

*ÂCIMISOWIN* AS THEORETICAL PRACTICE:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUAL TRADITION IN CANADA

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2007

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines autobiographical writings by Indigenous authors in Canada, giving attention to a rich archive that has been understudied or misunderstood. Drawing on the insights of autobiography theory and Indigenous studies, I critique the still prevailing influence of founding scholars of Native American autobiography who disseminated the belief that autobiography is a European invention, that there are no prior models in Indigenous cultures and that Indigenous autobiographies must therefore be the result of European contact. The lack of Indigenous perspectives in the academy has left many of these assumptions unchallenged and I introduce personal stories modeled on Cree-Métis storytelling methods as a corrective.

Inspired by the work of previous Indigenous scholars who have relied on *autobiography as theoretical practice*, I introduce a version modeled on *âcimisowin*, Cree autobiographical narratives, to support my contention that Indigenous authors in Canada write autobiographically as part of varying Indigenous intellectual traditions. This approach prioritizes Cree intellectual and cultural perspectives that considers one's identity and position to be a central rather than peripheral concern in research. Focusing on *wâhkotowin*, the Cree value of kinship or interrelatedness, as well as *kisteanemétowin*, respect between people, I provide new readings of texts that accommodate Cree and Métis epistemologies. In this work I ally myself with members of the Indigenous literary sovereignty movement that insist that attention be paid to the innovations and contributions of Indigenous intellectuals that to date have been neglected.

Seeing autobiography as an Indigenous intellectual tradition allows us to move beyond colonization as a prism with which to examine Indigenous life and literature. It allows us to see Indigenous identity not as hybrid but as living with contradiction. Some of these contradictions, like anxieties, are produced by the multiple and conflicting discourses that place special demands on Indigenous autobiographers, subject to a scrutiny that non-Indigenous autobiographers evade.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I originally finished my Master of Arts degree in the mid-1990s I decided not to continue directly into a Ph.D, partly because I was determined to spend time with my growing family but also because I was aware that so undeveloped was the field of Indigenous literatures that there were few faculty who would have been qualified to supervise me. For this reason I must begin by thanking my supervisor, Margery Fee, as I have directly benefited from her decision, mid-career, to develop an expertise in this field. More than that, she has been a model for the sort of supervisor that I hope one day to be. While I have always had confidence in her ideas and opinions, and appreciated her vast expertise, I have been greatly impressed by her ability to reconsider issues should I bring in new perspectives. While her dedication to Indigenous scholarship at UBC has been impressive, equally influential to my work has been her kind encouragement.

I have been equally fortunate to have on my committee Jo-ann Archibald, who as an Indigenous scholar has been inspirational to me. Not only has she developed a culturally-appropriate academic style in her own writing but her integrity and commitment to Indigenous perspectives have greatly influenced my research directions. I have also had the privilege to work with Laura Moss, whose energy and intellectual vigour are remarkable, able to demonstrate through insightful questions what parts of my argument have needed further explanation or interrogation. A special thank you also to Susanna Egan, who was on my pro tem committee, who introduced me to the field of autobiography theory and was especially supportive to me in my first few years in graduate school, when I was my most unconfident. Also thank you to my external reader, Paul DePasquale. I very much appreciated his careful reading of my dissertation and suggestions for improvement, many of which I plan to incorporate in future work.

Throughout the past six years I have been very aware of successes by Indigenous faculty that have encouraged me as I have completed my work. I must thank Graham Hingangaroa Smith for implementing the SAGE program, a support group for Indigenous grad students, both here at UBC and across British Columbia. Thanks also to Laura Donaldson, as well as to Mark Vessey in the department of English, who had the inspiration to bring her from Cornell to teach for a semester. I can not imagine my work without her formative introduction to Native American literary theory. I have been very fortunate to become a part of the First Nations House of Learning community and wish to thank especially Alannah Young and Madeleine McIvor for their example, both professional and personal, and recognize the efforts of Linc Kesler in First Nations Studies and Wendy Frisby in Women's Studies, who provided me with valuable and relevant research and teaching opportunities.

As for my fellow graduate students I owe many debts, most especially to Christine Stewart, Elizabeth Maurer, Rauna Kuokannen, Dolores Van der Wey, Mathabo Tsepa, Laurie McNeill, Manuela Costantino and Joanna Clarke, as well as the members of my 2001 cohort, and the members of the Autobiography Reading group. I am also grateful to those colleagues who so warmly welcomed me to Indigenous literary circles when I was clearly junior to them; thanks especially to Jo-Ann Episkenew, Renate Eigenbrod, Kristina Fagan, Jennifer Kelly, Cheryl Suzack and Jonathan Dewar. I could not, of course have completed this without the encouragement from friends who understood the enormity of this undertaking. Thank you especially to Suzanne Mathieson, Jan Fraser, Jan Hare, Jackie Rea, Myra Rutherford and Selina Funnell. I could not have accomplished this without my family. With gratitude I would like to thank Sam Davis, Eli Reder-Davis, Mischa Reder-Davis and most especially Eric Davis, for their sustaining love and support.



## **DEDICATION**

For my parents.

## **Introduction**

When I was a child my mother slept a lot. It is hard for me to judge whether she slept more or less at certain times in my life but it is generally true that I would find her napping on the couch when I came home from school. This is not to say that I found this unusual and I generally did not think about it much at all.

When I was in grade five we moved off of the local army base and to the outskirts of a small city on Vancouver Island to a house with a gigantic garden and apple and plum trees, with an empty lot full of blackberry bushes on one side and neighbours we rarely spoke to on the other. Because Mom didn't work outside the home and because she didn't drive, she had many fewer opportunities to see other people than when we lived on the army base. She no longer had other military wives to have tea with, and my brother and I could no longer go outside and find a mass of children within arms' reach. At some point I told her that she was depressed and bored and she told me that she was fine and that I was the one who was unhappy. While I remember these words, I easily dismissed them because it seemed to me that given her complete lack of autonomy -- town was too far for her to walk to, she was physically unable to go anywhere unless my father or her friends drove her, her sole source of income was the grocery money my father gave her on payday -- she had to have felt trapped.

I never questioned why it was that she couldn't walk into town but this was just something Mom didn't do. She had weak ankles and couldn't walk that far. Part of the reason could be explained by her weight problem. Pictures at her wedding show her as a slender twenty-year-old who was 5'4" and one hundred pounds. But by the time I was in kindergarten and she was not yet thirty she was almost two hundred pounds, a weight she fought with for most of her adult life. She was a member of TOPS -- take off pounds sensibly -- and went every Wednesday night for a weigh-in and a meeting with the girls, and then they would head out for Chinese food afterwards. That being said, I never remember Mom overeating. She seemed to have no compulsion to snack or eat sweets, but the fact that she was heavy was proof positive of her need to diet. She had magnets on our fridge with pictures of cartoon pigs with captions that warned about the dangers of overeating; inside one of the cupboards was a postcard of a naked obese woman to act as another cautionary; every week TOPS would dictate a no-no, the one thing that during the week its members were not allowed to eat. Some weeks Mom lost a few pounds and was that week's "greatest loser" and some weeks she gained a few and would come home and sigh. At the age of eleven I joined the pre-teen TOPS group and still remember the weekly pledge: "I am an intelligent person; I will control my emotions and not let them control me; every time I overeat in private my excess weight is there for all the world to see; what a fool I've been." I still credit the weekly weigh-ins and the tricks I learned to fool the scale as the source of years of panic around my weight.

Because my dad had his own demons, he was only supportive intermittently. Otherwise, inspired by his military training, he would try to cajole or coerce her to exercise more and drop the weight and when I lost thirteen pounds in grade seven he

would refer to me and praise my self-discipline, suggesting that she take a page out of my book. Willpower was the buzzword. You had to have willpower.

What really changed our family's eating habits, however, was my Dad's first heart attack when I was twelve. After that Mom rarely cooked with the frying pan, she never made corned beef and cabbage --the meat was too fatty and salty -- and she started to use wholewheat flour when she baked bread. She still used white flour and lard to make bannock, though, and when Dad went away she would make pan-fried potatoes as a treat.

My parents didn't consider modern conveniences necessary. Until my father's death in the mid-1980s, Mom used a wringer washing machine and in the summer a clothes line. She canned everything from plums and bread and butter pickles to apple butter and blackberry jam. While she would try the fancy Duncan Hines cake mixes and the occasional Hamburger Helper, she always made her own pastry for her pies and wouldn't think of buying a chicken that was already cut up because that was a waste of money.

Still, if Dad had been drinking he would get into a tirade about how messy the house was and start "mucking out" the kitchen, throwing things and insults. He would blame what he considered her laziness and lack of ambition on the fact that she was an Indian; "they didn't even have the wheel for Christ sakes," he would say. Sometimes she would yell back at him and call him a square head but usually she would say nothing, and reprimand me if I said anything; "he just wants someone to argue with," she would tell me.

Because it was difficult to explain Mom's lack of energy -- there were lots of things that my friends' mothers could do that Mom didn't -- the charge of laziness was

difficult to dispute. The fact that she was the anchor in the family, balancing out my Dad's moods or my brother's tribulations at school, or that no one was ever turned away at a mealtime or refused a cup of tea, was never seen as work.

It was only when my Auntie Alice, eighteen years older than Mom, became bed-ridden in her 50s that we began to understand exactly how myotonic dystrophy affects a person. Most people, including our family doctor, understood Duchenne's syndrome, a form of muscular dystrophy that affects children. But few knew the characteristics of myotonic dystrophy, how it only takes effect in adulthood, slowing down one's metabolism and sapping one's energy, as one's muscles slowly waste away. Even fewer knew that there was a particular syndrome for sons of affected mothers. From childhood these boys have a lack of muscle tone and energy to learn that hampers their progress in school, as well as other health complications. Even though in the early 1980s most branches of our family provided blood samples to determine how extensively this disease had hit us, no one could imagine that two decades later only one of my mother's nine brothers and sisters would survive. Neither could anyone imagine just how differently the disease would affect each sibling. My Uncle David could still walk around at age sixty, albeit with a walker, but had to have a tracheotomy because he could no longer swallow food. My Mom, like Auntie Alice, could still eat and drink but was bed-ridden by age 58 and could not so much as adjust her head if it slipped off a pillow. And of all the aunts, uncles and cousins, my brother is the only one to be on oxygen because the muscles in his diaphragm are not working well enough to allow him to fully inflate his lungs.

When I think about how I have described my childhood and my family in the past, I cannot help but notice how my versions of these stories have shifted over the years. As a teenager I became very religious and believed that my family needed salvation and the grace of God. As a young woman my religious devotion waned and I was more critical of patriarchy and my father's drinking problem. Feminism provided a cogent critique. Because of my mother's role in our family, she was bereft of economic opportunities, with no access to resources that could alleviate some of our distresses.

If I ever thought to frame our family story as an illness narrative, I would have, in earlier years, focused on heart disease, alcoholism, or perhaps learning disabilities or eating disorders. Until I was in my twenties I couldn't have discussed the effects of myotonic dystrophy because we didn't know what they were. While I now recognize how this disease affected us, I am hard pressed to dismiss previous versions, previous interpretations. It wasn't wrong, I don't think, to hope for divine intervention or acknowledge the oppressive forces that bore down upon us. But just as I truly appreciate how devastating M.D. has been to our family, I also recognize that far more influential on our lives than this disease and subsequently Mom's weakness, were her strengths. Besides her ability to bear hardship was her talent at storytelling. Mom told us stories constantly, over dinner, over cups of tea, over games of Rummy or Trouble. Because of the many forces that conspired to keep her at home, she was usually there and she would talk constantly about her life, focusing especially on her childhood, our family, our aunts and uncles and grandparents and other relations. We all -- Dad included -- loved to hear her tell her stories because she was so funny.

What I recognize now is that even though she rarely spoke Cree unless her siblings were around, she drew on Cree storytelling traditions to entertain and share with us, as a way to encourage and be with us. According to the generic categories as described by Cree linguist H.C. Wolfart, she never told *âtayôhkêwin*,<sup>1</sup> Cree sacred stories that often featured the trickster, *wîsahkêcâhk*. In fact she insisted that *wîsahkêcâhk* was just like Santa Claus and nothing to worry about. Neither did she tell us *kayâs-âcimowin*, Cree historical accounts, or *kakêskihkêmwîn*, which was counsel. Rarely would Mom dispense advice and while her stories revealed her understanding of what was good or bad, she never told morality tales. In fact she was always hesitant to tell other people what to do. When as a little girl I asked her whom I should grow up to marry her response was typical: "It doesn't matter to me," she said. "I don't have to live with him."

Instead Mom told *âcimowin*, which are stories or accounts of daily life, although "in this genre the supernatural is decidedly a part of the factual world" (Wolfart 246). Mom relied heavily on a sub-genre of *âcimowin* that was humorous. Wolfart explains:

Autobiographical texts commonly take the form either of *wawiyatâcimowin*, 'funny story' or an *âcimisowin*, a 'story about oneself,' told in self-mocking detachment, which lets the audience laugh along with the narrator about some misfortune he or she suffered. The former type also covers a variety of anecdotes, sometimes risqué or unselfconsciously racist but most typically marked by bitter irony. (246)

Sometimes Mom's stories would sound rude if you didn't understand the context. There was the time late one night when she went out to the outhouse, only to sit down on her

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<sup>1</sup> Because Cree spelling is not standardized, many of the sources I have relied upon throughout my research vary their spelling. I have decided to quote each term as spelled in the original, only footnoting when I judge that not to would confuse the reader.

sister Vicky who had had a bit too much to drink and had fallen asleep. Or there was the time one of my cousins decided to use bug spray to cure a sexually transmitted disease, only to find it burned his groin so badly that he had to run all the way from my grandparent's house down to the lake to wash it off. It is hard to tell stories like she did. As in any story-telling tradition it was also her inflection, the rolling of her eyes, the way she would exhale to dismiss something that was ridiculous, that added meaning. Amazingly, she rarely told the same story in exactly the same way, each time emphasizing and re-emphasizing different points.

Partly because I was raised listening to my mother's *âcimowina*, I was not surprised as I began to read non-fiction prose by Indigenous authors in Canada that I recognized that many included --and relied upon -- their own life stories. Whatever the genre -- from history, political commentary, public address, literary criticism or journalism -- I noted that writing by Indigenous authors integrated autobiographical detail. What did surprise me, however, was that this archive has been understudied and, I believe, undervalued.

Identifying this as an ideal research topic, I decided to complete graduate work on autobiographies by Canadian Indigenous authors, thinking that I would limit my study to conventional autobiographies written by a sole author. There have been many intriguing collaborative autobiographies written, from Gabriel Dumont's 1889 dictation of his participation in the Riel Rebellions and anthropologist Julie Cruikshank's collection of narratives by Yukon elders in *Life Lived Like a Story* (1991), to Rudy Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (1998). I decided, however, not to look at collaborative works because several typical autobiographies existed that had not



received critical attention. While Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* is the notable exception, there has been little work on the autobiographies of George Copway, Eleanor Brass, Richard Wagamese and Gregory Scofield. While I would never claim that the lone autobiographer has complete control over the production of his or her life story, especially given the influence of the editor and the market place, it seems to me that the study of collaborative work requires specific focus on the relationship between the person whose life story is being collected and the amanuensis or co-writer.<sup>2</sup> Because I wanted to study why autobiography was such a prominent genre for our people, it seemed to me that the inclusion of collaborators might obscure rather than clarify this question, especially since so often the partner in such literary productions is not Aboriginal.

In my original conceptualization of this project I noted that while several studies of Native American autobiographies have been completed in the last three decades in the United States, no similar work exists in Canada. I presumed, at the time, that I could build on the work done across the border and analyze national differences between the autobiographies by Native Americans and those by Indigenous authors in Canada. I planned to draw on the techniques developed by autobiography theorists to measure their effectiveness and relevance to the concerns of Indigenous works.

Instead I found that Native American autobiography studies, and to a lesser extent, autobiography theory, have been severely limited by the lack of Indigenous perspectives. In Chapter One I track scholarly conversations in these fields to question

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<sup>2</sup> There exist many notable collaborative productions involving non-Indigenous partners. Some examples are: Peter Erasmus' *Buffalo Days and Nights*, as told to Henry Thompson in the 1920s, when Erasmus was in his 90s; Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*, as told to Don Barnett and Rick Sterling in 1975; *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* (1997) by Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell; *Saqiyuq: Stories from the Lives of Three Inuit Women* (1999) by Nancy Wachowish in collaboration with Apphia Agalakti Awa, Rhoda Kaukjak Katsak and Sandra Pikujak Katsak.

why facile misunderstandings about Indigenous literary production could have been and still are being perpetuated. There is some irony in the fact that Indigenous Studies is often stereotyped for lacking scholarly rigour.<sup>3</sup> In this case it is precisely the lack of Indigenous perspectives that weakens existing scholarship. I justify my reliance on my own autobiography as a methodological tool, what I like to call *autobiography as theoretical practice*,<sup>4</sup> because I conclude that this can enrich academic inquiry, so unaccustomed to considering Indigenous perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the focus of my work is not only on conventional autobiographies but also on examples of autobiographical essays -- of work by authors who incorporate their life experiences with discussions about larger issues -- as well as autobiographical fiction. Through this study of these various forms I conclude that autobiography is an unrecognized Indigenous intellectual tradition.

Chapter Two is more experimental in form, designed to rebut the assumptions discussed in Chapter One, that Indigenous people are disinclined to talk about themselves. While throughout this work I limit my attention to standard autobiography, autobiographical essays and autobiographical fiction, and am hesitant to use the much larger and more inclusive term "life writing" because there are many variations of the genre that in this study I do not include, in this chapter I make an exception. I quote from

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<sup>3</sup> A current example of such a dismissive attitude of the field has recently been articulated by Tom Flanagan, author of *What's Liberal about the Liberal Arts: Classroom Politics and 'Bias' in Higher Education* "I am not so sanguine, however, about faux disciplines such as women's studies, native studies, queer studies, and cultural studies, which have been invented to get around the objective standards of the traditional disciplines. Practitioners in these fields generally practice advocacy scholarship in support of social movements and tend to create a monolithic rather than pluralistic intellectual climate" (27) (see *Academic Matters*, April 2007)

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to the Vancouver Autobiography Reading Group in general, and Laurie McNeill in particular, for coining this phrase.

<sup>5</sup> In Chapter Three I include a history of this approach, made famous by feminists. Standpoint theory similarly relies upon the blending of autobiography and criticism.

letters, diaries, interviews, sermons and reports to illustrate that throughout the historical record there are examples of autobiographical reflection, authors describing their situations in the context of their lives. Alongside my own *âcimisowin*, Cree autobiographical narrative, are quotes by a number of Indigenous scholars -- Jeannette Armstrong, Emma LaRocque, Neal Macleod -- who interweave their life narratives with their scholarly arguments.

While, in Chapter Two, I demonstrate examples of an Indigenous intellectual aesthetic style that employs autobiography to theorize, in Chapter Three I discuss the growing acceptance of the personal in academic writing. Alongside this emerging style is a history of Indigenous literature as a legitimate field of study over the past three decades, from a point of time when literally no texts by Indigenous writers were taught to the present day, when I study Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* for its contribution to Cree intellectual thought. The text is examined for its understanding of Cree theories of knowledge, based on the value of interrelatedness and the heightened awareness of the perspectives of others.

In Chapter Four I look at a confusing text called "Old Keyam," written in the 1920s, in order to understand it according to Cree protocols. Published fifty years after its author's death, it is considered by some to be Edward Ahenakew's semi-autobiography. In this chapter I discuss the difficulties of self-representation for someone like Ahenakew whose positions as an Anglican cleric and Cree activist and intellectual were often in conflict. While the details of Old Keyam's life were fictional, the debates he has with the other characters and with his reading public reflect Ahenakew's commitment to both his faith and his people. Drawing on some of the

conclusions from Chapter Three, I suggest that evaluating Old Keyam through post-colonial theory is reductive, and positions him as a colonized subject who is oppressed, resistant, and marginal. Instead I suggest that the confusing shifts of opinion in the text should be considered in light of Cree values, which consider respect for others more important than agreement with their opinions. Guided by my own understanding of a Cree sensibility and drawing on the work of Cree historians Winona Wheeler and Neal McLeod and Cree philosopher, Lorraine Brundige, I reconsider Old Keyam, seeing him not as defeated but strengthened by his commitment to his Cree identity, which allows him to approach all his contradictory relationships from a position of respect and honour.

In Chapter Five I modify the approach I use for Ahenakew's text and consider how to read George Copway's autobiography according to Anishnabe perspectives. While post-colonial theory deserves credit for the politicization of literary studies, Indigenous scholars are increasingly calling for ways to study literatures that does not constantly define the Indigenous person only in terms of conquest and colonization. This chapter is inspired by the a recent generation of literary critics, founders of Native American literary nationalisms, . These new voices insist who that insist that scholarship should strengthen the intellectual sovereignty of individual nations by promoting tribal approaches to their literatures, with a responsibility to improve living conditions for Indigenous people. Relying on Chippewa scholar Gail Valaskakis' idea of "Indian Country," I read *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh* (1847), not as the product of an author humiliated and colonized (as Tim Fulford argues he must be, in *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature and Transatlantic Culture, 1756-*

1830 [2006]) but rather as an Anishnabe activist determined to fight for land and for the idea of land.

I base my discussion of Copway on the growing dissatisfaction with postcolonial theory by contemporary Indigenous scholars. In Chapter Six I continue this, questioning the usefulness of the idea of hybridity. Rather than rely on Homi Bhabha's notion of a Third Space (36-39), I suggest that even those (like Cherokee<sup>6</sup> author Thomas King) who might be considered by postcolonialists to be hybrid are evaluated in ways that a non-Indigenous person is not. While King has been studied as an example of someone who has emerged on the borders between White and Native, I compare his autobiographical essays with those by his partner and literary critic, Helen Hoy, who is not Indigenous, to illustrate the specific demands of the audience on an Indigenous author. These different audience expectations reveal not only the anxieties of dominant culture but also the maneuvers available to the Indigenous autobiographer. I then compare King's stories with those by two Indigenous autobiographers writing in completely different contexts; while King is a unilingual anglophone, born in the United States and estranged from the Cherokee side of his family, Harold Cardinal, is a Native Cree speaker who grew up on a reserve and Hank Pennier is a Halq'emeylem and English speaker growing up as a "half breed" in the Fraser Valley. All three, and I speculate all Indigenous autobiographers, must necessarily engage with the contradictory societal forces that seek to define who they and other Indigenous people must be.

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<sup>6</sup> Why I refer to King as simply Cherokee, rather than Cherokee-Greek-German, is explored in Chapter Six.

An example of societal forces that define and categorize Indigenous people is the Indian Act.<sup>7</sup> Both First Nations and Métis autobiographers naturalize these definitions, regardless of how arbitrary or discriminatory these categories have been. Almost as influential are the historical prejudices or stereotypes of popular culture. So invested is dominant culture in the idea of the 'real' Indian that the Indigenous autobiographer must often dissuade his or her audience of their expectations or assumptions. For example, Bonita Lawrence, in *'Real' Indians and Others* (2004), outlines prominent notions that affect contemporary Indigenous identity:

In particular, the apparent consensus from all quarters within the dominant society that "real" Indians have vanished (or that the few that exist must manifest absolute authenticity -- on white terms -- to be believable as Indians) functions as a constant discipline on urban mixed-bloods, continuously proclaiming to them that urban mixed-blood Indianness is meaningless and that the Indianness of their families has been irrevocably lost....Most urban mixed-bloods have therefore had to contend, at some point in their lives, with the fact that they do not fit the models of what has been held up to them -- by whites -- as authentic Nativeness.

(135)

Note that Lawrence uses the term "mixed-blood" to refer to those Indigenous people who are of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage. As a term "mixed-blood" is more

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<sup>7</sup> The Indian Act of Canada became official legislation in 1876, establishing a different constitutional relationship between Status Indians and other citizens of Canada. While the vehicle to protect the rights of Indians and responsibilities of Canada, this Act has historically been used to suppress Indigenous culture. There were two famous revisions to the Indian Act, one in 1951, when such cultural practices as the Plains Sun Dance and the West Coast Potlatch were no longer considered illegal and another in 1985 (Bill C-31), when Status Indian women who married non-Status men no longer lost their Status; also, women who had lost their Status prior to 1985 were reinstated, along with their children. This recent amendment has been criticized as "abocide". For more information see: <http://www.abo-peoples.org/programs/C-31/Abocide/Abocide-1.htm>

often used in the United States where it is based historically on blood quantum rules that legally designated racial or ethnic identity based on the race of great-grandparents.<sup>8</sup>

Lawrence employs this term rather than Métis, which historically refers to the people of the Red River but is increasingly being used to signify mixed heritage. The irony in her use of this term, is that Status Indians, who also can be of mixed heritage, are implicitly presumed to be "full-blood," which seems to unintentionally prove her point. She argues that so insidious is the notion of authenticity is so insidious that authors often refer to their legislated status -- their membership in an Indian band, for example -- to legitimate their identity, even as they criticize the bureaucracy of Indian Affairs for their control over this membership. Even as authors oppose or undermine oppressive stereotypes about Indigenous people -- from physical appearance and education levels to social disfunction -- the fact that they have to address it reinscribes them. That Indigenous authors both in Canada and the US have to negotiate two layers of stereotype, one legal and the other racist, means any autobiographical project for them is more troubled than that of a dominant member of that culture.

Building on my argument that Indigenous identity is scrutinized from many directions, in Chapter Seven I look at the question about what it means to be Indigenous, and the anxiety this question produces, in two works of autobiographical fiction: Shirley Sterling's *My Name is Seepeetza* (1996) and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998). While both Sterling and Highway draw heavily on their own lives to write these two novels, by fictionalizing their stories both have creative license to draw on their imagination to articulate their fears about what it means to be Indian and about not being

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<sup>8</sup> For example, someone with one of eight great-grandparents who was African-American would be an "octoroon."

Indigenous enough. They also permit their personal stories to be generalized -- to allow other residential school survivors to see their own histories in new and possibly restorative ways. In this final chapter I examine the symbol of fireweed in both texts to consider the question that Sterling and Highway provoke, about the effect of the "white" world upon one's identity as an Indigenous person.

Because of this interplay of memory and imagination, Indigenous autobiographies are important sites of study. Not only do they offer the possibility to study Indigenous perspectives, they also offer the opportunity to question the influence on Aboriginal identity of the narrative expectations of dominant society as well as the colonizing impulses of the state. My position as a Métis scholar, not at arm's length but rather emotionally implicated, is something I can contribute to this area of study. In the forthcoming chapters I have tried to accurately retell some of my family's stories, along with the ones I tell about myself, acknowledging that like all autobiographers I can only tell this from my point of view.

Complicating my retelling is the fact that our points of view are not static. By this I do not mean that everything becomes progressively better and better but rather that we live in a state of flux. The world and our relationships shift and change, our bodies grow and age. We learn some things and forget others. When I was a child I described myself in parts: I was part German, I was part English, I was part Cree, all to describe the languages my parents spoke. I have discovered that none of these labels is particularly accurate. First, the Wildes and the Reders did not come from Germany but from RussiaPoland, from an area that is now Poland Russia, a small distinction but essential to explain why this branch of my family fled the chaos of Eastern Europe after World War



One to live in rural Manitoba. Second, contrary to what I always thought, Grandpa Patterson did not have an English accent; only when I heard his voice on a video of him made in the last years of his life did I realize he must have been born in Newfoundland. The fact that he never talked about his childhood and that no one in the family has ever met any of his relatives added to some suspicion, hard to imagine -- he was described by all as mild-mannered -- that he was fleeing from something and somewhere. Thirdly, I realize now that I described my mother's side of the family as Cree, mostly because this was Mom's first language and the language she would speak to her brothers and sisters. I did this to avoid the term she used, which was halfbreeds (which was at least better than when she would call us a bunch of dirty Indians and laugh) relying on a self-deprecating humour typical to my family. Even if *Halfbreed* was the title of Campbell's book, I never used this word. If really pushed I might explain that we were non-treaty because most of the family lived not on a reserve but in the bush, or in prairie cities, like Edmonton or Prince Albert or Saskatoon. (In later years I discovered that some of my cousins, my auntie Bella's children, went to residential school<sup>9</sup> because they had a Status Indian father, but why they did was not obvious to me at the time.) I knew there were Métis members of our family because Auntie Irene and Uncle Frank told me about their involvement in Métis politics, which extended to traveling to Europe as part of an Aboriginal delegation in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Frank's Dad was Pete Tomkins<sup>11</sup>, one of the "fabulous five" Métis activists who, along with Malcolm Norris, James Brady, Joseph Dion, and Felix Callihoo, established the Alberta Métis association in the 1930s. But this

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see:

[http://research2.csci.educ.ubc.ca/indigenation/Indian\\_ReACTions/Indian\\_ReACTions/ResidentialSchools.htm](http://research2.csci.educ.ubc.ca/indigenation/Indian_ReACTions/Indian_ReACTions/ResidentialSchools.htm)

<sup>10</sup> For more information see: <http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/03369>

<sup>11</sup> For more information see: <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/faces/mtomkpe.htm>

did not signify to me a stable identity: I came to understand that what kind of Indian you are can shift. Uncle Frank's grandmother was Poundmaker's widow. In 1985 Frank applied under Bill C-31<sup>12</sup> to become a Status Indian and was granted membership in the Poundmaker reserve.

Later, much later, well into adulthood, when I should have known better and more, I began to muse on some things that seemed strange: like the fact that unlike most Cree in Saskatchewan, who are Anglican, my family is Catholic; that Kohkum spoke a few words of French and that her maiden name was Durocher and our relatives were Merastys, Morins and Lalibertés.

Just after entering the PhD program at UBC I contacted an archive in Manitoba and not only got genealogies but to my surprise, copies of scrip certificates made out to Kohkum's father, Cornelius Durocher. I noted that he was listed, not as Métis but as a Halfbreed, the word my mother used, that I always thought was a racial epithet and not a legal if now outdated category.

While I haven't ever been comfortable using the term "halfbreed," for a long time I wasn't particularly comfortable describing myself as Métis because many of the symbols of Métis culture had no resonance in the life of our family. In my childhood I never saw a Métis sash or flag, never saw anyone play the fiddle or jig and never heard Michif. In a 2006 article Brenda Macdougall explains how the "notion that a singular Métis consciousness and national identity emerged at Seven Oaks in 1817 is still widely accepted without question and continues to be the standard by which all Métis communities are judged, regardless of their own historical trajectories" (434). She cites

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<sup>12</sup> for more informations see  
[http://research2.csci.educ.ubc.ca/indigenation/Indian\\_ReACTions/Indian\\_ReACTions/BillC-31.htm](http://research2.csci.educ.ubc.ca/indigenation/Indian_ReACTions/Indian_ReACTions/BillC-31.htm)

the influence of the work of Marcel Giraud that emphasized southern Plains-based Métis society.

Macdougall's contribution to the field is her focus on communities farther north; she also tries to avoid the "simplistic conclusions that the Métis are a 'people-in-between,' hybrids torn between the world of their non-Native fathers and Indian mothers" (436). Inspired by the predominance of Cree spoken in the area, she borrows the Cree cultural concept of *wahkootowin* that values the interconnections of family, place and economic reality. Focusing on the core families from Isle à la Crosse, Macdougall argues that this community was functionally matrilineal:

Importantly, each of these generations reinforced socio-cultural patterns established in the late eighteenth century when the first wave of outsider male trade employees entered northwestern Saskatchewan and began establishing relationships with Cree and Dene women. More precisely, the women indigenous to the region became the centrifugal force incorporating successive waves of outsider males who carried with them the surnames that came to mark northwestern Saskatchewan communities and identified the families locally and patronymically. Aboriginal women -- Cree, Dene, and then Métis -- grounded their families in their homelands, creating for them a sense of belonging to the territory through a regionally defined matrilineal residency pattern and, therefore, female-centred family networks. (444)

I appreciate Macdougall's attempt to rethink fur trade history as more than the corporate history of the Hudson's Bay Company or the record of men who worked for it.<sup>13</sup> I also

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<sup>13</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, author of *Many Tender Ties* (1980), is rightly credited as the first to look at the role of Métis women in Canada's furtrade, even though she replicates the stereotypes of Indigenous women found

recognize my own family in her description of female-centred family networks. But this is not the only thing I recognize. When I read the names of core Métis families at Isle à la Crosse that she lists, I see names of some of my ancestors: Joseph Durocher, Basile Meraste, Abraham Laliberté, Serazine Morin.

Thus my family research and academic scholarship have changed my own sense of identity. But whether I think of my family as Cree, Métis, or half-breeds, one thing has remained constant for both my family and me: we express our experience and our knowledge through *âcimisowin*, through autobiographical storytelling. This dissertation is both an example of this and a demonstration that this practice is not peculiar to my family but is, in fact, an Indigenous intellectual tradition.

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in the written record. Sarah Carter, in her comprehensive *Aboriginal People and Colonizer's of Western Canada to 1900* (1999), hails in a new era when she argues that First Nations' trading routes prior to European contact predetermined the position of forts. Her emphasis on Indigenous interpretations of European settlement seems to have influenced Macdougall's work.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Trying to Find the Conversation, Trying to Hear Indigenous Voices: Exploring the Intersections of Native American Autobiography Studies, Autobiography Theory and Indigenous Studies**

Given that so much literary production by Indigenous authors in Canada has been autobiographical in nature -- from works by George Copway (1847), Louis Riel (1874) and Abraham Ulrikab (2005; 1880) to Maria Campbell (1973), Eleanor Brass (1987), Gregory Scofield (1999) and Richard Wagamese (2002) -- a key question with which I begin this study is why this tradition has been overlooked until now. In this chapter I examine existing scholarship and argue that the lack of Indigenous perspectives within the academy has stifled intelligent inquiry. I propose that Indigenous autobiographies can be claimed not only as often neglected or misunderstood literary works but also as important texts in our intellectual history. Beginning with the comparison of scholarship on Native American autobiography and that of autobiography theory, I rely on the insights and work of Indigenous intellectuals to conceive of new ways of reading, ways that include my own position as a Métis literary critic.

In my work on Indigenous autobiographies in Canada, I participate in discussions with numerous and sometimes mutually exclusive constituencies. The first is a group of

scholars of Native American autobiography whose work has emerged over the past three decades in the United States. Probably the most eminent scholar in this field is Arnold Krupat, a prolific writer of over a dozen titles whose monograph, *For Those Who Come After* (1985), is considered a classic.<sup>1</sup> My contention that Native authors write autobiographically as part of varying Indigenous intellectual traditions challenges Krupat's key premise that "unlike traditional Native literature, the Indian autobiography has no prior model in the collective practice of tribal cultures" (31). While Krupat defines "Indian autobiographies" as those written with a white collaborator as opposed to "autobiographies by [literate] Indians," he argues that both are of bicultural, composite composition, not a traditional form but a consequence of contact with whites. He offers as proof of the bicultural nature of these autobiographies the fact that "there simply were no Native American texts until whites decided to collaborate with Indians and make them" (5). Other eminent members of this field include Lynne Woods O'Brien, Gretchen Bataille, Kathleen Sands, David Brumble III and Hertha Dawn Wong.

The second group is composed of autobiography theorists, whose field has developed simultaneously over the same stretch of time. A year before Lynne Woods O'Brien's *Plains Indian Autobiographies* was released in 1973, James Olney published *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* and noted in his acknowledgements how few studied this area: "Hence there are no colleagues that it seems necessary to name either for thanks or for exculpation from responsibility for what I have written" (xiii). While Georges Gusdorf's 1956 essay "Conditions and Limits of

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Warley, in "Reviewing the Past and the Future" (1996), calls *For Those Who Come After* a "foundational study" (75,5n); in *Reading Autobiography* (2001), Smith and Watson state: "In Native American life writing, Arnold Krupat, Dexter Fisher, and A.LaVonne Brown Ruoff have been path-breakers, and both Krupat's and Hertha D. Sweet Wong's theorizing about the synecdochal character of collaborative life stories is informative for reading the differences of Native American writing" (151)

Autobiography" is often credited as a seminal work in autobiography theory, it was not until Olney translated it from French to English and released it in 1980 that it became widely accessible to English-speaking scholars. Gusdorf posits that autobiography is a uniquely Western genre that only becomes possible when humanity has "emerged from the mythic framework of traditional teachings and...entered into the perilous domain of history" (30). The resultant autonomous individual is not only a "gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires, inventor of laws or of wisdom," but "he alone adds consciousness to nature, leaving there the sign of his presence"(31); he alone is imbued with a consciousness of self that makes it possible to write self-reflectively.

While there are obvious points of intersection -- Krupat's definition of autobiography seems premised on Gusdorf's model of the self -- there is curiously little overlap of interests of the first group with the second. With the exception of Wong, few scholars of Native American autobiography enter discussions about or use the language of autobiography theory. Long after autobiography theorists, beginning with 1980s feminists like Mary Mason and Caren Kaplan and ending with Paul John Eakin in 1999, critiqued and abandoned Gusdorf's model, many scholars of Native American autobiography continue to hold keenly to it. While I do not fit easily within either group, I draw upon the insights of the second, relying especially on the work of Eakin, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson to critique the work of the first.

The third group to which I belong, which provides a critical edge with which to examine the works of the first two, is composed of Indigenous academics. Primarily I consider myself to be one of a growing number of Canadian Indigenous literary scholars,

a group that includes Armand Garnet Ruffo and Cheryl Suzack (both Anishnabe), as well as Kristina Fagan (Labrador-Métis), Jo-Anne Episkenew (Métis) and Janice Acoose (Saulteaux/Métis). However, because our field is so interdisciplinary, influenced by the larger population in the United States, our group expands to include the discussions generated within Native American Studies. Given the exclusion of Indigenous people from academia on both sides of the border, which explains why there are none in the first two groups I examine, it is not surprising that this third group has very different intellectual interests than the first two. Longstanding goals include the integration of Indigenous content into the curriculum and the appointment of Native faculty, and extend beyond the typical concerns of literary studies to encompass issues of intellectual sovereignty (research protocols, control over data produced about our communities, language revitalization, community connections).

Recently several notable Native American theorists have found fault with Indigenous literary studies in Canada and the U.S. for its lack of relevance to the political goals of Aboriginal people. Shortly after Devon Mihesuah became editor of *American Indian Quarterly* in 1998, she "became worried that American Indian literary criticism threatened to take over the whole of Indigenous studies" (97), and she decided to no longer accept articles on popular works of Native fiction. That the editor of such an influential journal could mark her discussion with extremely dismissive remarks -- literary critics are "lit critters" determined to ignore activist writers (99) -- says much about the status of the study of fiction in contemporary Native American studies. Even Daniel Heath Justice, a University of Toronto professor and a Cherokee author, has made similar complaints. In an article in 2001 Justice points out the tendency for critics to



focus on the novels of the "Noble Nine" to the exclusion of all else. He suggests that anyone in the field could readily come up with their own list but he offers his as N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie, Diane Glancy, Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo and Gerald Vizenor. In a call for change he suggests "a series of questions and ideas to reconceptualize what the field of Native American Studies is, who it serves, how it accomplishes its stated and implied goals, where it is heading and who has a place in its future" (257). I do not think that Justice's specific point about the tendency of critics to focus on the "Noble Nine" is true in Canada; I am uncertain whether there are really nine Canadian Indigenous authors that have inspired overwhelming critical attention to the detriment of other topics. However, his call for relevance is repeated by many, including JoAnn Episkenew, Taiaiake Alfred and Marie Battiste.

Given that the study of Native American fiction has fallen out of favour, it is not surprising that Robert Warrior has recently written *The People and the Word: Reading Native Non-fiction* (2005). He argues that not only are there many understudied works of non-fiction prose, but also the content easily aligns itself with political engagement:

This tradition of writing is the oldest and most robust type of modern writing that Native people in North America have produced as they have sought literate means by which to engage themselves and others in a discourse on the possibilities of a Native future. Scholarly attention to the novel, as I figure things here, has told us more about the preoccupations of literary studies than about the history of the critical contributions of Native writers. (xx)

While I am not convinced that the study of fiction is as irrelevant as these theorists insist, I argue that Indigenous life narratives in Canada have been understudied. No doubt part of this can be attributed to the marginal status within literary circles of both Indigenous literatures and the field of autobiography. I also suspect that some of this neglect comes from the almost complete lack of Indigenous scholars in departments of English across this country. As Warrior says, although in his case he is referring to the need for scholarship on Native non-fiction, and I am referring to Indigenous scholarship itself, "this is not ethnic cheerleading" (xx). I am not simply advocating for more members of my club. While I am convinced that Indigenous faculty members act as mentors for and contribute to the academic success of Indigenous students, their inclusion enriches scholarship itself. The following discussion illustrates the problematic results of a discussion about Indigenous topics that fails to include any Indigenous perspectives.

Hertha D.S. Wong's contribution on "Native American life writing" to the 2005 edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature* is somewhat inaccurate. I structure this chapter in opposition to the points that she makes so recently, to illustrate that problematic statements and understandings made early on in the establishment of this field, like the scholars themselves, have rarely been challenged. She contends that there are three sets of scholars within the field of Native American autobiography: 1) those who are ethnocentric; 2) those who are cultural relativists; and 3) those who include "Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands, H. David Brumble III, Arnold Krupat, David Murray and [her]self" (126). She writes:

For the ethnocentric scholars, Native autobiography was an impossibility because indigenous people were incapable of the concepts and means necessary to

produce it; for the cultural relativists autobiography by a Native person was still a

Western form that erased even a trace of Native subjectivity and culture. (126)

The third group, she argues, "while recognizing autobiography as a Western form, researched indigenous modes of self-narration and examined the interaction of the two in historical and cultural contexts" (126).

Yet Wong's claim that the third group of scholars is neither ethnocentric nor culturally relativist, is by her own definitions, wrong. Her description of the first group which she describes as "ethnocentric enough to assume that indigenous people were 'primitive' and therefore had no sense of self and no writing with which to record" (126) seems to describe Arnold Krupat when he defines the "Indian Autobiography" in the second chapter of *For Those Who Come After* (1985). Krupat argues that autobiography "is marked by egocentric individualism, historicism, and writing...all present in European and Euroamerican culture after the revolutionary last quarter of the eighteenth century. But none has ever characterized the native cultures of the present-day United States" (29). Each of his points matches the following three assumptions that Wong ascribes to "ethnocentric scholars."

Wong's first point is that ethnocentric scholars "assume that indigenous people were primitive"; Krupat implies that Indian autobiographies are "primitive" by categorizing them as anti-historical -- they did not have a progressive sense of time -- as compared with modernity and history. He argues that "means for preserving tribal memory...did not privilege the dimensions of causality and uniqueness which mark the modern forms of Euroamerican historicism" (30). Krupat also distinguishes Indian autobiographies from "autobiographies by 'civilized' or christianized Indians..." (31).

Both his understanding of Native American autobiography as primitive, anti-historical, without the European concepts of linear time, and his uses of the terms "primitive" and "civilized" are evidence of his ethnocentrism.

Wong's second point about ethnocentric scholars is that they believe that Native Americans "had no sense of self"; Krupat writes that "egocentric individualism,...the cultivation of originality and differentness, was never legitimated by native cultures, to which celebration of the hero-as-solitary would have been incomprehensible" (29).

Finally, according to Wong, ethnocentric scholars assume that indigenous people have "no writing with which to record"; Krupat states that "the black-on-white which distinguishes scription from diction for the Euroamerican, the letter and the book, were not found among native cultures in the precontact period" (30). He does assent that "patterns worked in wampum belts, tattoos, pictographs painted on animal skins or in sand may all be considered forms of 'writing'" (30), but implies that these cannot be considered civilized forms of writing when compared with the alphabet. He states:

Further, while no culture is possible without writing in some very broad sense, no Indian culture developed the phonetic alphabet which Lewis Henry Morgan isolated as the distinctive feature of "civilized" culture. (30)

Clearly, in Krupat's evaluation, European literary innovations are the standard and Native American culture, because it does not develop in exactly the same way, is deficient, an evaluation that reflects his belief in the superiority of his ethnic group. Why Wong would hesitate to classify Krupat as a Eurocentric scholar is puzzling and seems to me to have something to do with his prominence in Native American studies.

For example, in a 1992 article, "Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self," Krupat argues that Native Americans have an identity based on communalism as opposed to Western liberal individualism; he draws on Western rhetorical categories to propose terms "for a theory of self-conception and self-situation *as they appear in the texts we call autobiographies*" (212). Krupat argues that while the "modern Western autobiography has been essentially metonymic in orientation, Native American autobiography has been and continues to be persistently synecdochic, and that the preference for synecdochic models of the self has relations to the oral techniques of information transmission typical of Native American cultures" (216).

A sophisticated understanding of metonymy or synecdoche is not necessary to understand Krupat's basic point. He argues that modern Western autobiography is "strongly marked by the individual's sense of herself predominantly as different and separate from other distinct individuals" (212), a relationship he calls "part-to-part" or metonymic. In contrast, Native American autobiography is a "narration of personal history...more nearly marked by the individual's sense of himself in relation to collective social groupings" (212), a part-to-whole relationship that he labels synecdochic. Essentially Krupat is creating a binary by defining the writing of one group as that which possesses certain characteristics and the writing of another as that which possesses the opposite. I would argue that any claims that one group of people lives, acts or writes in one way as a product of their identity while another lives, acts or writes in another is essentializing and reductive. Moreover, while it is true that different epistemologies will provide different ways of seeing the world, I would not claim that this will result in identical expression by one group and the opposite expression by another.

Proof that Krupat's ideas remain current is in the influence that they still have on the work of contemporary scholars. For example, in "Giving Voice, Autobiographical/Testimonial Literature by First Nations Women of British Columbia," published in *Studies in American Literature* in 2000, Laura J. Beard repeats Krupat's point that "the Indian autobiography is a contradiction in terms because the autobiographical project is usually marked by 'egocentric individualism...'" (66). She differentiates between conventional autobiography in which the individual is unique, and *testimonio*, where "the self is defined not in individual terms but in collective terms, as part of a collective struggle and a communal identity" (65) to argue that the *testimonio* allows the Indigenous person a voice to speak for her people. She cites, as I have, Krupat's argument that there "were no Native American texts until whites decided to collaborate with Indians and make them" (as cited in Beard 66), and compares the influence of white collaborators with those involved in helping Indigenous writers like Rigoberta Menchu produce testimonial literature.<sup>2</sup>

The problem with her subsequent discussion of Shirley Sterling's *My Name is Seepeetza* and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* as *testimonio* is the narrow lens this produces in her examination of two very different works by two very different authors. Sterling wrote her novel in a university Creative Writing class as a mature

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<sup>2</sup> Another example of the prevalence of Krupat's ideas is in the preface of *Western Subjects: Autobiographical Writing in the North American West* (2004). In their introduction of the various essays in the anthology editors Kathleen Boardman and Gioia Woods describe a resurgent interest in Native American "as-told-to" autobiographies and cite Krupat to describe them as of "bicultural composite composition" in order to highlight "the oppositional potential of collaborative Native American/white autobiography" (16). Another example of Krupat's influence is Diane Boudreau's discussion of Indigenous autobiography in Quebec in *Historie de la littérature amérindienne au Québec* (1993), where she cites Krupat (through Godard) to argue that: "Essentiellement préoccupées par la survie de leur culture, les auteurs amérindiens ne peuvent se dissocier de leur nation. Les intérêts de l'être individuel comptent bien peu face aux exigences de l'être social. Alors que, dans les sociétés occidentales, l'individualisme l'emporte souvent sur la collectivité, dans les sociétés orales, le groupe conteste l'égocentrisme" (121).

student completing a doctoral program; in comparison Maracle was politically experienced but only eighteen when she dictated her life story to the editor of a Marxist publishing house, with the full intention of completing a second installment in the future. The differences in genres, modes of production, tribal or cultural influences, historical contexts and literary qualities are ignored.

The effect of Beard's insistence that both works be categorized as *testimonio* is a weak reading. *My Name is Seepeetza*, she concludes, ends with an image of Seepeetza's journal encased in beadwork to symbolize the hybrid nature of Indigenous women's autobiography that draws "on the written tradition of Euroamerican autobiography and on the traditions of Native orature" (73). Even the novel's "often colloquial tone" is an element that links "Sterling's autobiographical text to Native oral traditions" (73). No matter that Shirley Sterling is trying to create a character with the voice of a child. Rather than seeing this use of narrative voice as a considered choice, Beard implies it is the result of Sterling's "oral traditions" seeping into her writing, presumably without her being able to help it. And the constant equation of literacy with Europe presumes that all Europeans have always been able to read and write, ignoring the low literacy levels of European peasants only one hundred years ago.<sup>3</sup> The equation of orality with Native North America also ignores European oral traditions from early epic to folk tales told even today.<sup>4</sup> This style of reasoning sees the Native author as inevitably hybrid and

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Literacy Myth* (1979), Henry Graff determines that the illiteracy rate of employees at an Ontario lumber company in the 1880s and 90s, was at 48% (222), typical for the working class. Central to Graff's argument is that literacy becomes the leading symbol for "progress," associated with morality, rationality and orderliness.

<sup>4</sup> For example: the oral traditions that generated the epic poems, *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey*; fairy tales as recorded by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson

tainted because she is drawing on a "foreign" practice of writing that will immediately destabilize her identity in a way that only invocations of orality can anchor.

Even more puzzling is Beard's assessment that the ending of Maracle's autobiography frustrates Western expectations:

*Bobbie Lee: Indian Rebel* ends abruptly, with no closure to the original manuscript. Bobbi Lee's life story is presented not as one that has achieved full significance but rather one that is still seeking significance and meaning. A

Western desire for an ending, or at least the sense of an ending, is frustrated. (78)

It is not Maracle's Native identity that explains why her story is not modeled on the typical trajectory of someone whose life has achieved "full significance." She was only eighteen years old when she produced it. But rather than consider the role of dictating her life, especially the hurried production of the first text in 1975, in producing this "abrupt ending," Beard suggests that Maracle is disrupting the "Western desire for an ending." For Beard, every feature of the work of Menchu, Sterling and Maracle must be explained by a simplistic binary of "oral" rather than "literate" cultures, based on the fact that they are Indigenous.

Beard is not the only scholar in the past decade to draw on Krupat's early work.

In 2002, Renée Hulan cites Krupat when she describes an Inuit autobiography:

the self represented is not without individuality, but it is identified with the rest of the community. This is the "part to whole" relationship that Krupat has called the "synecdochic self," rather than the more prevalent North American notion that each person possesses an interiorized self separate from other distinct individuals (*Ethnocriticism* 212). It is clear that people who do not revere individualism



would not represent themselves as rugged individuals, and this may be the most important factor contributing to the differences between Inuit and non-Inuit representations of the north and the people in it. (86)

Given Hulan's topic, at least we can assume that she is discussing works by authors who are living in ancestral homelands which might at least mean that these autobiographies are written in similar contexts. By comparison, Krupat argues, in his 1992 essay, that autobiographies as diverse as that by William Apes (1829),<sup>5</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko (1981), and Gerald Vizenor (1987), all demonstrate a synecdochic presentation of self. Granted, he does include the proviso at the end of this article that of course Native American writers (like Momaday) could use metonymic strategies and non-Natives could use synecdochic ones, but he refuses the notion that this might invalidate his argument: "So far as one may generalize, however, it does seem to be the case that Native American autobiography is marked by the figure of synecdoche in its presentation of the self" (231). Keep in mind that Krupat is not arguing that when Pequot politician and Methodist preacher William Apes wrote his spiritual confession (considered to be the first book written in the United States by a Native American) that he began a literary tradition upon which Silko and Vizenor modeled their works. Krupat barely credits Apes with any innovation whatsoever:

So far as his writings may be taken as formally and informally autobiographical, it seems reasonable to suggest that they show him engaged in a very particular form of synecdochic self-definition. Recalling from the first a lost tribal identity and a "goodly heritage" in which all share together, he attempts with increasing self-

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<sup>5</sup> Because both the surname of Apes and Apess are commonly used to refer to this author, I also use both spellings depending on the context. For example, Krupat prefers the first and Warrior the second. My use switches to coincide with theirs.

consciousness to reconstitute and redefine his "tribe" and its "heritage" in Christian terms as a means of constituting and defining himself -- this latter process, in *typical Native American fashion*, hardly self-conscious at all. (229, my emphasis)

Krupat's point is that Apes, as a Native American, has no interest in celebrating his individuality or even what distinguishes his tribe from other nations. While it would be tempting to argue that Apes promotes the universality of humankind and equality between Indian and white as he readily adapts his Native American identity to Christianity, this would conflict with Krupat's assertion that Apes' main goal is to render himself as one of a collective, "hardly self-conscious at all."

According to Krupat, "Apes's synecdochic presentation of self finds parallels in a great many autobiographies by Indians" (229), including those by Leslie Silko and Gerald Vizenor: Silko conceives of herself as a storyteller for her people and "conceives of individual identity only in functional relation to the tribe" (230); as for Vizenor, in his many autobiographical texts that "each take self-definition as a loose and impermanent thing, ... they have a certain collective sense of responsibility as identity" (230). Should Krupat's evaluation be correct and given that both Silko and Vizenor have some measure of celebrity as artists and intellectuals, there could easily be deliberation that they are participating in an aesthetic or struggling with audience expectation or a myriad of other possibilities. But Krupat quickly does not engage in consideration of possibilities, confident that they, like Apes, use synecdoche to represent themselves, "like most Indians traditionally" (229). It is reasoning like this that I, unlike Hertha Dawn Wong, would

categorize Krupat in the first category Wong lists, the group of scholars who are "ethnocentric."

Wong proposes a second category of scholars in this field who are "cultural relativists": those who "claim that autobiography is a Western form not practiced by Native people who shared their personal stories orally" (126). Cultural relativism, or the acceptance of coexisting cultural differences, is not usually defined so narrowly, but Wong employs this term to identify those scholars who only recognize as autobiography those works written by European or American authors that model themselves on the Western liberal definition of the individual.

Yet while Wong exempts H. David Brumble III from this second category, in *American Indian Autobiography* (1988), he defines autobiography in a similarly narrow way. In his conclusion to his first chapter, he notes that "the narratives of how-I-came-by-my powers more nearly resemble modern autobiography than any of the other types of preliterate autobiography" (45). He points out that they are "richly detailed," often beginning before birth and including childhood and other episodes in the life of the narrator. Moreover, because these stories foreshadow future performances of power, these "narratives are also like modern autobiography in drawing connections between events" (45). But Brumble uses the examples of two shamans' stories to explain why even the most detailed and lengthy narrative "differs *essentially* from typically modern autobiographies" (46 my emphasis). He argues that should two shamans from the same tribe both tell how they acquired their powers, their differences would result from the details of which entity, animate or inanimate, granted it to them, not from their individual differences:

Aua does not recall his arduous preparations and his visions and his spirit helpers as helping him to work out *just who he is*; they gave him power to do his work.

And *telling* about his quest for powers is a culturally sanctioned means of setting forth his credentials. And so even the most elaborately detailed narratives of the acquisition of powers are really closer to the coup tales than they are to the autobiographies of Rousseau, Franklin, and Adams. (46)

This logic suggests that the typical modern autobiography is by definition Euroamerican. If an American Indian recounts a life story that has almost all of the features of a modern autobiography, but has a protagonist that is American Indian situated in an Amerindian context, then this cannot be an autobiography.<sup>6</sup> Yet the definition of the genre and the model of individuality are more flexible for the three canonical autobiographers that Brumble cites. While Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *Confessions* and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* unfold chronologically and are written in the first person, the first divulges frank details from his private life while the second recounts the public successes of a life devoted to the public good. *The Education of Henry Adams*, in contrast, is more modernist in conception.<sup>7</sup> Historian Jeremy Popkin argues that Adams' use of "self-narration in the third person challenged the notion of the coherent, autonomous ego, capable of defining itself by telling a life story" (Popkin 247, 249).

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<sup>6</sup> Danielle Tisinger adopts Brumble's ideas in her discussion of Sarah Winnemucca's autobiography in "Textual Performance and Western Frontier" in the Boardman/Woods anthology (2004). Tisinger draws on Brumble to argue that "As a 'coup-tale,' Winnemucca's story follows tribal self-narrative expectations by explaining the heroic acts she performed" (119). However, Tisinger does consider Winnemucca's work to also be autobiography: [It is a 'coup-tale'] while at the same time allowing the influence of Western autobiographical traditions to help shape her story for white audiences" (119).

<sup>7</sup> Henry Adams (1838-1918) completed the first version of *The Education of Henry Adams* in 1905, distributing it privately for a few years after. He continued to revise this work until 1912 when he was unable to work anymore due to illness. The first version available to the general public, published in 1918, is based on a 1907 copy.

Brumble's categorization of the narratives of the shamans as separate from autobiographies by Euro-Americans demonstrates his emotional rejection of the former and allegiance with the latter. Even when Brumble studies a text by a Native American that he believes meets the criteria of the genre as "autobiography," it is its "difference" that marks it. Brumble insists that Don Talayesva, author of *Sun Chief*, written in collaboration with sociologist Leo Simmons, "struggles with two distinct ideas of the self: a traditional, tribal, Hopi sense of self and a modern, Western, individualistic sense of self" (4). What is clear in Brumble's introduction is that he himself struggles viscerally with Talayesva's narrative.

When Brumble first begins to read *Sun Chief*, he is startled and excited by the opening paragraph, when Talayesva describes how he was initially twins until his mother's doctor performed a ceremony that united the two fetuses together. While initially hesitant about Talayesva's exotic beginning, Brumble reacts warmly to Sun Chief's descriptions of his "dear mother," and sympathetically to his account of his mother's death. But as Brumble begins to "bask in the warmth of a comfortable sense of shared humanity" (2), all this crumbles when Sun Chief theorizes that his mother dies from someone's curse. Brumble instantly returns to his position as separate from the American Indian and drags the reader with him. "Here *we* must remember what *we* learned in Introductory Anthropology about the importance of harmonious social relations among the Pueblo tribes" (2 my emphasis). We the readers, presumably university educated like Brumble and with the same emotional response to the narrative, are with him in his anthropology class and our object of study are the Pueblo. The story continues and "*we* are even farther from what *we* expect of a Pittsburgh deathbed scene"

(2). If we as readers have intellectualized the differences between Talayesva and ourselves, the distance quickly becomes emotional. Brumble writes:

*We* have been carried quite away from *our own* experience and habits of mind.

*We* can comprehend that a loving son might be angry that his mother is not "trying hard enough" to live. But here the loving son is looking down at his dying mother with the dawning assumption that she may well be a witch. (3 my emphasis)

We, the readers, have accompanied Brumble away from the university classroom, with its injunction of objective, intellectual analysis to an implied shared sense of horror.

Brumble states:

This is the very stuff of culture shock...epistemological vertigo. Just as *we* seem to be establishing a comfortable relationship with one of these autobiographers, *we* are brought up sharp; *we* are forced again to wonder how high may be the walls between cultures, and how deep are sunk the foundations of those walls, how close to human bedrock. (3 my emphasis)

Brumble clearly outlines two categories of *us* and *them*; *we*, his readers, are in the dominant position, supported by the sanction of academia, the sentiment of the devoted child, the demands of filial duty, the original willingness to be open-minded and then the sense of betrayal and horror by the obvious difference. Describing *them* is an exercise of binary oppositions. *We* are in the dominant position; *they* are subordinate. *We* are logical and can study *them* at university; *they* are mystical, superstitious, even diabolical, practicing witchcraft and sorcery. *We* are decent, loyal and trustworthy; *they* are indecent,

disloyal and to be mistrusted and feared. *They* are different from *us*, essentially so, and so the walls between cultures grow higher and the foundations of these walls, deeper.

This logic continues when Brumble asserts that while *they* are not like *us*, and while *we* cannot consider *their* preliterate narratives to be truly modern autobiographies, Indians did and do have "autobiographical narratives designed according to their own autobiographical conventions" (46). So different are these, he argues, that even if white editors have refashioned Indian autobiographies to suit the conventions of their white readership, "if we look closely at even heavily edited as-told-to autobiographies, we can still make out the lineaments of ancient traditions" (47). Here Brumble implies that there is some mark of Indigenous identity in autobiography that cannot be erased, presumably similar to Laura Beard's belief in the uncontrollable influence of oral tradition on Shirley Sterling.

This supposedly logical belief that an autobiography by a Native American is essentially different from what is simply termed "autobiography" (the descriptor "Western" is not deemed necessary) is one of the assumptions of the field. In 1987, Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat released *I Tell You Now*, an anthology of autobiographical essays by contemporary writers like Simon Ortiz, Linda Hogan and Joy Harjo. To introduce the essays Swann and Krupat write:

That form of writing generally known to the West as *autobiography* had no equivalent among the oral cultures of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. Although the tribes, like people the world over, kept material as well as mental records of collective and personal experience, the notion of telling the whole of any one individual's life or taking merely personal experience as of particular

significance was, in the most literal way, foreign to them, if not also repugnant.

(ix).

This contention that Native Americans find writing autobiography *foreign* if not *repugnant* has been so oft repeated that it has become an evident truth. Swann and Krupat insist that even though David Brumble listed more than six hundred titles in his *Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies* (1981), "some Native Americans, as we shall have occasion to note, still have hostile or ambivalent feelings toward the autobiographical form of writing" (ix). They cite four examples: one from a contributor who tells them that "blithering on about your own life and thoughts is very bad form for Indians...I have heard Indian critics say, referring to poetry, that it is best if there are no 'I's' in it" (xii); the second is from a poet who was cautioned by a member of her tribe and finally concluded that she would not contribute, as she valued "the traditional sense of Indian peoples" in which the individual acted not "as personal self but, rather,...as transmitter of the traditional culture" (xii); a third female poet initially "rejected the idea of what she called 'speaking your own stories'" (xii); and finally "at least one of the male poets acknowledged great difficulty with the form" (xii).

Swann and Krupat offer no analysis but rather accept these reactions at face value as support for the self-evident truth of their claims. Even though the first example refers to critical discussions of poetry, and the second to problems of representation, Swann and Krupat offer no theories about the potential influence of an emerging literary sensibility among Native poets. Even though there might be numerous reasons why a member of one's tribe or nation or family might caution one to not write a life-story, from cultural protocols that forbid the sharing of ceremonial knowledge to the shielding of family



secrets, Krupat and Swann divulge no details about the concerns expressed in the second example. As for the third and fourth poet, their words are accepted as though these are undeniably reliable representatives of all Indian nations across America, and as though the four are enough of a sample for Swann and Krupat to suggest that this reaction might be gendered and that writing autobiographically might be more difficult for Indian women than Indian men. Presumably the autobiographical form is not so foreign and repugnant, and the writers not so hostile and ambivalent, if three out of the four still managed to contribute to their anthology, but this is not discussed.

So pervasive are their assertions that Alicia Kent uses their examples in "Native American Feminist Criticism in the Contact Zone" (1997): "[Swann and Krupat's] finding highlights two important points: first, autobiographical expression by American Indian women is somewhat different than by Indian men; second, this difference needs to be theorized" (102). Kent already asserted that "autobiography as an expression of the individual self remains an alien (and alienating) endeavor for many American Indians, particularly women" (101), and this claim is made without citation of any evidence. There seems to be no irony in the fact that she quotes from Wilma Mankiller's autobiography in her epigraph. Mankiller writes: "The voices of our grandmothers are silenced by most of the written history of our people. How I long to hear their voices!" (as cited in Kent 100). This quote does not support Kent's assertion that Indigenous women find autobiography alienating, but rather suggests that the academic disciplines that produce history about our people do not reflect us. The irony is not only that Kent is quoting a woman's autobiography in an essay that argues Indian women find it difficult to write autobiographically, but also that Kent is participating in the same silencing that

Mankiller denounces, by producing yet another version of history that is more concerned with the agenda of the historian than with the experiences of Indigenous women. Kent acknowledges that Leslie Marmon Silko "resists the application of feminist ideology to her stories" (108). Kent then analyzes Silko's autobiography and concludes that "while Silko's project of retelling myths is not feminist in the Euro-American sense of the word, it is feminist within the context of her tribe, for she recovers women's power and challenges Western patriarchal constructions of the woman's role" (109). Kent's insistence that Indigenous women's identity exists in its challenge to Western patriarchy is yet another colonizing way to define our womanhood.

In fact, describing and categorizing Indigenous people is a colonizing tradition that forms the basis of this area of study. Grouping so many people of disparate nations and histories under the same rubric is no more accurate or liberatory if that category is gender. Even though the feminist study of Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen M. Sands makes little effort to differentiate between nations, a practice not uncommon in the 1980s, they do at least acknowledge that different tribes or nations have varying customs and cite a well-known Native American; this is not unproblematic but at least they are attentive enough to look for evidence for their claims. In *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (1984) they quote Vine Deloria, Sr., to contend that Indian women are inherently modest:

While it must be recognized that Deloria speaks from a specific tribal perspective and that generalizations about qualities and the character of Indian women are always speculative, it is nonetheless clear that the quality of modesty has a direct bearing on Indian women's autobiography, since it suggests that those women

willing to put themselves forward in order to record or write their narratives are atypical in calling attention to themselves. It also accounts for the frequent guardedness of narrators in focusing on their own emotions and private aspects of their lives. (18)

Their provisos that preface sweeping generalizations, at least theorize about the "guardedness of narrators," something which Sands disregards in an article written a year earlier, in 1983. Even though she, along with future colleagues, muse at length about the hesitancy of Native Americans to write about themselves, she nonetheless expresses great confidence in their accessibility through the page:

Until we know Indians individually and intimately, they will remain merely another ethnic type -- interesting, romantic, but unknowable except as distant figures. Few channels lead beyond the stereotype, but some do exist. Personal contact, of course, is most effective, but even for those who have no such opportunity, the world of the individual Indian is not wholly closed....

Autobiography...offers us an insightful, complete, and varied means of entrance into the private and public world of the American Indian, partly because hundreds of such works exist, but primarily because this literary form possesses intimacy and depth. (55)

Sands speaks from the dominant position of a white scholar (rather than merely another ethnic type) wanting to "know Indians." She is the explorer, on an expedition to know not just the Indian individual but also that Indian's world. While personal contact, she suggests, is most effective, the study of the autobiography is yet another vehicle to transport one to this unknown terrain, in this case not just to the "world of the individual

Indian" but to "the private and public world of the American Indian," the archetypal figure, a conclusion in contradiction with her declaration that she is identifying a channel that leads "beyond the stereotype." Brumble and Sands' respective use of metaphor to move away from or to enter into the world of the Indian confirms their understanding of themselves as inhabiting another space that is marked as "not Indian."

Brumble also imagines the study of Native American autobiography as an expedition, but in his case it is a journey through human time, "back beyond the first glimmering of literacy" (4). He attributes the argument that "Western autobiography [is] the history of the rise of the idea of the individual in the West" to scholars Karl Weintraub (1978) and Georg Misch (1950), who trace this idea back to ancient Greece and ancient Egypt. Brumble suggests that "there is a sense in which Indian autobiography can take us even farther back in time" (4), because among the ancients we can assume there might have been now-lost oral autobiographical narratives but "we may read hundreds of oral autobiographical tales taken down from American Indians" (4). And because "it would never have occurred to these people to sit down and tell the story of their lives whole," Brumble thanks "the many anthropologists, poets, psychiatrists, and amateur historians who collected life stories" (4). The end result is that "the history of American Indian autobiography...takes us back to further reaches of human time than Misch could achieve" (5).

Sands and Brumble would benefit from one of the basic insights on which autobiography theory is based, which is the distinction between the text and the lived life. While theorists disagree on just how referential the text can be, it is widely agreed that the "I" of the text is a creation and an entity separate from the author, rather than a

transparent portal to "reality." Sands' desire to access the intimate world of the American Indian and Brumble's desire for mystical access to the ancients reflects more about their perspectives than the works of Native American autobiography. But these cautions were published early on.

In 1985 David Murray, in "From Speech to Text: The Making of American Indian Autobiographies," cautions critics about the distinction between text and voice, writing and speech, even if copied exactly, because of the differences between authorial intention and various interpretations of meaning:

it is possible to see the creation of the category of authenticity within a text, and appeals to this category, as, in fact, rhetorical stratagems *within* the text. There is, then, in this case, a culturally-produced diverse but interlinked set of markers within texts which readers recognize and respond to as 'Indian' or 'authentic'. My approach, then, involves looking at the ways in which texts deploy the idea of authenticity as an internal element of their composition rather than judging whether one version of Indian experience, or myth, is more authentic than another, since this would imply a fixed and recognizable entity outside the text which is prior to it, and presumably, knowable by means other than those operating within the text -- i.e. language. (31-32)

While Murray is engaging with the post-structuralist debates of his time about the discursive creation of "truth," his strategy, to look at the rhetoric around authenticity rather than judge how "authentic" the text is, demonstrates a sophisticated approach that could have benefited the work of other scholars at that time, like Sands and Brumble. By acknowledging that readers "recognize and respond," Murray at least gestures toward an

understanding that markers of authenticity in Indigenous autobiographies can be dictated from outside the text by expectations of dominant stereotypes. Yet even with these insights, Murray is still influenced by stereotypical assumptions; he argues that the resistance of Indigenous people to talking about themselves is a feature of orality. He writes: "The concept of an individual life as an unfolding story which can be isolated, recalled and retold, made into a product for contemplation, is not one necessarily shared by other cultures, and in particular not by oral cultures" (*Forked* 65). What is surprising is that even though Murray tracks markers of authenticity in Native American autobiographies, he does not consider invocations of "oral tradition" to be such a marker.

Mick McAllister, another scholar of Native American autobiography, argues that resistance to autobiography not only is, but also *should* be a feature of Native American culture. In a 1997 article he criticizes anthropologist Leo Simmons for nurturing Don Talayesva's ego and teaching him self-importance:

By becoming an autobiographer, [Talayesva] has given up some essential part of his character as Hopi. Ironically, the anthropologist who collected his life found Don Talayesva appealing because he had chosen to "be Hopi." Like the butterfly collector with his chloroform and pins, Leo Simmons killed with his attention the very thing he valued in Talayesva. By encouraging self-examination, by giving Talayesva the Euro-American idea that self-absorption is the best mode of self-knowledge, by distorting his subject's sense of what mattered, Simmons became a snake in the Hopi garden and the undoing of Don Talayesva's rebirth as a Hopi.

(12)

To begin with, the wholesale appropriation of "self-examination" and "self-knowledge" as "Euro-American" idea ignores Hopi epistemologies that are based on one's understanding of oneself.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, McAllister's metaphor of the anthropologist as collector and Talayesva as pinned butterfly is disturbing, and his exoticization of Talayesva is apparent. While he discusses Talayesva as though he is a collectible that Simmons has devalued, McAllister at least acknowledges the effect of the collaborator and the influence of the genre on the self-portrayal of the autobiographer. Typically, scholars of Native American autobiography have been largely uninterested in these factors. When, early on in the development of this field, Lynne Woods O'Brien argued that many early "as-told-to" autobiographies "could with equal justice be called biographies, since the interest of the recorder often directs the reader" (7), David Brumble brushes aside her concerns:

But O'Brien is giving up, perhaps, a bit too easily. We can certainly recognize degrees of editorial interference, for example. And in the case of many of these narratives, it is possible to learn enough about the nature of the collaboration, enough about the Indian's motivations and culture, enough about the Anglo collaborator's motivations and culture, to allow some pretty good guesses about where the Indian leaves off and the Anglo begins. (12)

Brumble cites as an example of this ability to divide the "Indian" from the "Anglo" voice, Krupat's study of S.M. Barrett's work with Geronimo in *For Those Who Come After*. In Chapter Three Krupat argues that Barrett, a student of Boas trained to collect scientific "facts," intentionally chooses to tell Geronimo's story in passive language "removed from

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Pueblo notions of education and the self see Greg Cajete's "Indigenous Knowledge: The Pueblo Metaphor of Indigenous Education" (2000).

moral judgment as well as from esthetic arrangement" (72). Yet Krupat's conclusion does not support Brumble's confidence in the ability to separate Indian from Anglo. Krupat writes: "it seems inevitable that the final text...is very much the work of Daklugie [Geronimo's interpreter] and, most particularly, Barrett himself" (61-2). Yet despite the fact that this text clearly serves Barrett's interests, as "testimony to the 'objectivity' and 'authenticity' of the scientist's document" (74), Krupat does not argue that the integrity of the autobiography has been breached or that this text should be studied as biography. Instead Krupat argues that "the central convention of autobiography, that the subject speaks for himself, does keep the Indian voice alive (however much mediated), as it preserves, though only as information, the Indian culture" (74). Yet with all the avowed confidence in the ability to discern the "lineaments of ancient traditions" even in the most mediated text (Brumble 47), and Krupat's insistence on the survival and continuation of the "Indian voice," even if that *Indian* has no editorial control, these are statements made on faith rather than evidence.

By contrast, scholars of autobiography theory have early on recognized the impact of diverse forces on the production of a text. They have developed reading practices to discuss such issues as the dynamics of collaboration and the accompanying imbalances of power. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson outline the politics of collaboration:

the role of the coxer in assembling a life narrative can be more coercive than collaborative. Complicated ethical issues arise when one or more people exercise cultural authority over assembling and organizing a life narrative.... In giving thematic shape to the narrative by virtue of decisions about what is included or



excluded, a coaxer can subordinate the narrator's modes and choices of storytelling to another idea of how a life story should read and how its subject should speak appropriately. Although this editorial coxer often effaces his or her role in producing the narrative, a preface "describing" the working relationship between editor/transcriber and narrating subject may try to control the audience's reading. (55)

Because autobiography theorists have identified several components that affect the production of the autobiographical act, they have created a specialized vocabulary designed to discuss these issues. Smith and Watson list several factors that affect the production of an autobiography from coaxing to the structuring modes of self-inquiry. Because the autobiographical act is both highly relational and responsive, it is not just the interactions between the two halves of the informant/editor equation that require analysis. The addressee, the implied reader, the audience, also needs to be considered. In "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" Sidonie Smith explains:

An audience implies a community of people for whom certain discourses of identity and truth make sense. The audience comes to expect a certain kind of performativity that conforms relatively comfortably to criteria of intelligibility. Thus a specific recitation of identity involves the inclusion of certain identity contents and the exclusion of others....But audiences are never simple homogenous communities. They are themselves heterogeneous collectives that can solicit conflicted effects in the autobiographical subject. (110)

While Barbara Godard does not explicitly consider the addressees in her 1983<sup>9</sup> work on the literary productions of Native women in Canada, she does propose a theory that tries to take into account the role of culture and the responsibility a narrator would have to her audience.<sup>10</sup> When discussing oral history tapes from the Native Centre at the Spadina branch of the Toronto Public library, Godard suggests that women regularly preface their words by attributing a story to a grandmother or female elder in keeping with the dictates of "the Indian copyright system, [in which] a storyteller can't use the story of another person unless an exchange has been made, and then this story must always be identified as coming from that person" (66).

While the process she describes is similar to Northwest Coast protocols around the ownership of stories, for Godard it is distinctly gendered as a way to transmit stories from one generation of women to the next. It is unclear to what extent "the Indian copyright system" is gender specific or if Godard, situated in feminist discussions, limits her remarks to women because she only focuses on the work of women. Regardless, as she argues that the protocols around story ownership include autobiography, the marks of feminist revisioning are apparent:

The connection with the grandmother, wise storyteller and enabler of life and creativity, is present even in narratives that have their origin in written form and are preeminently autobiographical. It is as though these narrators also feel  
[Ojibway activist and subject of the biography *I am Nokomis, Too*] Verna

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<sup>9</sup> While Godard presented this essay at the 1983 CRIAW conference, it was not published until 1985. I include the date to indicate that she produced this work in Canada at the same time others began theirs in the U.S.

<sup>10</sup> Unlike other scholars in this field, Godard is not an anthropologist or an ethnographer but rather trained in French feminist theory and employed in the department of English at York University.

Johnston's hesitation about telling their own life stories and do so only to justify the wisdom of their grandmothers. Thus even the true autobiography shows the traces of the ethnographic life history, for tribal considerations retain more force than the individual's narrative of feelings. (66, 71)

Here Godard expresses confidence in the existence of "traces of the ethnographic life history" in much the same way that Brumble is confident in the survival of "lineaments of ancient tradition" and Krupat in the continuation of the "Indian voice." Certainly, Godard's subject matter is unlike the collaborative autobiographies as discussed by Brumble and Krupat because the narrators she studies retain editorial control of their stories. But so present is the "connection with the grandmother" that in whatever genre the narratives are expressed, even those in written form, even those that are "preeminently autobiographical," this connection is not broken. Godard's speculation that these women are only able to overcome the reluctance to talk about themselves when in support and respect of their grandmothers' wisdom, is without cited evidence but rather a deduction based on presumably self-evident truths.

Except for one comment, where Godard states that "many native women understandably wish to keep their oral literatures to themselves, since it is so closely linked to their religious beliefs"(66), she is surprisingly unreflective on the silence of her sources and how this might then have some bearing on the texts that do exist. If the autobiographers are, in fact, reluctant to talk about themselves, a point which I am not convinced is a given, why is it that these theorists place so much value in texts that they consider to be produced reluctantly or under duress? And for that matter, why does it not occur to any of these scholars that perhaps Indigenous people are reluctant to talk about

themselves in the company of white scholars who are recording them?"<sup>11</sup> As long ago as 1847, George Copway noted that many aspects of Ojibway culture were not known by "white people, however far their researches may have extended" because "there is an unwillingness, on the part of Indians, to communicate many of their traditions" (32). In 1993 Native American scholar Greg Sarris remembers the caution given to him by his Pomo elders:

"Don't talk much with outside people," Nettie and Eleanor admonished. "Careful what you tell." When the professors visited each summer, Nettie became silent. Eleanor gave short, flat answers and told stories no one in the house had ever heard. (82)

Remarkably, there is very little theorizing, in Godard's work or elsewhere, on the effects on the text if the autobiographers are as clearly unwilling as these scholars contend.

As for Godard's assertions that Native women's autobiographies are more focused on "tribal considerations" than the "individual's narrative of feelings," she offers Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973) as an example. *Halfbreed*, Godard argues, is a communal text woven "about the warp of [her grandmother] Cheechum's words" and that "most native women's narratives are thus perceived by their tellers to be traditional, empowered by the grandmother who is the true author of the text" (72).

It is difficult to not bristle at the all-encompassing statements on the nature of "most native women's narratives," but at least on this point Godard parts company with Krupat et al. No matter how uncomfortable it might be for the Indian woman to tell her life story, it seems that autobiography is not so foreign a genre if these narratives, once

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<sup>11</sup> This is possibly a disciplinary difference. Godard, Bataille and Sands are not trained in anthropology or more specifically, ethnography. Ethnographers often begin by training locals to gather information for the very reason that their subjects of study are often distrusting of the scholar from outside the community.

told, are then perceived to be traditional and authored by female elders. How exactly this process works is not described, but Godard's explanation seems almost mystical: even though a woman tells her own life story, she is so reliant on her elders' wisdom that it is as though it is authored by the grandmother. This interpretation seems to rely more on the theorist's need to explain how an Indigenous person could write an autobiography than on the evidence itself.

In a later article, an analysis written in 1990 on work by Jeannette Armstrong and Lee Maracle, Godard argues sophisticatedly that the Native storyteller "destabilizes the unity of the subject of the dominant discourse of history, constructing a different subject of (hi)story" (221). Foundational to her logic is the argument that Native authors write as representatives of communities. Therefore, *Slash* is not discussed as fiction but as Armstrong and her community's subversive autobiographical voice. Likewise Godard insists that Maracle represents several collectivities in *I am Woman*:

Through her autobiographical "I," Lee Maracle narrates herself as a political representative for women and for Métis. But this is a complex intertextual game, for interpellated in her title is *I am an Indian*, an anthology of some of the first Native writing to emerge from the Indian Movement in the sixties. Indirectly, then, she also represents Indianness. (201)

While I suspect that Maracle would not balk, on some level, with an argument that insisted that *I am Woman* represented "Indianness," it is clear that Godard is forcing this issue. Because Maracle's title is so simple, it seems unlikely, although not impossible, that she would have chosen it to resonate with this anthology. However, Godard has her books mixed up. Kent Gooderham's *I am an Indian* (1969) is full of cultural stories and

autobiographical writings. Godard is thinking instead of *The Only Good Indian: Essays by Canadian Indians* (1970), edited by Waubageshig, a more political collection.

But Godard is not the only theorist to argue that an Indigenous person has a communal sense of self. Arnold Krupat, in "Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self", a chapter in *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature* (1992), explicitly argues that

the Native American self...would seem to be less attracted to introspection, expansion, or fulfillment than the Western self appears to be. It would seem relatively uninterested in such things as the "I-am-me" experience, and a sense of uniqueness or individuality. More positively, one might perhaps instantiate an "I-am-we" experience as descriptive of the Native sense of self, where such a phrase indicates that I understand myself as a self only in relation to the coherent and bounded whole of which I am a part. (*Ethnocriticism* 209-210)

Significantly, exactly the same conversation was taking place in discussions by autobiography theorists, although not about the differences between Native and Western subjectivity, but rather about the construction of the self of men versus women. Paul John Eakin's remarkable essay, "Relational Selves, Relational Lives: Autobiography and the Myth of Autonomy" (1999), has much to say about the generalization that scholars have made about the differences in men's and women's autobiography. He celebrates the contributions of feminist scholars who argue that the Gusdorf model of selfhood "did not fit the contours of women's lives" (47), ushering in an era of scholarly attention to women's autobiography that had to that point been neglected. One of the unfortunate consequences, he notes, is that a male-female binary was established:

The three most prominent of these male-female binaries are the individual as opposed to the collective, the autonomous as opposed to the relational, and, in a different register, narrative as opposed to non-linear, discontinuous, nonteleological forms. (48)

Citing commentators who seek to "undo the conceptual legacy of a culture of individualism that has blinded us to the relational dimension of identity formation" (63-4), Eakin argues that "all selfhood...is relational despite differences that fall out along gender lines" (50). Eakin essentially ended discussions in his field that tried to clarify what might be men's versus women's styles of writing or ways of identifying oneself.

I suggest that Krupat sets up an almost identical binary to the ones Eakin critiques. It is not that Krupat is uncritical of Western notions of selfhood. He comments that the

modern Western concepts of the self are so thoroughly committed to notions of interiority and individualism that even anthropologically sophisticated Westerners have a tendency to construct their accounts of the varieties of selfhood as an evolutionary narrative, telling a story of a progression from the social and public orientation of ancient or "primitive" self-conception (the self as social "person") to the modern, Western, "civilized," egocentric individualist sense of self. (*Ethno* 204)

However, underlying his rejection of this notion of progression is still a belief in the Western idea of the self that is separate from the Native American concept. While he gestures towards a sense of plurality, these versions are still clearly in two separate camps.

On one side is the Western concept of self, marked by notions of interiority, individuality and egocentricity; on the Native American side the self is the opposite:

For, to speak, now, only of Native American autobiographies, one finds little or no explicit mention of who-I-am, little or no mention at all of the self as the object of conscious and developed concern. (211)

For Krupat, the Western self is expressed through personal accounts "strongly marked by the individual's sense of herself predominantly as different and separate from other distinct individuals," while the Native American "narration of personal history is more nearly marked by the individual's sense of himself in relation to collective social units or groupings" (212). Whereas Eakin described and critiqued three prominent binaries, Krupat proposes similar ones, replacing male versus female with Western versus Native American categories: it is the Western individual as opposed to the Native American collective and the Western autonomous self as opposed to the Native American relational self. Even as Eakin suggests that male has been associated with narrative and female with "non-linear, discontinuous, nonteleological forms" (48), Krupat offers an explanation he ascribes to Carter Revard. He quotes correspondence with Revard who speculates

how much mere demographics has to do with the differences between Native American and Western literature. I take a major fact to be that in a small relatively classless society where everyone knows everyone else, it is redundant for anyone to offer an autobiography. ...I take it that in a society where there are many people and most of them have never met or meet only for brief moments, where "privacy" means one can hide everything in the past from everyone else, THERE



it is possible to offer autobiography. (personal communication from Carter

Revard as cited in *Ethnocriticism* by Krupat, 208)

As far as narrative is concerned, to Krupat and Revard, the Western autobiographer (allied with the metropolis and anonymity) has a complete story to tell that can begin and end without anyone intervening with contradictory information. In contrast, the Native American (allied with pre-urban, tribal life and a lack of privacy) has no need to become an autobiographer, as telling the personal story in his or her community would be "redundant."

Completely absent in Krupat's analysis is any sense of context. Whether he is discussing Apache leader Geronimo (1829-1909) or Anishnabe theorist Gerald Vizenor (b. 1934), Pequot autobiographer William Apes (1798-1839) or Laguna-Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko (b. 1948), all fit under his rubric with no discussion of their differences.<sup>12</sup> He qualifies his discussion by stating that Indigenous subjectivity does exist, but is different from the Western version:

But to say that the Western understanding of the self, in its various historical representations, is neither prioritized nor valorized in Native American autobiography is not at all to say that subjectivity is, therefore, absent or unimportant in these texts. (201)<sup>13</sup>

Even should one contend that Indigenous authors do not adopt Western understandings of the self in their autobiographies, this would hardly prove how these authors see

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<sup>12</sup> He does concede that occasionally there is an exception: "The autobiographies by the much-acclaimed N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa, seem to me as metonymic in their orientation as Rousseau's, for example" (231) But rather than provide an explanation he seems to argue that the exception merely proves the rule.

<sup>13</sup> As an aside, the number of provisos in his work bears rhetorical analysis.

themselves. Autobiographies, after all, are not unmediated reflections of their authors' consciousness but rather intentional creative works.

What is surprising, however, is that Eakin, so quick to identify the problems with a binary based on gender, is not as critical of the same binary based on ethnicity. In his essay on relational lives he thanks Krupat: "I am indebted to Krupat for sensitizing me to the richness of Native American autobiographical expression" and footnotes Krupat, suggesting that readers desiring "further discussion of Native American models of identity and identity narrative [should] see Krupat, 'Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self' (73n). It is remarkable that Eakin is not able to see parallel binaries in Krupat's work to those that Eakin has critiqued in a different context.

Krupat, however, is not without his critics, albeit gentle ones. Amelia V. Katanski, in *Learning to Write "Indian": The Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature* (2005), includes a chapter on boarding-school era autobiography. As one of the newest scholars in the area of Native American autobiography, she does not include discussions or the vocabulary of autobiography theory, but she evaluates the work to date in her field and gently criticizes her predecessors:

No doubt, contemporary scholars of American Indian literature do not view themselves as ideologically similar to the Friends of the Indian, and most would find such an affiliation repugnant. Indeed, much of the work of the scholars cited here [Krupat, Brumble, Murray and Wong] celebrates the continuance of American Indian literature. Through their groundbreaking studies in the field these scholars have kept Indian autobiography visible within the academy and

have enabled further interpretation and theorizing of these important texts. But by presupposing an inflexible relationship between identity and form, even seminal theorists of American Indian autobiography can be trapped into approaching the texts with strictly defined ideas about what type of self can be associated with Native autobiography, and what type of self (or self-representation) excludes a "Native consciousness." (138)

Katanski, like Chadwick Allen, author of *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (2003), and Joel Pfister, author of *Individuality Incorporated* (2004), is a non-Indigenous academic studying the rhetorical employment of tribal and pan-Indian identity in the fight for sovereignty by Indigenous peoples. She takes issue with the assumption that "American Indian writers are automatically and essentially transformed by contact with the English language...rather than actively choosing from a repertoire of options within a particular context to represent a chosen version of the self" (137).

Katanski repeats the criticism offered by Greg Sarris, author of *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to Native American Texts* (1993), on the tendency of literary scholars to "ignore the agency of Indian 'informants' in collaborative autobiography" (138) and Katanski suggests this critique can be extended to the self-authored texts that she focuses upon. Katanski quotes Sarris:

what all these scholars do not seem to see is that while purportedly defending Indians and enlightening others about them, they replicate in practice that which characterizes not only certain non-Indian editors' manner of dealing with Indians but also that of an entire European and Euro-American populace of which these

editors and scholars are a part. The Indians are absent or they are strategically removed from the territory, made safe, intelligible on the colonizer's terms.

(Sarris 90<sup>14</sup>).

But there is a key difference between Sarris' and Katanski's readings of scholars in this field. As a first example Sarris argues that Krupat ignores his own role as interpreter of texts that makes him yet another collaborator in these bicultural compositions. Krupat's Euro-American point of view (88), Sarris argues, effectively shuts out any questions about the Native American narrators. By comparison, Katanski critiques Krupat's argument about the Indian conception of self as synecdochic and the "nearly ubiquitous critical assumption that differing senses of self require different forms of life-telling to represent them" (135). While Sarris is concerned with the recognition of the Native American narrators, Katanski is concerned with the text, specifically about the dictates of genre.

In a second example, Katanski agrees with and repeats Sarris' criticism, which is that Brumble does account for the participation of an Indian in the production of the autobiography but it is an invented Indian self, where Brumble equates "anything nonrecognizable or unfamiliar ...as authentic" (Sarris 89). But Katanski prefaces this with her contention that "Brumble's contribution is important because it contradicts earlier critical assumptions [made by Krupat] that Native literatures had no way to tell life histories before the coming of Europeans" (136). Sarris is critical of Brumble because he obscures any recognition of a Native American narrator if an ideological substitute is used, while Katanski is more positive because Brumble enlarges the field of

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<sup>14</sup> Please note that the citation in Katanski's monograph incorrectly places this quotation on page 70.

study to include pre-contact narratives. While Sarris is concerned about the people who are the subject of the text, Katanski's interest lies in the text.

Finally, Sarris argues that Bataille and Sands invent thematic patterns in the lives of the autobiographies that they study to reflect their own interests rather than consider the Indian in terms of his or her history, culture and language (90). Katanski, by contrast, critiques David Murray's idea that the writing of an autobiography might destroy a Native American's sense of traditional self: "In other words, using the English language, and a Western literary form, necessarily indicates the obliteration of any traditional identity" (137). Again the first quotation, by Sarris, shows a concern with the recognition of the particular cultural context of Native Americans and the second, by Katanski, displays a concern with the separation of identity from literary form or genre. I make this comparison not to deny the insights of Katanski but to point out that while Sarris discusses these texts in order to acknowledge people, the Native American subjects of the text, Katanski is concerned simply with the text.

This is in keeping with a strange contradiction in her analysis. She states that "Sarris criticizes literary scholars for their tendency to ignore the agency of Indian 'informants' in collaborative autobiography" but differentiates her work with a comment in parenthesis: "(but he does not extend his critique to their treatment of self-authored texts such as those discussed here)" (138). She then quotes Sarris at length, in a passage that ends with this final sentence. Says Sarris, "The Indians are absent or they are strategically removed from the territory, made safe, intelligible on the colonizer's terms" (Sarris 90). She comments: "In *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, Sarris offers a method of reading that counteracts this critical "removal" by seeking to understand the motivations

and innovations of both parties in a collaborative text" (138). But Katanski extends Sarris' method to include works that she is studying, which are not collaborative but rather self-authored. She writes: "Scholars of American Indian autobiography must develop a critical praxis that also tries to make present the agency of authors in autobiographies authored solely by Native writers" (139).

Again, theoretically I have no problem with this. I fully support her argument that "critics must decouple form and identity when studying American Indian autobiography...." (139). Yet in Katanski's argument, the Indian that is absent is Greg Sarris himself. Even though she carefully includes Sarris' work, at no point in her discussion of him does she discuss his Pomo-Coast Miwok identity nor does she gesture to his continual reference to his own "borderline status" or his critical reading method that is deeply autobiographical in nature. It is no coincidence that Greg Sarris writes a chapter entitled "Reading Narrated American Indian Lives: Elizabeth Colson's *Autobiographies of Three Pomo Women*." As part of the Pomo community, he reflects on his anxiety about his insider/outsider status in relation to a story his elder tells about a visiting ethnographer. It seems a contradiction that Katanski wants to "make present the agency" of Native authors and yet intentionally leaves out Sarris' identity which is a key factor in his reading practice.

Sarris, a Native American scholar who weaves his life stories into his academic arguments, was one of my first influences. So committed is he to autobiography as theoretical practice, it is difficult to separate his life-story from his criticism. In *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* Sarris "interweaves a myriad of voices with autobiography and theoretical discourse" (7). He argues that it is important to collapse the dichotomy

between personal narrative and scholarly argument, not to distance oneself from the text but to move closer to it. Crediting the teaching methods of his mentor and Pomo elder Mabel McKay, he uses "dialogue that interrupts and disrupts preconceived notions, that can open the intermingling of the multiple voices and histories within and between people" (33).

Although Sarris is a member of the Federated Coast Miwok and elected representative for his people,<sup>15</sup> and his scholarly prose is modeled on Native American storytelling, he labels his approach *holistic* rather than Indigenous. I do not argue that Sarris provides *the* Aboriginal perspective, and Sarris himself rejects the labels of insider/outsider. He writes: "I occupy a somewhat unusual and awkward position as a mixed blood Indian and university scholar...[working] from the borders of different cultures and traditions..." (7). He considers his work to be cross-cultural and generically innovative, relying on storytelling not, he says, to privilege the personal over the scholarly or the subjective over the objective, but rather to see "these methods and modes not as dichotomous and oppositional, but as interrelated and relational" (7). I believe that it is not his method that is specifically Indigenous, but rather his subject position. I do not suggest that his Native American identity comes with a static, fixed list of attributes that dictates his behavior or excludes him from membership in any other community. However, through his close relationships with other Pomo and Coast Miwok people, most especially with the elders, notably Mabel McKay who recognizes him as family, he is uniquely positioned to speak from *an* Indigenous perspective, and his method facilitates this. He writes:

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<sup>15</sup> The Coast Miwok are now called the Federated Indians of the Grafton Rancheria; Sarris served at least five elected terms as Chairman.

*Keeping Slug Woman Alive* tells stories about relationships. In each of the essays I interweave a myriad of voices with autobiography and theoretical discourse to create a document representing exchanges that open the world people share with each other. As such, the essays collapse the dichotomy between personal narrative and scholarly argument. (6)

It is no surprise that a generation before Katanski, as early as 1993, Sarris was able to critique Krupat and Brumble even though this did not seem to diminish their prominence or influence. The fact that Pomo culture in general, and his elders and mentors in particular, were the subject of numerous anthropological studies would have given him privileged insight to the workings of academia.<sup>16</sup> But what gives Sarris his ability to critique work that was embraced by the majority of scholars at the time, is his perspective as Pomo-Coast Miwok.

Sarris is very careful to explain that his position in his Pomo-Coast Miwok community has been, at times, marginal. But before he can even begin to talk about his childhood in foster care, he describes the history of both the Pomo and the Coast Miwok tribes in California, their relationship with each other and the waves of colonization that they experienced. Partly this helps to explain that as a Pomo-Coast Miwok person his mixed heritage is not unusual. But it is not his genetic material that is his strongest link. As he states: "Mabel McKay was one of the people who took me in, and from her I learned what is most important to me today" (11).

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<sup>16</sup> For specific titles see the Works Cited in *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*. Examples range from S.A. Barrett's *Pomo Myths* (1933) to L.J. Bean and D. Theodoratus' "Western Pomo and Northeastern Pomo" (1978). Chapter Five of *Slug Woman* takes issue with Elizabeth Colson's *Autobiographies of Three Pomo Women* (1974)



In *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995)

Robert Warrior is one of the first to insist that Indigenous scholars should be drawing on the work of our own intellectuals and cites Greg Sarris as someone who does not do this.

He writes that:

few works by American Indians reveal a nuanced relationship either to the contemporary variety or to the generational history of American Indian intellectual production. To offer again one of many examples, even a text as theoretically sophisticated and concerned with local, Native critical categories as...Greg Sarris's *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*...all but eschews references to critical writings by American Indians. Though contemporary American Indian autobiographies and novels make their way into Sarris's argument, American Indian critical work -- most notably that of Vizenor, but others as well -- is conspicuously absent. For example, in *Slug Woman* Sarris argues that "tradition is not fixed, but an ongoing process" and then cites someone outside of Native American discourse. (xix)

On one level Warrior is correct. His point, that Indigenous scholars need to draw on the intellectual efforts of our people, has revolutionized Native American Studies in the past decade. But on another level Warrior misses the fact that Sarris draws on those intellectual sources and resources he has most intimate access to, which in his case would be his elders and his community and to his own story.

Warrior's call to intellectual sovereignty is long overdue and as he suggests, key to other forms of sovereignty. But I would suggest that he needs to reassess a question he poses at the beginning of *Tribal Secrets*: "how does construing the field in the terms of

intellectual history rather than literary or generic history change the critical landscape" (xiii)? I ask back to him, ought not "autobiographies and novels" be considered critical work? Indigenous autobiographies, especially, offer theories about the world they describe, drawing on the Indigenous perspectives of their authors and those described within its pages. The interaction between Sarris's own story, the literary works that he discusses and the (admittedly non-Native) critics that he draws in -- what I call *autobiography as theoretical practice* -- is the intellectual history that a new generation of Indigenous scholars like myself draw upon.

Just as Sarris' Pomo-Coast Miwok identity is not incidental but a key part in his relationships, my own Cree-Métis identity is significant as it affects how I approach not just my work but my stories. To engage in discussions with the various scholarly communities in which I am a member, to challenge the lack of Indigenous perspectives or to question the source of authority, in order to re-conceptualize not just what Native Studies is but what literary studies could be, I need to begin by telling these stories.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *âcimisowin* and Autobiography: Indigenous Intellectual Traditions

A story that I heard from my Mom and my aunties, the only one of its kind about Kohkum that was often repeated, was how Kohkum had cured a man of blindness. This story wasn't meant to be special. It was just the relation of simple facts that were told because they were true and worth telling. The date was never given but some time in my mother's childhood of the 1940s or 1950s, a young Cree man named Absolum Halkett wanted to become an Anglican minister. He was going blind, which in the bush in Northern Saskatchewan makes life terribly difficult. He came to Kohkum because he knew she made medicines and might be able to help him.

A point in the story that was always emphasized was that Kohkum wasn't sure what to do right away. She told Absolum Halkett to give her some time to think about it. That night she had a dream that a bear was encircled and trapped in the boughs of willows, the leaves of the willow choking him. She woke up and went and collected these leaves and made a poultice. When the young man returned she gave him instructions to put this paste on his eyes at night and every morning go to the lake and wash it off. Three times he would have to do this. If it didn't work there was nothing more she could do for him.

The thing that always struck me was the ending of this story. There were no poignant words of wisdom or satisfying emotional conclusions that I had learned to expect from a childhood of watching 1970s television. The ending was always the same, with the same anti-climactic comments: "It worked. But he never did become a minister." There wasn't a sense that this was a failure or a disappointment to anyone. So he didn't become a minister! What you could depend on was that it worked, that Kohkum had fixed him. Much later on I learned that the bear in Cree culture is a medicine spirit but no one from my family ever told me this and there was a sense that this was irrelevant. The bear was what Kohkum dreamed and "Deanna, why do you have to analyze everything?" My tendency to analyze was seen as intrusive, attempting to hammer down meaning that by nature could shift and change. It was always clear to me that while my own act of interpretation was my responsibility, these stories didn't follow the same rules as those followed by the movies I watched or the books I would read in university.

While growing up I can recall knowing the names of only two Native authors. Like most Canadian children of my generation, I read Pauline Johnson's "The Song My Paddle Sings" in elementary school. Unaware that she was also an internationally popular performer who made her final home in Vancouver, I imagined her as an Indian maiden in her canoe, paddling near my relatives in Northern Saskatchewan. I liked to pretend that I was an Indian princess too, and called myself Sonsary, after a heroine in a cowboy and Indian movie; Tracey, my best friend at the time, was renamed "White Dove" because she was fair. My mother would make us bannock and we would eat it in the tent in the back yard of the private military quarters (or PMQs) on the army base where our fathers

were stationed. We weren't the only ones "playing Indian."<sup>1</sup> I remember that when our family would go camping at Elk Lake, outside of Edmonton, the sign pointing to the outhouses would offer the choice for either "braves" or "squaws," with accompanying pictures.

I learned about the second Native author because even though my mother rarely read for pleasure, I remember the one exception, a book she read from cover to cover as soon as she received it. Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* was sent to her by one of my aunts and Mom searched through it for the many names of friends and people she knew.

Partly because of my mother's enthusiasm when seeing some reflection of our family in Campbell's book, I had a hunch about the importance of Aboriginal autobiography to Aboriginal readers. When in university I first perused one of the few resources available, Penny Petrone's first of three pioneering studies of Indigenous writing, *First People, First Voices* (1983), it seemed clear to me that autobiography was a preferred genre for Aboriginal authors in Canada. I noted recorded speeches, written appeals, battle songs, letters, poems, all of which were autobiographical, as well as portions from conventional autobiographies.

In the first two chapters, except for the occasional religious meditation or entry by a spokesperson of a group, the majority of the passages quote Indigenous people who rely rhetorically on the events of their own lives. Even in such short passages, these autobiographical references reflect life narratives: For example, in 1633 Montagnais chief Capitaneau prefaces his arguments with a French explorer by describing himself as "bewildered; I have never had any instruction; my father left me very young" (5); in 1786

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<sup>1</sup> There has been ample scholarship, especially in the States, on the settler pretending to be "Indian" as a potent colonial fantasy. See the work of Philip Deloria (1998), Shari Huhndorf (2001) and Daniel Francis (1992).

the Mohawk chief, Joseph Brant, begins a letter: "I was, Sir, born of Indian parents, and lived while a child among those whom you are pleased to call savages" (36); at his trial in 1885, the Cree warrior, Poundmaker, testifies, "I am not guilty...When my people and the whites met in battle, I saved the Queen's men. I took the firearms from my following and gave them up at Battleford. Everything I could do was to prevent bloodshed...You did not catch me. I gave myself up. You have me because I wanted peace. I cannot help myself, but I am still a man"(65).

There are still more examples: Ottawa chief Ocaita, in 1818, expresses his sense of betrayal by the British: "My heart now fails me. I can hardly speak -- We are now slaves and treated worse than dogs" (45); in an 1827 poem about her son who died in infancy, Chippewa poet Jane Schoolcraft asks the question, "Can I believe the heart-sick tale/ That I, thy loss must ever wail?" (48); In an article dictated and published in an 1865 newspaper article, a Micmac man begins by stating: "My name, Peter Paul; eighty-five years old last Christmas. People say that was 1779, the year of American Independence, and now, I just so old as the American Constitution. Me little shakey, some say that government shakey too" (54). At his trial in 1885, Big Bear pleads, "I have ruled my country for long. Now I am in chains and will be sent to prison...Now I am as dead to my people" (65).

If the first two chapters of this book contain autobiographical fragments, the last two contain longer autobiographical passages. For example, in chapter four a Blood chief describes his visit to Ontario (130) and in his 1930 school address, Dan Kennedy reminisces (155); in chapter five Rita Joe's poetry (192-3) and Alanis Obamsawin's essay (198) describe their childhoods. But none of this compares with the autobiographical

archive of chapter three. Petrone calls the Christianized Ojibways<sup>2</sup> that she lists, "the first literary coterie of Indians in Canada, and the first to write extensively in English" (77). Anthologized here is the Christian testimony of John Sunday circa 1837, the 1831 letter by Peter Jones about his travels in England, a portion of George Henry's 1848 pamphlet about his tour in Europe and selections of Peter Jacob's 1852 account of his visit to Niagara Falls. It also includes selections from the first text in Canada written in English by a First Nations author, George Copway's autobiography, *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowh* (1847). Also a Christian conversion narrative, it is an autobiography of emotional crisis and salvation through literacy.

Yet despite the fact that many authors relied on the autobiographical whether requesting recognition of rights or professing Christian faith, these works have not been studied as autobiography. Influenced by scholarship on Native American autobiography in the United States, Canadian scholars generally have ignored this archive. For example, in *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present* (1990), Penny Petrone discusses this literary flowering by Ojibway writers:

Autobiography was also a popular literary form. Because of the great interest in Indians at the time, personal histories were in demand, and autobiography achieved great popularity. It was a new form, alien to an oral heritage where the communal and collective were celebrated. (70)

Petrone does not question this point, that autobiography is alien to oral heritage. Instead she cites as evidence the introduction to an anthology of autobiographical essays by

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<sup>2</sup> The ethnonym for Ojibway is Anishnabe. Alternate spellings of Ojibway that are in more contemporary use are Ojibwa and Ojibwe. Too common spellings of Anishnabe are Anishinaabe and Anishnawbe.

contemporary Native authors, *I Tell You Now* (1989), edited by Arnold Krupat and Brian Swann.

Although the tribes, like people the world over, kept material as well as mental records of collective and personal experience, the notion of telling the whole of any one individual's life or taking merely personal experience as of particular significance was, in the most literal way, foreign to them, if not also repugnant. (as cited in Petrone, *Native Lit* 201).

It was Krupat who, in *For Those Who Come After* (1985), first articulated the idea that because "autobiography...is a European invention," Indian autobiographies are the product of "Euroamerican pressure," with "no precontact equivalents," (29, 21). His rationale that autobiography is distinctly European in origin comes from his definition of the genre as "marked by egocentric individualism, historicism and writing" (29), a product of the liberal notions of individuality, a linear progressive sense of time and the reliance on literacy, effectively ruling out "material as well as mental records of collective and personal experience," by non-Europeans. The end result is that should Indigenous people write about themselves, they are not creating a variation of their cultural traditions. Instead, Krupat argues that they are succumbing to "Euroamerican pressure," or, as Petrone argues, are using a form "alien to an oral heritage."

Except for Petrone's speculation about the popularity of the genre and the strength of the market for such subject matter, she does not theorize how it could be that these Ojibway writers could so quickly switch from *repugnance*, as suggested by Krupat and Swann, to a preference for autobiography. Certainly it is clear that Copway is aware of his audience. Addressing a seemingly White and Christian audience, the first two pages



gesture constantly to Christian and Western symbols.<sup>3</sup> Copway predicts that once his readers read his autobiography, "the story of one brought from that unfortunate race called the Indians," they will "no doubt feel for my poor people...[and] be glad to see that this once powerful race can be made to enjoy the blessings of life" (11).

Yet it is very clear that Copway's autobiographical impulse is strong and can not be attributed solely to Christianity. The immortality that Copway yearns for is not the Christian concept of heaven but the ability for his words to live on after his hand "that wrote these recollections shall have crumbled into dust"(21). He wants his work to be used not only as a cautionary or inspiring tale, "not only a warning and a trust," but also a testimony to his existence, "that the world may learn that there once lived such a man as Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh, when they read his griefs and his joys" (12).

It seems clear that despite Krupat and Swann's assessment, Copway is not only "telling the whole of [his individual] life" but he is also "taking merely personal experience as of particular significance" and it seems to be neither "foreign" nor "repugnant" to him. Copway warmly embraces the notion that his personal experience, his recollections, will live on after his death. One explanation, albeit reductive, is that Copway has absorbed Western concepts and values. Cheryl Walker, author of *Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms* (1997) concludes that his acculturation has deleterious effects:

Some Native Americans, in the process of becoming literate, took to mimicking the discourse of the whites. But rather than stabilizing their position vis-à-vis the

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<sup>3</sup> When shortly afterwards he describes how "a beam of heaven shone on [his] pathway, which was very dark" (2), he evokes the conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus; when he describes himself as a mariner dependent on the stars for navigation, he does not rely on the northern star, typically used to guide sailors in the Northern hemisphere, but on the "Star of Bethlehem," a reference not only to the birth of Christ but also to a well-known hymn set to the tune of Scotland's "Bonnie Doon."

dominant culture, their rejection of their own heritage as often as not began a process of national disestablishment that resulted, in the lives of the Indian authors themselves, in an almost complete loss of psychic balance. An example is George Copway... (16)

Alternatively, it is also possible to argue that Copway's autobiographical impulse, accompanied by his desire for notoriety, are not a rejection of his culture but are in fact Ojibway, that perhaps he is expressing his culture's value in actions that increase personal honour. It seems that Petrone would think so. She is convinced that autobiography was foreign to Canada's "first literary coterie of Indians," and argues that it is the Indigenous oral tradition that is most influential on the writings of Copway and his peers:

Personal experiences were juxtaposed with communal legend and myth...Despite their Christian and acculturated influence, their works are native accounts.

*Aboriginal in origin, form, and inspiration*, their writings comprise the first body of Canadian native literature in English; (70 my emphasis)

But let us take a moment to consider what comes of trying to determine from which traditions Copway is drawing. Any of these, whether Copway is colonialism's mimic man, or even a less extreme reading, that he is acculturated, assimilating a Western concept of self, or the opposite, that he is schooled in and reproduces writing marked by his Aboriginal identity, reveals our investment in defining Indigenous identity as essentially different from the western standard. To be clear, I am not trying to diminish discussions about the effects of colonization or the influence of oral tradition or Indigenous epistemologies. But underlying discussions such as those of Krupat and Swann, Walker and Petrone is the equation of form with authentic Indian identity. It is

one thing to identify a literary tradition that some Indigenous writers draw upon and quite another to suggest the degree of influence might measure either the writer's authenticity or (as with Walker) his psychic balance. Particularly in discussions about Indigenous literatures, questions about literary form often collapse into discussions of Indigenous identity.<sup>4</sup> The problem with defining and codifying Native American literary aesthetics, for example, as holistic, cyclical and humorous is that this often deteriorates into defining the Native American as spiritual, non-hierarchical and funny. These identity checklists are not only prescriptive and oppressive, but are also unable to account for the diversity and range of writers and their works.

This tendency to reductively define what might be Western against what might be Indigenous is characteristic not only of the white academic. Robert Warrior cautions the Indigenous intellectual in *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995):

Though we have been good at proclaiming our inclusion among the oppressed of the world, we have remained by and large caught in a death dance of dependence between, on the one hand, abandoning ourselves to the intellectual strategies and categories of white, European thought and, on the other hand, declaring that we need nothing outside of ourselves and our cultures in order to understand the world and our place in it...When we remove ourselves from this dichotomy, much becomes possible. We see first that the struggle for sovereignty is not a struggle to be free from the influence of anything outside ourselves, but a process

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Dale Parker, in chapter one of *The Invention of Native American Literature* (2003), also critiques this tendency.

of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives. (123-4)

Warrior's advice is not only prescient but also inspiring to a recent generation of Indigenous literary critics who have heeded his words and study Indigenous literature in its tribal or national context. For example, Craig Womack relies on Mvskoke epistemology to study Creek literature in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), arguing that he is privileging Creek voices, not perpetuating a quest for pure, uncontaminated Creek perspectives. Not unexpectedly, he is quickly criticized. Elvira Pulitano, in *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), devotes a chapter to his work, and at the heart of her critique is her rejection of what she considers to be essentialist claims: "[Womack] becomes the insider claiming to present the correct meaning of the story merely on the basis of an authentic Native perspective" (85). It does not appear to me that Womack is appealing to purity and authenticity just because he intentionally privileges what he interprets to be Native voices. While Robert Warrior does not explicitly address Pulitano, he addresses similar criticisms in *The People in the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (2005):

determining that texts by Creek writers have enough in common to study them fruitfully alongside each other does not necessitate declaring that all Creek texts derive from a pristine well of Creekness. Revealing an essence underlying such perspectives, it makes more sense to argue, has been a particular obsession at various times in Western thought, not in the Mvskoke tradition. (xxv)

Although Pulitano asserts that Womack denies the complicated heritages of many of the mixed blood authors he studies, I would argue that he simply does not feel compelled to

discuss them in terms of hybridity or métissage. Such discussions of biculturalism in literature, he argues, diminishes the Native artist from the status of 'originator' to that of 'adaptor' and 'adopter'; the use of conventional literary forms like the novel or short story is subsequently categorized as foreign to the Native writer when it is argued that these forms are not "indigenous to tribal cultures" (137). Womack elaborates:

The tendency to put Native people in this reductive tainted/untainted framework occurs, at least partially, because Indians are thought of not in terms of their true legal status, which is as members of nations, but as cultural artifacts. Native people are seldom regarded in terms of the political and legal ramifications of tribal nationalism. (141)

Womack's decision to focus on the literary output of members of his nation has been emulated by several other scholars. Daniel Heath Justice has recently released *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (2006) on Cherokee literary history and James Niigonwedom Sinclair is doing graduate work on Anishnabe literature at the University of British Columbia. This reclamation of nation-specific epistemology not only disrupts the generalized and monolithic discussions about Native literature, but also simultaneously contributes to an individual nation's intellectual sovereignty.

Thus, it is possible not only to recognize Christian and Western conventions in Copway's life narrative, but also to acknowledge its Anishnabe conventions without being drawn into discussions of cultural contamination or authenticity. Michael Angel, in *Preserving the Sacred: Historical Perspectives on the Ojibwa Midewiwin* (2002), lists the ways in which Ojibwa people traditionally identified themselves:

If pre-contact members of the Ojibwa had been asked how they identified themselves, they would have replied that they were Anishinaabeg, the "First or True People"...If asked to identify themselves more narrowly, members of the Anishinaabeg would have referred to small kinship or clan groups to which they belonged, since this was the most significant social group in Anishnabe society. Perhaps they would have referred to the name of the socio-economic unit or band to which they belonged. This name might be taken from the name of the leader, from the geographical location, or perhaps from the name of the clan in cases where all members were from the same clan. (6-7)

Clearly Angel's priorities of introduction and affiliation apply to Copway's text. On the third page of Copway's autobiography, once he has assured his audience of the Christian content and his aspirations for immortality, Copway begins introducing his family. He generally follows the stages that Angel proposes, first describing his parents as "of the Ojebwa nation" and then locating them more specifically, "on the lake back of Cobourg, on the shores of Lake Ontario, Canada West" (13). He introduces his parents, describing his father as a medicine man and a good hunter, noting that because "no one hunted on each other's ground"...[his father's hunting territory was] the northern fork of the river Trent, above Bellmont lake" (13). Copway then switches to discuss his great-grandfather, who was the first to enter the area to secure this hunting territory "after the Ojebwa nation defeated the Hurons," and notes that he was of the Crane totem or clan (13). His mother, "a sensible woman," was "of the Eagle tribe" (14).

This Anishnabe convention, to introduce oneself by introducing one's nation, family and territory, seems to live on in modified form. Contemporary linguist Roger

Spielman, author of *'You're So Fat!': Exploring Ojibwe Discourse* (1998) argues that while it is common in non-Native culture, upon meeting someone new, to ask "What do you do?", this would be considered very rude by the members of the Ojibway community that he works within because "status is somehow attached to what someone *does* rather than to who someone *is*." He continues: "The common question I heard in Pikogan when there was a visitor was '*Aadiwejiyan?*' (Where are you from?) or 'What First Nation do you belong to?'" (36).

While there are many factors that contribute to the request that the Indigenous person identify him or herself -- Dale Turner, for example, argues that "the survival of Indigenous peoples has depended on them explaining and justifying to the dominant culture who they are, where they came from, why they believe they possess special rights..." (229-30) -- an understudied reason is that to do so, to describe yourself and your family and where you come from, follows indigenous protocols as part of an intellectual tradition

For example, in *Living on the Edge: Nuu-Chah-Nulth History from an Ahousaht Chief's Perspective* (2003) Chief Earl Maquinna George integrates his voice into his people's history. He writes:

I believe it is important to understand the Nuu-Chah-Nulth people and their relationship to the land and sea. This is my objective for this book. In particular, I will take you on an exploration of the history and environment of my home territory in Clayoquot Sound, and impart my feelings about growing up and surviving there from my own experiences and perspectives. (14)

For George, not only is his story an integral part of the story of his people and his territory but also, in keeping with Nuu-Chah-Nulth tradition, so is his name. He is the descendant of Chief Maquinna, a powerful leader in the late 1700s who was made famous in a captivity tale, *White Slaves of the Nootka*, written by Englishman John R. Jewitt and first published in 1815. George is also the descendant of another Maquinna, born around 1835 who in 1896 dictated a letter to the editor of the *Victoria Daily Colonist* to defend the potlatch, made illegal by the Indian Act, but which he argued was similar to the white man's banking system. He begins his letter:

My name is Maquinna! I am the chief of the Nootkas and other tribes. My great-grandfather was also called Maquinna. He was the first chief in the country who saw white men. That is more than one hundred years ago. He was kind to the white men and gave them land to build and live on. By and bye more white men came and ill treated our people and kidnapped them and carried them away on their vessels, and then the Nootkas became bad and retaliated and killed some white people. But that is a long time ago. I have always been kind to the white men. (as cited in Petrone, *First* 69)

Just like his descendant after him, Maquinna interweaves the story of his people with his own.

Many Aboriginal authors write autobiographically because it is in keeping with their nation's worldview. Emma LaRocque credits the role of Cree epistemology, "which does not separate the word from the self," blended with her feminist understanding of language, for the subversive use of her own voice, recognizing that this challenges the value of objectivity. She writes:



As a scholar, I am expected to remain aloof from my words; I am expected to not speak in my voice. But I am a Native woman writer/scholar engaged in this exciting evolution/revolution of Native thought and action...as an integrated person, I choose to use my own voice whether I am writing history or whether I am writing poetry. (xxi)

LaRocque links her positioning of her self in her writing with being able to "speak in my voice." Writing "as an integrated person," drawing on her autobiography, is a Cree value.

Jo-ann Archibald, in "Coyote Learns to Make a Storybasket: The Place of First Nations Stories in Education" (1997), explains that when she began her research with her elders, she would introduce herself by telling them where and which family she comes from: "Identifying one in relation to place and family is part of knowing how one fits within the collective or larger collective group, a wholistic knowing...important in Sto:lo contexts" (99, 7n). This work was particularly significant because it came after a century of the suppression of the Halq'emeylem language and the Sto:lo people. While Archibald grew up listening to stories, she clarifies that she did not benefit, as a child, from her nation's cultural richness: "I did not hear traditional stories being told when I was a child; however I heard many life experience stories" (96). Just as LaRocque cites Cree epistemology and feminism to explain why she writes her self into her scholarship and poetry, Archibald cites ethnolinguist Dennis Tedlock and Greg Sarris to justify her use of her own life experiences in her dissertation:

My story is a retelling of life experiences constructed from memory with personal interpretations and contextual descriptions woven in, to resonate with the notion that the narrator can also be a commentator who offers "criticism" (Dennis

Tedlock, 1983, 236) and that "writing, as much as possible should reflect oral tendencies to engage the larger world in which the spoken word live" as advocated by Greg Sarris (1993, 45). (Archibald, 94 1n)

While Archibald is working within her Sto:lo intellectual tradition she is also, alongside LaRocque and Sarris, creating an Indigenous academic tradition that integrates autobiography into academic discourse. Not only does this undermine the fantasy of the objective or neutral position, but it also repositions the Indigenous person in academia from subject of study to speaking subject. Following her lead, also inspired by the work of Greg Sarris, I refer to my own story to challenge conventional definitions of theorizing.

I grew up on army and air force bases across Western Canada, occasionally visiting countless cousins, the children of my mother's nine older brothers and sisters. The archive of stories my mother told us was highly autobiographical. To recite the name of each uncle and auntie is to remember a volume of stories told to me by my mother, about their childhoods, the families they married into, their children. Alice, Helen, Bella, George, Ray, Victor, Irene, David, Vicky, and my mother, Francoise Delphina. Even though she never wrote any down, Mom was a remarkable storyteller, with incredible comic timing and turn of phrase, able to tell you and retell you these stories your whole life and then one day tell you one you had never heard before. While Grandpa and my four uncles were always part of these accounts, up front and center, surrounded by her six beautiful, slender daughters, was Kohkum, my grandmother, and her mother, Tsa-pan.

In summers we would return to Saskatchewan and stop and visit in Saskatoon or P.A., on our way up to La Ronge. Sometimes we would go even farther, and stay with Kohkum at the trapping cabin at Eight and a Half, named for the distance it was from somewhere not obvious to me. I don't remember communication being a problem during the time I spent with Kohkum, but I never remember her speaking a word of English. I remember being beside her when she pulled out of the lake a large plastic bag where she kept food she wanted to keep cool, to get me margarine for bannock. At some point I got tired and a little weak from breathing too much smoke around the fire, and she and my mother made a hammock that I could rest upon. Animal hides hung on the clothesline and plants were strung from the ceiling to dry. Kohkum would make medicines. As a girl, Mom would deliver these, always on the sly, as the practice was frowned upon by the priest. This isn't to say that Kohkum wasn't devout, for she regularly went to church, sent her children to First Communion, and practiced Catholicism rather than anything that we might recognize as Aboriginal spirituality today. But when she cured a man from blindness, a fact undisputed by any of her children, she relied on a dream that helped her find the right medicine. When some people suggested that her medicines were voodoo she would scoff with derision because she considered them to be talking out of ignorance. When I went to visit her and my grandfather en route to Montreal to go to university, they were both well over eighty and living in a seniors home. Kohkum pulled out from her closet a bag of herbs she had collected and gave them to me, to make myself tea when I needed it.

In fact, soon after I arrived in Montreal I caught pneumonia. The previous year had been difficult as my father had passed on, unexpectedly, at the age of fifty-one.

When I saw a poster advertising a program that sent undergraduates to Quebec to work as English tutors in public high schools for a couple of hundred dollars a month, I saw this as a way to escape my family's grief and evening shifts at the Oakridge White Spot.

While I had managed to enroll in English literature and Liberal Arts classes at Concordia's downtown campus and rented an apartment just the other side of Rue St. Catherine, I didn't have a bed or even a telephone when I was struck down. I lay on a thin foam mattress that I had brought with me and was overtaken by a dream that I can still remember vividly. I was aware that I was lying on the floor of my bachelor apartment and that I wanted a cup of tea but didn't have the strength to make it. Suddenly I saw a bird gliding above me, high in the sky, circling above me and making increasingly larger arcs until it was circling above the whole neighbourhood, the whole city, everywhere as far as it could see. I knew that this bird was looking for someone who knew me and would come and take care of me but as far as it could fly, it could find no one.

After I recovered from pneumonia and came to love my studies and my new city, I never was able to shake a certain sense of isolation, where I never saw any reflection of or reference to my community in any of my classes, which only served to reinforce my fear that Indians hadn't done anything worth studying and that Native people didn't go to university. If it weren't for my appearance, which causes people to ask me my ethnicity, I wouldn't ever have mentioned my Cree roots. It was years before I recognized that my understanding of the world as stories, linked together, to read closely or mull over, as well as my love for literature, is the result of my mother's continual story-telling that permeated my childhood and, I think, wired my brain.

In *Native Poetry in Canada* (2001), edited by Jeannette Armstrong and Lally Grauer, Armstrong begins her introduction with an anecdote about being in her on-reserve classroom in 1965 when her cousin pointed to "the Indian guy who wrote a book" (xv). She describes how she and her classmates "rushed to the window to look at him, awestruck...The only published 'Indian' most of us had heard of then was Pauline Johnson" (xv). She also recalls her sense of pride when Chief Dan George visited her community in 1967 to read "Lament for Confederation" and the visceral thrill when Duke Redbird's poetry was able to "make it to radio" (xvi). By the time the red-hot Native poetry scene of the 1980's began, Armstrong was participating in it and present when it culminated in 1988, when "the International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal brought together over fifteen prominent Native women writers from Canada and the United States to comment on Native Writing" (xix). She credits this with the establishment of the En'owkin School of Writing in her territory, ushering in an "era of literary proliferation reinforcing an appreciation of Native cultural diversity" (xx).

Armstrong's introduction is not only a short history of Indian poetry, but also a short autobiography. Certain events mark the narrative, like radio programs or Oka, but it is the series of epiphanies that Armstrong experiences that structure this history. As a teenager Armstrong recognizes the influence of west-coast orature on Chief Dan George's reading style and the cadence of his writing that "sounded like us" (xvi). She appreciates Redbird's *Red on White* for its ability to preserve "the underlying 'Native' themes" (xvii). She is stunned by the poetry of Sarain Stump, who incorporated the "secret poetic language of symbols and images that could be appreciated only by a Native who was culturally knowledgeable" (xvii). Her search for poems by "Indians" is not, to quote

Warrior again, "ethnic cheerleading" but a recognition of self in a context that by practice had excluded an Indigenous presence. Her description of a literary field that began with her cousin pointing out some "Indian guy who wrote a book" (xv) is not just a timely vignette but part of the history of poetry in Canada and just as important as the fiery debates of the 1988 Book Fair in Montreal.

At this conference Lee Maracle set off a storm of controversy when she asked non-Native writer, Ann Cameron, to abandon the use of Native stories.<sup>5</sup> Cameron argued that she was given permission to use the Nuuchahnulth stories on which her bestseller, *Daughters of Copper Woman*, is based. In her contribution to *Language in Her Eye: Writing and Gender* (1990), Lee Maracle records many voices at that event:

The truth is that a statement I made at the Third International Feminist Book Fair, objecting to the appropriation of our stories, has nothing to do with censorship.

'We are not monkey grunters in need of anyone to tell our stories.'<sup>6</sup> 'We have a voice.'<sup>7</sup> 'Don't buy books about us, buy books by us.'<sup>8</sup> 'And, Move over.' (185)

Embedded in these quotations is an assessment of the state of publishing at that time. In the late 1980's white authors like Cameron, W.P. Kinsella<sup>9</sup> and Darlene Barry Quaife<sup>10</sup> were finding acclaim writing books "from a Native perspective," while Native authors were having difficulty finding publishers. Criticism by Indigenous intellectuals of "appropriation of voice" or "appropriation of stories" was seen as endorsements of

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<sup>5</sup> Continuing this discussion, in what became known as the "Appropriation of Voice Debates," was the subsequent article by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias in the *Globe and Mail* entitled "Stop Stealing Our Stories."

<sup>6</sup> Maracle attributes this quote to Jeannette Armstrong

<sup>7</sup> Maracle quotes Chrystos

<sup>8</sup> Maracle quotes editor Viola Thomas

<sup>9</sup> While Kinsella is most famous for the novel, *Shoeless Joe*, which is the basis of the motion picture, *Field of Dreams*, he is also the author of a series of short stories situated on the Hobbema Indian Reservation.

<sup>10</sup> Quaife's first novel, *Bone Bird* (1989), won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book. The novel is about a young woman whose "Indian" grandmother is a medicine woman who shares traditional teachings with her.

censorship, limiting authors' rights to create a work using characters of any ethnicity or writing about any topic they choose. By rejecting the topic of censorship, Maracle is not engaging with the complaints of non-Indigenous authors. Instead, by using a montage of voices she brings the focus back to Indigenous interests. Anyone familiar with Jeannette Armstrong, who is trained in her Okanagan heritage and carries herself with authority and dignity, would understand the sense of outrage and insult that she expresses in the one quote, "we are not monkey grunTERS." Anyone familiar with Chrystos and her poetry and knows the strength of her words and how she has endured, would find it incredible that someone who speaks so clearly, even loudly, would have to say "we have a voice." So obvious as to almost be redundant, are the words of editor, Viola Thomas, who points out that there is a difference between "books about us" versus "books by us." The final phrase, "Move Over", referring to the name of the paper Maracle delivered at this conference, evokes rhetoric of the Civil Rights movement. Maracle's phrase, "Move over" not only demands a space for Indigenous authors but points out that those present with power need to relinquish some in order for change to occur.

In *Thresholds of Difference* (1993) Julia Emberley discusses the issues that Maracle's paper raises and comments that the "controversy generated [at the Book Fair that] indicated, once again, that ethnocentrism and racism were still present in a predominantly white middle-class feminist critical practice..." (96)<sup>11</sup> Emberley recognizes that Indigenous women like "Jeannette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, and Maria Campbell have resisted an articulation between Native women's struggle and feminism," resisted the equation of the situation of Native women with that of "women" more

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<sup>11</sup> She concludes that this feminism has "much to (un)learn about the difference between the tokenism of liberal pluralism and the articulation of a politics of difference" (97).

generally. In the interests of solidarity, Emberley suggests two things. The first is "an auto-critique of the colonialist assumptions in self-identified non-Native feminist...practice and theory" (98). The other is prefaced with a proviso that acknowledges that "feminism" can, for Native women, represent "a hegemonic apparatus of power" (98). Emberley suggests:

As a non-Native woman, I cannot speak to the intensity of this struggle, but I can mark it here as yet another reason why it is vital that Native women's writings are widely disseminated, published, and read if the building of affinities is truly to constitute a broadly based arena of social change. (99)

I argue that Native authors find similar auto-critique, contextualizing the history and role of colonization in our worldviews and praxis, to be one of the most compelling subjects of our literary production. Autobiography, or the more inclusive category of life narrative, is a preferred genre. Not only Native women but Native authors in general have found that self-reflexive writing that places life stories into historical context -- recognizing the role of colonization along with Indigenous epistemes on identity formation -- has become a favoured genre.

While I don't think I was present during these specific debates, I was, in fact, at the International Feminist Book Fair at the University of Montreal. I went as an undergraduate, about half-way through my B.A. While by this point I was familiar enough with French that I could follow along casual conversations, this conference drew participants from around the world who spoke many different languages. We had to use earphones to listen to translations of scholarly papers, work that was already densely theoretical and I almost fainted from the alienation. The anxiety I felt was palpable as I



tried to understand why I was there. At that point I stumbled into a session of about a dozen poets, all Indigenous women from across North America, who were giving readings of their work. Not only did I feel elation and relief, as though I was being rescued from suffocation by an oxygen tent, but I also felt a sense that I was "at home." For the first time in a university setting did I think, "yes, my mother would be comfortable here." I am still grateful to those poets and the organizers of that session. It seemed to me, finally, that I could be both an academic and a Métis woman, without contradiction.

On Thanksgiving weekend 2000, a few weeks before my mother died, I flew from British Columbia with my cousin Janet and her daughter Crystal to attend a family reunion in La Ronge. We were having a memorial service for Uncle Dave, who had passed on the previous year, and not since Grandpa's funeral in 1991 and Kohkum's funeral in 1993 had I seen so many of us all together. I wandered about thinking of Mom, who at sixty was the baby of the family, and instead of taking pictures I carried around a tape recorder and asked people to record messages that I could bring back for her. Younger cousins didn't have as much to say, just giving their names and sending on a "Hi there Auntie Delphine." Her brother, Victor, shy and reserved, said hello in English and sent kind words. But when I came to a table with my oldest cousins, who were just a few years younger than my mom, they grabbed hold of the recorder and started teasing Mom about her admonishments to them when she was their babysitter. Sitting with them were the Mackay girls, who had grown up next door and had been my mother's closest friends. They made a few jokes in Cree, translating quickly for me in English, while the table erupted in laughter.

Janet came over to tell me that cousin Leo and his wife Diane were looking for gumboots for her and Crystal, so that they could all go for the afternoon to the old trapping cabin at Eight and a Half. I went instead to visit my cousin Peggy and Auntie Jane, spending the afternoon drinking tea with them, going through a giant garbage bag filled with old photographs. Most of my memories of Peggy and her sister Sylvia were from a visit we had made when I was seven and we had stayed with them for what seemed to be months. The day we had left we had taken a handful of pictures of my brother and me with the two of them, the two of them and the dog with my mother, my dad and me with Auntie Jane and the dog and Peggy. It shocked me to realize that they had a mirror set taken from a different camera at the same time. It wasn't until then that I realized that the shots were always incomplete. Not only did another part of my family have a similar yet still different set, but even in the ones we had, in any that we had, the photo never included the person who snapped the picture.

While I've been trained to read texts as a literary critic, and have garnered insights from the study of autobiography theory, my first training began with family stories. From these I learned the shifting nature of any narrative based on the context in which it is told. This isn't to say that different versions necessarily change the facts of the story but that like the pictures, there is always going to be someone or something not captured within it. This coincides with one of the most basic tenets of autobiography theory, articulated by Paul John Eakin in 1985, that autobiography cannot "offer a faithful and unmediated reconstruction of a historically verifiable past; instead, it expresses the play of the autobiographical act itself, in which the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness" (97). While Eakin

was defending the genre from long-held critique by historians on the unreliability and bias of autobiography, his definition accommodates, however unintentionally, a Cree epistemology. In Cree scholar Neal McLeod's 2005 dissertation he insists that:

The inclusion of Cree narrative interpretive structures does not mean we abandon the truth: rather, it means that we accept a more nuanced understanding of historical truth, a concept which is comfortable with more than one interpretation existing simultaneously....nêhiyâwiwin [*Greeness*] involves a high degree of subjectivity and a stress on individual interpretation. (74, 77-8)

Nestled among Auntie Jane's pictures were two I asked to borrow and copy. One was a picture of the camp at Eight and a Half, probably taken from a canoe out on the lake. I had spent a summer there when I was about seven and this was such a mystical place to me that it amazed me that a picture of it existed. The other was a picture I had never seen before, of my mother looking so young, with me not quite two years old and Sylvia and her little brother Robbie and Auntie Jane's mom, Mrs. Sanderson, sitting on a rock in the sunshine.

At the family party that night I pulled out family pictures that had been stored in an old purse of my mother's for my entire childhood. One Christmas, just after she had moved into the hospital, I had arranged them in an album, and wanted to show them here and find out what others the rest of the family had. The reaction wasn't exactly what I expected. People were incredulous, as though I had brought out a time machine. While some, like Auntie Jane, had piles of snaps mostly from the 70s, no one even remembered seeing these circa 1950s photos. Cousin Leo and Diane smiled when they saw one of our grandfather with another older man, Mr. Bird. They told me that their daughter Vanessa

was living with John Bird's grandson, that this photo had Vanessa's newborn son's two great-grandfathers in it and could they have a copy. My cousin Jerry, who had such a pain-filled life from the time his mother, Auntie Bella, died when he was a teenager until just recently, marveled at the picture of him as a happy little kid of about five years of age, riding a tricycle over a patch of dirt. If you look closely you can see his feet spinning. Jerry's sister, JoAnn, looked at the picture I had of her, about seven, crouched down next to my mom, then seventeen, as though she had seen a ghost: "I don't have any pictures of myself as a child," she told me.

We started talking about what we knew about the old times and the subject of medicine came up. Kohkum was a well known healer in her time, learning from her mother and the women before her, but not one of her ten children studied with her. Auntie Maureen, or maybe it was Auntie Janet, said that she remembered when one of her kids had bad diaper rash and Kohkum had made a special salve. Somebody reminded us of how our aunts would find sap from trees to chew like store-bought gum. Leo said that he would go out and pick the leaves of a certain tree whenever he felt a cold coming on. And I told them about pee. When I was little and taking swimming lessons, I got this terrible rash on my toes. Mom told me that Kohkum would either find a dog that had just had pups to lick my toes clean, or she would have me soak my feet in my own pee. Of course I was distraught when Mom took me to the doctor's office. The nurse wanted a sample of my urine and I thought I knew what she intended.

Sometime later, on the July long weekend in 2002, I was talking to my cousin Eric who, because his father was Status, spent some years away from the family attending residential school. I asked him if he knew about the story of when Kohkum cured a man

from blindness. Uncle Vic, my mother's only living brother was there listening and Eric admitted he didn't know this story, but more surprising to me was that Vic had a slightly different version. "I never heard about the dream," he told me. I was dumbfounded, so certain of this detail, the sort of thing I couldn't imagine my mother making up.

When shortly afterwards I went to see my Auntie Irene in Saskatoon, I asked right away if this detail was, as I remembered, the part of the story that was always told. "Of course," she said. "How else would she have known what medicine to make?" Uncle Frank asked us what we were talking about and I said, "Oh you know, that story...the one about Absolum Halkett." Frank looked curiously at me and said, "why would you ask her about Abbie Halkett when I'm the one who knows the most about this?" I sat there stunned and uncomprehending. It's true that Frank's mother and Kohkum were both healers and friends, but he grew up in Alberta and only went to Northern Saskatchewan as an adult. How could he know more about this story than Irene?

"You know about Jim Brady, don't you?" he asked, and I knew about the work James Brady and Malcolm Norris had done as Métis leaders in Northern Saskatchewan because I had read up on them at some point.<sup>12</sup> My mother had, in fact briefly dated Malcolm Norris's son Mac, and my parents had, as newlyweds, camped with Brady and Norris in La Ronge. Through Mom I had heard that Malcolm Norris had died of illness in the late 1960s and that Jim Brady had disappeared out in the bush while hunting with a friend (the word according to the family was that they were abducted by a U.F.O.)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Murray Dobbin. *The One and a Half Men: The Story of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris, Metis Patriots of the 20th Century*.

<sup>13</sup> Murray Dobbin records that "the disappearance and death of Jim Brady and Abbie Halkett remain a mystery. Speculation about the disappearance produced many hypotheses, some pure fantasy -- such as the claims that the men traveled surreptitiously to Cuba, were plucked from the earth by a flying saucer, or that they were murdered by the CIA" (249).

It wasn't surprising to me that Uncle Frank would know Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris because his dad had worked with them but I wasn't sure how Abbie Halkett fit into the equation. "This is a story I've always wanted to see come to the light," he told me. "You know Malcolm Norris was Métis but he could get away with looking white. He was working with a bunch of S.O.B.'s as a prospector. Now Abbie Halkett was a full-blooded Indian and looked like one, and so did Jim Brady. But Malcolm said that if these white men wanted to work with him, they also had to work with Abbie and Jim. Well just about the time that Malcolm got pretty sick I saw Abbie and Jim getting ready to go and establish a claim. The word was out that they had struck it rich and even splitting the pot five ways, there was going to be plenty of money to go around."

Frank told me the details of how he figured out that the two white partners knew that Norris was too sick to fight this one and besides being racist they were greedy. They hired thugs to fly up from the States using the pretense that they were on a hunting trip and made sure that Absolum Halkett and Jim Brady would never be seen again.<sup>14</sup> Around this time Malcolm Norris died and the two partners made a bundle.

I thanked him for telling me this story and told him that I didn't know about this, that I was talking with Irene about how Kohkum had healed Abbie, never realizing that he was the man who had disappeared with Brady. Frank had heard the healing story before and told me "You know, there was a lot of things we knew. My own mother cured me of diabetes." I listened politely although I felt no need to believe or disbelieve this, except for the fact that if it were true, it could help a lot of people...maybe even that if it

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<sup>14</sup> Murray Dobbin, in the process of writing about Norris and Brady, kept notes of his research, including interviews he made about the disappearance (and likely death) of Brady and Halkett. These notes have been made available at [www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/03865](http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/03865) . (accessed May 1, 2007)

were true, it would be common knowledge. But as I said, I listened politely. "It was blueberries. She told me to eat blueberries and you know, it fixed me right up."

A few years later, in the summer of 2004, I was flipping through a newspaper in a café, the August 24th edition of the *National Post*. On page A7 I came across an article entitled: "The little blue pill: Researchers are convinced of the health benefits of the common, delicious blueberry." The story cites the work of University of Ottawa biologist John Arnason who is "investigating the health effects of blueberries...that were used by native people for hundreds of thousands of years. In particular he's tracking down the anti-diabetes potential in blueberries."<sup>15</sup>

Just recently, I was given a copy of *"The Orders of the Dreamed": George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth* by my PhD supervisor. Although this work was originally written in 1823, it was re-released in 1988 with an afterward by Stan Cuthand, whom I know as a Cree teacher and long-time friend of Uncle Frank. For some reason I had never read the afterward before and was surprised to learn that in the days when Cuthand had been a young Anglican minister he had gone up and lived in La Ronge for a while and had come into contact for the first time with the bad medicine that Maria Campbell talks about in *Halfbreed*. Campbell was warned by her Cheechum and Dad, "never ever fool around with anyone who uses medicine. If someone used medicine on you, you had to find a more powerful medicine man or woman to either remove or return the spell" (43).

Cuthand refers to George Nelson's account of some acquaintances that he met having been bewitched by medicine men and Cuthand tells his own stories but ends with a proviso, that he, too, knew people who could heal:

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<sup>15</sup> [http://archives.foodsafety.ksu.edu/ffnet/2004/8-2004/ffnet\\_aug\\_24.htm](http://archives.foodsafety.ksu.edu/ffnet/2004/8-2004/ffnet_aug_24.htm) (accessed May 1, 2007)

There were medicine people in La Ronge who were well know for their ability to heal the sick. Mrs. David Patterson and Mr. Jerrimiah McKenzie both have a wide reputation for their healing powers. (194-5)

I immediately got onto the telephone to call one of my best friends. My grandmother, called Kohkum by us, Mamma by her children, and Oh-soss by her best friend, was also Mrs. Patterson. My friend was just as excited as I was and encouraged me to call my family and to try to interview them as soon as possible about this. I hung up the phone a little concerned. What would I say? Even though all my life I have been told that Kohkum was a healer, now that I have seen this in a book, it must be true?

On Thanksgiving 2005 my husband and I flew to Edmonton for my cousin Lindsay's wedding. Standing there I saw Uncle Vic and I told him that Auntie Irene, who had passed on the previous January, had confirmed that Kohkum had dreamt of a bear, the part of the story he had never been told. "What I wonder," I told him, "was why you didn't know this part of the story. Why weren't you told?"

"What you don't understand is that we were told that the Indian stuff was no good and that the White man's things were better. I remember laughing at some medicine that Mom made and my sister Bella got angry with me and told me that I had to believe. That she would say this, that really surprised me."

"But you know," he continued, "there were lots of things that happened that you wouldn't believe. Once Dave was canoeing out on the lake and they figured he made someone angry by going too close to their campsite, so that when he came home one of his hands was limp. I remember the old ladies, my mom, her mom and an old friend got



together to figure out how to heal him. I remember them talking about it for quite a bit and then they started to work on him and they healed him."

"There was medicine like that that you had to be careful with," he told me. "You know Abbie Halkett, he went to school, he was educated. An old man from Stanley Mission came to him, just like you would do in the old days, and told Abbie that he wanted him to marry his daughter. Abbie was going to be a minister, he didn't know what to say but he didn't want to marry her this way. That upset the old man, who cursed him and told Abbie he was going to become blind."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Autobiography as Theoretical Practice;

### Cree Theory in Maria Campbell's Autobiography.

In the previous chapter I argue that autobiography is a common marker of Canadian Indigenous writing and the inclusion of *âcimisowin*, my own stories, is meant to support this assertion and evoke explanations as to why this is so. In this chapter I argue that there exists an Indigenous academic style that values the inclusion of the personal in the writing of theory, what I call *autobiography as theoretical practice*. By referring to our own lives scholars can critique the sense of disembodiment embedded in the notion of objectivity and express the values of epistemologies that understand intellectual work to be inseparable from the cultural, the physical, the emotional and the spiritual.

I follow this style and interweave descriptions of my experiences of school with the emergence of Native literature in Canada as a legitimate field of study, that point in time when works by Native writers started to be discussed by literary critics and taught in university classrooms. While I begin this chapter by mixing the personal in with theoretical discussions of Native literature, I conclude with an examination of Cree

theory that exists in Maria Campbell's personal writing; I end the chapter with my reading of *Halfbreed*, to specifically recognize it as an expression of Cree-Métis philosophy.

I do not argue that the Indigenous academic style that connects both the personal and the theoretical has developed in a vacuum. According to Julie Rak, editor of *Auto/biography in Canada: Critical Directions* (2005), the inclusion of the personal into scholarly discourse can be partly attributed to the work of white, feminist critics in the late 1980s, on the cusp of third-wave feminism, who became concerned about their complicity in the marginalization of ethnic others. The incorporation of personal narratives into research methodologies was an effort to critique "the fantasy of objectivity found in patriarchal scholarship" (Miller, as cited in Rak 15) and to make explicit what Donna Haraway calls "the unmarked positions of Man and White" (Haraway 86). The result, argues Rak, is that the "considerations of autobiography and biography as genres with definable properties" as traditionally studied within literature departments has shifted to "an understanding of auto/biography as a discourse about identity and representation," a focus that has become important for research in many disciplines, including education and anthropology (17,19).<sup>1</sup>

But the fact that the inclusion of the researcher's voice in scholarly writing is considered a recent innovation overlooks a long and neglected tradition of non-fiction prose written by Indigenous authors that has included --and relied upon -- personal narrative since George Copway wrote his autobiography in 1847 (See Chapter Five).

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<sup>1</sup> Core to this new method was the affirmation of non-dominant perspectives. In 1991 Haraway noted that "many currents in feminism attempt to theorize grounds for trusting especially the vantage points of the subjugated; there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful" (88).

Because few Indigenous authors have had a university education, never mind a position in the academy, until recent years this critical style has been more easily located in newspaper columns or magazine articles. Fundamental to the journalism of E. Pauline Johnson (1890s and 1900s), Mike Mountain Horse (1930s and 40s), Eleanor Brass (1950s and 60s), Doug Cuthand (1970s-present), Richard Wagamese (1989-1991) and Drew Hayden Taylor (1990s-present) has been personal anecdote and reflection included in political or cultural critique. That being said, the current generation of Indigenous academics who wish to emulate this style also can give credit to the work of feminists in the 1990s for lending this practice of incorporating the personal into research a certain legitimacy.<sup>2</sup>

Given the use of education in Canada as a tool for the assimilation of the Indian into white society,<sup>3</sup> it is not surprising that academic writing might provoke a personal crisis that would affect one's method of inquiry. One of the first Métis to work at a university, Emma LaRocque, describes the schism between her life in her community and her life at school. In a 2002 article she writes: "At home I grew up Cree with Wehsehkehcha<sup>4</sup>; in school my senses and intellect were overrun with Settlers and Savages, and neither knew anything about Wehsehkehcha, rendering me an "alien" in my own home/land" (211). LaRocque makes her sense of difference from dominant norms

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<sup>2</sup> Postcolonial theorists can also be credited for reevaluating what counts as legitimate academic form. For example, Susan Gingell, in her contribution to *Is Canada Postcolonial: Unsettling Canadian Literature* (2003), suggests fellow postcolonial critics "diversify our discourses" (101). Pointing out the range of discursive prose by writers on the margins, she asks why literary critics, regardless of their backgrounds "feel prompted or pushed to standardize their discourses generally and linguistically when it comes to writing or even talking about texts? What richness might we be losing as a result?" (102).

<sup>3</sup> In 1908 the Minister of Indian Affairs, Frank Oliver, identified education as the method that would "elevate the Indian from his condition of savagery" and "make him a member of the state, and eventually a citizen in good standing" (as cited in the Report of the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Chapter 10).

<sup>4</sup> Another spelling of *wisahkêcâhk*, the Cree trickster

explicit, even in her sentence construction: at home she describes her childhood with the phrase, "I grew up Cree with Wehsehkehcha." Her action of growing up was confirmed by Cree cultural identity. The image of Wehsehkehcha, the trickster, is metonymic, affirming a Cree epistemology. However, at school she is split into two: her "senses" and her "intellect," are no longer united and instead both were overrun with images of "Settlers" and "Savages," the Canadian version of the famous binary of cowboys and Indians. When she states that neither knew anything about Wehsehkehcha, she is commenting on the cultural emptiness, not just of the role of settler but also of savage. One creates the other, but neither represents her. She is alien in her home/land, referring to her Aboriginal claim to territory but also to dispossession.

Janice Acoose also describes her emotional experiences at school. In *Iskwewak-kah'kiyaw ni wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws* (1995), she critiques the field of Canadian literature that perpetuates stereotypes of Indians. Relevant to her argument is her visceral reactions to the lack of representation of Indigenous people that she discovers when she first begins her university studies:

After reading the course description in the department calendar, which described the place that [Canadian] literature grew out of as being transformed "from no man's land to everyman's land," I was horrified. My feelings and subsequent anger grew out of what was my own naïve respect for the university as an institution of higher learning. (30)

Acoose knows that before the European colonization of Canada, the land was not empty. Her understanding of university is as an institution that does not recognize her.

But it would be inaccurate to say that Indigenous academics incorporate their own experiences in their arguments only to defy the assumptions of dominant society. In "'What about you?': Approaching the Study of 'Native Literature'" (2002), Kristina Fagan argues that personal reflection is essential to developing a critical practice that is ethical. She explains:

To move forward, I believe that we need to be willing to talk openly about the personal, cultural, theoretical, and institutional reasons that we do what we do.

We need to show that the issues we deal with are concrete, personal, ordinary, and therefore very important.

Fagan argues that grounding these discussions in the personal is a valuable Indigenous approach that acknowledges the many forces upon our ideas and our roles as scholars. She notes that critics "usually present our ideas as fully formed, polished and apparently static" (236). This, she argues, is a fiction. To support her call for a more encompassing and profound *Indigenous* approach, Fagan quotes Lee Maracle's essay, "Oratory, Coming to Theory":

No brilliance exists outside of the ability of human beings to grasp the brilliance and move with it. Thus we *say* what we think. No thought is understood outside of humanity's interaction. So we present thought through story, human beings doing something, real characters working out the process of thought and being.  
(Maracle 238)

Neal McLeod, in "*nêhiyâwiwin* and Modernity", suggests that Cree perspectives are particularly well adapted for the method that Fagan and Maracle prescribe. He argues that

Cree narrative imagination involves a high degree of self-awareness. It seems to me that this is essentially the nature of theory: a self-consciousness of practices and social realities, as well as the attempt to think beyond these constructions.

(51)

At the end of this chapter I argue that Maria Campbell draws on this narrative imagination to discuss Cree perceptual theories and to reconsider who is her relation. Rather than jump to this discussion, which might decontextualize the reading, I rely on Maracle's suggestion, and describe my experience "working out the process of thought and being," aware that what I offer is only one way to tell this story. My decision to end this chapter with a reading of *Halfbreed* (1973) is easily justified as it is a work so influential to an entire generation of Indigenous authors that Campbell has been called "the Mother of Us All" (Lutz 83).<sup>5</sup> But what gives it particular relevance to me is that Campbell writes about a world not far from where my family is from. I know both the geography and the historical context because she writes about a time that coincides directly with the stories my mother has told me, partly because Maria Campbell and my mother were both born in the same month, in April 1940, in Northern Saskatchewan.

Of all of my mother's stories, there are two about going to school in the 1940s and 50s that she often repeated to me. The first was about the best mark she ever received. She was assigned to write an essay on any subject matter that she wished. She decided to describe how to prepare for a winter on the trap-line, something she knew about because she had accompanied her parents out trapping since she was five years of age and even as a girl could skin and clean anything. She wrote out each step and handed it in and was

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<sup>5</sup> In an interview with Hartmut Lutz, as recorded in *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Native Authors*, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias credits Daniel David Moses for this quote.

surprised and proud that she received an A for her work. This was a story I could easily imagine because even when I was a child my grandparents still trapped. We would stay with them at their summer camp at "Eight and a Half," and my mother and grandparents would visit in a mixture of Cree and English. I would follow Kohkum around as she collected medicines but could not talk with her because I didn't speak the language. It seemed to me that you would need to know how a whole different world worked to live in this place.

The second story my mother would tell explained why she quit school at the end of grade nine. She described how she had to memorize the names of the kings and queens of England, complete with their dates of succession to the throne. She never could get it straight. One day she decided not to go to school but instead went to the local café to apply to be a waitress. When they gave her the job on the spot she effectively ended her public school education.

At some point Mom moved south to work in cafés in Regina and live with her sister, Helen. Then she moved to Manitoba to work in the diet kitchen of a TB sanatorium. About the same time one of her brothers, my uncle Ray, joined the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and was stationed in Shiloh, less than an hour away from where Mom worked. When he came to visit he brought a fellow soldier along. It ended up that Dad wasn't a complete stranger to the family. His best friend at that time was Jim Tomkins, whose little brother ended up marrying my auntie Irene. Dad would go hunting or drinking with them sometimes.

Mom used to say that she was disappointed at first with my Dad's Germanic blonde hair and blue eyes but that he grew on her. Six months later they got married and I



was born a few years after that in a nearby Brandon hospital. The only memory of Dad's school years that he talked about took place when he was twelve years old and in grade six. He got into trouble with the teacher -- the only detail mentioned about her was that she was a red-head -- and she decided to strap him on the hands until he repented. He refused to cry in front of his classmates and this infuriated her so that she beat him more than thirty times until his hands were masses of welts. Even though a picture of Dad and the teacher made it into the local newspaper under the headline "Student and Teacher Make Up," he didn't return for grade seven.

For whatever reason, my experience in school was completely different. I loved the books and the tests and the praise, which both pleased and mystified my parents. Given that my brother, who has multiple disabilities, was placed in special programs, my success at school was unusual in my family and I quickly concluded that my life in school had no relation to my life at home. It never surprised me when my family didn't understand what I wanted to do or learn or think about. I studied the bible. I clipped out from the newspaper events I considered important, like the inauguration of Jimmy Carter, the death of Elvis Presley or the first, hasty marriage of Princess Caroline of Monaco. I became something of royalist, able to name not only the kings and queens of England but also details about the six wives of King Henry the Eighth, including which ones were beheaded. I studied both English literature and Western Civilization in high school from two of my all-time favourite teachers at the same time that Prince Charles married Princess Diana; I swooned at the loveliness of it all.

Yet even though I loved to read and write, and it was easy to describe my life at school, I knew that describing my family in words did not put us in the best of light,

something I knew was wrong and complicated. Part of this was context. School was an easy space to reference because everyone could imagine the classroom with a teacher at the front near a blackboard, with classmates all about the same age and books and tests and bells that rang to mark the passing of time. Central to my mother's stories was the place where she grew up, where much of the family still lived and where those of us who lived away would reunite. It was difficult to explain what it felt like to drive all the way to Prince Albert and then have to head north for about five hours, over a gravel road. When we arrived dusty and shaken we were in a world that was completely unlike the almost-suburban order of the private military quarters of army bases we lived on. There was no running water or electric furnaces or toilets. Instead the water truck would come once a week to fill up the barrel in the corner of the kitchen, wood was burned in the stove for heat and everyone used the outhouse.

But what was disturbing and difficult to explain was that even though all this resembled the stories of my mother's childhood, by the 1970s there was something new that didn't exist in her recounts, a sense of lawlessness that seemed to be inescapable. When I was seven my teenage cousins took me shoplifting with them and then took me into the bush to drink the stolen bottles of pop. The afternoon matinee on Main Street would show restricted movies and let children in to see them. Two of my closest cousins quit school at fourteen and had babies shortly after.

But other, worse things happened. Everyone, my grandparents included, drank heavily. Strong old ladies, the mothers and grandmothers of large families, would spend nights in the drunk tank and be released to walk home alone in the morning. My cousin Richard, sweet-natured and well-known by everyone, with disabilities similar to my

brother's, was found dead at the bottom of the stairs of the La Ronge hotel. Even though his case was highly suspicious, no one was ever charged.

All this to me was part of being Cree and I didn't really have a language to talk about it. I did not expect when I went to university that I would find a vocabulary there that would help me understand what was happening to my family because my education was, in my mind, completely separate from being a member of my family. True to my expectations, in my history course on Canada I learned a lot about Eastern Canada and nothing about Northern Saskatchewan. In my English studies there were no courses on Native literature or even, in the syllabi of my various classes, any works by Native authors. I never had an Indigenous professor and, in literature classes anyway, there were no other Indigenous students as far as I could recognize. So segregated were my two worlds that this did not seem strange to me.

In fact, in about 1988 I had the chance to hear Abenaki poet and National Film Board Director Alanis Obamsawin give a talk at Concordia University in Montreal. At the time I did not know her work but was drawn to hear her speak. I remember being both so impressed and surprised by what she had to say that I actually went up after her talk to ask her if it was actually true, if there really were books written by Native authors.

It seems to me in retrospect that this question was not as odd and as embarrassing as I came to remember it. At that point I had been an avid reader who had gone to libraries regularly for almost half my life. At eleven I had my first paper route and have read the paper daily ever since. Because my family moved a few times when I was a child, and because I went on a Canadian Youth project called Katimavik, where seventeen to twenty-one-year olds would travel to and work in three different places

across the country over a nine-month period, I had at that time in my life lived in or spent extended time visiting eight of the ten provinces. I lived for a short time with a francophone family in a small Quebec town and began listening to the CBC when I got tired of practicing my French, continuing to tune in throughout my twenties. By the time I first heard Obamsawin, I had completed two years of university.

Yet none of these practices regularly associated with broadening one's mind -- reading fiction and non-fiction, awareness of current events, travel, higher education -- had given me any indication of the accomplishments of Indigenous authors. In fact, other than Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, which I had read as a child, I did not even hear about contemporary works that were at that time just being published. I did not know about Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985), or Ruby Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun* (1987). Once I started to look I managed to hunt down first versions of Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975) and *I Am Woman* (1988), that both looked as though they were produced on mimeograph machines, and have since been reedited and reissued. Ironically, the first work of Native literature that I found available to use in a university paper was Anne Cameron's *Daughters of the Copper Woman* (1985), since disputed as Cameron is not First Nations and there was controversy over her right to print these stories.<sup>6</sup>

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the key moment for me, when I realized that there was an abundance of literature to read and study, was at the 1988 International Feminist Book Fair in Montreal. There were so many Indigenous writers

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<sup>6</sup> Cameron's work was caught up in the "Appropriation of Voice" debates of the late 1980s. See two articles by Christine St. Peter written in 1989 and 1997 for more details. For an example of criticism of Cameron at the time, see Marjorie M. Halpin's review of four of Cameron's books in the Spring-Summer 1990 issue of *Canadian Literature*.

and speakers present that Jeanette Armstrong, Lee Maracle and Julia Emberley have all remarked on the vigor of the debates<sup>7</sup>; Armstrong credits it with inspiring her to open the En'owkin Centre for International Writing in Penticton a year later.<sup>8</sup>

Academia, by its very structure, is slower to respond. When I started my Master of Arts program at York University in 1991 I had naively decided to focus on Indigenous literature, not realizing that it would be difficult to find any courses to take. Instead I consoled myself with the study of nineteenth-century Canadian literature. In the early 90s there was a focus on previously neglected women's writing and my coursework focused on such canonical authors as Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill and Sara Jeanette Duncan. When it came time for me to make a seminar presentation I relied upon one of the few resources available at the time, presenting material from Penny Petrone's groundbreaking two monographs on Canadian Native writing.<sup>9</sup> The thing most remarkable about this was that my professor, a leading expert on Moodie and Traill, had never heard of the authors I discussed and we both were uncertain as how to interpret Native texts.

What was far more popular at the time than developing strategies for reading Indigenous literatures was the discussion of the image of the Indian in Canadian texts. Leslie Monkman is credited as the first to open up this discussion much earlier than the others. In 1981 he released *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English Canadian Literature*. A few years later there was a flurry of activity: Tom King, Helen Hoy and

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion see Chapter Two as well as Armstrong's introduction to *Native Poetry in Canada*; Maracle's essay in *Language in Her Eye*; Emberley's *Threshold's of Difference*.

<sup>8</sup> see *Native Poetry in Canada*, xx.

<sup>9</sup> I consulted two works that Petrone compiled and edited: *First People, First Voices* (1983) and *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present* (1990). It was only after this that I came across a third work: *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (1988).

Cheryl Calver released *The Native in Literature* (1987) from the proceedings of a 1985 conference of the same name; Terry Goldie wrote *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literatures* (1989); Daniel Francis added *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (1992).<sup>10</sup>

Almost simultaneous to these academic discussions of the image of the Indian was an increased publication of works by Indigenous authors. In the early 1990s important Native writers from Drew Hayden Taylor and Daniel David Moses to Tomson Highway began their careers as playwrights.<sup>11</sup> Some of the contributors to the first book of literary criticism written by Indigenous authors in Canada -- Jeanette Armstrong's *Looking at the Words of our People* (1993) -- also published their poetry: Armand Ruffo, Kateri Damm, Marilyn Dumont. Thomas King, Eden Robinson and Richard Van Camp released their first novels.

The first time I conceived of a PhD topic I had been away from the academy for five years but was inspired by the productions by Cree and Métis artists: Tomson Highway, Gregory Scofield, Louise Halfe, Randy Lundy. I came across the stories collected by Cree linguist Freda Ahenakew. I listened to Tom King's Jasper and Gracie from the *Dead Dog Café*, speaking Cree regularly on CBC radio. Yet just as I was beginning to imagine that I could focus on Cree literatures, it became apparent that this

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<sup>10</sup> Criticism that predates all of this is the 1893 article, "A Strong Race Opinion: The Indian Girl in Modern Fiction," where Pauline Johnson complains about the different versions of the "Indian girl" in Canadian fiction; usually she is the daughter of the chief but without a surname, self sacrificing and often possessed of a suicidal mania, and inevitably she dies. Johnson writes: "[The author] knows what she did and how she died in other romances by other romancers, and she will do and die likewise in this, (she always does die, and one feels relieved that it is so, for she is too unhealthy and too unnatural to live)" (1997). See also Rayna Green's "The Pocahontas Perplex" for a history of this stereotype that she argues pre-dates European arrival in America.

<sup>11</sup> In "Alive and Well: Native Theatre in Canada" (1996), Drew Hayden Taylor outlines the history of this artistic explosion.

would be impossible as there would be no senior professor qualified to supervise this work, especially in the two universities closest to me. Fortunately, by 2001 a handful of faculty across Canada had refocused their research interests to include Native literature. I took a course with Margery Fee who at the time was teaching the only course on Indigenous literatures in the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. When I was accepted into the Ph.D. program, she became my supervisor.

While this sort of detail may seem irrelevant, this fact has tremendous impact on this area of study. I am not sure if there is, in Canada today, any scholar who has completed a PhD in English, focusing on Indigenous literatures, who has had the supervision of someone who themselves completed a PhD in Indigenous literatures. Native American scholar Jace Weaver writes about this situation in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006). He describes a chance meeting at a conference with a badly prepared Indigenous grad student. He writes:

Encounters with under-informed graduate students are not peculiar to Native American Studies (NAS), but probably only in NAS do you have persons involved as advisors who know little or nothing about the state of the field, so that doctoral work becomes essentially unsupervised research. (4)

While I consider myself very fortunate to work with committee members who have contributed to and helped legitimize this emerging field, it is clear when I attend either local or national conferences that there is very little activity in my area and my work does not benefit from the critical attention of peers.

This is somewhat reminiscent of the generation of Canadianists before me who went through similar experiences, discussing books many of their colleagues had never

heard of or taken seriously. When I was back in high school I vaguely remember that the debate about whether or not Canada had its own literature seemed to have waned.

Because at that time I was reading books by Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood and Marion Engel, the answer seemed self-evident to me and the discussion did not intrigue me. But less than a decade earlier, in 1972, Atwood had evaluated the situation differently:

Until recently, reading Canadian literature has been for me, and for everyone else who did it a personal interest, since it was not taught, required or even mentioned (except with derision) in the public sphere....Teaching [Canadian literature] is a political act. If done badly it can make people even more bored with their country than they already are; if done well, it may suggest to them why they have been taught to be bored with their country, and whose interests that boredom serves.

(20-21)

There are obviously similarities between the emergence of Canadian literature and Native literatures as fields of study: a lack of respect, never mind prestige, that the critic must fight against; the need to have new works not only taught in the classroom but taught proficiently; the fight against hegemonic forces that have dismissed these literatures.

But I want to make the case that this current situation is less similar than it appears. For one thing, despite the large percentage of citizens of the United States who were employed in Canadian universities in the 1970s, there was a critical mass of academics who were Canadian or at least landed immigrants. To some extent promoting Canadian literature was akin to self-discovery. If Expo '67 in Montreal, coinciding with Canada's Centennial, was a critical moment when this country began to think of itself as a



nation, then the promotion of Canadian literature would reaffirm this identity. But there is no bastion of Indigenous literature scholars able to lobby for the teaching of Indigenous literatures in universities. This is not to diminish the efforts of those who worked to include Native literature in classrooms. Instead I want to emphasize that those who have done this work have not had the same sort of affirming experience and have not subsequently had the same effect in their classrooms.<sup>12</sup>

What has supported my work, then, has not been mentorship by other Indigenous literary scholars at UBC. Instead I have benefited from the presence of the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL), situated in the middle of campus at UBC. There I have been able to attend meetings with a support group for Indigenous Graduate students initiated by visiting Maori scholar Graham Hingangaroa Smith; I have been able to participate in annual province-wide Indigenous graduate student conferences initiated by Jo-ann Archibald. I have been able to find colleagues interested in discussing Indigenous epistemologies. I had the incredible opportunity to work with Alannah Young to help facilitate drama exercises based on her training both as a ceremonialist and as an actor. Because of this I have been able to incorporate her scholarship on decolonizing the body in a Women's Studies class that I teach annually, inviting her to lead us in academic discussion, singing, drumming and movement.<sup>13</sup> I also became familiar with Coast Salish

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<sup>12</sup> In fact the situation is very complex for the non-Indigenous teacher in this field. While I leave further discussion of this for another project, I quote Jo-Ann Episkenew when she writes in "Socially Responsible Criticism" (2002): "Indeed, any class on Shakespeare would not be complete without a comprehensive examination of the political and religious situation in Elizabethan England, no doubt comprised of information that the instructor has gathered from books in the library. These scholars need not worry that there just might be an Elizabethan enrolled in his or her class and that Elizabethan student just might dispute the information given in the lecture. However, this might very well occur in a class on contemporary Aboriginal literature" (65).

<sup>13</sup> For further reading see "Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality" (2005) by Alannah Earl Young and Denise Nadeau.

protocols put in place to acknowledge that UBC sits on unceded territory belonging to the Musqueam people and came to understand myself as a Cree-Métis guest on this land.

It was during this time that I became aware of cultural differences between First Nations. For example, many Coast Salish ceremonies and songs are owned by individual families and use of them is considered private. In comparison, the teachings of the Medicine Wheel derived from ceremonial practices of Prairie nations like the Cree and the Anishnabe are considered to be in the public domain. In her work as a counselor at the First Nations House of Learning, Alannah incorporates Medicine Wheel teachings rather than offend the protocols of the Coast Salish.

I began to think about the concerns around protocol in relation to my own work. What are my responsibilities as a Cree-Métis scholar to respect the tradition of the land in which I am a guest? What principles should govern my intellectual work? What obligations do I have to scholars from other nations or to those from my own? These questions seem to lie outside the purview of typical academic ethical guidelines but it seems to me that the time has come that we can ask them, not to dampen enthusiasm for the field -- we scarcely can afford that -- but (and I quote Warrior here) to participate in work that "can contribute to improving the intellectual health of Native America, its people, and its communities" (xiv).

In March 2005 I had the honour to hear Harold Cardinal speak at the FNHL in one of his last public talks before his death to cancer, and was given a copy of this presentation by Alannah. In *"Einew Kis-Kee-Tum-Awin: Indigenous People's Knowledge"* he prefaces his words by arguing that proficiency in Cree is necessary in order to fully understand a term such as *"Kiss Kee Tum Awin,"* which means

"Knowledge." Because this article is not publicly available, I quote it at length. He writes:

It is a concept rooted in the language and conceptual framework of the Cree people. It is a term, which incorporates many different, complex and complicated, though inter-related terms and concepts each originating from and rooted in the Cree language and Cree belief systems....

Cardinal then explains that elders and Cree traditions "support and sustain any institutions we create." He gives an example:

Many years ago a Cree Elder asked me the following question: *Awina Maga Kiya* -- who is it that you really are?<sup>14</sup> I replied in Cree -- *Neehiyow Neyah* -- at that time, I thought I was saying "I am an Indian." The Cree Elder then asked in Cree: *Ta Ni Ki Maga Nee hi youw Kee Tig A Wee Yin? Tansi Ee Twee Maga?* Why is it that you are called "*Neehiyow*" -- what does the word mean? When the Elder realized that I did not fully understand the meaning of the word "*Neehiyow*," the Elder proceeded to explain...

The Elder said: "The word '*Neehiyow*' comes from two words in our language: (1) *Neewoo* - Four and (2) *Yow* - Body [World]. In the context in which I use the term, it means: Four Worlds or Four Bodies. We believe that the Creator placed knowledge in each of the Four Worlds. These are the sources of knowledge, which our people must seek to understand so that both their spiritual and physical survival will grow and continue. When we say that "I am a

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<sup>14</sup> Cardinal's discussion of a similar question, "*Awina maga kee anow?*" or "Who is it that we really are?" is recorded in his essay "Nation-Building: Reflections of a Nihiyow." My thanks to Paul DePasquale, editor of *Natives and Settlers: Now and Then*, a collection of essays in which this article resides, for pointing this out to me. For further discussion on the definitions of *Nee-yow*, see also Cardinal's essay, published in 1998 in the Moses and Goldie Anthology, entitled "A Canadian *What the Hell It's All About*."

*Neehiyow*" what I are [sic] really am saying is that I come from "the people who seek the knowledge of the Four Worlds. In short when I apply the word

*"Neehiyow"* to myself, what I am saying is that "I am a seeker of knowledge."

It is not incidental that Cardinal uses an autobiographical anecdote in his discussion of Cree philosophy. Not only does it construct him as a student but it also places the elder in the position of teacher and emphasizes the cooperative element in the Cree search for knowledge. In Cree thought, according to Cardinal, one's identity is not peripheral but rather central to any form of intellectual work. Cardinal continues:

*"Neehiyow"* Elders recognized that the four worlds contained such enormous sources of knowledge that even a person's lifetime was not long enough in which to gather and understand the knowledge, which was there. Hence they saw the pursuit of knowledge as an unending, continuous inter-generational exercise in which one generation would pass onto the next generation, the knowledge which had been gathered and understood with the expectation that subsequent generations would continue the inter-generational process of gathering and understanding knowledge.

Throughout the eons of time preceding the arrival of the White man to our land and territories, our peoples evolved, developed, maintained and sustained complex systems through which they continued the knowledge quest.... Many describe our systems of pursuing knowledge as "holistic" in the sense that our systems of knowledge did not isolate knowledge in a way, which separated the spiritual from the physical aspects of First Nation life. (March 29, 2005)

Cooperation is a significant part of intellectual work. Because there is more knowledge than anyone can hope to learn in one lifetime, people must work together. This means that seekers must not only cooperate with and respect their companions but also work in tandem with the generations before them. This concept of intergenerational inquiry is not limited to learning what previous generations knew but also appreciates the role of subsequent generations. Rather than limit the search for knowledge to the intellectual sphere, Cree understandings include the physical, the spiritual and the emotional.

The relationship to knowledge that the elder outlines depends on different assumptions than that which direct Western academic inquiry. Cardinal's elder understands research to be much less based on competition and isolation and he is not promoting the rhetoric of "academic excellence", "merit", "specialization" and "academic freedom" -- none of which are transparent terms but rather ones loaded with cultural assumptions that anyone has access to any "knowledge," as long as it neither infringes on someone else's copyright or plagiarizes from someone else's work. Even initiatives that the institution develops to encourage cooperation and interdisciplinarity are undermined by the structure of the place itself. For example, some classes and departments might structure assignments to accommodate cooperative learning; even so, it is the individual student's Grade Point Average that determines his or her ability to get into higher degree programs or secure funding. Even though universities may outwardly espouse interdisciplinary inquiry, the disciplines largely remain as the institutional foundation.

While Cardinal articulates a Cree relationship to knowledge that is fundamentally different than conventional academic approaches, central to his approach are

autobiographical questions. The questions that his elder asks him ("who is it that you really are?") and Cardinal's subsequent meditation reveal his understanding of knowledge as intertwined with self-knowledge. This is also evident in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (1973), where Maria learns Métis history from her Cheechum in order to understand herself. In what Campbell calls her "first real lesson" in her life, she describes an episode as a child in which she and her siblings are taunted at school because of their poverty. When the young Maria gets home she lashes out at her parents out of anger and internalized hatred: "I kicked her and said that I hated her, Daddy, and "all of you no-good Halfbreeds" (47). Cheechum subsequently takes Maria into the woods and, before she disciplines her, gives her a detailed account of the injustices her community had suffered, leaving their homes to move west, sacrificing wealth for freedom from domination under a white supremacist state, only to face loss in the Battles at Batoche. But rather than unite in resistance to a common enemy, some discontented Métis internalized the messages of racism and the indignities of poverty, to complain to each other that "you no-good Halfbreeds are ruining it for me" (47), the same complaint that Maria had made of her parents. Cheechum uses history to warn Maria about how those in power could exploit this sense of self-hatred: "The white man saw that that was a more powerful weapon than anything else with which to beat the Halfbreeds, and he used it and still does today. Already they are using it on you" (47). Cheechum is teaching Maria not to believe the messages of self-hatred but to fight against them through community loyalty and self-respect. In her own words Cheechum is asking a similar question to Cardinal's elder: "who is it that you really are?"

Campbell in turn asks the same question to a generation of readers, inspiring many to think about their own lives. For example, Gregory Scofield dedicates his autobiography, *Thunder Through My Veins: Memories of a Métis Childhood* (1999), to "Mom Maria, whose courage, guidance, support, and love enabled me to dream." In fact Scofield organizes his memoir around Campbell's. In her introduction she describes her visit to the Métis community where she grew up:

Like me the land had changed, my people were gone, and if I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. That is why I decided to write about my life. I am not very old, so perhaps some day, when I too am a grannie, I will write more. I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams. (7-8)

Scofield expresses similar sentiments. He begins his memoir with a similar homecoming. He writes: "Maple Ridge, the town where I was born and the place I have come back to, has, like me, changed and grown up" (xiv). He too proclaims that even though he is writing this, "I am not very old" (xv). He returns to memories of himself and his mother from his past:

I hope to find peace with them, to finally give them words to speak their pain which until now has been a stone in my throat. This is my story of survival and acceptance, of myself and my widening family. I write it for all of you who have survived and for those of you struggling to survive.... I hope to bring you, the reader, into a world I often found disjointed and traumatic. (xiv-xvi)

In these introductions Campbell and Scofield recognize that the geographic locale where they grew up is no longer what connects them to the past. Both are introspective, looking for peace within.

While trauma is often a marker of contemporary autobiography it would be a mistake to consider these two works as conventional therapeutic works. Instead Campbell and Scofield understand the world through Cree principles, especially the value of *wâhkotowin*, which is kinship. Neal Macleod explains:

Kinship, *wâhkotowin*, is very important with *nêhiyâwiwin*. These are important relationships not only between human beings, but also with the rest of creation.... *wâhkotowin* keeps narrative memory grounded and also embedded within the life stories of individuals. It also grounded the transmission of Cree narrative memory: people tell stories to other people who are part of the stories and who will assume the moral responsibility to remember. (*Diss.* 22)

In *Halfbreed* Maria Campbell has rewritten Canadian history -- "the history books say that the Halfbreeds were defeated at Batoche in 1884" (11) -- to include the story of her community through her personal story. This is not just a book for a Métis readership. She publicly addresses "all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country" (8). It is clear that she considers that everyone in Canada, every one of her readers, participates in her story even if they do not know the history. It is that precise time that she decided to look within herself to find peace that she decided to write about her life. Peace would not come through the writing of a personal diary or even through the writing of a document that she could share with a few friends. Only a published book could reach enough people to oblige her readers to understand Canada and themselves



differently. In this way Campbell treats her audience like kin. This is why, at the end of the book, she admits that she no longer believes in "an armed revolution of Native people" (156) because it would not achieve what she wants; "we would only end up oppressing someone else" (156). Instead she makes a prediction: "I believe that one day, very soon, people will set aside their differences and come together as one. Maybe not because we love one another, but because we will need each other to survive. Then together we will fight our common enemies" (156-157). Love is not the key ingredient to the bond in *wâhkotowin*. Essential to Cree ideas around kinship is intense loyalty and obligation.

Her final paragraph has symmetry to it, balancing her opening passage. Just as her book begins with her searching through her childhood village now abandoned, she ends by stating that "the years of searching, loneliness and pain are over for me." Her beginning suggests that one day she will be a grannie; at the end she quotes her Cheechum, her grannie. In the beginning she decides that if she is to find peace she must find it in herself; at the end Cheechum assures her that "You'll find yourself, and you'll find brothers and sisters." By telling this story Campbell gives her audience the same responsibility as kin; when Campbell states at the end that "I have brothers and sisters, all over the country," she refers to those comrades as well as family that she has worked with politically to make the lives of our people better. But she also has made relationships with innumerable readers who now have the "moral responsibility to remember."

In fact Gregory Scofield is one of those readers. He credits her, as well as Margaret Laurence and Beatrice Culleton, for making him want to write:

They brought my mind and spirit to life. They gave me a sense of something larger than myself, something more profound than the pain, fear, and anger. They led me to a place of belonging, a permanent home where I have found a voice to speak. (xv)

When Neal Macleod states that "*wâhkotowin* keeps narrative memory grounded and also embedded within the life stories of individuals" (*Diss.* 22) he is talking about this thing that Scofield describes as larger than himself and more profound than the pain he has suffered. Cree narrative memory, according to Macleod, is "storytelling grounded in history, cultural understanding and personal relationships...it is a mix of interpretation and description...blend[ing] recounting and explanation" (*Diss.* 20,21). What makes Campbell's life story so compelling to Scofield is that her story of herself and of her people literally made him understand his kinship to her. If before his family had forgotten their Métis history, her story "brought his mind and spirit to life." A similar case could be made for the effect of Culleton's and Laurence's stories on Scofield. Raised in a world where he does not see any reflection of his heritage, these books would have been beacons, also giving him some sense of the suppressed history that is larger than himself, guiding him to a place of belonging and self-acceptance.

Whether through intentionally modeling his autobiography on hers, or because of his knowledge of the "sacred ways of my great-grandmothers [that] are just as much a part of my life as is the act of writing" (xv), Scofield understands the value, power and obligations of *wâhkotowin*, kinship. Macleod takes care to note that "important relationships [are] not only between human beings, but also with the rest of creation"

(Diss. 22). Scofield is careful to explain that his return to Maple Ridge and his subsequent autobiography are because

I hope to find the little boy I left long ago. I hope to find his mother, tiny and frail....I hope to find peace with them, to finally give them words to speak their pain which until now has been a stone in my throat (xiv)

Scofield knows that he has obligations to himself at another time in his life and to his mother, no longer living. Through responsibility to his ancestors he creates his own version of Cree narrative memory, basing his storytelling, as Macleod describes, in history, cultural understanding and personal relationships. In other words, Scofield is able to tell about the story of his Cree/Métis family, the role that the defeat at Batoche and racism in Canada had on his grandfather and subsequently on his mother and then on him; by telling the facts but also interpreting them through his new understanding of how he belongs which necessarily allows him to come to understand himself as gay. When Macleod describes this process as "a mix of interpretation and description," it is important to realize that Scofield is not simply placing himself within a regurgitated grand narrative. For example, Scofield has not undergone a conversion experience where he now sees points of his own story as a battle between evil versus good. Instead Scofield has to actively tell and retell this story as he learns and he imagines more. At the end he acknowledges that he left certain parts out, certain friendships -- including his with Maria Campbell -- deciding to keep them private. As well he also keeps recent and painful relationships out of this story, not ready to talk about them: "Until then, I carry them inside, as they slowly work their way to my heart -- the place where all stories are born" (202).

Because Scofield values and understands *wâhkotowin*, he can then "keep narrative memory grounded" and this gives him "words to speak [his and his mother's] pain" and dislodge the stone in his throat. Macleod describes the process where "people tell stories to other people who are part of the stories and who will assume the moral responsibility to remember" (*Diss.* 22). In Scofield's story he not only tells his readers his life story but he is also telling this narrative to a younger version of himself; likewise, because he is giving a younger version of himself "words to speak [his] pain" (xiv), both the young and the adult Gregory must "assume the moral responsibility to remember" (*Diss.* 22), to remember each other's versions of what happened and to be responsible for each other.

Campbell also has similar conversations and responsibilities within *Halfbreed*, although in her case it is not with herself but rather with Cheechum. Campbell does not use the character of her great-grandmother as a mouthpiece for wisdom or her true feelings but instead presents Cheechum with her own opinions and tactics. Campbell describes the relationship of Maria and Cheechum as one between a child and an elder but also as two people who see things differently.

Core to the value of kinship is the understanding that everyone has his or her own perspective, that everyone tells stories, including their own story, from a different point of view. Lorraine Brundige, Cree philosopher, describes this:

Contrary to contemporary interpretations of communal versus individual rights, when social decisions were made by historical Swampy Cree, the people came together as a community, but each "individual" was recognized as having their own opinion (perception) and each person contributed to the discussion. Thus, individual rights (perceptions) and collective rights (perceptions) were brought

together in relationship. No one person was thought to hold a truth above everyone else and everyone's perceptions were granted equal opportunity to be represented. Understanding the full implications of consensus can help in the process of relationship building that is both reciprocal and respectful. (124)

Essential to community relationships is a recognition that everyone has their own perception and that working together involved listening to each other respectfully as a way to insure that attention and respect would be reciprocal.

This understanding of respect and reciprocity is key to the Cree value of kinship. When Campbell outlines her geneology at the beginning of the book, she is honouring the bonds of *wâhkotowin*. As Jo-Ann Episkenew states in her own discussion of *Halfbreed*,

The Elders' acknowledgement of their kinship with the Métis is significant because relationships between relatives are sacred in Cree culture....In the Cree kinship system, extended family relationships are more important than blood relationships. All of Maria's mother's sisters, had she had any, would also be considered Maria's mothers; all of Grannie Dubuque's sisters would be Maria's grandmothers, and all her brothers would be Maria's grandfathers. Relatives are wealth. (60, 68)

Campbell starts with Great Grandpa Campbell from Edinburgh, Scotland, a mean and jealous man who flogged his wife, Cheechum, in public and not long after died a mysterious death. Cheechum was "a Halfbreed woman, a niece of Gabriel Dumont" (14) whose mother's people lived in what is now Prince Albert National Park: "Even though they were Indians they were never part of a reserve as they weren't present when the treaty-makers came" (15). Cheechum's son was Grandpa Campbell whose wife, Grannie

Campbell, "was a small woman with black curly hair and blue eyes...a Vandal" (16) whose family had been in the Rebellion. After Grandpa Campbell's death, and a failed attempt at the impossible task of homesteading, Grannie Campbell, her eldest son who was Maria's father, and eight other children "joined other 'Road Allowance people' (16).<sup>15</sup> Conversely Grannie Campbell's sister Qua Chich had been married to Big John, who had come to Sandy Lake to homestead and find a wife. "Some years later, when the treaty-makers came, he was counted in and they became treaty Indians of the Sandy Lake Reserve instead of Halfbreeds" (22). Maria's father met and married her mother when he was eighteen and she was fifteen. She was the daughter of Pierre Dubuque, "a huge strong-willed Frenchman from Dubuque, Iowa" (18) and of Grandma Dubuque, "a treaty Indian woman...raised in a convent" (18).

What is evident, as Campbell goes through each person is the irrationality and yet the power of Canadian legislation. For example, Cheechum's mother was a non-status Indian who lived in Prince Albert National Park because when the treaty-makers came she and her people were not present. It is, after all, hard to believe that when Canada formed and went about segregating its Aboriginal population onto reserves, that there was some infallible mechanism that appropriately tagged each and every person and community. There were occasions, such as with Cheechum's mother, when some Indigenous people were missed and while they avoided segregation on a reserve they also had no legal right to continue to live on their land or access to the resources that fed them and no compensation for their loss. Even though Campbell notes that her great-grandmother was so intimidating that the RCMP only once attempted, without success, to

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<sup>15</sup>As Campbell describes it in Chapter Two of *Halfbreed*, those Métis who lost the rights to their land became squatters, eventually building along road lines and crown lands where they would not be run off by newly arrived landowners. In this way the Métis literally lived on the margins of society.

evict her from what was deemed then to be a national park, Cheechum's descendents no longer live on this land and have no legal claim. In contrast, Grannie Campbell's sister who was a "Halfbreed" by birth, and her husband, Big John, not necessarily even Aboriginal--(he came from away and Campbell mentions no Native family members) were registered as Status Indians and made members of the Sandy Lake Reserve. The fact that Big John brought resources with him when he arrived at Sandy Lake ("he brought with him two yoke of oxen, and a beautiful saddle horse" (22)), had good fortune with farming, and then had access to land through treaty, explains how Qua Chich could be "considered wealthy by our standards" (22). By comparison her sister, Grannie Campbell, just like the other Road Allowance people, had "no pot to piss in or a window to throw it out" (26).

Also embedded in the Indian Act of Canada, that determined who were Status Indians and who were not, was gender inequality. Written into the Indian Act in 1876 that remained until 1985<sup>16</sup> was the rule that any Status Indian woman who married a non-Status Indian man would lose her status. This is why Maria's Grandma Dubuque was a Status Indian woman until her marriage to a Frenchman and was no longer allowed to live near her family on reserve. Although Campbell does not mention Pierre Dubuque's death, he falls out of the storyline as soon as he is mentioned. Regardless of whether Grandma Dubuque was widowed or even divorced, she would have no right to return to her home community. The only way that she could have regained Indian status is if she married again to a Status Indian man. Even then she would have been required to live in this new husband's home community as she would become a member of his band.

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<sup>16</sup> 1985 is when Bill C-31 came into effect. Status Indian women who married non-Status men no longer lose their status but a series of complicated rules concerning the status of their children and grandchildren, have introduced their own inequalities.

She seems in the story to be single and Campbell mentions that she lived in Prince Albert where she "cleaned for well-to-do families" (43). Likewise Grannie Campbell's sister, Qua Chich, is not a Status Indian in her own right. Instead, because her husband, Big John, was counted in as a Sandy Lake Indian, Qua Chich was automatically considered a Sandy Lake Indian too. On the other hand it does not matter who Grandma Dubuque's brother married. He is not in danger of losing his status and becomes "chief on his reserve" (27).

It is clear how this government-imposed system undermined family ties. For example, while members such as Grandma Dubuque's brother and his family had the treaty protected right to hunt for food, Maria's father had no such right. Having been raised on the land and having a hungry family to feed he defies the law and hunts, hiding the meat in an underground stash. When the RCMP pay a visit they offer Maria a chocolate bar if she will tell them where he hides the game. When she "sells out" for an *Oh Henry* bar, her father is taken to jail in Prince Albert for six months (55). Not only is he criminalized for feeding his family, but without his help the family goes hungry: "We had no money and no meat" (55). It is not only identity that is legislated. Criminality and hunger are legislated. Although Campbell does not describe this occurring, had one of the members of the family who were treaty decided to share the food that they had hunted, they would likewise be subject to arrest as any game caught by treaty Indians was not allowed to be shared with non-treaty people.

Also, a spatial divide emerges in the family. The treaty Indians in the family were segregated to the reserves and, especially on the Prairie provinces until the end of the second war, restricted from leaving without a pass from the Indian agent. On the other



hand, Indian women like Grandma Dubuque who lost their rights to live on Reserve near family often gravitated towards urban centers where they could work as wage labourers to make a living. Even though during the time of Campbell's childhood, families like Grannie Campbell's lived literally on the margins of society, on the road allowances, a generation later these settlements would be abandoned as members of Métis communities relocated to cities in order to find work.<sup>17</sup> Maria's departure from her community to become a sex worker and a drug mule in Vancouver's downtown eastside is, in some ways, representative as Métis and non-Status Indian people were relegated to poor sections of cities deemed degenerate with limited economic opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

Campbell understands that shame is a form of psychological warfare used against her community and she understands how it works. She describes the poor self-esteem of her community's men who have internalized the racist beliefs against them, which in turn affects their decision to drink and then their participation in violence against women:

I never saw my father talk back to a white man unless he was drunk. I never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people.

However, when they were drunk they became aggressive and belligerent, and for a little while the whites would be afraid of them. Even these times were rare because often they drank too much and became pathetic, sick men, crying about the past and fighting each other or going home to beat frightened wives. (12-13)

What is remarkable is how the perceptions of each group are recorded in this passage.

The Métis men feel shame in front of white men, which causes them to be submissive,

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<sup>17</sup> In *'Real' Indians and Others* Bonita Lawrence deconstructs the common association of Indian authenticity with Indian status and membership on a rural Reserve, and the parallel discounting of urban Indians as "inauthentic".

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion on racial/spatial segregation see Sherene Razack's "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George."

turning to drink to feel power, only to become remorseful and then angry, expressing it as violence to each other and to community women. Métis wives, in reaction, show fear and suffer abuse. White men are the least affected by this cycle; they never have to feel intimidated except on the occasions when they interact with drunken Métis men.

Unofficial segregation was the remedy for this. In a later chapter, Campbell describes an "unwritten law" that Maria's people would only shop after four o'clock when "whites would then turn the town over to us. They never mixed with us although their revenue depended on Native people's money" (96).

The reason that Campbell describes the various reactions by the three parties involved is that according to Brundige's explanation of perspective, Cree philosophy trains people to recognize both their own perceptions and the perceptions of others. While respect and reciprocity are strong values, they are vulnerable if any one person or group refuses to submit to these protocols. For example, the white community does not recognize that they owe respect to the Métis who support the economy of this little town.

Cheechum is the only one who understands how to fight against this, responding with a tactic of segregation she employs herself. If the Cree value of *wâhkotowin* requires certain obligations towards kin, the only way to keep outsiders at bay is to refuse to be in relationship with them. Cheechum's policy is one of non-compliance. She understands that the only way to defy the hegemony that infiltrates every aspect of Métis life is an absolute refusal to interact with white society. She does not sleep on a bed or eat at a table (19). When she meets settlers who have built on what she believes to be her land, she ignores them and refuses to acknowledge them even when passing on the road. (15) When her grandson wants to enlist, Cheechum

was violently opposed to the whole thing and said we had no business going anywhere to shoot people, especially in another county. The war was white business, not ours, and was just between rich and greedy people who wanted power. (24)

She understands that the poverty of the Métis is created by the arrival and settlement of whites, and sees it connected to imperialism internationally.

Likewise Cheechum understands how hegemony functions. When Maria becomes upset about their family poverty and insults her parents, Cheechum metes out punishment with searing critique of white Canadian society: "they try to make you hate your people" (47). Understanding the mechanisms of how this works, she refuses to have her picture taken by "two white-haired ladies...wearing two-piece bathing suits" (39). Not only is she insulted by the indecency of their mode of dress -- she asks rhetorically and in Cree, "What's wrong with these women?" -- but she also refuses to be made a spectacle, her image a photograph outside of her control. She covers her head with her shawl and refuses to respond.

On another occasion when the family goes to a film about the Riel Rebellions, Maria is horrified to see her Métis heroes "made to look like such fools" while the North West Mounted Police and General Middleton "did all the heroic things" (97). While others were willing, Halfbreeds included, to stay and laugh hysterically, "Cheechum walked out in disgust" (97). She understood how powerful the use of images was in influencing how people or communities saw themselves.

For Cheechum the only answer was complete non-participation. She refused to convert to Christianity. She scorned welfare and even her old age pension, insisting that

she should try her best to be self-sufficient (15). For her, pride was also a protection. At one point when Maria begins to understand that she and her family are not welcome in town, she refuses to walk as though she were ashamed. Cheechum heartily endorses this:

'Never forget that, my girl. You always walk with your head up and if anyone says something then put out your chin and hold it higher.' (36)

Cheechum opposes welfare, Christianity and schools, to her all arms of the government, because they erode personal self-esteem and self reliance. Campbell describes her philosophy:

My Cheechum used to tell me that when the government gives you something, they take all you have in return -- your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul. When they are sure that they have everything, they give you a blanket to cover your shame. (137)

When Campbell tries to get off the streets she moves to Calgary and before she has a chance to get work she needs money to feed her small children. She is coached by her roommate to "act ignorant, timid and grateful" (133) and arrive at the Welfare office wearing a "threadbare red coat, with old boots with a scarf" (133) dressed up to look like the stereotype of a squaw. There she is given financial assistance, but warned not to waste government money. According to Cree values Campbell was wealthy because she had a lot of family and as a descendent of original inhabitants on the Prairies she also, by rights, should have had some benefit from the economic prosperity built on the back of her and Indigenous people. Instead she is begging and being treated as though she deserves this disrespect.

At this point in the narrative Campbell has run away from her family and struggles with addiction and failed romances numerous times. Yet even when comparing her life as a kept woman or a prostitute or an addict or a drug mule, it is only after going to the Welfare office that she discusses a sense of shame. She says, "I left his office feeling more humiliated and dirty and ashamed than I had ever felt in my life" (133). In fact she tells her friend that she would rather work on the street than have to return to welfare.

As much as Campbell is unwilling to humiliate herself and turns down a chance to work "dressed up as an Indian" for the Calgary Stampede, she knows that she has been vulnerable to messages from white society and has internalized shame of herself and of her people. She knows that she wears the blanket that Cheechum warned her about: "I don't know when I started to wear it, but it was there and I didn't know how to throw it away" (137). Even when she is involved in activism and politics, she still struggles because she does not know how to be free of it. In one of her final visits with Cheechum, Maria tells her that she is working at a halfway house for women, not to solve their personal problems but to offer shelter and friendship. Cheechum approves:

Each of us has to find himself in his own way and no one can do it for us. If we try to do more we only take away the very thing that makes us a living soul. The blanket only destroys, it doesn't give warmth. (150)

Taking over someone's autonomy under the guise of charity is one way to understand what Cheechum refers to as "the blanket." But Cheechum also considered scrip to be such a pretext. When, during the Riel Rebellions, the federal government issued land scrip to a chosen few, it caused "a split within the Halfbreed ranks" (11). This tactic of

divide and conquer eroded the loyalty that lies at the core of Cree/Métis systems of obligation and threatened the collective.<sup>19</sup> A similar scheme collapsed the hopes of Campbell's father; when he tried to work with Malcolm Norris and James Brady to improve the living conditions of their community, some of their men were "hired by the government, and this had caused much fighting among our people, and had divided them" (67).

Campbell discovers that it is only in reclaiming the Cree value of *wâhkotowin*, that considers family relationships to be sacred and obligations between kin to be immense, that she can discard this blanket of self-hatred and internalized racism. In this way Campbell is able to state that she has "brothers and sisters, all over the country" (157). Her vision is inclusive, no longer restricted to "an armed revolution of Native people" (156). Instead, by sharing her story with her readers she gives them an opportunity, the obligation, to unite with her to "fight our common enemies" (157), those who continue to ignore the suppression of Indigenous people, both historically and in the present day. Her final sentence speaks to her return to the values of her people as taught to her by Cheechum; her final words are "I no longer need my blanket to survive" (157).

Just as Cardinal's elder had asked him, "Who is it that you really are?" I include

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<sup>19</sup>In order to get land under the scrip system Métis people would literally be divided. As Pamela Sing explains:

When the Hudson's Bay Company sold Rupert's Land to the Canadian government, the latter signed two types of treaties with the Aboriginals who, in exchange, agreed to extinguish their property rights. The First Nations received collective treaties in the form of reserves, whereas the Métis had to apply for individual "scrips," certificates for either land or for money with which to purchase land. Several factors contributed, however, to the sale of such scrips -- for derisorily low sums -- and, ultimately, to the loss of territory...first, that the only eligible lands were those that had been surveyed, and that these were often not only found at a distance from those already occupied by the Métis, but also in scattered areas, so that families and communities would have to separate in order to take possession of a property; and second, the fact that several Métis, poverty-stricken, thought it more profitable to sell their scrips for immediate cash. (112-13)

my *âcimisowin*, my Cree autobiographical narrative, in my academic arguments to acknowledge that my identity is not peripheral to my topics but central, and according to Cree epistemology, I have responsibilities to those I am in relationship with. In *Halfbreed* Campbell's narrative memory is grounded in *wâhkotowin* and she comes to understand that her identity is central to her understanding of the histories of the Métis and of Canada. The autonomy that Maria regains is not individualistic but rather one in community and kinship, in relationships based on reciprocity and respect. While my theoretical approach is autobiographical, her autobiography is a context-filled discussion of Cree theory.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Cree Understanding of the Shifting Passages

#### in Edward Ahenakew's "Old Keyam" <sup>1</sup>

Even though Cree literary critic Neal McLeod calls the old man in "Old Keyam" "the semi-autobiographical voice of Edward Ahenakew," the second half of *Voices of the Plains Cree* is not a straightforward autobiography of the Cree writer and Anglican cleric. Many of those who knew Ahenakew considered his "Old Keyam" character to be at least partly autobiographical, disguised enough to free him from the censure of his bishop. Certainly some of the facts of the narrative come directly from Ahenakew's life. For example, much of Chapter Seven is directly taken from an address he delivered on June 16th, 1920 at the Annual Meeting of the Women's Auxiliary held in the City of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.<sup>2</sup> Also, several passages are directly taken from the author's notes

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<sup>1</sup> While now substantially revised, a version of this chapter has been published. Reder, Deanna. "Understanding Cree Protocol in the Shifting Passages of 'Old Keyam.'" *Studies in Canadian Literature* 31.1 (2006): 50-64.

<sup>2</sup> In this address Ahenakew celebrates the heroic involvement of Status Indians in the First World War, a conflict that because of their status as non-full citizens, they had no obligation to fight. Ahenakew uses this service to argue that "we have earned the right to have some say in the management of reserve affairs, in the disposal of proceeds from our own work. More particularly, the Indians of Canada should have a voice for the character of legislation that is passed in Parliament when it concerns ourselves, for that is the privilege of all under our flag --personal freedom" (85).



on his own family history.<sup>3</sup> But rather than receiving attention as autobiography--I consider it to be closer to autobiographical fiction--"Old Keyam" has increasingly been recognized as an important philosophical text, especially by Cree and Métis academics.<sup>4</sup> While generally overlooked for the two decades after it was first published in 1973, since its reissue in 1995 it has received attention from many including Maria Campbell, Winona Wheeler and Judy Iseke-Barnes, who cites it as she catalogues examples of storytelling that have preserved Indigenous communities (219).

"Old Keyam" deserves critical attention in itself, but also because it raises questions about representation. Its author was limited in what he could say publicly while at the same time holding contradictory positions on certain matters. Given the restrictions he lived under and the complexities that he negotiated, I wonder how Ahenakew would have been able to write an autobiography to convey his complicated position. I am not suggesting that identities are singular, consistent and discrete, but Canon Ahenakew's position was particularly conflicted as well as scrutinized. Given the generic expectations of autobiography produced in the 1920s, how could Ahenakew, bilingual and literate, an activist and a cleric, a Cree and a Christian, be able to express his opinions and experiences, especially when some of what he articulates is in opposition to himself?

The sudden and confusing shifts within "Old Keyam" mirror these points of conflict. Passages are written from the position of a government critic and Cree activist and then shift quickly and radically to passages preaching submission to government and church authority. One possible if unsatisfying reading is to assume that Ahenakew is

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth M. Buck edited this material for "The Story of the Ahenakews."

<sup>4</sup> The most notable exception is David R. Miller, a non-Native professor at First Nations University, who is studying the editorial changes made to Ahenakew's original text.

creating Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde-like shifts in Old Keyam to mirror his own multiple and conflicted identities. Postcolonial theory would suggest that these shifts reveal Old Keyam to be a colonized subject, oppressed, resistant, and marginal.

Instead I have been inspired by the work of an emerging generation of scholars who have relied on Cree epistemology to direct their inquiry, whose work is only currently available in dissertation form: historian, Winona Wheeler, who cites unpublished scholarship by Maria Campbell; philosopher Lorraine Brundige; literary historian Neal Macleod. I build upon Wheeler and Campbell's argument that "Old Keyam" contains Cree "word bundles," helping them to understand the codes they identify in context with the larger text; I draw on Brundige's articulation of the "Cree value of reciprocity" to understand Ahenakew's ability to tolerate contradiction in order to value and preserve respectful relationships. I draw on Macleod's understanding of the value and obligations of kinship or *wâhkotowin*, to understand the importance of relations. Because of their scholarly contributions I am able to understand Ahenakew, not as a colonized subject, but as a Cree intellectual.

As an extension of this Cree value I also am concerned that I offer a way to interpret "Old Keyam" respectfully given the fact that it has suffered years of neglect. In the introduction to "Old Keyam" written in June 1923, Ahenakew explains his motivation to write this work: "*The time has come* in the life of my race when that which has been like a *sealed* book to the masses of our Canadian compatriots — namely the view that the Indians have of certain matters affecting their lives — should be known" (9 my emphasis). Yet Ahenakew's manuscript remained sealed, despite his attempts to have it published. Stan Cuthand, his nephew, states that it was submitted to and subsequently

rejected by Ryerson Press as early as 1922 (*Intro* xiii). Ahenakew writes about interest in "Old Keyam" by a member of the American Philosophical Society as late as 1948.<sup>5</sup> Yet this work did not find a publisher during its author's lifetime. In fact, "Old Keyam" was almost lost. Paul A. W. Wallace, Ahenakew's long-time correspondent and friend, mentions in a 1929 letter that he is returning to Ahenakew a copy of "Old Keyam," that very well might be the only remaining manuscript that was the basis for the published text that we have today.<sup>6</sup> Not until after Ahenakew's death in 1960 is his work gathered and entrusted to Ruth M. Buck, a family friend and historian charged with the job to ready his papers for publication. She makes it clear in the 1973 introduction that the immediate relevance of this work had expired: "The papers in this collection deal with the traditions and past history of the Plains Cree and with the effects, fifty years ago, of a changing way of life" (1).

This work did not initially find its intended audience, what genre theorists call "uptake," until it was generically transformed by the passage of time from political commentary to cultural artifact, blunting its revolutionary potential. Yet other kinds of writing by Ahenakew were readily received: for example his collection of Cree trickster tales were published by the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1929; he worked with Archdeacon Faries to complete a Cree-English dictionary (1938); throughout his career as a clergyman, he regularly wrote in the *Cree Monthly Guide*, a self-published Anglican tract that he began in February, 1925 (Edwards, 138). But as a Status Indian and a cleric,

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<sup>5</sup> Stan Cuthand references the correspondence between Ahenakew and his friend Paul A.W. Wallace, for this information. In a letter dated June 4, 1948 Ahenakew mentions the interest in his work by Dr. Lingelbach of the American Philosophical Society and Dr. William Fenton of the Bureau of American Ethnology at the Smithsonian. See Preface, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> This was told to me in conversation with David K. Miller, Indigenous Studies, First Nations University of Canada in September 2004.

Ahenakew was not free to participate in any activity he wished. For example, in 1933 he was forced to give up his position in the League of Indians for Western Canada: "the Indian Department urged the bishop to tell him to attend to his duties as a churchman and not meddle in the affairs of the state" (Ahenakew, xviii).

While it was acceptable for Ahenakew to act in roles that positioned the Cree as a vanishing people (as an ethnographer to collect "Native American folklore" or as an informant to Cree linguists) or as a people in need of civilization (in his work as a missionary, spreading the gospel and Western standards of cleanliness and propriety), it was not acceptable when Ahenakew stepped outside of roles sanctioned by Church and State. Thus, while Ahenakew found a publisher and audience for certain kinds of texts, he could not find either for "Old Keyam" during his lifetime.

It was not until 1973 that *Voices of the Plains Cree* was compiled and published, amalgamating two separate works that had been written about fifty years earlier. The first section was written while Ahenakew was on an extended visit to the Thunderchild Reserve in the 1920s, where he collected stories from the aging Chief Thunderchild and translated them from Cree to English. While this first half is ethnographic, preserving cultural stories of the past, the second section, entitled "Old Keyam" after its central figure, is contemporary for its time. Ahenakew creates a character based on the Cree figure of the "Old Man" to articulate the "Indian point of view," yet Keyam is conflicted, both allied to Cree cultural and political rights and white standards of success. But rather than the hybridity, fusion or creolization proposed by postcolonial critics that creates a new form to challenge old genres and the colonial order, these two separate and competing impulses remain distinct throughout the text. "Old Keyam" is a site where one

can discuss the challenges to Indigenous subject formation under colonization. At the same time, specifically Cree concepts of relationship and authority are at play. To adequately understand this work, not only Ahenakew's position as a colonized subject but also his understanding of Cree protocol has to be taken into consideration.

Ahenakew translates *keyam* as Cree for "I don't care" and explains that this term "expresses the attitude of many Indians who stand bewildered in the maze of things, not knowing exactly what to do, and hiding their keen sense of defeat under the assumed demeanor of 'keyam!'--while in fact they do care greatly" (7). The character Keyam represents the early 20th-century generation of *Nehiyawak*<sup>7</sup> who, unlike Chief Thunderchild, was born and raised on reserves and never knew tribal life before colonization and the interfering presence of the Canadian state.

Contemporary Cree scholars Maria Campbell and Winona Wheeler argue that while "Old Keyam" seems to be addressed to non-Aboriginal readers "who have the power to address ineffective and harmful federal Indian policies"(180), the text instead ought to be considered as resistance literature full of coded messages for a Cree audience.<sup>8</sup> Campbell and Wheeler argue that only those who know the language and culture could determine the status of certain characters based on actual people or recognize the references to sacred stories in High Cree. Likewise it is only the Cree reader who can decipher Ahenakew's embedded codes or recognize "word bundles."

Wheeler summarizes Campbell's argument:

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<sup>7</sup> Cree word for Cree people; recently, several Cree scholars (Winona Wheeler, Lorraine Brundige) have begun keeping Cree words in regular font and italicizing the English translation. Because neither Neal Macleod or Brenda Macdougall follow this convention I have decided to revert to standard rules, for clarity sake, but maintain Wheeler and Brundige's style when I quote them.

<sup>8</sup> Note that Wheeler credits Campbell for the argument about word bundles, and quotes and discusses Campbell at length in her dissertation, but that Campbell's article is to date unpublished and in the possession of the author.

In the stories of Chief Thunderchild and Old Keyam, [Campbell] explains, are the teachings of Napewatsowin, *man ways*, in the context of nehiyawewin, *Cree ways*. Encoded for future generations are instructions on how to be warriors, providers, and protectors in an ever changing world. (183)

I build on these insights to interrogate the conflicts of identity in the "Old Keyam" text. I am persuaded by Campbell and Wheeler that the text is full of word bundles, teaching *nehiyawewin*. But when I focus on the more vitriolic passages that seem to be critical of the Cree and more allied with the colonizer's agenda, I believe Keyam's shifting positions are not fully explained either by a heroic or a subversive interpretation.

The best example of this problem of understanding is in Chapter Ten, where Keyam muses on the imposition by the white man of "regulations necessary for [Indian] welfare" (100). In this chapter Keyam convincingly and simultaneously argues both for the justification of Cree cultural and spiritual practice made illegal by the State and for the abandonment of these cultural and spiritual practices in favour of knowledge brought by those whites whom he describes as "those who mean well" (99).

The structure of the chapter is this: First a problem is articulated, one that Cree listeners would recognize as the same problem as that of Fine Day, a famous Cree warrior who had pledged to make eight Sun Dances over the course of his life but was prohibited from fulfilling this promise because legislation at the time made such ceremonies illegal. The chapter begins when a man wanders to the reserve, very disturbed because during a near-death experience he vowed to Ma-ni-to to make a Sun Dance:

When the lodge had been erected and the dancers were ready, the police came to forbid the dance. That was the law they told the people, and serious trouble was

averted only because the police were tactful, even sympathetic. But the man's vow remained unfulfilled and he was deeply troubled. (93)

Following the articulation of the problem, Keyam gives a Statement of Faith first as a Christian but also as someone who "respects matters of conscience" (which he later describes as a British principle). He makes his argument for the value of the Sun Dance, first by telling the legend and identifying the teaching of the Sun Dance as a ceremony where the dancer must "sustain trials to open himself to the store of mercy that is in Ma-ni-to" (94). Keyam does take care to declare that he does not criticize the motives of those who made the anti-Sun Dance law, but also states that "he does not think it altogether wise" (94).

Throughout this discussion, Keyam employs an arsenal of rhetorical strategies to defend the Sun Dance. First, he demystifies the outlawed ceremony through telling the story of its origin. Second, he uses logic to defend the Sun Dance, addressing three objections to the ceremony and rebutting them by describing how similar they are to Christian practices. Third, he goes on the offensive, questioning the justice of the law itself that contradicts the "freedom to worship as one's conscience dictates [which] is a British principle" (95). Next he questions the efficacy of legislation designed to suppress rituals but which, in fact, only keeps them alive. He then questions the justification for making illegal an act of worship "that is free of any vice" (95). He ends this half of the chapter with another Statement of Faith that he longs "for the day when the Christian Church will be strong on every reserve" (95). But while he insists that Cree religious beliefs eventually will be subsumed in Christian ones, he laments that "it is a time of change when all that made our lives secure is going from us, and we have not yet learned

the new ways, nor can we understand why these things should be" (95). While Keyam's prediction about the inevitable triumph of Christianity is in keeping with his Statements of Faith, his lamentations are those of a Cree person. The modals in this last phrase, the *can* and the *should* in "nor can we understand why these things should be," bear examination, if only because they can be read in two ways. Either the Cree cannot understand, suggesting an inability because of a lack of education in the "new ways," or perhaps it is a questioning of the necessity of changes, "why these things should be."

This sense of ambiguity continues in the next paragraph. While Keyam is quick to state that the Indians "know that they deceived themselves" by depending on medicine-men and conjurors, Keyam contradicts this statement when he effectively defends Cree spiritual beliefs. By describing these beliefs as "what the white man is compelled to scoff at because it does not always fall within reason" (96), Keyam implies that to disregard or "scoff at" what you do not understand is a deficiency. He recounts two stories given to him by Basil Starblanket, whom he describes as a "strong, hard-headed...[and] stalwart defender of the Christian religion" (96). Combined with the fact that he is the son of the famous Cree chief, *Ah-tah-ka-koop*, this makes Starblanket a very credible source. In the first story Keyam tells how Starblanket witnessed the work of a conjuror and in the second how *Ah-tah-ka-koop*, in the days before signing Treaty in 1876, evaded the curse of a conjuror who was greatly disliked and feared. The implication is that if even a stalwart Christian in the first story and an eminent chief in the second, both well respected by whites and Crees, could testify to the powers of conjurors, then these accounts must be valid and believable. Yet Keyam then dismisses these stories as



credible only to the uneducated by stating that "we who have gone to school know that such things are not always as they appear" (98).

But if I could argue that Ahenakew constructs for Keyam a veneer of compliance with the beliefs of the white man to appease his white readers, be they his potential publisher, his bishop or the officials at Indian Affairs, the last page-and-a-half swing directly against this argument. Keyam argues in the early passages that the Sun Dance was to some spiritually necessary, but in any event generally inoffensive. At the end of the chapter Keyam condemns traditional spiritual practices by arguing that they are harmful to contemporary Cree: "One of the greatest forces in maintaining this ignorance has been the influence of the medicine-men, particularly the one who professes the miraculous skill of conjuring" (98). If Keyam used logic to rebut the objections to the Sun Dance and other Cree practices, and dignified the value of acting as "one's conscience dictates," in the last page Keyam uses logic to list objections to current sanitation practices and contends that the only salvation is in following "the wise direction of a field matron...kind but firm" or "those who mean well" (99), supposedly like those "tactful, even sympathetic" policemen who came to the reserve to stop the Sun Dance. Keyam suggests that the Cree tradition of accepting the uncertainty of life encouraged a "stoic fatalism" that becomes "disregard for the simplest rules of health....The factors that worked for our well-being formerly were the natural accompaniments of a free life, not the deliberate precautions that we must now take" (98).

Here Keyam describes life without freedom: If before there was a teepee, now there is a shanty, overcrowded and unclean. If before there were constant changes in

camp, now the stationary settlements are filled with dirt and refuse. Clothing used to be simple and easily renewed while now, because of the adoption of European clothing styles and reserve conditions, it is difficult to keep clean. Now food is easier to obtain but unhealthy, so that ignorance contributes to malnourishment. Keyam readily identifies that these problems, like the "diseases that the white man brought amongst us" (98), are the result of contact. But rather than rail against the injustices of the loss of freedom, or the subjection to the poverty that elsewhere he has eloquently argued is the result of interference or obstruction by the white man, Keyam encourages submission:

The Indians must be educated to work faithfully with those who mean well, instead of working against them. Appropriate means must be taken to help us see the fallacy of the old ideas on one hand, and on the other the efficacy of the white man's methods in simple principles. (99)

This swing, from one point to another and then back again, mimics its author's position, and I look to the historical context to consider what roles were available to Ahenakew. The State's contradictory impulses, to segregate yet also to assimilate the Indigenous person, seem to be partly responsible for this attitude of "keyam" that Ahenakew describes in his text. Ahenakew and his generation were subject to the restrictions of legislation that criminalized traditional cultural practices while dictating everything from legal identity and mobility to education. The Cree were segregated from mainstream society, living on reserves or attending Indian residential schools. Their legal status was not that of full citizens but rather, in the words of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Lawrence Vankoughnet in 1876, that of "minors, with the Government as their guardians" (Harring 262). Yet there were policies in place to assimilate Status

Indians, to remove children from their families and raise them in schools where they were forbidden to speak their languages, and there were laws that forbade cultural practices.

Duncan Campbell Scott, Canadian poet and bureaucrat for the Department of Indian Affairs from 1879 until 1932--he was deputy superintendent, the highest non-elected position in this department from 1923 until his retirement--was a strong proponent of "enfranchisement," which would take away all treaty rights of Status Indians in return for the right to vote. Scott articulates his department's purpose "to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department" (Evidence given for Bill 14 before a special committee of the House, 1920). Keyam responds directly to this proposal in Chapter Twelve:

Enfranchisement is offered to us all, but at a price that many of us do not want to pay, for it means that we must leave our reserves, cut ourselves off from our own people. Why should we leave Treaty in order to have a say in the affairs of the land? (104)

Yet Keyam's resolution is not a simple rejection of government intrusion. In this passage he subsequently declares that "there is still room for us here. Could the Government not set a standard that would exclude the unintelligent and the non-productive voters?" (104) Keyam's concession is that the government officials (many of whom he is very critical of in several passages in the book, as incompetent patronage appointments), should determine and exclude the "unintelligent" and the "non-productive," criteria that could easily be manipulated to exclude more than Keyam intends. Regardless, no Status Indians in Canada were able to vote in federal elections until 1960.

But while I argue that government policies designed to simultaneously segregate and assimilate the Status Indian resulted in identity confusion and mixed loyalties, Stan Cuthand, in the introduction to the 1995 edition, gives another reason why Ahenakew and his generation (including the fictional Keyam) would ally themselves with the colonizer, even though it was not in their own interests:

I think it was because of their strong Cree upbringing. Their attitudes toward Christian religious authorities were shaped by their respect for medicine men and powerful Cree leaders. That respect took the form of deference. You never asked questions of the real old-timers. You just waited and watched. That was how they were. (x)

Brundige confirms the role of respect in Cree culture. She quotes Abel Chapman, a Cree elder: "A long time ago the youngsters gathered around an elder, like we sit around the TV today. The elder would relate stories about survival. That's how the children learned" (41). This is not to suggest that Cree learners complacently accepted the words of authority. Brundige argues that embedded in Cree philosophy was the need for perceptual reality checks and re-checks, because there was an understanding that everyone spoke from a different perspective. Upon contact she argues that the Cree understood that Europeans had a different worldview, but that it was important to share their land in order to "come together in a relationship as relatives who had much to learn and benefit from each other" (116). While Cuthand considers Ahenakew's generation to be deferential to authority against their own interests, Brundige notes that:

This is not to say that Cree peoples accepted everything the European had to offer, contrary to European expectations. However, because of the cultural value

of *kisteanemétowin* [respect between people], they would not have had reason to dismiss Europeans as less than human or incapable of relational interaction. (116)

The value of maintaining good relations was more important than epistemological differences. Brundige argues that because of the belief in multiple perspectives, perceptual differences were accommodated in traditional society:

Historically, Swampy Cree people were prepared to accept "other" stories and found no contradiction in the idea that Europeans and Swampy Crees had different beliefs about the world. Far more important than having the same beliefs was an ability to engage in respectful interaction. (85)

In Cree epistemology respectful interaction functions as a core value.<sup>9</sup>

Within his narrative Ahenakew demonstrates how contradictory arguments might be overlooked in deference to respectful relationships. In Chapter Eight, Old Keyam is newly married to Chochena and describes how they traveled to a city about seventy miles from the reserve in order that he could work as an interpreter at a conference on Indian education. When describing what they have heard, Keyam mentions that he and his wife have discussed the speeches many times and that they are not in complete agreement. Chochena "agrees with the Chief" so much so that "sometimes she has almost convinced" Keyam, and he admits that though this Chief's "motion was defeated...he spoke well" (87). Keyam, however, is convinced by another:

The Chief who spoke in opposition was another fine speaker -- a credit to us all.

Now I am not naming these Chiefs on purpose. It is not that I have forgotten their

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<sup>9</sup> I'd like to thank Paul DePasquale for pointing out to me that the early history of contact between the Swampy Cree and Europeans, including treaty-making, confirms this point. As an example he has directed me to Louis Bird's discussion of the 1930 adhesion of Treaty Nine as recounted in *Telling Our Stories: Omushkego Legends and Histories from Hudson Bay* (2005).

names....It is because I cannot mention all who spoke well and review all their arguments. I would not slight any of those who represented our people at that conference. We can be proud of them. It is not easy to take the stand that some of them did, and to speak boldly. (87)

Rather than discredit Chochena or other people with opposing opinions, Keyam practices *kisteanemétowin*. While he signals the importance of debate as he relates the content of different arguments, he takes care to articulate his respect for all participants.

Because of the preponderance of the stereotype of the *Indian* in the North American imagination, with the marketing of New Age shamanism as a recent incarnation, it is possible to dismiss *kisteanemétowin* as a naïve, uncomplicated value that emerges from a prelapsarian culture. But "respect between people" comes out of a complex epistemological system based on the interrelationship of all things. Rather than the famous Cartesian mind/body split or the hierarchies of human beings over animals and plants, the animate over the inanimate, Cree philosophy is based on the concept that everything is interconnected and *kisteanemétowin* is the recognition of these relationships.

Winona Wheeler explains how this epistemological difference affects her understanding and study of Cree history:

Cree teachings, like Cree stories/oral traditions, have no rigid beginnings or endings. Everyone's personal (his)stories interconnect and overlap, all are extensions of the past, and all are grounded in *wahkôtowin*, *kinship/relations*.

According to Nêhiyawîwîhtamawâkan, *Cree teachings, etymology*, we inherit relationships and obligations to the generations behind, among, and before us, to

life on this earth as we know it, and to our homelands. (2)

Concepts of time rooted in Western notions of progress and of space as a simple exchangeable commodity (ie. real estate) are challenged by *Nêhiyawîwîhtamawâkan* that see both as something with which you have a relationship and to which you have obligations. Keyam discusses this in Chapter Two, when he cajoles his audience to respect their neighbours, the Bush Cree. To Keyam, the influence of the past and of the land manifests itself in cultural differences:

We are told by some thinkers that between the material and spiritual parts of man there is a great division, that there is no shading of one into the other. I cannot believe that. One affects the other, and the place where a man lives can shape his character....It is the nature of one's country, its effect through many generations, that makes the difference in men. (58-59)

Contrary to Cuthand's evaluation of Ahenakew's generation, it is clear that whatever respect or deference Keyam feels for the school or church, he does not accept this teaching without question. He rejects the European belief in "the great division" between "the material and spiritual parts of man" in favour of the Cree concept of holism and the interrelationship between people and the land.

Yet, as much as there is evidence that Keyam voices the values of Cree philosophy and protocol, there are still swings to moments in the text where Keyam speaks with the voice of the assimilated. Continuing his discussion of the effect of the land on people, he explains the deficiencies of the Plains Cree as though he himself is no longer one. In the above passage, Keyam begins with the pronoun, "we" (as in "we are told by some thinkers..."), to build a narrative in which he and the group to which he

belongs, be it other students in school or fellow parishioners in the on-reserve church, or fellow members of his community, are "told by some thinkers." Because Keyam was limited to segregated communities, it is clear that the majority of those referred to as "we" would have to be Cree. To complement this action of "being told," Keyam resists and states that "I cannot believe that." Because he proposes a Cree belief, that "it is the nature of one's country...that makes the difference in men," he is allying himself with other Cree rather than individuating himself from the group. His "we," confirms his membership as a Cree. However, a page later he clearly articulates the values of the Protestant work ethic, but more significantly, no longer speaks as a group insider:

The prairie Indian lacks one thing sadly. It is what I would call 'stick-to-it-iveness.' He dislikes to work at anything that requires sustained effort, that has in it the element of plodding. He wants quick returns. He will put forth great effort when the object to be attained is within view, but when the work has only remote reward, and to get it means the exercising of much patience, he either gives in altogether, or continues in a most apathetic way. (59)

The first pronoun in this passage indicates that the narrator is not one of whom he speaks. On one hand is "the prairie Indian" and on the other is "I". This "I" is in a position of power, speaking in a well-established discourse, even by the 1920s, about the *plight of the prairie Indian* and *the Indian problem*. The adjective "sadly" further distances the narrator from the "prairie Indian" and marks affect that denotes a mix of empathy, pity and perhaps futility. It is not that "the prairie Indian" is sad but that in public discussions about the problems with "the prairie Indian" this one deficiency or lack is unfortunate as it clearly is so pervasive as to be insurmountable. Furthermore, "the prairie Indian"



clearly cannot be blamed for this lack but rather can only be pitied. When Keyam notes that "it is what I would call 'stick-to-it-iveness,'" Keyam is not only aligned with the majority who understand just what a deficit this is, but also sets himself up as an authority who has studied this problem.

There are other examples of contradiction worth examining. In Chapter Ten Keyam defends the Sun Dance and other Cree religious practices, asking "Why should individuals be forced to give up what they consider to be a means of reconciliation with the author of their being?" (95). Yet in Chapter Four he defends the "prohibition by Canadian law" of the *Mah-tah-e-to-win* (the give-away dance), "for it is like a drunken orgy, releasing all that is most reckless in Indians" (69). The effect of declarations made confidently in one place and retracted in another gives the "Old Keyam" text an unstable feeling. In coming passages I will propose a way to understand these sudden swings in position but at this stage I want only to emphasize the seemingly irreconcilable distance between these two points of view.

In the quote from Chapter Ten, Keyam is not speaking as much from the position of Cree activist as he is from that of colonized British subject, familiar with the discourses around freedom of religion. He is not defending Cree people, but rather the much sanctified *individual*. Joel Pfister, in his 2004 monograph, *Individuality Incorporated: Indians and the Mulicultural Modern*, cautions that there must be a "historical awareness that the word *individual* was invested with particular ideological meanings by dominant groups and was used by these groups both to dominate and to give

certain kinds of opportunities to Natives and others"(16).<sup>10</sup> In other words, despite the rhetoric around the rights of the individual, Native Americans were rarely granted these rights. In the second quote from Chapter Four, Keyam speaks again from the position of the dominant group and demonstrates the inconsistency that Pfister describes. If in Chapter Ten Keyam alludes to British law to defend the rights of the individual, in Chapter Four he cites Canadian law and its prohibition of dancing. In both cases his words, as contradictory as they might be, ally him with the colonizing state. He condemns the give-away dance because it releases "all that is most reckless in Indians." If the first quote invokes the *individual* to enshrine religious freedom, it is clear from the second quote that this right does not always apply to Indians. Within the context of the second quote, it is clear he agrees that it is the fiduciary duty of the State to dominate through legislation, to protect the Indians from themselves.

As much as I argue that concepts of *kisteanemétowin* (respect between people) and *nêhiyawîhtamawâkan* (Cree teachings) exist within the text, they sit uneasily with Keyam's shift in voice from "we" to "they." On one hand he was a fierce critic of government policy, bitter at the prejudice he experienced within the Church and in general society, and on the other hand he was known by his community to be a devout Christian, loyal to the British Royal family and a devoted Anglican cleric. His nephew Stan Cuthand writes in a 1978 article that while Ahenakew "worked hard with the League of Indians" he was "not aggressive in his approach to rectify the wrongs of his people, he was caught between two worlds, and was often more loyal to the church" (383).

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<sup>10</sup> His thesis is that the American government used sites like the Carlisle Indian School to coerce Native American children from various tribes to forget their specific nation in favour of being an *Indian* and then, in order to accommodate industrial society, to think of themselves as *individuals*.

But at the same time, while Keyam does sometimes speak with the voice of the colonizer, that he is able to entertain opposing points of view which prohibit him from succumbing entirely to the devastating evaluation of the church and state of aboriginal people as savages, heathens and wards rather than full citizens, is in itself Cree. Brundige suggests that besides the acknowledgment that people have different perceptions of reality, which encourages tolerance for different perspectives, the Cree value of reciprocity also reinforces respectful relations. Because a Cree world-view "does not hint that a possibility for knowledge or relational interaction can occur only if they both believe in the same things" (91), there is less emphasis on agreement and more emphasis on good relations. Keyam tries to reconcile possibly irreconcilable perspectives of the Cree and of the colonizers, because this is a Cree value.

Neal McLeod also includes a discussion of the text in his 2000 article, "Cree Narratives of Change," where he argues that "social and cultural changes [of the past century among the Cree]...were absorbed...into pre-existing philosophies and conceptual frameworks." He relies on Ahenakew's work to substantiate some of his family stories but also includes biographical detail about the author as told to him by his father. He writes: "All of my family who remember Edward Ahenakew, remember him as a very gentle and compassionate man." <sup>11</sup>

This recuperation of not just the work but also the man cannot be dismissed as revisionist or sentimental. Given the values of relations and the collapse of barriers between personal and academic discourse that marks Indigenous scholarship, McLeod's personal connection to Ahenakew is relevant. Mi'kmaq professor Marie Battiste argues

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<sup>11</sup> In "The Journals and Voices of a Church of England Native Catechist: Askenootow (Charles Pratt), 1851-1884," Winona Wheeler works through a similar problem.

that the "agenda of Indigenous scholarship...is to transform Eurocentric theory so that it will not only include and properly value Indigenous knowledge, thought, and heritage...but also develop a cooperative and dignified strategy that will invigorate and animate Indigenous languages, cultures, knowledge, and vision in academic structures" (213-14). Reading the text with a knowledge of Cree philosophy has the potential to reanimate the Cree value of reciprocity -- the aspect of identity that responds to multiple conversations, constantly moving and remaking itself in relation to context.

Simultaneously, there is insight in a postcolonial reading of *Voices of the Plains Cree*. Ahenakew's ancestral territories were taken over by Britain and turned into a colony of an imperial power. The establishment of the colonial political structures directly, tangibly affected Ahenakew who, under the jurisdiction of the Indian Act established shortly after Confederation, was designated a Status Indian by the state and confined to a reserve, without the right to vote. Postcolonial theory is particularly adept in discussions of the psychology of colonization, that uses binary categories to construct the colonizers as civilized and white and the Indigenous population as savage and not-white. Rather than rely on brute force alone, colonial powers also disseminate hegemonic discourses -- about the superiority of literacy over oral traditions, of English over Indigenous languages, the value of Christianity versus heathen religion -- that convince the settler population of their right to Indigenous land and Indigenous people of the degeneracy of their ways. Through this lens the character of Old Keyam can be discussed as manipulated by these discourses or he can be discussed as subversive; in either interpretation he is troubling to the colonial order.

But postcolonial theories propose an equation that becomes impoverished with overuse: the colonizer oppresses the colonized. On one side the colonizer has institutionalized power through the armies of the churches and nations of Europe, the capitalist imperative of the Industrial Revolution, the luck of immunity to common diseases, the epistemological license to ignore the humanity of Native North Americans, etc. etc., while on the other side the Indigenous person has agency. Over and over again the equation is computed, often very creatively, but it is nonetheless limited. On the other hand, readings of texts from the standpoint of Cree epistemology not only have the practical effect of encouraging further inquiries in the intellectual wealth of our people, but also allows us the chance to imagine a conversation that did not begin in 1492.

In no way am I endorsing a quixotic search for "authentic" Cree ideas untainted by contact. As Brundige argues, change is a basic element of Cree understanding. She writes:

In this way, stories that tell a picture of reality that melds the past, present and future together can also be understood as bringing the idea of change into a living existence. From a relational world comes an entirely different comprehension and articulation of instances of change. Change may not be seen as a detriment to knowledge but rather fundamental to knowledge. If we can understand stories in this way, then we can also understand "change" as a living process that moves together in the universe with all entities physical and non-physical. Relationships involving change can and do occur and thus a spirit of Creeness can continue to move in the world even though historical Cree people have little resemblance to contemporary Cree people. In other words, the storytelling process causes us to

re-experience the past in the present even if the storytellers and the words change.

Retelling and re-experiencing brings memory back to life. This is how Creeness lives on through changes.

Not surprisingly, many of the strategies or approaches used by Indigenous scholars are poorly understood. For example, when McLeod identifies Ahenakew as someone his family knew, he is not simply associating himself with celebrity or ignoring the complex relationship between an author and his work. Instead McLeod identifies a relationship with Ahenakew as a demonstration of how the world, for a Cree person, fits together. More generally, *Voices of the Plains Cree* is a text that has become important to emerging Indigenous academics who are looking for those who have come before us, looking quite literally for those to whom we relate.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### George Copway's Autobiography: Land Claims to Reclaim *pimatiziwin*

In the previous chapter I drew on the "Cree value of reciprocity" and the Cree value of kinship, or *wâhkotowin* to understand Ahenakew's "Old Keyam," not as a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde figure with different personas, produced through the contradictory demands of colonization, but rather as a Cree intellectual able to tolerate contradiction in order to preserve respectful relationships, in order to accomplish what might seem impossible -- to be both a Cree and an Anglican cleric, honouring as best he can both traditions. In this chapter I look at *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowh* (1847), republished as *Recollections of a Forest Life* (1850) by George Copway, an Anishnabe, also called Ojibway. Usually this work has been discussed in comparison with Native American rather than Canadian texts and usually it has been read as an example of internalized colonization (Copway's passages devoted to Christianity have been deemed incompatible with Ojibway thought). Instead I argue that Copway metaphorically links his faith with literacy and political action in order to argue for the return of land to his people; drawing on the Ojibway idea of *pimatiziwin*, or "living in a

good way" that blends multiple ideas about health and harmony with land, Copway's fight for land is also a fight for these associated meanings.

I begin with a short study of another work written in the mid nineteenth century, published just after Copway's, *Canadian Crusoes: A Tale of the Rice Lake Plains* (1852) by Catherine Parr Traill, a British émigré to Canada. Even though both Copway's and Traill's work have received a certain level of scholarly attention over the years, they are obscure, not often read today outside the university classroom. The first is usually placed as part of the American canon, categorized alongside Native American autobiographies, and the second is generally considered to be a classic in early Canadian literature. For example, Library and Archives Canada devotes a website to Traill, along with her sister Susanna Moodie, describing them as "two of Canada's most important 19th-century writers,"<sup>1</sup> while Copway, the first Indigenous author from Canada to publish a book-length work, receives no such recognition. Ironically, while Collections Canada lists numerous documents about Copway available in the library and archives (including copies of his autobiography), the only time he is discussed on their website is in the entry on Traill. There the website author praises *Canadian Crusoes* for its accuracy when describing the Ojibwe, noting that Traill quoted and paraphrased from Copway's *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh*.<sup>2</sup> While Copway traveled and lectured throughout the United States, as well as Great Britain, he was born in Rice Lake, the setting of Traill's novel.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/moodie-traill/index-e.html> (accessed May 8, 2007)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/moodie-traill/027013-3101-e.html> (accessed May 8, 2007)



I begin with Traill to illustrate Margery Fee's point, made in her contribution to *The Native in Literature* (1987), that the image of the Indian in novels by non-Indigenous writers often has more to do with white interests than it has to do with Indigenous perspectives.<sup>3</sup> To quote Fee:

It allows, through the white character's association with the Native, for a white "literary land claim," analogous to the historical territorial take-over, usually implicit or explicit in the text. (17)

*Canadian Crusoes*, a syrupy story modeled on British versions, where lost children survive and recreate society in the wilderness by working cooperatively, is nationalist in vision. French Canadian brother and sister get lost in the woods with their Scottish neighbour, in time to save an Indian maiden who alone has survived the plunder of marauding savages from another tribe. The three children christen her Indiana and admire her abilities to live in the forest, including her ability to handle a canoe.<sup>4</sup> By the end, the four emerge after two years in the woods, healthy and destined to pair off and produce Canadian offspring of either Scottish and French or French and Indian bloodlines. Traill's

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<sup>3</sup> Another example would be Harriet V. Cheney's "Legend of the Lake" first published some time in the 1840s. Oneidava is a home-grown Pocahontas, "beautiful and beloved" (133) yet uninterested in any of the young men of her tribe until Eugene St. Foy, a French artist, gets lost in the woods and is accompanied back to the Iroquois village. Not only is Eugene adopted as a member of the tribe and considered a surrogate son by the chief, but also he is given the hand of Oneidava in marriage. When word comes to him that his French fiancée would like him to return to France, Eugene is prevented by the tribe from leaving. Oneidava, with a masochistic desire to help her French lover, knows that "in the hour of need she alone could save him" (138), and manages to direct Eugene to a waiting canoe, when a sudden storm drowns them in the lake. According to the narrative, her people are more devastated by Eugene's death than by hers: "The descendants of the old Sachem, Oneidava's father, preserved [Eugene's] *port-feuille*, as a sacred relic, and the almost obliterated traces of his pencil, and his name, written by his own hand, painfully recalled his sad history to the memory of his countrymen. Tradition still cherishes his name among the scattered Iroquois, and from father to son is handed down the melancholy Legend of the Lake" (139).

<sup>4</sup> Her ability with a canoe was only one of her accomplishments: "Even Louis was obliged to confess that the young savage knew more of the management of a canoe, and the use of the bow and arrow, and the fishing-line, than either himself or his cousin" (126).

integration of Indiana's bloodline into the proto-Canadian family is the association that Fee describes, a literary land claim that literally makes the settler-children "native" through this new relation. The progeny of these four young "Crusoes" will be undeniably Canadian, absorbing ethnic differences but more importantly, extinguishing Aboriginal title.

Traill writes to justify settlement that creates the Canadian nation. At the beginning of *Canadian Crusoes*, she describes Rice Lake as she knew it and as it would have been a generation earlier when her story takes place:

At the time my little history commences, this now highly cultivated spot was an unbroken wilderness...which owned no other possessors than the wandering hunting tribes of wild Indians, to whom the right of the hunting grounds north of Rice Lake appertained, according to their forest laws....I speak of the time when the neat and flourishing town of Cobourg, now an important port on the Ontario, was but a village in embryo -- if it contained even a log-house or a block-house it was all that it did, and the wild and picturesque ground upon which the fast increasing village of Port Hope is situated, had not yielded one forest tree to the axe of the settler...no steamer had then furrowed its bosom with her iron wheels, bearing the stream of emigration towards the wilds of our Northern and Western forests, there to render a lonely trackless desert a fruitful garden. What will not time and the industry of man, assisted by the blessing of a merciful God, effect?

(1,2)

Copway also writes of Rice Lake, but he does not describe a "trackless desert," and even though he is a Christian convert, he is reticent about celebrating the changes he sees. In

his autobiography he first describes his parents who "were of the Ojebwa nation" and then describes where they lived, "on the lake back of Cobourg, on the shores of Lake Ontario, Canada West" (13). Rice Lake, he says, was so-called because of the "quantity of wild rice, and much game of different kinds, before the whites cleared away the woods" (13). While Traill equates European settlement with the image of "a fruitful garden," and its association with husbandry, Copway sees the loss of the woods as destruction, displacing the flora and fauna of the area.

It is worth pausing to take note that as we compare Copway's autobiography and Traill's novel, they are different genres. Much is made in autobiography theory of the point that the autobiographical pact leads the reader to expect that the "I" in the text has some correlation to the "I" of the author, that in the case of George Copway, he is the author and that the life he is describing is his own.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that autobiography is simply non-fiction compared with fiction and that it contains nothing but "the truth." Because writers draw on genres with which they are familiar, to understand and relate their own lives, an autobiography can be modeled on the novel form when it draws, for example, from the conventions of the conversion narrative, "a linear pattern -- descent into darkness, struggle, moment of crisis, conversion to new beliefs and worldview, and consolidation of a new communal identity" (Smith & Watson, 60). In fact Copway draws on many narrative models, of which the conversion narrative is only one.

Similarly, Traill's work is a novel written for children, but it also has the cachet of non-fiction. Certainly Traill constructs a setting where her characters and the action of the novel can take place. However, well before 1852 she was already a published author of

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<sup>5</sup> Philippe Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Pact" (1973) and his revisiting of this topic, "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)" (1982), have been reprinted in *On Autobiography* (1989).

her own autobiography, *The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the Domestic Economy of British America* (1836), itself modeled on epistolary fiction. Part of the allure of *Canadian Crusoes* to her mid-nineteenth-century reading public was the expectation that she would be offering a glimpse of the Canadian wild.

In her introduction Traill relies on sexual allusion to construct the land as virginal, in an unsanctified relationship with the Indigenous inhabitants. The "wild Indians" might be the land's only "possessors," but this is only according to "forest law," which is superseded by the British legal system. For Traill, the union is unconsummated as the tribes are "wandering" and the land is empty, "unbroken," "lonely" and unfruitful (1-2). Consummation comes because of "the industry of man," a phrase alluding both to hard work and also European technology. When the land "yields" its forest trees it does so to the "axe of the settler" as though the Ojibway had never used axes to build homes from their forests. The steamer is not only one of the inventions of the Industrial revolution but it also has a phallic quality, "furrow[ing] its bosom" and "bearing the stream of emigration towards the wilds of our...forests."<sup>6</sup> The result is fecundity turning a "desert into a fruitful garden" (2). Traill reinforces the "masculine" nature of colonization, able to break land previously unbroken, "assisted by God." Underlying this imagery is the implication that the "wild Indians" were not industrious enough to work the land, not man enough to dominate the landscape and not considered by God to be its rightful inhabitants.

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<sup>6</sup> To be faithful to the text I must note that the steamer is gendered "female," whose wheels are described as "her wheels". Still the image of the steamer furrowing bosoms and bearing fertile "streams" of emigration attributes sexual qualities that I read as male.

In *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975), Annette Kolodny argues that Euro-American men wrote about the frontier as a "virginal paradise to be possessed; in *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers 1630-1860* (1984) she extends this argument by turning her attention to the writing of genteel Euro-American women, who saw the frontier as garden and themselves as Eve in paradise. While *Canadian Crusoes* has evidence to support a blend of both theses, fundamental to these ideas is that the land is empty, with no Indigenous inhabitants with preexisting claims.

Not surprisingly, Copway provides an Indigenous perspective that challenges Traill's version. He relates his family history:

My great-grandfather was the first who ventured to settle at Rice Lake, after the Ojebwa nation defeated the Hurons, who once inhabited all the lakes in Western Canada, and who had a large village just on the top of the hill of the Anderson farm...and which furnished a magnificent view of the lakes and surrounding country. (13)

Copway relies on his genealogy to challenge assumptions that the land was empty and uninhabited before European emigration. Not only does he point to present-day Ojibway history, he also emphasizes the fact that they won this territory in battle with the Hurons, who themselves had their "large village."

While it is unlikely that Copway was intentionally responding to Traill's description of Rice Lake -- his work was first published in 1847 and hers in 1852 -- he does rebut common assumptions about the superiority of European customs<sup>7</sup>. He gives a

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<sup>7</sup> While I have not uncovered a similar passage about Rice Lake by Traill that was published before 1852, she was a prolific writer who began to write shortly after her arrival in Canada in 1832 and throughout the

long description about how to build a wigwam, from the cutting of poles -- presumably with axes -- to the sewing of birch bark to the frame (15-16). While his approach seems modeled on early ethnography, it also celebrates the technological knowledge of his nation. Copway then discusses at length the rights of ownership by specific Ojibway people and their families:

The hunting grounds of the Indians were secured by right, a law and custom among themselves. No one was allowed to hunt on another's land, without invitation or permission. (16).

Copway even outlines the punishments that interlopers would suffer if they hunted on someone else's territory.

But preceding these two topics is his description of his birthplace, a passage that is often quoted:

I was born in nature's wide domain!...Is this dear spot, made green by the tears of memory, any less enticing and hallowed than the palaces where princes are born? I would much more glory in this birth-place, with the broad canopy of heaven above me, and the giant arms of the forest trees for my shelter, than to be born in palaces of marble, studded with pillars of gold! Nature will be nature still, while palaces shall decay and fall in ruins. Yes, Niagara will be Niagara a thousand years hence! The rainbow, a wreath over her brow, shall continue as long as the sun, and the flowing of the river! While the work of art, however impregnable, shall in atoms fall. (15)

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1830s and 1840s. Her work appeared in periodicals in England, America and Canada. See *Canadian Crusoes*, li note 70.

It is not difficult to argue that Copway's writing is influenced by Romanticism.

Rhetorically he creates two categories to list first what is conventionally considered "great" and then what he proposes is "greater still": Art as the accomplishment of culture is transitory because it disintegrates, while the beauty of nature, of Niagara Falls, is undiminished and eternal. On one side are palaces and wealth that are subject to corruption and decay; the other is literally in the "state of nature" constantly renewed, eternally beautiful, and by implication morally virtuous.

But Copway's assertion that the rainbow shall exist "as long as the sun and the flowing of the river" is also reminiscent of the rhetoric that surrounded treaties.<sup>8</sup> One of the earliest and often cited treaties in Native North America is the 1613 agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch to peacefully co-exist, as recorded in the Two Row Wampum or Kaswentha, and considered by the Iroquois to be the basis of all future treaties.<sup>9</sup> Haudenosaunee oral tradition records that "as long as the sun shines on this Earth, this is how long our agreement will stand. Second, as long as the water still flows and third, as long as the grass grows green at a certain time of year." Similar phrases like "as long as the sun shines" and "as long as the river runs" became common vernacular in treaty negotiations, often used by treaty-makers to assure Indigenous populations that the Crown would live up to its promises (Quinn 138).

As early as 1847 Copway does not hesitate to criticize the treaty-making process. After he discusses his father's hunting territory he refers to a treaty made in 1818 between the Ojibway and the British: "Much of the back country still remains unsold, and I hope

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<sup>8</sup> See also Sharon Venne's examination of this phrase in her essay "Treaties Made in Good Faith".

<sup>9</sup> For further recent Aboriginal discussion on the Two-Row Wampum, see: Taiaiake Alfred's *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (1999), p. 52-53; John Burrows and Leonard Rotman's *Aboriginal Legal Issues* (1998), p.110; Gail Valaskakis' *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (2005), p46-7.

the scales will be removed from the eyes of my poor countrymen, that they may see the robberies perpetrated upon them, before they surrender another foot of territory" (17).

Here Copway references the moment that the Apostle Paul converted to Christianity on the Road to Damascus: "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized" (KJV, Acts 9:18). The realization by his community of just how they have been robbed and also how they can protect their remaining resources is comparable, for Copway, to Christian conversion. In fact there are several episodes of conversion in his autobiography including that of his father (28), his mother (42), and many at a tent meeting, including his own (45-46). But as a result of this epiphany and central to his spiritual practice was his acquisition of literacy.

Before this, I had only begun to spell and read. I now resumed my studies with a new and different relish. Often, when alone, I prayed that God would help me to qualify myself to teach others how to read the word of God; this circumstance I had not told to anyone. On Sabbath mornings I read a chapter in the New Testament, which had been translated for my father, before we went to meeting (46)

But being able to read and teach the Christian bible is not the only advantage of literacy, according to Copway. It also prevents or at least allows his people to know when they are being swindled.

For example, Chapter Six begins with a description of Rice Lake, "that beautiful lake...[that] winds along a mountainous region" (37). Copway describes the wild rice that "resembles fields of wheat," and the ducks that feed upon the rice that fly in such large



flocks that they "often appear like clouds" (37). In this lake exists twenty islands, the largest over three hundred acres. Once establishing its beauty and its value, Copway then describes how his people lost this territory:

In 1818, our people surrendered to the British Government a large part of their territory, for the sum of £750; reserving, as they had good reason to believe, all the islands. As they could neither read nor write, they were ignorant of the fact that these islands were *included* in the sale. They were repeatedly told, by those who purchased for the Government, that the islands were *not* included in the articles of agreement. But, since that time, some of us have learned to read, and to our utter astonishment, and to the everlasting disgrace of that *pseudo* Christian nation, we find that we have been most grossly abused, deceived, and cheated.

Appeals have been frequently made, but all in vain. (37)

Copway has created a three-part circuit that constantly reinscribes itself by equating three things: First, Christian conversion equals political consciousness (in this case when his nation realizes they have been robbed blind and become less willing to cooperate); Second, Christian conversion equals literacy (when new Christians embrace the religion, they automatically embrace reading and writing); Finally, literacy equals political consciousness (reading is its own epiphany, allowing Indigenous people the ability to see when they are being deceived). While it is possible to question whether these three things are truly coterminous, it is clear that Copway considers them to be so.

For example, in Chapter Twelve he describes a visit to his village by the Ojibway minister John Sunday, who led a "glorious revival" where "many were converted, and others reclaimed" (70). At subsequent Christmas celebrations, several chiefs gave their

Christian testimony: One of the chiefs states that "Now, I drink tea instead of whiskey, and have religion with it; now my house is comfortable, and my children are pious and happy" (70); John Sunday's brother, Big Jacob, testifies that he was horrified to learn that once his people had heard the preaching of the Methodists, "the chiefs and warriors were frequently in tears" (70). Yet even though he had never before cried on the battlefield or on the deathbed of his loved ones, at his conversion he cried too. Religious revivals, testimonies of conversion, temperance and emotional displays are all prominent features of Methodism. But Copway's descriptions of religion are integrally tied both to literacy and politics. He describes this gathering of Christian converts in order to explain how they worked together as the General Council of the Nation to lobby for their rights:

Several petitions, and other important documents were drawn up and signed by the different chiefs, to be presented to the Government of Canada. The whole Council waited on the Governor General, Lord Sydenham, in a body; they presented their petitions. In reply, we received but little satisfaction...Since then, nothing has been heard of our papers, and therefore we must conclude that they have been laid *under* the table. But what could be expected of a "*father*," who could smile in the presence of his "*children*," and yet stab them in the dark? (71)

Whether or not everyone in the General Council is literate, Copway gives the impression that they all have full ability to "draw up and sign" their petition. All of the factors for this three-part circuit are evident: Christianity is equated with literacy that is equated with political consciousness and then around again.

It is certainly possible to read this text through a postcolonial lens, with the Indians as colonized and transcultural subjects, adapting to European beliefs in

Christianity and adopting accompanying literacy skills. They use their agency to subvert the colonizing process through peaceful petition and protest, revealing the malevolence and injustice behind Sydenham's guise of politeness and paternalistic governance.

This is a more positive reading when compared with Tim Fulford's argument in *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature and Transatlantic Culture, 1756-1830* (2006). Fulford's assessment is as follows:

For [George Copway, Peter Jones, William Apess], the situation was much nearer to that formulated in Bhabha's model of mimicry. They wrote in white discourse when whites dominated territory and ruled Indians through an organized apparatus of state. For their words, the concept that Cheryl Walker has (adapting Bhabha) elaborated is useful -- 'subjugated discourse'. By this term Walker refers to the double-edged quality of much of colonized Indians' writing in English. For example, Apess and Copway employ white liberal stereotypes, referring to themselves by such terms as 'poor Indian' and 'child of the forests'. Walker argues that these terms -- though in context they embarrass, disturb or even ironically challenge white readers, bringing their own appropriateness in question -- also indicate the Indian writer's internalization of pejorative and infantilizing white definitions.

I am less interested in the merits of Fulford's opinion of Copway and Apess, compelling though it is, than I am in the way that he associates their writing with humiliation. There is no question in his mind that Copway and Apess are writing "white discourse," and by its very "whiteness" they are contaminated.

There is no discussion of the source of these two phrases. The first, "poor Indian," is not an evaluation of the Indian's economic situation, though often quite literally "poor." Instead it resonates with Alexander Pope's famous quote from his 1732 "Essay on Man" that considers Christian understandings of God: "Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind/ Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind." In this case Pope's reference to the "poor Indian" is as an example of those who do not have the "advantages" of Christianity or European philosophy and still see evidence of the divine in nature. Pope is invoking the stereotype of the "noble savage" who is often more naturally pious and moral than his European counterpart, a "child of the forest" living in harmony with others and the land. It is possible that Apress and Copway employ these terms to rhetorically position themselves as morally superior to their European audience, rather than as humiliated and subjugated. But to Fulford, humiliation is unavoidable. He continues:

Though the writers do not embrace them as the whole truth about themselves or other Indians, nevertheless they adopt them as an indication of their sense of Indians' humiliating colonized status in a white-dominated world. Such terms, then, are the price that an Indian writer pays when he *chooses* to write in white people's language and in white people's technology (print): they highlight his awareness that his literary authority, indeed his very literacy, stemmed from affiliation to the non-Indian culture which had successfully deprived most Indians of their independence and many of their pride as well. (37 my emphasis)

Note the sense of choice that Fulford outlines. According to Fulford, Indians are humiliated if they choose to use these terms and, to look at the last clause, even if they

don't use these terms, many are still "successfully deprived...of their pride as well." To restate this: Copway and Apess are necessarily humiliated when they use both the English language and literacy because both are the inventions of the colonizer, which they have no inherent right to. Furthermore, through their use of written English they make a choice to affiliate themselves with this humiliation and oppression of their people. According to Fulford's assessment, there is no way that Apess or Copway can draw on Indigenous traditions, or European ones, for that matter, to imagine a better world for their nations. At best they are bold, manipulating the emotions of whites to try but inevitably to fail to make change. There is little wonder that contemporary Indigenous critics want to find new ways to analyze these texts.

In *The People and the Word* (2005) Robert Warrior's first chapter is devoted to William Apess who he declares to be a "significant nineteenth-century Native voice...[whose] life and work speak to a contemporary Native intellectual agenda" (3). The contrast between Fulford's and Warrior's readings is immense. While Fulford determines that the work of Apess, like Copway's, is a relic of the past, the product of humiliation and defeat, Warrior insists that it is relevant, current and inspiring -- it stands "as a model for contemporary work" (xiii).

Warrior understands that he is making a choice not to focus on Apess' involvement in Christianity but to celebrate his contributions to Indigenous intellectual thought. Knowing the challenge before him he makes the case that work by Apess "shines across the decades to provide an intellectual beacon" (3), whose "nonfiction

innovations continue to make him an exemplar of the best the Native tradition has to offer" (4).<sup>10</sup>

There is little evidence that Copway, as Fulford contends, considers his literacy to be the adoption of "white people's technology." His literacy, like his religious experiences and his memories, become intertwined with where he is from, "naturalizing" them. Copway considers his ability to read not as something imposed upon him but rather a part of him. He writes: "The mind for letters was in me, *but was asleep*" (11). Rather than associating literacy -- and Christianity -- with an "affiliation to the non-Indian culture which had successfully deprived most Indians of their independence" (Fulford), Copway instead draws links between literacy, Christianity and political rights. He considers writing to be a tool, to record Ojibway traditions and history (32-33) and to fight for land.

George Copway's work is interested in literal land claims. While sometimes *The Life, History and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowh* is understood as a Christian narrative or a tract advertising the importance of literacy to dispense "civilization," Copway in fact links his understanding of Christian conversion and the value of literacy with the politicization of his people for the fight for land. Structuring his narrative is his description of specific locales or "spots" that reflects his geographic imagination. Yet while Copway very much values these "spots" he is willing to relocate to new territory in order to create what Gail Valaskakis calls Indian Country. Author of a book of that name, *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (2005), Valaskakis explains how the concepts of territory and of sacred place come together. She states:

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<sup>10</sup> Warrior is one of several contemporary critics engaged in similar recuperative efforts. See Jace Weaver et al, eds. *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 2006).

These two views of the environment [territory and sacred place] are merged in the discourse and meaning of Indian Country, which is recognized by Indians as a place that gathers Native North Americans together, wherever--on any reservation, at any pow wow or Native conference, in any Indian bar or Native Centre, at any Native ceremony, feast or communal event. Indian Country signifies both a shared sense of cultural and historical experience and a consciousness of what in Ojibway is called *pimatiziwin*, or "living in a good way"--in physical, social and spiritual health and harmony; a mixture of meanings that is intertwined with land. In Indian Country, the struggle over land is not only experienced, it is told and retold in the stories of dominance and survival that reconstruct, imagine and, most of all, assert Indian spirituality and empowerment in the memoried past and the politicized future. (103)

Applying this to Copway, it is possible to see that his fight for Ojibway territory and sacred places is not just through his political demands. Coterminous with his political consciousness are Christianity and literacy, and he sees all three as movements that reinforce his Ojibway heritage rather than abandon it

If Copway's repeating focus on "spots" is any indication, it is clear that his imagination and memory are organized around land, as territory and specific, sacred places. Rice Lake in general is "the spot on which I roamed during my early days" (38), "where some of the sweetest and happiest recollections of my life were centered" (69).<sup>11</sup> He records the place where he and his family experienced near-death: his "father, with feelings of gratitude, knelt down on the spot where we had nearly perished" (28).

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<sup>11</sup> Even the spiritual and the unconscious are imagined spatially. When recounting a dream of heaven, "that happy spot" (35), he describes in great detail where he and others were standing along a pathway and river that leads to death and the afterlife (72-3).

For Copway, geography is a sacred mnemonic. When surveying the specific area where he was born he asks: "Is this dear spot, made green by the tears of memory, any less enticing and hallowed than the palaces where princes are born?" (15). Embedded in this question is not just a sentimental reference to his birthplace but the suggestion that this beautiful and holy spot -- and by extension, Ojibway land -- does not need to be the property of Europe to be celebrated. Likewise he remembers where he first learned to read: "*Memory*, like an angel, will still hover over the sacred spot, where first you taught me the letters of the alphabet" (38). Even if his land is being cleared and settled by whites, his memory of it as sacred cannot be removed. Literacy, Christian conversion and Ojibway presence are all preserved, for Copway, in the land. Copway is quite literally "grounded" in his territory.<sup>12</sup>

But even though specific locales are significant, Copway is willing to give up territory in order to gain Indian Country, where Ojibway culture, history and perspectives, where *pimatiziwin* can be shared. For example, he records an address by Chief John Jones at an assembly of forty-eight chiefs. Their objective is to try to consolidate dispersed settlements by drawing other Ojibway Christians together:

"Brothers! Some of you are living on small parcels of land, and others on islands.

We now offer you any portion of the land which we own in this region, that we may, the rest of our days, smoke the pipe of friendship, live and die together, and see our children play and be reared on one spot. (92)

Jones describes "living in a good way," with his people not only reunited physically, on one parcel of land but also socially and spiritually living in harmony (smoking the pipe of

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<sup>12</sup> Keith Basso, in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (1996) argues that the Western Apache use landscape as a complex "text" through place names that allude to stories.



friendship) and dying in peace. It should not be assumed that Jones or any of the others consider their territories easily replaced. Instead, they realize that the lands around them are being cleared and that they need to make decisions together. While they agitate for the return of their territory and their sacred places, they understand that what is important is if they are together, able to reunite in Indian Country, as Valaskakis defines it.

Copway reports that after considerable debate a document was produced and delivered to the Governor General, which included a plea for a return of at least a portion of their lands. This petition was promptly disregarded. Copway laments: "Our people have been driven from their homes, and have been cajoled out of the few sacred spots where the bones of their ancestors and children lie; and where they themselves expected to lie, when released from the trials and troubles of life" (96). Fulford's reading of Copway as tainted and ineffectual -- colonized, infantilized when using the vernacular of the day, humiliated and compromised -- blunts the political impact of Copway's words and obscures his identity as Ojibway. Copway is not a notable member of a dying race. Ojibway people remain. No matter what one's opinion is about his writing as "subjugated discourse," the land that he writes about, holding the bones of his ancestors, still exists. While Copway's text records early battles over Ojibway sovereignty and territory, this also supports contemporary efforts because land claims, like the Ojibway value of *pimatiziwin*, are still relevant today.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Indigenous Authors Writing Self Under Scrutiny

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha, a key post-colonial theorist, proposes the notion of "the Third Space" (37), a contradictory and ambivalent 'in-between' space, where cultural meanings and symbols "have no primordial unity or fixity" (37). A cultural contact zone, the colonizer and colonized are not exact opposites because both are mutually affected by the context and each other. In this transformative space, even revolutionaries in the act of defying the imperial power and transforming "the meanings of the colonial inheritance" (38) are creating a hybrid identity.

While this vision seems to be liberatory, explaining how the Indigenous subject can use the remnants of colonialism to fashion new identities, it also ignores preexisting Indigenous epistemologies and their viability in contemporary contexts. In this chapter I contest the usefulness of the concept of Third Space for Indigenous authors in Canada, preferring instead to propose a model of identity that acknowledges colonialist discourses but also values the Cree concept of *wâhkotowin*. For example, in a previous chapter I argue that to interpret "Old Keyam" as evidence that Ahenakew was a colonized subject would miss the important fact that he understood himself to be a Cree person and comported himself according to Cree protocols. While I do not deny the fact that he was

affected by colonization, his understanding of kinship, or relationship not just to the people around him but the land and to ancestors and future generations, trained him to understand himself in relation to stories. Old Keyam was not a hybrid subject but rather a Cree character in a colonial context who understood that just as people tell stories to each other, with the moral responsibility to remember,<sup>1</sup> people respond to stories about themselves. My use of *autobiography as theoretical practice* is a way to express respect and reciprocity that is the basis of kinship; to understand a story I respond with my own story.<sup>2</sup>

I take as a caution the observation of Robert Warrior that "American Indian and Native Americanist discourses continue to be preoccupied with parochial questions of identity and authenticity...[rather than] engage the myriad critical issues crucial to an Indian future" (*Tribal Secrets* xix). It is not my aim to list criteria of who qualifies or does not qualify as an Indian but rather to identify and question the specific and often unavoidable demands upon Indigenous writers to engage with or respond to certain discourses.

I begin with a discussion of the development of postcolonial theory in Canada as it relates to current preoccupations of Indigenous literary criticism. I do so to provide an explanation as to why I do not borrow the concepts or vocabulary of these theories, especially as my argument could be misunderstood as a redrawing of insider/outsider binaries. I then propose a model to explain Indigenous identity, a model I imagine in

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of the Cree understanding and value of *wâhkotowin* see Chapter 3 and Macleod, 2005, 22.

<sup>2</sup> As I am aware of Bakhtin's description of the way in which a word can be so laden with meaning that it makes it difficult to use in other contexts, I am hesitant to use a word that is often associated with his thought, even if I don't mean to evoke his ideas: In Cree thought identity is *dialogic*.

spatial terms as a locus defined by four lines of tension, each representing formative discourses that affect all Indigenous identity to some extent.

Indigenous identity is defined by, policed, and constrained, sometimes viciously, by four tensions: identity in relation to stereotype, to legislation, to physical experience and finally, to community. As my test case, I examine the autobiographical writing of Cherokee writer, Thomas King, first in comparison with the writing of Helen Hoy, to make the case that King is subject to these discourses and Hoy is not. I then compare the work of King with the personal narratives of Hank Pennier, who is half Sto:lo and half white and Harold Cardinal, Cree lawyer and activist. While King, Pennier, and Cardinal each literally embody a different position, all are judged by how closely they appear to match the stereotypes that since Columbus have been generated by the colonizers, based on the currency of an image in their particular context. Each, whether a Native North American, a Métis, or a Status Indian in Canada, is in a separate legal category and each is affected by that categorization. Each discusses how their physical appearance is examined for clues to their identities as "Indian" or "not Indian" and each uses life narrative to articulate the complexities of these many locations that are subsumed under the simplistic label of Indian, and to ally themselves with other Indigenous people. Regardless of how seemingly tenuous or concrete their claim to Indigenous identity might be, according to varying definitions, or how easily they might be considered to be transcultural subjects, hybridized and irrevocably changed by colonization, all are measured by the discourses about Indigenous identity in a way that Hoy is not.

In the introduction to *Testing the Limits: Postcolonial Theories and Canadian Literature* (1995), editor Diana Brydon contests the idea that postcolonial analysis began

with the work of Edward Said in the 1980s. Instead she reminds her readers that the works of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi provided an "interpretive frame for theoretical analysis...[that was] part of the Canadian discursive framework for understanding the world during the late 1960s and early 1970s" (169). While Brydon is likely technically correct, she is describing a period of time when Native literature in Canada was rarely taught, a time when the terms "native" or "indigenous" referred not to Aboriginal perspectives, spaces or vocabulary but to white Canadians trying to differentiate themselves from the imperial center.<sup>3</sup> Two decades later, in 1989, postcolonial scholar Terry Goldie coined the term "Indigenization," to describe a process motivated by the psychological need of whites "to become 'native,' to belong here...[noting that one preferred method]...seemed to be through writing about the humans who are truly indigenous" (13).

It was not until about that time, when Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin released *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), that postcolonial approaches were widely adopted in the study of Canadian literature. As Canada became described less often as a member of the Commonwealth and more often as a settler colony, it became apparent that while there was writing about Indians there was little critical attention devoted to the writings by Indigenous authors. The publication of *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* in 1995, edited by Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie, and the re-release of *In Search of April Raintree* as a critical edition in 1999, were signs that a canon was forming.

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<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Sugars argues this point in *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism*, quoting George Grant's use of "indigenous society," John Moss' description of "native or indigenous" vocabulary, Dennis Lee's reference to "native space" (xxi).

The methods inspired by postcolonial theories, at first glance, seemed perfectly suited to analyze these texts. As Susan Gingell ironically notes: "Postcolonialism had arrived on the scene, having been conceived as a project to decolonize the minds and institutions of the soon-to-be postimperial world, and promising fair to take into its capacious embrace the libratory politics of all oppression fighters" (97). But in "Native Writing, Academic Theory" (2003), Judith Leggatt laments that this is not universally appreciated:

These theories give me a framework in which to read, and they seem to fit the literature very well. However, many of my Native students, my colleagues who specialize in Native literature, and even the Native writers that I read in a post-colonial context argue against the very idea of post-colonialism. They find the term and its theories neocolonial and repressive. (111)

Maracle, for example, argues that the prefix in "postcolonial" is premature;<sup>4</sup> Thomas King<sup>5</sup>, decries the term even if it can be argued that the theoretical interests match his own; common postcolonial themes he lists are "centers, difference, totalizing, hegemony, margins" (185) and I would add mimicry, agency, the subaltern and hybridity.<sup>6</sup> While he acknowledges the promise of a method that understands literature to be "formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor...the term itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America" (184-185). But according to King the worst fault of postcolonial writing is that it ignores the existence of Indigenous cultural traditions with the potential to inspire new generations of

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<sup>4</sup> in "The 'Post-Colonial' Imagination" (1992)

<sup>5</sup> in his famous essay "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" (1990)

<sup>6</sup> Definitions for the last four can all be found in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (1998).

writers and "supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression" (185).

King wrote this in 1990 just as the study of Native literature in Canada was becoming established, complaining that postcolonial discussions can be prescriptive and not really interested in the intellectual production of Indigenous writers but only in narratives that confirm postcolonial paradigms. Kristina Fagan's 2002 evaluation of Native Literature validates his warnings; just as King argued that Indigenous cultural traditions were not valued, Fagan notes that there remains "a widespread lack of knowledge about tribal identities and traditions"; as King warned that postcolonial approaches were prescriptive, Fagan notes the tendency to see texts "as a direct reflection of 'Native' life and culture...[emphasizing]...certain themes, traditions and social issues" (239), rather than in terms of their unique contributions.

In 2003 Judith Leggatt comments on the impasse, between her "perception of post-colonialism as a working towards non-hierarchical cross-cultural encounters" (120) and the perspectives of Native writers that she teaches. She agrees with King's complaint that the term "postcolonial" is problematic but insists that cultural traditions are not erased: "The ideas of hybridity and syncretism...demonstrate not only that colonization has transformed Indigenous cultures, but also that those cultures have adapted their traditions to their new situations, so that they continue" (117). Seeing a gulf between the perspectives of postcolonial theorists and Native writers, she predicts change: "As more and more Indigenous critics are entering the academy they are transforming it and attempting to create theories and methodologies that work within the frameworks of both

the academic culture doing the investigating and the culture under investigation" (123).

The transformation she predicts is already evident.

A generation of Native American literary scholars has emerged over the past decade, influencing the still-nascent Canadian cohort. But contrary to Leggatt's hopes for a more satisfying dialogue, these scholars reject postcolonial approaches and the discussion altogether. Jace Weaver, in his contribution to *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006) explains:

Metaphors abound for the effect of mandating Natives to confess their hybridity and employ Western theories or postcoloniality. In a new multicultural version of the discarded melting pot hypothesis, some non-Native critics desire Natives to dissolve into a soup of hybridity (in which they too, of course, can share), embracing our mixed-blood identities...To press everyone into a hybrid or mixed-blood mold is to consummate finally the as yet uncompleted enterprise of colonialism. (29)

Weaver's tone is untempered and he is uninterested in the etymology of "hybridity" as a term that challenged such notions as "authenticity"; he is dismissive of postcolonial theory's anti-colonial potential. Speaking for his generation he states:

To reject a non-Native imposition of hybridity and Western theoretical discourse-- to contend that Native American literature stands outside the American canon -- and to affirm American Indian Literary Nationalism is to say that never again will we cooperate, nor will we stand by and acquiesce, in the theft of another intellectual generation. (31)



In fact, his colleague Robert Warrior believes that by limiting his focus to Native American interpretations of its own literature-- he studies the work of John Joseph Mathews and Vine Deloria Jr.-- he is building the intellectual sovereignty of his and other Indigenous nations. In *Tribal Secrets* (1995) he recognizes that he is ignoring "many contemporary theological, feminist, and postcolonial literary critical discourses" (xxiii). He suggests that his framework "is not an attempt to define a critical discourse free from influences outside of American Indian experience" (xxiii) but rather to emphasize Indigenous sources that he argues have been largely overlooked. While this approach has been very influential on the field, he has been, upon occasion, misunderstood.

Elvira Pulitano, a European scholar and author of *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003), seems to miss his point. She is scathing:

Undoubtedly, Warrior has undertaken a very ambitious project, attempting to construct some kind of American Indian criticism with Mathews and Deloria as the primary material on which to base this discourse. Owing to their international and, I would add, hybridized experience, Mathews and Deloria seem to be perfect candidates to bring the Native American experience into a wider context and give some pragmatic foundation to a Native American critical theory. However, by failing to translate Mathews's and Deloria's international and hybridized experience into his own study, and by insisting throughout on a cultural criticism rigidly rooted in the American Indian experience, Warrior leaves unsolved the question of how a criticism that aims at eradicating binaries can argue for a tradition of Indian intellectualism or intellectual sovereignty. (78)

Without reducing the entire field of postcolonial studies to the one concept of "hybridity," it is clear that term has provoked rancorous debate. Responding to Pulitano's critique of Warrior and himself, Craig Womack wades in:

Pulitano treats a Native perspective like a blood quantum, a CDIP card, certificate of degree of Indian perspective, in this case anything short of one hundred percent turning its bearer into a hybrid instead of an Indian. At this point why do we not just give up and call it Hybrid American literature instead of Native American literature? A disturbing question is whether or not Pulitano actually believes in the existence of Native people, and, especially, tribes, given that her racial binary seems to only allow for non-Indians and hybrids. (*American Indian Literary Nationalisms* 116)<sup>7</sup>

My reactions are multiple. To start with, I personally appreciate the role that postcolonial theory has had in making space in the academy for the study of Indigenous

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7 In her book Pulitano also criticizes Craig Womack for "overlooking his own *strategic location*" (92), and suggests that his study of Creek intellectual traditions, as "a sophisticated work of literary criticism [is], as such, inaccessible to those members of a Native audience who cannot approach it from a similarly privileged position" (92). At the heart of this critique is Pulitano's rejection of what she considers to be essentialist claims: "[Womack] becomes the insider claiming to present the correct meaning of the story merely on the basis of an authentic Native perspective" (85). Her subsequent questions about the relevance of his academic work to the Creek community are an effort to question whether or not Womack belongs: "Can Womack's work still maintain, as the product of the University of Minnesota Press, its professed Creekcentrism? Does the fact that Womack holds a professorship at the University of Lethbridge [in Alberta] change the way in which he speaks to his community?" (92). Without wading into the debate around essentialism, I find the implications of these critiques bothersome. It is a common complaint that the work of many literary critics (be they Native American or European) is inaccessible to members of their respective communities but I am unconvinced that this makes the work irrelevant. In fact, I can easily imagine that, for example, many Parisians might very well be uninterested in the discussions of national memory in France by eminent historian Pierre Nora but I hazard a guess that many Creeks uninterested in literary criticism have read or at least bought Womack's book. While Europeans can easily find books written on their nations by fellow citizens, most First Nations people in the Americas cannot. As to Pulitano's questioning of Womack's use of the University of Minnesota Press, I suspect she is aware there is no Creek University Press. While academics regularly get published and work where they can, which in Native literary criticism is no mean feat given the number of presses or jobs available, Pulitano might be pleased to hear that Womack is now working for the University of Oklahoma, although I am hesitant to decree that this therefore makes his work more Creekcentric.

literature, and believe that postcolonial theorists are often welcome allies. Also, I suspect that my position as Métis affects the fact that I do not find a contradiction in the idea that I can be both of mixed heritage and Aboriginal. This is based, of course, on the fact that as of 1982 the Canadian constitution recognized and affirmed "existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada" (35.1), a term that "includes Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada (35.2). It is not possible to translate this category into American terms, as "mixed-blood" is, to my mind, an offensive label that reifies the role of blood in identity. Also, the presumed opposite of a "mixed-blood" is the Status or enrolled Indian, often presumed to be "full-blood". This presumption naturalizes legislation to designate who belongs to which community and who does not, work that is best left in the hands of communities themselves (Lawrence, *Real* 25-27). Finally, I also respect the fact that conversations are dynamic and contextual. For the first time there has emerged a critical mass, a community of Indigenous literary critics in America and Canada and they--we--want to start a brand new conversation. There will be time enough to reconsider the possible contributions of postcolonial theory, if it remains a compelling enough topic.

Finally, there always has seemed to me to be something disingenuous and threatening about the discussion of the mixed background of an Indigenous writer, often employed to explain how he or she was hardly representative of their nation as a whole, and perhaps not really a member. For example, it is often mentioned that King is not only Cherokee but also Greek and sometimes German, too. This is despite the fact that he has never been claimed by any Greek or German canon that I am aware of, that no one that I am aware of has written on any Greek or German influences in his writing, and that

he does not seem to be an active member in the Greek or German community. (On this last point I understand that you might ask how I could know this and I don't...I presume that he keeps in touch with his mother's side of the family and is therefore a member of that family, too. I don't find this a contradiction.)<sup>8</sup> In fact, it is because he is a Cherokee scholar and not because he is Greek or German that his writing (and identity) is subjected to a scrutiny that non-Indigenous writers do not have to bear. For example, a book-length study of King and his work is entitled *Border Crossings: Cultural Inversions* (2003); authors Arnold E. Davidson, Priscilla L. Walton and Jennifer Andrews comment on why they think he is a good subject of study:

Thomas King's biography provides one context for understanding his work; in turn, his 'in-between' position, as a part-White and part-Native writer, affords him a particular perspective into the foundations of borders--not only at the level of nation but also through the complex intersections and division between the oral tradition and the printed word." (10-11)

While King's specific position, as for all of us, likely gives him a particular perspective, I suggest that it is the fact that he is part-Native that makes him a subject of interest. This conflation of his heritage and his use of orality in his writing would not be commented upon--or at least not so easily linked to identity-- should they be studying a non-Indigenous author. They consider orality to be a marker of Native literature and, in a later chapter, clarify that they are trying to "establish the differences that exist between the oral

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<sup>8</sup> This reminds me of an interview I once heard of Robbie Robertson, a songwriter, musician and member of The Band who later in his career became more obviously influenced by his Mohawk background. The interviewer quoted to Robertson something Robertson's Jewish cousin had said (Robertson's father was Jewish and Mother was Mohawk). His cousin, the interviewer reported, had said that of course Robertson would talk about his Mohawk heritage and never mention his Jewish identity. What I noticed was Robertson's initial surprise and his question back, "My cousin said that?" He paused for a second and then seeming to put what appeared to be harsh criticism together with the person he knew, started to laugh. "My cousin" he explained, "is a really funny woman."

and the written" (110). To substantiate this they quote Arnold Krupat who argues, in *The Voice in the Margin*, that even contemporary Native American works have a relationship to orality that differs from works produced from "dominant text-based culture" (as cited in *Border Crossings*, 110). Disregarding the merits of this particular thesis which I have already discussed in Chapter One, it is King's status as a Native writer that makes him of interest. While there might exist a borderland where one might be neither wholly Indian or wholly not, it seems to me that there are multiple and unique demands on and scrutiny of anyone who identifies, or is identified, as having any claim to Indigenous ancestry. The nature of this scrutiny is complex, coming from all sides, and specifically directed at Indigenous writers, leaving the non-Indigenous writer aside.

To further investigate this it is useful to examine King's *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (2003) and Hoy's *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada* (2001) because they are similar enough to lend themselves to comparison. First, these essays both focus on Indigenous literature. Second, both are contemporary discussions. Third, King and Hoy do not have markedly different writing styles, as both mingle personal narrative with literary argument. Finally, both authors have similar social positions.

But there is an intriguing difference between these two works. It is not any essential difference in content, form, access to the publishing industry or social status of the author that separates King's work from Hoy's. It is the fact that King is an "Indigenous author" that subjects him to a scrutiny not experienced by non-Indigenous writers, a clamor for him to explain himself and the details of his life, where he was born, where his people come from, etc. etc. etc. . This position, discursively created, is subject

to multiple and unique demands; these discourses are located within our bodies and outside of ourselves, from inside our communities moving outwards to popular culture and the state. When King writes from the position of an Indigenous author, he is subject to scrutiny that Hoy does not have to consider, and his decision to respond autobiographically is different from hers.

*If as I argue, Aboriginal authors are coaxed or coerced to write autobiographically, it does not escape me that in order to support my own argument, as a Métis scholar, I am personally implicated. Inspired by the work of Native American literary critic, Greg Sarris, I refer to my own story to challenge conventional definitions of theorizing, to trouble the boundaries of insider versus outsider and to draw attention to the unarticulated expectations of Indigenous scholars and scholarship.*

One of the few monographs on Indigenous literature in Canada, Hoy's *How Should I Read These?* is primarily a study of works of fiction. Hoy declares her intention to "incorporate into the textual analysis...pedagogical and personal *moments*, not a comprehensive narrative" (19). She outlines her project, to search for "clues to Euro-Canadian cultural tendencies that bear on the reception of First Nations literature" (19). She elaborates: "this book sets out to explore the problematics of reading and teaching a variety of prose works by Native women writers in Canada from one particular perspective, my own, that of a specific cultural outsider" (11). Her implied readers are those who share her "Euro-Canadian cultural tendencies," those who would ask alongside her, "How Should I Read These?"

Hoy is part of a feminist vanguard who use self-reflexivity and self-examination to interrogate race privilege, "to combat structures of power and entitlement" (18). However, the question that Hoy asks changes if the person asking the question is Aboriginal. For example, how should *I* read these? What exactly would be the problems of reading a variety of prose works by Native writers in Canada from the perspective, *my* own, of a specific *cultural insider*? Given Hoy's and my own multiply located subject positions, I do not mean to propose that I am her mirror opposite. But despite Hoy's sincere attention to her own position, she is still replicating the colonial moment of contact when the (white) scholar studies and interprets the cultural production of the Indigene for the benefit of a mainstream audience of "cultural outsiders." In no way do I think of this as a personal indictment but rather as a criticism of an academic system and discipline that has few Aboriginal scholars and does little to foster Indigenous scholarship. It is no wonder that a scholar who enters this field would be non-Indigenous and feel she would be best situated to speak to a non-Indigenous constituency. The Aboriginal teacher and student, however, are still left out of the conversation.

While there is no comparable Canadian Indigenous literary scholar of Helen Hoy's stature, that is to say, someone who has a doctorate, is a full professor in an English department and has published book-length literary criticism on Canadian Native writing, Thomas King, her colleague and partner, is certainly the more famous. Although he has written literary criticism, he is better known as an award-winning novelist and as the first person of Native descent to present the prestigious CBC Massey Lectures, which were broadcast nationally and released as a collection of essays in 2003. (This description of him, as "the first person of Native descent" comes directly off the back

cover of the published lectures.) While Hoy prefaces her incorporation of autobiographical detail with an explanation, King makes no similar comment in his lectures even though personal narrative marks each essay. It is significant to note that this is not a standard characteristic of the lecture genre. While those invited to give the annual Massey lectures are usually well-known Canadian public intellectuals, speakers who have some degree of fame and celebrity, they typically do not refer to their personal lives. In contrast, King describes his childhood and his parents in great detail. First, however, he begins chapter one (as he does in each of the four subsequent chapters) with the creation story about the earth floating on the back of a turtle. To explain "the truth about stories," which is the title of his lecture series, King then quotes Jeannette Armstrong, who is a storyteller and fluent Okanagan speaker.

After this King begins to tell his own story. He describes his attraction to stories about "other worlds and interplanetary travel" attributing this to his desire "to get as far away from where I was as I could" (2).

I'm sure part of it was teenage angst, and part of it was being poor in a rich country, and part of it was knowing that white was more than just a colour. And part of it was seeing the world through my mother's eyes. (2)

King describes his mother, who single-handedly raised him and his brother, and then describes his father whom he didn't know and barely remembers. Although the back cover of his book states that his father was Cherokee and his mother is Greek, at no point in chapter one does he make any reference to his ethnicity, other than the hint in the above quote, "part of it was knowing that white was more than just a colour."



The textual clues to King's identity as Aboriginal (if one does not already know him to be Native) are in the preamble to his personal narrative. The Creation story he cites is well known enough to be considered "pan-Aboriginal," not only a contentious term, but sometimes acknowledging a familiar signifier, like the Christmas tree, that would be described as so recognizable a symbol of the season that it is not necessarily associated with its German origin.

Jeannette Armstrong's words also serve to situate King's identity, even if they are about the origin and use of Okanagan stories. She states:

Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns.

(2)

King does not claim to speak as Armstrong does, from the perspective of someone fluent in her language. Nor does he claim that he was raised by cultural elders in his historic territory. But by beginning with an oral story and gesturing to the epistemologies embedded within indigenous languages, he associates his storytelling style with Armstrong's, with "retelling the same stories in different patterns." However, Armstrong is talking about specific protocols and world-views of the Okanagan who believe that the words come not only from their people but also their land and their language.

Armstrong's education in and access to her nation's literatures is profoundly different than his. In fact, given the history of colonization that has systematically separated Aboriginal people from their land and stories, through the reserve system, residential schools and

legislation like the Indian Act that banned spiritual activities for several generations (1884-1951) and displaced women from their communities (1879-1985), Armstrong's experience is exceptional.

Still, King constructs for his subsequent personal narrative a genealogy to which he is heir. If as a child his father's departure denied King his language and connections to family, as an adult he reconstructs those severed ties through stories. He asserts his right to this inheritance. This is something ignored by the current contentious identity debates in Native America. If as Sioux academic, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn asserts, Native American groups should retain the authority to sanction their representative artists and scholars, individuals like King, who were separated from their communities through no fault of their own, would have no right to claim membership. But King also has to respond to the rhetorical expectations that his audience has of him as Native. After all, if Hoy varies from standard academic form, and defines herself as a *cultural outsider* rather than as an *expert*, she does so through the legitimating power of her status in dominant society. King does not legitimate himself as an Aboriginal writer and literary critic through the same methods as she does. It is not his doctoral degree, his equivalent position in the same university and his accompanying accomplishments, but rather his life-story that he tells that ultimately legitimates him. As an Aboriginal person he is expected to perform his indigeneity. By retelling the creation story and quoting Armstrong, King draws on dominant expectations of authentic Indian performance.

While there is some hint of colonial spectacle in this requirement, reminiscent of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century expositions of the Native for a white

audience, this is only one aspect of this complex discursive formation.<sup>9</sup> Anishnabe theorist Gerald Vizenor argues that the *Indian* does not really exist, but is "an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation" (*Manifest Manners* 11). But Cherokee author Thomas King does exist and the discursive Tom King in *The Truth About Stories* acts and reacts to the simulations and reflections that complicate his autobiographical accounts. This is because Indigenous identity is particularly loaded with the uniquely American concept of the *Indian* as either sidekick or enemy to the archetypal cowboy, an image that has been exported throughout the world through American popular culture. King questions these expectations, with their associated demands, when he describes how in his youth he had worked with a German crew on a steamship in order to pay for his passage to New Zealand: "The cook...told me that he had read all of Karl May's novels and had a fair idea of what Indians were supposed to look like and that I wasn't what he had imagined. 'You're not the Indian I had in mind,' he told me" (48). In his story, confronted by suspicion from the ship's cook, Tom King "confessed that [he] was a mixed-blood" (48), in order to explain why he did not look the way that the German crew expected. Yet like blue-eyed Ojibway author Drew Hayden Taylor who, like the title of his famous essay, is "Pretty Like a White Boy," Aboriginal authors have often had to negotiate expectations about their appearance. Paige Raibmon, in her introduction to *Authentic Indians* (2005) attributes this to the potent, unstable concept of Indian authenticity rooted in nineteenth-century assumptions of race. She notes that even in the 1880s, "Franz Boas complained of difficulty finding 'real Indians,' and German audiences

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<sup>9</sup> According to L.G. Moses "public exhibitions of American Indians...are as old as the Europeans' first encounters with the Americas" (10); however, by the end of the 1800s, continuing on through the 1900s, alongside the technological innovations displayed at World Fairs were human exhibits. Paige Raibmon argues that the presence of the "authentic" Native American "savage" was meant to contrast with the message of "progress" of civilization. See *Authentic Indians*, chapter two.

charged a group of touring Nuxalk with being 'false Indians,' because they did not look the stereotypical part" (8). While perhaps Tom King did not look Indian enough for the ship's crew, his reference to his mixed heritage to allay the concerns of the ship's cook is a tactic of distraction. Like the German novelist Karl May<sup>10</sup> before them, who wrote popular novels about the American wild west, they had never before met an Indian and as such could hardly be qualified to identify what a 'real' Indian looked like.

*I know from personal experience that being the Indian that someone imagines is a tricky business. I once interviewed a performance artist in Montreal as part of an art history class. The man specialized in outdoor installations mixed with ritual inspired, he told me, by "primitive" societies. He was about the age of my father, who had recently passed on, was generous with his time and I was flattered by his curiosity about me. He pressed me for details about my Cree background, disappointed that I wasn't fluent in the language but pleased to discover that my grandmother, my Kohkum, called me "Moot-sias", which he wrote down in his little note book. I felt a little guilty that I didn't tell him that "Moot-sias" means "brat" in Cree.*

Clearly May was not the first, nor the last, to write about the archetypal Indian, based on a mixture of historical research and Eurocentric fantasy. In 1892, E. Pauline Johnson, the famous Mohawk poet, suggested that authors who create Native characters but "have never met a 'real live' Redman," do so "to lend a dash of vivid colouring to an otherwise tame and somber picture of colonial life"(997). She complains particularly

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<sup>10</sup> Karl May (1842-1912) is the best selling writer of all time; his novels set in America's Wild West first became popular in 1892. During the Twentieth Century 23 German films were made based on his novels. May did not come to North America until 1908 and never traveled farther west than Buffalo, New York.

about the portrayal of the Indian girl in modern fiction, inevitably named 'Winona,' who "is rarely distressed by having to belong to any tribe, or to reflect any tribal characteristics...[but] is merely a wholesale sort of admixture of any band existing between the Mic Macs of Gaspé and the Kwaw-Kewiths of British Columbia" (997).

Remembering King and Fagan's comments at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that these national/tribal distinctions are still not well known.

As Vizenor describes the invention of the Indian as "the other in a vast mirror," (*Fugitive Poses* 37), this fantasy, at times ridiculous or thrilling, affects how the Indigenous person is viewed and how she views herself. In *Iskwewak Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws* (1995) Janice Acoose argues that these stereotypes function within the state as part of "an ideological apparatus that disempowers Indigenous women" (15). She relates this to her personal experience in high school:

Not having the political consciousness or strength of spirit to challenge contemporaneous pedagogy or the school's dominating ideological influence, I shamefully accepted that I was not only different but inferior. Consequently, I learned to passively accept and internalize the easy squaw, Indian-whore, dirty Indian, and drunken Indian stereotypes that subsequently imprisoned me, and all Indigenous peoples regardless of our historical, economic, cultural, spiritual, political, and geographic differences. (29)

The invention of the Indian is not simply the mistake of early colonizers, subsequent fiction writers and the government of Canada who codified Indian identity through federal legislation. If, as Acoose argues, these stereotypes that emerged "imprisoned...all

Indigenous people," they also provide a unifying experience of oppression with which we can identify. Of course these same stereotypes are used to identify and categorize us. In the 1950s Joseph Dion, author of *My Tribe, the Crees*, wrote that "in the eyes of the average white man there is a colour line, no matter how faint, which prompts him to set apart all of the original natives of the West as one group -- namely Indians" (148). In critical race theory concepts like "light skin privilege" and "passing" acknowledge the prejudices that some people of colour face that others, by virtue of lighter skin tone or other signifying features, can successfully evade; some by virtue of their "light skin" can pass as white. Bonita Lawrence discusses, in *"Real" Indians and Others* (2004), the importance of appearance, the need to recognize that white-looking Aboriginals receive "some form of unacknowledged benefit from NOT having to show up with a brown face when looking for an apartment, in dealing with government bureaucracy, or in trying for a job in the mainstream" (178). This light-skinned privilege, "particularly for those who already enjoy class and gender privilege, cannot be ignored" (177). Of course "passing as white" is no carte blanche. Lawrence cautions that "'honorary whiteness' that light-skinned Native people can enjoy if they desire vanishes when these individuals 'come out' as Native by challenging racism" (177). Complicating this is the example given by Lawrence of Cherie Moraga, the Chicana feminist, whose privilege would fluctuate according to location. In the southern United States she was seen as a mestiza while in Mexico she was seen as white.

*My father's parents were German-speaking immigrants who came to Manitoba from Eastern Europe in 1919. Born in the dirty thirties, Dad spoke infrequently about his*

*childhood and, partly because his mother died before I was born, most of what I know about this side of the family is from the stories my mom had heard and then retold.*

*After high school I moved to Vancouver to live with my best friend, who besides being tall, blond, slim and gorgeous, is also hilariously funny. Her landlady loved Selina, was tickled to meet the handsome young men that came by, and was more than happy to hear that Selina had a friend who could share the rent. Helen was a German lady who cooked meals I recognized as things my mother learned to make for my father, what I thought of as German food like kolupches and perogies stuffed with sauerkraut. The landlady never seemed quite so happy to meet me but I was used to and was comfortable with standing in Selina's veritable shadow, amused by the admirers she always attracted. A few days after I arrived, when I was out job-hunting, Helen came up to Selina to ask, "So your friend, is she an Indian?" When Selina related this to me I added, "So she didn't think I looked German?" and we both laughed.*

Yet even as Lawrence acknowledges that whiteness varies with location, she does not fully address the fact that markers of indigeneity are not only phenotypic. In certain contexts, to use her phrasing, "showing up with a brown face" is not an immediate recognizable sign of Indigenous identity but instead causes identity confusion. Harold Cardinal, in his groundbreaking 1969 response to the Trudeau government White Paper, *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians*, discusses this problem:

I wear a buckskin jacket today and have for many years. I wear it first of all because it is one of the most comfortable garments I have, but I also wear it as an example to young Indians. One other reason: I got tired of being asked if I were

from China or Japan or India or somewhere like that. I got tired of having people jump to the conclusion that, just because I was educated and could talk like a white man, even though I obviously am not one, that I must be Asian. I wear my buckskin jacket because it says, "I am a Canadian Indian." (23)

Cardinal mediates any confusion by others by adopting a costume that can signal his identity.

Indigenous identity in Canada is associated not only with facial features and the colour of one's skin but also with social disadvantages attributed to low income and poor education. This is a long-standing result of a history of racist discrimination that places Aboriginal identity and mainstream success in mutually exclusive categories. According to Carole J. Williams, in her history of nineteenth-century frontier photographs in *Framing the West* (2003), commercial images of Indians for sale to the general public in the late 1800's typically depicted Indigenous people as "lowly or impoverished" (164). She theorizes that "scenes of Native prosperity, respectability, or success...shook the dominant stereotypes of Indians...contradict[ing] the prevailing claims that Native Americans lacked the industry and ambition equal to the settler" (164). For Cardinal, this means that since his buckskin jacket identifies him as Canadian Indian, his education level will be questioned.

Had King simply considered himself to be "a person of Greek heritage," he would not face as stringent an examination as he does when he identifies as Cherokee. Imagine if you will, King at the University of Guelph as a professor of Classics, teaching the *Iliad* and creatively rewriting the *Odyssey*. In the same job and in the same body, his



discussion of his childhood experience of being "poor in a rich country" would be considered irrelevant and possibly self-indulgent.

King's childhood poverty is meaningful as a marker of Indigenous identity, but he argues that his adult success undermines his credibility. He cites a 2001 *Globe and Mail* newspaper series written by John Stackhouse that reviews him and his *Dead Dog Café* co-stars, where King is called "equal parts first class and first nations." Stackhouse implies, King argues, that his penchant for flying business class, his golf games with Graham Greene, and his big house in Guelph means that he's "the urban Indian. Not an Indian at all, really" (88). For Aboriginal autobiographers, poverty is seen as a constant and static position so that any activities associated with mainstream, middle-class Canada destabilize that identity. That Harold Cardinal's education level and Thomas King's love of steakhouses and winter vacations, all unremarkable indicators of middle-class white success, would seem inconsistent with Indigenous identity prove that these stereotypes still have currency.

*Because my dad was in the military we moved around a lot and I was used to introducing myself as the new kid. I was genuinely shocked in grade five when we moved to a small country school on Vancouver Island, my first school off of an army base, and was readily identified as a squaw. While I wasn't in any way ashamed of being Cree, I was horrified by the social rejection that I had never experienced before. By grade eight I made sure that I went to a junior high school on the other side of town. Although this didn't completely end my sense of alienation, I knew the exhilarating power of moving.*

*Several moves later, in Montreal, I married, only to return to British Columbia where my husband had found work in the suburbs in the Fraser Valley. It took me some time to realize, in the trajectories from the supermarket to the daycare to my jobs at non-profits that I was publicly identified as a middle-class wife and mother, and I was horrified to be publicly identified not by what I thought or did but rather by my marital status. What caught me off guard is that if visitors to our home saw my family photographs in the hallway or I would talk about my childhood, people were often surprised, perhaps emphatically so, that I was part Cree. I finally realized, after thinking this over while examining myself in the mirror, that my features hadn't changed but my access to stylish haircuts and nice clothes had. Somehow I looked less Indian if I wasn't poor. My "Indianness" hadn't disappeared, however, for everyone. When I would work with members of the Sikh community or interview Sto:lo people as part of my jobs, the first thing they would ask me is about my heritage.*

Many Native academics have related experiences where their educations have provoked questions about their indigenous identity. Emma LaRocque, a fluent Cree speaker, is one of first to teach Native literature in a university classroom. But while one might assume that these accomplishments would legitimate her expertise, she found the opposite to be true. In the preface to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, she describes how around 1985 she was contacted by the media:

A CBC radio journalist from Regina called for cultural sorts of information. After regaling him (about bears, blueberries, fiddles, ghosts, and things) for about an hour, it somehow dawned on him he was speaking to a professor. He abruptly

ended his interview with this request: "Could you tell me where I could find a *real* Métis storyteller?" (xxiii)

For the Indigenous author, questions about authenticity can come from any direction. In recent years, contentious identity debates have become a *cause célèbre* in America after questions about the heritage of such high-profile academics as Jamake Highwater, Michael Dorris and Ward Churchill emerged. In a 2002 article in *American Indian Quarterly*, editor Devon Mihesuah complains that "it appears that all a good writer has to do is claim to be a member of tribe x, y, or z and everyone takes his or her word for it" (97). Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has been highly critical of those who have benefited from affirmative action policies that accompany the recent cachet of Native identity, without "citizenship in an Indian nation" (78). She is caustic, apparently uninformed about or unconcerned with how easily tribal citizenship is lost through colonial oppression (the foster system, adoption, residential schools being a few examples). But Cook-Lynn makes the excellent point that "these matters are not just rhetorical or academic. The real question of who speaks for these native populations in a democracy like America should not be just a function of literary star-making by the media or by colonial and business and educational institutions or through an ignorant American romanticism" (79).<sup>11</sup> While Cook-Lynn is often associated with her scornful listing of those she does not consider to be Indian enough, she in fact insists that it has nothing to do with blood and everything to do with who has or does not have tribal recognition.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See also Margery Fee's "Why C.K. Stead didn't like Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*: Who can write as Other?"

<sup>12</sup> For an extended discussion of the legislation of Native American identity in the American context, see Eva Marie Garroute's *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (2003).

While it is questionable whether or not "wannabees" are really the biggest problem in Native North America, it is clear that the concern by Aboriginal people about the identity of others is not new and these concerns are similar to those Cook-Lynn articulates about cultural survival and sovereignty. While Joseph Dion sketches out this problem in the 1950s, the laws he refers to remained unchanged until Bill C-31 came into effect in 1985, with its own set of inconsistencies. Dion writes:

There are some reserves where the boys marry white girls. The present law says that the children of such a union are Indians and entitled to all treaty rights. Supposing our boys keep on marrying white girls outside for a sufficient number of generations, we would have white men in the reserve. At the same time, the law says that Indian girls marrying non-status men lose their treaty rights, so if the girls kept marrying half-breed Indians that did not belong to the reserve, very shortly the Indians would be outsiders, and the white men would be Indians.

(180-81)

In *The Truth about Stories* King outlines the situation since after 1985 with Bill C-31, although he does get one detail wrong, which illustrates how difficult the new formula is to understand:

Six-one Indians are status and, for legal purposes, are considered to be full-bloods even if they aren't, while six-two Indians are status and for legal purposes considered to be half-bloods even if they aren't

Now I won't swear that this is absolutely accurate, but as I understand it the effects of the Indian Act and Bill C-31 are as follows: Six-ones who marry six-

ones produce six-one children. Six-ones who marry six-twos produce six-one children. Six-ones who marry non-status produce six-two children.

And six-twos who marry six-twos, or who marry non-status, produce non-status children. And those children can never, ever be status.<sup>13</sup> (143)

Keep in mind that losing one's status means that not only do you lose your treaty rights, the equivalent of losing your inheritance, but you also lose your right to live on a reserve with your family. It is not difficult to understand Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Charlotte Côté suggestion that from the inception of the Indian Act in 1876 to the present day, legislation is a weapon in the arsenal of the colonizing state determined to commit cultural genocide.

Legislation is a common and universal experience for aboriginal people, even if it is because they are excluded from official identification. For example, Henry Pennier, a Métis logger, describes his difficulties during the time when it was illegal for Status Indians to drink alcohol, a section in the Indian Act that wasn't repealed until 1961:

Outside of my work I could not join the white society, socially, and if I went to a [sic] Indian party and there was liquor involved I was taking a chance of being jailed regardless of whether I had supplied them with liquor or not.... Us breeds used to have these documents which we got from the Indian agency saying we were non Indian and which we had to produce at liquor stores or beer parlours where we were not known. (127-8).

While Pennier needs to carry a document to prove that he is legally on the white side of the colour line, he is seen by whites to be on the Indian side. To be Indigenous, in fact, is not simply to be the opposite of white. While it is tempting to discuss Pennier as hybrid, his position as an Indigenous person is determined by four intersecting lines of tension

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<sup>13</sup> In fact six-twos who marry six-twos produce six-ones.

that shift over the course of his life. First his embodiment, literally his physical body, genetically linked to his Aboriginal ancestors, gives him his appearance. On the other end of this tension wire are stereotypes derived from dominant popular culture, about what an Indian looks like, so that he is recognized as Indian and is therefore subject to racism. Intersecting this is his own connection and sense of obligation to his communities, even though these communities alternately see him as Indian rather than white and a "breed" rather than an Indian. On the other side of this continuum is his legal identity, which is recorded through the Ministry of Indian Affairs, in this case his non-Indian card certifying that he is not Indian.

While King comes from a much different context, his identity is subject to similar tensions. Because of his appearance King was mistaken as Mexican or at least recognized as "not-white" throughout his childhood. At university he combines this physical experience and the expectation of stereotype to present himself as Indian:

in the 1970's, being recognized as an Indian was critical. And here tribal affiliation was not a major consideration. We didn't dress up as nineteenth-century Cherokees or as the Apache, Choctaw, Lakota, Tlingit, Ojibway, Blackfoot, or Haida had dressed. We dressed up as the "Indian" dressed. We dressed up in a manner to substantiate the cultural lie that had trapped us, and we did so with a passion. (45)

By the time King gave the Massey lectures he was no longer dressing in racial drag but he still expresses his desire to "look Indian." Even though he recognizes that "looking Indian is more a disadvantage than it is a luxury" (59), he acknowledges that his position in society, including his middle-class status, protects him from the usual burdens:

There's little danger that [middle-class Indians like myself will] be stuffed into the trunk of a police cruiser and dropped off on the outskirts of Saskatoon. Not much chance that we'll come before the courts and be incarcerated for a longer period of time than our non-Indian brethren... That sort of thing happens to those other Indians. My relatives. My friends. Just not me. (59-60)

While Henry Pennier was recognized by white society as Indian, King knows that he has enough cultural capital to protect himself from the worst expressions of racism. But King locates his identity not just between the poles of physical appearance and stereotype but also in his obligation to community. Whether or not he is "the Indian you had in mind," he allies himself with both friends and family who have to deal with "that sort of thing."

Unlike Pennier, King does not have a non-Indian card, nor does he talk specifically about his legal identity. But he does talk at length about legislation in both America and Canada. After describing the trickeries of Canada's Indian Act, which historically has stripped Status Indian identity from generations of Indigenous people including anyone who got a university degree, who served in the military, and who married a non-Status man, King talks about the recent amendments of Bill C-31 that were supposed to reinstate those who were involuntarily enfranchised. Instead, certain bands in Alberta fought against accepting any new members, noting that they were given no additional resources to deal with this added membership and fearing the social upheaval these new people would bring. King writes:

Unlike most other ethnic groups, we have two identities, a cultural identity and a legal identity, and the argument that I want to make is that we should be able to take both of them with us wherever we go, whatever we do, and with whomever

we do it. For the reality of identity legislation has not simply been to erase Indians from the political map of North America, it has also had the unforgivable consequence of setting Native against Native, destroying our ability and desire to associate with each other. This has been the true tragedy, the creation of legal categories that have made us our own enemy. (149)

King maps his own identity between the poles of legislation and obligation to community. He rejects the ability of the state to determine his identity as Indian and emphasizes the responsibilities communities have to support one another.

Harold Cardinal, in 2005, at one of the last speeches he made before his passing, "*Einew Kis-Kee-Tum-Awin: Indigenous People's Knowledge*," adds to this critique, arguing that the Indian Act lumped together "all 'First Nation persons' as being the same irrespective of their linguistic or cultural background. It was a convenient way of denying all of us our respective identities" (5). While King argues that Bill C-31 divides communities through competition for resources, Cardinal emphasizes how the legal category of 'Indian' itself undermines specific cultural communities. He elaborates:

Many years ago, a Cree Elder asked me the following question: *Awina Maga Kiya* -- who is it that you really are? I replied in Cree -- *Neehiyow Neyah* -- at that time, I thought I was saying "I am an Indian". (6)

It is only when Cardinal realizes that *Neehiyow* does not translate as the legislated category of "Indian" is he able to articulate his understanding of himself as Cree, as *Neehiyow*. Examining the etymology of the word, the Cree elder explained to Cardinal that *Neewoo* means four, that *Yow* means world. Cardinal translates:



When we say that "I am a *Neehiyow*" what I really am saying is that I come from 'the people who seek the knowledge of the Four Worlds.' In short when I apply the word '*Neehiyow*' to myself, what I am saying is that 'I am a seeker of knowledge'. (6)

Taught by his elder, Cardinal comes to understand himself not as a colonized subject but rather in Cree terms.

By comparing the personal narratives of Pennier, King and Cardinal, it is clear that Indigenous identity is fluid. Just as human bodies grow and age, stereotypes also change. Just as connections to community develop and alter, legislation can be amended. While Pennier, King and Cardinal each literally embody a different position, all are Indigenous people, having to negotiate stereotypes and government legislation, which shifts and changes over time; each relies on life narrative to explain these complications and to identify with their communities.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Symbol of Fireweed

#### in the Autobiographical Fiction of Tomson Highway and Shirley Sterling<sup>1</sup>

Earl Muldoe (whose traditional Gitksan name is Delgam Uukw), together with fellow litigants, the hereditary chiefs of thirty-seven other Gitksan Houses and twelve Wet'suwet'en Houses, spent thirteen years in Canadian court arguing the principle of Aboriginal title. Probably the two most famous moments in this long thirteen-year battle was the first, the ruling by Judge Alan McEachern in March 1992 when he denied that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en had any Aboriginal rights to their traditional territories (despite the fact that they had never signed a treaty); the second and equally famous moment in this case was on December 11, 1997, when the Supreme Court of Canada overturned this ruling declaring for the first time in Canadian history, that the concept of Aboriginal title exists and that one of the its founding principles is that oral histories can be submitted as evidence of this title.

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<sup>1</sup> Although it has since been substantially revised, a version of this chapter has been published. Reder, Deanna. "Stories of Destruction and Renewal: Images of Fireweed in Autobiographical Fiction by Shirley Sterling and Tomson Highway." Eds. Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episkenew. *Creating Community: A Roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal Literature*. Penticton, BC and Brandon, MB: Theytus and Bearpaw, 2002. 275-294.

My interest is in one small legal tactic used by the Crown, to argue that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people were assimilated into Western society and therefore ineligible for "considerations of distinct rights." This legal argument, commonly referred to as 'the pizza test,' argued "that Aboriginal people often work for wages, are members of Christian congregations, use *western* technology, attend public school and consume *white food*" (Culhane 229). Aboriginal witnesses were put on the stand to be questioned. They were asked whether or not band members owned cars or how often they ate fast food like Big Macs or pizza. The logic was that unless they lived as their ancestors did, they were not really Aboriginal people and therefore did not have legal rights to their land.

No matter that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people, along side anthropologists and historians, had testified about cultural vehicles that recorded their history orally since time immemorial. It was in the interest of the crown to cast doubt on the authenticity of the plaintiffs' legal claims. Surprisingly, when it came time for Judge McEachern to provide his Reasons for Judgment, he was able to employ exactly the opposite reasoning to come to the same conclusion. To McEachern's mind, the ancestors of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people were too primitive and hardly organized to be considered to have rights to the land, thereby nullifying the claim of the litigants. McEachern's words are as follows:

'the plaintiffs' ancestors had no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles, slavery and starvation was [sic] not uncommon, and there is no doubt, to quote Hobbs [sic] that aboriginal life in the territory was, at best "nasty, brutish and short" (*Delgamuukw* 1991:13)

Furthermore, while he originally agreed to allow the submissions of oral traditions by the litigants of evidence of Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en historical presence, in his judgment he "reverted to the position that oral traditions constitute hearsay, which is not admissible as evidence" (Mills 17).

I have included these two often cited arguments as a way to explain the anxiety about identity that is present in the two fictional autobiographies I discuss in this chapter. In the case of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en, these anxieties were not internal but rather proposed by the Crown, to abolish their legal claims to land. In the case of the two novels I discuss, the themes of marginality, ambivalence and alienation are not the result of assimilation or transculturation but a direct tactic by the colonizer, and colonizing institutions, to displace the Indigenous person and undermine his or her preexisting rights.

Anxiety over identity is a common theme in fiction by Indigenous authors. It is not until the end of *In Search of April Raintree* (1985) that April is able to consider herself as a Métis person. In Richard Wagamese's *Keeper'N Me* (1994) Garnet Raven is used to hiding behind invented personages before he makes his way back to his Anishnabe community and family. But I would like to suggest that Shirley Sterling's *My Name is Seepeetza* and Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* are different from these examples on several counts.

First, while there might be some resemblances between April and Beatrice Culleton or Garnet and Richard Wagamese--all were raised in foster care--there is not the same overt clues that exist in the books by Sterling and Highway, where the resemblances are much closer to the life story. For example, Shirley Sterling was called

Seepeetza, a name given to her by her father and used by her University of British Columbia students and colleagues. In Sterling's novel the fictional main character, Martha Stone has an Indian name, Seepeetza, which her family uses. On the book cover there is a picture of Sterling with two other Native girls dressed up in Irish costume presumably after they danced, as does the fictional Martha Stone, at various provincial competitions. On the back there is another one of her, looking a little older with a suitcase in one hand, her eyes shyly closed. Is it Martha Stone disguised as Shirley Sterling, or Sterling posing as Martha Stone?

Tomson Highway also bears a striking resemblance to his main character, Champion-Jeremiah Okimasis. Both are accomplished pianists and subsequently successful playwrights. Highway has a brother, René, who like Jeremiah's brother, Gabriel, was an accomplished dancer before his death to AIDS. The cover of the first edition of Highway's book bears a stunning photo with a picture of René Highway, posed as Gabriel Okimasis might be, mid-air, mid-dance, mid-flight. There is something intimate yet strangely distancing about this gesture, of sharing personal portraits under the guise of fiction. We look at the pictures and think we recognize the characters, yet really, how can we know who they are?

Second, while there might be good reasons for April and Garnet to be uncertain about their cultural heritage, it is not immediately clear why Martha-Seepeetza and Champion-Jeremiah would have similar anxieties. April and Garnet, like Culleton and Wagamese, were both removed from their culture; Seepeetza and Champion-Jeremiah, like Sterling and Highway, are sent to residential schools at a young age but they leave with siblings or cousins and are able to return to their homes on a regular basis, able to

hear their language, and in Jeremiah's case, able to speak it, and are able to get to know their elders. When compared with April and Garnet, Seepeetza and Jeremiah have so much more reason to feel confident about themselves as Indigenous people, so many more ways to be affirmed as N'laka'pamux or Cree, and yet are not.

As a way to compare these two works, to investigate this sense of anxiety more deeply, I have chosen the symbol of fireweed because it quite serendipitously appears in both works. Both use fireweed to signify the complex, evolving state of flux their characters must live in, both beautiful and horrifying, with resonance to Sterling and Highway's own childhoods. As autobiographical fiction, Sterling's and Highway's works are the fireweed flowers growing in the burned dirt. The two characters, Seepeetza-Martha and Champion-Jeremiah, are fireweed, too, in its many forms, as they cover the ground between one world and the other, at times cut down yet always full of possibilities.

These two works are both in that blurred category of autobiographical fiction; Sterling and Highway could easily have composed conventional autobiographies to tell their stories. Instead they decided to write in a way that would allow them to incorporate the experiences of their cousins and brother, as though they had first-hand access. They are able to draw on the universal aspects of their stories, knowing that they will resonate with others who have lived the same experiences, who as Status Indian children had to endure lives mostly separated from parents, forced to grow up in an institutional setting. There is the inevitable recounting of the first day of school, with the trauma of the haircut and the rejection of their childhood names. And in both texts, there is the symbol of fireweed.

In the last chapter of *My Name is Seepeetza*, Martha and her family go on one last day trip before another school year begins. They go straight up the side of the mountain and find thousands of purply-pink flowers all together in the tall grass along the creek. "We stopped and looked at it for awhile because it was so pretty. 'Fireweed,' said Dad" (124). As Seepeetza completes her year-long journal, she decides to store it in her father's old violin case and asks her maternal grandmother, Yay-yah, to make a buckskin cover for it "and bead fireweed flowers on it" (126). It is a satisfying image of beauty, although a deceiving one. Having read the heartbreaks and secret thoughts of a lyrical child on the verge of womanhood, we the readers want to carefully bind and preserve these words. We want to decorate them with something not from her school but from the mountains, that reminds her (and us) not of her teachers but of her people and her own beauty. In fact, I found that I was lulled by the narrator's honest and charming young voice, and almost overlooked the darker themes. So much of the novel is about Seepeetza's fears, her impulse for self-destruction, her alienation and loneliness.

The novel is a chilling indictment of the residential school system, with a seemingly simple binary system of 'bad school' versus 'good home.' But Seepeetza's relationship to her community and her family is complicated. For instance, Seepeetza is an "Indian name" given to her by her father after "an old lady who died a long time ago" (77). At the Kalamak Indian Residential School, she is forbidden to use it, "never to say that word again" (18), and forced to use her white name, Martha Stone, a name so unfamiliar to her that she has to hunt down her older sister Dorothy, to find out what it is: "I said it over and over. Then I ran back and told Sister Maura. After that she gave me a number, which was 43...we had to chain stitch our numbers on all our school clothes"

(19). This in itself helps explain her confusion, having been stripped of her family name. Her title proclaims to her reading public that she is not the name she was called at residential school.

But it is a mistake to look at the title of the novel, *My Name is Seepeetza*, and read it simply as a rejection of her "white" name and an affirmation of her First Nation's identity; after all, Seepeetza means White Skin or Scared Hide. She considers it "a good name for me because I get scared of things, like devils" (77). She does not link this with the fact that she looks white, although clearly this is significant to her identity. For example, while she is accepted in her immediate community, she still looks so white that other Interior Salish children, most notably her childhood nemesis, Edna, can label her "shamah" or "white" (99). And it gets more complicated. To state it simply, *My Name is Seepeetza* is about a red girl, who looks like she might be white, who because her status is Indian and therefore "officially red," is removed from her family (also officially red) to be educated, in effect, to be turned white. Added to this, her parents, also victimized by this process, are complicit in it. They refuse to teach Seepeetza or her siblings any of the six languages that her father uses as a court interpreter. Of course, Seepeetza's parents are trying in earnest to ensure a happier future for their children. Seepeetza's mother had welts on her hands and arms throughout the few years she went to residential school herself: "That's why she didn't want us to learn Indian. When Mum and Dad want to talk without us understanding them, they speak Indian. It sounds soft and gentle, like the wind in the pines" (89). Because of this Seepeetza is robbed of the language of her mother, her mother tongue, and the "Indian" her parents speak is a language of secrecy.



It was Seepeetza's great-grandmother, Quaslametko, who told Seepeetza's mother that she didn't want her grandchildren to go to school "because school would turn them into white people. They wouldn't be able to hunt or fish or make baskets or anything useful anymore" (30). And it is after the year-long testament to the meager rations, small praise, corporal punishment, and constant fear that Frank Stone, after admiring the fireweed and eating lunch, tells his children that their valley is getting crowded:

People will be building houses all around the ranch. Ranching won't pay much any-more. You kids want to get yourselves an education. Get a job. That way you'll be okay. (125)

At the close of the novel Seepeetza is to be sent back to school, perhaps with a few more skills that maturity and respite might give her but also with similar problems of years' past. Instead of Sister Theo, who would clobber Martha when she mis-stepped during dance class, Sister Kerr awaits, as she did for Dorothy: "You Stones think you're so smart...But I'm going to take you down a peg or two" (42). It is not that comforting that Seepeetza is securing her future by returning to the Kalamak Indian Residential School -- K.I.R.S. for short (or Curse, as her brother Jimmy aptly refers to it). Nor is there consolation in her visits from Saint Joseph, who tells her that she needs to learn humility (as if her compliance with the humiliation, punches and insults from the nuns and teachers isn't enough). But it is her dream of Saint Joseph that she realizes her deepest hope and simultaneously her deepest fear: "I guess that what I want most in the world is for someone to like me, to be my best friend. Nobody wants to be friends with someone who looks like a shamah. Even Cookie avoids me most of the time. I miss my mum. I miss her all the time" (85). Seepeetza-Martha wants unconditional love and acceptance;

she yearns for her mother and home. However, it is "home," in the person of her cousin, Cookie, and the other N'laka'pamux girls, that rejects her. By definition, as "white" or "shamah," at home she is an outsider.

For Martha, what has been lost is her home, in the figure of her mother whom she misses all the time. Knowing that she cannot return permanently there produces her anxiety about her cousin, Cookie, who "avoids her," and about her sense of belonging. Seepeetza-Martha's plans to wrap her year-long journal in buckskin, beaded with fireweed flowers, is an attempt to affirm her authentic place in her community, first by binding it with something from home, made by her grandmother's own hands and second, to decorate in order to mediate the horror of the words of her father, who tells her she needs to get an education and therefore needs to accept the abuse and alienation meted out at school.

Fireweed plays a similarly ambiguous role in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. It appears in Gabriel's hand just as he is about to leave his parents and community for another year at residential school. He is almost fifteen and about to go to Winnipeg to join his older brother Jeremiah. His mother, Mariesis, knowing he is now old enough to legally quit school, does not want him to go:

Wasn't that the drone of the airplane coming to take him away? Again? Hearing footsteps, she turned. Framed in a wash of golden light, Gabriel stood, twirling in one hand -- pink, mauve, purple -- a bloom of fireweed. How handsome he was!

(110)

The image of Gabriel as a young man in flower is symbolized by the blooms in his hand. It is a pleasant image of a mother recognizing the beauty of her almost-grown son, the poetic prettiness of the fireweed. She pleads with him:

"Quit school, my son," Mariesis said, trying her best to sound matter-of-fact.

"Stay home with us"... "I have to be with Jeremiah," replied Gabriel...

"You have been away since you were five. You'll be fifteen next January. For Jeremiah, it's too late. But you, you're our youngest." (110,111)

Yet the reason why Gabriel feels more loyalty to Jeremiah than to his parents is not only that he and his brother were sent away to a place where they were sexually used by the priests. It has been made clear where their parents' loyalties lie. At one point in the novel, the Okimasis brothers travel during summer holidays with their parents and two sisters over Mistik lake when Gabriel sees a flicker of light:

"Look, a fire!" he exclaimed softly.

"Where?" asked Jeremiah, turning drowsily to look at Gabriel...

The brothers looked with wonder at the distant glow... Mariesis had seen such fires before. She had known this lake like an intimate friend, a relation, an enemy, a lover for nearly fifty years--such occurrences were not new to her. She merely kept her gaze straight ahead, as if nothing had happened. Abraham, too was looking straight ahead..."That's the island where Father Thibodeau's men caught Chachagathoo." It was their mother's voice, though, as if someone was giving expression to the words. "Don't look at it." (89,90)

Told since childhood not to mention the name of Chachagathoo, this is the first time that the boys learn anything about her. Mariesis finally tells them that Chachagathoo had

*machipoowamoowin*, or bad dream power. The instruction from their parents is clear.

They are not to look at the light of that flame and are not to mention Chachagathoo; they are to believe in the priest who in this case is Father Thibodeau.

When the boys speak to each other in English, a language secret from their parents, Gabriel asks if it is *machipoowamoowin* that Father Lafleur does to the boys at the residential school (91). Jeremiah's answer is chilling because it is accurate: "Even if we told them [their parents] they would side with Father Lafleur" (92). What hope do they have if their own mother, who knows the lake "like an intimate friend," never questions the truth of the things the priests have told her? Even at almost age fifteen, when Gabriel flies away to be a school with Jeremiah, Mariesis' last words are: "'Tell Jeremiah if he misses Holy Communion on Sundays, I'll never cook caribou *araboo* for him again. Do you hear me?'" (112).

Once together in Winnipeg, the Okimasis brothers enter a large shopping mall that is described as standing like a large Weetigo, the Cree cannibal, consuming people who eat and shop and are then shat out. When Gabriel goes alone to the bathroom he finds a man:

Standing there, transported by Gabriel Okimasis's cool beauty, holding in his hand a stalk of fireweed so pink, so mauve that Gabriel could not help but look and seeing, desire. For Ulysses' sirens had begun to sing "Love Me Tender" and the Cree Adonis could taste, upon the buds that lined his tongue, warm honey.

(120-1)

Just as the shaft of the fireweed can be sucked upon, so can the penis of the anonymous man. The semen is sweet on his tongue like "warm honey" but the image is arresting.

This fourteen-year-old boy, the same who the day before was holding a fireweed flower in his hand while talking to his mother, is engaged in a random sex act in a public toilet in a shopping mall.

A few months later, mid-November, tired of his brother's constant piano practice, Gabriel, still fourteen until January, heads out late at night and ends up at The Hell Hotel on North Main. After a few beers he goes with another stranger to a dark passageway, where at the end a group of young men are raping a Cree woman. Seemingly undeterred, he and the stranger turn the corner where they begin to have sex:

The cold November air was like a spike rammed through the hand--his feet floated about the earth--and he saw mauve and pink and purple of fireweed and he tasted, on the buds that lined his tongue, the essence of warm honey. (132)

There is a clear connection between this sexual experience and the games he used to play with the other children at the residential school when they acted out the Stations of the Cross. Gabriel often played Jesus as the boys chanted around him: "Kill him! Kill Him! Nail the savage to the cross, hang him high, hang him dead!" (83). In one instance, "Jeremiah and his nine-year-old soldiers hurriedly 'nailed' Gabriel to the cross, swung it up, and banged its base into a groundhog hole" (86). During his sexual encounter in the alleyway behind the Hell Hotel, it is the cold wind that "nails" his hands and orgasm that floats his feet "above the ground" and again there is the vision of the fireweed and the taste of warm honey.

Of course, the re-enactment of the Stations of the Cross is a game sanctioned by the priests, and one that has clear connection to the sexual abuse Gabriel endures as a small child at residential school:

Gradually, Father Lafleur bent, closer and closer, until the crucifix that dangled from his neck came to rest on Gabriel's face. The subtle throbbing motion of the priest's upper body made the naked Jesus Christ--the silver of the silver light, this fleshly Son of God so achingly beautiful--rub his body against the child's lips, over and over again. The pleasure in his centre welled so deep that he was about to open his mouth and swallow whole the living flesh--in his half-dream state, this man nailed to the cross was a living, breathing man, tasting like Gabriel's most favourite food, warm honey. (78-9)

The sacred act of communion, the eating of the flesh of Christ, mixed in with the act of oral sex, the unholy sexual abuse of the child, and the child's own attempt to make sense of the experience and the religion is horrifyingly blended in all its obscene multiplicities. Here it is the penis of Father Lafleur, whose name is French for flower, whose semen the young child, Gabriel, can only understand as honey.

Some chapters later, Jeremiah is in the most important piano competition of his life and Gabriel, now a professional dancer, misses Jeremiah's concert because he is flying off with his lover, Gregory. There is one last image of fireweed in the novel when Jeremiah plays his piece for the judges and imagines the airplane taking off and his brother leaving him. Then:

Jeremiah played a northern Manitoba shorn of its Gabriel Okimasis, he played the loon cry, the wolves at nightfall, the aurora borealis in Mistik Lake; he played the wind through the pines, the purple sunsets, the zigzag flight of a thousand white arctic terns, the fields of mauve-hued fireweed rising and falling like an exposed heart. (213)

Fireweed, here, is not a profane symbol but an achingly beautiful one of his love for and his sense of loss of his brother, mixed with the magnificence of the land they came from. The allusion is not diminished by its association with exploitative sexuality although, unlike its first mention in the text, when Gabriel, at fourteen, is with his mother, we cannot forget the other forms it takes in further passages.

Winning the competition but feeling alone, Jeremiah goes himself to the Hell Hotel on Main:

Try as he might to will Gabriel into its smoke-obscured universe [his image in the mirror], remained infuriatingly alone. Beyond it, across the room, drunken Indians as far as the eye could see. He had tried. Tried to change the meaning of his past, the roots of his hair, the colour of his skin, but he was one of them. What was he to do with Chopin? Open a conservatory on Eeemanapiteepitat hill? (215)

Just as Seepeetza articulates her loneliness, Jeremiah experiences the same sense of alienation. Champion-Jeremiah knows he cannot become white but it seems to him, at this point in the narrative, that he cannot be both Indian and a classical pianist. Yet we, the readers, know that just as the author of the book, Tomson Highway, is, among other things, both Indian and a classical pianist, Jeremiah too can inhabit both subject positions without contradiction. It is only later on in the narrative that Jeremiah can admit that different facets of himself co-exist, and that his role as a musician is integral to his identity. In the words of Amanda Clear Sky: "'You are born an artist'... 'It's a responsibility, a duty; you can't run away from it'" (259).

While Seepeetza is sometimes mistakenly identified as white, Jeremiah never has this problem. Yet even though he spends his early childhood with his people, living on

the land, speaking his Aboriginal language fluently, all the time looking "Native," he feels distanced from traditional Aboriginal spirituality. It is not accurate to say that he is distanced from his own culture because his culture includes Catholicism, which displaced traditional practices. Jeremiah has been taught to be suspicious and frightened of what existed before colonization and this fear is intrinsic to his sense of his community. When Amanda, as a teenager, slips a picture of a Pow Wow dancer into his locker at school, "Jeremiah recoil[s]. There was something so...pagan about the image, primitive--the word made his eyes sting--Satanic" (162). Later on Amanda's grandmother, Ann-Adele Ghost rider, talks to Jeremiah about the culture his northern people have lost, Jeremiah is skeptical:

And what the hell was this tired old bag yattering on about anyway? What dances? What songs? "Kimisoom Chimasoo"? [a profane nonsensical rhyme] "The Waldstein Sonata"? [a work by Beethoven] (175)

Even in adulthood, when he works as a social worker, "after ten years of southern Manitoba Pow Wows...they still made him feel like a German tourist" (242).

In an attempt to help Jeremiah get over his combined sense of horror and abjection, Gabriel invites him to dance at the Pow Wow but:

Against all reason, Jeremiah was still frightened of this dance, this song, this drum, 'the heartbeat of our Mother, the Earth' as he had heard it said on more than one occasion. Like the door to a room off-limits to children, it still made his blood run cold. (243)

Soon after Ann-Adele talks about Chachagathoo, describing her as the "last shaman in that part of the world, the last medicine woman, the last woman priest!" (247). As Ann-



Adele talks about Chachagathoo's attempt to cure a man from the Weetigo and the interference of the priest that caused the sick man's death, a sound grew larger:

Where was it coming from? The forest? Across the channel? The bowels of the earth? And what was it? More drumming? Or someone pounding at some great steel door, demanding it be opened? Gabriel was perplexed but Jeremiah knew.

(246)

Jeremiah knows that the room "off-limits to children," the subject of which his parents would never speak, was about to be opened.

But it is not only the knowledge of Chachagoathoo's power that Jeremiah needs but also the opening of another door. Even though at this point in the story he has given up piano, he begins to play again and eventually collaborates with Jeremiah and Amanda on plays, blending his education and his sense of being Cree:

"Well," said Jeremiah [to Gabriel] cavalierly, "if James Joyce can do 'one day in the life of an Irishman in Dublin, 1903,' why can't I do 'one day in the life of a Cree man in Toronto, 1984'?" (277)

While Jeremiah is beginning to believe in his ability to be both Indian and a classical pianist, or in this case be a Cree man and a playwright, there are still more epiphanies to come. When a reviewer of his play is confused by the image of the Weetigo dressed in a priest's cassock, Jeremiah at first does not understand. Gabriel responds, telling him that he "didn't say it loud enough" (285). "Jeremiah tried to ask again. But, finally, his memory opened the padlocked doors" (285). Whereas Gabriel is fully conscious of the abuse he suffered, Jeremiah has it locked away in his memory. After this revelation, he

loses his revulsion and suspicion of powerful cultural artifacts that he once would have labeled satanic and begins to draw on Cree cultural stories that as a child he never knew.

Finally, at the end of the book, both brothers and even their very Catholic mother are able to participate in Aboriginal traditions, unknown to them in childhood and shared with them by Ann-Adele Ghost rider. Gabriel is on his deathbed in hospital, dying from an AIDS-related illness, nearly devoured by the Weetigo. He is surrounded by his lover, as well as his mother, his brother and friends. Ann-Adele takes Mariesis' rosary out of her hands and substitutes an eagle feather. She burns the four sacred medicines, triggering the fire alarms; Jeremiah, fearless, stands up to the fire-fighters and hospital staff. Following the last wishes of his brother and against the pleas of Mariesis, he ensures that there is no priest present. In the end the Fur Queen comes to escort Gabriel away.

Just as the four medicines represent wholeness, present also is the power of fireweed; the first is to survive the ordeal; next, to flourish in burnt soil without forgetting the fire but rather inscribing within oneself the colours of the fire that testify to survival, and finally, to constantly assume further incarnations.

Both Shirley Sterling and Tomson Highway had difficult childhoods because they are First Nations. Their designation as Status Indians made them legal wards of the state and they were compelled to attend residential school, where abuse was commonplace, not permitted to speak their Aboriginal language and separated from their families. Instead of autobiography, Sterling and Highway write fiction infused with their own experiences, perhaps because they are able, as authors, to reconcile their own disparate experiences as understandable fiction. Their autobiographical fiction, like other Indigenous

autobiographies, is the beauty after destruction, the fireweed, and the articulation of the colonization that was not only the agenda of their education but also woven through their home lives. The fiction is beautiful evidence that they have managed to make a coherent whole out of a terrifying history. Since trauma often silences its victims, this is a triumph.

In both works the two protagonists, Seepeetza-Martha and Champion-Jeremiah, carry about with them two names as well as the knowledge that their parents love them yet are complicit in sending them away. Both have teachers who are supposed to guide them but instead hurt them and both find that the very things they choose to express their artistic selves, Seepeetza through her writing and Jeremiah through his piano, provoke keen discomfort and a sense of alienation from their Indigenous community. When Brother Reilly praises Martha's writing, "A golden feeling kept washing over me" (61). Yet she denies this when classmates ask her about what the teacher has told her: "I didn't want Edna finding out what he said to me about my writing. She'd twist my arm and ask me if I thought I was smart" (62). And in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, in the middle of a riotous kitchen party in Wasaychigan Hills, Jeremiah asks Amanda:

"Ever thought you were born on the wrong planet?...Into the wrong...era? The wrong....," he laughed pathetically, "race?"...I just couldn't figure it out. I mean, what the fuck are Indians doing playing...Chopin?" (257)

Martha-Seepeetza's and Champion-Jeremiah's anxieties about their identity don't for one minute free them from the racism that oppresses them. They can not cross the colour line to become white. Even if Seepeetza is lighter-skinned than her peers, it does not open the doors of the residential school to let her out. And even if Jeremiah can not understand

how he can be a classical pianist and an Indian, he can not readily deny these two aspects of his identity (although he tries by quitting piano for many years).

Neither character nor many Indigenous people in Canada can easily regain their place of origin because home no longer exists or they have found another place in which to reside for a while. Both novels question what it means to be an Indigenous person. For Jeremiah the question is "Can I be a classical pianist and still be an Indian?" By becoming a playwright who draws on Cree themes and composes his own score, he resolves these two positions that once seemed to him to be in direct contradiction. For Seepeetza, if she looks white, does that make her a shamah? In the last vignette at the school, before Seepeetza returns home for the summer, she has the chance to defend herself from girls who accuse her of picking on Edna: "I curled my fists again and said, 'She's the one who calls me shamah. I'm not. I'm a halfbreed'" (100). It is her chance to explain her looks while laying claim to her Indigenous identity.

## CONCLUSION

The central argument of my dissertation is that autobiography is an Indigenous intellectual tradition that has not been recognized because of the limitations of the academy and academic approaches, and that the essence of these limitations is the lack of Indigenous perspectives. When these perspectives are added, and when Indigenous experience and identity are valued, both the Indigenous intellectual tradition and the Indigenous intellectual become visible as something other than a victim of colonialism. Thus I have incorporated my own autobiography.

My discussion has contributed to current scholarship in six ways. First, my work refutes the still prevalent influence of founding scholars of Native American autobiography who disseminated the belief that autobiography is a European invention, that there were no prior models in Indigenous culture and that Indigenous autobiography must therefore be the result of contact.

Second, by insisting on the integration of Indigenous perspectives in the academy, my approach not only demands inclusion of voices seldom heard in academic discussion, but also corrects misconceptions about Indigenous identity and experience.

Third, because my approach prioritizes the reliance on specific Indigenous epistemologies to understand Native texts, I offer an alternative reading of such canonical

writers like mid-nineteenth century autobiographer George Copway; rather than understand Copway's work as a clash between an identity as Ojibway and one as Christian, I rely on Anishnabe understandings of land to recuperate his ideas about land rights and Native sovereignty. The result is that rather than dismiss Copway's writings as the ramblings of a victim of colonization and a noted failure, we can appreciate his work as the contribution of an Anishnabe intellectual whose concern for land remains relevant today.

Consequently, by relying on Indigenous theories to understand these texts, a fourth contribution of my work is that I align myself with and support the emerging literary nationalist movements proposed by Native American scholars in the United States. They argue, and I concur, that the privileging of tribal perspectives supports intellectual sovereignty of specific nations, which is a necessary pre-condition for political sovereignty.

A fifth innovation, which contributes to new ways of thinking about Native literature in Canada, is my use of Cree scholarship and Cree concepts to understand Cree texts. As I have become increasingly convinced that my work needs to become more personally relevant to reflect my experience as a Cree-Métis, I looked specifically at *wâhkowtowin*, the principle of interrelatedness, and *kisteanemétowin*, respect between people. As a result, I have been able to reconsider Canon Edward Ahenakew's seldom studied semi-autobiographical text, "Old Keyam." It is noted for its apparent sudden shifts of opinion between valorizing Cree ideas and then spurning those ideas in order to champion white standards and ideals. By contemplating Ahenakew's understanding of *wâhkowtowin*, which would have encouraged him to consider himself to be in

relationship not only with his Cree kin but also with his Anglican community, I argue that this text is far more interested in respectfully acknowledging these opposed relations rather than endorsing only one perspective. Ahenakew's understanding of *kisteanemétowin* would have made him more tolerant of contradiction and varying perspectives in order to preserve good relations.

The sixth contribution that my work makes to contemporary scholarship is my reliance on *âcimisowin*, stories about myself, as a way to acknowledge that key to Cree epistemology is the fact that one's identity and position is a central rather than peripheral concern in research. It is an intellectual tradition that accommodates and expects multiple perspectives that come as one's own position shifts in relation to the shifting positions of others to whom one is related. Through the use of this method I follow not only family tradition but also a tradition in Indigenous scholarship, that includes but is not limited to Cree and Métis scholars Harold Cardinal, Howard Adams, Maria Campbell, Janice Acoose, Neal Macleod, Lorraine Brundige and Winona Stevenson-Wheeler.

My dissertation has stressed the limitations of postcolonial theory, Native American autobiography studies and autobiography theory, as tools for understanding Indigenous writing in Canada--especially the autobiographical nature of this writing. Each of these approaches has been blind to the Indigenous nature of the autobiographical in both Native literature in Canada and aspects of contemporary scholarship. They have been blind to what is still relevant, current and inspiring in long forgotten or long misread early Canadian Indigenous writings.

Because of this blindness, scholars have yet to begin to explore adequately the reasons why Indigenous people in Canada rely on autobiographical storytelling or life narrative to articulate the characteristics and the complications of and challenges to our identity. Seeing autobiography as an Indigenous intellectual tradition allows us to move beyond colonization as a prism with which to examine Indigenous life and literature. It allows us to see Indigenous identity not as hybrid but as living with contradiction.

I consider this dissertation merely a beginning. Over the course of my research I have read for the first time many valuable works which I did not cover, that are rarely studied, and which I see as sites for future research. For example, there exists a body of work to which I have alluded to in several chapters by Indigenous women who are academics and rely upon their life stories to theorize their areas of study. I imagine drawing on Sherene Razack's racial/spatial analysis to understand why these women almost always interpret their experiences without reference to gender but rather as Indigenous in the academy. Another example of a future project, following in the footsteps of Craig Womack and Daniel Heath Justice, who both produced studies of their respective nation's literature, is the study of Cree or even of only Métis autobiographies. I cannot help but emphasize my great fortune that I started this work on the heels of fellow Cree/Métis scholars. I am certain that they never could have imagined that their dissertations, public documents not usually discussed until revised and published more widely, would be cited so early on. With their contributions, and I hope mine as well, the study of Cree literature is about to explode with activity. The usual trajectory for Indigenous academics, from graduate school to administration--usually at the expense of their scholarship in order to correct the almost complete absence of Indigenous faculty in



universities in positions of policy making--needs to be altered. Because a previous generation of scholars bore this burden in order to make space in the academy for Indigenous perspectives, emerging scholars have benefited greatly and consequently are responsible for making new inroads. Rather than have innovative work languish in university archives, young scholars need support and encouragement to publish and teach, rather than to administer programs, in order to mentor a new generation. Ideally, keeping in mind my discussion in Chapter One, of scholarship without Indigenous perspectives, this will be seen as a benefit not only to Indigenous communities and individuals but also to the institution and to scholarship in general.

In this work I ally myself with members of the Indigenous literary sovereignty movement who insist upon the innovations and contributions of Indigenous intellectuals that have been to date uncelebrated. I am convinced that the discussion of literature as examples of specific national or tribal traditions can have the positive effect, as Robert Warrior argues in *The People and the Word*, of "improving the intellectual health of Native America, its people, and its communities" (xiv). Not only does this approach prioritize further reflection on Indigenous epistemologies and ethics, it also could potentially help revitalize the use of Indigenous languages. That said, I also think this approach is timely, a way to shift the focus of research from the effects of colonization to the contributions and potential of Indigenous worldviews. I predict that the next generation of literary critics who build atop the base that my colleagues and I hope to establish will return to pan-Indian approaches in the discussion of literature because nation or tribal specific approaches are unlikely to satisfy or resonate with a growing urban Aboriginal population, many of whom have no connection to home communities,

language or culture. Because the term pan-Indian is so associated with the monolithic, homogenous notion of the "Indian," I wonder if the powwow term, "inter-tribal" might better explain future approaches that hold within them possibilities to unify and celebrate our belonging together.

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