* floor wit *my han*
 you know
 like a *dog hees tail*
An den I pant *an* I lick hees han.
 Boy *dat shore* makes him happy
 “Good dog Bob” *he say*
an he go back to *hees* business. (*Stories* 10–11; emphasis added)

The most obvious feature of ancestral language influences in this excerpt, as in any other passage in Campbell’s collection, is her use of what Susan Gingell refers to as “eye vernacular” (“Lips’ Inking” 18). The letters, words, phrases, and sentences as they appear on the written page of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* are spelled as they are “pronounced ‘a la mitchif’” (Sing, “Intersections”).³ Hence, “th” becomes “d,” as in “dat” for “that” and “boder” for “bother.” The English homophones “their,” “there,” and “they’re” are all spelled “dere,” hence harmonizing orthography and pronunciation. Consonant clusters in word-final positions are either reduced (“han” for “hand”) or altered (“tole” for “told,” “ole” for “old”). Past-tense endings are dropped (“dey start” for “they started”) or—if one assumes the narrative to have shifted to the historical present—the subject-verb concord in English is violated (“he ask” for “he asks”). However one may interpret the nonstandard verb endings in the excerpt above, the latter may also be read as going beyond the realm of pronunciation variation.

Stories of the Road Allowance People also features other examples of nonstandard uses of English that concern not phonology but morphology, syntax, or pragmatics. For example, irregular forms of verbs and nouns of standard English are treated according to existing regular patterns (“womans” for “women” or “knewed” for “knew”). Personal pronouns are duplicated in both subject and object positions (“me I” or “dat man he”), and evidentials are used repeatedly to indicate the nature of evidence for a given statement (“he say”). In short, put entirely into village English and set on the page as verse rather than prose, *Stories of the Road Allowance People* requires readers to “[sound] out the words on the page” (Gingell, “Lips’ Inking” 17). Demanding loud reading, Campbell’s collection

not only “subvert[s] the concept of ‘literature’ and the practice of its ‘reading’ as an art to be appreciated silently” (Sing, “Intersections”); it literally makes readers *speak* English as *spoken* by Métis—this I call a very conscious act of decolonization. *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, then, marks a discourse that, to speak with Renate Eigenbrod’s words, is “to be understood on its own terms” (150), despite the fact that the people’s stories are told on the page in a language other than their ancestral Michif.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO MICHIF

Michif is a very special case when it comes to Indigenous languages.⁴ It is not a language that existed in North America upon European arrival but one that arose in association with the fur trade and turned into a fully developed language of the Métis by the 1840s (Bakker 190).⁵ As Peter Bakker argues in *A Language of Our Own*, Michif intertwines Cree (i.e., a Métis version of Plains Cree) and French (i.e., Métis French) components to form a new, independent language that, despite its similarities with both Cree and French, exists in its own right and marks the Métis as a distinct people. Mixed languages—a linguistic phenomenon not as rare as generally assumed (Bakker and Muysken 50)—emerge through the process of language intertwining whereby the grammar (phonology, morphology, and syntax) of one language is combined with the lexicon of another (Bakker 202) to “form an organic whole” (Bakker and Muysken 49). The process of intertwining is rather uniform across mixed languages: when mixed languages develop as in-group languages in the context of bilingual unions, the grammatical system is always provided by the mother’s language, presumably because it is more easily learned due to the close contact between child and mother (Bakker and Muysken 50).⁶ The only exception to this rule seems to be Michif. Because of the typological features of Cree—due to its polysynthetic nature, its verbs cannot be broken down into a grammatical part and a lexical part; hence their “integrity . . . cannot be violated” (Bakker 233)—the intertwining of languages in the case of the Métis has resulted in a language in which the verbal

groups are mostly Cree (83–94%) and the nominal groups mostly French (88–99%) (Bakker 117).⁷

The peculiar intertwining of Cree and French in Michif is illustrated in the following example taken from Bakker’s *A Language of Our Own*, in which the uneven lines are in Michif (italics indicate Cree), whereas the even lines provide the structural analysis in English:

- (3) un vieux *ê-opahikê-t ê-nôcihcikê-t*,
 an.M old trap-he.CONJ COMP-trap-he.CONJ
- (4) *êkwa* un matin *ê-waniskâ-t âhkosi-w*,
 and an.M morning COMP-wake.up-he be.sick-he
- (5) but *kêyâpit ana wî-nitawi-wâpaht-am* ses pièges.
 but still this.one want-go-see.it-he.it his.P trap.
- (6) *sipwêhtê-w. mêkwât êkotê ê-itasîhkê-t*, une tempête.
 leave-he, meantime there CONJ-be.busy-he. a.F storm
 (Bakker 5)

The marriage of Cree and French structures in Michif is quite complex. Take the following examples: Cree distinguishes nouns, pronouns, and verbs based on animacy, that is, whether or not someone or something is animate (see Wolfart and Carroll 19). Michif nouns are usually derived from French, but they are treated as though they were Cree nouns: Michif verbs agree with Michif nouns based on the animacy of the corresponding Cree noun (Bakker 99). Finally, obviation (the marking of a second third person found in all Cree dialects) “is present in Michif but more reduced than in Cree” (Bakker 89). Michif is, however, more analytic than its polysynthetic parent language Cree (see Bakker 155, 256), but even Cree dialects show a lot of variation in terms of their tendency for holophrases, that is, one-word sentences (Wolfart 43n55; see note 7 below).

MICHIF ENGLISH IN STORIES OF
 THE ROAD ALLOWANCE PEOPLE

Since Maria Campbell recorded her people’s narratives in Michif, the English code used in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is

not transcribed but *translated from Michif*. Yet, the effect the stories gained once Campbell had translated them into village English speaks volumes. The stories were alive all of a sudden, not just for her but, as Campbell reports, also for the people in her community (see Gingell, “One Small Medicine” 190). Moreover, *Stories of the Road Allowance People* has influenced other Métis authors (see Sing, “Intersections”), such as Joe Welsh, who, in the acknowledgments for his story collection *Jackrabbit Street*, thanks Maria Campbell, who “didn’t just open the door for us—she kicked the damn thing down.” There is no material available in “village English” with which we could compare Campbell’s re-creation of this English code in *Stories*. Given her people’s reaction, however, it seems reasonable to assume that the English code we are reading in the collection is a successful recreation of the particular English code used by her people. At the same time, we cannot assume that the English code used in Campbell’s collection includes no traces of the Cree language as some speakers of Michif also speak Cree.⁸ The very notion of distinguishing a Michif from a Cree English code is then problematic not just because of a lack of sources but also because of the strong influences of Cree in Michif. And yet, it is possible to trace features of language use in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* that can be related more directly to Michif than to any of its parent languages and that I will discuss in what follows—namely, the code-switching in both Cree and French, the inconsistent use of adjective-noun agreement, and the structure of possessive constructions.

Stories of the Road Allowance People is composed in English, but the collection also features code-switching in both Cree (e.g., “Astum” and “Sip way tay,” *Stories* 11, 12) and French (e.g., “La Beau Sha Shoo,” *Stories* 50, 56, 57, 65; “Anglais,” *Stories* 50, 105). Interestingly, the code-switching in Cree involves complete sentences (“Astum” and “Sip way tay” are imperatives, translating into “Come here” and “Leave,” respectively), while all the French used in *Stories* is restricted entirely to noun phrases (e.g., “La Beau Sha Shoo,” “Anglais General,” and “Angleterre”). Apparently, the very switching of codes in Campbell’s translations reflects the structural make-up of Michif as a special case of a mixed language that is at least slightly

polysynthetic (mother = Cree = verbs; father = French = nouns; see note 7 below). Moreover, it is noteworthy that, as Pamela Sing has pointed out, the only references in Campbell's collection to the British colonizers are via the French ("Angleterre" or "Anglais" used as noun and adjective) rather than the English language ("Exils" 122–23)—another decolonizing choice of language use. While there is no reason why a Cree poet composing in English should not also include French besides Cree, the use of both languages in a collection of Métis oral tradition can hardly be regarded as coincidence, however.⁹ Given the genesis of the Métis People and their language, I would therefore consider the incorporation in *Stories* of both French and Cree a more or less direct Michif influence.

Noun phrases in standard French require agreement between adjectives and nouns in both number and gender, a grammatical feature unknown to standard English. *Stories of the Road Allowance People* features at least one noun phrase in which the adjective does not correspond in number with the noun, namely "dah udders mans" for "the other men" (*Stories* 113). The same noun phrase is, however, also found showing no number agreement between adjective and noun, as in "dah udder mans" (*Stories* 114). *Stories* features another noun phrase that violates the adjective-noun agreement of standard French, namely, "La Beau Sha Shoo" (*Stories* 50, 56, 57, 65)—probably meaning something along the lines of "the beautiful song"—which in standard French is either "*Le Beau Sha Shoo*" or "*La Belle Sha Shoo*."¹⁰ The adjective-noun agreement in *Stories* is therefore very irregular, a characteristic also found in Michif, where prenominal adjectives agree with the nouns in number and gender, whereas most postnominal adjectives do not (see Bakker 106). Showing inconsistent uses of adjectival modifiers in noun phrases, both Michif and the Métis variant of English in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* resist the linguistic "norms" set by Parisian French or even Quebecois or Acadian French.

Possessive constructions in *Stories* follow exactly the order found in Michif, which is more reminiscent of Cree than French (Bakker 88). Thus, noun phrases with possessives in *Stories* always consist of the possessor followed by a possessive pronoun and the possessed, as

in “a dog hees tail” (possessor: a dog; pronoun: hees; possessed: tail) for “a dog’s tail” (*Stories* 11) or “dah Prees hees book” for “the priest’s book” (*Stories* 42). As such, Michif inverts the order used in French (possessed—preposition—possessor: *le chien de mon garçon*) and comes close to the possessive structures found in Cree (possessor—possessed: *nikosis otema*), which lack possessive pronouns and mark the possessed using the obviative (Bakker 88; Wolfart and Carroll 47–50), a second third-person marker (see Wolfart and Carroll 25). Possessive structures in both Michif and the Métis variant of English in *Stories* hence reflect the complex balancing of or marriage between Cree and French structures in Michif.

HOLOPHRASTIC TRACES IN *STORIES*
OF THE ROAD ALLOWANCE PEOPLE

A phrase such as “a dog hees tail” exemplifies the possessive structures in *Stories*, but it also echoes the verb complexity and third-person equality of the Cree language. Usually referred to, from an Indo-European perspective, as pronoun copying and gender confusion, respectively, these echoes of verb complexity and third-person equality are very dominant features of language use in other Indigenous English codes besides Michif English, and I shall end my linguistic discussion of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* on these echoes because they mark the only notable trace of the holophrase in the collection.¹¹ Pronoun copying describes “the practice of adding a pronoun after the subject noun or object noun” (Bartelt 110). This practice occurs frequently in *Stories*, in both subject and object positions.

“Oh dats your dog Bob” *Dah woman he say.*
 “He always sleep under dere when your gone.”
Dah man he put hees han on dah floor an he say
 “Astum Bob.” (*Stories* 11; emphases added)

Given the generic make-up of Michif, however, the repetition of pronouns in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is better described as echoing verb complexity in Cree. Subjects and objects in many Indigenous languages, including Cree, are often already expressed in

their verbs, which are “holistic” (Chafe, “Discourse Effects” 44–45) and thus allow for the construction of one-word sentences that linguists call *holophrases*. In interlinear translations of Cree or Michif idea units, for example, that also include independent noun phrases (e.g., the Cree sentence *iskwew kiwâpamew maskwa*), subjects and objects are duplicated in the English translation—unless, of course, one renders the interlinear translation (“woman he/she saw him/her bear”) so as to have it conform to standard English (“The woman saw a bear”). The repetition of pronouns is also observed in other varieties of English (Bartelt 110), but the structure of many Indigenous verbs, which express both the event and its participant(s), turns this language feature into an interesting phenomenon in Indigenous contexts, especially given that the repetition of pronouns is not common in English (Baker 102). To answer how much the echoes of Cree verb complexity in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* are directly associable with Michif and its two parent languages goes beyond the scope of this article.¹² What interests me instead is the relationship between gender and the personal pronouns used in *Stories*.

Some Indigenous languages, particularly the Algonquian languages (Blackfoot, Cree, Ojibwa, Mik’maq, etc.), distinguish nouns, pronouns, and verbs based on animacy. Hence, there are no pronouns reflecting gender in Algonquian languages; nor are there any gendered personal pronouns in Michif since these are all derived from Cree (Bakker 104). The Cree-Algonquian influence is notable, for example, in Métis French—the French variant intertwined with Métis Cree into Michif—where gender difference in personal pronouns for persons does not exist. Thus, “Ma femme, il est malade” and “Mon vieux, elle est dans la maison” are perfectly grammatical sentences in Métis French (Bakker 251). Métis French is an excellent example of the influences an Algonquian language, such as Cree, can have on an Indo-European language, such as French or English. Combining a female person with a masculine pronoun, the first of the two Métis French examples could also have been taken out of *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, where pronoun uses are restricted to male pronoun forms that “denote both female and male gender as well as the impersonal ‘it’” (Eigenbrod 150).¹³

The function third-person equality serves in the narratives can be related to the tendency of many Indigenous languages for holophrasis, the use of one-word sentences. For, in order to make sense of these Métis stories, one has—as Renate Eigenbrod has quite aptly put it—to read each sentence “all at once”; thus, context in *Stories* also becomes *context* (Eigenbrod 150). In Indigenous languages, the interrelatedness of component parts that activate a larger image happens on the word level—thus the notion of holophrases. Maria Campbell’s use of pronouns creates the same function and effect in *Stories*, not on the level of words, of course—English grammar does not allow this—but on the level of sentences. Imitating discourse structures that are invited by the use of holophrases in Indigenous languages, such as Cree and to a slightly lesser extent also Michif (see above), the echoes of both Cree verb complexity and third-person equality function as holophrastic traces in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*.

“MEMBERING” AND THE PERFORMANCE
OF MÉTIS PEOPLEHOOD

Renate Eigenbrod assumes that Campbell’s choice to use exclusively masculine pronouns is related to the fact that the stories Campbell translated are all men’s stories, but she also points to the storyteller’s explanation in “Jacob” (*Stories* 87) “that preconceived gender roles were insignificant” in Métis communities (Eigenbrod 150). If we consider, moreover, that personal pronouns in Cree and Michif are never gendered, the use of just one kind of pronoun in *Stories* makes sense. The *masculine* pronoun uses and Campbell’s description of her translation process as involving putting the *Mother* back into English do not create a paradox, then; instead, they suggest the “marriage” of Mother (land and grammar) and Father (story and lexicon) in Métis culture and language and in the very creation of *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, which passes on the stories of male storytellers as translated by their female student. The knowledge of the land Maria Campbell talks about in her interview with Susan Gingell (quoted above), I think, refers to both the land in

general and to one's people's homeland—that is, in the case of the stories of the Road Allowance People, northern Saskatchewan. The putting back of the Mother implies, then, not so much a feminizing of the English language than an ensuring of balance, what might also be called a “membering”—through oral storytelling or even dancing (*Stories* 88)—of one's relations, which involve all, man *and* woman as well as humans *and* nonhumans, the land and everything and everyone walking upon it.¹⁴ As Maria Campbell puts it:

My way of understanding what that [putting the Mother back in the language] means is women own half the circle in our tradition. Therefore, she is in our language. Also, the language comes from the Earth, and the Earth is our mother. A particular place on the mother, a particular landscape, makes me the being that I am. (qtd. in Gingell, “One Small Medicine” 203)

How much the “membering” of one's relations is tied to language becomes evident in “Jacob,” a story that expresses the pain and loss that the residential and boarding school systems caused Indigenous peoples across North America, including the “linguistic barrier” it created within Indigenous communities (White 89). In this particular story, Jacob returns from residential school having lost his language, including his ancestral name. His parents have passed away, so no one, including himself, knows who his folks are. By the time “dah Prees” with his big book of names shows up in front of Jacob's door many years later to take his children to residential school, it is too late: Jacob's wife learns from the priest that they both had the same father and commits suicide; thus, Jacob and his children are forced to continue living without their wife and mother. The narrator sums up the tragedy and implications of Jacob's story in the following way:

Dats why we don know who his peoples dey are.
 We los lots of our *relations* like dat.
 Dey get dah whitemans name
 den no body
 he knows who his peoples dey are anymore. (*Stories* 87;
 emphasis added)

I don't think that Campbell's use of "relations" rather than "relatives" is accidental in this passage. "Relations" refers to kinsmen and kinswomen, the members of one's family or, in a more extended sense, the members of one's community, one's people. At the same time, "relations" evokes "all my relations," the English equivalent of a phrase used to end a prayer or speech in many Indigenous cultures. As Thomas King explains,

"All my relations" is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, "all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner. (King ix)

"Membering," Warren Cariou writes in his analysis of "Jacob," "is a communitarian kind of memory, one that connects recollection with the idea of *membership* in a larger whole"; it is "a performance of social bonding" (195), a communal performance of cultural memory that creates and celebrates peoplehood, and thus denotes both a *remembering* and a *membering*. As Jacob's story shows, the "membering" of one's relations, which is so crucial to individual and communal survival, is impossible without one's language. Insofar as language marks and expresses kinship relations and responsibilities, it is crucial in creating peoplehood, that "regime of respect" ("Sovereignty" 46) that, as Taiaiake Alfred has put it, "honors the autonomy of individual conscience, noncoercive forms of authority, and a deep respect and interconnection between human beings and the other elements of creation" ("Sovereignty" 45). There is no "membering," no performance of peoplehood, without the proper language. Stories need to be told, but they also need to be told in a manner that reflects the very relationships these stories intend to inscribe.

CONCLUSION

Michif is one of the key features that distinguishes the Métis People from other Indigenous peoples and peoples of mixed ancestry; like all mixed languages, Michif “stresses the distinctness” of the Métis People (Bakker 203). Every use of Michif thus inscribes and performs peoplehood. Yet, Métis peoplehood does not have to come to an end with the loss of Michif, which is on the verge of extinction and has little chance for survival (Bakker 27). Cultural workers and storytellers such as Maria Campbell, in their reinvention of Michif in Michif English, are showing their people ways for the continuation of their peoplehood. Part of putting the Mother back in the language, according to Maria Campbell, implies grounding one’s own being, becoming conscious of one’s homeland and place, of one’s relations. The Mother’s contribution to Michif has been Cree grammar, those Cree verbs and holophrastic structures. I am not sure if Maria Campbell would agree with me on this, but it seems to me that putting the Mother back in the language also involves putting that other half of Michif into one’s use of English—that Cree and holophrastic component of Michif that distinguishes Métis discourse from Euroamerican and other Indigenous discourses.

As my discussion of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* has demonstrated, however, Campbell’s language use is not restricted to features found in other Indigenous English codes. Susan Gingell considers Michif variants of English to be part of Creenglish and has referred to Campbell’s use of English in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* as “Metis Creenglish” (“Lips’ Inking” 17–18). Warren Cariou, on the other hand, refers to the language used in *Stories* as “a Métis dialect of English” (194). The traces of Michif in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* (code-switching in Cree and French, adjective-noun agreement, and possessive structures) may not be exclusive to this particular text, use of English, or even type of language, for that matter. *His*-genitive constructions (“the king his sword”), for example, were widespread in Early Modern English during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and also extended to feminines and plurals (Lass 146); some German dialects still feature *his*-gen-

itive constructions today (e.g., “der Frau ihr Auto” rather than “das Auto der Frau”).¹⁵ Neither are the Michif traces in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* overly pervasive, at least when compared to uses of English that are also found in other Indigenous English codes, such as eye vernacular (see Gingell, “Lips’ Inking” 18) or the violation of the subject-verb agreement. And still, these Michif traces are not marginal; on the contrary, they are highly significant because they inflect the English with features of the Métis language and thus render the language used in *Stories* into what, siding more with Carliou than Gingell, I would call a *Michif English code* that, naturally, overlaps in part with other Indigenous English codes, most notably Creenglish.¹⁶

This is not to assume that Campbell’s re-creation of village English is the only available form of Michif English; nor do I think it is the only correct form of Michif English. Campbell’s intention in translating her elders’ stories was to have their voices come alive despite the movement from one language to another. Although her translations have been very influential, the English code Campbell uses in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is not intended to be prescriptive. My point, rather, is that the stories of the Road Allowance People were recorded in Michif to textualize Métis, rather than Cree or French, oral traditions. Thus, just as “Jacob reclaims the power of naming, but also appropriates the priest’s/whiteman’s property of the written record” (Acoose, “Honoring Ni’Wahkomakanak” 228), *Stories of the Road Allowance People* deconstructs the English language to allow for the continuation of Métis cultural memory on Métis rather than the colonizer’s terms. Using an English code that both michifizes and holophrasticizes standard English, *Stories of the Road Allowance People* allows the voices of Métis elders and their community to come alive “without the willful assault of Euro-American languages” (Tatsch 258).

Pamela Sing has described the written use of the almost entirely oral language Michif as “an expression of belonging and kinship, of identity and culture, a source of literary innovation and experimentation, and a weapon of resistance against reifying tendencies” (“Intersections”). Sing’s analysis of Michif can readily be applied to

Maria Campbell's story collection. Marrying Mother (land, grammar) and Father (story, lexicon) in an English-language textualization of Métis orature, the voices in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* create peoplehood in a traditional manner and mark Métis resistance against dominant forms of discourse, therefore performing a double act of decolonization. When Ron Marken describes *Stories of the Road Allowance People* as performing a "self-governing of the tongue" (5), this self-governing is reflected not just in the narrative content but also in the *very way* the stories of the Road Allowance People are "voiced" on the page. "Words," Jeannette Armstrong reminds us, "contain spirit, a power waiting to become activated and become physical" (183). Putting the Mother back into Métis uses of English may not save the Métis language; but, as the narrator of "Dah Teef" notes at the end of *Stories*,

An dah stories you know
 dats dah bes treasure of all to leave your family.
 Everyting else on dis eart
 he gets los or wore out.
 But dah stories
 dey las forever. (144)

"Membering" *dah stories dat grow out of dah Halfbreed lan*, the Road Allowance People perform Métis peoplehood; this act of Métis intellectual sovereignty is both empowering and life affirming. Given the significance of Michif English for Métis cultural persistence, further research on this Indigenous English code in contemporary Métis literature is desirable, and could help us gain further insights into the variation of Michif English across Métis communities in North America.

NOTES

I gratefully acknowledge that financial support for this research was received by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I also thank Maya Chacaby (Anishnabe), Neil ten Kortenaar, and all other 2008–09 fellows at the Jackman Humanities Institute, University of Toronto, for many inspiring con-

versations about Indigenous languages and literatures and storytelling and language in general, as well as the anonymous readers for their feedback and comments. I owe the metaphor used in the title to Ted Dyck, to whom I am grateful also for having commented on earlier versions of this article.

1. For a discussion of the history of Indigenous people's relationship with English, see Frederick H. White's "Language Reflection and Lamentation." According to White, of the about two hundred Indigenous languages in North America today, "only 10 percent have a chance of enduring beyond the second decade in the new millennium" (95).

2. Linguists assume that Indigenous variants of English, often referred to as Indigenous English codes, are informed by the respective ancestral language tradition (Leap 91). Hence, there are as many different Indigenous English codes as there are Indigenous languages. These codes share certain ancestral language influences (violation of the subject-verb agreement, echoes of Indigenous verb complexity, etc.); at the same time, it is possible to make out language uses in these codes that are more or less directly associable with the respective ancestral language.

3. To discuss the question of how far forward the pronunciation variations in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* have been passed on from generation to generation would go beyond the scope of this essay. Both Pamela Sing's study of Michif in Métis literature ("Intersections") and Susan Gingell's discussion of Creenglish in Cree and Métis literatures ("Lips' Inking"), however, suggest an increased remembering and reinvention of lost mother tongues in contemporary Aboriginal literatures. Gingell also refers to a 2007 on-line article that attests to the importance of Creenglish in everyday conversation in a northwestern Ontario community and points to the significant role played by this Indigenous English code in contemporary struggles for ancestral language revitalization ("Lips' Inking" 6).

4. My discussion of *Stories of the Road Allowance People* is largely informed by Peter Bakker's work, most of whose data are provided by the Michif dialect spoken in Turtle Mountain, North Dakota. As Bakker discusses in chapter 5 of his *A Language of Our Own*, however, Michif dialects, despite some variation, are virtually the same. So his findings can be considered applicable to all the various Michif dialects spoken in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, North Dakota, and Montana, as well as in small portions of northern Alberta and Oregon.

5. The Métis are the descendants of European, mostly French-speaking fur traders and Cree-speaking Native women, and thus clearly emerged as a consequence of the fur trade. Their language, however, a mixture of Métis

Cree and Métis French, is less obviously a consequence of the fur trade because the Cree component of Michif is based on Plains Cree, the Cree dialect spoken on the prairie where the fur trade was far less important than in the Woodlands (Bakker 28). As Peter Bakker argues (274–75), this paradox may be explained, firstly, by the fact that Plains Cree was a lingua franca of the fur trade, and secondly by the fact that the Métis ventured out onto the prairie for their biannual bison hunts as well as to set up winter camps.

6. Another reason for the combining of the mother's grammar with the father's lexicon in mixed languages is the assumption that the mother's language is more likely spoken by other people in the children's immediate context than the father's language because, in the case of most mixed languages, the fathers are "immigrants" and not originally from the region in question (Bakker 207; see also Bakker and Muysken 50). The question of how well this assumption applies to Michif is important but cannot be discussed in full here. As pointed out by Susan Sleeper-Smith in her *Indian Women and French Men* (particularly in chapter 7, "Hiding in Plain View"), many Indigenous communities in the Great Lakes deliberately used Euroamerican facades as strategies for persistence in the nineteenth century, such as appointing mixed-ancestry offspring as their spokespersons. Whether other Indigenous persons in the community aside from the mother have contributed notably to the birth of Michif, therefore, is a point that requires further inquiry.

7. Like many other North American Indigenous languages (see, e.g., Rood 170; Mithun 38), Cree is polysynthetic; that is, it has a tendency for producing one-word sentences called holophrases. Holophrases are polysyllabic units of utterance that result from joining both lexical and grammatical morphemes into one single word (Comrie 42). The base of a holophrase is always a verb, to which the subjects and objects are added in the form of affixes. Verbs in Indigenous languages thus encompass all components of grammar needed to compose a coherent sentence.

8. Many Métis and Crees, for example, "have a particular accent in English" (Bakker 74).

9. While code-switching in French is absent in Louise Bernice Halfe's poetry, it is occasionally used in Gregory Scofield's poetry (see "Conversation My Châpan Mary Might Have Had with Mrs. Sarah F. Wakefield") as well as in Joe Welsh's *Jackrabbit Street*.

10. I would like to thank Parth Bhatt, Angela Cozea, and Madeleine Maillet for sharing their thoughts on this particular noun phrase.

11. For a comprehensive discussion of how the holophrase carries

over into the English written by contemporary Indigenous authors, see Neuhaus.

12. Pronoun copying is common in Canadian French (see Gingell, “When X Equals Zero” 463n10). Cree and Michif (which uses Cree-derived personal pronouns; see Bakker 9) use personal pronouns only for the purpose of emphasis (Bakker 104; Wolfart and Carroll 23). Cree, however, showcases a high level of what linguists refer to as reduplication (see Ahenakew and Wolfart)—the repetition of the root or stem of a word, of a certain part of it, to express a grammatical function (e.g., intensification) or to create a new word. Such reduplication is similar to and yet different from pronoun copying as found in Canadian French or the echoes of Cree verb complexity in the Métis English code used in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. In English, on the other hand, reduplication is mostly restricted to informal vocabulary (“super-duper,” “bye-bye,” “chit-chat”), and pronoun copying is rare and reserved mostly to colloquial discourse (Baker 102).

13. The stories of the Okanagan storyteller Harry Robinson also showcase echoes of third-person equality, but these were often deleted by Wendy Wickwire in her textualization of Robinson’s stories (see Wickwire 15).

14. Campbell has made it very explicit that her understanding of saying “English has no mother” is *not* the same as saying “English is a sexist language” (see Gingell, “One Small Medicine” 203).

15. I would like to thank Arden Hegele for pointing me to the existence of *his*-genitive constructions in Early Modern English.

16. For a discussion of Creenglish in Cree and Métis poetry, see Gingell’s “Lips’ Inking.” Gingell’s inclusion of both Cree English and Métis English in Creenglish points to a very significant observation, namely that what Tol Foster (Cree) has described as “relationship regionalism” also has a linguistic dimension.

WORKS CITED

- Acoose, Janice. “Honoring *Ni’Wahkomakanak*.” *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*. Ed. Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2008. 216–33. Print.
- . *Iskwewak—kah’ ki yaw ni wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws*. Toronto: Women’s, 1995. Print.
- Ahenakew, Freda, and H. Christoph Wolfart. “Productive Reduplication in Plains Cree.” *Actes du Quatorzième Congrès des Algonquinistes*. Ed. William Cowan. Ottawa: Carleton U, 1983. 369–77. Print.

- Alfred, Taiaiake. *Peace, Power, and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*. 2nd ed. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.
- . "Sovereignty." *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*. Ed. Joanne Barker. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2005. 33–50. Print.
- Armstrong, Jeannette C. "Land Speaking." *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing*. Ed. Simon J. Ortiz. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1998. 174–94. Print.
- Baker, Mark C. *The Atoms of Language*. New York: Basic, 2001. Print.
- Bakker, Peter. *A Language of Our Own: The Genesis of Michif, the Mixed Cree-French Language of the Canadian Métis*. Rev. ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. Print.
- Bakker, Peter, and Pieter Muysken. "Mixed Languages and Language Inter-twining." *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction*. Ed. Jacques Arends, Pieter Muysken, and Norval Smith. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1995. 41–52. Print.
- Bartelt, Guillermo. *Socio- and Stylolinguistic Perspectives on American Indian English Texts*. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2001. Print.
- Bear Nicholas, Andrea. "The Assault on Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Past and Present." *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*. Ed. Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod. Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2008. 13–43. Print.
- Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973. Print.
- , trans. *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1995. Print.
- Cariou, Warren. "'We Use Dah Membering': Oral Memory in Métis Short Stories." *Tropes and Territories: Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writing in Context*. Ed. Marta Dvořák and W. H. New. Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 2007. 193–201. Print.
- Chafe, Wallace L. "Discourse Effects on Polysynthesis." *Discourse Across Languages and Cultures*. Ed. Carol Lynn Moder and Aida Martinovic-Zic. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2004. 37–52. Print.
- Chamberlin, J. Edward. "Doing Things with Words: Putting Performance on the Page." *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*. Ed. Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 69–90. Print.
- Comrie, Bernard. *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology: Syntax and Morphology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1981. Print.
- Eigenbrod, Renate. *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*. Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 2005. Print.
- Fee, Margery. "Writing Orality: Interpreting Literature in English by Ab-

- original Writers in North America, Australia and New Zealand." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 18.1 (1997): 23–39. Print.
- Foster, Tol. "Of One Blood: An Argument for Relations and Regionality in Native American Literary Studies." *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*. Ed. Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2008. 265–301. Print.
- Gingell, Susan. "Lips' Inking: Cree Writings of the Oral in Canada and What They Might Tell Educators." *Celebrating the Local, Negotiating the School: Symposium on English Language and Literacy in Aboriginal Communities*. Nov. 7–8, 2008, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan. Web. <http://aerc.usask.ca/downloads/GingellDRAFTpaper.pdf>.
- . "'One Small Medicine': An Interview with Maria Campbell." *Textualizing Orature and Orality*. Ed. Gingell. Spec. issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* 83 (2004): 188–205. Print.
- . "When X Equals Zero: The Politics of Voice in First Peoples Poetry by Women." *English Studies in Canada* 24 (1998): 447–66. Print.
- Harjo, Joy. "Remember." *She Had Some Horses*. 3rd ed. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2006. 40. Print.
- Harjo, Joy, and Gloria Bird. Introduction. *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*. Ed. Harjo and Bird. New York: Norton, 1997. 19–31. Print.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006. Print.
- King, Thomas. Introduction. *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction*. Ed. King. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990. ix–xvi. Print.
- Lass, Roger. "Phonology and Morphology." *The Cambridge History of the English Language*. Ed. Lass. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 3:56–3:186. Print.
- Leap, William L. *American Indian English*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1993. Print.
- Lutz, Hartmut, and Konrad Gross. "Maria Campbell." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*. Comp. Lutz. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991. 41–65. Print.
- Lyons, Scott Richard. "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" *College Composition and Communication* 51.3 (2000): 447–68. Print.
- Maracle, Lee. *Oratory: Coming to Theory*. North Vancouver: Gallerie, 1990. Print.

- . “Ramparts Hanging in the Air.” *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures: The Transformation of a Conference*. Ed. Telling It Book Collective. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990. 161–72. Print.
- Marken, Ron. Foreward. *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Trans. Maria Campbell. Penticton, BC: Theytus, 1995. Print.
- McLeod, Neal. *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times*. Saskatoon: Purich, 2007. Print.
- Mithun, Marianne. *The Languages of Native North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Neuhaus, Mareike. *Holophrastic Readings of Contemporary Aboriginal Literatures*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, forthcoming. Print.
- Rood, David S. “North American Languages.” *International Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Ed. William J. Frawley. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. 167–72. Print.
- Scofield, Gregory. “Conversation My Châpan Mary Might Have Had with Mrs. Sarah F. Wakefield.” *Singing Home the Bones*. Vancouver: Polestar, 2005. 12–16. Print.
- Sealey, Bruce D., and Antoine S. Lussier. *The Métis: Canada’s Forgotten People*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation P, 1975. Print.
- Sing, Pamela V. “Exils et ‘désécritures’: Le cas de la langue michif.” *Littérature, immigration et imaginaire au Québec et en Amérique du Nord*. Ed. Daniel Chartier, Véronique Pépin, and Chantal Ringuet. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006. 105–27. Print.
- . “Intersections of Memory, Ancestral Language, and Imagination; or, the Textual Production of Michif Voices as Cultural Weaponry.” *Studies in Canadian Literature / Etudes en Littérature Canadienne* 31.1 (2006): n. pag. *CPI.Q (Canadian Periodicals)*. Web.
- Sleeper-Smith, Susan. *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2001. Print.
- Tatsch, Sheri. “Language Revitalization in Native North America: Issues of Intellectual Property Rights and Intellectual Sovereignty.” *Collegium Anthropologicum* 28 Suppl. 1 (2004): 257–62. Print.
- Taylor, Charles. “The Politics of Recognition.” *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. By Charles Taylor et al. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994. 25–73. Print.
- Warrior, Robert Allen. *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994. Print.
- Weaver, Jace, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior. Preface. *American In-*

- dian Literary Nationalism*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2006. xv–xxii. Print.
- Welsh, Joe. *Jackrabbit Street*. Saskatoon: Thistledown, 2003. Print.
- White, Frederick H. “Language Reflection and Lamentation in Native American Literature.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18.1 (2006): 83–98. Print.
- Wickwire, Wendy. Introduction. *Write It on Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller*. By Harry Robinson. Comp. and ed. Wendy Wickwire. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1989. 9–28. Print.
- Wolfart, H. Christoph. *Plains Cree: A Grammatical Study*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973. Print.
- Wolfart, H. Christoph, and Janet F. Carroll. *Meet Cree: A Guide to the Cree Language*. 2nd ed. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 1981. Print.
- Wolvengrey, Arok, comp. *Nēhiyawewin: Itwēwina / Cree: Words*. Ed. Freda Ahenakew et al. 2 vols. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2001. Print.
- Womack, Craig S. “Theorizing American Indian Experience.” *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*. Ed. Craig S. Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher B. Teuton. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2008. 353–410. Print.

The Politics of the Camera

Visual Storytelling and Sovereignty in
Victor Masayesva's *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*

CHANNETTE ROMERO

In her 1990 article "Videomakers and Basketmakers," Leslie Marmon Silko declares, "In Victor Masayesva's hands, video is made to serve Hopi consciousness and to see with Hopi eyes" (Silko, "Videomakers" 73). This Hopi "consciousness" is reflected in his films' content, which feature traditional basket making, weaving, and the planting, harvesting, and storing of corn, the most sacred essence in the Hopi worldview.¹ Just as significant, however, is Masayesva's style and point of view, which reflect the Hopis' historic suspicion of visual representation. The Hopis have long been exploited through photography and film, and Masayesva's films reflect his nation's profound ambivalence toward filmmaking. Unfortunately, his ambivalence and privileging of Hopi audiences over non-Hopi viewers has led to limited critical interest in Masayesva's films.² However, the very thing that limits critical interest is precisely what makes his films worthy of study; his films openly expose the politics associated with American Indian filmmaking. The fact that Masayesva openly addresses his ambivalence toward film indicates his self-reflexivity and willingness to engage his viewers in an extended inquiry into the strengths and limitations of the art of the camera. By acknowledging his own ambivalence, Masayesva encourages his viewers to engage in a multifaceted dialogue about representation, the role of the viewer, and the possibilities and dangers of storytelling through film. This reflexivity indicates both Masayesva's critique of and complicity in the politics associated with visual representation. I hope to prove that his skepticism toward the camera, while challenging for viewers, ultimately reflects and contributes to Hopi sovereignty.

CAMERAS IN HOPI LAND

In his introduction to *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images* (1983), Masayesva, who began his career as a still photographer, discusses his own ambivalence toward the camera. He describes how the subject of one of his photographs called him a *Kwikwilyaqa*, a spiritual katchina that uses “buffoonery, burlesque” to make social commentary (“KWIKWILYAQA” 11). While he initially laughed at the similarity between his head under the camera’s focusing cloth and the blanket the katchina wears over his head, “[l]ater came the sober realization that he might have meant *Kwikwilyaqa* in the perspective of what this being does: he duplicates” (11). Masayesva is all too aware of the danger of “duplicating” mainstream American culture, of using Euroamerican tools and ways of seeing to explore the Hopi worldview, especially since the camera, the ultimate tool for reflecting the mainstream viewpoint, has long been an instrument of imperialism.

The Hopis were one of the earliest tribes to be photographed and filmed by non-Natives. After gaining control of Hopi land at the end of the Mexican-American War, the U.S. government began to survey the land for the building of a transcontinental railroad; the accompanying survey photographer was to record the land, waterways, and the “Indians future travelers might encounter” (*Photographers* 15). The Hopis were perceived by these mid-nineteenth-century photographers as objects to be recorded for future tourists. They, the land, and even their culture were to be controlled, catalogued, and owned.³ This initial objectification through tourist photography was soon followed by ethnographic photographs taken by John K. Hiller, Edward S. Curtis, Joseph Mora, and others in an attempt to collect information on a people they judged incapable of recording their own histories. Photographers like Heinrich Voth and Adam Clark Vroman soon began intrusively photographing private Hopi ceremonies. When the Hopis began to protest, these men resorted to sneaking cameras into kivas, private ceremonial rooms that only the initiated may enter (Graulich 82). As James Riding In notes, early photographs of American Indians “illustrate the schizophrenia of

U.S. society towards Native people,” as they depict American Indians as uncouth, backward, and unchanging while simultaneously reflecting a desire to preserve and possess elements of these cultures before they “vanish” (52). Simon Ortiz describes how the stereotype of the “Vanishing Indian” was used to elide the very real way that U.S. policies led to American Indian deaths: “Real and actual Indian peoples and their cultures vanished into an image designed, constructed, and manufactured in that era . . . when the United States began aggressively to flex its powerful imperial muscles” (4). The camera, through its ability to widely disseminate images to the public, became the means of spreading the destructive “Vanishing Indian” stereotype, a stereotype that masked the United States’ imperialism.

Linda Hutcheon points out how the “photographic semblance of eternal, universal Truth and innocent, uncomplicated pleasure is what always potentially links the medium to institutional power; it seems to reproduce so easily those grand narratives of our culture” (119). Far from being “universal” and “innocent,” early images of American Indians construct “information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful” (123). In an attempt to consolidate an image of a socially powerful America, American Indians and their cultures were presented as “vanishing,” leaving Euroamericans the rightful inheritors of this continent and its history.⁴ To construct this image, early photographs tried to limit any evidence of the continuation of Native cultures; they often decontextualized their subjects, photographing them alone, removed from their tribal contexts and families, as children are direct evidence of survival and continuation. Vine Deloria Jr. points out how photography was “a weapon in the final skirmishes of cultural warfare in which the natives of North America could be properly and finally embedded in their place in the cultural evolutionary decline” (11). To enact this “evolutionary decline,” photographers like Edward Curtis removed all traces of change and adaptation, providing their American Indian subjects with inaccurate and inappropriate costumes and placing them in highly stylized poses that satisfied the romantic fantasies of Euroamericans. Anne Makepeace

describes contemporary Hopi women's laughter over a Curtis photo of Hopi girls grinding cornmeal. The women point out that "the girls would not have worn their wedding dresses for this messy task, and they certainly wouldn't have been getting married and grinding meal all on the same day" (11). The false stereotypes and Euroamerican voyeurism of early photographs continued into the era of film, which was perceived as furthering the documentary ethnography of photography and museum displays.⁵ At an early age Masayesva refused the stereotypes embedded in these representational traditions; he "vowed never to be a portraitist in the manner of Edward Curtis and the many more recent photographers for tourist magazines that featured Indians posing in native costumes. Those images represented the epitome of stereotyping to me" (*Husk of Time* 5). In contrast to early photographs' and films' isolated, decontextualized subjects—a practice Masayesva notes continues in current tourism images—Masayesva's photographs and films seek to portray the Hopi people within their tribal context.

A comparison between Masayesva's first film *Hopiit* (1981) and the silent educational film series *The Vanishing Indian* (1920s) demonstrates not only the radical difference between Hopi self-representation and non-Native portrayals of the Hopis but also why Masayesva seeks to appropriate the power of the camera for himself and his nation. Little is known about *The Vanishing Indian's* production in the 1920s. The film series' trailer announces that it is the "greatest collection of character pictures of Indian life ever taken of the Seminoles, Hopi, Apache, Navajo, Ute, Blackfoot, Crows, Flathead, Sioux, all the Southwest Pueblo Indians and many other famous tribes," collected, as the title announces, because these peoples are in the process of "vanishing." However, the film series was never completed, and the bulk of the remaining footage highlights southwestern tribes, including the Hopis, made "famous" by the many ethnographic photos and films already in existence at the time.⁶ *The Vanishing Indian* depicts Hopi "Squaws" cooking and making pottery and baskets and Hopi men shooting arrows at a target.⁷ What is especially striking about the representation of the Hopis in *The Vanishing Indian* is the camera's placement. It is usually placed above

its subjects, literally and symbolically looking down at them. The film alternates between wide shots that show its subjects at a remove and close-ups of its subjects' fragmented body parts, never showing a close-up of faces that might indicate their humanity. Laura Mulvey argues that cinema audiences derive pleasure from "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (8). In order to objectify its subjects, film makes the "body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups . . . the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look" (14). *The Vanishing Indian's* camera placement and use of fragmentation renders Hopi bodies as objects for Euroamerican viewers' voyeurism.

To complete this objectification, *The Vanishing Indian* only depicts its subjects looking away from the camera. Whenever one of the Hopis stares directly into the camera, asserting his or her right to gaze back at viewers, the camera quickly cuts away. For example, the scene of the men shooting arrows is filmed entirely in wide angles, indicating a detachment from what is being shown. When one man looks directly at the camera, raising his arm to gesture where his arrow landed, the camera quickly cuts away to a shot of the men's backs, apparently to avoid another direct gaze. However, the Hopi men begin to stare directly at the camera as they take turns shooting; one man even smiles at the camera, so the film is forced repeatedly and rapidly to cut to the men's backs in an attempt to control these men's desire to assert their subjectivity in the film. In *Fugitive Poses* (1998), Gerald Vizenor claims that "the eyes are a tacit presence" that resists the way the camera tries to reduce American Indians to silent objects (156).⁸ He argues, "The eyes in a photograph are the secret mirrors of a private presence," since they contain "stories of resistance, and traces of native survivance" (158, 160). Survivance, according to Vizenor, is "more than survival"; it refers to an active, enduring presence that demands sovereignty and repudiates "dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (15). By refusing the dominated object status associated with the camera's placement in *The Vanishing Indian*, these Hopi men assert their subjectivity and mutual right to return the gaze. They also disrupt the camera's voyeurism. Mulvey argues that film audiences only experience pleasure if they perceive

distance between themselves and the objects on the screen, making “the conscious aim” of film “always to eliminate camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience” (17). In *The Vanishing Indian* this distance is created by the film’s attempts to render the Hopis not only as objects but also as anachronisms, hold-overs from the past that are in the process of “vanishing.” By looking directly into the camera, the Hopi men portrayed rupture the supposed cinematic and temporal distance between themselves and the audience, disrupting their viewers’ voyeuristic pleasure.

Like *The Vanishing Indian*, Masayesva’s first film *Hopiit* also includes a scene of target practice. However, Masayesva’s film appropriates this ethnographic film trope and revises it to express a Hopi consciousness. *Hopiit* depicts a group of young boys shooting arrows, thus visually asserting the continuance of the Hopi people and culture, despite *The Vanishing Indian*’s predictions of their imminent end. In *Hopiit*, the camera is eye-level with the boys. While the scene begins with a wide-angle shot of them shooting at a target, this shot is quickly replaced with close-ups of the boys’ faces as they play. The boys begin to charge at the camera, shooting arrows near the cameraman’s feet. Instead of cutting away, this scene continues, showing the boys as they cheer, celebrating their shots and jumping directly toward the camera. This scene depicts the boys’ pleasure in close-up, allowing them to gaze directly at the camera. Masayesva’s use of close-ups here and the boys’ inclusion of the cameraman and camera in their game reflect an intimacy with its subjects that differs from the detached, wide-angle, ethnographic depictions in *The Vanishing Indian*. *Hopiit* also allows its subjects to express their cultural ambivalence toward the camera—they are, in fact, shooting arrows at the cameraman. Instead of working to hide the camera’s presence, *Hopiit* allows it to become part of the content of the film, acknowledging and disrupting the voyeurism historically associated with viewing Hopis on film. Despite their distinct differences, the striking similarity between *Hopiit* and *The Vanishing Indian* is that the Hopis being filmed continually assert their subjectivity and resistance to the gaze by staring directly at the camera.

The Vanishing Indian does indeed portray the Hopis in a time

of transition, albeit not the “vanishing” it asserts. Instead, the film is evidence of the Hopis’ changing relationship to the camera. The women and men depicted have agreed to be filmed, but by the end of the film, they seem to be trying to take control of the camera, talking and gesturing to the cameraman before he can cut away. Leslie Marmon Silko describes how the Pueblos, including the Hopis, were initially tolerant of the camera: “The Pueblo people did not fear or hate cameras or the photographic image” (“Videomakers” 72). However, they soon “objected to the intrusive vulgarity of the white men who gazed through the lens,” “learn[ing] from experience that most white people attending sacred dances were cheap voyeurs who had no reverence for the spiritual” (“Videomakers” 72). By 1915, photographing and filming ceremonies had been banned in most villages because of the intrusiveness and voyeurism of the cameramen and also because of the Hopis’ fear that the images could be used as evidence that they were practicing a religion that had been outlawed by the U.S. government.⁹ Because of repeated abuse, this ban was later extended to the current prohibitions against all “picture-taking, video recording, audio recording, sketching, and note-taking” (Hopi Tribe Cultural Preservation Office). By 1995, these restrictions were extended to all representations of the Hopis, including those by academics and documentary filmmakers.¹⁰ These restrictions do not so much express exclusiveness as an assertion of sovereignty, of the Hopis’ right to control their own images.¹¹

Masayesva’s decision to become a photographer and filmmaker reflects this desire for self-representation as well as suspicion of it. In *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images* Masayesva writes, “As Hopi photographers we are indeed in a dangerous time. The camera which is available to us is a weapon that will violate the silences and secrets so essential to our group survival” (10). However, Masayesva argues, if the camera is used within Hopi traditions and “cultural conscience,” it can also be “something that sustains, enriches, and adds to our spiritual well-being” (11). Masayesva’s films refute the inaccurate, noncontextualized images of the Hopis, using the camera as a powerful “weapon” against false stereotypes. However, precisely because the camera is a weapon, Masayesva’s films, especially *Itam Hakim*,

Hopiit, continue to reflect ambivalence about the dangers associated with their medium.

LANGUAGE

Masayesva's most well-known film, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* (*We, Someone, the Hopi*; 1984), is a documentary created in recognition of the Hopi Tricentennial, the commemoration of the Hopi and Pueblo revolt against Spanish rule in 1680. The film's dedication not only marks this event, but it also contextualizes the film itself within the Hopi tradition of resistance to imperialism. In the film, the Hopi storyteller Ross Macaya recounts oral stories of Emergence, Bow Clan Migration, Spanish Conquest, the Pueblo Revolt, and a Hopi Prophecy to a group of young children. Macaya's voice, speaking in Hopi, is played over a Hopi context: images of Hopi land and traditional activities. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* ends with Macaya stating, "These stories are going to be put down so the children will remember them. The children will be seeing this and improving on it. This is what will happen. This will not end anywhere." Despite Macaya's assertion that filmmaking will allow for "remembering" and thus the continuance of Hopi tradition and oral history, the film expresses profound ambivalence about whether filmmaking is the correct medium for oral storytelling.

Part of *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*'s ambivalence is associated with the role of Indigenous languages. The film expresses apprehension about whether these oral stories should be recorded in Hopi or English. Although he originally filmed *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* entirely in Hopi for a Hopi audience, Masayesva created a later version of the film that includes a voiceover translating Macaya's words into English. Critics argue that the inclusion of English reflects a desire to reach non-Hopi viewers (see Bahn-Coblans 42; Leuthold 121; Weatherford and Masayesva 50). However, I assert that it also acknowledges the decline of Hopi language skills in younger generations. In his essay, "It Shall Not End Anywhere," whose title deliberately refers to the ending of *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*, Masayesva describes "the dilemma facing every Native American language preservation project . . .

maintaining an oral tradition” (91). Masayesva forcefully asserts that Indigenous languages and oral traditions are “the expressions of a tribe’s sovereignty” (92). However, he also expresses ambivalence about whether the Hopis should try to preserve the language they are losing.¹² Masayesva argues that attempts like his own to preserve the Hopi language, while well meaning, resist the traditional Hopi acceptance of change. He writes, “It is as if we had even lost the will to let things go, whether it be rituals, ceremonies, songs, or language” (94). Masayesva’s ambivalence toward language preservation reflects a Hopi-specific worldview. The Hopis have many prophecies predicting the end of their world. Masayesva describes the numerous “predictions that our songbirds would leave us, fathers would turn weapons on their children and children wreak violence on innocents . . . that our language would leave our tongues and the rain clouds would abandon us” (*Husk of Time* 64). He notes, “all this had been planned and consecrated” (*Husk of Time* 64). Masayesva’s ambivalence toward preserving the Hopi language reflects a general Hopi ambivalence toward affecting a future already “planned and consecrated.”

Not surprisingly, this ambivalence also surrounds the use of “mechanical proxies”—such as tape recorders and video cameras—that are necessary to record and preserve Indigenous languages. Masayesva argues, “Each new medium of conveyance, whether it be the English language, video, film, theatre, music and song, each and every one poses a tremendous challenge to the tribal person” (“It Shall” 94). He warns, “There are numerous examples of dead ends, superficial, lifeless, irresponsible, harmful and unaccountable derivations of tribal experience . . . [that] stand out and caution us against more recordings” (95). Masayesva is suspicious of “lifeless” mechanical recordings that might help to bring about the predicted end of Hopi culture. Despite his concerns, he ultimately argues that language preservation through film is possible as long as it acknowledges “accountability” to the “sources of experience that inspired the original tribal community” (95).

Itam Hakim, Hopiit’s use of Hopi and English languages expresses both accountability and ambiguity. While the film’s English voice-

over will allow younger generations, the “children” Macaya refers to, to better comprehend the oral stories, it also allows non-Hopis access to the traditional “sources of experience”—the stories, ceremonies, and prophecies recounted in the film. To avoid voyeuristic appropriation and consumption of these oral sources, Masayesva carefully develops strategies to limit the non-Hopi audience’s access to them. The film often shows the viewer images (such as eagles, corn, and dancers) without providing any direct context, expressing an expectation that the viewer is already familiar with their cultural significance. Echoing Macaya, Masayesva assumes that the viewer, like the children, “will be seeing this and improving on it,” using their own knowledge to interpret the significance of the images (*Itam Hakim, Hopiit*). This strategy reflects the function of a traditional storytelling audience, to fill in missing and implied information. However, it also limits non-Hopis’ access to the cultural significance of these images and their relationship to ceremonial life.

The film continually asserts the importance of oral storytelling. It opens with Macaya recounting personal stories of his youth in Hopi, followed after a minute by the English translation. He is then joined by a group of young children. While the children are first shown in a wide-angle shot that includes an outhouse and surrounding land, the camera soon pulls in closer, interspersing shots of Macaya with images of the children in three-quarter shots, medium close-ups, close-ups, and then extreme close-ups. The tightening focus on the children’s images encourages viewers gradually to focus more attention on them, reinforcing the significance of oral storytelling. While the film initially shows the children playing, whispering among themselves, and looking distracted, as the camera angles tighten and Macaya begins telling the story of Hopi Emergence, viewers are shown extreme close-ups of the children’s faces, increasingly rapt with attention. These opening images position the audience with the children hearing the tales, encouraging them to identify with and mimic the children’s increasing interest in the oral stories.

While the film obligingly offers an English voiceover for the emergence story, certain images are left untranslated. For example, when describing the first Hopis’ emergence through the center of a

bamboo reed, the film shows viewers a bright moon in a dark sky as clouds gradually pass over its surface. The contrast of dark and light creates a shift in point of view; viewers feel like they are on the surface of the earth looking up at the moon, and in the next moment they feel like they are below the surface of the earth looking up through a dark hole at a brightly lit sky. Sonja Bahn-Coblans questions whether this is an “an image of the ‘sipapu,’ (for those who do not know, the hole in the Hopi kiva symbolizing the emergence hole)” (55). The important thing to note here is that “those who do not know” about the kivas are not intended to know; the uninitiated are given no clues in English as to how to interpret this image. By refusing to translate this and later scenes, the film limits the non-Hopi audience’s access to and consumption of the stories.¹³

The film refuses to include English translations in other key places; the most telling is the description of the religious practices of the Bow Clan. When describing the Bow Clan meeting the Bear Clan in the first Hopi settlement at Oraibi, the English translation recounts the Bear Chief asking, “Do you have a dance or ceremony to bring to my village?” This scene dissolves into a wide-angle shot of several antlered deer grazing in a clearing as the English voiceover translates Macaya saying, “It was true that the Bow Clan, *Awata*, practiced the *Ahl* religion. From the beginning they carried their sacred bundles on antler racks and this they now put down near the rock called Oraibi, west of the village.” Macaya then continues speaking for a full minute in Hopi, unaccompanied by an English translation. Non-Hopi viewers are left hearing the untranslated Hopi and seeing the backs of the antlered deer as they head toward and eventually disappear into the forest. After a full minute of only Hopi speech, the English translation finally reports, “Today, they bring offerings to this rock, alongside of Oraibi rock.” This scene is telling for two reasons. First, Masayesva has chosen not to show the ceremony being described; *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* asserts that this ceremony is not to be casually consumed by an uninitiated viewer. By refusing to translate this ceremony visually (through actual images of offerings being brought to this rock) or linguistically, the film preserves the secrecy and dignity of this ceremony. Second, the image of the deer with

their backs to the viewer represents the spiritual significance of the deer to this ceremony, while also acting as a metaphor for the way the uninitiated viewer only experiences a brief glimpse of the Hopi religion. Non-Hopi viewers are confronted with their uninitiated status and the film's refusal to offer them a privileged, initiated perspective. Joanna Hearne argues, "Masayesva's belief in accountability and restraint in filmmaking leads him away from Hollywood and documentary practices intent on answering questions and revealing information" (326). In a conventional documentary, a Native informant provides all necessary contextual information, including tribal secrets. While *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* does not deploy these conventional techniques, the film could, paradoxically, be seen as providing the necessary contextual information—silence. The film's aesthetics shift viewers' focus away from revealing tribal secrets toward asserting respect for those secrets. In this way, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* teaches viewers the value of silence in the Hopi worldview.

In an interview with Fatimah Tobing Rony, Masayesva asserts the importance of respecting tribal and clan secrets. He says,

I know I'll never know what that society knows, because I'm not a member or because I'm born into a certain clan. I'm not going to break down the walls to get that information. I've grown up accepting my limitations. And that's hard for people who want to know everything, to dig into it, to dissect it, to see what it looks like. (Rony, "Victor" 25)

Here, the desire to have access to privileged information is likened to "break[ing] down" and "dissect[ing]" it, gaining information only through detached destruction. This desire to "want to know everything" is not a traditional Hopi trait. In *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images* Masayesva writes, "Hopis are very private, often secretive people who understand the value of silence. . . . As a Hopi, you cannot violate the silences, just as you would not intrude on ceremony" (10). According to Masayesva, the desire to "know everything" is not only violent and destructive but also a violation of sacred belief. By likening it to intruding on a ceremony, Masayesva asserts the legitimacy of silence in Hopi religion and knowledge. He also indirectly

refers to the way early non-Native filmmakers and photographers intruded on ceremonies, seeking images of the ceremonies, secret knowledge, and even “changes in the ceremonies to make them more photogenic” (Lippard 29).

Masayesva could have chosen to ignore the ceremony altogether, leaving non-Hopi viewers unaware of their missing knowledge. However, rather than risk the cultural importance of the ceremony being lost, Masayesva decides to describe it in Hopi without portraying it. This decision represents the diversity of the film’s three distinct audiences: members of the Hopi Bow Clan, Hopis in other clans, and non-Hopis. The Web site for the Hopi Tribe’s Cultural Preservation Office describes how “the Hopi learn only the story of their clan,” as each story “is more than enough to consider and meditate upon during a lifetime.” By alluding to the Bow Clan ceremony, the film prompts its Hopi viewers to meditate upon its cultural importance. When the image of the deer cuts to a wide-angle shot of Hopi land with large, dark rain clouds, Hopi viewers are prompted to consider how this ceremony calls the ancestors, who appear in the form of rain clouds. Unlike early films such as *The Vanishing Indian*, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* does not depict extreme wide-angle shots of empty landscapes that document the pristine land once the American Indians have successfully “vanished.” Instead, when the film employs extreme wide-angle shots of land, they always either include a human figure or, as in the scene described above, depict the ancestors’ presence as rain clouds. By continually asserting Hopi presence on this land, Masayesva resists the dangers of the camera’s historic connection to imperialism.¹⁴

The effect of Masayesva’s decision to limit non-Hopi access, according to Bahn-Coblans, is that the “non-Native cannot help feeling that the subtitles do not even offer half of what is actually told” (55).¹⁵ Mainstream audiences used to consuming images of American Indians and their ceremonies on screen are bound, like Bahn-Coblans, to feel “somewhat dissatisfied” (56). The lack of a full English translation highlights non-Hopis’ distance from these stories and images, forcing them to become aware of their lack of knowledge of the Hopi language and culture. This lack of translation also

calls attention to Masayesva's decision to limit non-Hopi access and to privilege Hopi-to-Hopi communication over translation for non-Hopi audiences. The film's lack of complete translation denies viewers the privileged "insider" status and viewpoint traditionally associated with the camera. According to Mulvey, viewers derive pleasure from film's "illusion of looking in on a private world" (9). By calling attention to the voyeurism historically associated with filmmaking, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* urges its audience to consider the issues surrounding cultural translation in American Indian film.

CONTEXT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Immediately after tackling the issue of cultural and linguistic translation, the film addresses the related issue of nostalgia in visual representation. After alluding to the Bow Clan ceremony, the film strategically includes sepia photographs of the Wuwuchim ceremony taken between 1893 and 1906 by two non-Native photographers, Heinrich Voth and Joseph Mora. In *Husk of Time* (2006), Masayesva critiques photographers' use of sepia prints:

Sepia resonates in the minds of non-Indians viewing photographs of Native Americans because it creates a buffer where nostalgia blossoms and dulls the ache resulting from misplaced responsibility for another human race. Sepia removes the subject from this world, and when the subject is safely removed, so is the non-Indian's accountability. (8)

Masayesva's critique of the nostalgia surrounding sepia photographs seems aligned with other American Indian thinkers who condemn early photographs of American Indians. In 1982 Vine Deloria Jr. critiqued the way images of American Indians in early photos by Edward Curtis were "well received by the Indian community" as an "opportunity to universalize the nobility and wisdom suggested there" (12). Gerald Vizenor explains why these images should never be accepted by American Indians: "Natives are the eternal fugitives of the camera; the decorated poses, captured and compared, are the public evidence of dominance, not the private stories of survivance" (157).

While Masayesva's published observations clearly seem aligned with those of Deloria and Vizenor, his use of archival photographs in *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* presents a far more complex response to these early images, one that seeks to discuss the "private stories of survival" that Vizenor feels are inaccessible through film. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*'s use of sepia photographs reflects more recent American Indian critical responses to archival photos. Lucy Lippard's *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans* (1992), Anne Makepeace's *Edward S. Curtis: Coming to Light* (2001), and Simon Ortiz's *Beyond the Reach of Time and Change* (2004) all include essays by American Indians that seek to "crack" these archival photographs' surfaces, "breaking them open to get at the living content that has been erased from our history books" (Lippard 15). The essays included in these collections seek to provide the names, personal histories, and tribal contexts for the American Indians who appear in these photos, using their images to connect to tribal and family histories. Geary Hobson writes, "Such photographs taken during the Vanishing American era provide . . . important visual and factual linkages . . . to their descendants who are anything but vanished" (114). Many of these writers describe the pleasure of encountering their relatives for the first time in these photographs. Masayesva himself claims, "I wouldn't know my grandfather if not for photography, because I never met him and I saw him in a [photograph of] a Snake Dance. So, that's how I met him" (qtd. in Rony, *The Third Eye* 213). It is ironic that this familial connection was created through the problematic medium of photographs of ceremonies, especially this particular ceremony. Snake Dance images were highly sought after by Euroamericans, who fetishized the Hopis' relationship to snakes, leading to many intrusive violations of the ceremony and the eventual 1915 ban against photographing and filming ceremonies. However, Lucy Lippard suggests that uncovering the personal stories and tribal contexts behind these early photographs plays a "significant role" in the American Indian "struggle at all social levels to be recognized as active subjects rather than passive objects" (15). Masayesva's decision to include early photographs in *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* reflects this struggle for recognition.¹⁶ I believe he includes archival photo-

graphs to indict them, showing both their limited accuracy and their lack of “accountability.” He also, in a sense, reclaims them for Hopi use by disrupting the “nostalgia” surrounding them, using them instead to show a more complex portrayal of early-twentieth-century Hopis and their experiences with the camera. By appropriating the very photographs created by intrusive, voyeuristic non-Natives, Masayesva fully claims the power of the camera.

Itam Hakim, Hopiit teaches its viewers to consider the larger tribal context surrounding photographs of ceremonies. The first archival photo that appears in the film is a close-up of the backs of two horned priests and four Hopis wearing ceremonial outfits. As with the deer, this focus on the Hopis’ backs indicates ambivalence toward showing any images of the ceremony. The film cuts to a second photograph, zooming in to a close-up of dancers until the image appears grainy and unclear. These photographs highlight the viewer’s status as either initiated or uninitiated; because viewers are not given any context for understanding these images, no tribal secrets are revealed. As with the oral tradition, Hopi viewers can supply the necessary context, while non-Hopi viewers are forced to acknowledge their “outsider” status. The cinematic technique Masayesva uses to explore the photographs further reinforces the importance of context. This technique (which is now termed the “Ken Burns Effect” despite the fact that Masayesva and Burns both began to use the technique independently in the early 1980s) uses slow pans and zooms to focus on areas of interest in still photographs embedded in a film.¹⁷ In this case, Masayesva zooms in on the upper-left-hand corner of a photo to highlight a group of Hopi audience members watching the ceremony from above on a rock. By focusing on the audience members rather than on the dancers who are placed in the center of the photograph, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* highlights the important role the audience plays in ceremonies.

By zooming in on a part of the photo that one might have missed in an initial viewing, the film also asks its viewers to consider the politics behind the camera—how the camera’s framing and choice of subject encourages particular readings over others, while missing or ignoring other types of information. To reinforce this point,

the next shot depicts a close-up of a third archival photograph that depicts two horned priests wearing antlers and deer skins, then cuts to a close-up of the bottom of the photo, highlighting the priests' shoes. The close-up of the priests' feet shows viewers their nontraditional, manufactured boots, evidence of mainstream influence that photographers like Edward Curtis worked hard to conceal. Lucy Lippard describes how Curtis "erased unwelcome signs of modernity" that challenged the static, "Vanishing Indian" stereotype, often traveling with "wigs (for those who now had white man's haircuts), 'primitive' clothes, and other out-of-date trappings" (25). Buyers of Curtis's photographs saw these signs of change and adaptation as "anachronisms" that "destroy the time-honored distance between Them and Us" (27). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* disrupts the false stereotype that the Hopis exist anachronistically. By zooming in on the priests' boots, Masayeva urges his viewers to confront the effects of mainstream culture on early-twentieth-century Hopis. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* uses archival photographs to contextualize Hopi consciousness historically, to document a people who were able to maintain their ceremonial life alongside mainstream influence. At the same time, by exposing how this historical understanding of the Hopis can only be perceived by analyzing the margins, rather than the chosen subjects, of these photos, the film demonstrates the origins of the Hopi suspicion of the camera.

The photographs I have been discussing are accompanied in the film by Macaya's Hopi-language commentary, with no English translation. Viewers are left to supply their own context for the photos and ceremony depicted. Only after a full minute does the film provide a brief English voiceover, obviously only a partial translation of Macaya's long narrative. The voiceover merely states, "Only the *Ahl* priests are allowed there. Their offerings are meant for Alosaka, for they are left outside the village." By translating that which explains the secrecy of the ceremony—"Only the *Ahl* priests are allowed there"—but not providing any other context for understanding Alosaka, the film reinforces the importance of ceremonial secrecy to its viewers. Macaya continues to speak in untranslated Hopi for another thirty seconds as the camera shows viewers a fourth and

fifth archival photo portraying a priest making offerings. By refusing to translate these ceremonial images linguistically or contextually, Masayesva reclaims them for a Hopi audience. By only showing photographs that were shot outside as opposed to within the ceremonial kivas, Masayesva refuses to duplicate the early photographers' intrusiveness and voyeurism, choosing instead to only show what the uninitiated may witness. Paradoxically, the film can only affirm the incompleteness of visual representations of the Hopis by showing its own incompleteness as a film. It thus calls attention to the limits of still and moving film adequately to depict the significance of the Hopi ceremonies and worldview.

The limitations of film are most fully articulated in *Itam Hakim, Hopii*'s treatment of its last sepia-toned image. This last photograph initially appears blurry; Masayesva uses racking, refocusing the image to reveal a close-up of a sepia-colored drum. This image dissolves into another sepia-toned image, this time a close-up of two pairs of bare, raised feet. The film then cuts to a medium close-up of a sepia-toned man's midsection. His suspenders, striped button-up shirt, and trousers fill the center of the screen. The film then pans from left to right, revealing how this man is connected to a series of other men. All the other men are bare-chested and holding hands. Finally, the film cuts to a larger image, an archival photograph of a ceremony shot in wide angle that contains all three close-ups. By demonstrating how all three images come from the same photograph, the film shows viewers that all photos only provide fragments, an incomplete picture that is unknowable and meaningless unless placed in a larger context. Through the microcosm of this one photograph, Masayesva seeks to demonstrate the limited accuracy of photography and even film.

The camera proceeds to pan from left to right, first lingering for ten seconds on the left-most dancer, who is dressed in the striped shirt, trousers, and suspenders, before panning over the other dancers' images. Finally, the film comes to rest on the right-most dancer, who appears older and is bare-chested, barefoot, and dressed in a traditional dancer's costume. The film zooms in on this dancer, lingering for fifteen seconds on his face, which is almost entirely obscured

by his hair, demonstrating again the inability of photographs to represent the Hopis fully and accurately. By panning from the more assimilated-looking, younger dancer to the older, more traditionally dressed dancer, the film suggests that this photograph is compelling, not because it documents a ceremony, but because of the way it documents the Hopis in a time of transition. The Wuwuchim ceremony depicted here joins men to each other literally through their linked hands and spiritually through the ceremony, which also connects them to the Hopis' ceremonial cycle. By zooming in and lingering on the dancers in the photos' margins, whose clothing reflects different generational responses to mainstream influence, the film demonstrates how this image documents both these men's tribal connection and the mainstream forces that threaten that connection. The film's use of close-ups, zooming, and panning makes viewers conscious of the significance of this photo's larger historic context. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* teaches its viewers to look beyond the historic voyeurism of the camera's gaze that positions these men as "Other" and outside of time, toward the temporal story this photograph tells about early-twentieth-century Hopis and the struggles they faced to maintain ceremonial life under the pressures of assimilation.

The film's use of racking in the beginning of this scene foreshadows the way it plans to refocus its viewers' perspective in the scene to come. Its treatment of this photograph seeks to disrupt viewers' familiar expectations regarding archival photos, whether those expectations are nostalgic fantasies of the "Other" or negative critiques of photography's colonialist impulses. Instead, by refocusing on images contained in the margins of the photo, the film disrupts the photograph's own impulse toward generalization and abstraction, redirecting viewers to the intimate and potentially painful stories being told there. By placing this photograph and its story within a larger tribal context, the film teaches viewers new ways to read archival images and creates new ways to interact with these images. While the photograph's wide-angle abstraction positions the viewer as an alienated, yet privileged spectator of a ceremony, the film's close-ups and pans of this same image's margins reposition the viewer as a witness of the intimacy among men, land, and

ceremony. Hopi viewers of the film are thus freed to identify with the tension between older, more traditional and younger, more assimilated Hopis, and also with the ceremony that manages to keep them together despite this tension. In this way, the film uses an archival photograph to strengthen Hopi ceremonial life, as indicated by the photograph's final dissolve into a close-up of Macaya, who has been singing the (untranslated) Wuwuchim ceremonial song in a voiceover the entire scene. The privileging of dissolves over cuts throughout this scene symbolically demonstrates the continuity among all of the images shown: a continuity among the men in the photograph, despite encroaching mainstream culture, as well as a continuity between the past depicted and the present, because Macaya still knows the ceremonial song. Masayesva's filmmaking aesthetics—using racking, close-ups, zooming, panning, and dissolves to explore these still images—presents a more intimate, Hopi-centered gaze than is traditionally found in photographs and film. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* uses these techniques to reposition the Hopis' relationship to the camera, reclaiming archival images to expose the complex histories they contain.

VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY

By drawing viewers' attention to the politics of the camera—what is shown or not shown, what is highlighted or marginalized—the film asks its viewers to consider the role of “accountability” in photography and filmmaking. Masayesva could have encouraged his viewers' dedication to ceremonial life without using the archival photos, but his use of them indicates his film's implication in the tradition from which it emerges. The ambivalent use of archival photographs in the film indicates Masayesva's awareness that the camera carries risks of repeating the dominant gaze. The ending of his film *Imagining Indians* (1992) contains similar misgivings when a woman frustrated with stereotypical images of American Indians in drawings, photographs, and film uses a dentist's drill to carve up the film's lens before dashing the camera to the floor. In an interview with Fatimah Rony, Masayesva claims that this ending was “really a composite pro-

cess to let people know there were a lot of cracks in the seams. It was *about* imagining Indians, and *I* was part of that imagining. And I wasn't trying to absolve myself. . . . I was implicating myself" (Rony, "Victor" 31). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit's* use of archival photographs of ceremonies, photographs that have since been banned on the reservation, suggests a similar self-implication, as well as an awareness of how the "cracks in the seams" could be used to strengthen traditional Hopi life.

The use of archival photos suggests that Masayesva seeks to create a useful dialogue between such images and his own. Masayesva carefully selects the photos that appear in the film, refusing to include these photographers' more voyeuristic photos of the Snake Dance, katchinas, or nonpublic ceremonies held within the kivas. The photos he does choose provide familiar examples of how American Indian ceremonies were typically photographed: wide-angle shots of costumed dancers, holding unexplained implements, with either no background audience or one that is deliberately marginalized or blurred. Linda Hutcheon describes how using photographs of "commonplace" images is useful for their critics "*because* of their pre-existing meanings" (125). She suggests that disrupting images that are "culturally understandable and accessible" to a wider audience can sometimes provide the best means for critique (125). By choosing such "familiar" photographic tropes and then exploring the "unfamiliar" in their margins, Masayesva seeks to upset any notion of romantic abstraction or nostalgia in these photographs. By placing these photos back into a Hopi context, especially one that continues to struggle with the issues represented in the photos' margins, the film demonstrates the way archival images of American Indians can be reclaimed through accountable use.¹⁸

This accountability does not require avoiding the camera. Instead, it demands that images be located within a tribally specific context and that the risks involved be acknowledged. In an interview with Fatimah Rony, Masayesva states,

I understand the risks I'm taking. But beyond that it's not as *separate* as you might think. . . . Our communication is mostly visually transmitted, whether it's in ceremonies, rituals where

we reenact our histories, how we came to be and why we are set up the way we are. That's how our information is transmitted besides our oral histories. (Rony, "Victor" 23)

The camera can be perceived as updating and continuing a traditional Hopi way of transmitting information. In *Husk of Time*, Masayesva asserts that "traditionalism never grows old. It resurfaces in changing contexts, or it reshapes present contexts," always proving useful because it contains "knowledge of differing contexts" (56). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* presents its viewers with a flexible form of traditionalism, in which film, despite its risks, is able to transmit Hopi stories, language, and images to a younger generation. In doing so, Masayesva suggests that it achieves a form of ritual. In *Hopi Photographers*, he writes, "I believe we would not be far from the mark if we were to take photography as ceremony, as ritual, something that sustains, enriches, and adds to our spiritual well-being" (11). In her preface to Lippard's *Partial Recall*, Silko argues, "At Hopi, thoughtful action of any sort becomes worship; devoted attentiveness becomes worship" (10). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*'s careful balancing of multiple audiences, limiting of non-Hopi access to information, and repositioning of archival photographs are all acts of devotion that attempt to strengthen traditional Hopi life. In his 1991 speech at the Two Rivers Film and Video Festival, Masayesva claims that "there is such a thing as an Indian [filmmaking] aesthetic, and it begins in the sacred" (qtd. in Leuthold 1). *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* represents one such attempt to recontextualize sacred oral stories and traditions in a medium that has been reclaimed by Hopi aesthetics.

In *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens* (2001), Beverly Singer asserts that American Indian filmmaking is "intended to demonstrate how film and video visualize healing from the ruptures of our history" by "help[ing] to reverse the devastating effects of assimilationist educational policies that coerced a sense of inferiority in us" (9). By resisting the stereotype of the "Vanishing Indian" that positions historic and contemporary American Indians as anachronisms, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* demonstrates how present-day Hopis can draw strength from images of past Hopis' efforts to maintain ceremonial life in the face of mainstream pressures to assimilate. Further, by

reclaiming these archival images and showing their usefulness for contemporary Hopis, the film urges Hopis to begin to “heal from the ruptures” caused by their historic exploitation through photography and film. While the film acknowledges the camera’s historic connection to imperialism, it demonstrates how it can be disrupted and appropriated in the interest of contemporary Hopis.

By appropriating the camera, long associated with colonial dominance, Masayesva seeks to decolonize images of the Hopis. He effectively appropriates the camera in the interest of sovereignty. Beverly Singer writes, “telling our own stories is deeply connected to being self-determined. . . . It is part of a social movement that I call ‘cultural sovereignty’” (2). She argues that Native-centered films “are helping to reconnect us with very old relationships and traditions” that “help revive storytelling and restore the old foundation” (2). The ability to wrest stereotypical images of Hopi ceremonies from their imperialist framework helps to revive and maintain the stories and ceremonies, which are essential for tribal sovereignty. Quoting Seneca elder John Mohawk, Jace Weaver writes, “If you want to be sovereign, you have to act sovereign.’ ‘Thinking sovereign’ is a necessary precondition” (70). Victor Masayesva’s *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* seeks not only to present an image of cultural and visual sovereignty but also to prompt “thinking sovereign” in its viewers, Hopi and non-Hopi alike. By encouraging viewers to acknowledge and resist the historic imperialism and voyeurism of the camera’s gaze, Masayesva urges viewers to adopt a Hopi consciousness that values the connection among images, stories, and silences.

NOTES

I am indebted to Victor Masayesva Jr. for his support of this article and for his powerful films, that teach us to see differently. I am also grateful to Joanna Hearne for her generous sharing of resources and to Christopher Pizzino and the anonymous *SAIL* reviewers for their invaluable feedback on earlier versions of this article.

1. Dennis Wall and Virgil Masayesva write, “For the people of the mesas corn is sustenance, ceremonial object, prayer offering, symbol, and sentient being unto itself. Corn is the Mother in the truest sense—the people take

in the corn and the corn becomes their flesh, as mother's milk becomes the flesh of the child. . . . The connection between the people and the corn is pervasive and deeply sacred" (2).

2. As my works cited page indicates, Masayesva's films have received some critical attention. However, this attention is limited, and many of the articles referenced are brief or analyze his films alongside other better-known American Indian films.

3. Railroad tourist pamphlets at the time declare, long "before the Pilgrims landed upon the shores of New England . . . the great Southwest was peopled by a race who enjoyed a high degree of civilization," a civilization that is "more picturesque than the Swiss, Irish, Serbian, or Russian peasants" (see Graulich 81). These tourist pamphlets, with their accompanying photographs, describe how the earliest histories and cultures in the Americas could be accessed and appropriated by Euroamericans.

4. Vine Deloria Jr. argues that Edward Curtis's photographs of American Indians "relate less to the reality of Indians than we would like and testify to less precise aspects of the American experience—the history we would like to have possessed" (13).

5. See Rony, *The Third Eye*, chapter 3.

6. Copies of the incomplete film series can be found at the Smithsonian and Library of Congress.

7. In *The Vanishing Indian*, Hopi women are inaccurately shown performing these duties in isolation (instead of within the context of other women) and outside of the home, an inaccurate practice that allowed early filmmakers to use available sunlight. The film shows these women beginning the work process, and then the camera quickly cuts to the finished product. The film assumes that its non-Native viewers would have no desire to make the products themselves, merely to voyeuristically consume the image of women laborers. Masayesva's first film, *Hopiit*, depicts women differently, showing five women indoors talking and laughing as they weave baskets; it provides long close-ups of the basket makers' hands so that viewers can see exactly how to weave reeds into a basket.

8. Lucy Lippard makes a similar claim when she writes, "even when the photographer is focusing on activity rather than person, even when faces are resistant and 'expressionless,' the eyes cannot be veiled and humanity asserts itself" (16).

9. This fear was justified. Lucy Lippard points out how the 1910 ban against photography was a result of a trip to Washington DC where photos of Hopi ceremonies were used in a congressional hearing to discredit their religion (29).

10. Following Hopi research protocols, I contacted Terry Morgart at the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office prior to publishing this article. The preservation office agreed to its publication, pending approval by Victor Masayesva Jr., which was given via e-mail communication on September 4, 2008.

11. In fact, Peter Whiteley suggests that restricting access to Hopi culture and ritual runs counter to principles that encourage the Hopi “to spread the beneficial effects of their teachings.” He quotes former tribal chairman, Abbott Sekaquaptewa, saying that he supports research on the Hopi “so long as it enhances their lives, their understanding” (29).

12. Masayesva writes, “severed from our agricultural roots, we are left with the shell of a language used primarily for the adornment of ceremony. . . . Now when we record our language, we have begun the post-mortem, reserving and stacking the words in which one now sees imprinted paleolithic bookshelves which accumulate sediment” (“It Shall” 93–94). This statement questions the very desire to record the “shell” of a language that has become as removed from its culture and land as the “paleolithic” period.

13. As a non-Hopi speaker following Hopi research protocols, I have not quoted from sources that translate Hopi songs and ceremonies into English.

14. The opening scene to Masayesva’s *Imagining Indians* (1992) humorously pokes fun at this Hollywood convention. The film opens with a wide-angle shot of Monument Valley, a staple of early Hollywood westerns. An off-camera director quickly shouts “cut” because his stereotypical image of an empty western landscape is disrupted when an American Indian is shown walking out from behind a group of bushes.

15. A few critics like Bahn-Coblans inaccurately refer to the English voiceover as “subtitles.”

16. Masayesva is not alone in his complex desire to negotiate Joseph Mora’s photographs of the Hopi. Ramona Sakiestewa describes Mora’s photos as a “tremendous legacy to the Hopi people” (75). She argues that Mora’s devoted attention to physical detail and willingness to allow the Hopi to clothe themselves as they saw fit demonstrates “his genuine relationship to Hopis as individuals rather than as inanimate objects or subject matter” (74).

17. Ken Burns credits filmmaker Jerome Liebling for teaching him the effect. See Kennedy.

18. In his speech at the Two Rivers Film and Video Festival, Masayesva asserts, “A Native filmmaker has . . . accountability built into him. The white man doesn’t have that. That’s the single big distinction. Accountability as an individual, as a clan, as a tribal, as a family member” (qtd. in Leuthold 1).

WORKS CITED

- Bahn-Coblans, Sonja. "Reading with a Eurocentric Eye, the 'Seeing with a Native Eye': Victor Masayesva's *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 8.4 (Winter 1996): 47–60. Print.
- Deloria, Vine, Jr. Introduction. *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions*. By Deloria. New York: Pantheon, 1982. 11–13. Print.
- Graulich, Melody. "I Became the 'Colony': Kate Cory's Hopi Photographs." *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880–1940*. Ed. Susan Bernardin et al. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003. 73–107. Print.
- Hearne, Joanna. "Telling and Retelling in the 'Ink of Light': Documentary Cinema, Oral Narratives, and Indigenous Identities." *Screen* 47.3 (Autumn 2006): 307–26. Print.
- Hobson, Geary. "The Folks Left Out." *Beyond the Reach of Time and Change: Native American Reflections on the Frank A. Rinehart Photograph Collection*. Ed. Simon Ortiz. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2004. 109–114. Print.
- Hopi Tribe Cultural Preservation Office. *Hopi Cultural Preservation Office Home Page*. Nov. 15 2007. <http://www.nau.edu/~hcopo-p/> Web.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Kennedy, Randy. "The Still-Life Mentor to a Filmmaking Generation." *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 2006. Print.
- Leuthold, Steven. *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1998. Print.
- Lippard, Lucy R., ed. *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans*. New York: New Press, 1992. Print.
- Makepeace, Anne. *Edward S. Curtis: Coming to Light*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2001. Print.
- Masayesva, Victor, Jr., dir. *Hopiit*. IS Productions, 1981. Film.
- . *Husk of Time: The Photographs of Victor Masayesva*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2006. Print.
- , dir. *Imagining Indians*. IS Productions, 1992. Film.
- , dir. *Itam Hakim, Hopiit*. IS Productions, 1984. Film.
- . "It Shall Not End Anywhere: Transforming Oral Traditions." *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*. Ed. Laura J. Murray and Keren Rice. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1999. 91–95. Print.
- . "KWIKWILYAQA: Hopi Photography." Masayesva and Younger 10–12. Print.

- Masayesva, Victor, Jr., and Erin Younger, eds. *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Images*. Tucson: Sun Tracks and U of Arizona P, 1983. Print.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16.3 (Fall 1975): 6–18. Print.
- Ortiz, Simon J., ed. *Beyond the Reach of Time and Change: Native American Reflections on the Frank A. Rinehart Photograph Collection*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2004. Print.
- . "History is Right Now." Ortiz, *Beyond the Reach* 3–8. Print.
- Riding In, James. "Legacy of Resistance." Ortiz, *Beyond the Reach* 52–55. Print.
- Rony, Fatimah Tobing. *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996.
- . "Victor Masayesva, Jr. and the Politics of 'Imagining Indians.'" *Film Quarterly* 48.2 (Winter 1994–1995): 20–33.
- Sakiestewa, Ramona. "Weaving For Dance." Lippard 73–75. Print.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Preface." Lippard 8–11. Print.
- . "Videomakers and Basketmakers." *Aperture* 119 (Summer 1990): 72–73. Print.
- Singer, Beverly. *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001. Print.
- The Vanishing Indian*. Sioux Super Films, 1920s. Film.
- Vizenor, Gerald. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. Print.
- Wall, Dennis, and Virgil Masayesva. "People of the Corn: Teachings in Hopi Traditional Agriculture, Spirituality, and Sustainability." *American Indian Quarterly* 28.3–4 (Summer 2004): 435–453. Print.
- Weatherford, Elizabeth, and Victor Masayesva, Jr. "To End and Begin Again: The Work of Victor Masayesva, Jr." *Art Journal* 54.4 (Winter 1995): 48–52. Print.
- Weaver, Jace. "Splitting the Earth." *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Ed. Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2005. 1–89. Print.
- Whiteley, Peter M. *Rethinking Hopi Ethnography*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution P, 1998. Print.

Alexie's Nutshell

Mousetraps and Interpenetrations of
The Business of Fancydancing and *Hamlet*

BLAKE M. HAUSMAN

Seymour is a rare beast: an unlikable lead character who nonetheless engages the audience. He's a tragic figure of Shakespearean proportion, and the comparison is not made lightly.

Catherine Graham, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*

There's this place I go to. . . . It's dark there, like inside a machine or in the belly of a whale, and all my dreams are there, and my memories, and my lies, and they all get mixed up, and spin spin spin. That's when the poems happen.

Seymour Polatkin, *The Business of Fancydancing*

Sherman Alexie's work "represents an interpenetration of codes between the ostensibly discrete spheres of the Native and the queer," according to Quentin Youngberg's essay, "Interpenetrations," published in the spring 2008 issue of *SAIL* (60). Youngberg's analysis offers an astute reading of Alexie's second film, *The Business of Fancydancing*. The film tells the story of a homosexual Spokane Indian poet, Seymour Polatkin (Evan Adams), who returns home to his reservation after ten years of critical and economic success in the largely white cosmopolitan literary circles of Seattle and beyond. Seymour's story pushes multiple audiences to engage problematic expectations about sexuality, tradition, and performance. Youngberg describes Alexie's engagement with such expectations in terms

of coding practices, noting the doubleness and dualism of the codes signified by Seymour Polatkin's character and the contexts in which he appears. Youngberg describes this dualism as a "double valence," enabling Alexie's film to mobilize the twin processes of "queering the Native sphere" and "'Indianing' the (white) literary sphere" (60). Thus, the film becomes a convergence zone where signs from each paradigm simultaneously seep into and affect the other, what Youngberg calls a "double-edged effect" (64). It is this kind of "interpenetration," Youngberg suggests, that enables Alexie's work to serve as a subversive element within both Native and queer circles of signification and meaning.

The term "interpenetration" is used by scholars in several fields.¹ In chemistry, interpenetration signifies a complex mixture. Simply put, mixtures are different from compounds because the original substances retain their basic properties and could be extracted from each other. This notion of fundamental properties that survive chemical changes has become a rather generative metaphor for those of us in the humanities and social sciences. In anthropology and sociology, interpenetration denotes elements or sites of cultural contact and exchange.² In economics, it signifies the merger of business and politics, often in regard to a particular identity, market, or niche. Many scholars of politics, philosophy, linguistics, literature, and performance arts have employed the term to describe a situation in which two or more distinct units or paradigms converge, mix, and mutually affect the other(s). An impressively varied and cross-disciplinary archive of scholarship based upon "interpenetration" has emerged at sites of cultural crossing and exchange. Germaine Bryce's 1949 essay in the *Modern Language Journal*, "The 'Interpenetration' of Literatures," demonstrates how the concept of "interpenetration" enables scholars to engage complex questions that have yet to be asked.³ Bryce engages the possibility of transnational literary study as it was then appearing possible in the post-World War II environment. Bryce uses quotation marks around the term, "interpenetrations," as do several works of scholarship from the twenty-first century. This use of quotation marks suggests that when we discuss "interpenetration," we are most likely discussing something

that is beyond our current vocabulary. Recognizing “interpenetration” can enable one to articulate something genuinely new.⁴ Youngberg’s “Interpenetrations” does precisely this, for it is the first work of literary scholarship about Alexie’s film. Youngberg asks questions about *The Business of Fancydancing* that greatly needed to be asked, and his analysis is insightful.

In this essay, I would like to complement Youngberg’s argument by demonstrating another “discrete sphere” with which *The Business of Fancydancing* interpenetrates—the Shakespearean sphere. It is a sphere that defines the canon of English and world literatures, a sphere that has often troubled American Indian narratives. Leo Marx’s assertion that “*The Tempest* may be read as a prologue to American literature” speaks volumes (72). From a Native American perspective, Caliban is the prototype of the derisively misrepresented Native character, a long-standing archetype in English-language literature.⁵ It may, therefore, be easy to target Shakespeare and his plays as agents of cultural colonialism, as Eric Cheyfitz convincingly does in *The Poetics of Imperialism*. For writers from the Global South, engaging Shakespeare’s works has long been a means of confronting the colonial machine. There is a longstanding tradition of deploying Caliban, in particular, as a means of oppositional engagement with the European, or Eurowestern, canon.⁶ Aimé Césaire reimagines Caliban in his iconic revolutionary play, *Une Tempête*, and Roberto Fernandez Retamar deploys Caliban to articulate a Latin American literary consciousness. Hundreds of others have utilized Caliban to articulate a colonized condition, and a comprehensive list of post- or anticolonial Calibans would no doubt be longer than this entire essay. However, for my purposes here, it is most important to consider the oppositional stance assumed in many of these responses to Shakespeare. While some writers, such as C. L. R. James, have used Shakespeare as an ally and a lifeline connection to the canon, the more typical pattern in postcolonial literature is an us-versus-them stance that pits the Shakespearean legacy in direct opposition to Indigenous self-articulation.⁷ For many writers who have preceded Alexie, invoking Shakespeare is an act of invoking the enemy’s language to position Indigenous self-definition in opposition to the anglophone canon.

The issue of engaging the enemy's language and transforming colonial structures is familiar territory for Native literatures. In his essay, "Towards a National Indian Literature," Simon Ortiz describes the transformation of Spanish Catholic ceremonies into authentically Acquemah ceremonies. Ortiz affirms "the creative ability of Indian people . . . to make these forms meaningful in their own terms" (8). Ortiz argues that "this is the way that Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization" (10). For Ortiz, these transformative responses are methods of working toward liberation. Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird describe a similar goal in their introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*. Harjo writes, "When our lands were colonized the language of the colonizer was forced on us. We had to use it for commerce in the new world, a world that evolved through the creation and use of language" (23). Regarding the act of "reinventing," Gloria Bird replies, "The 'enemy' was determined to control how we, as native people, perceived ourselves in relation to the world," arguing that the act of reinvention "can undo some of the damage that colonization has wrought" (24). The act of "reinventing the enemy's language" is ultimately something transformative and regenerative. As Harjo puts it, "It was when we began to create with this new language that we named it ours, made it tough and beautiful" (23–24). While neither Ortiz nor Harjo and Bird discuss Shakespeare directly, their arguments enable us to read Alexie's film as a bold act of reinventing the forms and patterns of colonial language and literary tradition. To what degree, then, does Alexie use Shakespeare to liberate, to undo some of the damage of colonization? By examining *The Business of Fancydancing* as an interpenetration of the Native and Shakespearean spheres, we enhance our ability to interpret Alexie's vision of Native survival and endurance within the larger anglophone world.

The playwright Lynn Riggs used *Hamlet* as a metaphor to describe the pressures exerted upon a Native person existing within the dominant anglophone culture. It is significant that Riggs was a homosexual urbanite, much like Alexie's Seymour Polatkin. *The Business of Fancydancing* builds great tension through Seymour's apparent absorption within the white world as a gay Indian novelty.

Consider Riggs's commentary on the "absorbed" Cherokees in his play, *The Cherokee Night*:

An absorbed race has its curiously irreconcilable inheritance. It seems to me the best grade of absorbed Indian might be an intellectual Hamlet, buffeted, harrassed [*sic*], victimized, split, baffled—with somewhere in him great fire and some granite. And a residual lump of stranger things than the white race may fathom. (qtd. in Justice 97)

Wondrous strange things, indeed. Riggs uses *Hamlet* to render an idea about his Indian characters to a contemporary theater critic. In doing so, Riggs shows us how a *Hamlet* reference can engage the expectations of an audience member from the dominant culture. Riggs's notion of "absorption" is important, and I will return to it as a means of conclusion. For now, it is useful to see how Riggs positions this absorbed Indian character in relation to Hamlet's victimization by the power structure that *absorbs* him. Riggs's *Hamlet* reference is itself multivalenced, for it gives the theater critic a Eurocentric point of reference at the same time that it reflects upon the brutality inherent to the processes of absorption or assimilation. Note, then, how Riggs's *Hamlet* reference is unlike many Caliban references and revisitations. Rather than simply rendering the Native in opposition to the European, Riggs synthesizes his dual references in a way that offers subversive ideas without demanding direct confrontation.

In the analysis that follows, I will explore a similar absence of direct confrontational opposition between Shakespeare and Alexie. Instead of rendering Seymour Polatkin and Shakespeare as diametrically opposed to each other, Alexie aligns them in subversive and far-reaching ways. Rather than position lines from Shakespeare as an assault against Indigenous identity or sovereignty, Alexie smoothly incorporates Shakespearean phrases directly into the film itself. Indeed, *The Business of Fancydancing* includes several lines that are lifted directly from *Hamlet*. Just as Hamlet references ancient Greek narratives, Seymour Polatkin references *Hamlet*. The result is another level of "interpenetration" mobilized by the film. This inter-

penetration has twin implications for literary studies in the twenty-first century and beyond—implications for the potential presence of Native literature within the anglophone canon and implications for how we can read the Eurowestern canon that still dominates our construction of what literature is.

A HAWK FROM A SHAWL DANCE?

Youngberg refers to John Purdy's 1997 interview with Alexie as a means of establishing Alexie's penchant for inside jokes, what Alexie describes as "Indian trapdoors." There are several such trapdoors throughout *The Business of Fancydancing*. Youngberg discusses the Shawl Dance as one such trapdoor, for an informed Indian audience will recognize that Seymour's performance of a Shawl Dance, a woman's dance, transgresses gender construction. Youngberg also mentions the cock ring on Seymour's leather jacket as a similar trapdoor, this one designed for an audience informed about signification patterns in the queer community. Another Alexie trapdoor appears when Agnes Roth (Michelle St. John's character) reads from the Jewish *Kaddish* after burning tobacco near Mouse's corpse. Agnes enacts her character's bicultural identity in this scene, but she does so in a way that might lead uninformed audiences to believe she is speaking the Spokane language rather than Hebrew. Alexie positions several other trapdoors throughout the film, supporting Youngberg's argument that the film subtly interpenetrates the paradigms and signification patterns of its multiple yet discrete spheres.

Alexie's *Hamlet* references function as trapdoors. Of course, the Shakespearean text is rife with its own trapdoors.⁸ Consider Hamlet's encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in act 2, scene 2, where Hamlet offers his "Denmark's a prison" speech.⁹ It is a useful scene for our purposes here, especially considering the homoerotic undertones of Hamlet's assertion that "man delights not me" (2.2.309). The bumbling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet's "old school mates," are sent to uncover the source of Hamlet's lunacy.¹⁰ When *Hamlet* is performed on stage or on film, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are often unable to fully catch Hamlet's

multivalenced references. When Hamlet asserts that he can “tell a hawk from a handsaw,” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern often misrecognize the fact that, rather than losing his ability to express himself clearly, Hamlet is consciously playing with their expectations by mutating a then-common phrase, “hawk from a hernshaw” (2.2.375). They walk right over this particular trapdoor. Though Guildenstern later describes Hamlet’s words as “crafty madness” to Gertrude and Claudius, the play’s audience may often doubt Guildenstern’s ability to interpret such craft (3.1.8). In this way, the old school mates’ inability to recognize this trapdoor parallels the reactions of uninformed audiences who “walk right over” Alexie’s deployment of trapdoors such as the Shawl Dance, the cock ring, the *Kaddish*, or *Hamlet* (Alexie qtd. in Purdy 15).

Perhaps it should not be surprising that most viewers walked right over Alexie’s Shakespearean trapdoors when the film was first released. However, it is curious that these trapdoors were so readily missed. While the film is Alexie’s longest *Hamlet* reference, it is by no means his first. Consider the short story “Assimilation,” in which Alexie deploys a parody of Polonius’s death to characterize the Indian protagonist’s white husband: “She remembered Mikey’s third-grade-class’s school play, an edited version of *Hamlet*. Jeremiah had walked onto the stage to help his son drag the unconscious Polonius, who had merely been clubbed over the head rather than stabbed to death, from the stage” (*Toughest Indian in the World* 17). Or, consider how the lovers in Alexie’s “Do You Know Where I Am?” recite “Shakespeare monologues as foreplay: *To be or not to be, take off your panties, oh, Horatio, I knew him well, a fellow of infinite jest, I’m going to wear your panties now*” (*Ten Little Indians* 151). Or, consider Alexie’s poem “Hamlet on Trial, Chicago, 1994,” as it questions the relevance of Shakespeare to the reservation: “My book has nothing to do with Hamlet. My book is filled with reservation Indians. Maybe my book has everything to do with Hamlet.” Indeed, as Alexie told Sarah Phelman when *The Business of Fancydancing* was out traveling the circuit of independent film festivals, “There’s a lot of Shakespeare on the rez. *King Lear* is happening every day. *Hamlet*, too” (Phelman).

Alexie's emphasis on the relevance of Shakespeare to everyday reservation life is important, for it reminds us of Alexie's question: "If Indian literature can't be read by the average 12-year-old kid living on the reservation, what the hell good is it?" (Purdy 7). If the basic tensions and poetic nuances of *Hamlet* are an "everyday" event, then it is entirely possible to reinvent *Hamlet* through situations and "coding practices" that are immediately familiar to the adolescent Indian audience that Alexie prioritizes. Consider the case of Alexie's recent novel, *Flight*. The adolescent narrator has a terrifying revelation: "I am my father." To make sense of this quandary, he compares his situation to Hamlet's:

Who can survive such a revelation?

It was father love and father shame and father rage that killed Hamlet. Imagine a new act. Imagine that Hamlet, after being poisoned by his own sword, wakes in the body of his father. Or worse, inside the body of his incestuous Uncle Claudius?

What would Hamlet do if he looked into the mirror and saw the face of the man who'd betrayed and murdered his father?

And what should I do now that I am looking into the mirror at the face of the man who betrayed and abandoned my mother and me? (151)

Alexie does not invoke *Hamlet* merely to drop a name. Rather, his work deliberately reimagines the dramatic possibilities of Shakespeare's play. Collapsing characters and reworking scenarios from *Hamlet* is a means for Alexie to "imagine a new act." How, then, does *The Business of Fancysdancing* imagine a new act for Alexie's poetry? More importantly, how does the film bring the issue of "audience" into its multivalent mix?

We should remember that Alexie's first published book of poetry came in 1992, and it was also titled *The Business of Fancysdancing*. The film of the same title was produced in 2002, ten years later. Thus, Seymour Polatkin's return to the reservation after a ten-year interval suggests that *Fancysdancing* the film renders a reconnection with

its “source”—*Fancydancing* the book. Phelman writes, “Upon his return, Seymour is greeted with distrust, anger and derision by his tribe, who accuse him of having become successful by selling out his Indian heritage.” This notion of “selling out” also surfaces directly in the book, particularly in a poem that is titled, naturally, “The Business of Fancydancing.” Alexie’s dancer in the poem is not named Seymour Polatkin but rather Vernon WildShoe. The poem describes Vernon as a kind of human currency, as a sexualized “credit card”:

... Vernon is like some promise
 to pay the light bill, a credit card we
 Indians get to use. When he reach-
 es his hands up, feathers held high, in a dance
 that makes old women speak English, the money
 for first place belongs to us, all in cash, money
 we tuck in our shoes, leaving our wallets empty
 in case we pass out. At the modern dance,
 where Indians dance white, a twenty is a promise reach-
 ing into back pockets on unfamiliar Levis. (69)

While the 1992 poem renders an Indian audience, the 2002 film renders Seymour Polatkin’s primary audiences as non-Indian and mostly Caucasian. In the film, Seattleites with guilty consciences are infatuated with Seymour’s tragic verses, providing Seymour with a seemingly boundless credit line. Seymour’s own pockets are thus filled with the spoils of “dancing white,” and the film’s viewers are given direct reflections of who Seymour has pleased in order to become, as he puts it, “the Affirmative Action poet.”

Like Seymour, Alexie became rather successful between 1992 and 2002. Like Seymour, Alexie has drawn much critique as well as praise. Critics have accused Alexie of selling out, of misrepresenting his people, of reinscribing the very stereotypes he works to undermine, and of promoting himself with unabashed egotism. As *The Business of Fancydancing* reinvents *Hamlet*, Alexie responds to such critique. Alexie personally engages his own critics by making a cameo appearance in the film, playing a person on the reservation who resents Seymour’s story theft and egotism. “When was the

last time Seymour talked to Mouse?" Alexie's character asks. "Writing all those poems, walking around here thinking he's too good for us. He always did." When this nameless character ridicules Seymour, Alexie ironically calls attention to what may be Seymour's greatest problem—his selfishness and pride.¹¹ Seymour seems unashamed of being in the awkward position of the "Affirmative Action poet." He acknowledges being a "token brown guy" who "rail[s] about the terrible tragic injustice in the world," but he seems to relish being in this position, fearless of its potential consequences. Hamlet claims that "conscience does make cowards of us all" (3.1.83). If so, is Seymour beyond conscience when he tells Aristotle that he is better than the Indians on the reservation? Is Seymour's ego beyond reproach? He tells the interviewer, "Sometimes I think that nothing is real until I write it first, that no idea, whether good or bad, has ever really been thought of until I think it." This line is a rather egocentric riff on Hamlet's line to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.249–50). When Alexie reworks the Shakespearean script to showcase Seymour's own selfishness, he prods us to consider Seymour's egotistical detachment from his tribal community. Regardless of whether the film dismantles the critiques lodged against Alexie's own writing, *Fancydancing* nonetheless transforms *Hamlet* to engage the assumptions that may inform such critique. Critics who chide what they find to be headstrong attitudes in Alexie's writing must themselves reckon with the fact that the egotism of *Fancydancing's* protagonist is at times repulsive. As the film progresses, pushing Seymour toward a confrontation with his own conscience, Alexie hints at the mouse-trap that he has set for his "Affirmative Action poet."

"IN A NUTSHELL"

Alexie's Web site (<http://www.fallsapart.com>) contains an archive of the film's reviews. Very few mention Shakespeare. One might recall what "The Player" (Richard Dreyfuss's character) tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: "Audiences know what to expect, and that is all they are

prepared to believe in.” The film’s early audiences were most likely not expecting this interpenetration of the Native American and the Shakespearean. Andrea Vogt was the only critic to offer a concrete connection to *Hamlet*: “One reviewer called a tender scene between Seymour and his college girlfriend ‘terrible writing,’ only to find out from Alexie that the dialogue was among the 35 lines in the film lifted from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” (47).

The scene in question is an interpenetration of *Fancydancing*’s conclusions and act 2, scene 2 of *Hamlet*. In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have been sent by Claudius and Gertrude to question Hamlet and “glean” what “afflicts him” (2.2.16–17). It is the same scene in which Hamlet claims he “can tell a hawk from a handsaw.” The scene is an interrogation. In many ways, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are agents of the power structure that smothers Hamlet. These “friends” thus embody the forces that harass, victimize, and split the absorbed Indian described by Lynn Riggs. In *Fancydancing*, Agnes may not be an agent of the national power structure, but as a teacher on the reservation, she is an agent of the reservation’s culture and institutions. She is also, literally, Seymour’s “old school mate.”

As the scene begins, Agnes and Seymour are alone together in Seymour’s old room, the “smallest room for the smallest Indian.” They joke about being the “smallest Indians in the world,” about being “concentrated Indians,” about getting jobs “hanging off rear-view mirrors” as a dream catcher and a burden basket. These lines offer some needed comic relief during a tense funeral scene, and they speak in metaphors of commodities recognizable to “the average 12-year-old kid living on the reservation.” These images also foreshadow the “nutshell” dialogue that will soon emerge. The humorous image of humans being shrunk into miniature commodities plays with Hamlet’s statement to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: “O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams” (2.2.254–56). The dream catcher joke is itself a multivalent symbol, preparing us for the trapdoor ahead. Then, Agnes shifts tone. So does Seymour. Agnes says, “I’m glad you came back. The rez, she’s missed

you." Seymour replies, "This place is a prison." Seymour's line here is a point of interpenetration, a place where the spheres collide—the line begins colloquially with "*this place is,*" but it concludes by quoting Hamlet's assessment that "Denmark's a *prison*" (2.2.243; my emphasis).

When pressed about being missed by the reservation, Seymour slips into a *Hamlet* reference, sending out a "trapdoor" signal. Agnes hesitates, then questions: "What did you just say?" By asking Seymour to repeat himself, Agnes recognizes the Shakespearean "trapdoor" in the script. Her double take thus provides a metacommentary on the ability of *Hamlet* to seep into the film. Seymour then repeats the signal. He answers Agnes's question with a sentence that echoes Hamlet's almost verbatim, substituting "reservation" for "Denmark": "The reservation's a prison." Now that the trapdoor has been confirmed, Agnes "falls through" right into act 2, scene 2 of *Hamlet*:

AGNES: Well if that's true, then the whole world is a prison.

SEYMOUR: The whole world *is* a prison, with a million confines and wards and dungeons. The reservation's just the worst.

AGNES: I don't think so.

SEYMOUR: You can think what you want. To me it's a prison.

AGNES: Well, you've wanted to leave here since you were six years old. It's your ambition that made the rez a prison.

At this point, Agnes changes tone and deviates notably from the Shakespearean text. Rather than saying, "It is too narrow for your mind," she strikes a deeply personal chord with Seymour. Seymour responds by changing his own tone, reciting the lines with greater affectedness, making it obvious that he is quoting: "Oh God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and call myself a king of infinite space, but that I have bad dreams." Seymour slightly modernizes the syntax here, but the word choice is notable. In changing Hamlet's "would it were that" to his own "but that," Seymour keeps certain traces of the early modern syntax in his own phrasing. He self-consciously calls attention to his own act of recitation. Agnes, sensing another

trapdoor of sorts, leaves the specifics of Seymour's personal history alone and goes back into "character":

AGNES: Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

SEYMOUR: A dream itself is but a shadow. It's amazing.

One might wonder what Seymour refers to when he says, "It's amazing," for at this point they are drawn together. They kiss. Then Seymour says, "It's like kissing my own sister," prompting Agnes to slap him. They muse on the possibility of having a family, but they both know that it is a "dream." Agnes eventually leads the conversation back to where it began, to the idea of the reservation wanting Seymour's presence.

AGNES: You know you can always come back here. You don't have to come back just for me.

SEYMOUR: The only reason I'd come back is for you.

AGNES: Why are we spending all this time talking about the impossible?

SEYMOUR: Because the rest is silence.

If Agnes is, as Seymour says, "the only reason I'd come back," then perhaps we can read this scene as a kind of vortex where questions of ghosts and bad dreams seep between multiple spheres. Which ghosts haunt Seymour's dreams the most? His sister's? His old school mates'? The ghosts of alternate lives that he cannot lead?

Ultimately, the "prison" scene self-consciously brings the possible and the impossible together, forcing them to seep into each other. This metaconsciousness of (im)possible mixtures is triggered by the characters' own willingness to fall into the *Hamlet* trapdoor, signaling the fact that Hamlet serves as a nexus of interpenetration between parallel yet distant worlds. *Fancydancing's* "prison" scene ends abruptly when Seymour shifts ahead to act 5, to Hamlet's final line: "the rest is silence" (5.2.363). This fusion of scenes affirms the fact that Alexie is not using his film to merely perform a "Hamlet-in-Indian-dress." Far from it. Rather, what Alexie is doing is decidedly Shakespearean in spirit, for it does what all good art before it does—

at least, all art that wants to converse with both the living audiences of its present moment *and* the legacies of artistic traditions from its global past. To paraphrase T. S. Eliot, Alexie's film demonstrates his status as a good poet and as a mature poet, precisely because he subtly steals from Shakespeare, doing so in order to manifest something new in the present.¹²

What Alexie's film does to *Hamlet* is exactly what Shakespeare's play does to Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Though there are parallels and interpenetrations throughout each script, what we have is not a simple reproduction but rather a reimagination, an act of appropriation, inversion, and subversion that tells us as much about our present world—the world to which each piece holds “the mirror up to nature” (3.2.22)—as it does about the world of the distant past. Shakespeare complicates Oedipus's acts of killing his father and sleeping with his mother by creating a situation where Hamlet's uncle Claudius has already performed both acts, thus summoning Hamlet home for the funeral. Likewise, Alexie complicates Hamlet's metaphors of nutshells and bad dreams by altering the dynamics that first drive Seymour Polatkin away from the reservation and later summon him home for Mouse's funeral. When we consider how Alexie reimagines Shakespeare and ultimately creates “a new act,” we should note that Alexie inverts *Hamlet*'s tragic ending. Rather than give us only one character (Horatio) who survives the journey from the first to the final act, as Shakespeare does with *Hamlet*, Alexie gives us one dead character at the beginning (Mouse) and a whole tribe of survivors at the end. Thus, *Fancydancing* inverts the generally expected tragic Indian story, concluding with several characters who are alive to continue their respective journeys.

ALEXIE'S MOUSETRAP

Given the fact that the death of a character named “Mouse” instigates Seymour's return to the Spokane Reservation, and given the fact that Hamlet stages a performance of a play he calls *The Mousetrap* to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.600), one may be tempted to determine precisely how these mice relate to each other.

The role of the mouse in each play is by no means interchangeable, for we notice as many reinventions and reversals as we do parallels. To be sure, creative “reinvention” is a central trope in Hamlet’s “mousetrap,” for Hamlet alters the play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, and transforms it into his *Mousetrap* by making the material more explicitly relevant to Claudius’s act of fratricide. By having Hamlet stage “something like the murder of my father” (2.2.591) in the form of a play, Shakespeare is able to revisit one of his favorite motifs, the play-within-a-play. When Hamlet revises the play-within-a-play in the middle of act 3, he literally creates “a new act” within the epicenter of the play bearing his own name. In comparison, while *Hamlet* offers only one play-within-a-play, *The Business of Fancydancing* offers several scenes wherein the film’s audience watches Seymour deliver his poetry to a “live” audience. Alexie’s motif of poetry-audience-watching-poetry-audience recurs throughout the film, always echoing the Shakespearean play-within-a-play. What, then, is *Fancydancing*’s “Mousetrap”? I suggest that Alexie transforms the play-within-a-play motif by spreading it throughout the entire film, rather than concentrating it in the epicenter of the script. Alexie’s film becomes an extended exercise in catching the conscience of both the film’s viewing audience and Seymour Polatkin himself.

In *Fancydancing*’s opening scene, Mouse (Swil Kanim) videotapes Seymour and Aristotle’s (Gene Tagaban) graduation from Wel-pinit High School as co-valedictorians. Mouse then turns the camera upon himself and says that he’s “going to work in the uranium mines” while Aristotle and Seymour are off at college in Seattle. Within Alexie’s narrative structure, the Mouse character is both still alive and already dead. Mouse’s presence as both speaker and documenter signifies his presence as “coauthor” of Seymour’s poetry, for he speaks both to Seymour, by filming Seymour and Aristotle, and to the audience itself, by turning the lens upon himself, creating a camera-within-a-camera.¹³ Mouse watches and is watched, he speaks and is spoken to, and, unlike the opening scene of *Hamlet*, he cracks a joke. Fifteen minutes later, the film cuts to a scene where Mouse and Aristotle read lines from Seymour’s book, *All My Relations*. In the poem they read, Seymour has “stolen” Mouse’s story

about “kittens” and “the uranium river.” Concluding the poem, Mouse reads:

“O Lord remember. O do remember me”—It’s all lies, Ari.
 Those are my kittens. He took my life, man. *All My Relations*, it says. All my relations. It’s all lies, man. . . .
 It’s like I’m not even alive. It’s like I’m dead.

The question is thus directly raised—did Seymour’s poetry kill Mouse? The question is somewhat avoided as Mouse and Aristotle ridicule Seymour’s hypocrisy and tendency to cry, but the scene ends by returning to the unanswerable question of whether Seymour’s poetry is actually responsible for Mouse’s death. Did story theft metaphorically kill Mouse? If so, the poetry (coupled with Mouse’s compulsion to drink rubbing alcohol and eat “bathroom cleaner sandwiches”) has become a literal “mousetrap,” for it is a mechanism that instigates Mouse’s death. This conundrum raises another related question—did Seymour imagine that Mouse was dead in order to write about him and steal his stories? After ten years of separation, are Seymour’s childhood acquaintances from the reservation effectively “dead” to him? Though Seymour did not personally give Mouse the chemicals that physically took his life, Mouse’s character here parallels Polonius, the character whom Hamlet “unintentionally” kills. To what degree are Hamlet and Seymour accountable for these deaths?¹⁴ Did Seymour’s ego kill Mouse, at least metaphorically?

To engage these questions of accountability and responsibility, we must remember that Alexie’s reconstructions of *Hamlet* do not produce easy equations of one character standing in for another. In several respects, Mouse’s character collapses and synthesizes certain elements of both Polonius and Old Hamlet. As noted above, Mouse’s death directly parallels that of Old Hamlet, for his is the death that pulls the protagonist home. Also, consider the last line of the “kitten” poem that Mouse reads: “O do remember me.” These words sound conspicuously similar to the final words offered by the Ghost of Old Hamlet to his son at the end of act 1: “Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me” (1.5.91). Yet, if Seymour has somehow killed

Mouse, then Seymour himself collapses Hamlet's character with that of Claudius. Seymour's situation realizes the great fear expressed by the young protagonist of *Flight*, the fear of being Hamlet looking into the mirror at Claudius. And if Claudius's killing of Old Hamlet precipitates Young Hamlet's eventual "madness," then Seymour has, metaphorically at least, driven himself to madness.

Let us return to the film's opening scene. After the camera-within-a-camera introduction, the film cuts immediately to a scene in Seattle. Seymour holds his book, *All My Relations*, in his hands. He sits behind the glass window of a Seattle bookstore during "National Indian Month," reading Alexie's poem, "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel." This poem partially explains Seymour's success—Americans love tragic stories about Indians, and Seymour delivers. It also parodies the expectations of Seymour's audiences who have been schooled in the "traditional" doctrines of Manifest Destiny, right away holding the mirror up to Hollywood. If it is true that "audiences know what to expect, and that is all they are prepared to believe in," then Alexie uses this scene to reflect the expectations of general American audiences. In particular, the scene targets certain expectations held by Seymour's economically influential audience of white people who like poetry. The scene ironically suggests that Seymour's white audience wants to be ridiculed by the Indian poet. This irony is personified by a white man who stops in front of the bookstore window, listens to Seymour blatantly ridicule white men, and then chooses to enter the store. Perhaps this white man feels responsible for Seymour's suffering and exploitation. Perhaps he will now purchase Seymour's book. Perhaps he expects that Seymour's book will deliver more critiques of white men, and maybe he expects these poems to soothe the guilty liberal conscience he has inherited. Perhaps he wants Seymour's book to be a vehicle of his own atonement or absolution. Slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, indeed.

While the poem in the window reflects several dimensions of audience expectations, it also conjures the presence of ghosts throughout the narrative, for "In the Great American Indian Novel, when it is finally written / All of the white people will be Indians and all the Indians will be ghosts" (*Summer of Black Widows* 95). Seymour

writes poetry rather than novels, but the ending lines of the poem raise a serious question. Has Seymour Polatkin, the great American Indian poet, made ghosts of the Indians he writes about in order to achieve his critical success with a predominantly white audience?

Later, twenty-three minutes into the film, after Mouse's "O do remember me" scene, where should Mouse's ghost appear? Inside a bookstore filled with mostly white patrons, of course. This bookstore scene renders another moment of audience-watching-audience, and it creates another site of interpenetration with *Hamlet*. In act 3, scene 4, following the play-within-a-play and the murder of Polonius, Hamlet visits Gertrude in her chamber. He accosts his mother, berating her for marrying his uncle. At this moment, the ghost of Hamlet's father enters the stage. Hamlet sees the ghost and attempts to speak with it; Gertrude does not see the ghost. Hamlet asks her, "Do you see nothing there?" (3.4.132). Gertrude responds, "Nothing at all; yet all that is I see" (3.4.133). Like Shakespeare's audience, who easily detect the ghost's presence, Alexie's audience is acutely aware of Mouse's presence in the bookstore. Like Gertrude, who does not see the ghost, Seymour's poetry audience does not see Mouse sitting in the front row. These parallels produce, as Youngberg puts it, another salient "double valence."

However, the contrasts between these two ghost scenes are insightful. In *Hamlet*, the ghost speaks, and Hamlet replies. In *Fancydancing*, Mouse attempts to speak with Seymour, but Seymour does not reply. Mouse wants to say "goodbye" to his old friend. Seymour chooses not to respond because doing so would force him to stop reading his poem, to stop performing for the poetry audience. The poem he reads, "Giving Blood," is another poem from Alexie's 1992 book *Fancydancing*. At the moment Mouse materializes, Seymour reads:

you have to clear
 our extensive screening process which involves a physical
 examination
 and interview
 which is a pain in the ass but I need the money so I sit down
 (*Fancydancing* 78)

While he reads these lines, Seymour reacts to Mouse's presence. Between glances into his own book, Seymour's eyes fixate on Mouse's ghost. Seymour's voice quivers while reading. However, unlike Hamlet, who listens intently to the words of his father's ghost, Seymour cannot interrupt his own performance, his fancydancing, to dialogue with Mouse. For Gertrude, the ghost scene becomes evidence of Hamlet's madness, but Seymour does not want to risk appearing "mad" in front of his captive audience.¹⁵ Perhaps, unlike Hamlet's hopeful wish that Gertrude can also perceive the ghost, Seymour assumes that the largely non-Indian audience will not be able to perceive Mouse's presence. Regardless, Seymour has books to sell. Seymour is so occupied with the words, words, words of his tragically ironic poem that he does not attempt to speak with the "real ghost" of the childhood friend whose stories he has stolen. The contradictions of Seymour's actions manifest themselves in this scene—a scene that is literally and figuratively Seymour's own "Mousetrap." Seymour's conscience has been caught, largely by *his own* performance.

In true Shakespearean style, Alexie constructs this scene as a metaphorical "hall of mirrors"—a poetry audience watching a poetry audience on film. The "hall of mirrors" construct speaks to Kenneth Branagh's decision to set the "to be or not to be" scene of his *Hamlet* (1996) in a literal hall of mirrors, as well as Michael Almereyda's comments on his staging of "The Mousetrap" as a film-within-a-film in his *Hamlet* (2000): "the film within the film . . . answers what Shakespeare called for in the play, in that a mirror is being held up to nature: the audience of the movie is watching an audience watch a movie. It's a hall of mirrors" (Fuchs). This shadowbox reality, this fractal of audience and near-mirror-images, moves to catch the conscience of both Seymour Polatkin's character and of Alexie's audiences who are watching the film. Thus, it is a critical moment of interpenetration—as the audience, we sift into an ambiguous liminal space between realms of performance as Alexie's *Hamlet* mutations seep into our world and we seep into the film's tricky web of implication and responsibility. We watch as Seymour milks sympathy from the almost entirely white audience while he tells the tragic

and sublime story of a Crazy Horse who cannot afford to return to the reservation because a white nurse with an ominous computer will not let him sell any blood. The literal content of the poem is soon contradicted by the fact the Seymour later drives himself home in a nice European car. Nonetheless, the bookstore audience's conscience has been caught by the words of Seymour's poetry, and Seymour's conscience has been caught by his inability to acknowledge Mouse in the middle of a performance.¹⁶ The ghost waves and mouths "goodbye," then disappears with the reading of the poem's last lines:

sorry Mr. Crazy Horse, I'm sorry Mr. Horse
 but we've already taken too much of your blood
 and you won't be eligible
 to donate for another generation or two. (*Fancydancing* 78)

Reflecting the poem's narrative of exclusion, Seymour has effectively excluded Mouse from speaking. Remember me, indeed.

Though I assert that the "Giving Blood" scene is the hall of mirrors wherein the implied expectations of Alexie's various audiences converge, I realize that it may provoke more questions. When I refer to the film's audience as "we," many of my own readers may question the degree to which the film's audience is actually a unified subject. Alexie himself plays with this idea every time he quotes the artist Johnny Satter, who worked on the set of *Fancydancing*: "this movie is going to be too white for Indians, too Indian for white people, and too gay for everybody" (qtd. in Youngberg 73).¹⁷ Youngberg goes even further with this notion of audience division, suggesting that different audiences will see different films: "The straight white viewer sees a different film than does the gay white viewer, who sees a different film than does the straight Indian, who sees a different film than the queer Indian" (73). One should probably add interior, coastal, urban, rural, and degree of literacy to Youngberg's list of dividing points. My own personal experience viewing the film in Bellingham, Washington, testifies to the divergent reactions of different audiences.

In the spring of 2002, I saw *The Business of Fancydancing* at the

Pickford Theater on two different occasions. The audience was noticeably different each night, the first one being much more reserved than the second. I found myself making a bit more noise than my fellow movie-goers on the first night, but my voice was barely audible above the rest of the audience chatter and laughter on the second night. When I first saw the film, I embarrassed myself by laughing uncontrollably when Seymour tells Agnes, upon realizing that she is both Jewish and Spokane, “Damn, so you’ve got, like, tribal numbers tattooed on one arm and death camp numbers on the other.” As someone who is Jewish-Indian myself, the line hit me instantly. Seymour’s tone and imagery were perfect. If ever there was a Sherman Alexie trapdoor through which I could fall into spontaneous laughter, here it was. I cracked up. Quickly realizing that no one else in the theater was laughing, I soon quieted down. I wondered why my fellow audience members did not find it funny. Did they want to laugh but were afraid it was inappropriate? Did they think it was too tragic to be funny? What was wrong with them? What was wrong with me? Fortunately, I was able to witness a completely different reaction the second time I viewed the film in the theater. That night, nearly everyone laughed at Seymour’s line about Jewish-Indian people. It was a loud, hard, shared laugh, the kind of laugh that can help purge the poisons from our heads. I felt vindicated. More importantly, I realized that even though both showings of the film were experienced by a Northwest audience in the same independent cinema, different audiences will indeed react quite differently.

Youngberg’s argument that different audiences see a “different film” is rather tricky, and I will return to it as a means of conclusion. For now, regardless of our identities and orientations, the “Giving Blood” scene crystallizes the film’s interpenetration of its various spheres—the Indian, the queer, the urban, the Shakespearean. We all come to the film with differing assumptions about ghosts, Indian poets, and white poetry audiences. This scene engages some aspect of our expectations and reflects them back upon us. It implicates the film’s audience in these reflections, and it prepares us for the film’s final scene.

TO BE AND NOT TO BE

Fancydancing concludes on the Spokane Reservation at Mouse's funeral. At this point, the film's weblike narrative has fleshed out the tense attractions and repulsions between Seymour and Aristotle, between the dual pull of the coastal city and the interior reservation. Ninety-two minutes into the film, Seymour finally approaches Mouse's casket under the watchful eyes of a reservation audience gathered for the ceremony. This image inverts the "Giving Blood" scene and brings the contradiction full circle—for the first time in ten years, Seymour's audience is composed of the reservation Indians about whom he writes. Seymour is not expected to embody Indigenous personas or deliver a tokenized address. Rather, he is expected to simply say something. The audience waits for something from this man made of words, words, words. Now, for the first time in the film, and presumably for the first time in ten years, Seymour Polatkin has nothing to say to his audience. Like Mouse's ghost at the reading of "Giving Blood," Seymour is now the mute.

Alexie could conclude the film by solidifying Seymour's exclusion and alienation. Rather than end with an either/or scenario, however, the film ends with both/and. Alexie allows Seymour the chance to choose, once again, between the reservation and the city. Apparently, Seymour chooses both options. The film ends by literalizing Seymour's dualisms. We see two Seymours. One Seymour screams and cries to the audience (without offering any specific words) and stays on the reservation. The other Seymour says nothing at all to the audience, then walks to his car and drives back to Seattle. Agnes is the only character to respond to this Seymour's lack of words, and she does so in song. The song itself enacts this dualism. Agnes's powerful and hypnotic singing voice has already been established, for we heard her soulful rendition of "Amazing Grace" several scenes earlier. But this final scene represents a transformation. While music is a central element of the entire film to this point (Alexie even suggests that he considers the film a "musical"), this song is entirely different from all the music we have heard thus far. This time, the words are in Salish. And to be sure, *The Business of Fancydancing*

is the first work of anglophone literature that responds to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with a song in Salish.

For a Salish-speaking audience, the song is a clearly marked trapdoor. However, chances are that many people in the film's audience will not immediately understand the literal meaning of Agnes's song. Yet the song contains something that transcends the language divide. It sends out an unmistakable wave of emotion, and when another singer joins in, it weaves chords strong enough to pull Seymour back into the room. The voices reach out, as if the song is a lifeline to Seymour. Everyone hears it—everyone in the film's actual audience and everyone in the film-within-a-film's audience. All of us who cannot understand the lyrics will nonetheless recognize the emotional depth of the music. Yet when we consider the song's English translation, the split Seymour gains even greater significance:

Who are you when you turn your back?
 Where do you go when you leave here?
 You can't hide from your truth
 Can't run from where you belong

Some things you can't choose
 Sometimes you can't have it all
 I know your dreams remind you
 Where you belong

Memories hold you tight
 When there's no comfort in white arms
 Loneliness will bring you back
 Where you belong (Alexie, "Official Website")¹⁸

The song is sung while the split Seymour says goodbye to himself in the driveway. The song's lyrics thus conclude *Fancydancing's* cycle of paradox—he simultaneously "belongs" and "does not belong on the reservation" (as he adamantly maintains when Aristotle "leaves" him in Seattle). He is a screaming mute that both speaks and cannot speak. His contradictions are exposed and unified in this final scene, for he is the poet who both "is" and "is not." In comparison to Lynn Riggs's notion of an Indian Hamlet as an "absorbed" character,

the paradoxes of this Seymour Polatkin are sustained throughout, never entirely dissolved or absorbed into one world or another. Seymour *is and is not* absorbed, in both of his homes. Riggs insists on a “residual lump of stranger things than the white race may fathom,” a bit that refutes the possibility of total absorption. Perhaps Alexie’s film makes this bit more knowable to white audiences, and to all audiences, than Riggs could have imagined possible during his day. More importantly, rather than giving this contradictory element the unappealing shape of a “residual lump,” *The Business of Fancydancing* renders it with beautiful music.

Seymour’s dualism exposes a fundamental paradox of the most well-known speech in the English language. The paradox is this—“to be or not to be” *is not* inherently a question (3.1.56). Hamlet suggests that it is, which is more of an insight into Hamlet’s suicidal tendencies than it is an actual question. It is, rather, a statement—a statement of contradiction. “Or” implies opposition but not necessarily a choice or a question. One cannot be without also not being, and vice versa. Guildenstern puts it more succinctly in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: “You can’t not be!” It is not a choice; it is a fact. Like Seymour’s sexuality, and like Agnes’s verse that “sometimes you can’t choose,” this phenomenon is not really an either/or decision. And like many of Alexie’s protagonists, Seymour can choose where he resides, but he does not fully exist on or off the reservation. He is drawn to write about the reservation, even though he does not live there. As he tells the prying journalist, “Every time I sit down to write a new poem, I want it not to be about the reservation, but the reservation just won’t let me go.” Seymour paradoxically exists in both places, present through absence and vice versa. This inextricable duality echoes Stephen Booth’s analysis of the “To be or not to be” soliloquy in his essay, “The Value of Hamlet.” Booth argues that the speech opens by presenting a series of polarizations that appear to exist in mutual opposition. As the speech proceeds, the oppositions begin to merge into each other, and what remains is a situation where polarized oppositions only seem to exclude one another, when in actuality they create each other within a system of “simultaneous likeness and difference.”¹⁹ One end of the paradox

cannot exist without its complement. In a review of the film, Bill Gallo writes, “The quandary facing Seymour Polatkin . . . is as old as literary striving itself, especially minority literary striving—how to reconcile gnawing contradictions within the self and maintain a coherent identity.” From the angle that I am offering here, Seymour’s character is actually incapable of maintaining a coherent identity by existing in either the city or on the reservation. Rather, he achieves coherence by existing, paradoxically, in both.²⁰

One should note that when Seymour drives home to the funeral, Shakespeare’s most famous line appears at the reservation boundary. The phrase, “To be or not to be,” is sung Indian-style, with looping pentatonic melodies that spiral over a steady pulsing drumbeat. As the words are sung, Seymour stops his car and approaches the boundary sign, which reads, “Welcome to the Spokane Indian Reservation.” Seymour stoops down to brush away some branches covering the bottom corner of the sign, revealing two hand-written phrases—“Home of Seymour Polatkin” and “Not anymore.” These lines, in tandem with Hamlet’s paradoxical speech, crystallize Seymour’s foundational paradox. The reservation both is and is not his “home,” both is and is not “where he belongs.” The film’s final scene, with its two Seymours, performs this unavoidable duality.²¹

“THINGS STANDING THUS UNKNOWN,
SHALL LIVE BEHIND ME”

On one hand, the immediate demographic and sociological differences between a boy from the modern Spokane Reservation and a prince from medieval Denmark might suggest that the two characters do indeed come from two completely worlds, irreconcilable worlds that cannot be synthesized by any amount of witty literary criticism. However, statistics of demography and sociology aside, Alexie’s film invites us to reckon with undeniable human connections. Arguably, the greatest difference between the characters of Hamlet and Seymour Polatkin is not one of time, place, overt sexuality, or tribal/national identity. Arguably, the greatest difference between the two men is the fact that Seymour never returned

“home” halfway through his university education in Seattle. Perhaps, if Hamlet had likewise remained at school in Wittenberg for another ten years or so, he might have grown from a solipsistic lad into a relatively well-adjusted personality who made a living in Germany. Perhaps the seductively tragic prince, his life terminally damaged by his ravenous uncle, would capitalize upon his own suffering. Perhaps he would sell his tragic verses to adulating Danskophiles in German bookstores. Perhaps he would have become, like Seymour, a man who could leave a tough funeral after a few verbal spars and one hefty scream without triggering the death of nearly everyone else in attendance. Perhaps Hamlet should have simply done what Seymour did—leave and not come back any time too soon.

Of course, such an argument is riddled with potential problems. It suggests that the ultimate answer for a modernized protagonist who is misunderstood by his/her own family is, simply, to leave and stay away. This pattern of individual exodus is very familiar to Indian people, as well as to other minorities across the continents; it is the unfortunate pattern of the “brain drain” wherein the most intellectually talented individuals are often forced to leave home in order to “succeed.” However, *Fancydancing* balances this pattern by creating parallels—and more importantly, reversals—between the characters of Seymour and Agnes. When Mouse first meets Agnes, as she drives toward the elementary school on the Spokane Reservation, Mouse suggests that she is “doing this all backwards.” She is, of course, simultaneously going forward, “starting a new trend,” and returning to the reservation that her own father left, armed with an education of her own and prepared to work as a tribal teacher.

Agnes is not necessarily Seymour's contrary or replacement. Perhaps she is more like Horatio—a character with great affection for the protagonist, the only other character who seems to have studied seriously at university, a character who ultimately returns “home” and seems to stay. However, Horatio is charged by Hamlet's dying words to “draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story” (5.2.353–54). And to be sure, Horatio is the only central character who does not die in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's masterpiece is quite the massacre, a royally incestuous massacre that triggers international warfare. On the

contrary, while centuries of American “massacres” of Indians precede the film, Seymour survives the narrative. He is alive. Agnes need not paraphrase Seymour’s life. Seymour, finally humbled at the film’s conclusion, lives on to tell his own story. One wonders how this funeral scene will cause Seymour’s poetry to evolve in the volumes to come. *Fancydancing* ends with a funeral, but life continues. The funeral audience is not massacred. They just have to look at Seymour stand silently in front of them, and perhaps they question the nasty things they have thought about Seymour while he was away.

As with all quality art, *The Business of Fancydancing* is bound to have its detractors. Some have bemoaned the film’s narrative: “Perhaps Alexie could have written a better script, one that actually had a line of motion that did not curve and go back and forth and confuse the audience” (Cisneros).²² Some have chided Alexie’s efforts to challenge himself, arguing that he “should stick with words and leave the directing to someone else” (Grady). Whenever I show the film in my classes, a few students will inevitably critique the lack of visual effects, the abrupt narrative shifts, and the overall low-budget production.²³ For many viewers, *The Business of Fancydancing* is vulgar, in its production as well as its content. Of course, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* has also been accused of vulgarity. In 1768, Voltaire described *Hamlet* as “a vulgar and barbarous drama,” going so far as to suggest that “one would imagine this piece to be the work of a drunken savage” (381). A century and a-half later, T. S. Eliot would argue that “Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle,” a claim echoed by many less-favorable reviews of Alexie’s second film (Eliot 102). Eliot’s claim might also be lodged against *Fancydancing* by a critic who feels that the *Hamlet* references and interpolations harm, rather than enhance, the film’s overall power.

However, we can also turn to Eliot for Alexie’s vindication. Alexie’s work consciously opens itself up to a dialogue with the center of the Eurowestern canon.²⁴ It opens channels for multidirectional interface. It is not merely a confrontation or an opposition; rather, it is an interpenetration of modern Native American poetry and the larger anglophone canon. As Eliot notes in “Tradition and the Individual

Talent," contemporary art alters the canon of existing art. The "really new" work affects our perception of "the existing monuments":

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (50)

Will Alexie's work persist "after the supervention of novelty"? Like Shakespeare, Alexie has achieved great popularity during his life. Future generations will ultimately determine whether or not Alexie is "for all time," as Ben Jonson famously said of the Bard (288). In the present, however, Alexie subtly yet unmistakably invites us to connect with the canon and help the "readjustment" along.

Youngberg describes this process as "'Indianing' the white literary sphere." It is curious, given Youngberg's emphasis on the "double-edged effect" of Alexie's interpenetrations, that he concludes by arguing that different audiences see "different films." Youngberg's "final analysis" rings with certain chemical veracity, and it suggests that we recall the definition of "interpenetration" itself—a mixture, wherein the ingredients retain their distinctiveness and could potentially be extracted from each other. Audience interreaction is surely an essential ingredient of *Fancydancing's* unprecedented mixtures. Given the Shakespearean context for Alexie's reflections of his own audience, however, I must respectfully critique Youngberg's conclusion. I insist that we all see the same film. As Hamlet says, it is "two dishes, but to one table" (4.3.24). We have different points of entry, but the film brings us together in moments of mutual reflection. We see different shapes within the house of mirrors, and we view from different angles, but our vision is reflected in same pieces of glass. We all look into the same mirrors; we all view the same film. This common ground can be quite useful. Interpenetration enables connection. It enables recognition, the kind of recognition that we need in order to indigenize the canon, the academy, and the globe. Perchance to dream, indeed.

APPENDIX: SELECTED LINES FROM *HAMLET* (2.2.222–375)

GUILDENSTERN. My honoured lord!

ROSENCRANTZ. My most dear lord!

HAMLET. My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?

ROS. As the indifferent children of the earth.

GUILD. Happy in that we are not over-happy. on Fortune's cap we are not the very button.

HAM. Nor the soles of her shoe?

ROS. Neither, my lord.

HAM. Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

GUILD. Faith, her privates we.

HAM. In the secret parts of Fortune. O most true, she is a strumpet. What news?

ROS. None, my lord, but the world's grown honest.

HAM. Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she send you to prison hither?

GUILD. Prison, my lord?

HAM. Denmark's a prison.

ROS. Then is the world is one.

HAM. A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o'th' worst.

ROS. We think not so, my lord.

HAM. Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.

ROS. Why, then your ambition makes it one: 'tis too narrow for your mind.

HAM. O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILD. Which dreams indeed are ambition; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

HAM. A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROS. Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

HAM. Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to th' court? For by my fay, I cannot reason.

ROS. and GUILD. We'll wait upon you.

HAM. No such matter. . . .

.....

. . . in the beaten

way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROS. To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

HAM. Beggar that I am, I am ever poor in thanks, but I thank you. And sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal justly with me. Come, come. Nay, speak.

GUILD. What should we say, my lord?

HAM. Anything but to th' purpose. You were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour. I know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

ROS. To what end my lord?

HAM. That, you must teach me. . . .

.....

. . . be even and direct with me
whether you were sent for or no.

.....

GUILD. My lord, we were sent for.

HAM. I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and Queen moult no feather. I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom

of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'ershanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals—and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me—nor woman neither. . . .

.

HAM. . . . You are welcome.

But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

GUILD. In what, my dear lord?

HAM. I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw.

NOTES

1. In addition to its role in chemical research and cultural scholarship, the concept of interpenetration is also central to the Korean tradition of Hua-Yen Buddhism.

2. See Roger Bastide's foundational study, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations* (1960).

3. Bryce's essay does not employ the term "transnational," a term that is now widely recognized in 2010, but she clearly anticipates it. Bryce's use of the plural "literatures" also suggests a certain prescience in her analysis. Though the study of "Native American literatures" is beyond the scope of Bryce's essay, her inquiry anticipates the plurality of Native literatures and their and global relevance.

4. See the end of this article for a selected list of recent scholarship that employs the construct of "interpenetration."

5. See Vaughan.

6. See Ashcroft. Also see *"The Tempest" and Its Travels* (2000), edited by Hulme and Sherman.

7. James argues that *Hamlet* is “the central drama of modern literature” and that “[w]hat gave Shakespeare the power to send it expanding through the centuries was that in *Hamlet* he had isolated and pinned down the psychological streak which characterised the communal change from the medieval world to the world of free individualism” (244). James’s point tracks with Alexie’s emphasis on one of Seymour’s central problems—his unabashed egotism and pride.

8. The “trapdoor” metaphor recalls the actual trapdoors in Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre.

9. Because the exchanges between Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are so central to this analysis, a few important passages from this scene are included in the appendix.

10. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are reflected in Alexie’s characters—by Agnes and Aristotle (Seymour’s “old school mates” from Seattle), as well as the interviewer (Rebecca Carroll) who attempts to determine where Seymour’s poems “come from.” Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the interviewer attempts to pry information from Seymour. She pushes him to explain “the source” of his poetry—“Where do the poems come from?” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been sent to help determine “the source” of Hamlet’s lunacy. Though Hamlet’s old school mates are unsuccessful in their quest, *Fancydancing*’s interviewer does succeed. She is the only character in the film to actually get Seymour to discuss the deep wound that afflicts him—the death of his sister.

11. Does Alexie mock his critics by playing a character who, according to Agnes, doesn’t read?

12. Eliot’s commentary, from an essay about Phillip Massinger in *The Sacred Wood*, intends to demonstrate the different methods of poetic appropriation for “good” and “bad” poets, doing so to delineate the differences between “mature” and “immature” poets. This question of poetic maturity is central to Alexie’s film. Seymour’s character, both as a fictional character and as an avatar for the real Alexie himself, has been developing his poetic prowess for ten years prior to returning to the reservation. He has matured as a poet, but now he must face the scorn of those back home from whom he has stolen many of his stories. Interestingly, Kevin Smokler of *Film Critic* writes: “Alexie has grown significantly as an artist since writing *The Business of Fancydancing* almost a decade ago, as evidenced by the remarkable maturity in his directorial debut.”

13. The idea of Mouse (and Mouse’s ghost) as coauthor of Seymour’s poetry speaks to one of the great (though surely apocryphal) stories about

Hamlet. Legend has it that Shakespeare himself played the Ghost during the original play's original London production in roughly 1600.

14. Hamlet, to Laertes, on madness and accountability:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. (5.2.230–32)

Hamlet pleads temporary insanity to explain the killing of Polonius. Perhaps Seymour was temporarily “taken away from himself” when he wrote the poems that killed Mouse.

15. When Hamlet speaks to the Ghost in front of his mother, she becomes convinced for the first time that her son is mentally ill: “Alas, he's mad” (3.4.106).

16. As the film's audience, we witness the entire interaction between poet, audience, and ghost. I argue that our sense of proportion within this hall of mirrors is affected by the implied question—what things, what people (both seen and unseen), are watching this film along with us?

17. In addition to Youngberg's essay, Alexie's reference to Satter's comment surfaces in the DVD commentary, in several interviews, and during live performances prior to the film's release in 2002.

18. The lyrics were composed in English by Michelle St. John and translated into Salish by Alexie's mother. Because this is written on paper, anything that this essay attempts to express about the film's final scene is basically pointless. The song is a song, and it must be heard and experienced in order to be understood. The best way to respond to this song is with another song. Thus, this essay is also a contradiction, as it must be in order to make its point.

19. The quote, “simultaneous likeness and difference,” is taken from one of Professor Booth's graduate seminars at UC Berkeley, though the summary of Booth's analysis of the soliloquy is derived from his essay.

20. Regarding this issue of the false dilemma and Hamlet's neurosis in act 3, most Shakespeareans will point to Hamlet's sense of reconciliation in act 5, scene 2: “If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows aught, what isn't to leave betimes? Let be” (5.2.216–20). Seymour Polatkin never seems to reach this sense of acceptance. Then again, would we want him to? Unlike Hamlet, Seymour survives the final act.

21. There is a certain dualism and balance in the twin dynamics of Seymour and Agnes. Seymour is born on the reservation, but he leaves. Agnes is

born off the reservation, estranged from her Indian family, but she returns. There is no character to counterbalance Hamlet in such a way.

22. This review scores the film “zero fry breads” on a scale of five.

23. Alexie's abrupt cuts between scenes, his quick shifts across time and space, could be read as an independent filmmaker's method of producing a narrative effect similar to the “trapdoors” of the old Globe Theatre.

24. In *Muting White Noise*, James Cox offers a detailed analysis of Alexie's *Indian Killer* in relation the Native and European novel traditions. This essay could be seen as a supplement to Cox's interpretations, as well as an attempt to expand it in terms of time and genre.

WORKS CITED

- Alexie, Sherman. *The Business of Fancydancing*. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 1992. Print.
- , dir. *The Business of Fancydancing*. Perf. Evan Adams, Michelle St. John, Gene Tagaban, Swil Kanim. Wellspring, 2002. DVD.
- . *Flight*. New York: Grove, 2007. Print.
- . “Hamlet on Trial, Chicago, 1994.” *Beloit Poetry Journal*. Web. <http://www.bpj.org/hamlet.html>.
- . “The Official Sherman Alexie Website.” Web. <http://www.fallsapart.com>.
- . *The Summer of Black Widows*. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 1996. Print.
- . *Ten Little Indians*. New York: Grove Press, 2003. Print.
- . *The Toughest Indian in the World*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000. Print.
- Almeryda, Michael, dir. *Hamlet*. Perf. Ethan Hawke, Julia Stiles, Diane Venora, Kyle McLaughlin. Miramax, 2002. DVD.
- Ashcroft, Bill. *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Bastide, Roger. *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978. Print.
- Bird, Gloria, and Joy Harjo, eds. *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*. New York: Norton, 1997. Print.
- Booth, Stephen. “On the Value of Hamlet.” *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*. Ed. Norman Rabkin. New York: Columbia UP, 1969. 137–76. Print.

- Branagh, Kenneth, dir. *Hamlet*. Perf. Kenneth Branagh, Kate Winslet, Derek Jacobi. Warner Brothers, 1996. DVD.
- Bryce, Germaine. "The 'Interpenetration' of Literatures." *Modern Language Journal* 33.8 (December 1949): 619–23. Print.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Une Tempête*. Paris: Seuil, 1969. Print.
- Cheyfitz, Eric. *The Poetics of Imperialism*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991. Print.
- Cisneros, Elena Azul. "Cameradancing." *Reznet: Newz and Viewz by Native American Students*. Web. http://www.reznetnews.org/voices/021125_fancyfilm/.
- Cox, James. *Muting White Noise*. Norman: Oklahoma UP, 2006. Print.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Sacred Wood*. 7th ed. London: Methuen, 1969. Print.
- Fuchs, Cynthia. "Interview with Michael Almereyda." *Pop Matters: Film*. Web. <http://www.popmatters.com/film/interviews/almereyda-michael.html>.
- Gallo, Bill. "Native Son: Sherman Alexie gets a load off his chest in The Business of Fancydancing." *East Bay Express*. Aug. 28, 2002. Web. <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/issues/2002-08-28/movies2.html/1/index.html>.
- Grady, Pam. "The Business of Fancydancing." *Reel*. 2002. Web. <http://www.reel.com/movie.asp?MID=136467&buy=open&Tab=reviews&CD=13>.
- Graham, Catherine. "'Fancydancing' dances to its own step." *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. Sept. 27, 2002. Web. <http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2002/September/27/style/stories/02style.htm>.
- Hulme, Peter, and William H. Sherman, eds. *"The Tempest" and Its Travels*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000. Print.
- James, C. L. R. "Notes on *Hamlet*." *The C. L. R. James Reader*. Ed. Anna Grimshaw. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. 243–46. Print.
- Jonson, Ben. *The Works of Ben Jonson, Vol. 3*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1910. Print.
- Justice, Daniel Heath. *Our Fire Survives the Storm*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2006. Print.
- Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden*. New York: Oxford UP, 1964. Print.
- Ortiz, Simon J. "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism." *MELUS* 8.2 (Summer 1981): 7–12. Print.
- Phelman, Sarah. "Giving Hollywood the 'Business.'" *Metro Santa Cruz*. May 8, 2002. Web. <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/cruz/05.08.02/fancydancing-0219.html>.
- Purdy, John. "Crossroads: A Conversation with Sherman Alexie." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9.4 (Winter 1997): 1–18. Print.
- Retamar, Roberto Fernandez. *Caliban y otros ensayos*. Havana, Cuba: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1979. Print.

- Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. Print.
- . *The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Denmark*. The Arden Shakespeare. Ed. Harold Jenkins. London: Routledge, 1982. Print.
- Smokler, Kevin. "The Business of Fancydancing." *Film Critic*. 2002. Web. <http://filmcritic.com/misc/emporium.nsf/2a460f93626cd4678625624c007f2b46/162713d187b1bb9088256c1foo7e6e5b?OpenDocument>.
- Stoppard, Tom, dir. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Perf. Gary Oldman, Tim Roth, Richard Dreyfuss. Thirteen WNET (NYC). Buena Vista Home Video, 1991. DVD.
- Vaughan, Alden T. "Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.2 (Summer 1988): 137–53. Print.
- Vogt, Andrea. "Sherman Alexie: 'It's All Good.'" *Washington State Magazine*. Spring 2003. Web. <http://www.thefreelancedesk.com/Alexie.htm>.
- Voltaire. From *Theatre Complet*, 1768. Reprinted in *New Variorum Hamlet*, vol. 2. Ed. Horace H. Furness. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1877. 381. Print.
- Youngberg, Quentin. "Interpenetrations: Re-encoding the Queer Indian in Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 20.1 (Spring 2008): 55–75. Print.

SELECTIVE LIST OF ADDITIONAL CULTURAL
RESEARCH REGARDING "INTERPENETRATION"

- Chasin, Alexandra. "Interpenetrations: A Cultural Study of the Relationship between the Gay/Lesbian Niche Market and the Gay/Lesbian Political Movement." *Cultural Critique* 44 (Winter 2000): 145–68. Print.
- Coffman, Elizabeth. "Women in Motion: Loie Fuller and the 'Interpenetration' of Art and Science." *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 17.49 (January 2002): 73–105. Print.
- Jackson-Holston, Caroline. "'Queen Lilies'? The Interpenetration of Scientific, Religious, and Gender Discourses in Victorian Representations of Plants." *Journal of Victorian Culture* 77.1 (Spring 2006): 84–110. Print.
- Klopper, Dirk. "Soliciting the Other: Interpenetration of the Psychological and the Political in Some Poems by Buy Butler." *English in Africa* 21.1–2 (July 1994): 141–56. Print.
- Ogden, Chris. "Diaspora Meets IR's Constructivism: An Appraisal." *Politics* 28.1 (2008): 1–10. Print.
- Tonna, Jo. "The Interpenetration of High and Folk Traditions in Malta."

- Dwellings, Settlements, and Tradition: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Ed. Jean-Paul Bourdier. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1989. 161–81. Print.
- Sacks, Howard L. “From the Barn to the Bowery and Back Again: Musical Routes in Rural Ohio, 1800–1929.” *Journal of American Folklore* 116.461 (Summer 2003): 314–38. Print.
- Winner, Irene Portis. “Segmentation and Reconstruction of Ethnic Culture Texts: Narration, Montage, and the Interpenetration of the Visual and Verbal Sphere.” *Issues in Slavic Literary and Cultural Theory*. Ed. Karl Eimermacher. Bochum, Germany: Brockmeyer, 1989. 411–31. Print.

POETRY

romanticizing warriorhood

KEITH L. CAMACHO

whenever we wounded any of those people with a shaft which entered their body, they looked at it and then marvelously drew it out, and died so forthwith.

antonio pigafetta, 1521

pigafetta, ferdinand magellan's recorder of events,
says that my ancestors "marvelously" drew shafts
out of their bodies wow

i then began to marvel at our warriorhood
at our encounters at our spears

the kind of spears my ancestors used
the kind I wanted to use
the kind my friend used

she showed me one
sketched on a paper pad
showed the sharp tip
the slim shaft
and said, "see, that's what we used"

quiet thinking *marvelled*

i then shaped my spear like my friend's own

the spear is made of ifet umbre nai, a solid red wood

old decorated as benches, clocks and other things
 around our homes everywhere, really

so i drive to a jungle in guam,
 the island magellan
 stumbled upon lost at sea: what he they you call
 "discovery"

entering the jungle
 i ask permission
 from the spirits

with my machete
 chopping away
 i find an ifet tree

cut a piece
 carrying the wood
 to my truck

drive away
 returning to the house
 the outside kitchen, actually

i begin shaping the wood
 smoothing out splinters
 cracks and chips

initially, the spear looks
 like a baseball bat
 which was part of my intention

i wanted something to play with something to
 hurt with
 something to cut and trim
 and sand and think
 about how my spear will turn out

i want jagged edges on the sides
 easy now one by one i don't want to cut myself

“looking” at the spear,
i know it’s mine

i also carve into the grains
the genealogies of
familiar capili and pakito: what she us i call: “indigeneity”

raising the spear breathing pausing
high above my head lowering quickly

thrusting piercing my abdomen

dazed i am in pain

it hurts *you hear me?* it fuckin hurts

i then “marvelously”
expunge the spear
from my body

guts spill
intestines fumbling
through my hands
i then fall to my knees
gurgling coughing spitting

looking

above me
stands antonio pigafetta
writing something

his eyes filled with excitement
as if he were a modern-day
anthropologist
historian
maybe even journalist

his hands move
faster than mine

they are quick
 like his companions' hands
 which pick and pick and pick at my entrails

i blink for the first time
 falling to my side

slowly oh sooo slowly
 so I can view
 the spaniards
 become
 the cannibals
 they are

now i can barely open my eyes

glancing up

and noticing clou ds c a l m l y mo vi n g ac ros s
 t he sky a nd in be tw een p a l m le aves

i blink again

and witness pigafetta
 walking away

he has seen enough

i laugh

laughing hard *you hear me?* fuckin hard

because my relatives
 and friends are also laying
 on their sides

withdrawing spears
 from themselves
 while drawing
 these events
 into their minds

and so we laugh

still laughing

because we never “died so forthwith”

not then

not now

not ever

Book Reviews

Kirstin C. Erickson. *Yaqui Homeland and Homeplace: The Everyday Production of Ethnic Identity*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-8165-2735-9. 186 pp.

David Martínez, *Arizona State University*

Kirstin C. Erickson, an associate professor of anthropology at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, has written a sensitive and eloquent contribution to the non-Indigenous tradition of researching cultural groups completely alien from one's own. Erickson, a Euroamerican ethnographer trained at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, embarks on a quest to comprehend the ways in which Yaqui women play an active and even central role in the creation and maintenance of Yaqui culture and identity through "everyday" activities, whether they are preparing meals and tending children, hosting friends and relatives, or constructing altars for patron saints. More specifically, Erickson benefits from the close relations she made in the villages of Potam, Rahum, Vicam, and Loma de Bacum, which are located south of Hermosillo, Mexico.

By focusing mainly on women's lives, Erickson adds a much-needed discourse to Yaqui studies that hitherto have focused on the ceremonial lives of men, as exemplified by Edward H. Spicer's 1940 study of Pascua Village in Tucson, Arizona, which places particular emphasis on the *padrinos* and the elaborate rituals during Easter week. Erickson also demonstrates that there is more to Yaqui culture and history than the heroic political resistance to Mexican colonial-

ism, as detailed in the work of Evelyn Hu-Dehart—namely, *Yaqui Resistance and Survival* (1984), which covered the years 1821–1910, at a time when the mestizo population of Mexico was seeking its own form of liberation, but which did not adequately include the needs of Indigenous peoples. Of equal importance here is the emphasis that Erickson gives to everyday activities, such as household chores, which permits the Yaqui informants to speak in a more accessible, less ritualized voice, as opposed to the ceremonial poetry captured in the collaborative work of Larry Evers and Felipe S. Molina in *Yaqui Deer Songs* (1987).

At the same time, Erickson is respectful of the work by her predecessors, especially Spicer, whom she quotes recurrently throughout her book. Indeed, Erickson reflects on her subjects' lives within the context that Spicer originally gave to Indigenous existence in his epic 1967 treatise, *Cycles of Conquest*, which examined the episodes of invasion, settlement, and resistance between Indigenous communities, including the Yaqui, and their non-Indigenous counterparts from Spain, Mexico, and the United States that occurred in the Southwest during a four-century period beginning in the 1530s. What resulted from this consistently violent and racist series of conquests were Indigenous nations whose sense of self was diminished to "enclaves," ethnic islands in a sea of social and political hostility. As both Spicer and Hu-Dehart appreciated, and which Erickson acknowledges, an important aspect of modern Yaqui identity is a conscientious effort to withstand the forces of assimilation that engulf them. With respect to the narratives that drive Erickson's discourse, the author states: "Through ordinary social practices, particularly biographical narratives, Yaqui individuals produce the meaningfulness of *their place* by tracing a history of exile and return" (43). Despite adaptations of language and dress, the Yaqui have maintained a unique ethnic identity, even as lands were seized and a diaspora northward into the upper reaches of the Sonoran Desert ensued.

A mental as well as a cultural boundary persists between the Yaqui, who call themselves *Yoeme*, and the Mexicans, whom the Yoeme call "Yoris." The Yoeme are divided not merely along village

lines but also along kinship ties, in which a system of reciprocity is preserved as a foundation for collective identity. It is within this group dynamic that the women with whom Erickson consults take on their roles as creators of customs and values. At the same time, Erickson notes with some dismay that the Yaqui women with whom she spoke identified themselves as Yaqui first, women second. “It was difficult for me,” Erickson writes, “to engage women in conversations about themselves exclusively *as women*; Yaquiness continually entered the equation” (74).

At the root of this “Yaquiness” is a history that extends back into mythical times, as recounted in the story of the Talking Tree. A man named Ramón tells this story, which goes back five thousand years “down to Belem,” an ancient Yaqui village where the Surem lived, who were no more than a meter tall but who were “very wise.” During this time, a pole appeared atop Omteme Mountain. Because the people could not comprehend what was happening, they sought a wise woman named Maapol, whom the little birds living on the mountain told the people about. Maapol lived by the sea. When Maapol arrived at the mountain, she was accompanied by an army of ants and scorpions. And when asked about the pole, she determined that it was a sign that foretold the arrival of a people from across the sea. They would bring change and a thing called “religion.” Maapol then advises the people to prepare themselves and to mark and protect their territory. The people listened, and the foreigners arrived as prophesized. New Spain was established, the Mexican Republic was founded, and leader after leader sought Yaqui lands. “They sent them to Yucatán,” Ramón finishes his story, “Oaxaca, the Valley [Valle Nacional]. But they couldn’t finish them off. Many fled to Tucson, over there. And to this day they are there. They have their own reservation and are now recognized as a North American tribe. . . . And that is how it is” (27–30).

Resistance, then, to non-Indigenous efforts at termination is something that cuts across gender, kinship, and village lines. While the communities that Erickson studied are no longer engaged in armed rebellion, their principles have not weakened as a result. On the contrary, as Erickson ably demonstrates, Yaquiness is as strong as ever in

the community. With respect to Yaqui women, Erickson asserts that their “labor and agency are inextricably bound to the production of homeplace.” Their lives, in essence, are a “celebration” of how they “transform the patios and rooms of their homes into spaces of communion and intergenerational continuity,” thereby “empowering themselves, their children, and their communities” (111–12).

In the end, Erickson’s book is a worthwhile read. She properly respects her Yaqui collaborators, permitting their narratives to drive her understanding of Yaqui customs and values. Erickson does have a tendency, though, to privilege Euroamerican theorists, which, in my opinion, does not shed any light on the Yaqui condition. Given that the author apparently learned the Yoeme language, she should have done more to use their words to explain their way of doing things. Also, in spite of being conscientious about the reforms that the anthropological community has made to its relationship between researchers and Indigenous communities, Erickson never explains her interest in the Yaquis nor what she hopes her work will achieve on their behalf. The Yaquis, after all, are still in a colonial relation with the Mexican federal government and are still resisting just as Maapol told them they should.

Eric Gansworth. *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function: Poems and Paintings*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2008. ISBN: 0-8156-0900-0. 135 pp.

Susan Bernardin, *State University of New York College at Oneonta*

In her essay “Wampum as Hypertext,” Angela Haas notes that “wampum embodies memory, as it extends human memories of inherited knowledges via interconnected, nonlinear designs with associative message storage and retrieval methods.”¹ In his third collection of poems and paintings, Eric Gansworth, an enrolled Onondaga who was raised on the Tuscarora Reservation, continues his longstanding interest in wampum as both a medium and message of Haudenosaunee intergenerational memory. Since his first book *Nickel Eclipse: Iroquois Moon*, Gansworth has turned to wampum as a guiding aes-

thetic for his mixed-genre explorations of Indigenous loss and continuance. In his preface to *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function*, Gansworth extends wampum, understood as “the beads used to create belts that held all of Haudenosaunee cultural ideas” (xvii), to inspire what he calls “Indigenous Binary Code,” or “images borrowed from popular culture, medical texts, family members who were willing to be models, friends, traditional imagery, formal western representation, objects from my home, all in communication with one another, creating hybrid new narratives by illuminating old ones with different light sources” (xvii). The wampum strings in the book’s cover painting, the striking use of purple ink on white pages, together with the purple-and-white palette of its paintings, announce *Half-Life*’s task to communicate in multiple languages of memory, from the visual to the auditory, from the cellular to the cultural.

The paintings and poems comprising *Half-Life* emphasize a living relationship with memory. The book cover’s triptych, entitled “Cross-Pollination: Imagination,” underscores Gansworth’s kinship with other Haudenosaunee artists such as Shelley Niro and Jolene Rickard, whose works also embrace the ongoing vitality of Haudenosaunee cosmology. The triptych interlinks the Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash) and three of Gansworth’s relatives. Together with its companion poem, “Cross PolliNation,” which can be read horizontally or vertically, the cover painting provides a blueprint for how to approach *Half-Life*, which demands collaborative participation of its viewer-readers. The twelve interior paintings thus reference the poems but also recombine elements from the artist’s cross-pollinated iconography: Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* shares space with Grandmother Moon; corn husk dolls with the Beatles. The paintings compress rich, interconnected knowledge systems that bank on multiple associations: for example, frequent images of interlinked wampum figures evoke the ubiquitous powerlines of Niagara Falls as well as family and national narratives.

As its title suggests, the book also breathes and beats. The rhythms of the cardio-pulmonary system—the collaborative movement of heart and lungs—animate the book’s movement in sections

beginning with “Inspiration” and continuing to “Beat,” “Pause,” “Beat,” and ending in “Expiration.” Graphic images of EKGs and anatomical hearts and lungs circulate in several of the paintings, linking physiological and emotional metaphors, or what Gansworth calls the “mechanisms of our endurance” (xvii). Together, *Half-Life*’s poems and paintings ask how we write stories of the heart—of relationships, family, culture, and nation—in the face of so much ongoing loss. Shaped by grief both immediate (the death of Gansworth’s brother) and writ larger in mass culture (the murder of John Lennon; the fall of the Twin Towers), the poems and paintings in *Half-Life* remember without ever forgetting the fragility and tenuousness of memory. Like the alternating colors of wampum beads, speakers in the poems leave and return, are absent and present, breathe in and out.

The book’s title and chapter headings alert us that the poems will follow a similar structural movement of moving inward and outward. The complicated wordplay of “half-life,” in concert with “cardio-pulmonary function,” promises more than a metaphor for the body undergoing change, of the amount of time it takes for decay, as many at half-life, or middle age, might feel. The title’s charged fusion of physiological and emotional languages feeds the book’s preoccupation with temporality and mortality, with the unsought and unexpected changes that make us suddenly aware of our bodies and their diminishing lives. For example, the sequence of paintings and poems comprising the section entitled “Pause: The Rain, The Rez and Other Things” registers both the immediate shock of a brother’s death and an ensuing year of mourning: a year between two states of being in acknowledgement of

the star path
 the dead walk for their first year after
 leaving us and before they arrive
 at their final destination. (75)

In memorializing movements of grief, these poems echo broader tensions in the book between calendrical time and cyclical time: between the sense of “time slipping away” and the sense that time

moves in circles. Through decades-old photographs and remembered conversations, the speaker tries to harvest elusive memory of “you in infantry / me in infancy” (57). Poems here sound out other ways to “accrue loss,” such as when Walter the minister

says something in Tuscarora and since
 his mother was the language teacher
 we are inclined to believe him though
 we did not understand one word and are
 thankful, sort of, when he translates. (60)

Out of his brother’s looming absence, a reminder of other haunting losses—of Tuscarora land, of home, of language—a family remakes itself, creating new narratives of being in the world.

From paintings that imagine his nieces as living embodiments the Three Sisters to his repeated invocations to remember in “Learning to Speak,” Gansworth locates memory—and the responsibility to remember—as keys to Indigenous continuance. A trilogy of poems, entitled “How to Make a Cornhusk Doll, Parts 1–3,” thus serves as an apt coda for the three major sections of the book. From part 1 to part 3, these poems tell fluid versions of the same story: breathing life out of death, making something out of nothing. A series of instructions, the poems express a wealth of intergenerational Indigenous knowledge. Each variant of the poem plays out a cycle of creating new life out of seemingly dead husks. The third poem’s closing invitation to “Imagine the possibilities. IMAGINE. And, as always, I do” (120) connects the customary absence of facial features on Haudenosaunee cornhusk dolls with the productive role of imaginative possibility. In the face of so many losses, losses both personal and shared, Gansworth finds unexpected possibility in absence. Gathering metaphors of cultural memory, he makes visible new narratives of personal, familial, and collective continuance.

In his painting, “Keeping the Beat: Imagine,” multilayered images reference a sequence of poems devoted to memory and loss in pre- and post-9/11 New York City. The most compelling section of this painting occupies the top right panel: two narrow vertical lines serve as instantly recognizable shorthand for the Twin Tow-

ers, with the plane just coming into view. Represented as a wampum design, this image indigenizes a still-unfolding story of grievous loss and its repercussions. The creation and use of wampum belts has long accompanied changing worlds and new contexts. In a world unstrung once again, *Half-Life* shows the continued power and vitality of wampum aesthetics in healing grief of both recent and longstanding origin, not only in Haudenosaunee worlds but also in the worlds linked to them.

NOTE

1. Angela M. Haas, "Wampum as Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice," *SAIL* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 80–81.

Luci Tapahonso. *A Radiant Curve: Poems and Stories*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2008. ISBN: 0-8165-2709-1. 128 pp.

Esther Belin, *Independent Scholar*

A general inquiry about Navajo poetry often lists Luci Tapahonso's name near the top. Tapahonso is one of the earliest-documented Navajo poets in publication. Her newest poetry collection, *A Radiant Curve*, confirms her place near the top of any list in American literature. Whether there exists an audience to receive her information into the American literature canon is arguable. A similar argument exists when determining whether any traditional Native Americans still exist. The semantic relationship tribes have with the English language is mostly one of invisibility, but when it does transpire there are often layers and layers of investigation and interpretation that need to occur before the manifestation. Indeed, the context to any tribal writing using the English language is calculated and complicated at best.

A Navajo-language speaker would readily disclose that the English word *poetry* does not exist in the Navajo worldview. As a fellow Navajo poet, I would simply induce that the word is nonexistent

because it is exclusive of audience. The Navajo worldview is centered on audience; many taboos exist for this purpose. Similar to how anthropologists have observed the central role of shamans in so-called primitive societies, shamans keep the tribe together with ceremonial lore to maintain a societal worldview. Shamans are the orators, the healers, the chanters. Again, a Navajo-language speaker would readily disclose that an equivalent word for *shaman* exists in the Navajo worldview. The English translation of *hataalii* is often written as “medicine man.” However, it is just a personified version of *hataal*, to sing, chant, or speak with an audience in mind.

And as most tribes, the Navajo people are especially good at adapting. The original role of *hataalii* is losing audience; the political strategy to eliminate tribes within the United States has made it essential for tribes to integrate and hybridize their worldviews to maintain a solidified tribal identity. As more Navajo writers continue to publish in the English language, the more they are confirming that English has become a tribal language. Using that tribal English, Tapahonso presents her audience with intricate and varied methods to reimagine and resume a tribal existence in midst of the persistent industrial and capitalist ideology surrounding tribal borders. Her gingerly textured tribal phrases could easily be dismissed when analyzed via Western origins of literary criticism. Although Tapahonso writes utilizing the English language as a vehicle, her writing is meant to be heard. As a tribe with an imposed orthography, the Navajo people often stress the importance of their oral transmission of data, song, and worldview. Thus, Tapahonso affirms her position as storyteller (chanter/singer) and includes an audio disc of her reading selected poems and singing her songs. The inclusion of this recording is a welcome supplement. Her selected poems include longtime audience favorites “Hills Brothers Coffee” and “Raisin Eyes.”

Tapahonso eloquently maneuvers her audience with such ease: at times, she is a dictionary, historian, theologian, shopping mall. She masters rhetorical distance and space with the use of her local and global tactics. Tapahonso opens *A Radiant Curve* with “The Beginning was Mist,” a poem many could argue is simply creating con-

text or prologue. Rather, Tapahonso has it listed equally in the table of contents with other similar poems throughout the book. Those localized poems are meticulously placed throughout the text to serve the social function of poetry. Tapahonso's oral tradition ideology requires a subordination of style (what many would identify as the literary art via Western standards) to the subject (audience memory and engagement) because it is so readily connected to tribal well-being. Thus, tribal writers hold an even greater burden when offering their texts as contributing social elements to collective survival.

On a global level, Tapahonso's volume is vital as a noninvasive academic text. As a scholar, Tapahonso contributes to numerous fields of study: linguistics, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and so forth. The real functioning art of this volume stems from the sestina "The Canyon was Serene." Tapahonso weaves her audience into the query around the Navajo philosophy of *hozho*, beauty, balance. She uses the ancient sestina form to ponder integral Navajo practices.

For me, the Beauty
Way is abstract most of the time. At dawn, I rush out and
drive
to work instead of praying outside. (51)

By utilizing this troubadour form of verse, Tapahonso presents her audience with her translation of the Beauty Way. This poem singly functions as an oratory to re-imagine *hozho* in thirty-nine lines. It takes on the chant structure of repetition in form and word placement. Tribes only exist if tribal members create and live by manifestations of existence. Her radiant audience is given the permission to embrace their own methodologies from collective memory to learn

that beauty
can't be forced. It comes on its own. It's like the silky sheen of
horses
on cool summer mornings. It's like the small breezes, the
sway and rise
of an Appaloosa's back. (52)

In the end, Tapahonso fulfills the requirements of great literature. She takes her audience on a quest involving monster slaying, tragedy, and comedy. But most of all, she models for young Indigenous writers opportunities to grasp the English language as a tribal language capable of illuminating and eliminating vast distances: “We / must remember the worlds / our ancestors / traveled. / Always wear the songs they gave us” (89).

Jacqueline Shea Murphy. *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-8166-4776-7. 296 pp.

Patrice Hollrah, *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Jacqueline Shea Murphy takes the title of her examination of Native American modern dance histories from Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Almanac of the Dead* and quotes Silko in the epigraph to the introduction, “Dance as Document”: “Throughout the Americas, from Chile to Canada, the people have never stopped dancing; as the living dance, they are joined again with all our ancestors before them, who cry out, who demand justice, and who call the people to take back the Americas!” (1). Murphy chooses an apt quotation to describe the political implications of dance for Indigenous peoples in her quest to explore the relationships “between Native American dance and the history and development of modern dance in America” (4). In a well-researched and documented investigation, the author engages with Native dance, always placing her analysis in the contexts of Native sovereignty, land, community, culture, history, politics, economics, spirituality, colonization, and Christianity. Her approach avoids the objectification of Natives and instead focuses on a “dance studies model, with its attention to corporeality and the energies and agencies engaged by bodies moving, within particular frames and contexts, in time and space” (8), allowing her to see Native American dance as a “form of knowledge and history” (9), a document of sorts. Murphy acknowledges her position as a non-Native scholar who presents herself as an expert on Native

American dance and realizes that she must address her relation to the subject with integrity, which she does by sharing her research with the Native dancers and choreographers before publication of her book.

The first part of the book, “Restrictions, Regulations, Resiliencies,” contains three chapters, and the first, “Have They a Right? Nineteenth-Century Indian Dance Practices and Federal Policy,” discusses U.S. and Canadian governmental policies that restricted Native dancing from the 1880s through 1951. In the second chapter, “Theatricalizing Dancing and Policing Authenticity,” Murphy shows how the governments contained Native agency by allowing stage representations of Indians in shows like *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, in which audiences could see Indians as exciting but safe. Murphy includes François Delsarte’s ideas about the body’s correspondences between inner emotion and outward gesture, the “real” and “natural,” ideas grounded in Christian thought: “as Delsarte promoted it, bodily movement expressed the godlike universal ‘truth’ of inner selves” (53–54). On the one hand, the staged production created “authentic” Indians for the public’s consumption, and on the other hand, the Native performers had control over their own bodies in the arena. Native dancers and the Delsartian theory of Christianized ideals contributed to a “modern dance rhetoric that also saw dance as accessing a natural” (80).

The final chapter of part 1, “Antidance Rhetoric and American Indian Arts in the 1920s,” deals with the continued federal efforts to curtail Native American dancing, the Native American dancers’ response to the restrictions, and non-Native artists and intellectuals’ protests. Murphy researches hundreds of letters and documents in the U.S. National Archives that illustrate how American Indian voices express different worldviews of religion: “These responses indicate conceptions of dance as integral both to religious practices and to land and water rights and link attempts to curtail dancing with desire for Indian land and resources” (82–83). Federal rhetoric labeled Indian dance as “wasteful” and “excessive”; non-Native supporters of Indian rights argued for Native American dance as “art” and “amusement” (83). Neither the federal officials nor the non-

Native artists see Native American dance as a fundamental part of religious practice.

The second part of the book, "Twentieth-Century Modern Dance," begins with the chapter "Authentic Themes: Modern Dancers and American Indians in the 1920s and 1930s," that analyzes U.S. choreographers' attraction to Native American dance in the context of federal Indian policies of the 1920s and 1930s—for example, the American Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935. American Indian dance, like American Indian art, was available to non-Native American collectors, totally disconnected from its community. Murphy takes an in-depth look at choreographers Ted Shawn and Lester Horton. Shawn used Indian dance and its associated "full-blooded masculine vigour" as a means to "negotiate issues of masculinity and sexuality in an art form that faced charges of effeminacy" (114). Horton used Indian dance for what it had to offer in terms of "theater process and practice" (114). Both choreographers appropriate Indian dance for their own means, demonstrating how non-Natives assume the right to knowledge about Indian peoples and cultures in a "primarily visual capitalist economy" (115), portraying their understanding of Indian authenticity and identity, a familiar trope of outsiders defining Indians.

The second chapter of part 2, "Her Point of View: Martha Graham and Absent Indians," pays special attention to the "absent Indian woman in Graham's signature piece," *Appalachian Spring* (149). Similar to Toni Morrison's thesis in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Murphy argues that "Native American culture and dance played an active, if not always visible, role in Graham's dance process and choreography much later than has been usually acknowledged" (149), and she also dissects the problematic nature of a white woman representing the absent Indian woman. The final chapter of part 2, "Held in Reserve: José Limón, Tom Two Arrows, and American Indian Dance in the 1950s," explores the complexities of arguing for these two as Native choreographers and their challenges to the U.S. government's termination and relocation policies.

The final part of the book, "Indigenous Choreographers Today,"

begins with the chapter “The Emergence of a Visible Native American Stage Dance,” which discusses the growth of Aboriginal and Native American stage dance, precipitated by the “Red Power” movement and the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s and the identity politics and multiculturalism of the 1980s. Murphy considers the influence of the American Religious Freedom Act in 1978 and the “relations between stage dance and ceremonial practice as engaged by Native choreographers” (197). In the second chapter of part 3, “Aboriginal Land Claims and Aboriginal Dance at the End of the Twentieth Century,” Murphy illustrates the role of dance in the settlement of land claims in Canada. She goes on to interview dancers and choreographers who all define land as a central part of their dances. Marrie Mumford, director of the Aboriginal Arts Program at the Banff Centre for the Arts for Aboriginal People, says, “Being in contact with the earth gives us time to reflect, reminds us of who we are and where we come from, connecting us to the great mystery, ancestral roots, and ancient teachings, to guide us in creating new stories that contribute to defining our relationships” (227). The final chapter, “We’re Dancing: Indigenous Stage Dance in the Twenty-First Century,” explores a few of the stage dance pieces that Murphy has viewed, examining “how they make visions of a multilayered, interconnected, cyclical, spiritually animated world clear through their staging and through the stories their choreography tells” (240). She discusses how Native dancers address a history of colonization and reject that violence, thereby empowering themselves on the road to healing.

The People Have Never Stopped Dancing is the winner of the 2008 de la Torre Bueno Prize for Outstanding Book of the Year and a *Choice* Outstanding Academic Title, awards richly deserved, for Murphy does a fine job of challenging stereotypes about American Indian dance and offers the reader new ways to think about the agency of Native dancers’ bodies on stage.

Jordana Finnegan. *Narrating the American West: New Forms of Historical Memory*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1-60497-519-2. 207 pp.

Gregory Wright, *Snow College and Utah Valley University*

In *Narrating the American West*, Jordana Finnegan explores the various ways western writers use the autobiographical genre to forge connections between personal and cultural identities and experiences. Finnegan is especially concerned with the autobiographical narratives of writers living in and writing about the “New West,” a region where “a diverse variety of texts . . . revise colonial narratives on multiple levels” (9). Euroamerican writers Gretel Ehrlich, Annick Smith, and William Kittredge figure prominently in New Western revisionism and attempt to rewrite the colonial discourse of Frederick Jackson Turner’s West in their own personal narratives, yet as Finnegan argues, too frequently their efforts reinscribe the concept of the West as a realm for white men. In Finnegan’s “New West,” Native American writers Janet Campbell Hale, Simon Ortiz, and Leslie Marmon Silko as well as Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros use autobiography to confront western colonial narratives and also to challenge the autobiographical form itself.

Finnegan’s reading and critique of New Western autobiographical narratives are particularly astute. Her examination of these texts reveals deep contradictions in how these narratives both challenge and reproduce the grand, colonial narrative of the American West. In *The Solace of Open Spaces*, Ehrlich reverses conventional, Western gender roles as she depicts her work and life on a Wyoming sheep ranch, but as Finnegan argues, “this inversion . . . ultimately reinforces mythic versions of the cowboy and colonial representations of landscape, while neglecting the complex histories of racial conquest” (15). Despite the critical reception Smith’s *Homestead* has received for its romantic descriptions of Montana and call for wilderness preservation, Finnegan reads the narrative as a trope of the West as safety valve. While Smith does call for environmental protection, her memoir, according to Finnegan, “erases contemporary Native American claims to the land . . . by figuring indigenous

people as (tragically) defeated and disappeared” (61). Kittredge’s *Hole in the Sky: A Memoir* serves as another example of a New Western that attempts to revise historical narratives of colonization and possession. Although the memoir reads as a confession and a repudiation of the “ownership ideology that produces mental and ecological breakdowns,” Finnegan notes that, while Kittredge condemns his family’s role in the conquest of southeastern Oregon, he also “obscures their complicity in Native American dispossession” (107–08). Finnegan’s analysis reveals that, despite the noble efforts of New Western writers, their narratives “leave intact certain aspects of colonial representations” (152).

In the first three chapters of her study, Finnegan pairs Ehrlich’s collection of autobiographical essays with Janet Campbell Hale’s *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter*, Smith’s personal narrative with Simon Ortiz’s *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land*, and Kittredge’s memoir with Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller*. Her intent in these pairings is to show how the voices and narratives of Native peoples, which are too frequently ignored, complicate the New Western paradigm and to demonstrate how Native American writers use autobiographical acts to refocus the re-envisioning of New Western histories and memories. According to Finnegan, autobiographical writing forges connections between personal and cultural experiences and “provides an opportunity for marginalized subjects to reclaim a voice by articulating their versions of selfhood in a historical context” (10). While Native writers have adopted and appropriated Western literary forms to ensure cultural survivance, Finnegan provides only a limited discussion of the contentious use of the term “autobiography” in Native American literary and critical study. For example, she contends that Hale uses personal narrative to invert the conventional Indian captivity narrative and to convey her individualized feelings of confinement and marginalization in the West. Conversely, Ortiz and Silko, Finnegan argues, form a synecdochic self in order to narrate the resistance and survival of colonized peoples and their ancestral homelands in the Southwest. The work of Kathleen Sands and Arnold Krupat serves as Finnegan’s theoretical basis for understanding the prob-

lematic nature of autobiography in Native American critical theory. Finnegan does not consider Native American theoretical approaches like LeAnne Howe's examination of "tribalography," an omission that ultimately weakens her study.

The concluding chapter of Finnegan's study explores the various ways that Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros casts the New West as *mestizaje* and subverts the popular mythology of the West. Cisneros's novel *Caramelo* depicts a region where identity is "multidimensional and interconnected," crossing both literal borders and metaphorical borders of gender, race, and culture. As Finnegan asserts that the autobiographical acts of Hale, Ortiz, and Silko challenge and resist colonial discourse and its imposition of identity on colonized peoples, she argues that Cisneros's novel is the fulfillment of those efforts: "Moreover, while each [the projects of Hale, Ortiz, and Silko] draws upon personal memory and cultural narrative to rewrite colonial histories, *Caramelo* explicitly theorizes a borderlands consciousness" (149). While Finnegan's inclusion of Cisneros in her study introduces another narrative form of rhetorical resistance, the addition of this chapter seems puzzling. Finnegan seems to suggest that Cisneros's novel demonstrates the possibility for an integration of personal/individual and cultural/communal forms of identity, but she does not address the significant differences between Chicana/o and Native American identity.

Narrating the American West offers an important critique of New Western autobiography and historiography and illuminates the counternarratives of Native and Chicana/o writers; however, this study requires a more thorough examination and discussion of the complications that autobiography and Chicano/a claims to an Indigenous identity create for Native peoples.

Contributor Biographies

ESTHER BELIN is a writer and two-dimensional artist who graduated from the University of California, Berkeley and the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 2000 she won the American Book Award for her first book of poetry, *From the Belly of My Beauty*.

SUSAN BERNARDIN is associate professor of English at SUNY Oneonta. She is a coauthor of *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880–1940* and the author of articles on contemporary and foundational Native writers, including Eric Gansworth, Louis Owens, Mourning Dove, and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin. She is currently working on a new edition of *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song*, in collaboration with Karuk tribal members and non-Native scholars in northwestern California.

KEITH L. CAMACHO is an assistant professor in the Asian American Studies Department at the University of California, Los Angeles. He researches issues concerning the sovereignty and survival of Indigenous peoples in the Pacific Islands.

RENATE EIGENBROD has been teaching Canadian Aboriginal literatures since 1986, for the last seven years in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. She is the author of a monograph, *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada*, and the coeditor of several publications of literary criticism, most recently of a special literature issue of *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* and of *Across Cultures/Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures*, a comprehensive volume of scholarship, creative writing, and interviews.

BLAKE M. HAUSMAN is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of California, Berkeley. His dissertation, “Yellow Bird’s View from the Ridge: John Rollin Ridge, Joaquin Murrieta, and Future Nationalisms,” explores Ridge’s novel as a tricky origin point in the canons of both Native American literature and transnational Murrieta narratives. Hausman is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and his work has been published in *SAIL* and *AIQ*.

PATRICE HOLLRAH is the director of the Writing Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and teaches for the Department of English. She is the author of “*The Old Lady Trill, the Victory Yell*”: *The Power of Women in Native American Literature* and other essays on various authors in American Indian literatures.

DAVID MARTÍNEZ (Gila River Pima) is an assistant professor of American Indian studies at Arizona State University. He has published articles in *Wicazo Sa Review*, the *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, and the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*. He is also the author of *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought*.

MAREIKE NEUHAUS holds a PhD in English from Marburg University, Germany. She is currently an Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow at the Jackman Humanities Institute, where she is researching the cultural specificity of ancestral language influences in Indigenous literatures composed in English. Her research interests include Indigenous literatures, languages, and notions of peoplehood as well as Canadian literature, linguistics, and rhetoric.

CHANNETTE ROMERO is an assistant professor of English at the University of Georgia, where she teaches Native and ethnic American literatures.

GREGORY WRIGHT is an English instructor at Snow College and Utah Valley University. His essay “(Re)Writing the Captivity Narrative: Sarah Winnemucca’s Life among the Piutes Records White Male Sexual Violence” was recently published in *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*.

Major Tribal Nations and Bands

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, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712, or send an e-mail to bryan.russell@mail.utexas.edu.

The Grand Council of the Crees
2 Lakeshore Road
Nemaska, QC JoY 3Bo
Canada
Phone: 819-673-2600
Fax: 819-673-2606
Web site: <http://www.gcc.ca>

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
115 Sixth St. NW Ste. E
Cass Lake, MN 56633
Phone: 218-335-8200; 800-442-3909
Fax: 218-335-8309
Web site: <http://www.llojibwe.com>

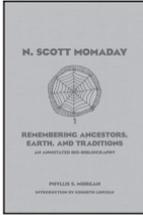
Navajo Nation
PO Box 9000
Window Rock, AZ 86515
Phone: 928-871-6000
Web site: <http://www.navajo.org>

Onondaga Nation
102 W. Conklin Ave.
Nedrow, NY 13120
Phone: 315-492-1922
Web site: <http://www.onondaganation.org>

Pascua Yaqui Tribe
747 S. Camino de Oeste
Tucson, AZ 85757
Phone: 520-883-5000
Fax: 520-883-5014
Web site: <http://www.pascuayaqui-nsn.gov>

Spokane Tribe of Indians
PO Box 100
Wellpinit, WA 99040
Phone: 509-458-6500
Fax: 509-458-6597
Web site: <http://www.spokanetribe.com>

White Earth Indian Reservation (Anishinaabe)
PO Box 418
White Earth, MN 56591
Phone: 218-983-3285
Fax: 218-983-4299
Web site: <http://www.whiteearth.com>



N. SCOTT MOMADAY

**Remembering Ancestors, Earth, and Traditions
An Annotated Bio-bibliography**

By Phyllis S. Morgan

\$60.00 HARDCOVER · 352 PAGES, 6 B&W ILLUS.

N. Scott Momaday, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *House Made of Dawn* (1969) and National Medal of Arts awardee, is the elder statesman of Native American literature and a major twentieth-century American author. This volume marks the most comprehensive resource available on Momaday. Along with an insightful new biography, it offers extensive, up-to-date bibliographies of his own work and the work of others about him.



UNIVERSITY OF
OKLAHOMA PRESS

2800 VENTURE DRIVE
NORMAN, OK 73069
TEL 800 627 7377

OUPRESS.COM

facebook.COM/OUPRESS

YouTube.COM/OUPRESS

American Indian Quarterly

Edited by Amanda Cobb-Greetham

A forum for diverse voices and perspectives spanning a variety of academic disciplines, *AIQ* is committed to publishing work that contributes to the development of American Indian studies as a field and to the sovereignty and continuance of American Indian nations and cultures.



To order subscriptions or
back issues:
WWW.NEBRASKAPRESS.UNL.EDU
or 402-472-8536

UNIVERSITY OF
NEBRASKA PRESS



Available online through your
library's subscription to:



*The
Florida Review*



The Florida Review
Summer 2010
Native American Writing

Featuring Allison Hedge Coke,
Geary Hobson, Santee Frazier,
Orlando White, Sherwin Bitsui,
Stephen Graham Jones, and more.



Subscriptions:

In the U.S. \$15 per year (2 issues)
Single copies available for \$8.00

The Florida Review
Department of English/UCF
P.O. Box 161346
Orlando, FL 32816

www.flreview.com