

SAIL
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From the Editor

Aya *SAIL* readers!

Just a brief note to let you all know what's been happening with *SAIL*. Eric Anderson resigned as the Book Review Editor in January, so, in addition to having had an open position on the Editorial Board for more than a year, we also found ourselves operating without a Book Review Editor for a few months. Happily, these positions have been filled! It's my pleasure to announce that **P. Jane Hafen** is *SAIL*'s new Book Review Editor, and that our full Editorial Board is now **Chad Allen**, **Gwen Griffin**, and **Dean Rader**. This issue will be the last one that my Editorial Assistant, **Daniel Justice**, works on in that capacity – I hope you'll all join me in wishing him well in his new position at the University of Toronto this fall.

You'll notice a few changes in this issue of *SAIL*. I hope that you like the new cover design and invite your comments (yea or nay) about it. As some of you know, *SAIL* is moving with me to Michigan State University; new contact and manuscript submission information can be found on the inside cover of this issue. Also, please notice that there are poems amidst the essays and reviews this time. We're happy to be publishing these "creative" works again and want to actively solicit more submissions of poetry, short stories, creative non-fiction, and other non-essay manuscripts.

As always, let me know how you think we're doing.

Malea

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“Stranded in the Wasteland:” Literary Allusion in *The Sharpest Sight*

Carolyn Holbert

Sacrifice your freedom;
Sacrifice your prayer.
Take away your language;
Cut off all your hair.
Sacrifice the loved ones
Who always stood by me;
Stranded in the wasteland,
Set my spirit free.

“Sacrifice” by Robbie Robertson,
*Contact from the Underworld of
Redboy*, 1998.

T. S. Eliot, like his masterwork *The Waste Land*, is considered a “difficult” poet because of his masterful use of literary allusion. Louis Owens has done something no less monumental in *The Sharpest Sight*. Rather than create an overtly difficult novel, however, he has created a deceptively simple novel, a simplicity that masks a mythopoeic complexity. Milan Kundera says that the very spirit of a novel is “the spirit of complexity. Every novel says to the reader: ‘Things are not as simple as you think’” (18). This maxim seems to have been forgotten by many readers of *The Sharpest Sight*. A review of the literature will show that few critics have given this novel serious attention, and many writers, particularly reviewers, regard it only as a Native American mystery novel. This shows, I am afraid, the lack of knowledge in many of the modern readers, those who do not recognize the incredibly detailed allusions to classical mythology and various literary works. It also shows an inability to recognize the intellectual word play, what I call the Game of Chess, between Jessard Deal and the reader. This is an incredibly rich novel, one that shows a masterful mind at work.

Louis Owens has done exactly what Eliot said good writers should, to “borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest” (“Phillip Massinger” 153). He uses authors from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, from the iconic (Shakespeare) to the nonsensical (Edward Lear) to the sentimental (Frost) to Eliot himself. He blends classical mythology, some from sources used by Eliot

himself, with Native Choctaw spirituality, ancient history with yesterday's news. Like Eliot's poem, the novel "challenges us to recognize that we are involved [. . .] with all these odd voices" (Calder 59). Owens melds these voices into a cohesive whole, and the resulting novel can be appreciated by both the surface reader and the academically prepared reader.

Louis Owens, a mixedblood Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish writer, blends the multiple cultural and literary traditions of his own life into the novels he creates. The resulting blend of Euro-American literary traditions, particularly the influence of T. S. Eliot, and Native American spiritual and cultural traditions, primarily that of the Choctaw, functions seamlessly. While some might object to the "imposition" of Western literary criticism upon a Native text, such arguments do not hold with regard to *The Sharpest Sight*. This is a mixedblood text, neither Choctaw nor European, but both. Louis Owens himself has stated that in this novel he attempted to "weave Native American and Euramerican stories and mythologies and epistemologies" into a "thoroughly 'mixedblood' novel" (e-mail). An analysis of the level of literary allusion in *The Sharpest Sight* will show that Owens achieved this goal.

The "metaphoric structure" of both *The Waste Land* and *The Sharpest Sight* uses "bits and pieces of history, myth, and literature [to] create a dismal contemporary world" (Guerin et al. 247). Eliot's wasteland is the urban waste of London where the inhabitants have lost any connection to the rich tapestry of myth and tradition in their pasts; for readers of contemporary Native American fiction, Louis Owens creates a rural American wasteland of lost spirituality and lost identity, one planted with as many literary allusions as the setting of Eliot's own work.

Eliot primarily used Indo-European material in his works, rarely making use of American sources. Owens uses many of the same Indo-European mythological materials, but Owens does more. Following what Margaret Dwyer calls "the syncretic impulse" (in her essay of the same name), Owens reaches as deeply into the traditional and spiritual roots of his and his characters' Choctaw ancestors as he does into European roots. In particular, Owens uses the ethnographic material of John R. Swanton. Swanton, pioneering modern anthropological techniques in the early twentieth century, collected materials of the Choctaw and other Muskohgean tribes, forming a body of work that is still regarded as the most authentic record of their historical/traditional cultures.¹ The resulting conflation of images and traditions from Indo-

Europe and America is paralleled in the blended bloods and conflicted cultures of Owens' characters, who have some remarkably similar mythic traditions. The genetic roots of his characters—as for many real-life Americans—are not taproots going deep into a single culture but are furcated rootstocks branching out into multiple cultures. Owens uses these tangled mythologies and traditions to create a wasteland that, while firmly part of Eliot's Indo-European vision, is still uniquely and quintessentially American.

Eliot himself related how he was heavily influenced by and used references from two primary sources: Jessie Weston's study of the grail legend in her *From Ritual to Romance* and fertility and vegetation myths from Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. In a similar move, Owens too uses elements of the grail myth and makes several classical references in his novel, mostly in the names of various people, animals, and places. Attis, the catalyst character who is dead by the time the novel begins, is a name that refers to the half-god of fertility of Asia Minor. It is no accident, I am sure, that Owens' mixedblood character shares a name with a mixedblood deity. The classic Attis, as described by both Frazer and Bullfinch, begins his life found in a river and ends it with his spirit entwined in the boughs of a tree. Our Attis is first seen in the river and ends up with his bones and what remains of his flesh cradled in the branches of trees.

Diana Nemi, the young, sexy, and dangerous would-be villain of the novel, shares her name with the goddess Diana of Nemi, an ancient goddess of the moon, one connected with fertility and the hunt but also known for her viciousness. A guardian of virtue as well as an ancient sex symbol, Diana of Nemi is herself not one thing but many. Although she is usually connected with the hounds of the hunt, Bullfinch explains how she is also related to the cat. She is said to have escaped the wrath of the giants waging war against the gods by turning herself into a cat (Chapter XVI), a skill shared by the novel's Diana. Owens, in turn, relates this shape-shifting goddess with the Choctaw black panther, the *nalushashito* or soul-eater. While this great black cat is certainly part of the Euro-American cultural imagination, it was considered powerful and important long before the first Europeans arrived on this continent. Whether a harbinger of death, as it was in the North Carolina mountains of my own childhood, or as a symbol of the dark side of feminine nature, the black panther is both a symbol of death and rebirth, of both fire and water ("Spirit"; "Great Dreams"). For the Choctaw, the black panther steals souls, particularly the souls of those unprepared to die. In Diana Nemi, Owens integrates these cat/woman

images from multiple cultures on two continents: the fire of her eyes, the fluidity of her movements along the river, the shapeshifting, the darkly feminine, the desire for revenge and the symbol of death.

Even the horse of the character Jessard Deal has a classical name, Bucephalus. This name refers to the favorite horse of Alexander the Great, a horse that could be controlled by no one but Alexander himself, just as Deal's horse cannot be controlled by anyone but him. Mundo, the deputy sheriff and one of the main characters, has a name that means "world" or "people of the world" in Spanish, and the town which provides the novel's setting is Amarga, meaning "bitter" or "bitter place." In this bitter world, we find all the components of Eliot's post-WWI European wasteland moved into late twentieth-century America.

Eliot's poem has five parts; all five parts have a related part or incident in *The Sharpest Sight*. Part I in *The Waste Land* is "The Burial of the Dead." The first lines of the poem also could be used to set up the opening of the novel:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mining
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (1-4)

The action of the novel begins in the late winter/early spring, when annual rains bring water back to the dry Salinas River. But for the dead man, Attis McCurtain, "an ancient memory had awakened, a stirring in his stilled blood, moving with him and around him on the flood" (Owens 8). His "dull roots" of cultural memory and identity have been awakened by rain, and the yearning in his eyes, which Mundo sees and Attis' brother Cole dreams, shows that desire has also been awakened by the rain.

In the cruel April of the poem, near the end of the first section, Eliot has men passing each other on a London street. These men discuss the sprouting of something quite different from the lilacs or the "dull roots" of the opening lines:

"That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that friend to man,
"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again! (72-75)

The corpse is planted, like a spring flowering bulb, in the garden, not buried with ritual and respect. The advice from the speaker is to make sure that the dog is not allowed in the garden because, like dogs are wont to do, it will smell the decaying flesh and try to exhume the body. With these lines, Eliot, changing only one word, is using a quote from “Cornelia’s song in Webster’s *The White Devil* (v.iv): ‘But keep the wolf far thence, that’s foe to man, For with his nails he’ll dig them up again’” (Pinion 124). Since “Dog” is capitalized, it likely refers to “the Dog Star or Sirius, which, according to . . . Frazer in ‘Osiris’, appeared above the horizon when the Nile valley was inundated” (Pinion 124). This connects the flooded Nile with the flood happening along the Salinas River as *The Sharpest Sight* opens. A further connection can be made with the dogs of Isis who dig up the dismembered corpse of Osiris, conflating the traditions of dogs who dig up corpses with the Dog Star flood that washes away and dismembers bodies. Since Frazer himself relates Osiris—whose body was also trapped in the branches of a tree—to the Greek and Roman Attis, Owens makes a connection between ancient Egyptian mythology, Greek and Roman mythology, Eliot’s *Waste Land*, and with the flood of his novel. Further, Owens hints at the cleansing duties of the Choctaw bone-pickers here, with their long, flint-like fingernails on thumb, index, and middle fingers with which they “dug” the remains of decayed flesh from human bones (Swanton 176).

There is also a more literal connection between the novel and this section of the poem. If Owens had named his chapters, Chapter 23 could have been called “The Unburial of the Dead.” Here, near the end of the chapter, a teenaged boy named Bucky digs up his own grandmother’s body, drapes the decaying remains across the hood of his truck, writes “Just Buried” on the window, and drives around town with this macabre display. This story is taken from an actual event, as Owens explains in *Mixedblood Messages* (188). This unburial takes the disrespect of Eliot’s world and increases it by several degrees. Eliot’s speaker, even though lacking respect, does see the need for a buried body to remain buried. Owens’ character has lost even this. His spiritual emptiness is such that he has dug up, has unplanted, the dead body. A dog which digs up some dead thing is only following his nose and his instincts; a human who does so for fun shows the ultimate emptiness. When questioned by the deputy as to why he did this, “Bucky’s expression became incredulous. ‘Didn’t you ever want to do that, Mundo?’” (Owens 146). His response is both naive and profound.

Bucky is so spiritually “wasted” that he is surprised that everyone does not or has not wanted to dig up their own relatives. He perceives his own aberrant behavior as normal, his behavior as innocent curiosity.

Part II of the poem is called “A Game of Chess.” This title, Eliot’s notes and a reading of the source text will show, refers to the seduction of a married woman, in the Renaissance play *Women Beware Women* by Thomas Middleton, through a series of moves much like those in a game of chess. All the while, a real game of chess is used to divert the attention of the mother-in-law from what is happening to her daughter-in-law. As Nancy Gish explains, this “allusion focuses on deception and sexual violence” (61). The text of the poem shows us a world where sexual relations have lost their moral or spiritual relevance and have also lost their connection with fertility, where “sex is disconnected from either love or children” (Gish 59). In the Indo-European tradition, the sexual act has served several purposes, from joyful celebration to a purely procreative function. Sex in the Eliotic wasteland is neither meaningful nor joyous. Eliot’s loveless world, for example, is inhabited by women who have emotionally barren affairs while their husbands are away fighting in the war. When pregnancy results, the Lil of the poem takes “pills . . . to bring it off,” to have an abortion (159). The lack of fertility in this world is not just a result of spiritual drought but also of deliberately destructive act.

The world of Amarga, California is also infertile, and here Diana plays her own version of the game of chess. Her game is one that subverts the fertile power of the classic Diana of Nemi, for this Diana does not bless anxious couples with new life; instead, she brings death. Further, unlike the chaste Diana of Nemi who rewarded chastity and punished immoral sexual practices, this Diana is a seductress. She is successful in the seduction of Cole McCurtain, and, we learn, had been successful much earlier in the deliberate seduction of her sister’s sweetheart, Cole’s brother Attis. The seductions were too easy, perhaps, not requiring the moves and strategy one must employ against a worthy opponent, but Mundo is a worthy opponent, one worth the game. In scene after scene, little by little, hint by hint, year after year, she sets up his seduction. But to her “check,” Mundo makes a defensive “checkmate.” Her strategy fails. In both wastelands, to use sex, a joyous and procreative act, as a means to an end is to deny the spiritual. Diana, like the Lil of the poem, practices empty sex in an empty world, a practice which will turn against her when she is raped by Jessard Deal later in the novel, when she becomes part of another chess game played by the grandmaster himself.

From the infertility of *The Waste Land*, Eliot moves to Part III, "The Fire Sermon," a sermon delivered by Buddha that Eliot says is the equivalent to the biblical Sermon on the Mount (*Waste Land* note 308). Here Eliot uses the polluted Thames as a metaphor for the polluted world. He says that the old river, before it became polluted, bore "no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/ or other testimony of summer nights" (76-79). Unlike these sexual images of "summer nights" spent on the river banks, Owens' river flows with "logs and old boards and tumbling trees" (*Sight* 94). A few lines further in the poem, Eliot says that on the riverbanks were "White bodies on the low damp ground/ and bones cast in a little low dry garret" (193-94). This is also an excellent description of the aftermath of the flood on the Salinas River. The receding flood leaves behind the bleached "tails and bones of big fish" lying on damp sand that used to be river bottom (*Sight* 10), and, more importantly, it leaves behind Attis' body, "cupped in the branches" of four oak saplings "ten feet off the ground" (251). The body was now "mostly bone," left clean and dry (252), just like the dry garret of "The Fire Sermon." This reconnects Attis with the ancient burial practices of the Choctaw, wherein they placed their dead high on a platform ten or twelve feet high, allowing the elements to naturally decompose the body and render it to mostly bone (Swanton 174-77). Only then could the bone pickers come and scrap off the last remains of flesh, making the bones finally ready for burial. The desire to find and properly dispose of Attis' bones is the focus for much of the novel, just as the narrator of "The Fire Sermon" is a "modern man who remains haunted by thoughts of hidden bones and bodies" (Gish 74). This, too, relates to Choctaw tradition. Swanton relates that it was so important to the Choctaw that their bones be disposed of properly that, during a time of migration, bones were carried hundreds of miles in order to be buried in the proper spiritual homeland. Only then could the spirit of the dead rest (Swanton 12-21). Cole McCurtain follows this ancient tradition when he finds Attis' bones, cleaning them in spite of his wanting to vomit, wrapping them carefully, and eventually taking them to the ancient homeland of Mississippi. Again, Owens connects Eliot, Eliot's source material, and Choctaw tradition into a cohesive whole, blending all the ancestral components of the novel's characters.

The dead and dying fish from the Salinas also have a parallel in the source myth Eliot used concerning the Fisher King. As Gish explains, Jessie Weston describes "a land that has been laid waste, made barren and sterile, by the illness or wounding [. . .] of the Fisher King. Weston

attributes his name to the fact that fish are ancient symbols of life" (43). In the novel, the dammed Salinas River no longer flows in its old channel. Below the dam, the water goes underground. It flows in the old river bed only when the rains of late winter and early spring make it flood. This flood tricks the migrating fish into thinking they can again swim up the river to spawn, but they are inevitably trapped there by the receding waters, and "the young they leave behind will dry in the sun" (*Sight* 163). This ancient symbol of life is now the symbol for death and destruction, and the river's water, the return of which should symbolize the return of life, instead becomes a pathway of death, destruction, and further separation from the traditional way of life. The wasteland of *The Sharpest Sight* is more severe than that of Jessie Weston or of T. S. Eliot; here even water itself is an emblem of death.

Although Eliot does not make water a symbol of death, he does make it a carrier of death. In the fourth section of Eliot's poem, "Death by Water," there is a description of the dead Phoenician who has been dead for two weeks:

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool. (314-17)

Compare Eliot's description to this one of Attis in *The Sharpest Sight*:

Attis McCurtain spun in the river, riding the black flood, aware of the branches that trailed over his face and touched his body, spinning in the current of the night toward something he could feel coming closer, rising up to meet him. He knew he was dead, and in death an ancient memory had awakened, a stirring in his stilled blood, moving with him and around him in the flood. . . . And then he began to turn, slowly, swinging in a wide circle, around and around in a great whirlpool, the dead trees etched now against a black vault of sky. (Owens 8-9)

Attis, too, is caught by a current, rising and falling in a spinning vortex of memory and desire, and then, like the Phoenician, he also enters the whirlpool. In both the novel and the poem, the dead bodies are in water which "carries associations from previous references to transformation

and possible rebirth as well as poignant memory, [and] failed desire” (Gish 88).

By washing away Attis, a character who had lost his spiritual way, and by re-watering the unnatural and manmade dry riverbed, the flood of the novel certainly relates to the mythic punishing and cleansing power of the flood in European/Judeo-Christian tradition. The Choctaw, too, have a cleansing great flood story and a punitive whirlpool story in their ancient religious traditions. The Choctaw whirlpool kept the wicked or those who died violent deaths from reaching the pleasant afterlife. John R. Swanton relates the following story of the whirlpool as first collected by N. A. Catlin:

The wicked [. . .] go down thousands of feet to the water which is dashing over the rocks, and is stinking with dead fish, and animals, where they are carried around and brought continually back to the same place in whirlpools—where the trees are all dead, and the waters are full of toads and lizards, and snakes—where the dead are always hungry, and have nothing to eat—are always sick, and never die. (Swanton 218)

The dirty water spinning Attis correlates Eliot’s whirlpool spinning the Phoenician with the Choctaw’s punishing whirlpool, again reflecting the tangled web of identity and spirituality seen throughout the novel.

Eliot himself would likely recognize the wasteland created by Owens, but he might not recognize the characters that populate this deadly contemporary world. Populating Eliot’s urban wastes are spiritually hollow people, people who have lost their ancient spiritual connections. The speaker of “The Hollow Men” is one such person, a person whose emptiness is filled with straw. Owens’ world is also populated by the spiritually bankrupt, but he does not stop here. He adds many others, some possibly redemptive and others damnably destructive, and Jessard Deal is one of the latter. Deal’s spiritual vacuum is not filled with harmless straw but with powerful evil. Eliot’s hollow man is a powerless shell, a shadow between the thought and the act, incapable of action. Jessard Deal is capable of both thought and action; whatever evil his mind imagines, he usually is able to put into action, and his menace seems all the more deadly and twisted when his speech is analyzed. Like Eliot’s speakers, Jessard speaks in literary fragments, fragments twisted into new meanings.

With few, if any, redeeming qualities, this character espouses Eliotic ideals and makes the kind of literary allusions of which Eliot himself could be proud. Jessard Deal talks like T. S. Eliot writes, as if he is Eliot “gone bad.” His Native culture has been stripped from him, and he has filled the vacuum inside himself with Euro-American literature, but that literature, too, is separated from the culture in which it was created. There is no cultural buffer of any kind between Deal and his intellect, between his thoughts and his actions, between his needs and desires. Deal is the most thoroughly deracinated character to be found in the novel because he has been torn from not one but multiple cultures. What he has is text without context, and the result is powerful and perilous.

Like other aspects of *The Sharpest Sight*, in the character of Deal, Owens exceeds the power and threat of Eliot’s world. There is not only the game of chess played by Diana; there is also a Game of Chess played by a Grandmaster. This second chess game is one that involves even the reader and Deal is the Grandmaster. As Wayne Booth explains in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the reader invariably becomes involved in the action of a text each time he or she reads it. This “active collaboration” between the reader and the author allows for the reader “to decipher allusions and subtleties” (303). The “author encodes a work (Guerin et al. 248); it is the reader’s responsibility to “try to decode it” (248). When the reader gets involved with *The Sharpest Sight*, and when the reader meets and interacts with Jessard Deal, the reader, too, is involved in the game Deal is playing. Each time he makes a literary reference, he is making another move. When we do not recognize what he is doing, we cannot make our own defensive counter-move, and Deal wins. From his opening gambit to his final device, the characters in the novel rarely recognize his moves; it is left up to the intellectually and qualitatively curious reader to both recognize his allusions and counter his ploys. Owens has encoded Deal’s speech with layers of meaning that must be decoded for full understanding. As Booth says, author and reader need to be in a kind of textual “collusion”; with this collusion we can decode the text and counter Deal’s misguided reason (Booth 304).

Jessard Deal, an ex-con bar owner in Amarga, California, controls both his help and his patrons like a master symphony conductor, only Jessard is conducting a symphony of violence. It is through the character of Mundo that we are introduced to Jessard Deal, and he tells us:

From behind the bar on Friday and Saturday nights Jessard rehearsed the room like an orchestra, drawing out the extra desperation from desperate men, whetting the cutting edge of his customers. And when the wild edge had been honed to a killing point, Jessard Deal would come out from behind the bar and start to take all the meanness into himself. (*Sight* 80)

Deal is no empty hollow man; he is a powerful player in a world where, he believes, evil and its accompanying pain are the ultimate power. He orchestrates anger and pain until it explodes into violence; once that happens, he takes all the anger, hate, and pain into himself, thereby giving him all the more power. This description is eerily similar to that of an evangelistic revival meeting, where the evangelist draws out and whets the edge of guilt of the congregation until they reach a point of ecstatic religious release. This ecstatic release is drawn in by the evangelist, increasing his status and his power over this congregation and the next. Jessard Deal's church is his bar, his congregation is the patrons, and his religious ecstasy is desperation and violence.

We meet Deal when Mundo, the deputy sheriff, goes into the bar to see if Deal has any information concerning Attis McCurtain, the dead man Mundo has glimpsed and lost in the river. Owens gives us a frame for Deal in his first and last speeches in the novel, lines that repeat his beliefs about what constitutes a moral world. When Deal sees Mundo walk in, he says, "The moral world comes to deal." This is a clever pun. The moral world, as evidenced by the symbol of the law, comes to make a deal. But Mundo Morales, "moral world," has also come to Deal. This play on words marks for us Deal's intellect and knowledge as evidenced by his power over language. But Deal immediately takes this a step further. He asks Mundo if he ever reads poetry, and then explains his own views on the subject: "Problem with poetry is the right people never read it, and if they do they don't know how to read it right" (83). This is a sentiment shared with Eliot himself. Eliot firmly believed that poetry belonged in the hands and heads of the intellectuals, of the university educated, of the well-read. Eliot says that "a poet should have the right, small audience in his own time. . . . There should always be a small vanguard of people, appreciative of poetry, who are independent and somewhat in advance of their time or ready to assimilate novelty more quickly" (*On Poetry* 21). He also says that when a reader fails to understand a poem, he or she "attributes his own difficulties to excessive scholarship on the part of the author"

("Pound" 149). In another essay, Eliot explains that the difficulty of reading poetry really belongs to the "half-educated and ill-educated who stand in the way" of understanding ("Use of Poetry" 94). This certainly reflects the idea of the "right reader" to which Deal also refers, and Deal clearly considers himself to be a right reader of poetry, one with the intelligence and knowledge to understand what he reads, unlike most of the people around him.

The first allusion made by Deal is very recognizable. While destroying his own house with a sledgehammer, he, breathing roughly from the exertion, says that "'most men lead lives of quiet respiration'" (Owens 150). This misquote serves two purposes: it is a humorous pun on his own loud respiration, and it shows he knows the original by Henry David Thoreau, written in Book 1 of *Walden* which states: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (755). This allusion is not made to impress Deal's listeners, however, as only his horse is nearby. Instead, it is made for his own amusement and to impress us, the readers. Deal plays multiple games of chess, and only one of them, that with Diana, is sexual. This one is purely intellectual, and we, anyone who reads the text, are the opponents. Unless we are knowledgeable and curious readers, unless we are those who can "read it right," Deal will win this game, too.

Deal's second move is against the FBI agent, Lee Scott, and Dan Nemi, the possible killer of Attis McCurtain and the father of the girl Attis himself killed. His speech contains several interesting references:

"Looney fucking toons," Jessard Deal said with a smile. "Not worth a warm bucket of shit, either one of you. What a piece of work is a man. How express and admirable." (190)

Looney Toons is the old production company for cartoons, of course, and it has come to be a slang phrase meaning someone who is crazy or insane. Deal is telling the men that they are crazy and that they are little more than cartoons, caricatures of real people. Then he quotes Shakespeare to them, from one of Hamlet's famous soliloquies:

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! (II.ii.320)

Clearly mocking their ignorant speech concerning Indians being “servants of Satan” (*Sight* 190), Deal, who has earlier described himself as one of “us redskins” (102), certainly does not regard the two men as “express and admirable,” but he does get the intent of Hamlet’s speech correct. Hamlet, too, is being sarcastic when he says that man is a “piece of work,” one worthy of admiration for his great intelligence. Perhaps, as even reasonably well-informed readers, we might recognize this allusion, but Scott and Nemi do not. To make sure that we realize Deal’s audience does not get the point nor recognize the allusion, Owens has Nemi respond to Deal with a polite “I beg your pardon?” (190).

The next literary reference is not a twisted quote but a mention of the great American religious reformer, Jonathan Edwards, the author of the sermon “that furnishes Owens with both his novel’s title and its epigraph” (LaLonde). He asks Gloria, Mundo’s wife, if she “knows” Jonathan Edwards. She, like Nemi, is not well read and innocently asks if he, Edwards, lives in their town. To this bit of intellectual naivete, Deal explains to her and, more importantly, to us, how he got his knowledge:

“I never had the luck of a good education, but there was a period in my life when I had a great deal of time on my hands, Mrs. Morales. In a small room with a very small window, in a hard, desert place. Outside the window was a stone wall, and above the wall was a sky that never changed. I had access to a library, and thus it was that I came upon the solace of words.” (*Sight* 212-13)

Since Gloria is not intellectually attuned to Deal, these lines will mean little to her, but to us, they are important. Whether she realizes it or not, we realize that Jessard Deal was in prison for a long time. The prison is in a “hard, desert place” where there is never any rain. The ground is hard; the sky unchanging. Neither of these descriptors would work if he had been in a fertile place, a place where rain would soften the earth and clouds change the sky. In this wasteland, Deal discovered the “solace of words,” particularly poetry. He follows this speech by drinking brandy and making a toast “to poetry” (213).

In this same conversation with the Morales couple, Deal makes a significant remark, one that is not understandable at all unless we become one of Booth’s curious readers. When told that Gloria Morales

had moved from Santa Fe to Amarga, Deal finds this worthy of comment: “‘From Santa Fe to Amarga. An interesting pilgrimage. Can a person go the other way?’” (210). Without some knowledge of Spanish, this statement means nothing, but with that knowledge it shows a major significance, one that expresses Deal’s entire philosophy. From Holy Faith to Bitterness is an interesting pilgrimage, one that twists the very meaning of the word. One usually makes a pilgrimage to, not away from, religious faith. But Deal’s faith is bitterness, so this inverted pilgrimage is appropriate in his belief system. He follows this statement with another innuendo-loaded comment: “‘So, let me see now. A woman comes from Santa Fe to Amarga to be with Mundo Morales. A dull brain like mine is too easily muddled’” (210). The irony of this is clear when the words are clear: a woman leaves her holy faith to travel to a bitter place so she can be with a man of the moral world. This oxymoronic statement is nothing more than bar-talk for the surface reader but is significant for the informed reader. Jessard Deal believes in a world where people leave their morals and faith behind, a world where bitterness and pain are the goal, a place where the moral world will, eventually, always come to deal with evil. Since the language of the text is so loaded with power and symbolism, the “right reader” of *The Sharpest Sight* must read carefully and well.

Deal’s belief system and his love of poetry become clear in the section where he abducts and rapes Diana Nemi. His entire speech is poetic, written in a kind of prose-stanza so cleverly done that his own speech and his poetic allusion are hard to separate. The effect of this beautiful prose being used in a rape scene intensifies the horror of the event for the reader. It also creates another Boothian collusion between author, text, and reader. The reader recognizes the beauty of the language as the character of Diana cannot. We know what is happening and understand its horror, but we feel conflicted because the event is written so beautifully. Here Owens comes closest to putting his reader into the text itself, the disunity between language and event creating in the reader a sense of anxiety something like that Diana herself must feel. This effect is magnified for the well-read reader who can recognize the beauty not only of Owens’ prose but also of the poetry Deal quotes and misquotes to Diana. Lovely poetry is often paired with seduction and romantic sex, but here it is paired with sexual violence. For the reader, this is a kind of intellectual rape. The lines of poetry have been ripped from both their source and their intent, leaving the reader to cope with feelings of recognition and dismay, of pleasure

at that recognition and disgust at what it means. The allusions and the prose stanzas combine here, in a very short chapter, in an event that changes the course of the novel.

There are four of these prose-stanzas that begin with the word “see.” Addressed to Diana, they are likely more telling to us, the readers, since Diana has little knowledge of poetry and is so frightened she likely would not remember it if she did. It is the readers who must “see” the truth about Deal, see his twisted view of the world, see his incredible knowledge of poetry. Like the speaker in *The Waste Land*, Deal recognizes the need for human connection, for meaningful touch, but Deal comes to a very dangerous conclusion about this connection: “Only through pain is someone truly reached, touched” (*Sight* 234).

In Eliot’s wasteland, the characters do not touch emotionally or spiritually. They cannot communicate on an honest level, and their physical touch is neither joyous nor fulfilling. Deal recognizes the place and the problem, but his solution is not joyous fertility. For him, the solution is appalling pain. In this waste, the dead are dug up out of the ground and human connection is made only through suffering. No longer is the wasteland populated with hollow men and women, hovering somewhere between thought and action, longing dully for what they know not; this wasteland is full of players, players in a deadly game of life and death, of hope and despair. To win the game is to win the world, and Jessard Deal is playing to win.

The first poet that Deal quotes to Diana is Alfred Lord Tennyson. Deal is holding Diana suspended by her tied wrists. While stroking her cheek and breast with one finger, he misquotes from this poem, Tennyson’s “Tithonus:”

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality
Consumes; I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here are the quiet limits of the world,
A white-hair’d shadow roaming like a dream
The ever-silent spaces of the East,
Far-folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn. (1-10)

Tennyson’s poem refers to the Greek myth of Tithonus, a beautiful mortal who loved and was loved by Eos, the goddess of the dawn.

Since she was immortal, he wanted to be immortal as well, and Eos presented his petition to the gods. His wish was granted, but since he had not asked for eternal youth along with eternal life, he was forced to live forever, growing older and older every day. Rather than regard the ancient story retold in the poem as a lesson against trying to gain power to which one is not entitled, Deal prefers to see this as an example of female betrayal. His own elucidation of the poem to Diana says that Tithonus “‘made a mistake. He trusted a woman’” (235). Considering the context of Deal’s speech, it is clear he is not going to make the same mistake as did Tithonus. Diana, however, has made just such a mistake. She trusted a man. When Deal called her with hints about his knowledge about her role in Attis’ death, she falls for the ploy, goes to his bar, and unwittingly places herself in his power.

The next poet to be appropriated by Deal is Robert Frost. Frost is beloved by many people, including numerous people who otherwise say they do not like poetry, and the nostalgic and sentimental beauty of Frost’s verse gets a nasty twist by Deal. Having dragged Diana down onto the ground, Deal says to her: “The woods really *are* lovely, dark and deep, and full of constant unaccounted deaths. It really *is* design of darkness to appall, for you see, design does govern even in things as small and inconsequential as you and me” (235). The first line, obviously, is from Frost’s well-known poem, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” with a phrase added about death at the end. The next line is likely to be less well known, but it is from Frost’s poem “Design.” In a discussion of how a white, fat spider came to catch a moth, Frost concludes with a question: “What but design of darkness to appall?— / If design govern in a thing so small” (Frost 340). As Helen Vendler explains in a note to the poem, “design (order in nature) was often used as a proof for the existence of God” (421). Frost seems to be questioning this notion, but Deal has added his own conclusion to that of Frost, making the question an absolute and changing the intent to one of evil design that governs all things. Deal’s skewed interpretation of Frost is his justification for the carefully designed and appalling rape of Diana in the darkness of the forest.

As the emotional torture of Diana continues, Deal sustains the intellectual “torture” of the reader with more allusions. Having cut the ropes that bound her, Deal apologizes to Diana for hurting her, making her think she might escape from him after all. She asks him what he wants, and he tells her, “‘A sacred commitment of kindred souls. The awful daring of a moment’s surrender. Ecstatic violence’” (*Sight* 237). Then he misquotes lines from Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach” to

justify his desire for the “sacred communion” and “ecstatic violence” of rape:

‘Ah, love let us be true to one another. For the world that seems to lie there like a bag of dreams hath really neither hope, nor joy, nor diddlysquat. We lie alone, you and I, upon the naked shingles of the world. [...] The sea of faith was once, too, at the full [. . .] but now we hear its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar. Let me be cruel, not unnatural. Do you like poetry, Diana, here on the vast edges drear of the whole goddamned show?’ (237)

These lines are taken from the third and fourth stanzas of “Dover Beach,” lines taken out of order, rearranged, and given an entirely new context.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl’d.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! (Arnold 21-30)

In the middle, Deal inserts a line from *Hamlet*, spoken in reference to his mother and referring to her betrayal of his father’s memory by her new marriage: “Let me be cruel, not unnatural; / I will speak daggers to her, but use none” (III.ii.420-21). When Diana, not recognizing the allusions but recognizing the illogical logic, tells Deal that he is crazy, he responds with another quote from *Hamlet*: “Yes, but madness in great ones must not unwatched go” (III.i.189).

Deal said that he had discovered the “solace of poetry,” but his solace was not in merely enjoying the beauty of the language, of letting the words transport him to a place and time far away from his dreary cell. Instead, he selects certain lines of poetry from various sources and, with the change of line order or an inserted phrase or two, twists

the meaning to fit his own perverted beliefs; or, as Gish says about Eliot himself, he “frequently uses the syntax and phrasing of a source while partially changing the words” (108). In so doing, Deal is proving himself to be the type of poet T. S. Eliot advocated: “The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that which it was torn” (“Phillip Massinger” 153). The beauty and feeling of the source lines is vastly different from the sentiment of Deal’s lines. Deal uses all of these to support his notion that women in general and Diana in particular are not to be trusted. They will, he believes, destroy men if not thwarted. The lines from “Tithonus” are used to justify Deal’s suspicion. The lines from Frost are used to justify committing appalling acts in the dark woods. The lines from Arnold are an apt description of where they are and what he intends to do to Diana there. And the partially quoted lines from *Hamlet*, lines where Hamlet intends to force his mother to admit to her betrayal of his father, are perhaps the most sinister of all. Hamlet used words alone against his mother, but Deal will use both words and a phallic dagger against Diana.

To further the “unique, utterly different” quality of the poetry used by Deal, Owens has this character commence the actual rape while reciting bits of nonsense verse by Edward Lear, a nineteenth century poet whose works were used by Eliot himself. The poem Deal uses here is one often reprinted in poetry anthologies for children: “The Owl and the Pussycat:”

The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar, “O Lovely Pussy! O
Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are.”
[.]
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-tree grows
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of its nose. (Lear 720)

To refer to Diana as a “wonderful pussy” as he is in the act of raping her has quite a different connotation from that of the source poem. The “Pussy” of the poem is the beloved of the speaker; the “pussy” of the novel is a thing, a physical space forcibly occupied by the rapist. The “madness [. . .]” and the degradation of emotional and sexual

relationships" (Gish 66) seen in Eliot's "Game of Chess" are magnified in this game played by Deal.

The last speech by Jessard Deal in the novel is an extended repeat of the first lines we hear from him. Seconds away from killing Mundo Morales, Deal says to him that death is "'The real thing, Mundo, that for which the moral world must always deal. Witness Mr. Nemi here. Why, he has his throat cut i' the church. [. . .] This is the richest moment of your life, Mundo, and, of course, the last'"(250). This final speech is full of both allusion and irony. The repeated lines are true, of course, because death is something with which the moral world must always deal. This time, it is not the moral world coming to deal, however; instead, it is Deal attempting to deal with the moral world in the only way he knows how, by destroying it. For Deal, the ultimate moment of living is that sharpest moment just before dying. Deal also makes his final allusion here, one to a speech in *Hamlet* by Laertes concerning what he would like to do to Hamlet, "to cut his throat i' the church" (IV.vii.127). Laertes would like to illustrate his utter contempt and hatred for Hamlet by killing him even in church, a place of sanctuary, but he does not do this, of course. He kills Hamlet in a fixed sword fight. But Jessard Deal does cut a "throat i' the church," as least as so far as his bar is his church and sanctuary. It is here that he controls his congregation, leads them into violence, and entraps victims in his own games of evil and intellect. And it is here, in his church, that he dies. Immediately after making this statement to Mundo, it is Jessard Deal himself who dies, killed by the only character in the novel who can see Deal for what he really is, Hoey McCurtain.

In the game of chess that is much of this novel, here Hoey McCurtain has made the ultimate checkmate, killing the grandmaster. This action was set in place by Deal's rape of Diana. That act led to Hoey McCurtain abandoning his intent to kill Dan Nemi himself, to his recognizing that Diana was the true killer of his son, and to his forgiving and even offering cleansing and comfort to the raped Diana. Abandoning revenge and adopting forgiveness allows Hoey to have the sharp sight he needs to see Jessard Deal for who and what he is, the ultimate evil who "would have killed everybody" (*Sight* 250). The discovery of the rape by Dan Nemi led to Nemi's confronting Deal. This led to Mundo and the newly deputized Hoey, now himself a member of the moral world, to Deal's bar where they found Nemi's body and had the ultimate conflict with Deal. In opposition to Deal's attempt to destroy the moral world, the moral world destroys him, and a degree of balance in the world has been restored.

The final restoration of order comes when Hoey McCurtain, his son Cole, and the bones of his son Attis return to their traditional and spiritual homeland. Using elements from ancient vegetation myths and from Choctaw religious tradition, Owens creates a new resurrection and offers a new hope to a fallen world. Rather than the trinitarian elements of the Christian tradition, in which the father figure always remains in the homeland (heaven), the son goes into the world, is sacrificed and then returned to the homeland, and the combined spirit of both is left behind in the world to make the earth-heaven connection, here there is a quartet, using the sacred number four. From the four directions, to the four winds, to the four corners of the earth, it is the number four in Native American tradition that is sacred and complete, not the number three. Hoey McCurtain is the father figure, but he, too, has left his spiritual homeland behind. In the alien world to which he takes his family, death follows. His son Attis is sacrificed, first to American society, then to the Vietnam War, and finally, to Diana Nemi's desire for revenge. Then his younger son, Cole, reaffirms his traditional and spiritual connections and knows what must be done to restore order and to restore his dead brother. Finally, the father and the living son, bearing the bones of the dead son, return to their ancient Choctaw homeland in Mississippi. There they will be complete and the spirit of the dead son reunited with his bones, a further completion. But they also leave behind a spiritual connection, the fourth element. Mundo, who carries the blood of the world in his veins, becomes the recipient of Attis' car, his gun, and his dog. Mundo has accepted his own mixed heritage of Indian, Spanish, and even Chinese bloods and his spiritual role. He, has, his dead grandfather says, "'become more comfortable with the dead. [. . .] He knows at last who he is'" (262). By integrating his birthright and this legacy from Attis, Mundo becomes the pathway for the transmission of tradition in the world. The lessons of Attis will never be forgotten by Mundo or *mundo*. The novel then ends in the spring, a classic time of renewal, rebirth, and resurrection.

In ending the novel thusly, Owens takes us back into *The Waste Land* of Eliot. Eliot ends his poem with Part V, "What the Thunder Said." Here, Eliot leaves his readers with a wasted, dry world still hoping for a savior. The world knows what it needs, from the "give, sympathize, control" of eastern tradition to the sacrifice and resurrection of the western tradition. Yet, the poem ends with the speaker sitting upon the "shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind" him, asking himself if he should "at least set my lands in order" (424-

26). There is no salvation, no resurrection at the end of the poem, only the recognition of what is needed and the hope that it will happen. The jumbled voices of Renaissance English, of Italian, and of Sanskrit with which Eliot ends the poem seems to imply that hope is useless in a world of “chaos and madness” (Calder 64). While several of the novel’s characters are stranded in the wasteland for much of the novel, Owens eventually takes his characters and his readers beyond chaos and madness, gives them hope, and then moves that hope into actuality.

Just as Louis Owens pictured a wasteland in *The Sharpest Sight* that is far more deadly than that of Eliot, he also gives us far more optimism. Eliot’s speaker keeps asking “Shall I ?” but does nothing. Owens’ characters take action. The hopelessness and emptiness of Eliot’s world prophetically have become the hopeless and evil world of contemporary America. In a world of action, however, there is also reaction. This reaction against the evil Jessard Deal represents results in the very kind of salvation Eliot’s speaker longs for in the poem: a return to the tradition and spirituality of the past. Owens’ past is the Native American past, particularly that of the Choctaw, and his characters reconnect with those spiritual traditions. Even the dead Attis gets reconnected through his ritualized bone cleaning and later burial in the homeland. The bone-pickers of Choctaw tradition were specialized individuals who used their long fingernails for one purpose only: “to pick all the flesh from the bones” of the decomposed dead (Swanton 176). When Cole McCurtain finds his brother’s remains, he begins to move the bones, fighting “back his fear and nausea,” (*Sight* 252). Taking the bones home, carefully wrapped in Attis’ jacket from Vietnam, Cole first defends his right to his brother’s bones against the FBI agent and then begins “to clean his brother’s bones” (*Sight* 254). This connects Cole to both the ancient duties of the bone pickers of Choctaw tradition and to the Fisher King of Jessie Weston. Weston says that part of the initiation of the Fisher King is a “contact with the horrors of physical death” (182). Doing his duty in spite of his physical response indicates that Cole has passed the test and that spirituality and tradition have been restored. The Fisher King/Savior will make things right again and return the land to fruitfulness. This recovery is what saves the world of *The Sharpest Sight*, and, if we are the “right readers” Eliot hoped for, it may well save far more than that fictional world. The struggle for understanding within and without the text is what Ricoeur calls the “struggle leading the reader back to himself” (164). This going back to personal spiritual and traditional identity is the

salvation of both the novel and the generalized wasteland of modern life.

T. S. Eliot says that “immature poets borrow; mature poets steal” (“Phillip Massinger” 153). If we apply this to the writing of novels, then Louis Owens in *The Sharpest Sight* is, by Eliot’s definition, a mature novelist. Like Eliot, the acknowledged master of literary allusion, Owens has liberally appropriated expressions from other writers and put them into the mouth of the character Jessard Deal, a character who speaks in twisted allusions, as do the narrators of Eliot’s poems *The Waste Land* and “The Hollow Men.” Like those of Eliot, Owens’ allusions may be lost on the uninformed reader but add an important layer of meaning for the prepared or “right” reader, as Eliot himself might say. While some of the allusions Owens uses are to nonsense verse, as Eliot himself did in “The Hollow Men,” others are from well-known literary poems used in new and sometimes dreadful ways. In another Eliotic allusion, Owens has his characters inhabit a spiritual wasteland that rivals that of Eliot. Although I fear I may have missed some of Jessard Deal’s intellectual moves, I like to believe that I am one of the “right readers” of this text, that I have met the challenge of the novel. Each new reading reveals some new facet, some new insight and further convinces me that *The Sharpest Sight* is a remarkable achievement: carefully crafted, well written, and deeply readable.

NOTES

¹ John R. Swanton collected this information while employed by the Bureau of American Ethnology. His *Source Material for the Social and Ceremonial Life of the Choctaw* was published in 1931. For two decades the Choctaw tribal paper *Bishinik* has recommended the Swanton material as the “best source of information available today” on historical Choctaw customs (1979, 1994). In a personal correspondence, Louis Owens also recommended Swanton as the most accurate source for historical materials.

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John Joseph Mathews' Reverse Ethnography: The Literary Dimensions of *Wah'Kon-Tah*

Susan Kalter

Thanks in large part to Robert Allen Warrior and Louis Owens, the work of John Joseph Mathews (French-Welsh-Osage) is beginning to come to prominence in the academy. Warrior shaped his 1995 call for a practice and recognition of intellectual sovereignty in Native American literary studies around the figures of Mathews and Vine Deloria, Jr. Owens, who has been writing about Mathews since 1990, has consistently exercised this awareness of sovereignty by emphasizing the “cultural survival” that Mathews witnesses and the “native art” that he enacts. For Owens, what is significant in Mathews in part is his subversion of the concept of the Vanishing American (163, 165). Both critics call into question readings of Mathews “that contend that [his work] is mired in tragedy, victimization, and hopelessness” (Warrior xxii).

Yet in the nearly twenty years since critics first began to write about Mathews' work, not one has focused more than passing attention on his first literary production: *Wah'Kon-Tah: The Osage and the White Man's Road* (1932). Many possible reasons for this neglect exist, and perhaps it is this reasoning in the collective that keeps *Wah'Kon-Tah* out of view. First, critics seem uncomfortable with the “literary” status and generic placement of the work, despite general acknowledgment of the text's literary dimensions.¹ Second, Owens has asserted that Mathews relies heavily on the journals of Major Laban J. Miles, an agent to the Osages and the central figure of the book (163).² In a critical era when reconfirming the intellectual sovereignty of Native American writers is paramount, any activity that even mildly suggests dependence upon a non-Native writer is bound to be de-emphasized. Finally, as a historical novel, *Wah'Kon-Tah* has been severely overshadowed by Mathews' other novel *Sundown* (and less severely by his nonfiction piece *Talking to the Moon*).

Because *Sundown* is shaped around a clear protagonist—Challenge Windzer—and because that protagonist is mixed-blood, this novel lends itself to critical attention by simultaneously reproducing the expected categories of fictional development in Western literature and reconstructing them. Moreover, as Christopher Schedler points out, *Sundown*'s emphasis on alienation and breaks with tradition serve to

cast it as exemplifying a unique mode of Native American modernism. Sexier than the seemingly realist poetics of *Wah'Kon-Tah*, the modernist allegiances of *Sundown* also please contemporary critics because Mathews here seems to be talking frankly about "the present" rather than nostalgically about "the past." Again, the importance of emphasizing survivance and current problems in Native American communities, as well as the resistance to the Western "obsession with the tribal past" (Vizenor "Socioacupuncture" 183) makes *Wah'Kon-Tah* a less desirable candidate for critical attention. Add to these factors the impression of *Wah'Kon-Tah* as a tragic narrative of cultural demise rather than a comic, communal discourse (Vizenor *Narrative Chance* 9) and it is no mystery that the novel cannot now be seen from the window of the contemporary academy.

Yet the neglect of *Wah'Kon-Tah* by the literary academy suppresses full appreciation for the artistry of John Joseph Mathews.³ In this article, I wish to show that Mathews constructs the narrative consciousness of *Wah'Kon-Tah* in such a way as to admit multiple and opposing perspectives and, in fact, to oust himself, the author, from a position of knowing authority. Throughout the novel, in fact, at least three distinct narrative consciousnesses are present: the authorial, the apparent protagonist (Miles), and the alternate protagonist (the tribe in its collective authority). Furthermore, Mathews fabricates through *Wah'Kon-Tah* an experience for his non-Osage readers of celebratory biography and intimate ethnography while in fact performing a sympathetic parody of Agent Miles, a structural critique of the agency system, and a refusal and reversal of the ethnographic impulse in its comprehensive trajectory. In showing the agency system to be a paradoxical beast unleashed upon the Osages, he parodies Miles' "agency," his activities as an extension of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, while portraying him sympathetically: understanding of how his consciousness has been constructed within a plethora of institutional and cultural strictures. Though Mathews seems to complete the historical Miles' frustrated impulses toward a publishable ethnography of the Osages, he uses these moments to reveal the inadequacy of the claims of comprehension and comprehensiveness, turning the magnifying glass back upon Miles himself in a reverse ethnography of the agent and his culture. It is partly through this reclaiming of agency by the authorial consciousness and the consciousness of the alternate protagonists that, despite significant gestures toward the tragic, *Wah'Kon-Tah* confirms Owens' and Warrior's arguments that Mathews privileges a comic view of Osage cultural survival.

While it is sometimes through, but often despite, Mathews himself, we may incidentally read *Wah'Kon-Tah* as a double critique of the patriarchies in collision and collusion across U.S.-Osage history. The novel begins with Agent Miles' memory of his first journey to the reservation in 1878 once his one condition of Indian service—proximity to a railroad—had been met by the Secretary of the Interior, Karl Schurz. This June 1879 flashback occurs as he returns from Independence “in the States” with the treaty money owed annually to the Osages for the sale of their previous reservation in Kansas. The scene launches the two intertwined topics that will take up the largest portion of the novel: the struggle with the U.S. government over non-conditional payment of the money and Miles' attempt to use the money and another provision of their treaties—Western-style education—as leverage to destroy an apparently patriarchal Osage institution, child marriage. Other Osage practices like the scalping associated with the mourning dance and the horse-taking practiced at large on the Great Plains come under attack. Both reflect Osage hegemony in the region they had occupied during French and Spanish control of the area.

Before European contact, the Osages had lived in the lower Ohio valley as part of a group of Dhegian-Sioux speaking people, who later broke into five autonomous groups: the Quapaw, Kansa, Omaha, Ponca, and Osage (Rollings 5). By the early 1600s, the nascent fur trade controlled by more easterly tribes drove these groups into the Mississippi Valley, where the Osages soon acquired economic, political, and territorial hegemony through their trading of furs, horses, and slaves (Rollings 6). They became gatekeepers of three important waterways—the Missouri River, the Arkansas River, and the Red River—and spanned an extensive territory from the Ozarks to beyond the Ouachita Mountain area of Arkansas and into present-day Kansas and Oklahoma (Rollings 7-8). The United States acquired the Louisiana Territory in 1803, and, in a series of treaties from then until 1825, extinguished Osage title to all their lands in Missouri and Arkansas (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 349-53). The Osages had been suffering encroachment from U.S. and Cherokee citizens throughout this period. In 1865, extensive Osage land holdings in southeastern Kansas were reduced to a “diminished reserve” within the Kansas Territory, which had been organized in 1854 (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 356-59). In 1870, continued trespassing and squatting by aggressive whites and pressure by the railroads induced the Osages to sell their reserve in Kansas and buy from the Cherokee their final home in Indian territory, which

ironically had once been claimed by them as Osage territory (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 359, *The Osages* 650-92, Kaye 127-31). The fact that they bought the land rather than receiving it in trust from the U.S. government, and bought it in common rather than in severalty, protected and enriched them after 1900, when oil was discovered on their land, making the Osages for a time one of the richest nations per capita in the world.

It seems fitting that, through his overt critique of translation, Mathews establishes the existence of a third consciousness in the narrative. When Miles first arrives on the Osage Reservation, he is unable to speak the Osage language. Confronted with the people's complaint that their own money is being portioned out to them in food rations rather than cash—stripping them of the decision-making power commonly exercised by world citizens—Miles attends the council of the chiefs (43-44). His attempts to work out a compromise, which would incidentally minimize U.S. government expense for its illegal actions, are met coldly. One man rises and tells Miles that white men are all talk and lies, that the government is spending the Osages' own money, and that the Osages will not be fed like dogs. At the end of his speech, he says: "Tell them that the Osages are not many but they know how to die." However, when the interpreter translates the speech, he thinks "it discreet to leave out the threat" (47). Unless Laban Miles learned later that this man had made "a threat," the mention of it signals the existence of a third consciousness in the narrative beyond Miles and beyond Mathews (who would not have been alive at the time). This consciousness is implicitly the memory of another tribal member or the oral tradition of the tribe as a whole.

Mathews' highlighting of the omission forms one of the irresolvable tensions of the narrative. By omitting the threat, the interpreter attempts to minimize harm by keeping from an untested interlocutor a potentially destabilizing discourse. Agents in the Indian service were known to take such comments as evidence of the Indians' irredeemability, and the Osages did not yet know whether Miles was such an agent. Yet by failing to translate the threat, the interpreter not only undermines the power of the speaker but possibly does more harm than good since the Major is unable to see the full seriousness with which the Osages view the unlawful control of their money. By reinserting the comment into the narrative, Mathews allies himself with the view that the U.S. citizens need to hear the full discourse, but refrains from decision on whether delay of this hearing was positive or negative.

The third consciousness of the narrative expands further when the discussion of the rations moves to Washington. Here we are introduced to Wah Ti An Kah, “a great orator” to whom Mathews attributes the Osages’ decision to remove “to the Oklahoma Territory, instead of going farther west” (49-50). Whereas in the first example, we saw Mathews surfacing the consciousness of tribal memory, here he is unable to do so cleanly since both tribal and white opinion are split in their perspective of Wah Ti An Kah. Because Wah Ti An Kah’s voice is heard often in the counciling about the rations and does much to stir the people, the Major says “that he was very loud and lacked the dignity of a true Osage.” We learn that “the chiefs purposely leave the name of Wah Ti An Kah off the list” of councilors chosen to go to Washington. “They were afraid that he would harm the cause by undiplomatic speeches” (51). However, Wah Ti An Kah does go to Washington and is largely, if not solely, responsible for the change in the government’s practice respecting the rations. This despite the fact that when Wah Ti An Kah meets with the commissioner of Indian affairs in Washington, this rude, cowardly man chooses to interpret his appearance as indicating that “all Osages were savages yet and would not know how to use money” (54).

From *The Osages*, we know that Mathews’ own opinion of Wah Ti An Kah was not altogether favorable. In speaking of the council that led to the treaty relocating the Osages to Oklahoma territory, Mathews writes: “The committee finally got them to hold the feather [sign the treaty], and one member of the impatient committee had already left when *Wah-Ti-Anka*, chief councilor of the Upland-Forest People, arrived late on the twelfth, after Vincent Colyer, chairman of the committee, had made his farewell speech....He spoke for the Black Dog and the Claremore bands. He and the two bands knew that the council was in progress but they preferred to sulk in their lodges....This was the spirit of the Judeans before the Roman procurator again” (690-91). So when he presents Wah Ti An Kah as the reason for the Osage presence in the blackjack country of Oklahoma, Mathews not only admits a tribal consciousness of the man but he admits it in all its roundedness. The new home allowed the Osages to prosper both because the location discouraged agricultural envy and because the land ended up producing oil. Yet this oil production leads to the further erosion of respect for Osage tradition, so Wah Ti An Kah’s influence may be seen being measured by modern Osages as both somewhat beneficial and somewhat jeopardizing. In fact, Mathews admits a tribal consciousness of Wah Ti An Kah that is heterogeneous as well. The

narrative not only acknowledges both the positive and negative of Wah Ti An Kah, but admits the presence of two camps within the Osages: those who supported the man and those who remained largely critical of him. In this way, Mathews dismantles potential impressions of the third consciousness as indicating a uniformity of opinion among the tribe. A fourth collective consciousness emerges here and it is one that remains unstable, shifting adherents as the subjects of debate change.

Wah Ti An Kah's success with the commissioner of Indian affairs on the issue of rations is likewise ambiguous. His interpreter consistently undermines the most assertive statements Wah Ti An Kah makes ("Tell this man to sit down" is translated as "a request instead of a demand"[53]) so that the reader cannot be sure whether it is the speaker or the interpreter who wins the contest for the Osages. Thus does Mathews again allow the range of tribal opinion of Wah Ti An Kah's actions on behalf of the tribe to form the third and fourth consciousness of the narrative. The airing of Wah Ti An Kah's actual words to the commissioner prior to the mistranslations allows the reader to witness the Osages' continuing attitude of superiority toward white culture. This move is designed to shock the white reader out of complacency and confuse the meaning of "Osage dignity" in that reader's mind.

The existence of multiple consciousnesses in the narrative space of *Wah'Kon-Tah* suggests that the novel is not actually a novel written about the Osages "from the outside looking in" as Owens remarks (166). Nor could we assert, however, that we look at the Osages from the inside: in part because Mathews, as a mixed-blood Osage, was well aware of his own distance from the core continuations of Osage tradition occurring around him. Instead, I would argue that Mathews enacts a fabrication: an "intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on" (Goffman in Sarris 24). It appears to the non-Osage reader that "what is going on" is an ethnographic portrait of the Osages from Major Miles' point of view. The readers receive enough previously unknown information about the Osages to satisfy their desire for anthropological knowledge. Since Miles' point of view is filtered through an author whom the non-Osage reader of the early twentieth century will think of only as Osage, not as distanced from or close to tradition, that reader may presume that such an accommodating author will have corrected any erroneous information. Because Mathews repeatedly spotlights Miles' efforts to aid the Osages in making the transition from "savagery" to

“civilization,” the 1932 reader in particular will applaud the book as a complimentary biography. Here finally is an Indian who appreciates the kind-hearted efforts of a self-sacrificing agent!

However, Mathews consistently undermines Miles’ point of view. He refrains from meeting his readers’ expectations to correct or edit out Miles’ delivery of erroneous information,⁴ instead placing contradictory evidence in the text, often at wide intervals from Miles’ claims. For example, the narrator tells us early on that the Osages’ “tribal laws were severe and based on the rudiments, but they were few” (31). Later, we find Agent Miles having written in his notes that he “was very much surprised to find that here was a country occupied by more than two thousand people, in which there was no law covering any crime that might be committed among these people” (38). In another section, the narrator’s voice and Miles’ seem to converge on the subject of “sullen Indians”: “For everything that went wrong they blamed the agent and they came to him to talk over the matter; matters which they could have solved themselves, but in their state of doubt as to their status, and their worry over the strange new laws of the white man they wished to be safe before taking action” (95). These “sullen, independent Indians, to whom the traders referred as ‘mean Injuns,’ would stalk with dignity into the office...and ask why [Miles] had not done this or that” (159). Yet one of these “mean Injuns,” *Lame Doctor*, subsequently comes to Miles for help rather than to complain. Miles’ apparent objectivity in judging these Osages by universal standards is revealed as only shallowly observant, as miscomprehending, and as deeply prejudiced when Miles nearly rebuffs *Lame Doctor* by assuming his visit is insincere. We learn that *Lame Doctor* has been carrying the burden of having seen three white men murder his father in cold blood before his eyes when he was quite young. Not only does the incident belie the perspective that all “sullen” Indians ever do is complain; it exposes that label as a failure in human understanding masquerading as humanistic depth. That it would never occur to an Indian agent that the “sullen” emotions he witnessed around him might have a quite specific and recent provenience astounds.

In this way, we begin to recognize that what at first appeared to be an ethnography of the Osages from the Major’s point of view is actually a reverse ethnography of white sympathizers using the Major as a representative sample population. Mathews appears to abide by an Osage ethics in producing this ethnography, as when he mentions toward the end “a certain definite action” that the Major takes which causes an “obvious coldness” on the part of his Indian friends (325).

Though he honestly raises the fact of a rift, he treats the dead respectfully by not detailing the incident that led to it. In fact, while the Major is shown questioning Lame Doctor's sincerity, Mathews never questions the Major's personal sincerity. He allows us to see that the Osages knew he had great love in his heart for the Indian (338).

The romantic posture of this love does not escape Mathews, however. Repeatedly throughout the text, we learn of the Major's intense frustration over being unable to express "what he had begun to feel" toward (33) and "what he thought and understood" about the Osages (76). Mathews' parody of this inexpressibility complex is perhaps most intense when a visit to Big Chief provokes in the Major a strong "desire to get back to the office and to [his] notes," putting him "in the mood" (76). Like a lover who loves from afar, without really knowing the object of his love, the Major's feelings for the Osages soften his heart to the world at large. But in this case, that softening encompasses the Department of the Interior, a central obstacle to the happiness of his beloved!

His thoughts toward the department became kinder, and the restrictions under which he worked, gradually lost their importance and he was almost ready to excuse the people in far off Washington in their misunderstanding and their whims, feeling that if they could be made to understand as he understood, all would be well In periods of such optimism, the Major could put himself in the place of the department. He appreciated the checks and balances, and the restraint of initiative, in the various departments, and he once wrote boldly in his notes that the government was only the mirror of the people In such periods of optimism, he could almost sympathize with the white men to whom he referred as the low white who attempted to get the ear of the government, by whining about homes in the new lands of the west. In fact, during these periods, he believed that understanding was possible, and desired by all right thinking men, and he used his own standards as the criterion of man's action, never taking into account biological processes (76-78).

Even Mathews is unable to sustain the extended parody, shifting to overt disagreement in the final phrase. That the Major's love draws him away from active involvement in the day-to-day life of his beloved and toward the self-absorbing activity of writing reveals both his latent impulse to dominate and his complacent neglect of his real responsibilities to the tribe.⁵ The source of this critique in the third consciousness is evident since Mathews has certain members of the tribe articulate as much to the Major himself. The Major is also made to exemplify a larger societal phenomenon of U.S. romantic neglect, as the reversed ethnographic lens of this consciousness on the Major's *typical* thinking makes clear.

To accentuate the Major's unknowing detachment as against his repeated claims to knowing sympathy, Mathews uses the window as a trope. In fact the novel's iconography signals its importance by featuring in the frontispiece a picture of Laban J. Miles seated by a window before an open set of notes. In each instance, when we see the Major looking out the window, we notice that his stance of observation prevents him from recognizing crucial information "beyond the frame" and implies a lack of involvement in the life outside despite the effect he is having on the Osages at that very moment. The first time we see him looking out the window, he has taken a break from reading his old notes. While mentioning an unprovoked attack by whites upon some Osages, they fail to mention all that he knows: that the government sent the fifth cavalry to the reservation after the attack "to preclude any trouble" (37). Their presence, far from soothing the Osages, was realistically viewed as setting the stage for a potential massacre of their people. Yet the Major decides to omit any mention of the cavalry in his notes. Though he is sensitive enough to comprehend why the Osages desert their camps, he chooses not to transmit that knowledge and thus actively harms their cause with the government. In other instances, we see Miles looking out the window only to romantically misread the aspect a father walking with his family past the Agency (in a variety of orientalizing) (40), or failing to connect his issuing of payments through the Agency window to the whiskey tirades that always characterize payment time (157).

If Mathews refuses a comprehensive ethnography of the Osages by omitting detailed explanation of the lacunae in Miles' understanding (as when he fails to explain in more than a superficial way the impulses behind the mourning dance scalpings) and if he reverses the ethnography so that it becomes a study of Miles himself, he does not refrain from critiquing Osage social structures at times. Mathews'

authorial consciousness is not always aligned with one or more of the tribal consciousnesses of the novel. However, these critiques are always embedded in the more thoroughgoing critique of the enveloping social structures and ideologies of the U.S. At one point, Mathews notes that the “Major was a Friend,” meaning a Quaker. “He had been taught how to live; to worship Duty, Justice, and Honor, but best of all he had been born with a deep sense of humanity” (78). It is hard to mistake how Mathews plays on the word “Friend” as hinting toward the phrase “Friend to the Indian.” However, when the Major finds himself in a position to act as such a friend concretely, rather than in the abstract, he is unable to do so.

Lame Doctor—the “sullen Indian”—tells the Major that he believes Wah’Kon-Tah has placed a ban on him to kill ten whites in response to his father’s murder. Once Miles has convinced Lame Doctor that he need not carry out the ban any further than he already had, Lame Doctor attempts to sanction his shift in vision communally and reconcile with his community by joining the church of his people. He asks his “friend” Miles to give him beef so that he may make a present for the medicine men who will assist him in his repentance (164). The Major refuses. In his refusal, the stark contrast between his own sterilely individualistic relationship with God and Lame Doctor’s impulse to make his “conversion” an occasion for more widespread healing is palpable. Miles thus demonstrates that when called to act concretely as a friend to the Indian, he must always set conditions on this friendship. He must demand assimilation from Lame Doctor, even when such a demand has no bearing on his perceived duties of readying the Osages as a whole for their final encounter with civilization. Mathews clearly critiques the stratification among the Osages that prevents a poor man like Lame Doctor from participating in a healthful healing process. Yet the manipulation Miles exercises over the vulnerable man overshadows the delay that the gifting customs induce. And in Mathews’ other writings, we discover that it is the breakdown of the prestige, self-esteem, and traditional importance of the Little Old Men wrought by contact with the U.S. government that leads some of them to distribute their spiritual powers to the detriment of others in the tribe (*The Osages* 736).

A more extended dual critique, in which the multiple consciousnesses are fully in contention with one another, emerges when Mathews takes on Major Miles’ reaction to the practice of child marriage among the Osages. Given Mathews’ own apparent attitudes toward male-female relations, an analysis of the incidents described

becomes that much more complex. Historically we know that the encounter of competing patriarchies in colonial situations often leads to a kind of collusion, or reinforcement of both the patriarchal systems, as in the India discussed by KumKum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid or the Algeria discussed by Peter Hitchcock or Winifred Woodhull.⁶ However, collusion is not the only possible outcome. Through the fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton and the drama of Wole Soyinka, we also witness how the breakdown of the existing patriarchy by the invading one may constitute one of the mechanisms of dominance in representations of the colonial relationship.⁷ Because Mathews is self-consciously an outsider to Osage culture despite his very insided involvement in tribal affairs, it is difficult to know to what extent his constant reiteration of the fact of male supremacy among the Osages merely replicates the ways in which U.S. observers misperceived Plains women's power through the lenses of white patriarchy, as when they took it to indicate that women were slaves and beasts of burden to their men.

While more and more scholars recently have been attending to gender relations in Plains tribes, little has been written specifically on Osage gender relations beyond Mathews' own work. In her keenly insightful article on *Sundown*, Jennifer Gillan uses Alice Fletcher and Francis LaFlesche's research on the Omaha to infer that Osage social structures gave significant political power to women. On the other hand, as Alan Klein points out, the nineteenth century movement toward a horse and buffalo economy among the Teton Dakota, Assiniboines, Gros Ventres, and Blackfoot meant a relative loss in power for the women of these tribes. Whether the Osage system may be called patriarchal and not merely patrilineal, therefore, should still be a matter of debate.

In retrospect, we can see how Mathews' characterization of Miles reveals the agent's own patriarchal lens. In writing of Osage subsistence, Miles is exclusively concerned with the men's contribution to it, equating it with the whole (34). Yet later, he is confronted by Gray Bird's half-acre of vegetables and corn (enough to supply them for the winter)—which is most certainly the sphere of Gray Bird's wives in actuality (124; cf. Wilson 62; cf. *The Osages* 449). Mathews allows women's dominance in camp to break through the narrative when Miles is not present, as when a white official comes to convince the Osages to council with the Wichita (212). Yet he denies them full stature elsewhere: "To an Osage woman matters of the world were badly adjusted, and they went through life scolding things animate and

inanimate, without hope that by scolding matters might be readjusted, but as a sort of perennial protest against a world governed by, and existing for the gorgeous male" (210). Thus it is possible that it is despite Mathews rather than because of him that we see the passages on child marriage as a dual critique of patriarchy: U.S. and Osage. Yet Mathews also shows how Osage experience fits into the second description of the meeting of patriarchies in a colonial situation. As in the African and Chicano experiences, Western imperialism collides with Osage patriarchy, exhibiting tendencies to destroy rather than reinforce it.

Mathews sets the scene by silently undermining the Major's subsequent triple denial of his impulse to interfere in the custom. Shi Kuh—"one of those mean fellas"—comes to the Agency to take his daughter out of school so he can marry her to a man he has chosen. Her presence at the school is a sign of the previous interference of the agency system as a whole and the Major's participation in it. Ironically, as the Major negotiates with Shi Kuh over whether the girl will have any agency in the matter, the two speak in Osage. Since the Osage language apparently makes no gender distinctions, they both repeatedly refer to the girl as "him." The technique is part of Mathews' subtle exposure of the Major's unconscious arrogance.

When the girl leaves with her father, we begin to receive a severe critique of how literacy allows the Major to dominate the Osages even while helping to liberate the girl. The Major receives two notes from her asking his help to escape from her father's camp to return to the mission, both of which he ignores. The second one reveals that her father has locked her in a log cabin to prevent her from running away.⁸ While the incident is an obvious criticism of Shi Kuh's coercive exercise of his patriarchal authority, the locked cabin may also be compared to the locked schools of the Osage reservation. In "Women of the Osage: A Century of Change, 1874-1982," Terry P. Wilson notes that these schools were fenced to prevent "unauthorized parental visits" (!) and runaway attempts—which were frequent. In one case, a runaway was whipped with a strap and then a rubber tire after she was caught and was then made to pay for her own "search and rescue" (69-71). The fictional Miles himself is subconsciously aware of how Carlisle and Haskell were like prisons for the children: "He wouldn't let himself think of those austere buildings as prisons though they actually imprisoned many sensitive spirits, and spiritual imprisonment was more tragic to the Indian than physical suffering" (101). So while Osage orality is also held up for scrutiny—Shi Kuh is very subtle in his

answer to the girl's consent that she will go on the condition he promise to bring her back when she wants—it is literacy and the institutions that create it that Mathews questions most.⁹ Had there been no push for literacy among the Osages, Shi Kuh's daughter would never have been exposed to an alternative and Shi Kuh would never have felt compelled to replicate the boarding schools' mechanisms of coercion.

On the other hand, Mathews appears to be no enemy of internationalism. Osage women's lack of exposure to alternatives eliminated the need for coercion by keeping them narrowly focused on the goal of reproducing strong male warrior-hunters (Wilson 61). But the "alternative" offered by exposure to the agency system does not eradicate male supremacy; it merely replaces one father with another, much more distant. When Shi Kuh's daughter escapes back to the Agency, the Major finally interferes. Preventing Shi Kuh from reclaiming her, he has her escorted by the Indian police to the school. Facing down two bodily threats, he ultimately promises Shi Kuh that his daughter will not "leave [the] Reservation until I have talked with [the] parents" (100). Yet he breaks this promise, allowing the daughter to return to Haskell. Significantly, the participation of literacy in the Osages' domination reappears: "He told her that she must immediately write to her father telling him that she had run away and had come to the station, and that he had required her to write the letter on account of his promise. She sat down on one of the boxes, and with pencil wrote a letter, her dark face bent low over the paper, placing the point of the pencil in her mouth after every sentence" (102). Only after she is gone does the Major deliver the letter to Shi Kuh, whose face becomes "unreadable" to the Major in the moment of his betrayal.

In usurping the role of the father, the Major does nothing less than arrange the girl's marriage himself, albeit indirectly, by the apparently liberatory standards of his own society. Jennifer Gillan points out that during this era the Osages' loss of actual potency was compensated for by symbols of potency and their loss of actual influence by symbols of influence (5). It stretches the comparison too far to say the same of the girl's acquisition of greater freedom and autonomy, which is more than theoretical (cf. Gillan 5). However, the communal power of the tribe as well as both the men's and the women's power within it is most certainly weakened. What emphatically does not occur as a result of the Major's usurpation is a debate among the Osages, spurred by Osage women, over the legitimacy of the practice of child marriage. Without such internal activism, the Major's interference is unlikely to provoke a change in the underlying gender imbalance.¹⁰

Once again, we encounter in this conflict the presence of at least two tribal consciousnesses in addition to Mathews' and Miles': in this case, the individual and opposing consciousnesses of Shi Kuh and his daughter, which like Mathews' and Miles' probably represent the views of many others in their communities. Intriguingly, Mathews' authorial consciousness seems to collude with Miles' in one other aspect. Rather than reinforcing the dominant trope of the majority of boarding school narratives—the urge to run away—Mathews reveals that boarding school experiences themselves were multiple. While it was probably a majority of students who rejected the system or at least reacted with profound ambivalence, Mathews uses his historical sources to build the voice of the minority like Shi Kuh's daughter who ran toward the schools rather than away from them.

By juxtaposing the Major's intrusions into Osage affairs with his self-reported love and understanding of the Osages throughout the novel, Mathews articulates a profound insight into the paradox of the agency system. Structurally, it puts men like Miles into isolated and close proximity to the tribe, ideal for creating the conditions of understanding. Miles is one of very few whites in a position to understand the Osages and represent them positively to the U.S. government. Yet, structurally, being in the position also prevents him from understanding the Osages in the most profound ways, entailing as it does responsibility to carry out the government's orders. In fact, Miles would never have aspired to the post in the first place unless he had already succumbed to the prevalent ideological propaganda that the Osages must assimilate into U.S. society. While Carol Hunter remarks of *Sundown* that abrupt assimilation causes the decline in young Osage values and morals (71), I would argue that Mathews illustrates in *Wah'Kon-Tah* that the slow, deliberate assimilation of the late nineteenth century was more insidious than the abrupt, rapid immersion of the twentieth, and, in fact, intensified the harm that the latter was able to work.

For we see Miles here give in first to the temptation to coerce the Osages into compliance with Western ways, but then pleurably transfer responsibility for that coercion onto the Osages themselves (143). In the opening of the novel, Miles' enthusiastic admiration of the tribe encompasses their intense individualism: "It seemed to him that they did not . . . attempt to control the destinies of others" (41). Yet when confronted with child marriage, Miles does just that. He issues an order against the marriage of young girls and when the Kaws (Kansas Indians: a splinter group from the Osages over whom the

Major had jurisdiction on the Reservation) ignore the order, he tells the family in question that he has “power to cut off [their] rations” (105).

Repeatedly, the Major passes up the opportunity to begin a shift in the custom by relying on the power of persuasion: “He was undetermined whether to call another council of the Kaws, or whether to carry out this order by depriving this chief and the husband of the little girl of their rations. He decided on the latter and the rations were cut off” (106). Had he counceled with them, he might have discovered that his own reasoning in the matter—that girls who married while still children could not be mothers of big men and that the tribe would “become small”—was exactly the opposite of the reasoning that had brought the Osages to the practice in the first place—that arranged marriages “protected [women] for mating with the best young men so that the tribe could prosper by the pairs’ reproduction of still more good men” (104; Wilson 61). Mathews reinforces the connection between starvation and military force that Helen Hunt Jackson may have been the first to mark out and publicize widely (65, 71, 97-98, 268, 281, 294) by writing that the Major “meant to stay by his guns” (105). Later he explicitly names the action as the exercise of “the iron hand of the conquering race” (107).

Mathews makes it clear that Miles has absolutely no authority to withhold rations from individual families and then whole tribes, only the power to do so. “He had been unable to find anything gratuitous in the government’s relations with these people; these people had paid their own way. He was of the opinion that there existed no precedent for legally depriving one of something which was already his, and the department had already stated that the domestic customs of these tribes were outside of its authority” (105). The structural position that Miles holds as agent fuels rather than discourages his crusade because he takes the Osages’ refusals personally. “[H]e believed that it was a small concession for these people to make to one who thought always of their interest . . . when he received [the reply from a Kaw chief that he was father of his own daughter and intended to do that which pleased him], he felt injured” (106). Mathews nicely shows how the conflict raises all the Major’s latent stereotypical thinking to the surface, as when he likens the conflict to taking up spear and shield and not daring to lay them down again (106). The language used here demonstrates how the tribal consciousnesses that have constructed Mathews’ mode of speaking have failed to penetrate and alter Miles’ discourse. The incidents also cause the Major’s “understanding” to break down as we see him reading emotions of his own choosing into

the expressionless faces of his interlocutors (108, 110, 98-99, 200). In this way, Mathews illustrates how the Osages become blank slates for Miles' romanticizing imagination rather than taking on real substance in his mind.

In the chapters that follow the incidents over child marriage, the Major's coercive bent becomes increasingly insidious as he learns how to instill the will-to-coerce in the hearts of the Osages themselves—or at least some of them. The Major's power to shift the very tribal consciousnesses that contend with him in the novel is representative of larger forces at work in the U.S. A fine example occurs in "Birth of the Osage Nation," where we see him imposing an artificial political structure atop the existing and long-standing structure of clan chiefs. "[T]he Major thought the time ripe for the organization of the tribe in order to bring in a more democratic system, though as a matter of fact they were almost communist in their community ownership of the land and cattle" (137). As Stephen Cornell and Joseph Kalt point out, these impositions of U.S.-styled democracy onto tribes already practicing a variety of democratic and semi-democratic forms crippled a large number of tribes economically, and also socially by creating factionalism over suitable economic initiatives (9-21). Not only would the Major's initiatives theoretically undermine the stability of the clans by boosting "energetic, ambitious men" and "the more intelligent men: . . . natural leaders" over hereditary chiefs; they would give undue power to the mixed-bloods. Despite his express hope that they would not "take the matter into their own hands," causing the full-bloods to withdraw (142), he puts the organization of the police court into the hands of "two young mixed-bloods" because he cannot "find an orderly way of" connecting it with the executive branch and allowing it to be "composed of men of their own choosing" (141).¹¹

Mathews begins to reveal, as soon as the Osage Nation is born, how the Major's apparently enlightened empowerment of the Osages actually signals certain tribal members' internalization of the Major's coercive methods. The parallels between his actions against child marriage and their own actions could not be more marked. "[T]hey provided a regulation requiring all children of school age to attend school a certain number of months during the year, and as a penalty provided that the annuities of the parents should be stopped if such children were kept out of school. The Major smiled with pleasure at this regulation when he considered that the council was composed mostly of full-bloods who have a natural aversion for anything that seems to imply coercion" (143). That the council is replicating his use

of power-without-authority is underscored by their provision for a whipping post (143). Helen Hunt Jackson's discussion of the Nez Percés' reaction to the introduction of a whipping post by an Indian Bureau agent must have come to mind for some readers as they encountered this passage (108-09). The Major at one point even admits "that the council was using a weapon which was not theirs to use, as this money belonged to the people and there could not be anything conditional about the payment of it. However, he was overjoyed that the council, composed mostly of full-bloods, had made the regulation for their own people" (144). When the Major remarks that "the council [had taken] over some of the responsibilities that had been his" (143), today's reader must shudder at the irony.

The insidious nature of the Major's transfer of responsibility for coercion marks one of the pessimistic moments in the text. The final chapter marks another, with its focus on the son of Eagle That Dreams and the familiarly Amer-European disrespect he and his friends feel and display toward their parents. But Mathews does not succumb to this pessimism. He merely exhibits it. The final chapter ends in the dawn of a new day. Eagle That Dreams rises from his bed and looks in the mirror: "He took up a comb and parted his long iron gray hair carefully—along the straight red line running down the center. For some time he looked at the red line which was the symbol of the straight road which he traveled each day. Each day as he combed his hair he was reminded of this straight road which was red as the symbol of dawn; of the rising sun; red the color of fire which was the Father from which all things came" (342). Though we have just seen him preparing for his own funeral and engaging in a discussion over the new elements of Peyote and the shift in the proper direction of burial, his waking actions indicate that core elements of Osage tradition have survived through drastic change.

When the Major reaches old age, we discover that he favors Big Chief as the representative Osage in his mind: "'Wah Ti An Kah,' he would say, 'was a great man; a man interested in his people and a great leader, but he was too noisy; always wanted to be in front and show himself off. That wasn't Indian—that wasn't Osage,' he would say with firm dignity. Then after a pause, 'The greatest of your people was Big Chief'" (326).¹² The reader may suspect that the Major reaches this conclusion because Big Chief appeared to him to have taken the white man's road. Big Chief, the chief of the Tzi-Sho, the Sky People,¹³ does not allow the people to perform a mourning dance for him, helping to discourage the scalping component of the ritual

permanently. At his death, Big Chief is placed in a cairn over which the U.S. flag is planted. It seems a symbol of Osage defeat, especially given that Mathews fails to mention the practice of planting these flags upside down (*The Osages* 591, 631). In the novel, the flag “seem[s] to take control immediately” after it is placed in Big Chief’s cairn, yet Mathews knew that U.S. observers before Miles had suppressed this potentially subversive aspect of the ceremony.

It is through the figure of Big Chief that Mathews makes apparent the arrogance of an outsider proclaiming what is Indian and what is Osage. Far from following the white man’s road, Big Chief consistently propounds an ethic of mutual acculturation: “He told [the Pawnees] that Pawnees were great people and that they knew much which Osages did not know; that it would be good if these people could come to visit Osages in friendship. He . . . said that Osages knew much that Pawnees did not know and that they might visit Pawnees in terms of friendship” (233); “Indian knows many things, but white man says that these things are not good. I believe white man does not know many things that Indian knows” (71). What the Major may see as a conversion to white ways, Big Chief filters as selective adoption of good practices.

So while the novel dwells on death and burial, its tropes are not symbols of the nostalgic regret over a passing era. For we see that the Major and Big Chief do not look upon death in the same way. Miles turns away from it, denies it, dreads the mourning that accompanies it, and tells himself lies to put off its immanence. Big Chief, on the other hand, sees death as “a mere matter of transition” and is not afraid of it (73). Big Chief knows something about death that Amer-Europeans do not know. And in this way, Big Chief’s view of death represents Mathews’ larger philosophy.

Though an American flag is planted in Big Chief’s burial cairn, appearing to signal defeat, the Major’s final view of the cairn reaffirms the continuation of the Osages underneath the symbols of Americanization. “He thought he saw the form of a horse lying there. The spirit of Big Chief had started on the long ride” (238). Just as Big Chief’s educational philosophy allows for one to continue to be Osage while learning from Amer-Europeans, Mathews’ philosophy of death and burial allows his people to continue to be Osage even while witnessing the death of what was once Osage. Knowing that some will continue to hold the straight red road in their hearts, Mathews creates a novel whose existence reminds us that not all the younger generation of Osages have unlearned the respect due their true fathers and mothers.

Its literary qualities show us that Mathews did not relinquish his intellectual sovereignty simply because he told another's tale.

Far from being the posthumous mouthpiece for Major Laban Miles, John Joseph Mathews created in *Wah'Kon-Tah* distinct and contending voices for the main actors in late nineteenth century Osage history. By marking the distance between himself and Miles with his ironic language, he proclaimed his independence from the historical sources upon which he based his novel. By further offering to his reader glimpses not only of "the tribal consciousness" but the differing parties within that too readily collectivized entity, as well as the forceful polyphony of a number of individual characters, he relinquished full control of his novel so that his particular views would not shut out the views of other Osages, or worse, be taken as representative of them. Ultimately the differentiated Osage consciousnesses that populate the novel overwhelm Miles' apparent role as protagonist and reverse the object of ethnographic examination. By recognizing how their perspectives survived within Miles' writings despite his mediation, Mathews denied to the tragic events of their story the final word.

NOTES

¹ Owens writes that *Wah'Kon-Tah* is "in itself of more historical than literary interest" (166). A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff calls it a "fictionalized account of Osage life" (7) while Lee Schweninger terms it a "fictional history of the Osage" (43). Given the historical tendency to treat Native Americans' own histories of their tribes as fictional, perhaps this oxymoronic characterization by Schweninger touches upon the sensitivities that those who take these histories seriously would like to avoid. Yet the general questioning of the factuality of history itself ought to allow us to acknowledge the faithfulness of *Wah'Kon-Tah* as history while also recognizing its compositional formation as novel.

What distinguishes the work as a novel rather than as some other literary genre? Christopher Schedler, for example, calls *Wah'Kon-Tah* "a fictionalized biography" of Agent Miles (136). Biography usually relies upon a third-person detached narrator and usually covers the entirety of an individual's life. *Wah'Kon-Tah* does neither. Warrior's

placement seems much more acute. While he calls it a “history of reservation transition” at one point, he also terms it a “historical novel” (22). Though Mathews does not appear to create fictional characters as many others writing in the genre have done, he reconstructs history and re-creates it imaginatively while at the same time adhering to Bakhtin’s famous definition of the novelistic. That is, he dialogizes the many competing speech genres and the utterances that encounter one another within those genres. Throughout the novel, the unidentified third-person narrator slips in and out of Miles’ thoughts using free indirect discourse, which is a major device of enacting dialogism for Mathews, as well as using apparent quotations from Miles’ own journal. One particular aspect of the polyphony of the work—the multiple consciousnesses of the novel—forms a major focus of this article.

² Owens places the work within the literary genres by labeling it a “historical fiction” (163). Yet he also asserts that Mathews relies heavily on the journals of Major Laban J. Miles. I cannot verify or refute this assertion without access to the journals themselves, which are currently in private hands. I hope to show in the pages that follow that this novel does not place Mathews’ intellectual sovereignty in doubt.

³ Christopher Schedler contends that Mathews’ artistry itself is neglected, overshadowed mainly by the work of his contemporary D’Arcy McNickle. *Wah’Kon-Tah* was his first publication in 1932, followed in 1934 by *Sundown*. *Wah’Kon-Tah* was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection, establishing Mathews as a known writer (Owens 163). Over a decade later, he would publish *Talking to the Moon* (1945), which Robert Warrior first explored extensively in *Tribal Secrets*. Mathews then published a biography (!) of oilman E.W. Marland, *Life and Death of an Oilman*, in 1951 and the authoritative history of the Osages to date in 1961, entitled *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*. Mathews also served on the Osages’ tribal council and involved himself more and more in Osage cultural and political affairs after 1945.

⁴ For instance, while Miles attributes the Osages’ avoidance of allotment early on in the Dawes Era to whites and mixed-bloods (148), Mathews points out in *The Osages* that full-bloods were the ones who headed off this threat to communal ownership. “The mixed-bloods were increasing and were almost equal in number to the fullbloods, and

when the Cherokee Allotment Commission arrived in June 1893, and urged the Osages to take allotments and sell their surplus lands as the other tribes would do, they refused, solely on account of the fact that the fullbloods still outnumbered the mixed-bloods, who were almost unanimously for allotment" (726; see also 692).

⁵ Miles' concentration on his journals and other attempts to express in writing how he understands the Osages often seem by Mathews' juxtaposition of events to interfere directly with his daily responsibilities, especially as perceived by the Osages. When a Big Hill Osage comes to tell him that he does not know what is happening in that region, Miles is in the midst of perusing his papers. He casually delays a visit to the area—which the reader perceives as urgent—for several days. We might, indeed, infer that this delay in responding to white trespassers on the reservation allowed the situation to escalate into violence, since he learns upon his visit that the trespassers are dead (79-88). The initial visit of the Big Hill Osage to the Agency has a distinct tone of accusation: the man is evidently amazed at Miles' lack of awareness about what is going on around him (probably as compared to how Osage leaders would have kept themselves informed of similar matters both in the past and in that day). Miles claims that one man cannot know everything while the Osage tells him that he never bothers to try to find out what is going on.

⁶ In *Recasting Women*, Sangari and Vaid discuss how women in India are subordinated by both indigenous and capitalist socioeconomic formations and how their subordination intensifies when caste is rearticulated as class by the intrusive society. Interpreting a passage from Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*, which is based on a historical incident "recorded by Eugene Fromentin in 1852 during the French occupation," Hitchcock writes that "the Maghrebi fantasia is not just a measure of tribal masculinism but also a bizarre, carnivalized mirror of orientalist desire" (142). Woodhull discusses how women in Algeria "symbolize, and are called upon to stabilize, Algeria's irreducibly contradictory identity in and through their present condition of subordination" (114). The obsession with the veil is an instantiation of how women are caught in the midst of the simultaneous demands for modernization on the one hand (by a patriarchal Europe which feminizes Algeria as it thrusts its only partially assimilated feminism upon it) and for "the restoration of a culture that French colonialism had all but destroyed" (113) on the other.

⁷ In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi represents the cynical British characterization of the Mau Mau revolutionaries to the world as atavistic and their brutal suppression of the movement through indiscriminate torture and murder of Kenyan men as a mechanisms towards breaking down a Gikuyu patriarchy that had been capable of resisting British rule. In *The Squatter and the Don*, Ruiz de Burton illustrates the simultaneous disintegration of U.S. and Californio patriarchal authority as represented by the disempowerment of William Darrell and Don Mariano Alamar and their replacement by a new U.S. patriarchy as represented by the ascent of Clarence Darrell. Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* traces how the benevolently paternal protection of the Yoruba from their own traditions strips the king's horseman of his cultural authority and weakens a functional patriarchy despite the fact that that patriarchy's treatment of women is never at issue.

⁸ The similarity of this incident to the locking of Huckleberry Finn in his Pap's cabin is highly ironic. Both children are caught between those who want to civilize them, American-style, and those who wish to keep them faithful to family, a threatened lifestyle, and parental obligations. While Mathews drew upon writers from all eras of American literature, it is more intriguing to ask whether Mark Twain created his distorted images of anti-civilization from events that were occurring around Indian country surrounding boarding school coercion.

⁹ Other instances of the way in which literacy dominates the Osages are the way Miles uses a book to record the names of individuals who have stolen horses in order to send them away to the remote justice of the U.S. and its hanging judge (198); the way Miles' wife has to destroy children's magazines that arrive on the reservation because they narrate stories of massacres and scalplings by red savages on virtuous whites (259); and the way Miles attempts a rather difficult realism in writing to the white bride of an Osage youth to discourage her from relocating to the reservation—making a nice life look bad to the bride while trying to convince the groom that his life is not really bad but just something he will make look bad! (267)

¹⁰ Gerald Vizenor has written about how Western images of Indians deny time to them. Miles appears in his interventions not to fall into this practice. Yet they are selective. While he intervenes to encourage

Osage marriages with whites and with Indians from “friendly” tribes, his intervention in the proposed marriage of a young Osage man to an Arapaho woman acquiesces to and reinforces the “traditional” enmity between the Osages and the Arapahoes. He therefore abets in fixing the Osages in a permanent past, as cyclical as Western images of Indian time, seemingly impervious to changes wrought by the internationalism he otherwise advocates.

¹¹ Mathews suggests in “On the Prairie and the Plains” in *The Osages* that the Little Old Men remained a shadow government for some time behind the government established by U.S. agents, deferred to by the latter in their decision-making.

¹² Mathews exposes in *The Osages* how white representatives of the U.S. government constructed an image of Osage dignity that linked it with conciliation and not being noisy by concentrating on words of those amenable to their designs rather than listening to the recognized leaders (299). He writes, for example, of how Sibley recorded a speech by an Osage in reply to Lewis and Clark and Pierre Chouteau: “This was neither the spirit of *Tzi-Sho Hunkah*, the Grand *Tzi-Sho* of the moment, nor the spirit of Arrow-Going-Home, the Grand *Hunkah* of the moment. The former is never mentioned, and the other was far away on the Verdigris and had refused to have anything to do with the treaty, representing at least half of the tribe. Nor, yet, was this humility the spirit of the tribesmen who were still at the Place-of-the-Many-Swans. This must have been the gist of the speech of White Hair, and because of its un-Osage-like humility and sweet reasonableness, it has been recorded by a really honest man who said he knew them well” (388).

¹³ One of the two moieties of the tribe, the other being the Earth People. The chiefs of these moieties were historically very important. The *Tzi-Sho* (Sky) chief is the peace chief while the *Hunkah* (Earth) chief is the war chief (*The Osages* 56).

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Reading Culture

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This essay has been written with the narrow conviction that if Native American literature is worth thinking about at all, it is worth thinking about as literature. Much energy and effort has been expended on mawkishly fondling the first two words of that troika, but little, in comparison, on the third. The vast majority of thought that has been poured out onto Native American literature has puddled, for the most part, on how the texts are positioned in relation to history or culture, and can be summed up as follows:

1. Native American literature contains within it links to culturally generated forms of storytelling.
2. Native American literature reflects the experience of Native Americans in the United States.
3. Native American literature acts out, by virtue of its cultural material, the tenets of “post-modern” discourse.

Naturally, certain Native American novels make use of the idea of storytelling, and storytelling has become an interesting *subject* of Native American fiction, but the simple fact is that not all stories are novels. And even though many Native American novels can be thought of as instances of “historical or ethical documentation,” the novel is, in the end, the object of study, not the historical record (Brooks, iv). As for the third, and most ridiculous, assertion, that Native American literature is itself “post-modern” commentary, it follows that if this is the case, we first have to treat novels as literary creations, not as spontaneous expressions of critical solidarity or relevance. By far the most amazing thing about Native American literature is the reluctance of its creators and commentators to treat it as literature that exists within a field of other literatures. What has remained a popular, and mind-numbingly defensible, position is to think of literature as located within the sphere of life. It is not.

The phrase we hear so often that always begins “where I come from, stories . . .” needs to be questioned. It needs to be questioned because, despite claims for the power and efficacy for stories (made by Silko and Momaday, and most others), the suggestion of place and the imposition of personality come first in that construction: Where. I. Come from. Instead of basing our analysis on the first four words of that sentimental phrase we should take a close look at the fifth. Stories. In this case, novels. If novels say anything, they say it as text, and, as such, the first step is to look closely at the words that comprise those texts and to move, ever slowly, ever outward, from there. This essay is simply that first step.

Native American novels often make use of two kinds of words or word sets: parts of Native American language and Native American myth. What does the inclusion of Native language and myth do to the fabric of the novel, and how are they included? When we look at this in relation to the claims made for culture, a strange relationship begins to emerge. Let us first look at Louise Erdrich’s use of the Ojibwe language in *The Antelope Wife*.

Two-thirds the way through *The Antelope Wife* two characters steal a German prisoner. What ensues is an amazing feat of cultural translation, the likes of which I haven’t seen since I last read *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The prisoner, who has been able to intuit that his life is in danger, makes an incredible effort to save his own life, though the only weapon he has is his cake-baking ability.

“Grüssen!” the prisoner bowed. His voice was pie sweet and calm as toast. “Was ist los? Wo sind wir?”

Nobody answered his words even though he next made known by signs—an imaginary scoop to his mouth, a washing motion on his rounded stomach—his meaning.

“Haben Sie hunger?” he asked hopefully. “Ich bin sehr gut Küchenchef.”

“Mashkimood, mashkimood.” Asin’s attitude was close to panic. He wanted to put the bag over the boy’s head. Because he had once been known as a careful and judicious old man, the others had to wonder if there was something in the situation they just hadn’t figured yet. The kitchen, a window

shedding frail light on an old wooden table, the stove in the background of the room, the prisoner blinking.

“Skimood!” Asin cried again, and Shawano picked up the gunny-sack uncertainly, ready to lower it back onto the porcupine man’s head.

“Hit him! Hit him!” Asin now spoke in a low and threatening tone. At his command, everyone fell silent, considering. Yet it was apparent, also, that the old man was behaving in an extreme and uncharacteristic fashion.

“Why should we do that?” asked Pugweyan.

“It is the only way to satisfy the ghosts,” Asin answered.

“Haben Sie alles hunger, bitte? Wenn Sie hunger haben, ich werde für sie ein Kuchen machen. Versuch mal, bitte.” The prisoner asked his question, made his offer, modestly and pleasantly, though he seemed now in his wary poise to have understood the gravity of Asin’s behavior. He seemed, in fact, to know that his life hung in the balance although Asin had spoken his cruel command in the old language. Not only that, but he suddenly, with a burst of enormous energy, tried again to make good on his offer, using peppy eating motions and rubbing his middle with more vigor.

One among the men, of the bear clan, those always so eager for food, finally nodded. “Why not?” said Bootch. “Let him prepare his offering. We will test it and see if his sweet cake can save his life.” (Erdrich 134)¹

It continues on the next page. “‘Erdbeeren,’ he said, softly, with mistaken and genuine sincerity. ‘I fuck you thank you.’” His giftor responds: “‘Gaaween gego,’ she said, *meaning it was nothing special.*” (135, emphasis mine)

Here two very strange things going on. First, the German is not translated, and the only help we are given is vague, if vigorous, stomach rubbing and eating gestures. Bootch, clearly the smartest of the bunch, knows, by dint of intuition that the German is talking about baking a cake. How did he know? Second, the Ojibwe, though much

less complex, consisting of one word and a short phrase (as opposed to the compound sentences in German), is explained both contextually and in translation. The bizarre position of Ojibwe occurs elsewhere in *The Antelope Wife*: “My branch of the Ojibwa sticks to its *anokee*. *That word, which means work, is in our days of the week.*” (104, emphasis mine) The German is not translated. Ojibwe is. This creates a textual inequality between German and Ojibwe, not to mention between Ojibwe and English; Ojibwe is neither fluid, like the English, nor densely cryptic, a site of strange meaning and difference, like the German.

Why is the German more or less left to be understood, while the Ojibwe is given special explanations? After all, having an English “translation” following the Ojibwe text obviates the need for Ojibwe at all—the Ojibwe language is textually irrelevant; it does not communicate useful information nor does it engage in that other trick of language by withholding information or meaning.

When we look more closely, we see that Ojibwe crops up in *The Antelope Wife* in three contexts: as nouns, as proper nouns, and as expressions. In all three instances Ojibwe is subordinate to its English context and irrelevant to the complicated plot, story, and thematic development of the novel.

Roughly ninety percent of the Ojibwe words found in *The Antelope Wife* are nouns. Makak (18) Ode’min (138) Mashkimod (78). Bakwezhigan (56) Nibi (92, 141) for example.³ In these instances, even when they are not explained, they are situated within English syntactical constructions. One way this happens is by introducing Ojibwe words with English articles—the, a, an. The Ojibwe language does not have articles. To write “the weyass,” is to mean “the *the* meat.”⁴ It is not unlike sitting down to dinner at what you’ve been told is an exclusive, expensive, and excellent French restaurant and noticing that the prime rib is served “with au jus.” One wonders just how prime that rib will be . . .

Another syntactical concession is the use of locatives. In Ojibwe, prepositions such as into, at, on, and beside, are designated by adding a locative ending to the noun in question. Town is *odena*. In town, or at town; *odenaang*. In *The Antelope Wife* Ojibwe place names are always introduced without regard to Ojibwe grammar or syntax. Again, to say, “I’m going to Gakaabekaang,” is to say, “I am going to Minneapolis.” Ojibwe words have been lifted out of their own element and hosted in English, and not hosted very well. The expressions favored in the novel are particles that do make grammatical sense on

their own, and are the least obtrusive instance of Ojibwe in the text. Gego (88), eya (85), and howah (96, 130, 133, 171) are the most common and do little except signify the identity of the speaker. To be fair, it would be clumsy and strange to use Ojibwe-language-derived syntactical constructions when using Ojibwe words. Erdrich adheres to the most popular conventions that govern the use of foreign words in English. This in itself is very telling; Ojibwe is a subordinate language here. It cannot exist on its own.

Ojibwe is a language dominated by verbs. One word-count lists verbs as comprising eighty percent of the language. To see only two or three Ojibwe verbs in the entire novel is striking. The closest thing to a conversation in Ojibwe, which occurs among a group of elder women on page 171, contains no verbs whatsoever. What happens is that an incredibly beautiful, primarily “active” language is reduced to a few nouns, simple phrases, and the like. Native language has no life of its own in purportedly “Indian” fiction, and no purpose except, at best, in bits, to function as a “gang sign,” and, at worst, as static, dioramic museum pieces.

All of this has depressing consequences. What we have in *The Antelope Wife*, and in *House Made of Dawn*, and in *Ceremony*, for example, is not Native American languages. Languages are systems of words and their representation used to construct relationships based on communication and non-communication, between people and communities. What we have in Native American fiction certainly is not that. All we have are Native American words. The use of these lexical nuggets ends up feeling more like display, with language itself a museum piece, and this precisely when Native American languages in question are in the process of dying out. Ironically, during the last thirty or so years, certainly since *Custer Died For Your Sins*, Native American writers have been honing their hatred and dismissal of anthropology and anthropologists, while at the same time creating novels that function as “Native Informants.”

There is light at the end of the linguistic tunnel if you believe Leslie Marmon Silko.

Where I come from, the words most highly valued are those spoken from the heart, unpremeditated and unrehearsed. . . . But the particular language being spoken isn't as important as what the speaker is trying to say, and this emphasis on the story itself

stems, I believe, from a view of narrative particular to the Pueblo and other Native American peoples—that is, that language is story. (*Yellow Woman* 48-50)

Silko goes on to claim that “many individual words have stories of their own” and that this “perspective on narrative—of story within story, the idea that one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end—represents an important contribution of Native American cultures to the English language” (50). That words have “stories” inside of them is, I think it safe to say, very well known. That’s why there is a special term for it in English: etymology. That there are stories within stories was well established in Homer’s time, though it had to wait for perfection until Cervantes took up the quill.

For the moment, let’s take her word for it—language doesn’t matter—so let’s look at what does. Clearly, the subject of myth informs Silko’s novels and essays. *Ceremony* elegantly illustrates this point. It is the story of a young man, separated from his parents, who is raised by an aunt, and who must seek out where he belongs. His own struggle is mirrored by and linked to a much larger struggle in the universe, in which the forces of darkness are trying to wipe out the forces of good. Our hero must choose between giving in to the dark powers or embracing the forces of good, and the fate of his community hangs in the balance. What I have described is not only the bare-bones story found in *Ceremony*. It is a dead ringer for the *Star Wars* trilogy. That *Star Wars* and *Ceremony* were both made available to the public in 1977 is, of course, coincidental.

When Silko uses the drought myth in which the people are punished for fooling with magic as a template for *Ceremony*, it has little to do with the structure of the novel or its meaning. In fact, the myth itself has an entirely different narrative structure, design, and effect than Tayo’s story.

Tayo’s struggle begins with his waking from a nightmare. We are told that he “could feel it inside his skull—the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more” (7). The novel then becomes one man’s struggle to find order in his mind and in his community. The novel is patterned with convenient flashbacks, ever-escalating violence, a good dose of flora and fauna, all culminating in the climax at the abandoned uranium mine. It is an incredibly well plotted and

beautifully-written novel. But it functions as a novel. It has the same kind of psychological appeal that many novels have that have been published since the beginning of the Vietnam war: it is taken for granted that war is traumatic; that it has scarred Tayo; that he, like many veterans, feels homeless in his own land. That he is Indian only adds special poignancy and irony to his dilemma, but not a different meaning.

The drought myth and the other myths that appear throughout the book contribute to the subject of *Ceremony*, not to its form or its mode. In the beginning of the drought myth people fool with magic and so bring starvation and disease on themselves when they forget to make their offerings as they had been taught. The myth begins in a world where everything is as it should be. The next episode is the drought, a conflict, a trouble, which must be resolved. From there on Hummingbird and Fly take necessary steps toward resolving the problem.

This is the opposite of how the novelistic action works. *Ceremony* begins with Tayo already in conflict, and it is suggested that his problems, and the problems of the community, have existed for quite some time. Instead of a series of well-laid out steps that all contribute to a solution, as in the myth, Tayo moves forward, regresses, revolves around his problems, and continues on in ever-growing narrative linearity, which needn't describe a straight line, but does adhere to one dimension. Gradually, meaning is created from the friction between Tayo and his community, Tayo and his experience, Tayo and his history, until, at the very end, the resolution is achieved through dramatic confrontation. Despite all of Silko's fancy footwork and strident claims for "circularity" or the "never-endingness" of stories *Ceremony* has a very very old-fashioned narrative structure. Predicament. Growth. Climax. Resolution. The myth has the opposite type of structure, with the climax coming at the beginning, and is devoid of narrative "growth."

As seen already, *The Antelope Wife* deploys the Ojibwe language in strange ways. *Ceremony* deploys myth in strange ways of its own. One has to ask, since Silko says it is so, if "language is story," and if the Pueblo view of storytelling is not to "fragment stories of experience," why does myth in *Ceremony* get chopped up and spread out to compost throughout the book? And, if authorial intent matters more than language or form, then why position myth in the book to make it look like poetry?

“Thought-Woman, the spider,
Named things and
As she named them
They appeared.” (*Ceremony* 1)

The impetus behind this phenomenon is that something is gained by looking like poetry, even though the myth is *not* poetry. It is, says John Hollander,

common and convenient for most people who don't read carefully to use 'poetry' to mean 'writing in some kind of verse,' and to regard thereby the design without considering the materials. The most popular verse form in America today—the ubiquitous jingle readers identify with 'poetry' even as, fifty or sixty years ago, they did anything that rhymed—is

A kind of free verse
Without any special
constraints on it except
those imposed by
the notion—also
generally accepted—that
the strip the lines
make as they run
down the page (the
familiar jagged strip with the
jagged
right-hand edge) not
be too wide (Hollander 1)

Anything can be scrunched onto the left margin, or centered, but that doesn't make it poetry. Myth can be typed out the same way but that doesn't make it poetic.

Many Native writers use myth. Not all of them make it look like verse, but whatever myth is used is often set aside, given its own page, or used as a chapter or section heading. It is almost always given supra-textual position. Erdrich does that in *The Antelope Wife*. A “myth morsel” begins each section, with beading as the principal occupation of the mythic personalities:

The pattern glitters with cruelty. The blue beads are colored with fish blood, the reds with powdered heart. The beads collect in borders of mercy. The yellows are dyed with the ocher of silence. There is no telling which twin will fall asleep first, allowing the other's colors to dominate, for how long. The design grows, the overlay deepens. The beaders have no other order at the heart of their being. Do you know that the beads are sewn onto the fabric of the earth with endless strands of human muscle, human sinew, human hair? We are as crucial to this making as other animals. No more and no less important than the deer. (Erdrich 73)

Erdrich's use of myth differs from Silko's, but neither writer carries on the "mythic mode" for very long—three or four pages at most in *Ceremony*—and "myth" in both these books is literal. That the "mythic mode" can't be sustained for very long signals that whatever constitutes "myth" and is supposed to be some kind of cultural material is different, in voice, arrangement, intent, and action, from the rest of their novels. There is a reason for this, and it is linked to the literal aspect of "myth." When Silko writes that Hummingbird and Fly took pollen and prayer sticks and went to see old buzzard, they, the Hummingbird and the Fly, did exactly that. When they go down to the fourth world, they are literally going there. Myth is literal, not metaphorical. Metaphor is a situation in which one thing is used to designate another. In many Native American myths, certainly in the ones Silko uses, this is not the case. The action and environment described within the myths is resolutely literal. Most Native American "myths" function this way, which is why they are not poetry. When most people describe myths as poetic, or arrange myth to appear like verse, what they really mean is that it is beautiful or meaningful. They mean that myth is significant. All these things are true, but it is not poetry. Poetry, to dip into Hollander again, makes use of the same elements as fiction—"fable, 'image,' metaphor—all the material of the non-literal." That doesn't even begin to completely define what fiction or poetry is, but it's a start. And the reason we only get snippets of "myth" is that as writers and readers we are conditioned to want and expect novels to function on a different level than that of literality. We know that in novels **what** a character says or does to another character, and **how** it is written, means more than what is physically happening on

the page. When Tayo refrains from killing Emo, he has achieved a victory greater than simply refusing to be a murderer. Mii ezhi-miiziinaad binensan Wenaboohoo, mii geget igo ezhichiged. Mii sa eta.

In Silko and Erdrich, then, the presence of myth, set apart from the prose, outside the action, in small doses, ultimately contradicts the claim for “mythic” or “culturally derived story-telling.” So what is it doing there? Myth is set up to look like verse or epigraph and is intended to suggest that the precepts found there are deep, extra-specially meaningful, awfully important, and outside of and different from the novel form being used by the authors. Myth and language here are not important in and of themselves. They are important because they lend a resonance or deeper sonority to the action of the novel. Tribal myth, devoid of context and continuity, serves only to thicken the prose-stew, like the flour my mother adds to her delicious gravies; it has to do with consistency, not taste.

What Silko and other writers seem to be obsessed with is transcendence, not transmission. She and others seek to step over language, not pass it along. But the language does matter, and how it is used matters even more.

What is amazing to witness is the degree to which writers and critics join with Silko in championing intent over product, desire over language. For your own amusement, try to imagine a world of scholarship about Flaubert in which his ethnic and geographic origins, his class, the history of France in the nineteenth century, the tensions of increasing mechanization and the dissolution of village life, all of this could fill three or four bookshelves, but there is not one book that looks at his artistry. That is the status of Native American literature.

No one could say that Native American literature has even been taken very seriously as literature. If Silko is right, and the medium is of little importance and “words from the heart” are paramount, then novels, and Native American novels in particular, are nothing more than fluff. It would be easier and much shorter for her to stick to didactic speeches. If Silko is right then one would expect to see ethnographies on the bestseller lists instead of Silko’s and Erdrich’s novels. But Silko is wrong, and, like it or not, her words and how she uses them are why she is read at all. Only by not looking at the words, only by not interrogating language could anyone claim that myth and language and culture itself are important in Native American fiction. They are not. They are stage props. They are on the stage but they are not the play.

What then, do myth and Native American languages do in Native American fiction? Myth and Native American language in fiction are not conveyors of cultural sensibilities or cultural truths. But they do have a function and a legacy in the literature. They embody (if myths have bodies), they inscribe, the longing for culture, much as a dream catcher, three hubcaps, and reservation plates embodies our idea of an “Indian Car.” The presence of myth and language suggests an intense emotional longing for culture, but they are not culture. This intense longing (think of Tayo in *Ceremony* or Lipsha in *Love Medicine*) is used to transcend barriers of language, of culture, to make lasting what is otherwise periodized by oral performance and ceremonial enactment.

Native American Literature, if there is such a thing, does not constitute culture. It constitutes desire with seemingly culturally derived forms. All Tayo has to do is want back in and the culture provides a way. For Lipsha, wanting isn’t quite enough (he does, after all, kill his grandfather with a turkey heart), but the purity of his intentions and his longing for medicine are able to perform a healing that transcends culture.

By providing narratives that use desire—desire calling on cultural forms pulled from the contexts and languages that give them meaning—to bridge the gaps between feelings of connection and displacement, we have created narratives that bleed out our rich cultural specificities into the world, translated and trammled. How can anything be a translation if the original ground and primary languages are forgotten?

By declaring that what we write is Indian literature—because of the mere presence of myth, of Native American words, or the origin of the author without first looking closely at language and its use, without looking at art and artistry—we seek to transcend our heritages instead of continuing them. The answer to the question of what makes these stories Indian stories is much the same as what turns the Chevy I mentioned a moment ago into an Indian car—the force of our desire for it to be so. Yet when the Chevy is sold—and here lies the root of the problem—it ceases to be an Indian car. It is just a bad car with bald tires. So, too, with our literature—when we seek to define our genre out of an emotional urge, without taking pleasure in our cultural specificities (language, socially constituted myth, and locally enacted customs) for their own sake, our literature will always be secondary to its concerns. As if the illusion has created the illusionist, not the other way around. We are in the ironic position of trying to arrive at difference through the familiar. What is the point, after all, of

promoting literature in English as the repository of the remnants of oral tradition, mythic tropes, and “ways of being” and then getting angry when “non-Indians” utilize the exact same modes? If the most highly valued words in Indian life and literature are those spoken from the heart, why isn’t anyone in a rush to claim *The Education of Little Tree* for the people? We commit ourselves to the task of having to police the boundaries of our domain by enacting pale versions of our culture on the page while relying on a discourse of blood to protect our cultural resources. This is little more than the literary equivalent of a badge and gun: a symbol of our pledge to protect and serve, and the means to do so.

Our written literature in English is responsive to a set of historical circumstances, inventive in its evasiveness, rich in its suggestive capabilities, but, ultimately, it is not culture. Books are not reality, and prose, in English, is not a culture and shouldn’t be put in the position of trying to duplicate it. When Derrida wrote his famous chapter “On That Dangerous Supplement” his goal was a very simple one, despite his difficult prose—he sought to show that there was nothing necessarily more “primary” about speech, that both speech and writing were posed, constructed, situated, “false” in every aspect. He did not say, as Krupat and Vizenor have crossed his wires, that speech and writing were the same. It seems that Native American writers have made the same mistake in assuming that writing and culture are interchangeable. One can write from a culture. You can suggest myth. You can craft prose to sound “speakerly” but it cannot speak. We can evoke a connection to the past in our writing, but our novels are wishes, fantasies, fairy tales, bounded by our present. Writing, as we should all know by now, doesn’t represent our reality; it creates new realities. Literature has reality, but not life, to offer. And if we insist on asking our writers and demanding of our prose to give us stories that represent instead of create, we ignore the gifts our cultures and languages have left us and limit ourselves in what our art can potentially offer.

What I love about my cultural patrimony is the life it provides, not the material. What is priceless about my language is not what it means to speak Ojibwe, but what Ojibwe, in its beautiful, tricky turns, means. What is beautiful about good prose, language, and experience itself, is specificity—there is more richness in detail than in any generalization, and the use of Native American languages and mythic types in literature, so far, has ignored the trove of beauty which is our lived linguistic heritage for the gushing well of communicability. Perhaps we

have been so misunderstood for so long, we don't know how to stop answering the world, in the broadest possible terms, and this, to me, is the greatest tragedy.

Our experiences and positions as Native Americans inflect our work but shouldn't determine it—the quality of our writing should: the layering of detail, the building of unseen worlds, the uses of our languages as conveyors of beauty and meaning in their own right. Instead of making language to jump across the chasm of culture, we should make our readers jump over the canyon of difference. We should be free to construct narratives unchained from the projects of historicizing and pointing away, always away, from our cultural centers, and instead claim the rights that other writers have enjoyed for centuries: to make larger the worlds of our prose through significant linguistic and cultural detail.

If, instead of seeing literature and language this way, we mix our realities with our fictions so much that our imagined voices become confused with our lived ones, we risk making Statius' mistake of bowing down before Virgil—"forgetting we are empty semblances and taking shadows to be substances." (Alighieri, 224) Or, perhaps more culturally appropriately, the mistake of the common loon (incidentally the chieftain clan among the Ojibwe)—answering his own call echoed back from the next lake over, and, unaware of the mistake, urged to call again, and again—only to remain eternally thwarted.

NOTES

¹ The erratic capitalization in the German is Erdrich's.

² I have, in this instance, preserved the standardized spelling most commonly used with the Ojibwe language, popularly known as the "double vowel system."

³ Special thanks to Virpi Valimaa for her work on word types in Erdrich's use of German and Ojibwe.

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Book Reviews

***Roots and Branches: A Resource of Native American Literature—Themes, Lessons, and Bibliographies.* Dorothea M. Susag. Foreword by Joseph Bruchac. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. ISBN 0-8141-4195-1. 310 pages.**

A non-Native high school teacher in Montana, Dorothea Susag writes in her preface that *Roots and Branches* was born of her “increasing frustration over trying to make regional literatures available” to her students, a quarter of whom are of Native ancestry, primarily Blackfeet, Sioux, Métis, and Chippewa/Cree. Fully recognizing that her own “ethnic, cultural, geographical and educational biases have influenced the philosophy, form, and content of this resource,” Susag demonstrates a sensitivity to and deep respect for tribal people, cultures, and traditions. She demonstrates as well a sensitivity to the students she has worked with, Native and non-Native alike, who, although in differing ways, all can benefit, she says, from reading Native American stories.

In this volume, Susag has gathered an impressive bank of resources for teaching Native American stories; she has created thoughtful lesson ideas and varying approaches (all field-tested) to a range of literary texts. Perhaps just as important—and certainly of great use to the non-Native instructor—she also discusses the problem of many popular but misguided stories that have reinforced the stereotypes and misleading assumptions about Native Americans.

Native voices are the main fare even as Susag explains her rationales and goals. She began her search for materials for the current volume by visiting the seven Montana tribal communities and speaking with them about their literatures; she stresses the importance of all teachers beginning by contacting local tribal communities. Susag’s instructional text is filled out with quotations and poems by well-known contemporary Native writers such as Joy Harjo, Sherman Alexie, N. Scott Momaday, Paula Gunn Allen, Joseph Bruchac, and Linda Hogan, as well as by Native voices less broadly known by the non-Native readers who might use this volume.

The book itself is organized into several useful sections, each filled with examples and specifics, as well as helpful annotated reading lists. She begins with themes, rationales, and subthemes and continues with historical and cultural literary contexts. She then gives details for nine

secondary-level units (readings, discussion questions, resource materials, and supplementary activities), ranging in length from a five-day lesson (“*The Way to Rainy Mountain* by N. Scott Momaday: A Journey into Human Reality through Imagination and History”) to a nine-week unit (“Commitment to Relatives and Community,” featuring a variety of texts such as D’Arcy McNickle’s *Runner in the Sun*, Ella Deloria’s *Waterlily*, Debra Earling’s “Perma Red,” and selected poetry from the anthology *Songs from this Earth on Turtle’s Back*). Though the units were designed for secondary education, many, Susag notes, have been used successfully in college classes, and she includes some suitable for younger students as well.

The next three sections are annotated bibliographies: resources for teachers, anthologies, and Native literary texts. The resources for teachers are further categorized into historical/cultural, educational, and literary criticism. In the historical/cultural, for example, she extensively annotates twelve main texts or sources, then follows these with an additional 32 which are lightly annotated. In the “criticism” category, *SAIL* is listed as “the only scholarly journal that focuses exclusively on American Indian literatures.” The bibliography of literary works, identifying each by genre (although the applicability of Eur-American categories to all Native literatures may be argued), includes novels, short stories, poetry, traditional stories, and biography/autobiography, clearly identifying the “as-told-to” whenever the texts were not written by the Native person himself or herself.

One section which may be particularly helpful to non-Native instructors is that following the three bibliographies, “Non-Native Authors on Native Subjects,” in which Susag explores problems with several popular texts, such as *The Indian in the Cupboard* and *The Education of Little Tree*. Her balanced and careful annotations here clearly identify and explain texts’ specific shortcomings, especially racism and stereotyping; Susag recommends specific other texts students can read to counter the damage. But not all non-Native texts are deemed damaging. Margaret Craven’s *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, for example, is described as *not* problematic, and one, Craig Lesley’s *River Song*, is recommended as “an excellent novel for Native young people, especially those whose ancestors and relatives have survived because of the salmon in the Columbia River” (231).

Even had *Roots and Branches* ended at this point, it would be a solid, useful, carefully written collection of materials as up-to-date as possible given the nature of non-electric publishing. *Roots and Branches* was copyrighted in 1998; Susag cites and reviews texts published as late as 1997, such as Susan Power’s *The Grass Dancer*.

But Susag also includes six appendices as additional and immediate resources for her audience: geographical contexts (including maps of tribes' locations); historical contexts (primary dates and explanations of federal Indian policies, acts, and programs and other events affecting Native populations); sources and definitions of stereotypes about Native peoples; statements of tribal philosophies from the Montana tribes she worked with; a (briefly annotated) list of regional publications for teachers in the north-central U.S.; and names, addresses, and phone/fax numbers of commercial resources. Only three internet sites are listed in this otherwise helpful section.

The limitations of Susag's book (at least those visible to me as a non-Native university instructor of contemporary fiction) are largely those of any text published on paper: lists will inevitably be out of date even before publication, and the physical constraints will necessarily mean that not all texts can possibly be mentioned; for example, in the bibliography of literary texts, only two of Louise Erdrich's novels are included, though both receive generous annotations. And as Susag herself points out, it is probable that some of the texts she lists will be out of print soon, if they are not already.

I would like also to have seen more mention of the increasing and increasingly useful websites on Native literature and arts hosted by various Native communities, many of which have extensive links. But web addresses tend to go "out of print" even more rapidly and with even less warning than paper texts. Still, this is a fine and useful volume. The clear-eyed good sense and comments on approaches to teaching these texts could easily be extended to use in any literature classroom; they would certainly be helpful for use in introducing students of all ethnic backgrounds to the verbal arts of traditional and contemporary Native writers.

As Joseph Bruchac writes in the foreword, "It is especially because of the primacy and the importance of stories that Native American literature is of such value to teachers and this book is such an important guide. . . . This book will be, I am certain, an extremely useful beginning point. It can tell you where to look if you want to find those places where, as my elders put it, 'the stories camp.'"

Pat Nickinson

***How Raven Found the Daylight and Other American Indian Stories* by Paul M. Levitt and Elissa S. Guralnick, Boulder, Colorado: U P of Colorado, 2000. ISBN 0-87081-586-5. 120 pages.**

Paul Levitt and Elissa Guralnick offer several rather pedestrian retellings of some fairly common Native stories in *How Raven Found the Daylight and Other American Indian Stories*. It is unclear who the authors intended as their audience for this book, but my suggestion is that it is best suited as a children's book or for light popular reading. The commentary is left to a minimum, with a perfunctory introduction about pre-contact Native cultures of the Pacific Northwest and their 'special' stories. The stories themselves are enjoyable, although they could be better appreciated in any number of other books.

The common literary motifs of the earth-diver myth, the hero journey, the pregnancy narrative, and some stories about Native-non-Native contact are covered by the authors' selections. The mention of Lytton, B.C., in "Why the Indians Changed Their Homes" is the only indication of where these stories might be from. They are rendered like fairy tales, akin to those of the Grimm Brothers, as is the case with the following excerpt from "The Girl and the Dog": "Princess Never-Knew-A-Care did not want to marry. Dozens of handsome young men asked her father for her hand; but she rejected them all" (43). Princesses are found in European cultures, not Native cultures. Other similar Eurocentric references emerge, such as those in "The Story of Hot and Cold":

"When Snow-Bird invites you to sit on the ice chair," said the grandmother, "you must put the golden staff on the chair before you sit. Otherwise, you'll stick to the seat and freeze to death. The golden staff will keep you warm and protect you from the chair." (15)

I asked myself, in reflecting on the golden staff if, perhaps, the gold came from the mining of the Black Hills? Because the authors do not provide us with any information about the original recordings or the editing of the stories, there is no way of answering queries about the European influences.

It is entirely possible and, indeed, very instructive if the storytellers included these European references in their versions. For example, Harry Robinson's (Okanagan) retelling of the 'Puss 'n Boots' story in his collaboration with Wendy Wickwire, *Write It on Your Heart* (1989), offers us an avenue towards greater cross-cultural

understanding. The opportunity for this same kind of insight could be possible with these stories, but the authors have not allowed for any type of analysis. The author's seem to imply that they are providing some critical contribution by mentioning that the stories are derived from incomplete notes collected by Franz Boas. Boas's collections are a potential source for viable new material but, without indicating any information about what collections were used, the authors have not added any new findings about Boas, his work, or the people with whom Boas worked. Their description of Boas reads much like the fairy tales that they provide:

Many years ago, the anthropologist Franz Boas lived with these Indians and collected their stories. But his collection is in the form of notes, often short and incomplete. The authors of this book have taken those notes and, as authors do, embellished them, using the bright colors of Indian life. We therefore owe a double-debt: one to the world of Franz Boas, without whom there would be no record of these tales, and one to the Indians of the Pacific Northwest, whose rich and fertile minds are a source of the first American literature. (xii)

The authors fail to realize that there is, of course, an oral record of 'these tales' in the Native communities from whom the tales are derived. Their decision to 'embellish' the stories is left without any further elaboration and serves only to devalue Boas' attention to detail. I would suggest that readers instead read the Grimm Brothers, Harry Robinson, the actual collections of Franz Boas or any number of children's books written by several talented and respected Native writers.

Larissa Petrillo

***Indian Giving: Economies of Power in Indian-White Exchanges.* David Murray. A Volume in the Series: Native Americans of the Northeast: Culture, History, and the Contemporary. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 2000. ISBN 1-55849-244-5. 258 pp.**

In an essay on tribal gaming, Gerald Vizenor once mused about European Americans' fascination with money and its effect on Native people. "Luther Standing Bear," Vizenor observed, "must have wondered about a civilization that would count coups with coins." And yet, Vizenor continued, counting coups with coins in casinos could be Native Americans' last "representation of tribal sovereignty." Since contact with Europeans, Native American tribal sovereignty has revolved around sometimes strange and complex networks of exchange—beaver, wampum, gold, coins, poker chips. Neither Indians nor Europeans, however, have ever agreed among themselves or with each other about what meaning such exchanges constitute for their respective cultures. In the academy, the question of the meaning of exchange for Native peoples has for thirty years shaped many of the central debates concerning assimilation, syncretism, and sovereignty. Were Native people "keepers of the game," or merely counting coups with coins?

With the publication of *Indian Giving*, David Murray enters the fray, arguing that "western societies' thinking about their own political organization and economy since the sixteenth century has been based on a series of implicit oppositions between primitive and civilized societies" (1). Faced with the daunting task of trying to make sense of Indian-white exchange in the early modern era, Murray sets out to reconstruct "the whole discursive economy, the full imaginative and symbolic ramifications of relations" of seventeenth-century Indian-white exchange, thereby avoiding treating the subject "in more narrow political or economic terms" (9). The early modern transatlantic economy becomes "a system in which we find a circulation of signs creating and sustaining a set of values" (9).

In general terms, Murray's project seems quite promising. His seven-chapter study opens with a general examination of the rhetoric of giving in early discovery and settlement texts. Murray demonstrates that exchange is a highly charged activity, and that when objects are exchanged across cultures (as they were in early America), "such transformations of meaning and value . . . show the inadequacy of trying to separate economic and spiritual realms." Early modern cross-cultural exchange also sheds light on theoretical models in the present, according to Murray. A close examination of seventeenth-century Indian-white commerce throws into question the "long-standing fundamental distinction between use value and exchange value" (193) that has obtained in western social theory since Marx.

From a general statement of his argument's theoretical underpinnings, Murray moves on to tackle the tropes of abundance

found in early modern descriptions of the New World. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, Murray encounters representations of a bountiful virgin land uneasily juxtaposed with images of “Europeans as givers and . . . the power of giving” (60). The logical contradictions of these representations are striking. Why would a plentiful place, a *locus amoenus*, need anything from anyone? Why would the explorers need to depict themselves as benevolent patrons in this Eden?

The answer lies, Murray believes, in the Europeans’ desire to work out their anxieties about giving and taking—royal sovereignty, noblesse oblige. Thus in John Smith’s *Map of Virginia* (1609), Powhatan becomes a “monarch,” and his mock-coronation by Captain Newport, a “mixed message” of forced obeisance, Native resistance, and “the opposition of hard-nosed self-interest and the rhetoric of benevolence and abundance.” Contact with the New World appears to have lead Europeans to face the dangers of “excess” head on, as too many new things and new people exceeded their prior categories of understanding and restraint.

The Europeans’ Indian-language glossaries particularly interest Murray in this regard, and he turns to Roger Williams, whose *A Key into the Language of America* (1634) contains poems, narratives, and word lists that embody “the most complex account of contact produced in early New England” (93). In some ways, however, it is the metaphoric power of Williams’s title that most interests Murray. Williams’s “key” inscribes within itself “the idea of locked secrets . . . the need for interpretation and control over meaning” (95). Roger Williams used Indian words as a key to “deconstruct” the European’s appeal to aristocratic reciprocity. Indian words and things offered Williams a space within which to explore his own social marginality and to argue for a more reciprocitous system of exchange. Almost alone among his European contemporaries, Roger Williams understood the translations necessary to unlock the meaning of exchange between Indians and whites. In his final comments on the subject, Williams explained to posterity that he had been deeded Indian land in Narragansett Bay, “by gift” from Canonicus, the leader of the Narragansetts, thus distinguishing his ownership from outright European “purchase.”

But what did a Native person like Canonicus intend by such exchanges? To answer this question, Murray looks to wampum. Because wampum was a medium of exchange present in many eastern woodlands cultures before European contact, Murray feels that it can be used to chart the networks of “demand and desire” at work in Indian-white exchange from a native point of view. Murray challenges claims

made by Lynn Ceci and others that the wampum trade in the post-contact period “shifted from giftgiving and reciprocal exchange to a more capitalistic market exchange” (120). Instead, Murray believes that wampum reveals “the difficulty of identifying criteria of value in exchange” (120). Wampum is “the prime example of a hybrid object” whose meaning as “use, ornament, and money are in an unstable relation” (129). Like glossaries and landscape descriptions, wampum itself shows that exchange in the New World operated at a fundamentally metaphorical level.

Yet wampum was not the most significant item exchanged between the two peoples, and *Indian Giving* concludes with a two-chapter meditation on “the gift of religion.” As Murray reads it, the rhetoric of Christian salvation in Indian-white interactions—like the rhetorics of abundance, words, and things—contained contradictory impulses. On the one hand, Christian missionaries discussed the Covenant of Works, a rational exchange system whereby a convert might, by doing good, signify his or her conversion to Christian benevolence. On the other hand, ministers emphasized Grace, an irrational “indwelling of the spirit” that Murray terms a rhetoric of “excess and sacrifice.” Murray argues that missionaries were trapped between “two sorts of economies—possessive individualism and sacrifice and excess” (173).

For Europeans, questions of sovereignty were again at the center of the exchange. Was God or the individual the seat of sovereignty in the Christian soul? In contrast, for Native people, a “complex agenda” emerged. By acknowledging that European Christianity did have some “magical powers,” many Indians paradoxically engaged in a “reaffirmation of their own scheme of values.” They accepted alike European trade and religious objects into their own cultural systems as magical things that circulated within mutable “economies, changing their nature in the process” (194). Murray concludes that while Christian missionary discourse was among the most powerful modes of exchange brought by Europeans to the new world, “the gift of religion . . . cannot be separated from other exchanges, and neither can the message be authorized and kept from changing” (197).

Indian Giving closes with a curious scene of exchange taken from Stephen Long’s 1833 account of an expedition to find the source of St. Peter’s River. In the passage, an Indian maiden emerges from the woods to hand explorers printed European religious tracts and then melts back into the forest. Without a formal summation to his argument, Murray lets this image stand as a gloss on his text: “it is a

gift, variously received but not appropriated—or received and returned—or received and transformed” (199).

It is an unsatisfying end to an unsatisfying book, despite the interesting wealth of textual materials Murray cites and the subject matter he explores. *Indian Giving* never seems to get beyond remarking on the “complexity” or slipperiness of exchange. Readers who are curious about the historical context for many of the exchanges described in this book will be exasperated by the way Murray starts a subject only to abandon it a few sentences later.

Even though Murray claims to be focused on the seventeenth century, he offers primary texts in support of his thesis that are drawn from historically and culturally divergent periods—ranging from Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (1596) to Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd* (1891). Protestant and Catholic doctrine are sometimes elided, despite Murray’s many protests to the contrary, so that “Christian conversion” sometimes seems the same at all times and for all people. From all the Christian missionaries working in the early modern era, Murray chooses to discuss at length only David Brainerd, the eighteenth-century New Light missionary—an odd choice since, again, Murray claims in the Introduction that “the main focus of the book is on the seventeenth century.” As Sandra Gustafson has shown, Brainerd’s experience with Native Americans is indeed a fascinating chapter in American rhetorical and cultural history, but in the context of Murray’s argument, there seems little justification for singling him and his work out for such detailed analysis.

To be fair, *Indian Giving* isn’t really about history. Nor is it about discourse. It is about metaphor, the “power of the imagination at key points in the enterprise” of North American colonization. Yet even on this level, as a guide to the complex metaphors of seventeenth-century inter-cultural exchange—and to the ability of such metaphors to help us see anew, to problematize, to “deconstruct”—*Indian Giving* does not allow for the power of the Native people’s imagination to show through. It certainly never lets their critical or political writings intervene.

One could argue that this book is primarily about the *seventeenth-century*, a period with few extant Native texts. True enough. But a quick examination of the archival record suggests a few tantalizing possibilities that Murray overlooks. *Native Writings in Massachusetts* (American Philosophical Society, 1988), a study of Native signature evidence by Kathleen Bragdon and Ives Goddard, would seem to offer a good place to begin a study of Indian-white exchange in seventeenth-

century America in that most of the early Native writing we now have is related to land tenure, deeds, and tribal sovereignty. But although Murray cites Bragdon's other work, he never mentions this body of material, material that would seem crucial to his argument.

These are scant texts it's true, and of little metaphorical power, but if Murray were to have opened up his field of vision for native texts as he has done for European texts—let's say to 1830—he could have availed himself of several important works. As Hillary Wyss's *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity and Native Community in Early America* (U of Massachusetts P, 2000) demonstrates, the archival materials for the period from 1700-1830 contain a wealth of texts produced by Christianized Indians. These materials could have served Murray on two important counts.

First, they would have provided ample examples of Native intellectuals confronting the discourses of exchange that surrounded them every day. One thinks immediately of Samson Occom's famous remark that he was paid only 1/12 the amount of his white missionary counterparts, or of William Apess's ironic explanation of Native people's suffering: "Their land is in common stock, and they have nothing to make them enterprising." Second, these archives would have helped close a significant gap in Murray's argument. Because they collect primarily the work of Native converts, they reflect the discursive effect of Christian conversion on a Native population and demonstrate how the "economy" of salvation works itself out in the Indians' own metaphors and imaginations. *Indian Giving* opens again a central question in the history of Indian-white relations and offers a wide-ranging set of texts as evidence of the slipperiness of cross-cultural exchange in early North America. It still remains, however, for other scholars to shape Murray's local insights and stimulating bibliography into a deeper historical and discursive analysis. We need to know more precisely how early modern European capital expansion in the new world combined with state formation, print culture, Christian missionary endeavors, and Native cultural improvisation and statecraft to create new social formations and perhaps even new, cross-cultural modern subjectivities.

Phillip Round

***Telling the Stories: Essays on American Indian Literatures and Cultures.* Elizabeth Hoffman Nelson and Malcolm A. Nelson, eds. American Indian Studies Volume 7. New York: Peter Lang, 2001. ISBN 0-8204-3954-1. 186 pages.**

Attuned as we are to issues of orality and literacy, scholars of Native American literature know only too well the difficulties of shifting from oral to literate modes of discourse in cultures. Those difficulties also pervade our own discourse. Case in point: translating from academic conference papers to a book. As someone who has edited such a publication, I am all too aware of the difficulties involved, but there are significant possibilities inherent in the undertaking as well. Books from conferences are good. Their breadth casts a wide net for potential readers while their content is specific enough to interest the specialist on a particular author or work. There is also the sense of dialogue that derives from various approaches and styles that the academic conference invites, from the virtual line-by-line reading of a book nearly completed to the more exploratory and inquisitive style of someone who is just fleshing out an idea. Books from conferences are also bad. The breadth of presentations sometimes turns into chasms across which we can barely see each other much less engage the argument. And sometimes the depth of papers is such that only a few other people in the world (who usually are not in attendance) can offer a response to the paper. All that is to say that books published from conference papers are bound to be like academic conferences: good and bad at the same time.

Elizabeth Hoffman Nelson and Malcolm A. Nelson do, however, attempt to convey in print some sense of the setting of the conference and thus invite readers into the larger dynamics that the editors are attempting to represent. The Preface contains three delightful vignettes from three different American Culture Association conferences and a brief statement from Elizabeth Hoffman Nelson describing the source of the essays, which is the 1997 American Culture Association meeting in San Antonio, Texas. It is clear from the Preface that the reader is invited to expand traditional notions of the “academic conference” and be informed by and through storytelling itself. But Hoffman Nelson is aware of the difficulty of moving from the oral to the written and notes in the Preface that some conference stories demonstrate the “spontaneous orality that prevents these storytellers from being included in a book like this” (xi). If nothing else, this book inspires one to attend the American Culture Association conferences.

As Hoffman Nelson notes, the breadth of the collection is wide, so I will attempt arbitrarily to present the essays in terms of kinds of interests of potential readers. Those readers with a theoretical bent, for example, will be gratified by the very first essay by Scott Manning Stevens titled "Mother Tongues and Native Voices: Linguistic Fantasies in the Age of Encounter." Stevens offers a model for understanding European-Native contact in linguistic terms. In his model Europeans pass through three stages of linguistic (mis)understanding: 1) linguistic denial, where indigenous people are seen as blank slates needing to be written upon by cultured language; 2) linguistic fantasy, where Natives now have language and what they are saying reflects and supports European notions of divine right among other things; and 3) linguistic despair, where "the deeper the missionaries went into the language the more profound the differences they encountered" (10). By the end of the third stage, Europeans address their linguistic despair by offering a programmatic solution: "Natives [must] cease to speak their own languages if they were to be both civilized and saved" (12).

Heatherly Brooke Bucher interprets a Makiritare creation myth in terms of storytelling and gender dynamics by employing the insights of Maurice Blanchot's notions of the "work" as something that exists in and above the relationship of reader-writer-text. The gist of her argument is that the creation myth can be interpreted allegorically in particular contexts in ways that shift gender dynamics. "In the end," she argues, "we discover that the text wins out over the gender relations present, and the desires of both teller and listener to capture and hold the story for longer than a moment" (36).

Sidner J. Larson offers both theoretical and practical insights on autobiography and identity in his essay titled "Constituting and Preserving the Self through Writing." The essay is a wonderful survey of issues of identity and how those issues are negotiated in autobiography. For example, Larson notes in relation to his own autobiography *Catch Colt*: "I had always found authority problematic, which I had been taught to believe was the natural consequence of being part Indian, which equalled bad seed, juvenile delinquent, half-breed, and other negative associations. I did not yet possess the words and concepts to understand that what I really resented was being defined from outside, in ways that conflicted significantly with my own internal discourse" (61).

The bulk of the essays in *Telling the Stories* focuses on readings of particular works, and it is here that those interested in particular authors or works will find much to engage. Jeri Zulli, for example, furnishes a

very interesting “postcolonial reading” of D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*. “Perception in D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*” is both enlightened close reading and troublesome application of theory. The insights on perception in the novel are welcome (as is the discussion of this novel in general; there is much more here than has been written). But Zulli is unable (at least in this short paper) to escape the very trap that she argues befalls postcolonial critics, namely, the temptation to set up binaries (Native and European, invader and invaded, etc.). When she states that Archilde, the protagonist of *The Surrounded*, is “anti-binary,” she has set up another binary (binary and antibinary). This difficulty can be overcome, as Bakhtin does for example, but it takes much more space to do so. Still, the argument as a whole is a good one—characters in *The Surrounded* are conflicted in many ways and represent many different ideologies and positions at the same time. As she notes, “*The Surrounded* complicates our understanding of racial perception essentialization and dispels notions that the colonized and the colonizers constitute binary, opposed positions” (79).

John K. Donaldson’s essay “Native American Sleuths: Following in the Footsteps of the Indian Guides” contains more than a logical trap; it fails to engage existing critiques. While Donaldson does a remarkable job of introducing us to the vast array of detective fiction that involves Native peoples, he does not give due credit to Ward Churchill’s argument in *Fantasies of the Master Race* that Hillerman is using Navajo culture merely as a backdrop to enhance the notion that “ratiocination,” the mode of logical inquiry followed by Western detectives, is superior to other epistemologies. Even more troubling perhaps is that Donaldson has missed the explicit critique of Hillerman and his ilk in Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*. In fact it seems to be the case that Alexie is painting Hillerman as the Indian killer in the sense that he is appropriating Native culture in a way that leaves it lifeless in the end. Regardless of whether one accepts Churchill’s and Alexie’s positions on this matter, Donaldson’s statement at the end of his essay is a bit too easy if not troublesome: “It is in this tradition of exploring our national unity, our ties to each other, our connection with the land, our links to a common past that the new novels with Native American sleuths belong, rather than in the now outworn Cooperesque tradition of the Indian sidekick” (122).

Space does not permit me to discuss every essay in the collection. There is, however, most likely something of interest to most every person interested in Native American cultures and criticism. Jeane C. Breinig’s discussion of Alaska Haida narratives is a refreshing

interdisciplinary exercise that includes politics, literature, and storytelling with an on-the-ground perspective. Malcolm A. Nelson's "These Were Mari Sandoz's Sioux" is an interesting and helpful exercise in literary history. Blanca Chester's "Western Fictions in Welch's *Fools Crow*: Languages of Landscape and Culture" is instructive and engaging, as is Maurice Collins's "King and Kodachrome: *Green Grass, Running Water*'s Models for Non-Native Participation." Carrie Etter's essay on Sherman Alexie's sonnets will appeal to poetry critics with its detailed analysis of endings and the history of Western sonnets. "Tales of Burning Love: Louise Erdrich's *Scarlet Letter*" by Tom Matchie seemed a bit of a stretch to me, but the argument is certainly worth considering, and the essay ends up being a good review of the novel. There is also an interesting essay on pedagogy by Conrad Shumaker titled appropriately enough "Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*."

I have saved one essay for last, and I do so because it is the best essay in the collection. Robert M. Nelson's "Rewriting Ethnography: The Embedded Texts in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*" embodies his well-known theory of *Ceremony*, namely, that in including traditional Laguna narratives Silko was repatriating the stories that had been told to Franz Boas and his student Elsie Clews Parsons. The irony of course is that Boas and Parsons were anthropologists collecting the stories to "preserve" them while Silko's novel containing these continues to sell and remains one of the most assigned texts on college campuses. The irony is not lost on Nelson: "Like Ishi in his glass case at Berkeley, authentic Keresan texts, like their tellers, qualified as museum pieces, and Laguna was as much an archaeological as an ethnographic site . . . It is a telling comment, then, that the Boas book is out of print, impossible to come by except through interlibrary loan" (53). Nelson's thesis is profound and soundly argued, and his essay itself is an exemplar of how to do contemporary criticism, especially of Native American texts. Always respectful of the text and the culture that produced it, Nelson is also creative in his interpretation. For example, his argument that the embedded texts in *Ceremony* are both literally and figuratively the "backbone" of the story demonstrates both the genius of the novel and the value and uses of criticism. Such a combination of clarity and innovation is increasingly rare in academic writing.

Contributors

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Larissa Petrillo recently completed her PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Her dissertation, "Contemporary Lakota Identity: Melda and Lupe Trejo on 'Being Indian,'" contextualizes the life stories of a Lakota / Mexican couple from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

Phillip Round is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Iowa and author of *By Nature and By Custom Cursed* (University Press of New England, 1999). He has published in *American Indian Quarterly*, *Arizona Quarterly*, *Early American Literature*, and *The Iowa Review*.

Greg Salyer is Associate Professor Humanities and Chair of the Department of Literary Studies at Huntingdon College. He is the author of *Leslie Marmon Silko* in the *Twayne United States Authors* series.

Due to a production error, the following biographical notes were omitted from SAIL 13.4:

Lori Burlingame is an Assistant Professor of English at Eastern Michigan University, where she specializes in Native American literature. She has published an interview with Leslie Silko in *Bookpress* and articles on D'Arcy McNickle, Leslie Silko, and James Welch.

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Chris LaLonde is Associate Professor of English and of Native American Studies, and Chair of the English Department, at the State University of New York, College at Oswego. He has published on contemporary Native American fiction and poetry and on teaching Native American literatures. *Grave Concerns, Trickster Turns: The Novels of Louis Owens* will be published by the University of Oklahoma Press in spring 2002.

Rowena McClinton is an Assistant Professor of History at Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville.

Annette Van Dyke is an Associate Professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield, where she teaches Native American women's literature, women's spirituality, and other women's literatures. She has published numerous articles on Leslie Marmon Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, and S. Alice Callahan.

Craig Womack (Oklahoma Creek-Cherokee) teaches in the Native American Studies Department of the University of Lethbridge. He is the author of *Drowning in Fire*, a novel, and *Red on Red*, a literary history of the Muscogee Creek Nation.

Poetry

Authority Figure

I sit in class watching, observing
fellow students trying to outdo each other,
being “esoteric” using every big word they just learned
I shake my head, every class the same.
I think, “This is not my version of knowledge,
this is not how one earns respect.”
every day my worlds collide, that
30 minute ride from the rez to campus
alters my perceptions,
flips my world as a shutter closes and
gray area moves in
like a fog or thief in the night
my parents never finished high school
never went to college,
but are two of the most intelligent people I know
respected Elders of the tribe
wise beyond 90% of the people
walking on this campus,
than the so-called intellectuals I
have to spar with every day
walking this fine line between academia and
rez life can wear one down
there is a delicate balance to be maintained
my family understands the necessity of classes, essays, and stories
but in my mind, I think, “This doesn’t put food on the table.”
. . . . not yet anyway
Is all this practical?
I laugh & question that every day I cross that
invisible line, that boundary drawn in the sand
the intellectuals think it’s fascinating, interesting
to be “Indigenous.”
I’m looked at as a specimen, a rarity, lab rat,
THE authority on Native issues, sovereignty, treaty rights,
masots, language, trickster stories, traditions
of EVERY tribe in the country
yeah . . . that’s me,
I got it all in my back pocket.

but . . . come to the rez, find it for yourself.
Know where it is? In every pair of Native eyes you see.
Ask them all, every question that fills your book.
you may learn, but will you
UNDERSTAND?

Sally Brunk

Auntie Moon

Beading
my Auntie Moon beads
lines of her face lead to a story
experience and avenue of life
a busy highway with no end
a face dark and beautiful
so like my Mother's
deep brown eyes of knowledge
have seen a tapestry of
tragedy and happiness
hands that do intricate beadwork
have nurtured babies, held loved ones
fought racist people
small arthritic fingers
have threaded together generations
memories and histories of ancestors
those colored beads become a legacy
story to be retold, never forgotten

Auntie Moon beads

Sally Brunk

Skin On Skin

five little girls
Kiowa, Pawnee, Ojibwa, Choctaw, Crow
we were babies out of our teens
hundreds, a thousand miles
separating us from loved ones
Haskell Indian Junior College
was our home

a simple walk to the 24-hour grocery store
“Strength in numbers,” Montana said
this statement was true, but not for us
Dillon’s, hangout to skinheads
they were present
as reliable as the locusts that claimed
everything in Kansas that summer

it started with taunts through the store
down one aisle then another
continued into the muggy heat
that took one’s breath away
hearts racing,
we turned toward our version of home

we kept close to one another
“Stay near the houses, they wouldn’t want
witnesses,” Jocelyn whispered.
we could see the rooftop of our dorm,
when they made their move
then we made ours

run! Is what instinct told us
what Mother said to do in that situation
I could feel ancestors next to me
felt long black hair brushing against my
sweaty
face, was it my own or someone else’s?

We were caught in the tall dry grass
bordering campus
I felt dead dry stalks pushing through my
t-shirt
realizing nothing thrives in this state
except the hate which was delivering
blows to my face and head

I swallowed blood, smelled the fear
coming from the skinhead
who was kicking me in the ribs
I heard cries, screams
and above everything else . . . rage

I remember a flash of black boots
I remember the words
“Dirty stupid squaws, get out of our state!”
“All you stupid squaws need haircuts!”
then I saw the flash of a switchblade
gleaming in the hot September sun

I heard my Grandmother’s voice screaming,
“Move, Makoose, move!”
I felt the strength & love of my family with me
as I began to kick, scream and rage
against my attacker
my friends did the same,
I believe our helpers were with us

soon we heard screaming brakes on asphalt
I saw a flurry of Indian boys
friends on the football team
just getting out of practice

my last image of my attacker
is his black t-shirt gleaming in the sun
as he ran with his fellow skinheads
for the high ground, like a war party
was on their trail

I felt strong arms lifting me up
holding me, trying to stop
the bleeding from my nose, lip and eye
the wound near my ribs
these scars I still carry

they never found our attackers
I guess all skinheads look alike right?

I didn’t tell my parents for two years
when I did, we had a healing ceremony
for the whole family

sometimes, late at night, nightmares haunt me
I wake up sweating, shaking & clutching my
ribs
where your knife made contact

someday you, like my scars
will fade away

My Grandmother tells me this.

Two Places

Near Chipley, Florida
Grandpa stopped the truck.
“That place is slam-full of deer.”
He pointed with his chin
to a dense knot of cypress
growing in knee-deep water.
A field of white pine saplings,
straight as arrows,
covered the distance to the older trees
in orderly rows.
“We used to hunt there,
but the lumber company
bought it all up.
They rent it out to rich boys
from Tallahassee and Jacksonville.”

He eased the clutch and
the truck, still in third gear,
bumped forward again
on the whitesand/red sand road.
Shadows from the ditch trees
stuttered on the dashboard.

He stopped the truck
near a collapse of grey cypress boards.
“That’s where your great-granny was born.
Her daddy, old man Tharp, killed a man
with a tomahawk.
They called him ‘Walkin’ Man’
because he walked wherever he went.”
We walked past the boards
to the bushes on the fence.
He stopped to relieve himself
and I gathered the raspberries
the deer had left.

In Chicago
we went to the Field museum,
and while we were standing in line

he wet his grey, bowlegged workpants.
Ashamed, he told me what he had done and I
helped him find the men's room.

Grandma was slumped on a marble bench
waiting for us.
She was too tired to see
Sitting Bull's saddle
or Chief Joseph's shirt
or listen to the tape recorded
words of the safely dead Joseph
explaining why the Indians would fight,
no more forever.

We walked past a fierce, fiberglass
Sioux in Full Battle Dress
and sat down on benches in a hollow
Actual Iroquois Lodge.
It stands in the east wing of the basement,
made of cement and pine logs.
Grandpa put his Stetson in his lap to
hide his wet pants, but revealed
Mr. Walker's black hair.

A loud, blonde lady in moccasins
explained all about Indian life
while Grandpa's pants dried.

Dennis Cutchins

Far -Off Screams

I have taught many how to remember
learning myself to forget the me and my
I have been led through places, faces,
the cold doorways of December, but
most of all, I've practiced saying goodbye.

I have taken leave of the Rez in which I was born
that dirty place with a soul
I have left and tried to be reconciled with
Leaving
the land where I was born
Now how to explain?

This attachment to desert and mountain
to a language that was mine only briefly,
to faces unseen, places I've never been.
What invisible cord is this
revealed only across distances,
feeding this exiled heart?

How shall I speak your names
so many have taken them before
making the sacred and profane.
No, 'tis not the appeal of your anthems
or postcards--though yours are misunderstood
and perhaps beautiful yet--
Most sentiments of places are false.

But this, this much is true--
I was born there,
and when I came, crying easily,
your sorrow-filled air filled my lungs
The air I took had such things in it:
murmurings and voices
sounds I am bound to
decipher, cries and outcries
this mute soul understands
the mind on dimly so.

Stories

the air had stories of coyote
stories I need to be re-taught
because given me when I had no words--
these stories remain though others

now have entered my heart.

So when you were taken from me
and I was left solitary
bow loop lopped off
from all your scents and sounds,
I tried to recall: what was it
your incomparable air had carried?
What strange memory left lingering in my soul?

In Europe's famous capitals
school's taught so well in that litany
of London, Vienna, Frankfurt, Paris, Athens
these eyes went hungry.
Whose words could I read, whose face
could show me what I needed and need
to find? and years went by.

Now, if I strung like Whitman
the names of all your treasures
all your mountains
all your deserts
if I listed your languages
your famous rivers
would they make for me, at last,
a passage to you?
Would they summon, like the power
you said stories have,
if arranged and pronounced just so,
would they bring me to you?

They have names for every kind of loss:
loss forbidden and permissible
loss within bounds and without, loss
of kin, friend, wisdom, loss

of culture, of tradition
that should be left to remain
but is not, but where

where are the words I crave
for the unparalleled
squalor of you?
For this hunger that remains
for your landscape.

The stones you lodged in my heart
the stones that came
from stories you did not give to me
and the stories you did.

The stories that kept piling
from an adobe church you would not save
and from the graveyards you did.
The stones your women quarried
with famished hearts
the stones you gave them to eat
these kept piling over the years--
in my bag from city to city
I have carried your stones.

There are composed faces, now decomposed:
entire bodies walled in stone
of fathers and sons with long hair
mad shaman who preferred your stones
to forced conversions
There are stones your priests commanded
on the backs of men,
young and old backs arching
into a mausoleum for the world to see.

Now on the banks of the Rio Grande
your chimneys are sucking the moonlight
off of stones men wept to carry
and then wept to see
the wonder they had wrought of stones.
Now who will save them, invaders hold

you, monumental stone by sacred stone--
if not yet sold, you will be.

If stone by stone now
if I break this heart
all of its silent
stony hull, then
over stones
will the rivers break free
will they take a new lake into their streams
into coyote's far-off screams?

David Erben

Indian Hair

Little did we know
when the clouds came
I would be gleaning
in midsummer fields
of your hair
the stipples of your brow
sheaves for dry seasons.

When the rains cease
I want to think
this weave of hair
strand by strand
in this seizure of hand--
memory so stranded
will be plenty. Will it?

This minute, this short burst all I heed:
everything I need in it.

David Erben

Visiting the Seminole Rez in Tampa, Florida

Smoke shop, bingo palace, curio shop for the non-curious, wild life for the tamed, and for the curious a museum with Osceola's carved head rooted above the ground where the skulls and bones are, his headless body elsewhere. Medicine man (chief artifact?) Bobby in his splendid patchwork English indulges us: say Chihantamo? (how are you) say Hintjola! (fine!). The museum placards are reticent about Osceola, this warrior who dies of a sore throat. They don't say anything about the sentimental Dr. who kept his head (chopped off in the post-mortem) and later tied to the bedpost of his two sons when they misbehaved, their own private bogeyman. This much-gifted head that was then gifted to the Dr.'s daughter, whose husband gifted it to a medical school, where it floated in a jar, handsome in formaldehyde eternity. . . Among the images that stay is the lily woman legend/painting:--the fish in the river complained they alone had no protection from the sun. So Wimauma, waiting for her lover by the bank, is sent to do the needful. Inside the river she stands, from her submerged head rises a stalked lily, from each outstretched hand, a sheltering lily pad. Each time she thinks of her lover greenly in the water, the lily unfurls . . .

David Erben

Contributors

Sally Brunk, Anishinabe/Lac du Flambeau, is a Senior majoring in English at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan. She is active in the AISES Chapter, and her chapter won Chapter of the Year for 2001 at the AISES National Conference. She was born and raised on the Keweenaw Bay reservation in Baraga, Michigan where her father was a member. She is a member of her mother's tribe, Lac du Flambeau, in Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin. She is the storyteller of her family and writes in hopes that people will learn to understand and to gain knowledge from hearing about experiences as Native people. She says, "If I have affected one person with my writing, I have done much."

Dennis Cutchins is an associate professor of English at Brigham Young University, where he teaches American and Western literature, as well as film and literature. Originally from northern Florida, he earned a PhD in American literature, specializing in contemporary Native American novels, from the Florida State University in 1997. He has published articles on the works of Louise Erdrich and Leslie Silko, though this is his first published poem.

David Erben teaches Native American literature and Cultures at the University of Toledo and is also a poet, although chiefly a performance / spoken word poet, and writer.

Announcements and Opportunities

Call for Papers

Cultural Productions of Women of Color

We are seeking papers and presentations (10-12pp) that treat the cultural productions of women of color as sites of philosophical reflection and insight. Cultural productions might include a broad range of aesthetic modes of statement such as literature/poetry, painting, sculpture, photography, film and video art, screen/playwriting, dance/choreography, music, public/avante garde theater, etc. Genres are loosely conceived such that graffiti, for example, could be considered as a form of visual art, and other modes of statement such as body-piercing, tattooing, and hair-weaving could be treated as forms of corporeal art.

Papers might explore how various cultural productions emerge out of, in response to, and/or as constituting forms of political and cultural resistance to oppression in its many manifestations. Authors might consider how women of color draw on and rework philosophical systems and perspectives on culture and the human condition generally, and how they do so light of their own visions of social change and their lived experiences. Essays might also consider how a particular medium of statement is related or contributes to such reformulations. Additional approaches could include analyzing cultural productions as encoding philosophical projects on varying topics such as social change, consciousness and culture, language and subjectivity, and knowledge/theory and praxis. Treatments might also entail exploring the ways that cultural productions of women of color contribute to different traditions of critical thought such as Africana and feminist philosophies, Confucianism, Marxism-Leninism, existentialism, Francophone Negritude, critical theory, post/modernism, psychoanalysis, etc. Other approaches and topics are welcomed.

Ultimately, we plan to prepare an edited collection on this topic. Toward that end, we seek to generate interest and encourage development of these themes by organizing presentation panels at various relevant academic conferences, including:

NEED DATES, CITIES, DEADLINES

1. American Philosophical Association Meetings:

a. Eastern Division: December 27-30, 2002 in Philadelphia, PA

**Deadline for papers and abstracts: February 21, 2002

b. Pacific Division: TBA

**Deadline for papers and abstracts: June 1, 2002.

c. Central Division: April 24-26 in Cleveland, OH

**Deadline for papers and abstracts: June 1, 2002.

2. Modern Language Association: December 27-30, 2003 in New York.

**Deadline for abstracts: March 21, 2002

3. International Association for Philosophy and Literature: Annual meeting is usually held in May or June. Updates on 2003 location and specific dates will be posted asap.

**Deadline for abstracts: September 1, 2002.

4. NAAAS: National Consortium of Association of African American Studies, Asian American Studies, and Native American Studies: February 11-16, 2003 in Houston, TX.

**Deadline for abstracts: July 1, 2002.

5. National Women's Studies Association: Conference will take place in June 2003. Updates on the specific location and dates will be posted asap.

**Deadline for abstracts: September 1, 2002.

6. Midsouth Philosophy Conference: February 2003 in Memphis, TN.

**Deadline for abstracts: September 1, 2002

7. Radical Philosophy Conference: November 2004. Updates on specific location and dates will be posted asap.

**Deadline for abstracts: December 1, 2002

Please send abstracts (250-500 words) along with a covering letter indicating interest and availability for participating in one of the meetings listed above. Abstracts and inquiries may be directed to one or both of the parties below:

Angela Cotton
Women's Studies Program
105 Old Chemistry Building
SUNYSB
Stony Brook, NY 11794-3456
516.632.7652 (phone)
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Call for Submissions

BORDER TOWNS: MARGINS AS PLACE

Edited by Simon J. Ortiz and Laura Tohe

Writers are invited to submit creative nonfiction works to be considered for publication in **BORDER TOWNS: MARGINS AS PLACE** which will be a look at the towns or places prominently near or just off Indian (Native American or Indigenous homelands) reservations such as Gallup and Farmington, New Mexico, Winslow and Flagstaff, Arizona, Rapid City and Winner, South Dakota, or even larger “towns” like Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, Tucson. These writings will also be a look from within the actual places-towns themselves. Writing can consider the social and political marginalization of Native people and others since too often that’s what “border towns” are manifestations of and symbolize. Writing can be by Indigenous (Native Americans) writers or by non-Indigenous (non-Native Americans) writers.

Please send 10-15 page submissions by August 31, 2002 to

Simon J. Ortiz
276 St. George Street
Ste. 204
Toronto, Ontario N15R 2P6
Canada

and/or

Laura Tohe
Department of English
Arizona State University at Tempe
PO Box 870302
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MAJOR TRIBAL NATIONS AND BANDS MENTIONED IN THE ESSAYS OF THIS ISSUE

Compiled by Daniel Justice

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

References are listed by nation, author, government address, and primary governmental officer. Some nations welcome outside scholarly inquiry, while others limit access of information to tribal members or to non-members with whom there is a long-term relationship.

The most up-to-date resource for those tribal nations in those lands claimed by the U.S. government is the Bureau of Indian Affairs' website (www.doi.gov/bia/tribes/entry.html); be aware, however, that on occasion this site has been disconnected by the Department of the Interior for various legal and political reasons. The site was accessible at the date of the printing of this issue. Another good resource, and one that includes "terminated" and non-federally recognized communities as well as those with government-to-government relationships with the U.S., is Barry T. Klein's *Reference Encyclopedia of the American Indian*, 9th ed. (Nyack, NY: Todd Publications, 2000); Klein lists tribal governments and contact numbers that were current in 2000.

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

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Osage Tribe of Oklahoma
P.O. Box 779
Pawhuska, OK 74056
Charles O. Tillman, Jr., Principal Chief

TURTLE MOUNTAIN CHIPPEWA (Louise Erdrich)

Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa
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Richard A. Monette, Chairman

LAGUNA PUEBLO (Leslie Marmon Silko)

Pueblo of Laguna
Laguna Pueblo Council
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Laguna, NM 87026
Roland E. Johnson, Governor

LEECH LAKE OJIBWE (David Treuer)

Leech Lake Reservation
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Eli O. Hunt, Chairperson

CHOCTAW (Louis Owens)

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Tribal Council of the Mississippi Band of Choctaws
Box 6010—Choctaw Branch
Philadelphia, MS 39350
Philip Martin, Tribal Chief

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Durant, OK 74702-1210
Gregory E. Pyle, Chief

OKLAHOMA CHEROKEE

Cherokee Nation
P.O. Box 948, Tahlequah, OK 74465
Chad Smith, Principal Chief

United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians
P.O. Box 580, Okmulgee, OK 74447
Jim Henson, Chief