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Living History

A Conversation with Kimberly Blaeser

JENNIFER ANDREWS

An enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Kimberly Blaeser was raised on the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota. Blaeser is a professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, where she teaches Native American literature. She has written three collections of poetry, *Trailing You*, *Absentee Indians and Other Poems*, and *Apprenticed to Justice*, and an academic study of fellow White Earth writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor, titled *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, and edited an anthology of short fiction by Anishinaabe writers called *Stories Migrating Home*. Blaeser has published more than sixty articles, personal essays, poems, and short stories in American and Canadian journals, newspapers, and collections and is the recipient of numerous awards.

This transcribed and subsequently collaboratively edited interview is part of a larger book-length project on recent Native North American women poets' use of humor and irony. The following conversation took place in March 2003 at Blaeser's home in rural Wisconsin and since has been updated several times via e-mail.

JENNIFER ANDREWS: I want to start by asking how your poetry informs your scholarship, and vice versa. I'm thinking particularly of the haiku poems you've authored and your analysis of the haiku form in your book on Gerald Vizenor.

KIMBERLY BLAESER: In some ways I think there's a tension that plays out between the creative and the academic, and it might be because there's an inbred expectation of what it means to be an aca-

demic. And so, of course, I resist that, and it's apparent in some of my critical pieces. I tend to try to break open those expectations and deliberately not fulfill them by doing instead whatever it is I want to do in my discussion of the texts. I was telling you about that book that Craig Womack and a couple of other people are editing; the essay I did for them is not at all what you would think of as a classic academic essay. I'm playing a lot with that form and allowing the parts of my work, and ways of thinking and dealing with language, to mingle and come closer together. With haiku, it's a slightly different situation, because the way that Vizenor himself engages with the idea of haiku or haiku theory is creative. His language about it is creative, and it's energizing, not static in the way that we think of academic accounts or descriptions. So I think that the very essence of haiku makes the possibility of writing about it easier because it brings the creative and the critical closer together.

JA: What you've said about playing with form is really interesting, because your book on Vizenor is classically academic in structure and tone but written in a very accessible way. So it seemed you were already playing with the form of scholarly texts by making your monograph accessible and, in particular, making Vizenor's language accessible, which is often tricky. Speaking of influence, in your first book of poems, *Trailing You*, you begin the collection with a preface that celebrates the influence of family and friends. Collectivity seems to be central in the preface: the idea that there isn't a stereotypical solitary writer. And then there's a whole section of poems in the second book, "From One Half-Mad Writer to Another," which dialogues with and pays tribute to a variety of writers and different languages. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about how other writers have influenced your work.

KB: That's a great question. The idea of feeling that none of this is something that is only my voice is just the way I understand story, or even understand identity. I so much feel that anything I say, think, am, be, write—all of that—is inevitably intertwined beyond our ability to track it back. I think that from the uterus, and beyond, we're linked to other people, to other stories, voices, and experiences. In my family there was so much oral exchange because early on we

lived in the middle of nowhere with my grandparents; we didn't have television or any of those kinds of things, and part of the whole process of everyday life was this lively oral exchange. People would tell stories; they would mimic one another; they would tease; they would joke; they would sing. I was really quite shy and quiet as a child in the midst of all this hullabaloo, but it embedded itself, and I imagine marked me in a certain way, and I feel that is part of who I am. So when I come to any kind of writing, I know that those voices are there, whether or not I can identify them. The source is not just me; it could never be just me.

Then, in other ways that are more traceable, I consciously commit to memory things that I think are important to remember: what people said, details about people's lives, or details about places I'd be shown and the story someone would tell about it—"this is the lake Grandpa Bunker said had the best tasting rice"—or whatever they were saying. I would make a conscious effort to remember. Because another thing that was important to so many people in my family was memory. We lived by memory. And everyone had a story about someone beyond them. That kind of process was just something that you learned. I think in some ways that dedication to memory is a gift that you are given. So I both consciously commit events and words to memory, and I also intuitively hold on to things, knowing there's some reverberation I need to think about later. And then I think there are things that are somewhat more mysterious: there are so many times when what becomes the source for a poem is a voice that speaks a line or a phrase or something that I hear, and I hear in a way that I guess you would say is spiritual, or subconscious; it's given to me. It's not something that I feel that I'm creating. It really does come from someplace I don't quite understand. There's also a conscious effort to carry and tell the stories that I think other people didn't have an opportunity to tell or record, or that weren't valued in a certain way at the time; I feel that that is my privilege, but it's also my responsibility. I do owe something; I survived because of those stories, because of those occurrences, because of those people.

JA: It's fascinating to hear you talk about the power of collectivity in your own work and how a single voice can speak for a community.

KB: The leaders in many of the Indian communities were leaders because they were orators. The other part of your question that I don't think I answered was about my second collection, *Absentee Indians*, where a lot of the poems are engaging with the writing of other writers. That again is because I feel that there is a celebration of influence in Native literature, and I am happy to be a part of that. I don't want to pretend or to set myself up as some individual creator, as it were, because I know so well that I'm not. So I feel that having a conversation that moves from this book to that book to this book—that cuts across years and different voices—is more enriching for readers and also for me as a writer. I think it's important to notice that things that Indian authors like Gary Hobson or Denise Sweet or Joy Harjo or whomever might have written have echoes and that those echoes will appear, for example, in my book. In some places I borrow from specific texts, like in that very last poem in my second collection (“Y2K Indian”), where I literally build part of that poem from the words of other poets. But in other places it might be an allusion or a gesture to something that someone else has said or written.

JA: I wanted to ask you about the photographic collage at the beginning of *Trailing You*. How did you pick the photos, and what do they add to the text? It seemed to me that there was an incredibly rich dialogue between the poetry and the photos, and the fact that you haven't included captions or identified who is in them means that readers engage with the photos differently than they might otherwise.

KB: That was part of my intention, because I didn't want the photographs to represent a single, identifiable person. There's one photo in particular that I was just thrilled to use because it's a photo of one of my aunts when she was a young girl, and she looks absolutely identical to the way her daughter looked at the time that the book was put together. So even if someone picked it up who knew those two, they wouldn't necessarily know whose photograph had been included. And so again, it's like a gesture, it's like a movement into the past. In a sense the photos in *Trailing You* are not fixed in time because there's a photo there that could be me or could be my mom. In the collage, there are photos there that could be my rela-

tives or they could be twenty other families' relatives. I also wanted to avoid including any of those classic static romantic Indian poses; instead, some of the photos I selected are kind of funny. There's the one of three of my cousins where two of them have dolls by the hands and one of them has my brother. They are family photos that I had affection for to begin with, because I care about the people, and they brought back memories, which seems appropriate given that so many of the poems in that collection are memory poems. But at the same time I didn't want the photographs to be so specific; the images are intended to open a dialogue with the reader and not merely foreclose an imaginative interaction between reader and text.

JA: Did you meet with any resistance from the publisher?

KB: Oh no, my publisher actually welcomed the idea of the collage. Joe and Carol Bruchac's *Greenfield Review* published *Trailing You*, and, of course, Joe just loved the idea of the collage and was really happy to include the images.

JA: In the first poem of the collection, called "Speaking Those Names," you pay tribute to the power of the spoken language and celebrate the acting of naming. How do you see the oral tradition and speech utterances influencing your poetry?

KB: I think that the idea of being called a name and being among people who know your name might have more authority in the Indian community, because Native people can have so many names, and there's the idea that your name can change throughout your life. And in many tribes you're not to disclose your Indian name. That sort of giving of and becoming a name is a very interesting process: it has to do with being part of a community. I think the other thing that's fed into that poem, which is probably not so obvious, is that for me, naming or knowing the people who named you is another one of those survival tools that I used when I was away from home. It was a way of reclaiming my balance when things became incredibly complex, and I began to lose a sense of where I fit in things. Because part of what these names tell you is where you fit. And that goes back to the same idea of not being single, because somehow each of these names is locked by tentacles to the being of other people; your history and their history are intertwined.

JA: What about the other spoken and written languages that you use in your second collection of poems, *Absentee Indians*? You seem quite comfortable writing in other languages, most obviously Ojibwe and Spanish.

KB: I think that there are probably a number of things that come into play, especially when I write in Ojibwe. One of them is that I grew up hearing the Ojibwe language a great deal, but I lack the ability to speak it very well. My grandmother would have been fluent in Ojibwe, as would my older aunts and uncles. However, the younger brothers and sisters, including my mother, were not fluent. And my generation is pretty much in the same position, but as children, our grandparents and older aunts and uncles would encourage us and tease us to learn certain things. So we'd use a mix of languages, and the sentences would sometimes combine Indian and English together. And then words became distorted and transformed in really interesting ways. We used to use a word like "bangii" to mean broken or messed up. Then when I came across it in Ojibwe I discovered it really means "a little bit." So we distorted that meaning. So there were these interesting transformations in the language, and the creation of a mixed-up language came to represent the situation of several generations who could no longer be considered fluent speakers of our native tongue. Salvaging the language, giving it a place, and reclaiming it, trying to recover it, becomes important. Decolonizing our lives has to do with reclaiming the language. That became symbolic for me. I use the multiple languages because I want to acknowledge that people are mixed; they're not isolated individuals. I want to acknowledge the mixed nature of our reality, which is partly about this conglomeration of languages, which is *not* like a Tower of Babel.

JA: I was thinking of the poems in *Absentee Indians* where you use the Ojibwe language without providing translations. And that's really wonderful, because there's a sense for me, as someone who doesn't know Ojibwe, of being on the outside, which forces me to reconsider my relationship to the text and my assumptions about possessing "insider" status. And the mixing of language in those poems appears seamless, creating a wonderful visual representation of bilingualism.

Those poems are fascinating because they so cleverly challenge the colonization of language, and especially the assumption that English is dominant and should be.

KB: So often readers presume that English can adequately represent everything else that's been colonized. What I try to tell my students about reading Native literature is that they have to try to enter it from the perspective of the culture from which it was written.

JA: And students have to make a commitment to study the text closely and carefully, rather than simply saying, "Well, I don't need to do this because it's going to require me to do some extra labor." One aspect of your poetry that I really enjoyed was the playful and often ironic poetic voice that frequently recurs in both collections, from "Sleeping with Mackenzie," in which the housecat becomes the source of sexuality and seduction, to "Who Takes Me to Places Where Poetry Lives," which invokes the paradoxes of someone who sees himself outside of poetry yet fundamentally influences its creation. At times you use a more sharply ironic tone, as in "On the Way to the Chicago Pow-wow" and "Dear Andy Rooney." Could you talk about humor and irony in your poetry: how you use them and whether you see humor and irony as having a traditional grounding within tribal communities?

KB: When I create things that use an ironic voice, I'm not sure how conscious that is. I think it might actually stem more from the experience of learning to survive as a mixed-blood and having encountered various kinds of colonization. So many Indian people really have this incredibly wonderful ironic sense of humor. And many of the exchanges between relatives and in everyday settings are so filled with humor and playfulness. But sometimes consciously, say in the Andy Rooney poem, I thought that putting it in a way that was somewhat playful would mean that people would resist it less and be more ready to receive the message. Part of the way that irony works is that it requires the reader to participate, to decipher what's going on, so that's a way of pulling someone into the process. I think that's what you do when you play with language among your friends and family too; it's an exchange, it's an engagement, it's fun. It's probably just another way of opening up the poetry, taking it out of the

solitary state. There are obviously different kinds of humor that I use. The poem in *Absentee Indians* that's called "Twelve Steps toward Our Homesickness" is more overtly humorous. Readers don't have to work at it; they just get a good laugh. But then I undercut that with a moment or a line that is serious. Then the serious may startle a little bit more. A lot of how I judge what's going to happen is by reading things out loud, and I try to hear it in a voice that isn't necessarily mine, to hear it as a performance piece.

JA: One thing I thought about asking you when you were talking was who do you think your readers are? Do you have a sense of who buys and reads your poetry?

KB: I have a vision of different groups of readers. I know that I write for a Native audience—that's my heart; I want those people to be laughing if something's funny, or I want those people to say, ahh, I remember; I want them to connect with the poems. And I also want, as anyone does, to write for a broader audience, and to bridge some of the differences, and hope that a part of what I'm doing is showing that there's a universal quality in humanity and in some of these classic experiences like love and loss. I also hope that as I'm developing as a poet, I'm writing for poets.

When I do readings—that's an amazing thing, doing readings—I almost never know what I'm going to read. I might have an idea, but I want to see who the audience is first. Sometimes it's nerve wracking because you don't really know who will be there. I did a reading in northern Wisconsin, in Stephen's Point, and there was—though I didn't discover this until partway through—a group of poets in the audience who were writers of pantoums. And so, of course, I read a pantoum and they were so delighted; that was the greatest thing for them. You try to get a sense of what people are about and read for them.

JA: So that they feel a connection to your poetry.

KB: That's the most rewarding kind of feedback. I did a reading this year at Western Kentucky University, and I had an unexpectedly large audience. I thought it was going to be the middle of nowhere, but the room was full and there were people out in the hallway, and there were a lot of writing students there. And you feel really great

when they say to you, oh I feel so inspired now to write. Because that's what you want to do too. But I think various poems are directed at very different audiences. I have this long fishhouse poem, and there are not too many people I could read that to. . . .

JA: I also wanted to ask you about the poem I mentioned earlier: "Who Takes Me Places Where Poets Live." The older man who's the subject of the poem claims to have trouble understanding poetry except as sound, which he says he can understand as music. The link between music and poetry is an important one for several other Native North American women writers. I'm thinking here specifically about poets like Joy Harjo, who has recorded songs of her poetry, using the written texts as lyrics. It's often difficult for academics to make sense of this blurring of genres—what's a poem, what's a piece of music, are these song lyrics, are they not? Is music an integral part of your work?

KB: That's a really important link for me because there are lots of places where they are so close that you couldn't take them apart. Obviously, if you look at Native oral traditions, many of what we call poems are song-poems, and they were performed that way. I also sing some of my poems; one titled "Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way," which has country and western lyrics, I wrote for Craig Womack. I was doing a reading for the MLA [Modern Languages Association] conference when it was in Chicago in 1995. The reading was at the Newberry Library, and Craig showed up with his guitar and we sat outside the ladies room and tried that song/poem together and then went up and performed it. It was one of those moments when things just worked. We were playing, making jokes, living the poem.

JA: The song-poem is very exciting because it moves beyond a single genre, challenging academics to think differently about how writing works, or how language works.

KB: And there are so many Native writers that are mixed-genre writers.

JA: When you teach creative writing, do you ever talk about the genre?

KB: I do, but I usually talk about it with respect to other writers.

JA: It's hard to teach your own work.

KB: I'm doing this Ojibwe literature class, Ojibwe Literature of the Great Lakes, and this is the first time I've ever actually put some of my own work onto the syllabus, which has been fun.

JA: How have the students responded?

KB: They do a fairly good job of picking out meanings. It is also a great opportunity to talk about the distinctions between the narrator of the story and Kim Blaeser the author. I find it easier to do that with my own work than to presume to know about somebody else's. I think it's really interesting to see whether what you thought the poem was doing actually works out. But then half the time we as poets don't know what we're doing anyway. The writing is intuitive. I strongly believe that part of what makes a writer is intuition; it's a felt movement, and part of that is sound.

JA: One of your poems, "Surviving Winter or Old Stories We Tell Ourselves When a Blizzard is Coming," epitomizes the power of sound and its repetition. Without stories, told over and over again, there is no hope of survival. The poem reminded me of Joy Harjo's "Anchorage," which pays tribute to Audre Lorde. In "Anchorage," the speaker talks about the need to tell stories of survival even if they seem impossible to believe. I was interested to hear your thoughts on storytelling as survival.

KB: Most of my ancestors were so engaged in the process of simple survival that they didn't have time to even think about the idea of survival. A lot of the things that we do would have been out of reach for people who were living hand to mouth, but that kind of survival was helped along by the belief that comes to us through storytelling, through connections with people around us, through watching the seasons unfold and seeing that other creatures can survive the winter. So when I think about survival, it has to do always with relationships and being within a community that is not only of people but is a community of place and story and season. There are ways in which we very consciously write about the survival of Indian people, which is now much more linked to spiritual, emotional, and personal survival. Historical survival has become to a large degree symbolic. Physical survival is more taken for granted. There still is great poverty on reservation areas, and there are high levels of

suicide, but there is not a constant military threat. But we're still teaching one another to survive, and we're still supporting one another through example or through mentoring. That is all part of what I do as a writer; I hope that when I have reached into my past to a poem, a story, someone's life experience, and that's kept me going, or inspired me, I can also present that as a gift to someone else. Part of what we try to do with our writing, I think, is not just to be literature but to be about survival, to be about life. I call that a supra-literary intention. For Native writers, the very act of writing is a claiming of survival, and it's also the passing on of possibility. There is a dedication within the literature that refuses to forget that our ancestors were people on the brink of extinction.

JA: In your poetry and your critical work, you talk about the challenges of theorizing and teaching Native literatures, and you suggest that tribal-centered criticism is a viable alternative to more traditional Western theoretical frameworks. What characterizes tribal-centered criticism?

KB: I've been thinking again this semester about how to get students to read, and because we're studying the Ojibwe literatures of the Great Lakes, that's an opportunity to get them to explore a tribal-centered reality. I'm teaching undergraduates, so the course is not overly theoretical. But I'm encouraging all students to acknowledge that even in the use of language you're coming from a different perspective. And that seems to be the first hurdle to go through, just getting the students, the readers, to acknowledge that they have to position themselves differently to read the work. I think that Craig Womack's *Red on Red* was a really good attempt at doing this.

JA: The way in which you talk about a tribal-centered approach seems fruitful to me. For example, I recently vetted a journal article on Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*, in which the author did a Bakhtinian reading of the text. One of the things that you talk about in your essay published in *Looking at Our Words* is how Bakhtin is useful but removed from Native culture. You suggest that it would be more productive to employ theories that are created by from and dialogue with Native critics and writers. Having just read your essay, I found this Bakhtinian analysis of Maracle particularly frustrating because

the theoretical model was simply placed on top of the text; the article seemed to sidestep any real engagement with the text because it would have been too complicated, too messy.

KB: Yes, I know what you mean. At the time that I was writing about Vizenor's haiku, I realized that looking at his haiku in relationship to the haiku tradition is important, but not to look at it in relation to the dream song tradition would be crazy, because that's so important to it. And the same thing is true with Gordon Henry's work. In his novel *The Light People*, there's a section called "The Prisoner of Haiku" that was published separately as a short story. It's this incredible story that has to do with the relationship between the dream song and the haiku, and within the story there's this wonderful haiku sequence filled with historical allusions. For example, Henry alludes to the naming of people with an "X," much like the "X" on the treaty documents. He also uses bits of Native language here and there and incorporates different traditions that come from the history of the Ojibwe people and the culture and the language and the land. One haiku links the tracks of birds in dirt to hieroglyphs. It's very much informed by a contemporary tribal perspective. And yet it's performing as haiku as well and thus has this link to the dream song. I think that's a perfect example of showing you the multiple dimensions of Native writing. If you're going to read his work, you can't possibly read it without coming from that Ojibwe perspective as well.

JA: So much of recent Native criticism in Canada and the United States has wrestled with the question of whether to simply apply theoretical concepts to Native works and integrate them into the larger discussion of literary theory or to think about these texts and their cultural contexts differently. And that's why the idea of tribal-centered criticism seems very appealing; it moves beyond that either/or dilemma by turning the assumption of needing to name and label a particular text on its head.

KB: Who's to say that someone else's name for something is more important.

JA: Speaking of names and naming, what formal aspects of poetry most appeal to you, and which ones most bother or frustrate you as

a poet? I noticed that in *Absentee Indians* there are a lot more prose poems; your poetic voice is becoming more flexible. Are there certain formal or thematic elements that inspire you?

KB: I try to concentrate on finding the form for each piece as it arises. Which is sometimes, again, intuitive, and sometimes not. But I have for a long time been really interested in the prose poem, and in blurring the distinctions between prose and poetry. I've also been experimenting with visual presentation by butting words against one another on the page and eliminating commas and capital letters. Part of my effort in any of these formal decisions has to do with sound. I hope I'm getting better at trying to translate the sounds I hear onto the page. I hope that the voices that speak—a lot of times I use italics for a spoken voice—don't all sound the same, because they're not. I want to become better at imitating the sounds that are in my head, or in my memory. Again, it's the oral or the performative quality that dictates what gets on the page. And so I'm experimenting with things like line breaks or stanzas. Inflection is important in so many places, and it is a challenge to get inflection on the page.

JA: I wanted to ask you about transformation, which is something that a lot of Native American women poets discuss. For instance, Paula Gunn Allen talks about transformation ostensibly as a tribal ceremony and theme. She says that transformation is a central part of American Indian poetry, of its extinction and regeneration. And she argues that the only kind of poetry Native American poets now can write is about the process of extinction and regeneration through transformation. I wondered if you've thought about that term, and if so how might you talk about it?

KB: I have thought about it. One thing that Paula Gunn Allen does is she hyphenates the word "remembering," making it "re-mem-ber-ing." By including that hyphen, she stresses the idea of putting something back together; I've always thought that's a really wonderful way of understanding that word. Because memory is so important, serving as a kind of adhesive, it does put things back together, and it makes intergenerational connections. The whole idea of transformation is, of course, a spiritual notion. And it's somewhat illogical, so people want to pin it down—is it literal? is it figurative? how do

we mean it?—but I think it has to mean everything or we couldn't believe the possibilities it offers. With my students, just to have them be open to the possibility of transformation operating on many levels, I'll start by describing something very physical like the transformation of a caterpillar to a moth. You see something that was crawling on the ground that is now flying about. It's been transformed. It literally changes form. And then I try to open up the possibility of there being things that we don't understand. How do we know what happens ceremonially in any religion? I'll often use a Christian example like transubstantiation and ask whether that's something they can believe or understand and whether it's metaphorical or literal and what it does to us when we accept it in one way or in all ways. And then what happens when we are recipients or participants in the life of imagination, story, poetry, or song? Some sort of change takes place, but is it transformation? If language has that power to really move us, to literally change our thinking, and if who we are depends on how we think, and I think it does, then we are transformed. When things bump against each other, they transform one another, and that relationship happens in many places including texts. If you use a word in the beginning of a collection of poetry, and it gradually begins to gather speed, or force, or velocity, or it begins to accumulate some other meanings or broaden out or open up, by the time you see that word at the end of a text it's been transformed and your thought process to a certain degree has been transformed. There's a movement right now called Poets Against the War: Do we recognize the power of poetry to actually transform the way people think and act? I think Native people for centuries have believed in the possibility of language being transformative. If we're talking about contemporary reality, it makes sense that this understanding would be a part of that supra-literary reality that I talk about in terms of Native literature.

JA: You get that sense with transformation that it is almost unnameable, indescribable, and that's part of what I think is really interesting about it. And it's something that a lot of Native American, particularly women, poets talk about.

KB: This is a question, because I haven't thought about it before,

but do you think it might be because women bear children and therefore are the vessels for a particularly dramatic form of physical transformation?

JA: I think so. I think that pregnancy and birth is actually a large part of it, because it is a very clear example of “trans” and “formation,” an acknowledgement of change and metamorphosis that is both life changing and life affirming. Similarly, there’s always a moving, living increment or part of the poem that’s transforming through reading, through performing, through engagement with a reader that you can’t predict, that you can’t hold onto. Which is really wonderful, and celebrated, it seems to me, in a very positive way.

KB: I think you just said something important when you said you can’t hold on to transformation, because it’s the possession that people want, and perhaps that’s why they resist the notion of transformation because you can’t possess something that’s changing before your eyes.

JA: Exactly. And that’s why talking about transformation is exceedingly difficult too, because it isn’t easily pinned down. As we’ve just noted, motherhood is an example of transformation, a change that you talk about in a detailed and moving way in the section called “Motherbirth” in *Absentee Indians*. What inspired you to write these poems?

KB: After I had Gavin, my first child, the writing time seemed to disappear, but I was more inspired to write than ever. In fact, I wrote the poem that’s called “Motherbirth” in the hospital after he was born. I was so in that moment of having this ecstatic experience, and I wrote that poem at I think it was three o’clock in the morning. So I began then, and there were so many moments that were what I call haiku moments. I couldn’t let them go, and yet I didn’t have big spaces of time, so I began to write small, little pieces, and a lot of the poems I wrote around that time were short or haiku or snatches. The other thing that fascinated me, and I think I’ve written more about it in prose, is the language of children. The acquisition of language, but also the imaginative way they express themselves—“Mommy, What Color Is Fast”—that is so playful that it takes you out of your staid use of certain kinds of words. There’s a poem in *Absentee Indians*

called “Up-Ducky-Down” that uses some of the little words that children make up, or the way that they interpret a word.

JA: What I liked about that section of poems was the sense of celebration and emphasis on a generational connectedness, which was really intimate and wonderful. Dreaming is also linked to birth and transformation in your poetry; what does the act of dreaming offer you as a writer?

KB: I think that growing up the way that I grew up, in a culture where dreams were very important and where we used to sit around and tell our dreams, it’s always been important to me to recognize that dreams have power, and that they will bring you ideas and knowledge because they function in a place where there aren’t the same barriers we have when we’re awake. If we allow that to help us in our waking hours, they really can enrich our lives. And there is a symbolic reality to dreaming too. Dreams have a history.

JA: You also talk extensively about ritual in “Rituals, Yours and Mine,” and it is central to much of your work. How do you define ritual; what does it mean to you?

KB: I think it’s one of those words that people think of as having a small confined meaning, but in fact I think it has such a large meaning. Ritual as being a ceremonial act is one thing, but then ritual has to do with connections and repetitiveness and history, how we have certain ways of doing things that we do all the time, and when we go back to do something we do it that way because we’ve done it that way before and it means something to us because it reminds us of the other times that we did whatever we’re doing. And because it has a history it contributes to the current performance of the act. The challenge I face as a writer is how to incorporate ritual into a text. I think in a text there’s always allusion, but there are other things like repetition. I keep thinking about gesture; the text may speak about gesture, but it may also be a gesture. And that gesture may be something long-standing and repeated like a ritual. There can be everyday rituals or ceremonial rituals, and I don’t see them as that distinct from one another because they both help us feel the strands that connect us. I think we take comfort in ritual, but it’s also another of those things that we perform because it’s an act of responsibility

or response-ability. It's a response, a give and a take, and it is also something that we owe, that we're responsible for, and it returns to us a larger ability to be. When I think about things in my own life, I often link them to things in my past life or to my parents or my grandparents or my longer-ago historical relatives or a larger mass of the Ojibwe people. I try to bring in the small details of rituals to keep that connection alive. To somehow perform that in poetry is an interesting task.

JA: "Rituals, Yours and Mine" is a tribute to the daily rituals that you witness being performed by an older generation, a form of memorializing that celebrates the immediacy of these acts and the fact that they are passed on from generation to generation. You acknowledge that the daily, the quotidian, is important in constructing your identity and your sense of self.

KB: We can see that in children. For example, my daughter Amber, who is three years old, has this incredible sense of ritual, of what we've done before and will do again, and she anticipates events because they mean something special. If she feels that sense of connection at three, multiply that over and over, and it becomes inter-generational, the repetition of ritual becomes incredibly powerful. It's something that takes you outside the idea of individuality, again. I think memory becomes a kind of ritual too.

JA: That would make sense because with memory there's often a recollection of what is comforting and familiar and important.

KB: And a recollection of the vocal. There's a way that people speak about memory, and I try to bring that into my poetry; you could say that I ritualize the vocal because I'm trying to—it's not reenact so much as somehow attempting to—respeak. Because ritual has a lot to do with the speaking of the same words, the singing of a certain song, while being conscious in the moment. And I guess that's part of why we invest ourselves in ritual. The respeaking is not about language, but rather it's about going beyond language.

JA: If moving beyond the limits of language is an integral part of your poetry, what do think of scholars who might want to label you and your writing feminist? There are a lot of Native American women poets who talk about feminism as tricky or difficult term, one that they don't really find useful.

KB: It's not a term that I tend to take up very often. I talk about women; I talk about the power of women; I talk about mothers; I talk about the feminine. At the same time, I think there's a sense in which the power of women has been so long recognized in indigenous cultures that there's not the same sort of struggle to gain recognition for yourself in the eyes of society, because it already exists. What we've been taught as Indian people, in my community, is that women are strong and powerful and that women have held the family together and that women are the carriers of the stories and the teachers and so on. Women were the ones who ensured the survival of the population. I've always felt I'm in a place where I can do just whatever I want. I've never really felt restrictions. Maybe that's why it hasn't been a great source of struggle, for me. And I think there's so many ways in which I've broken stereotypes about women, and maybe didn't even realize that until I came away from the reservation and saw that some of the things I did were thought to be "male" activities, even something as simple as being a good poker player. My thought process in relation to that really was engaged more when I became involved in an academic community because that's where the discussions were raised. The University of Notre Dame, where I did my graduate work and first taught after completing the doctorate, was a little paternalistic, so that might have been where I had my rude awakening to what went on in the rest of the world. It wasn't so much individual people; it was the way the institution acted. There have been moments in my academic career when I bumped against someone and I've been stupefied because I just didn't realize that this sort of attitude existed, because I really didn't have that much exposure to it. Which is a very lucky thing, I guess.

JA: It's wonderful! If you have good mentors as a student and new faculty member, you are much better able to handle institutional pressures.

KB: So much of the mentoring that came to me came from other Indian people, often in different parts of the country, and the Indian men were just as supportive as the Indian women. There's been a celebration of the power of women among the people that I've known throughout my life. And that means when I was home at White Earth,

and among the people that I was lucky enough to know when I was a graduate student. I've always experienced strong women, and so it's not been an anomaly, it's been sort of the ordinary, and that's what I take up in my work. And if I have an access to prejudice against women, it's through the racism that Indian people have experienced here. The similarity for me, the way I link them, is through racism. Creatively, that's how I channel it.

JA: Place and community are obviously crucial to your identity, yet you have spent much of your adult life away from White Earth. In *Absentee Indians*, absence from the reservation and the challenge of returning to it are prevalent themes. More specifically, you talk about the idea of doubleness in which one is always circling back and returning to one's memories, which you characterize as a wrinkle or fold in time. How does the idea of memory shape your poetry?

KB: Another phrase that I think I've used is a ghost space in memory. And it's really about being out of time, or time being irrelevant. There's a timelessness, and there's something beyond the temporal, some kind of connection. When there's a loss of time, of ego, of a lot of the sort of things through which we ground ourselves as humans, it's sort of a spiritual space. And it is one of those experiences or ecstatic moments of being beyond the language that we have. It's a moment when you can't talk about it, but you can gesture toward it. You hope that the language, like a haiku almost, dissolves and the poetry wants to be experiential and not literary. Those peak experiences, or ecstatic moments, are extraordinary in a way, but they're not extra-ordinary in the sense of being inaccessible because they *are* accessible to everybody. We should build our lives around them.

JA: Your description of memory as a fold in time reminds me of recent critical debates about how Native American notions of time are often simplified by non-Natives to create a neat contrast between the linearity of Western temporality and the circularity that characterizes Aboriginal concepts of time. Marilyn Dumont, a Métis poet from Canada, actually has a poem calling "Circling the Wagons," where she essentially says that to describe Native ideas about time as circular is reductive. Your idea about memory as a fold in time, and the way in which time is malleable, seems to more accurately

capture a different experience of time rather than simply saying it's linear *or* circular.

KB: Leslie Silko talks about time as a spider's web, in which multiple things are going on. There's the circular shape, but there's also the lateral, the different strands on the spider's web, and then I envision what happens when a fly lands and there's a vibration. So we're talking about the vibration, the motion, the movement, and I guess it's that idea of being in the essence of movement that is in a continuum; we're in a constant evolution and yet at the same time it reconnects us, and so it folds back, and maybe it's like a . . .

JA: An accordion.

KB: Yeah! When you talk about a circle, you're still restricting it to a single dimension.

JA: Exactly, and I think Dumont is suggesting that if you talk about circularity and linearity, what you're essentially doing is reducing to a single dimension something that isn't reducible. Speaking of multiplicity, what current projects are you working on?

KB: There are several things I'm working on simultaneously. One of them is a new collection of poems, which I see as a verbal and material collage, and it is a family tree. It has a center poem that gives stanzas to different people and family, and it's set up as a family tree would be on the page. Ideally, individual stanzas will open up into other pieces that might be poetry or might be prose or whatever. I expect the collection will include photographs and other kinds of reproductions. There are some really cool letters that I discovered that one of my uncles had written to my grandma when he was in the military service, and I have all kinds of family memorabilia to integrate into the collection: tribal enrolment cards, hunting licenses, and lots of other things that give another dimension to the idea of generations and family and history and place. I've been writing a lot of haiku, and I'd like to do a haiku collection with photographs, in which the photographs might not necessarily be that particular place, image, or whatever, but function as haiku moments themselves.

JA: So juxtapositions that may be unusual or startling, but a sense of replicating that moment in the poem in a photograph in a way that's not literal.

KB: Right, right. I'm also editing a collection of Anishinaabe poetry, and that'll probably be the first thing that's done because I have most of that together. And I'm working with a photographer who's been taking photos at White Earth for about ten or fifteen years, and I'm going to do the text for it, though we're not even sure what kind of text that's going to be, to go with the photos. And then the performative element is becoming more important. I want to produce a CD of my poetry, some with music, and maybe, if I can get to work with someone who's in film, put together a poetry video.

NOTE

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More Than One Way to Tell a Story

Rethinking the Place of Genre in Native American
Autobiography and the Personal Essay

TYRA TWOMEY

Native American autobiography is a problematic genre for historians and literary scholars alike for a number of reasons. First, there is the persistent question of authorship: because so many early Native autobiographies were, to varying degrees, recorded, edited, rearranged, and coauthored by whites, some scholars contest the idea that they be studied as samples of Native American writing at all. Next is the cultural specificity of the Western understanding of “autobiography,” arguably a wholly foreign concept to the traditions of story-making characteristic of Native groups. The differences between Native autobiographies and their Western counterparts raise an array of problematic questions, not only about the conventions of autobiography as a literary genre, but also about the notions of self-hood and identity that characterize the people who write autobiographies. A case has been repeatedly made by literary scholars for the inability of Native American writers to conceive of themselves independently of their notions of tribal identity, for example. Other similar derivations argue for Native views of the passage of time, personal success, cause and effect, the nature of history, and meaning-making as differing from Western perceptions, all in ways said to be observable through analysis of these written records. Some writers seem content to draw conclusions about Native peoples based on such observations; others, frustrated with the degree of textual variation and authorial complexity these writings offer, have wondered whether Native autobiographies should be considered a different literary genre entirely.

Although I begin with an investigation of some of these complexities as they currently influence, and arguably impede, literary study of Native autobiographies, my contention is that this last question is both the most promising and the most emblematic of the basic assumption clouding the work of those scholars who have tried for years to unravel the mysteries of Native American autobiographical writing. In order to understand these early writings it is necessary not only to separate them from the conventional expectations of the generic Western autobiography but also to distinguish between literary and rhetorical notions of genre itself.

TWO CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO GENRE

Literary genre, following the classification system established in Aristotle's *The Poetics*, has been traditionally understood as "a formalistic classification of types of texts" (Devitt 697). In application, although this is an oversimplification, a text belongs in a genre both because of how it is *like* other texts in that genre and because of how it is *unlike* texts in other genres.¹ To question the inclusion of a particular work in the category of "autobiography," or to examine the ways in which its textual features distinguish it from other autobiographies, is to examine the work through the lens of this literary view of genre, one which leads directly to the kinds of broad cultural assumptions made above: if these autobiographies are not like other autobiographies, it must be because their authors are not like other authors.

Current rhetorical study, however, tends to approach genre in a very different way. In a rhetorical understanding of the term, according to scholars in the branch of rhetoric now calling itself "genre theory," genres are not *forms* at all but rather "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (Miller 31), where "recurrent" describes similar situations arising under similar circumstances and inspiring similar responses, and the forms produced are the result of the rhetorical action best suited to the situation, becoming typified by repeated application. Following this definition, a rhetorical understanding of autobiography can only be gained through an

understanding of the situations that prompt a writer to tell the story of his or her life. And if a piece of writing does not seem to *be* an autobiography, what needs to be known to understand the piece *as it is*, is not how it differs from things that *do* seem to be autobiographies but what rhetorical context called it into being, and what purpose was served by the rhetorical action the written product represents.

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP

By definition, in literary studies, an autobiography is a reflexive life story, written *by* the person it is written *about*. But as the studies in Arnold Krupat's 1985 *For Those Who Come After* and David Brumble's 1988 *American Indian Autobiography* demonstrate, pieces of writing published as the autobiographies of early Native Americans were rarely the product solely of the pen of the Native American "author" they portrayed. Autobiographies were commonly "collected" by anthropologists studying the customs of particular tribes. They were sometimes dictated directly to amanuenses, sometimes translated before being transcribed, sometimes cowritten by Native and white writers, and sometimes recorded as interviews and only later "edited" into narrative form. Both Krupat and Brumble offer evidence of the degree to which the words of Native speakers and writers were vulnerable to influence and change by their collaborators. Krupat quotes John Neihardt, the editor (or coauthor) of the autobiographical *Black Elk Speaks*, in a candid admission of the influence he had on Black Elk's original words: "'The beginning and ending are mine,' says Neihardt, 'they are what he would have said if he had been able. . . . And the translation—or rather the transformation—of what was given to me was expressed so that it could be understood by the white world'" (128). The transcription notes and the historical facts of Black Elk's later life that Krupat presents in his analysis indicate clearly, however, that the ending of the book in particular strongly misrepresents Black Elk's intentions and beliefs. Brumble notes similarly the danger of a Native story's being changed, however unintentionally, by the simple interaction between Native narrators

and Western writers, who bring with them their Western assumptions about the writing of life stories: in the very form of the questions interviewers asked of those whose stories they were recording, Brumble observes, they “led their Indian autobiographers to think about their experiences in new ways” (85). Such rethinking does not make those experiences less real to either the individual who lived them or the audience who read about them later, of course, but it does affect both their presentation and their contextual surroundings—the placement of an event in proximity to one part of the tale instead of another, for example—in ways that change the story.

These collected and coauthored tales, Brumble argues, “*must* distort the selves they portray” (11, emphasis added). “There is a sense, of course,” he continues, “in which every autobiography is a fiction of the self; no autobiography is a ‘true’ representation of the self in any absolute sense. But self-written autobiography is at least the subject’s own fiction . . . so it must always be authentic in this sense at least.” These collaborative efforts, by contrast, are all affected, to varying degrees, by the influence of outsiders’ perspectives on the story being told, and Brumble cautions readers to approach them with “considerable humility.” “Such autobiographies are, in an important sense, bicultural documents,” he contends, “texts in which the assumptions of Indian autobiographers *and* Anglo editors are at work” (11, emphasis in original). Although Brumble makes a distinction between what he calls “as-told-to narratives” and the autobiographical writing of Native Americans who could and did write in English, there is a degree to which the “authenticity” a reader can expect from either type of text is equally questionable. As scholar David Murray reminds us, in our study of even those Indian writers who penned their own stories, we, as later readers, cannot see inside these writers’ minds to know how they might have represented themselves *to* themselves or to others like them: “We can only work . . . with the evidence we have about how they represented themselves *to whites*” (53).

Krupat and Brumble, among others, take particular interest in Sarah Winnemucca’s autobiography, *Life among the Piutes*, for many reasons, not the least of which might be its ambiguous positioning with relation to the previously mentioned distinctions.² The text

calls authorship into question, because although Winnemucca could and did read and write in English, her writing, by her own admission, was never skilled, and although editor and personal friend Mary Mann indicates in the book's preface that she only changed Winnemucca's spelling to "correct orthography and punctuation," the reading public has no way of knowing to what degree the women collaborated to produce the text. Perhaps Winnemucca handed Mann a finished manuscript with only spelling errors and "occasional emendations" (Hopkins 2) to polish, which act would make Winnemucca the uncontested "author" of this literary document. Or perhaps they met often to plan and discuss the text, in which meetings Mann's ideas about writing—organization, chronology, the relative importance of events—mixed with Winnemucca's to produce the final story, in which case the artifact they produced would be a collaborative biographical study of a different categorical nature. The text also challenges scholars' notions of "authenticity": even Winnemucca's own ideas at the time of her writing, some thirty years after her first contact with whites, could not reflect the "authentic" mind of a precontact Piute.³ Everything we know about Winnemucca—and, through her, about the Piutes—is shaped by not only by Mann's interventions but by Winnemucca's own awareness of her non-Native audience and the non-Native ideas and attitudes that were influential throughout most of her life.

Questions like these feed the fires of the kinds of judgmental inquiry about Native American writers—as writers and as Native Americans—that both shape and disfigure literary scholars' understanding of their writing. Despite the genuine complexity of the authorship of this bicultural document, scholars have little trouble crediting Winnemucca with the work, and more seem intrigued than put-off by the converging cultural influences shaping the narrative. Far more taxing is its adherence to or deviation from the standard literary form of the autobiography, and, subsequently, the ways in which its form, and the assumptions that accompany it, seem to demonstrate to readers—or to deny—Winnemucca's identity as an individual rather than always, first, as a Piute.

WESTERN VERSUS NATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

The history of Western autobiography has been written “as the history of the rise of the idea of the individual in the West,” harking back, in the works of different historians, to the ancient Greeks or the Egyptians (Brumble 4). The traditional form of works in this genre parallels its history, telling the chronological story of the writer’s life as first the development of his or her own individuality and then the unique accomplishments and perspectives this individuality allowed for. Autobiographies, in the Western tradition, begin with the author’s birth or early childhood and progress through his or her life, focusing on occurrences that led to personal growth or served as “turning points” in his or her development. They assume that childhood is a necessary precursor to the author’s individual adulthood and that all stages in the writer’s development have value: their goal is “finding meaning in the whole life” (Brumble 85). The rhetorical situations prompting such writings are likely to have, among their similarities, the writers’ senses of themselves as mature, self-aware, and successful or accomplished—they must have lived long enough to be able to make meaning of something approximating a “whole life,” and they must be able to reflect upon their own turning points and past experiences of personal growth. Additionally, being fully aware of the long history of Western autobiography, and presumably having read the autobiographies of others, writers of autobiographies must imagine a potential readership for whom their individual story will have value and must craft the story to meet those imagined expectations.

In his 1991 “Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self,” Arnold Krupat finds evidence of this emphasis on individuality in standard Western autobiographical form in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose self-definition Krupat quotes: “‘I understand my own heart,’ Rousseau writes, ‘and understand my fellow man. But I am made like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different’” (178). Krupat offers Henry David Thoreau as another example, both because of his similar focus on individual distinction and because of his acute awareness of the audiences he

addressed. "Thoreau's model of proper speech-in-writing," he says, "images the individual man addressing other individual men . . . who, while they certainly make up the generalized categories of 'neighbors,' or 'readers,' or 'writers,' or 'students,' must finally read as he writes, in the 'first person'" (179).⁴ This is different, Krupat says, from the context of an oral tradition, wherein "speech always assumes a present listener as opposed to writing, where the audience is absent to the author, the author absent to the audience" (178).

David Brumble sees Native American autobiography as a unique opportunity for scholars to see the vast historical evolution of this literary tradition repeated in microcosmic form and to contextualizes Native writing against this backdrop. For him, "there is a sense in which Indian Autobiography can take [scholars] even farther back in time" than studying the writings left by the Greeks or the Egyptians. "We may *assume* that there was oral autobiographical storytelling among the ancients," he says, "but such traditions as there may have been are lost to all but inference. On the other hand, we may read hundreds of oral autobiographical tales taken down from American Indians" (4).

It takes Brumble only a few lines to start using "autobiography" instead of his original term, but I think it important to look more closely than he does at the contexts and consequences of "oral autobiographical storytelling," a different type of rhetorical action from a Westerner's writing of an autobiography, responding to a very different type of rhetorical situation than the tradition of Western autobiography outlined earlier—not the least in its removal from that very tradition. Many early Native writers did not read English at all; few, if any, were reading Thoreau to get a sense of what readers of the form might have expected. Instead, these Native writers had their own traditions of storytelling, traditional ways of passing knowledge about great lives and great events on to later generations, their own ways of telling their own stories to others, and in these ways even the material conditions of information conveyance were vastly different from the ways of Western culture:

Traditionally, the autobiographical forms . . . that existed among Native American peoples . . . were communicated

orally . . . and therefore publicly as well. One did not tell of one's war honors in private, to one's wives or best friends, but to assembled members of the tribe, an audience that included eye-witnesses to the events narrated who were duty-bound to object to or deny any false claims. (Krupat 178)

Although there were certainly instances in which Native Americans did tell stories of their accomplishment to single members or small groups of their families or closest friends, the sense of difference Krupat portrays remains valid: whether a large group or a single listener is present, there is little similarity between telling a story to a listener who, whether "duty-bound to . . . deny any false claims" or not, sees your words, as you speak them, as a direct extension of yourself, and the writing model Krupat offers, wherein "the audience is absent to the author, the author absent to the audience" (178).

Beyond the physical context of the active telling of a story, but certainly influenced by this context, are other traditions of Native American storytelling foreign to the Western autobiographical genre. David Brumble offers several examples of characteristics native to orally told stories that white editors felt compelled to alter in adherence to generic expectations. First, he writes illustratively, "Editors routinely cut repetitious passages, for example. Repetition grates upon the modern ear. Repetition grates upon the modern ear. But in many tribes repetition was a rhetorical feature in oral narrative" (11). Also, he notes, "the editors almost always order their material chronologically, even though this sometimes distorts the sense of time implicit in some narratives" (11). And oral "autobiographical tales were likely to be discreet stories of episodes in a life, rather than the story *of* a life"; in an autobiographical tale recorded faithfully, with little or no editorial intervention, he finds, "there are very few connections between narratives" (85, emphasis added). It should be noted, however, that in saying "few connections," Brumble is demonstrating the expectations of a scholar well versed in the form of a particular genre. The fact that he sees "few connections" does not mean that the narratives he describes are unrelated; it simply means that their connectivity is not explained in the ways he expects it to be.

The elements in Winnemucca's autobiography are neither wholly connected, in the ways Western readers might anticipate, nor wholly disconnected; in the detail devoted to some aspects of her life and the blanks left in others, the story is both chronological and episodic. For the literary scholar, this makes the story hard to categorize; for the cultural scholar, it opens up tempting avenues through which to draw conclusions about its author. For example, one could say that Winnemucca's story is episodic because she did not possess a Western sense of time, or that it appears disconnected because she failed to recognize that "personal details" such as of the circumstances of her multiple marriages and her conversion to Christianity "would be essential in most traditional Western autobiographies" (McClure 36). Through this line of reasoning, the text's formal deviations seem to effectively demonstrate a Native understanding of the world.

Not surprisingly, the conclusions that scholars draw about her life and writing, working backward from these textual features, lead them to inconsistent portrayals of Winnemucca. In keeping with his characterization of Native autobiography as a developmental art of trading oral traditions in for the written forms of Western culture, Brumble calls her work "essentially an oral performance put down in writing" (71); he supports this view with Winnemucca's own words from an episode in her narration in which another Piute, Bannock Jack, asks her to write a message for him because he knows that she "can talk on paper" (Hopkins 142). Although we would assume that such writing would mark Winnemucca as standing outside the traditions of Western culture—Brumble adds an admonishment that readers not assume her "at all aware of literary models" (71)—modern reception of her work actually leans in the opposite direction: the reputation Andrew McClure sets out to rebuff in his 1999 article about Winnemucca is of a writer who is "overly assimilated and sympathetic to the dominant culture" (29) and "heavily biased by her acculturated and Christianized viewpoint" (Bataille and Sands 21). In the work, McClure notes, "readers will find unexpected Western elements such as romantic sentimentality and a seemingly naïve acceptance of the ultimately hostile 'white brothers'—things that simply do not *sound* 'Indian'"; rather than being a written

record of her public speeches, informed by her people's oral tradition, to McClure Winnemucca's work is a deliberate "appropriation of English and its literary forms" used to disrupt Western notions of "Indianness" from within the existing frame of an established literary genre (31–32, emphasis in original).

But how can so much—and in this case, with such widely discrepant conclusions—be "known" about Winnemucca based on the readings of scholars so far removed from the time and cultural surroundings of her writing? An illuminative answer is offered by twentieth-century rhetorician Kenneth Burke. Burke calls form—what literary scholars often equate to genre—"an arousing and fulfillment of desires." In *Counter-Statement* he explains: "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part," and in that anticipation, "to be gratified by the sequence" of parts that lead to the expected conclusion (qtd. in Coe 182). For readers, notes genre scholar Richard Coe, these expectations "translate into genre-specific reading strategies"; and "when a genre is misidentified," these expectations lead to "misreadings" (183). In the case of Winnemucca's *Life among the Piutes*, as with the case of many other early Native autobiographical writings, the identification of the work as an autobiography leads to a specific "arousing of desires," which are not then fulfilled—at least not in ways immediately recognizable by literary scholars with a preexisting set of well-developed expectations. It is the desire for claims of individuality such as those Krupat finds in Rousseau and Thoreau that, when left unfulfilled by these writings, leads Brumble to say that "for all her Indian activism, Winnemucca retained an essentially tribal sense of self" (71), Krupat to argue that her "very title proclaims her individual life as comprehensible foremost in relation to the collective experience of her tribe" ("Synecdochic" 185), and McClure to agree that she fits Krupat's "category of the Native American autobiographer and the 'synecdochic self' perfectly." "Winnemucca's autobiography," McClure continues, his desires aroused by generic expectation, inadequately filled by the work in front of him, and so satisfied through a logical explanation of the source of this dissatisfaction, "is the medium through which the reader sees the consequences of

white settlement on the *tribe*—it is a communal statement about the tribe given through Sarah Winnemucca” (36, emphasis in original).

“SYNECDOCHIC SELFHOOD” AND
GENERIC EXPECTATION

Andrew McClure refers to the “synecdochic self” that is Arnold Krupat’s metaphoric frame for the distinctions he perceives in the conceptions of selfhood that inform the writing of Native American autobiography. “Where personal accounts are marked by the individual’s sense of herself predominantly in relation to other distinct individuals,” Krupat says, invoking the Western tendency of self-definition, “one might speak of a *metonymic* sense of self; [but] where narration of personal history is more nearly marked by an individual’s sense of himself in relation to collective social units or groupings,” as in his understanding of the precontact practices of Native Americans, “one might speak of a *synecdochic* sense of self” (“Synecdochic” 176, emphasis in original). This is a fine distinction; in less precise dictionaries, “metonymy” and “synecdoche” appear as synonyms. But where in metonymy an attribute of a thing has come to stand in terminologically for that thing—individuality as an attribute of personhood becomes “individual” as a name for “person”—in synecdoche the name for a single member of a group of things assumes the meaning of the entire group. The standard grammatical example is of “fifty sail” as an expression representing “fifty ships.” Ultimately, the implication is that, in Winnemucca’s case, the writing of *a* Piute is taken as representative of the habits of mind of *all* Piutes—and from there (although these conclusions are based, of course, on readers’ interpretations of many examples of Native American autobiography, not just on Winnemucca’s) to the thought processes of all Indians. We can see this happening, for example, when Krupat, in defining his metaphor, says that the synecdochic model “has relations to the oral techniques of information transmission typical of Native American culture” (“Synecdochic” 178), instead of Native American *cultures*; surely they were not—and are not now—all the same.

The results of this metaphor are also at play in McClure's at-times conflicted treatment of Winnemucca as an author: even while calling her a perfect example of Krupat's definition, naming her work a "communal statement" (36), and insisting that "self-definition independent of the larger tribal identity is alien to Native cultures" such as the one to which Winnemucca belongs, McClure also describes her as capable of "construct[ing] a dialogic self that can uphold Native identity and simultaneously adapt to the dominant culture," of "resist[ing] falling into [the] invented identities" expected by white readers (31–32), and even of "adopt[ing] the Noble Savage guise in order to subvert it" (45). McClure seems to find in Winnemucca both a synecdochic representative for her tribe and a convention defying individual with an "unconcern for self-definition" (36) who can nonetheless define herself as "dialogic" while both adopting and subverting the definitions projected onto her self by others.⁵ The purpose that these contradictions seem to serve is to enable him to sustain his analysis of Winnemucca as an individual (which she must be in order to "author" a Western-style text with any "authority") actively resisting the status quo (which demands a "tribal" rather than individual persona). If we were to condense McClure's at times strained and jumbled reading into a single, somewhat sweeping claim, it might appear as follows: although her work is not the "self-portrait" an autobiography ought to be, by "see[ing] the self in relation to the larger group, her tribe" (McClure 39) and then acting as their representative in what Brumble calls "an extended self-vindication . . . an attempt to defend her own reputation and that of her family and her tribe" (68), Winnemucca is able to show "to the mass of [American] people . . . the story of her people's trials," "extenuating nothing and setting down naught in malice" while "comparing justly . . . the two races" (Mann 2).

The confusion in McClure's reading is understandable: the work Winnemucca does to present herself and her people in a positive light is foregrounded throughout her text, often at the expense of the kind of personal detail the literary genre autobiography demands. She describes in detail the generous, responsible nature of the Piutes as a people (see 8–9, 23, 40, 45–49), the high moral standards of women

in her culture, the lengths to which she has gone to protect her own virtue (see 181–82), the persistence with which she has attempted to promote her people's good despite constant resistance from the American government, and the good relations she has established and maintained with government officials throughout her dealings with them.⁶ To underscore this presentation, the book includes as an appendix reprints of twenty pages of letters from these officials attesting to her good character. Brumble, when confronted with the same confusing wealth of material, explains this nonstandard textual emphasis culturally, as evidence *not* of an individualistic challenge to readers' perceptions but instead as an unimaginative application of an accepted tribal practice. Winnemucca's "first education," he explains, "was in a shame culture rather than a guilt culture," (Brumble 69) and he sees as specifically characteristic of such cultures the use of narrative explanations to explain one's actions against accusations of misconduct. (The whites Winnemucca portrays, contrastingly, tend to respond to such accusations with "dismissals, flat denials, and, especially, with assertions of authority" [67]). Winnemucca's demonstration of these narrative features "should not surprise us" because many other Native autobiographical writings show similar concerns: "Indians of many tribes," says Brumble, "were answering their accusers with autobiographical narratives long before the Paiutes came into contact with the white man" (69). In making a similar gesture, Winnemucca, rather than defying convention as an individual author, is simply responding to white prejudice in such a way as befits a synecdochic representative of her people.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING AS SITUATED RESPONSE

By focusing their analyses on autobiography as a literary genre and on the ways in which Winnemucca's work reflects or digresses from the genre's formal demands, both David Brumble and Andrew McClure miss the opportunity to fully investigate her writing as a rhetorical action suited to the exigencies of its situation. Instead of seeing the book primarily as a reaction to a situation and working

to understand the context that brought the work into being, they read her text chiefly as a testimony to her attempt to reconcile with Western readers her “Indian habits of mind” (Brumble 54) and conceptions of “tribal identity” (McClure 32). Autobiographies like Winnemucca’s, those that demonstrate attributes of both Western autobiography and oral autobiographical storytelling, of both Western and tribal understandings of the selfhood of the autobiographer, are presumably what drove Arnold Krupat to argue for the classification of Indian autobiography as a distinct “genre of writing” defined by the “original, bicultural, composite composition” of texts that “are not a traditional form among Native peoples but the consequence of contact with the white invader-settlers, and the product of a limited collaboration with them. Both their production and their function involve complex, cross-cultural issues,” he says, and a “consideration of the language, culture, and history both of Native Americans and of Euroamericans” is necessary for the full understanding and appreciation of their *literary* value (*For Those* xi, emphasis in original). And so Krupat too recognizes the layers of complexity that inform Native American autobiographical writing, but only as supporting information: from his literary perspective, understanding context helps us understand the meaning of the finished text. Viewed rhetorically, however, the text can be seen as an author’s active attempt to make—and change—the meaning of the surrounding context. If we remove the lens of “autobiography” and simply view Sarah Winnemucca’s writing as it presents itself, we can read Brumble’s label “autobiographical-historical self-vindication” (68) not as an indication of Winnemucca’s cultural habits of mind or of a Native tendency toward an idiosyncratic use of the autobiographical genre but as the beginning of an examination based on purpose and function—an attempt to name the *action* the text represents instead of explaining why its form is not what it ought to be.

Some of the most productive material Brumble offers for clarifying this murky view of Native American autobiography is in his study of the work of modern Native American autobiographer N. Scott Momaday, whom Brumble characterizes as inventing the notion of “writ[ing] autobiography after the fashion of an oral

storyteller" (166, emphasis in original) in order to meet the exigencies of his own situation: to "recall," in writing, "the kinds of stories he himself heard as a child" in order that his readers be able to "experience something like his own experience of listening to his mother and father and his Kiowa relatives telling stories." Momaday knows the standard form of the literary autobiography, Brumble explains, and has read extensively from both traditional and contemporary Western examples. Momaday even teaches a course in the form at the University of Arizona, "but he chooses none of these moderns for his model. In his two published volumes of autobiography . . . he chose to write autobiography after the fashion of the nonliterate, oral Indian storytellers" (Brumble 166). In neither of his two published autobiographies, Brumble notes, "do we find continuous, chronologically ordered narrative," but instead his writing is episodic, "staccato-like," presenting "one brief story after another," connected perhaps by theme or threads of association. His autobiographical work is also without literary allusion, something that figures prominently in his other writing but would not have characterized the oral forms he remembered from childhood and sought to reproduce (166–67).

Brumble takes care to show that the correlation between Momaday's attempts to create such a form and the older works of Native writers is incidental rather than deliberate. Describing the recorded autobiography of *Two Leggings* as an excellent example of the "preliterate sense of 'autobiography,'" Brumble says that *Two Leggings* is "not telling the story of his life, but rather the stories of his life" (37) in a style very similar to Momaday's storytelling; however, Brumble insists, it was only *after* developing his approach that Momaday read *Two Leggings* and other Native autobiographies. "The autobiographical narratives of Black Hawk, Geronimo, White Bull, Crows Heart, and Maxidiwiac had helped me to understand Momaday," Brumble explains, "but not at all because Momaday had read their narratives; rather, all of them had been participants in closely related oral traditions" (17).

Brumble's approach to autobiography as a literary form guides his connecting of the textual commonalities between Momaday's work and the writings of the early autobiographers, and while Brumble

stops short of calling for the placement of Indian autobiography in a distinct genre, as Krupat does, Momaday is more than willing to argue for such a distinction. For Momaday, however, “the quintessential difference between ‘Indian autobiography’ and modern, Western autobiography” is not formal but ideological: in his own reference to *Two Leggings*, Momaday says that where Western autobiography presents “the story as dead matter” with “an ending somewhere in the past,” Indian autobiography tells “a story that is being carried on” (Brumble 173).⁷

In an essay entitled “The Morality of Indian Hating,” written in the 1960s, when he was a graduate student, N. Scott Momaday takes what could be, but for its placement in time, a direct shot at Krupat’s 1991 conception of the Native American “synecdochic self”:

The Indian has been for a long time generalized in the imagination of the white man. Denied the acknowledgement of individuality and change, he has been made to become in theory what he could not become in fact, a synthesis of himself. This is not semantic trickery. The Navajo, to illustrate, is an American Indian, but ‘the American Indian’ is not conversely a Navajo; he is rather, to the public mind, that lonely specter who stood for two hundred years in the way of civilization, who was removed time and again by force, and who was given in defeat that compensation we call savage nobility, after the example of Rousseau. (58)⁸

This Western habit of viewing Native Americans as synecdoches, although Momaday doesn’t use the word, is to him both reductive and demeaning, acting at once to deny Native Americans their individual selfhood and to freeze them at a place in time where, being both tribal and “savage,” they are permanently foreigners to Western traditions just as they are impediments to “civilization.”⁹ From such a critique it is no wonder that, well-read or not, he does not choose to write in the tradition represented to Krupat by the same Rousseau. Native Americans have to thank for the “noble savage” image they have fought since long before Winnemucca adopted and subverted it in 1883.

For Momaday, Native American identity is not a product of seeing oneself “only in functional relation to the tribe” (Krupat, “Synecdochic” 185).¹⁰ Instead, it is a matter of combining and recognizing the correlations between “myth, tribal, and personal history—[or] ‘the mythical, the historical, and the immediate,’ in Momaday’s phrase” (Bumble 168), and it is through this conception of identity that Momaday represents the oral traditions of his people in his autobiographical writing. “Each section” of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Bumble observes succinctly, “is three pages long and consists of three related accounts, one from Kiowa myth or folklore, one from Kiowa recorded history, and one from Momaday’s personal or family history” (166). Bumble finds other evidence of this tripartite influence in such Native American autobiographical works as *Black Elk Speaks*, Dan Kennedy’s *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief*, James Paytiamo’s *Flaming Arrow’s People*, Don Talayesva’s *Sun Chief*, Alma Greene’s *Forbidden Voice*, and Joseph Mathews’s *Talking to the Moon*, which example he finds especially “remarkable . . . since [Mathews] clearly has Thoreau’s *Walden* as his primary model” (168–70). And McClure connects this pattern to Winnemucca, reminding us that her frequent characterization of whites as “brothers and sisters of the Paiutes comes from a tribal story” (47).

In some of these examples, traces of one or more aspects of the “mythical, historical, and the immediate” are much harder to find than in the deliberately constructed formal organization of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Nonetheless, it is the very inclusion of these features, the connectivity between the narrator’s individual life and the tribal history and mythology that inform that life, when found in a genre whose readers’ desires are aroused in expectation of an entirely different form of fulfillment—what Krupat calls the “who-I-am” instead of the “who-we-are” (“Synecdochic” 175)—that allows Bumble to make the following summary, particularly in reference to early as-told-to autobiographies but relevant also to more general trends in scholarship concerning Native American autobiography:

That early Indians should tell about their own lives only after telling the history of their people has suggested to several

scholars something essential about Indian habits of mind. It seems to confirm that these early Indians conceived of themselves as tribal beings, that it was unconventional for them to think about themselves apart from their people. (54)¹¹

Brumble's summary seems to suggest that the inclusion of myth and tribal history in the personal story genre of the autobiography is an unavoidable result of the habits of mind of these early writers rather than the conscious layering of several different, correlative, and interdependent aspects of the writers' identities. But the deliberate arrangement of these features executed by Momaday belies this assumption; his construction is, while perhaps more consciously than for these other writers, like theirs, a particular rhetorical action designed to fit the varied attributes of the rhetorical situation that inspired it: it tells the story (or stories) of his life, it reflects the oral traditions of his childhood, and it represents his conception of identity. The shape this action assumes on paper, however, bears at times little resemblance to the traditional Western literary genre of the autobiography. In fact, Momaday's triad is startlingly evocative of the triad essayist Aldous Huxley uses to describe essayistic writing:

Essays belong to a literary species whose extreme variability can be studied most effectively within a three-poled frame of reference. There is the pole of the personal and the autobiographical; there is the pole of the objective, the factual, the concrete-particular; and there is the pole of the abstract-universal. (v)

To connect Huxley's "personal" to Momaday's "immediate," his "factual" to Momaday's "historical," and his "abstract-universal" to Momaday's "mythical" may be to create an imperfect set of direct correlations but still shows such dramatic similarity that, if assigning the autobiographical works of Native Americans to a "literary species" is a worthy goal, considering the essay as a potential for that "species" is a must.

NATIVE AMERICAN WRITERS AND THE
ART OF THE PERSONAL ESSAY

In the introduction to his 1994 *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*, Philip Lopate defines the genre, a “subset of the informal essay” (xxiv), as follows: “the hallmark of the personal essay is its intimacy . . . confiding everything from gossip to wisdom. Through sharing thoughts, memories, desires, complaints, and whimsies, the personal essayist sets up a relationship with the reader” based on the “core . . . supposition that there is a certain unity to human experience” (xxiii). Lopate then explains the absence of Native American voices in the anthology in a way that should, by now, sound dishearteningly familiar: “In many countries and cultures,” he says, “the ‘I’ characteristic of such writing forms as the personal essay ‘has been downplayed . . . because of communal factors (Native Americans have viewed the tribe, not the self, as the key unit of identity)’” (lii). In Aldous Huxley’s model, as in Lopate’s assumptions, a personal essay foregrounds the personal with relation to (but while also including) the factual and the universal; other types of essays would similarly foreground other aspects instead and include with lesser emphasis this personal “intimacy.” Both models make a distinction that Momaday does not; they name one element of the three he considers necessary components of identity as *more* necessary, or more germane to a particular form of expression, than the others. Even if Lopate had read Momaday, if his only criterion for the essays he presents were the prominence of the personal (although this prominence is not equally apparent in all of his anthologized examples), he could still have made his exclusionary justification by characterizing Native Americans as viewing the tribe *alongside* the self as key *units* of identity. But Lopate’s introduction, some thirty pages long, includes many descriptions of the “art” of the personal essay that, apparently without his awareness, suit Native American autobiographical writings very well indeed.

Some of the features Lopate mentions as characteristic of the personal essay are formal; others are better described as rhetorical actions essayists take. A “formal technique” he identifies as “employed

by the personal essayist is the movement from individual to universal" (xl). Such movement is exemplified in Momaday's shift between related accounts in each section of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, and in Winnemucca's progression from a firsthand description of an undeserved whipping her brother received at her uncle's hand to her next statement: "Brave deeds don't always get rewarded in this world" (72–73).

The interweaving of personal experience with tribal history demonstrated by Momaday and Winnemucca, among others, comes to mind when Lopate calls exemplary essayists "fine sifter[s] of the past," who, like Irish essayist Hubert Butler, emphasize the importance of "local history" to contextualize the "tiny snail track" of the writer's own experience (xxxvi), or who carefully select worldly events external to the writer's community to contextualize his or her responses to immediate circumstances. And where traditional autobiography begins with a narrator's birth and marches on in linear, chronological progression toward the "now" of the writing act (which happens, presumably, not too far from the "end" of death, since if the comprehensive "story of a life" is to be told, one must assume that its conclusion is at hand), the essay, according to Theodor Adorno "does not begin with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to discuss; it says what is at issue and stops where it feels itself complete" (qtd. in Lopate xliii).

Paraphrasing Michel de Montaigne, who is held by some to be the "father" of essay writing as we know it, Lopate elsewhere expresses this focus and its resultant versatility, this ability for essay writing to be at once localized and universal: "The essay is a notoriously flexible and adaptable form. It possesses the freedom to move anywhere, in all directions. It acts as if all objects were equally near the center and as if all subjects are linked to each other" (xxxvii). In these characterizations also, the essay as Lopate characterizes it strongly resembles Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and such autobiographical passages in *The Man Made of Words* as "When the Stars Fell" and "The Indian Dog" (Momaday 170–73)—or perhaps it is these writings of Momaday's that resemble the essay. In fact, it is hard to think of a writer in any genre who is more aptly depicted than Momaday

by the following description: "The essayist attempts to surround . . . something . . . by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk, each seemingly digressive spiral actually taking us closer to the heart of the matter. . . . The essayist must be a good storyteller" (Lopate xxxviii).¹²

And it is not only Momaday whose autobiographical writing appears essayistic from this perspective. Comparing Winnemucca's writing to Lopate's original definition of the personal essay, we can find within her work, without difficulty, examples of all of the forms of intimacy he demands: she offers gossip ("It only cost one dollar a plate for beans baked in Boston" [170]); wisdom ("Be kind to both good and bad, for you don't know your own heart" [51]); thoughts ("If women could go into your Congress I think justice would soon be done to the Indians" [53]); memories ("There was another occasion when my brother saved the life of his friend . . . but as I do not remember all the particulars I will not attempt to relate it" [73]); desires ("But my heart ached for the women and children, for there was no clothing for them" [201]); complaints ("this I told to the General, but he would not believe it" [175]); and whimsies ("Sometimes I laugh when I think of this battle. It was very exciting in one way, and the soldiers made a splendid chase, and deserved credit for it; but where was the killing?" [177]). The work also sets up not one but several different relationships with her readers at different points in the narration; "Dear reader," she says at one point, "I must tell a little more about my poor people . . ." (89); "Oh, for shame!" she rebukes readers "educated by a Christian government in the art of war" at another (207); "Ah, my dear friends," she begins in a third (243). And such apparent discrepancies in her presentation as the contrast between her crying "shame" against Christian education in one context and calling the Piutes' conceptions of God "just like those of Jesus" (51) in another, while jarring to scholars of the literary autobiography, are expected characteristics of the more exploratory form: *essai* in Old French was "trial"; *exagium* in late Latin was "weighing" or "balance."¹³ As Georg Lukacs wrote, "The essay is a judgment, but the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict . . . but the process of judging" (qtd. in

Lopate xxxi), and Winnemucca's writing shows her in "the process of judging," among other things, her immediate surroundings and her people's legends, the individual characters of both Piutes and whites, the virtue shown by Christians and non-Christians, the behavior of military personnel and governmental officials, the policies and promises enacted or ignored by those who made them, her own actions, and her people's governmental, matrimonial, and child-rearing traditions.

In fact, instead of meeting the rhetorical exigencies of one situation—one that calls, perhaps, for a traditional autobiography or a personal essay—Winnemucca's work meets an array of exigencies. As Brumble has observed, it is an act of vindication against accusations that had been levied against herself and her tribe. It is also both "her story" (Mann 4) and "the story of her people's trials" (Mann 2). It is an adventure tale of war and banditry, of cross-country chases, rescuers wearing disguises, and lost babies being miraculously returned to their mothers. It is a painfully detailed description of the political negotiations involved in the Piutes' fight to even survive the governmental "assistance" enforced by the institution of the reservation system and then to return to even a fraction of their native lands. It is a testimonial explication of the "old ways" of the Piute people, shown in deliberate contrast with the "new ways" of white society. And it is the story of an optimistic myth worn down by a harsh reality—it is at once personal and immediate, factual and historical, mythical and universal.

RHETORICAL GENRE AND BOUNDARY (OR "FRONTIER") RHETORICS

The comparisons mentioned earlier are not meant to argue for the reclassifications of the literary works of Native American autobiographers as personal essays instead but are intended to show that such a classification would, in many ways, be just as valid as calling them "autobiographies" after the Western tradition. From the perspective of the designation of literary genres, the autobiographical writing of Native Americans fits perfectly into neither category; widely varied

itself, “autobiographical storytelling,” (to broaden Brumble’s term to include both directly written and as-told-to examples), is like and unlike the Western autobiography, like and unlike the essay (personal or otherwise), like and unlike the purely oral traditions that precede it. On a map assigning territories to different generic forms, autobiographical storytelling would hover at the borders of several lands.

Such geopolitical metaphors are common to academic disciplines like English (the modern dispenser of generic classifications). Genre theorist Debra Journet mentions “turf,” “boundary,” and “property” alongside “borders” as examples of terms used to divide the academy into disciplines, and disciplinary material into types and categories such as genres. To Journet, these metaphors—and active strategies for challenging them—are key to understanding and working productively within the generic expectations of academic writing, especially in instances such as a collaborative project between scholars in different disciplines charged with producing a single text somehow representative of their separate traditions. The standard, if unsatisfactory, approach to such situational demands, she notes, involves attempting to “recast the values and assumptions of each discipline into the discursive forms of the other” (57); the text that results from such attempts, she notes, often succeeds at meeting the demands of neither discipline. Appearing as a distorted version of one or both disciplines’ generic expectations for such projects, the resulting text thus leaves the desires of readers from both disciplines unfulfilled. What is needed in such situations, says Journet, rather than awkward attempts to clothe material in a generic form that does not fit, is the creation of genuinely new generic forms suitable to the rhetorical demands of the interdisciplinary situation. These forms she calls “boundary rhetorics,” and says of their potential that they can “do more than renegotiate the borders between disciplinary genres; they open up new territories to explore” (65).¹⁴

When Journet compares interdisciplinary work to “becoming acculturated to the ‘strange land[s]’” of other genres, and associates with generic groupings “the idea of shared language and customs” (57), she is, to a degree, still being metaphorical. When Krupat

describes "Indian Autobiography as a ground on which two cultures meet" (*For Those* 33), he is not. Because the writing produced by Native autobiographers is always "a post-contact phenomenon" (Krupat, "Synecdochic" 179), there is a very real sense in which this writing always represents "the textual equivalent of the frontier" (Krupat, *For Those* 33). There is a difference, of course, between the "boundary" dividing one disciplinary genre from another and the cultural "frontier" of competing voices and traditions that characterize Native American autobiographical writing, but there is also an important similarity that transcends the convenient overlap of these geographical metaphors: in both cases writers—working together or alone—are confronted with rhetorical exigencies that their existing repertoire of rhetorical strategies cannot meet. To take the desired action in each scenario, the writer—or writers—must step outside the "borders" of familiar forms, "exploring . . . new territories" by creating new genres. Although born in a different context and to a different set of new exigencies than the one for which Journet intended the term to be used, the autobiographical works produced by many Native Americans were—and are—the very kinds of new forms she hoped to see. They do not simply wrap Native ideas—or "tribal identities"—in the packages of traditional Western forms; nor do they convey purely oral forms in the different medium of writing. Instead, they combine elements of personal narrative, Western autobiography, essayistic exploration, and oral storytelling to meet these new situations the only way they can be met—with "boundary rhetorics." Native American autobiographical storytelling is not Western autobiography. It is not the personal essay. It is not a story told aloud to "assembled members of a tribe." It is not "the story of [a] life, but rather the *stories* of [a] life." To view it as belonging to any of these established genres—especially with the intent of critiquing the ways in which it fails to meet the preexisting expectations of an already codified form—does these works and their authors a profound injustice.

What is important is not the term used to describe Native American autobiographical storytelling but the recognition of the fact that the generic designations we give pieces of writing do more

than group them according to shared features into categories for study; genres “signal a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology” (Berkenkotter and Huckin 478).¹⁵ Identifying a piece of writing as belonging to one or another genre does not label only the *form* of the writing but also the *act* of writing—the “social action,” in Carolyn Miller’s terms, that serves a social purpose for the writer and has an effect on the writer’s society (or societies). Calling a text an “autobiography” arouses in readers more desires—more expectations—than the preconceived set of textual features an autobiography is assumed to include. “Autobiography,” a Western term for a traditional Western art form, carries in addition to “norms” for the telling of the Western “life story” an association with Western epistemological, ideological, and ontological preferences—such as the understandings of identity and individuality that predominate in Western culture. “The question of the unity of the self and its relation to the text . . . [is] not just . . . an interpretive issue (whether we can ascribe a voice or intention) but . . . a political and cultural one, in so far as it involves memory and Indian traditional values and forms of expression,” explains David Murray, in the “Autobiography and Authorship” chapter of his *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts*. And the Western “concept of an individual life” as a linearly “unfolding story which can be isolated, recalled and retold” in its entirety, and made into a single, distinct “product for contemplation, is not one necessarily shared by other cultures” (65).

In the postscript at the end of his study, David Brumble illustrates his still-developing awareness of the cultural assumptions that studying Native autobiographical writing as Western autobiography imposes on these texts. Noting the benefit that can be gained by relinquishing some of our generic expectations and listening, instead, to what is—and is not—told by these storytellers, he says:

If a Sioux warrior tells about his life by describing his deeds, if he tells us nothing about how his personality developed, I hope that we can now recognize that, still, he *is* telling us something essential about his personality, that we *are* being allowed a glimpse of the way this man sees himself. . . . If [Native auto-

biographer] Maxidiwac makes nothing explicit about just how it is that she came to be the person she is . . . [but tells of many other things,] We should realize that in all her talk of fields and plants and her deeds, we may catch a glimpse of a self very different from our own. We should recognize that [the Native Americans whose autobiographical writing we study] are by their silences providing us with “true evidence of their personality”—precisely by telling us nothing about their personality. (181–82)

While I hope that the dangers of extrapolating overmuch upon the ways in which the “self” Western readers “glimpse” through such readings might be “very different from [their] own” have been adequately outlined, the importance of these glimpses, and of the work scholars must do in order to see these “selves” as they present themselves, to look at what is *written or not written* instead of what is *expected and presumed missing*, cannot be overstated. The “silences” of Native writers are—like their personal narratives, tribal histories, mythologies, “self-vindications,” and autobiographical stories—rhetorical actions that can only be fully understood in relation to the socially, culturally, politically, epistemologically, and ideologically influenced rhetorical circumstances surrounding them: rhetorical circumstances that were not, and will never be, identical to the rhetorical circumstances prompting Western writers to create the works whose recurrent forms qualify them for inclusion in the literary genre autobiography. An unexamined grouping of Native autobiographical writing under this—or any—generic heading only serves to obscure those influential circumstances in ways that impair our ability to understand these works as what they are.

At the very end of his postscript, Brumble begins to propose just such an examination: “Perhaps,” he says, “we should return . . . to the problem of defining autobiography” in ways other than in the “confining . . . generic definitions” characteristic of current scholarship. When “read without a culture-bound insistence that the autobiographer speak to us as would Henry Adams or Rousseau,” he says, “the hundreds of Indian autobiographers—speaking to us from three

centuries, from well over a hundred different tribes—can show us an immense range of human ground” (182–83). Brumble leaves the details of how, exactly, one *should* read Indian autobiography up to other scholars and his readership, perhaps hoping for someone else to codify the appropriate generic classification for these bicultural documents.

My answer is this: rather than focusing on the nature of the *literary work*, to truly understand these texts, we must focus on the nature of the *work* accomplished by the act of creating the *literature*. To approach genre as a textual result of purposeful rhetorical action rather than as a tool for literary definition is to open up an avenue into this “immense range of human ground,” a way to explore the new generic “territories” created by Native American autobiographical storytelling—an active rhetorical response to rhetorical circumstances unlike any others in the world.

NOTES

1. Amy Devitt elaborates: “Since genres are defined by such similarity and difference, texts must not only always participate in a genre but always participate in multiple genres simultaneously. Thus, texts need not be categorized singularly, as either tragedy or comedy, for example, or simply, as ‘genre writing,’ such as mysteries, romances, science fiction, and westerns. . . . Texts are generic in multiple and complex ways” (700–701). This elaboration is part of her attempt to reconcile current work in literary and rhetorical genre studies and probably reflects views that neither David Brumble nor Arnold Krupat were working within the understanding of literary genre that influenced their writing about autobiographies in the 1980s.

2. *Life among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* was published under the author’s married name, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins; perhaps because this marriage was short-lived and perceived as not appropriately characteristic of the author’s life, modern scholars often refer to her simply as Sarah Winnemucca. I have chosen to follow that trend. In-text citations, however, are to “Hopkins” so as to correlate with Works Cited entries.

3. Modern spelling conventions allow both “Paiute” and “Piute”; I have kept Winnemucca’s spelling in my own prose for the sake of simplicity and consistency with quotations from her text; where other writers use the “a,” I have retained their spelling.

4. Krupat adds, parenthetically, addressing Thoreau's gender-specificity, that "there remains the problem of what women were to do with these constructions" but offers no further comment or solution.

5. In portraying her as "dialogic," McClure means that Winnemucca is in dialogue with different aspects of herself; the material reality of the dialogues that took place between Winnemucca and Mann that presumably helped construct the work here go unmentioned.

6. These last two themes appear in detail throughout Hopkins's final two chapters, "The Bannock Wars" and "The Yakima Affair."

7. Brumble's in-text citation notes as the source for this quote a 1985 interview with Momaday, but no such interview appears in his bibliography.

8. "The Morality of Indian Haters" appears anachronistically in Momaday's 1997 *The Man Made of Words* but has reputedly been published unchanged from its original composition.

9. Interestingly, Krupat, in the same 1991 article, after disclaiming the notion that his metaphor should imply that "all autobiographies of Indians must necessarily be unimpressed by varieties of individualism, [or] that all autobiographies by Native people must take synecdoche as their defining figure," mentions Momaday as an example of a Native writer using a more metonymic model. "Synecdochic" 186.

10. This comment is made in particular reference to Leslie Silko's *Storyteller*, whom Krupat says "conceives of individual identity only in functional relation to the tribe." "Synecdochic" 185. Although elsewhere in the article he speaks of Native and Western conceptions of identity as being equally valuable despite their difference, Krupat's use of the word "only" here seems to imply that such a conception is somehow lacking in relation to Western individualism.

11. In Brumble's original context, this statement is qualified by his acknowledgement of its limitations: the problem with this deduction, he says, is that it is made on the basis of only the as-told-to autobiographies, the contents and certainly arrangement of which were not necessarily selected by the narrators, and so might not reflect the actual intentions of these narrators. While this is a valid objection, he makes other statements throughout the text that imply that the impression held by these scholars to whom he refers is an accurate portrayal of a point of view with which he agrees at least in principle, if not in its more derogatory implications. See Brumble 46, 176.

12. Momaday on writing, creating a depiction with which Lopate would have found familiarity: "What we have in all writing and in all prehistoric rock art . . . is a common denominator that is truly definitive: the element of story. Man is a storyteller" (130).

13. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

14. The question of whether such a new genre, once created, would then become subject to the same limitations as the old genres it was designed to replace or would remain open to continual revision remains contested in genre studies at this time; some scholars, such as Gunther Kress (see his essay "Genre in a Social Theory of Language") argue that genres are never stabilized but are always in the process of adapting to better serve situational demands. Others, such as Carolyn Matelene (see *Worlds of Writing*) are, like Journet, concerned about the interaction between changing needs in school and workplace writing situations and the "outmoded prescriptions" of instruction in and repetition of existing forms no longer suitable to new situations yet stubbornly resistant to change.

15. The rhetorical term "discourse community" can be used in relation to communities defined very broadly, as with a group of several nations sharing a common language, or extremely narrowly, as with a group of people with nearly identical and identically contextualized understandings of a specific set of terms, such as the workers sharing a single project in a particular microbiology lab. Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin employ the term in the context of academic disciplinarity, using it to frame similar observations about disciplinary genres as those Debra Journet and other genre scholars make. By including it in this argument, I hope to expand their meaning beyond the boundaries of academic disciplinary genres and into the genres of communication in general, where a discourse community can be any group with a shared understanding of a set of textual or linguistic features or attributes—in this case, the common features and associations accompanying the Western notion of autobiography.

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Approaching a Sacred Song

Toward a Respectful Presentation of the Discourse We Study

ANDIE DIANE PALMER

Educators who focus on American Indian or First Nations languages often have the privilege of bringing tape recordings of songs and stories to their students in the classroom. Learning the protocols for such sharing of the treasured gifts of ancestors is made easier by the good examples of our teachers in and out of the classroom, who share such gifts as part of their own teaching. I use this essay to make explicit some teaching practices that go without saying, as they are modeled by Upper Skagit Elder, university professor, and storyteller Vi ʔaqʷšəblu Hilbert. This essay is a reflection, written back to my own teacher, about what I have learned and continue to learn in her presence. It is written in response to the wish of one of my own students that such good examples could be more widely shared and consciously articulated in the literature on educational practice.

Many of us who teach in the area of First Nations or American Indian languages and traditions have been given permission to share taped recordings of privately owned songs and stories, photographs, and videos with our students in the classroom. In informal discussion, some educators speaking at the 2000 Canadian Indigenous and Native Studies Association conference expressed their trepidation regarding the classroom presentation of such materials from their own areas of expertise, even when explicit permissions had been given to them by the creators or performers of the materials.¹ The classroom presents a new context in which implicit agreements to respect the materials and act with honor toward the original pre-

senters necessarily require a different enactment of protocols than a face-to-face encounter with the original presenters.

The classroom situation does not afford the checks on presentation that are provided in personal interaction with a singer. In a face-to-face interaction, audience members can often take explicit direction from the singer with regard to how they might stand, sit, or otherwise respectfully attend to, and participate in, the event. If necessary, permissions and explanations can be given by the singer or another knowledgeable person present. Audience members in face-to-face interaction with a singer can also assume that the singer can exercise some degree of autonomy in choosing to give voice to a particular song, or not, when in their midst. Within the classroom, where the song is audited from a tape recording, the expectations of a song's owners or performers might not be as clear. Cultural conventions ordinarily associated with classroom learning may not be in accord with those of song presentation. Note-taking, for example, might ordinarily be seen as a reasonable display of attentiveness for a student in a classroom setting, whereas taking notes while listening to a singer could imply a lack of engagement.

Some of the inherent difficulties of classroom presentation have been mitigated where locally developed curricula and textbooks have been put into place in consultation with teachers and communities (e.g., the work of Julie Cruikshank with Yukon elders to develop *Dän Dhá Ts'edenintth'é / Reading Voices: Oral and Written Interpretations of the Yukon's Past* and the body of work developed by educator David Cort and noted storytellers with his elementary school students on the Tulalip Reservation). Educational organizations have also taken steps to provide guidelines for presenting traditional teachings in a manner that is culturally appropriate. For example, the University of Alaska at Fairbanks and the Alaska Native Knowledge Network have developed a set of standards for presentation, which provide the approved philosophy for teaching from cultural materials and suggestions for preparation. Unfortunately, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network guidelines do not provide specifics for the working out of practice in the classroom, the very learning environment that they attempt to address. Some ethnographic

studies examine communication failures in the classroom (e.g., Philips), but ethnographic research that explicitly examines successful practice in the teaching of cultural materials in the classroom is more difficult to locate. One notable exception to this generalization can be found in the work of Linda Goulet. Goulet examined the teaching practices of two highly regarded teachers of aboriginal students, one working in her Dene home community and the other a nonaboriginal teacher working in a Northern Cree community. Her research identified specific effective practices of these teachers and noted particularly how they were able to teach the students for “responsible self-direction” (68, quoting Sheila Watt-Cloutier).

Cathy Sewell observed that educators are much in need of concrete examples of successful practices in university classrooms (Sewell and Pocklington).² My aim here is to make explicit a framework that allows for a respectful approach to song in the classroom, according to Lushootseed principles as I have come to understand them, with implications for presenting song from other traditions as well.³ I suggest that such practices can be observed and adopted, consciously or not, when one has the privilege of learning from a good teacher in the classroom. Such practices often seem to “go without saying,” but a record of them can inform and enrich the teaching practices of others not directly exposed to them. I further propose that exposure to such successful practices allows for an improved understanding of the meanings of the songs as extended into such contexts, as well as a better understanding of the discomfort many have expressed when they find that cultural materials are improperly aired or displayed.

Vi *taq*⁴šəblu Hilbert, has sometimes shared the songs of her relatives, recorded on tape, in the Lushootseed literature and language classes at the University of Washington. She has done so in such a way that I have felt more at ease in sharing those recorded songs, when permitted, as well. I will begin by describing the directly observable (external) components of her practice. Here, insofar as I am capable of describing it, is what Hilbert modeled for us:

She let us know that before she ever played a song for us, she thought over why we might need to hear it.

She always prepared the way and put us in a ready frame of mind to listen. She would tell us that we were going to hear a song and that the song was a gift, a treasure. She would describe her familial relationship to the singer and tell us a little about what she appreciated about the person.

She would then describe the purposive action of the person who had recorded the song—who it was recorded with, who the person stated he or she had recorded it for, what the stated purpose of the song was.

She would tell us how thankful she was that someone had thought it important to record the song.

She would express gratitude that this person had recorded the song so that we could hear it.

She would discuss restrictions that might have been placed on the recording or auditing of the song and explain why we were currently able to hear the song and the decision that had to be carefully made by the singer to record it.

She would introduce the singer as someone present, including, where warranted, directly addressing him or her as a relation.

When she turned the tape recorder on, she would listen, standing quietly and attentively.

When the song was over, she would turn the tape recorder off, pause, and thank the person whose voice we had listened to.

I think we benefit from this special care in presentation in the classroom. Of such practice Linda Akan writes,

Teaching and learning seem to be inseparable. Although the roles of teacher and learner may be clearly understood, especially in face-to-face interaction, they are also internal processes. . . . Ideally, teaching implies setting an example by being the example and carrying the message of our Ancestors. (192–93)

Hilbert's role as teacher, modeling a respectful stance toward song, helped make students aware of their responsibilities to the singer and his or her work and helped us to listen with our full attention. She would ensure that everyone was attentive and in a state of readi-

ness to hear the song. By ensuring that we understood that we were listening to a singer, and to that singer's song, Hilbert promoted a more direct engagement, and reminded us that songs as performed are communicative acts. They call forth a connection between singer, hearer, and focus attention on a specific location in time and space.

Hilbert also provided a template for future action with her way of presenting. Through presentation, she provided a set of protocols that allowed me to be in a position to listen, and, when teaching myself, to prepare my students to listen. The readiness and ease she fostered allowed those of us in her class to be in a position to listen with mindful purpose. The protocols set up a space of possibility in which to enter into the discursive action of song. We were in a position to do so even if we did not understand what we were being exposed to (and we can continue to learn what this is for all of our lives) because we knew that we were placed in a position of behaving respectfully by participation in the protocol. It allowed for the activation of potentials in discourse that might otherwise not be available if the song were presented as only a record of a past event.

Implicit in this framework of action is a set of understandings about what the song, and hearing the song, can mean. As Akan has said of her own Saulsteaux teacher and grandfather, Alfred Manitowey, Hilbert is "setting an example by being the example and carrying the message of our Ancestors" (192–93). Hilbert sets the example by "being the example" when she greets the one who sings on the tape. Sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, the living audience is directed to understand that the song performance invites the presence of the ancestors to whom it is sung, and by whom it is sung.

Bruce-*subiyay* Miller writes that there is a silence in greeting, that "allow[s] the ancestors to visit" (25). Here, in the preparation, and in Hilbert's attentive listening, we find that silent space of acknowledgment before the spoken greeting and thanksgiving. The thanks acknowledge interlocutors in the room who may have been called back by the song. Miller reminds us that interlocutors may not be physically present; mindful speech and song can acknowledge and entreat those who have passed and can also engage those yet to be born. I would suggest that the point in time that the song is sung

(and is sometimes tape-recorded) is only one part of the temporal frame that the singer takes into account; how those songs might be apprehended in other times, reaching forward and back from the point of performance, can also be acknowledged.

The song as performed must also be explicated with regard to the situated meaning for the singer and the appropriateness of its airing in a particular geographic location at a particular point in history. By way of example, I consider here the performance of *lehel* songs. Lehel, also known as *slahal*, *slehel*, and *lahal* in several Salish languages, as well as “bone game” and “stick game” in English, is a gambling game played by two teams, the object of which is to guess which hand of one of the players holds a marked bone. In Coast Salish territory, lehel games are held in conjunction with canoe races and other spring and summer gatherings. Miller notes that in his Skokomish (Coast Salish) tradition, the season associated with the beginning of lehel playing is “in May, when the salmonberries bloom” (34). The games are played on the coast with serious attention to winning but are also joyous affairs associated with celebration. Songs are sung by members of the side holding the bones as part of their efforts to overpower or distract the opposing players’ attention from the true location of the marked bone. Lehel songs are acknowledged throughout what I know of Salish territory to work, in part, as entreaties for spiritual assistance in the game. The power in, or of, the songs as performed can manifest in unanticipated ways.

In Secwepemc (Interior Salish) territory in British Columbia, prescriptions concerning the singing of lehel songs have developed in a very different way than they have on the West Coast since the 1860s. After learning of the games at summer gatherings, the Oblate priest Father LeJacq enforced a prohibition on the singing of Secwepemc songs, including lehel songs, which he regarded as instruments that might draw the singers away from his Catholic teachings. He did permit the singing of lehel songs at funeral wakes, however. Under his gaze, singers of lehel songs ostensibly sang and played “for amusement only,” to pass the nights at wakes throughout the year (compare Whitehead 81–83). In Secwepemc territory at Esk’et (Alkali Lake, BC) today, the strict prohibitions imposed by the

Oblate priests have relaxed, as has the order's power to enforce them, but wakes have become the preferred and typical setting for lehel games and songs. For a person at Esk'et to sing a lehel song, whether within or outside of the context of a wake, is to activate the potential for song to call on those who have passed away for assistance in helping another over to the other side. A child heard singing a lehel song away from a lehel game, (i.e., for idle purpose) calls some elders at Alkali Lake to an awareness that someone may soon be dying.⁴

I would suggest that scholarly inquiry into local use of song can be best approached with an assumption that all songs are part of the spiritual "work" of performers and their audiences, and while that work might be may not be fully understood by the scholar-as-auditor, the potential for the activation of multiple unfolding meanings is not extinguished by the physical absence of the performer and that the potentials called to the fore may shift and will continue to shift over time. A recent collection of performances and of essays on songs, *Spirit of the First People: Native American Music Traditions of Washington State*, edited by Willie Smith and Esmé Ryan, makes clear that songs require our careful regard and approach and that they continue to be part of a living tradition. The authors and singers inform us through their partially overlapping and supporting commentary that songs may be regarded as gifts received (SiJohn); as healing (Cunningham and Amoss); as something other than "music" or the product of an earthly composer and, simultaneously, as property (Haines); as prayer; or as instruction to act (Timentwa and Chamberlain). Songs can strengthen ties on parting (Beavert-Martin) and can serve as teachings, as greetings, as announcements to let other persons know who is entering their territory, as welcome, as requests for aid, as company, as support, and as sacred connection. Their performance can be seen as connecting us through embodied resonance, as a mutual breathing together, as a co-creation of a time and space for learning to occur (see also Lightning).

Given the myriad ways that song can be activated, implicit in a respectful approach to song is an acknowledgement that, as part of the expression of language not moribund but living, the song meaning can change. We can therefore also expect that the concomitant

classroom experience of song and the appropriateness of its performance in that context can, and will, change. A recorded song or speech and accompanying materials, such as photographs of associated ceremonial activity, that might be appropriate to present at one time will not necessarily be so in all seasons and at all times.

Following the good example of a teacher in the performance of a protocol of presentation that acknowledges the song, its situation, the singer, and the audience's relationship to the singer entrains the mindful consideration of the potential of all Lushootseed songs to be prayerful entreaties and leaves open the potential for change of meaning and for learning on the part of all auditors. The vessel that carries the songs forward is thereby enlarged. We can thus assist with the care and packing of this new and "different canoe" by observing the helpful examples of our elders.⁵

NOTES

This article is based on a paper presented at the Thirty-seventh International Conference on Salish and Neighbouring Languages, Bellingham, Washington. Conference proceedings appeared in the *University of British Columbia Working Papers in Linguistics* 9 (July 2002): 287–92. This article is dedicated to the memory of Catherine Francis Sewell. A former student and an educator in the School of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, Cathy is also fondly remembered as a singer—a founding member of the aboriginal vocal group Asani (in Cree, "The Rock").

1. Past experience as students can contribute to this apprehension. Educators have recounted their own experiences of discomfort from times when they were students and were presented with such materials without some acknowledgement or reassurance of permissions granted to instructors to share the materials.

2. See also the experiences of aboriginal students in universities as documented through guided reflections in the work of Jane Vera Martin and of Wayne Gorman.

3. Lushootseed, or *dxʷləšutcid*, is the Coast Salish language spoken in the Puget Sound region of Washington State, along the rivers and salt water between *siəčas* (Olympia) and *dxʷlubi* (the Lummi Reserve near Bellingham).

4. I am grateful to Shuswap language teachers Celina Harry and Julianna Johnson for their explanations of the meanings of the singing of lehel songs by children at Alkali Lake. Responsibility for any misunderstanding of what they have so patiently tried to teach is, of course, my own.

5. The Lushootseed word *qilbid*, often glossed as “canoe,” refers generically to any vehicle or conveyance, including the automobile, and even the printed page. Hilbert has considered the change in modes of transferring cultural materials, from face-to-face interaction to the archive of the spoken word on audio and videotape and in print as a change in vehicle, as a “different canoe” (254), with all the concomitant changes in strategies of packing and delivering that are anticipated or unforeseen.

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Revising Strategies

The Intersection of Literature and Activism in
Contemporary Native Women's Writing

LISA J. UDEL

Literature can and does successfully contribute to the politics of possession and dispossession.

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

How are we to read contemporary Native women's written work? If writing can be considered a form of activism, as I believe, what is the role of the reader of such works? What do the writers expect of us as readers of and potential actors in the causes they promote? In exposing the reader to the violence of Euroamerican expansion and domination during the last three centuries, Native authors overtly seek to educate the non-Native reader uninformed of such history while also confirming experiences known to Native readers. Through examples of contemporary Native life that include violence, poverty, and broken family units, along with the lost traditional lifeways of language, spirituality, and artistry, Native authors expose the reader to ongoing problems that continue to erode Native nations' ability to survive in modern America. The reader, often ignorant of such facts, comes away with an enhanced understanding of the various ways Western colonialism has destroyed, and continues to destroy, Native cultures.

Concomitantly, what is our response to the examples of effective grassroots resistance seen in these works: Winona LaDuke's novel *Last Standing Woman*, her essay collection *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, the tentative affirmation of Elizabeth

Cook-Lynn's *Aurelia: A Crow Creek Trilogy*, and the spiritual commitment of Linda Hogan's novels *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*? All of these texts assert that the beauty of the linked natural and spiritual worlds is all around us, that Native nations, despite the obstacles posed by Western cultures, will survive and indeed flourish. Are such examples representations of genuine conditions among select Native communities, or are they models of what can be obtained? If Native American literature has its roots in "truth-telling," in "setting the record straight," as many scholars have argued (see, e.g., Brumble), then we must ask how much of those initial motivations continue to drive contemporary Native writers and their readers today. What do contemporary Native writers demand of their readers who are both Native and non-Native? In their work, LaDuke, Cook-Lynn, and Hogan profess to tell truths and expose lies to the reader. The authors' demands on the reader are reformatory; their works model a superior Native reality, with the hope of producing an educated reader/activist who, upon finishing the text, will work to improve the lives of contemporary Native Americans.

A chief aim shared by LaDuke, Cook-Lynn, and Hogan, along with many other Native women writers and theorists, is the decolonization of North America. Several Native writers characterize this movement as "Indigenism" and describe it as a liberation movement and worldview that offers an ideology that integrates life with nature. This philosophy identifies an indigenous "Fourth" or "Host" world on the planet that is composed of Native peoples globally; the industrialized and industrializing states comprise the First, Second, and Third worlds, and are seen as sitting atop the Host world, subjugating and feeding off it simultaneously (Guerrero, "Academic Apartheid" 59–61). The concept of Indigenism presupposes several assumptions: that indigenous people worldwide share a common experience of colonization and subsumption into a capitalist and hegemonic nation state, a shared investment in the attainment of sovereign nationhood, and a fundamentally nondisruptive, integrative relationship with the natural habitat (Guerrero, "Academic Apartheid" 61). All three writers produce texts that reflect their political and artistic ideologies. I wish to consider how their ideologies

shape their written work and also to discuss whether their work fulfills the agendas they articulate and to what result.

Indigenist movements operate within both the grassroots settings that LaDuke and Hogan describe and the academic milieu that Cook-Lynn has shaped, addressing reform at all levels. Regardless of where they devise an Indigenist program, whether within the university academy or within reservation or urban communities, Native women deploy an ideology based in ecoculturalism, an identity located in the linkage between a sense of being with a sense of place (Guerrero, "Exemplars of Indigenism" 217). Native intellectuals argue for an academic Indigenism that would be based upon Native experiences of language, history, culture, religions, and so on. Intellectual Indigenism would apply Native knowledge bases to decolonize current Native studies programs and the Native communities they serve. Grassroots activists employ an ecoculturalist methodology that identifies women's health and prosperity with a feminized, maternal earth in order to combat the destruction of natural habitat (ecocide) and a land-based culture (ethnocide), which they view as inextricably bound.

LaDuke, Cook-Lynn, and Hogan discuss eco-and ethnocide in their novels and essays, addressing the readers, instructing us *how* to read their work, *why* it is crucial that we know the historical "facts" of the narrative, and *what* our next action should be once we have finished reading their work. LaDuke's historical fiction and the political articles written over the past twenty years overtly address Native land reclamation projects, environmental restoration, economic sustainability, and Native sovereignty. As Steven Salatia observes, LaDuke has become one of the most recognizable tribal figures in modern America; however, much of her visibility stems from non-Native media such as *The Progressive*, *off our backs*, and the *Utne Reader*. LaDuke's position within Native communities and within Native studies is more ambiguous.

Although the practical applications of their reform differ, LaDuke and Cook-Lynn share a desire to change elements of Native American life, with LaDuke focusing on the material aspects and Cook-Lynn focusing more on the intellectual. The subject matter of their work,

both grassroots and academic, their historical and cultural specificity, coupled with their demands on the reader, determine in part the kind of presses that publish their work—Voyageur, South End, University Presses of Colorado, Wisconsin, and Iowa, respectively—along with the limited reviews their work receives in both the non-Native and nonacademic press.

I have included Linda Hogan in this discussion because she straddles the two blocks that I have identified. Hogan has produced poetry, fiction, autobiography, and nonfiction prose and has edited several anthologies of Native women's spiritual and ecocritical work. Her novels *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms*, and *Power*, along with her essays *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* and her recent autobiography, *The Woman Who Watches over the World*, are published with Simon and Schuster and W. W. Norton. Hogan's work, like that of LaDuke and Cook-Lynn, focuses on questions of Indian survival, environment, and identity. Unlike the two other authors, however, Hogan is published with prominent and commercial houses, accordingly receives reviews in the mainstream press, especially in recent years, and has gained wide recognition as an important Native writer.¹ Like LaDuke and Cook-Lynn, Hogan depicts crucial, recognizable moments in history; she traces their origins and examines their results. Hogan also draws the reader into the world she depicts and speaks directly to us, informing and advising us of our possible participation in producing change. Each of Hogan's novels focuses on a different Indian nation: the Osages in *Mean Spirit*, the "Beautiful People" of the North Woods in *Solar Storms*, and the Taigas of the Florida Everglades in *Power*. I will focus on the latter novel in my discussion.

The three authors represent complementary elements of Native women's activist writing. Whether exploring the grassroots, the academic, the artistic, or the spiritual, the authors address the following themes in their work: Native identity and survival in the modern world; the role or responsibility of the writer, the intellectual, the artist, and the tribal member in Native America; how history has determined and continues to influence tribal politics and indigenous survival; and lastly, how these issues concern the ongoing struggle

for Native sovereignty. The authors' engagement with these themes shapes the content and formal structure of their work, often producing prose and poetry that is politically and artistically ideological in nature.

In *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre*, Susan Rubin Suleiman examines the ideological novel, or *roman à thèse*, of the early twentieth century. Suleiman defines ideological novels as texts with a clear ideological message that seek to persuade their readers of the "correctness" of interpreting the world (1). The *roman à thèse* "is a novel written in the realistic mode (that is, based on an aesthetic of verisimilitude and representation), which signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical, or religious doctrine" (7).

The novels that I discuss seek to represent an historical, cultural, and artistic verisimilitude in the hopes of persuading the reader of the validity or "correctness" of the worldview they portray. Typically the ideological novel "affirms absolute truths [and] absolute values" (Suleiman 10). Additionally, an overriding impulse of the ideological novel is to "make others see" what the author believes to be true (Suleiman 19). As we consider how LaDuke, Cook-Lynn, and Hogan address the issues of survival, history, and responsibility, we must examine our response to the authors' ideologies as well as the efficacy of their work.

SURVIVAL

The question of Indian survival in contemporary America runs throughout the work of these three authors. In *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, LaDuke details the work occupying current grassroots Native environmentalist groups. LaDuke structures *All Our Relations* in ten chapters, each identifying a specific tribe and an environmental/political problem, along with the group's organized efforts to address it. The chapters provide a detailed map of the area under discussion with Indian place names as well as the Anglo place names and a narration of historical events leading up to the current crisis and, in some cases, recent Native victories. LaDuke

profiles the Seminoles, the Northern Cheyennes, and the effect of nuclear waste on Western Shoshone land, as well as her own work with the White Earth Reservation Land Recovery Project and current use of solar energy among the Hopis, as examples of political issues confronting contemporary Native Americans. One of the central concerns of Native survival for LaDuke, then, is the material conditions of reservation life. She notes that all reservations are plagued by “ethnostress,” which LaDuke describes as “what you feel when you wake up in the morning and you are still Indian, and you still have to deal with stuff about being Indian—poverty, racism, death, the government, and stripmining,” the conditions that arise from being Indian in a country that opposes the political, cultural, and religious aspects of that identity (90).

One of the primary environmental problems facing Native groups today is the use of reservation lands as nuclear waste dumps.² In addition to the pollution of indigenous land bases, the expropriation of land and its resources remains another issue of deep concern to Native groups. Such use of Native lands has obvious repercussions on the health of its residents as well as their autonomy over cultural, political, and spiritual matters. LaDuke, like many Native activists, articulates an ecoculturalist ideology when she points to a symbiotic relationship between indigenous people and the environment. They link their systems of cultural organization to a specific place that contains and imparts memories of their history and identity.

Like LaDuke, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn questions how Indians are to survive in the modern world, where Native and Western cultures often collide. Cook-Lynn’s scholarly work covers a wide range of material, including contemporary images of Indians in popular culture, the function of art in a nationalist agenda, and the effects of tribal politics upon the individual. While recognizing the importance of environmental integrity to Native groups, Cook-Lynn approaches the issue of Indian survival somewhat differently from LaDuke. Cook-Lynn links Indian survival to the development of intellectual traditions within the academy as well as to the success of the type of land reclamation movements that LaDuke describes, noting that practitioners of Native studies must reevaluate and revise the purposes of

their discipline. Until recently, Cook-Lynn argues, university systems, Native studies departments, and publishing houses have defined who an Indian is; such a system weakens Native intellectualism and undermines movements toward Native sovereignty ("Radical Conscience" 13). Additionally, it privileges white readers' and editors' tastes over Native expectations which thwarts the goals of activist writing intent on articulating Native perspectives and concerns.

Education in the United States has always affected questions of Indian identity and survival. Given the history of mission and boarding schools, the majority of Native individuals regard non-Native educational systems with ambivalence if not open hostility. Whereas schools have historically been used to assimilate Indians and thwart tribal sovereignty, Native studies must now work to ensure nationalist movements. Cook-Lynn calls for a level of self-consciousness among the individual, noting that within this context, the Native intellectual must ask what it means to be an Indian in contemporary tribal America. If the individual does not consider the question of location and purpose, then Native American intellectualism will cease to exist ("American Indian Intellectualism" 124). Therefore, the survival of Native America is linked to the survival of Native intellectual traditions, both inside the academy and beyond.³ Native scholars involved in such a project must study their own societies and histories, and the results must provide the foundation of the discipline. Cook-Lynn proposes that Native studies come out of and serve the interests of Native communities, linking the academy with the community.

Linda Hogan's many novels link the survival of Native individuals to the strength of their ties to Native traditions. Hogan portrays Native characters poised at crucial moments in their tribes' various histories. For example, Omishto, the protagonist of *Power*, stands at the divide between the white world and the Taiga world of the Florida Everglades. Omishto, which means "one who watches," must decide whether she will assimilate into the mainstream white world, as her Taiga mother has, or live in Kili Swamp with the Taiga elders of her small tribe. At sixteen, Omishto faces questions of identity and survival. As she enters womanhood, her decision will determine

the direction her life takes henceforward. Omishto's realization that she must choose which world to inhabit stems from the killing of a panther, a sacred, primordial animal among the Taigas.⁴ This act is carried out by Omishto's mentor, Ama, who maintains Taiga traditions and has been destined to assume leadership within the tribe. Ama's act has serious repercussions: panthers are protected by the Endangered Species Act, and killing one is illegal under U.S. law. More important, their sacred position as creator of the Taiga people demands reciprocity and protection from the tribe. Ama is tried by the state of Florida, where she is acquitted as mentally unsound; she is then tried, found guilty, and ultimately banished by the Taiga elders.

Hogan maps Omishto's growing comprehension of her role in Taiga survival. While gratified to have a place within the community of Taiga elders, Omishto is also ambivalent about the demands placed upon her, observing: "I know our survival depends on who I am and who I will become. But this is too large for me. It makes me want to run away" (161). Omishto knows the history of white conquest of the Everglades tribes; on several occasions she relates particular episodes that highlight the violence of that conquest. She recognizes the complexity of maintaining Taiga traditions in contemporary America.

RESPONSIBILITY

LaDuke, Cook-Lynn, and Hogan all link Indian identity and survival to the tribal responsibilities of the individual. LaDuke identifies her responsibilities thus:

I am not a traditional Anishnabe [*sic*], I am a product of colonization, a woman and a warrior. My role, as I see it, is to protect those on the inside of the circle—those elders who pray daily in the traditional manner and language to Mother Earth—the manner in which she is accustomed to be cared for, and has been for longer than the Anishnabe can remember. If anyone can pray to her, it is the elders, and they will teach the children. I am here to fight for that. ("In Honor of Women Warriors" 4)

LaDuke successfully employs legal and organizational strategies of contemporary America to restore Native American traditions. To that end, her work with the Anishinaabe Akiing and the White Earth Land Recovery Project exemplifies the goals she lays out. LaDuke devotes several detailed articles describing the specifics of her activism with both organizations.⁵ She wishes to provide a model of successful grassroots activism to the reader.

Cook-Lynn addresses the question of personal responsibility through the role of the Indian intellectual and the function of Native art. As both an intellectual and a poet, Cook-Lynn devises strict, often prescriptive, guidelines. She envisions the Native studies scholar as one who must work always with tribal sovereignty in mind. Like the intellectual, the Indian artist is obligated to create works of art that propound Indian nationalism. Cook-Lynn characterizes the majority of Native American poetry as protest or resistance art that works toward liberation and decolonization movements worldwide. Poetry is deployed to transform the political and cultural landscape of indigenous peoples. Art must be functional, insists Cook-Lynn.

In her oft-cited and provocative essay "The American Indian Fiction Writer: 'Cosmopolitanism,' Nationalism, the Third World, and First Nation Sovereignty" and in the more recent "Literary and Political Questions of Transformation: American Indian Fiction Writers," Cook-Lynn argues in favor of nationalism to promote Indian sovereignty. Literature that violates nationalistic modes of fiction, which Cook-Lynn labels "cosmopolitan," undermines the anticolonial struggle of literature supporting sovereignty because it reflects the "tastes and interests of the dominant culture" ("American Indian Fiction Writer" 28; "Literary and Political Questions" 46). The cosmopolitan writer usually disclaims any tribal responsibility or nationalistic perspective, thereby calling into question the need for resistance or decolonization; the cosmopolitan writer is often relegated to an "outsider position" or, in extreme cases, the "traitor position" (such as Salman Rushdie experienced), often marking their work invalid or "inauthentic" in some circles; and last, cosmopolitanism provides a disincentive for Native writers to embrace Third World points of view because they fear being labeled "strident, lack-

ing in artfulness, or aesthetically flawed" ("American Indian Fiction Writer" 29). By embracing concepts of "hybridity," the transcendence of national affiliations, and the exoticizing of Native cultures, cosmopolitan writing undermines decolonizing movements while it also perpetuates aspects of colonialism. Cook-Lynn's critique of cosmopolitanism echoes similar critiques of postmodernism's fluid form, a historicity, and reader-response orientation. Like many scholars of color, Cook-Lynn argues that such critical approaches to literature, as well as the literature itself, drains the text of historical specificity and accountability.

In contrast, nationalist literature examines the meaningfulness of indigenous or tribal sovereignty in the twenty-first century. What this means for the writer or intellectual is the obligation to consider representational elements of narration, all in service to a critical discourse that functions "in the name of 'the people.'" It is a "matter of principle" for nationalistic literature that the Indian nation is recognized as the dominant cultural force driving this methodology ("American Indian Fiction Writer" 30).

Like LaDuke, Cook-Lynn describes American Indian nationhood as characterized by "tribal bonding with geography," a peoples' spiritual connection to a specific place that arises from that culture's history and mythology and recalls the Indigenist definition of eco-culturalism I outlined earlier ("American Indian Fiction Writer" 31). Native writers who may successfully engage in nationalistic writing will come from traditional Native backgrounds, or they will have to reestablish their connection to that heritage. Cook-Lynn's model for the nationalist Indian writer obviously excludes a great number of writers whose work is considered legitimate or interesting by critics and readers alike and poses many problems concerning representation, authenticity, intent, and voice for Native writers and their audience who want both political reform as well as aesthetic expression.

HISTORY

A large part of the Native writer's responsibility, observes Cook-Lynn, is to rewrite the history of America in relation to its indig-

enous population (*Wallace Stegner* ix). Revising Native-Anglo history requires the inclusion of Native perspectives and narratives that then lead to a reassessment of Eurocentric motivations and behavior. Cook-Lynn writes, "It may be that Americans will have to come face to face with the loathsome idea that their invasion of the New World was never a movement of moral courage at all; rather, it was a pseudoreligious and corrupt socioeconomic movement for the possession of resources" (*Wallace Stegner* 33). A reexamination of Indian-white history reveals the dichotomies between the different cultures, raising questions about truth-telling and voice, as well as hegemony and resistance. This is precisely what LaDuke and Hogan do in their work. For the non-Native reader, encountering this new perspective can serve as an illuminating moment, imparting new information, new ways of viewing one's own culture as well as informed ways of seeing the "Other." For the Native writer, the act of "setting the record straight" along with its affirmation for the Native reader becomes a crucial decolonizing act.

In "The Relationship of a Writer to the Past," Cook-Lynn explores the uses of history in Native scholarship and art. As an example, Cook-Lynn cites the Sioux Uprising of 1862, where thirty-eight Dakota Sioux men were hanged in public execution for their participation. Ordered by Abraham Lincoln, the execution was witnessed by Dakota women and used as a warning against further Dakota resistance. Several elements of Cook-Lynn's narrative are important to consider: describing the executed men as "patriots," she forces the reader to reconsider the character of the men hanged that day; emphasizing Lincoln's authorship of the execution forces the reader to reconsider one of America's great heroic figures as an executioner rather than melancholy liberator; and most important, Cook-Lynn tells us that her grandmother was one of the young girls who witnessed the execution. The incident "was forever etched in their minds and it became one of the private horrors of colonialism," Cook-Lynn notes (*Wallace Stegner* 63). For Cook-Lynn and Native descendants like her, the story must be told in order to retrieve lost histories and maintain Native identity. The failure to know or learn such stories has allowed non-Native intellectuals to ignore how history continues

to inform the present story for Native writers and thinkers. Their different uses and interpretations of history both determine and stem from the dichotomous worldviews of Native and non-Native cultures. This approach is particularly evident in Hogan's *Mean Spirit*, focusing as it does on the exploitation and murder of several Osage individuals for their oil holdings.

In her novel, *Last Standing Woman*, Winona LaDuke carries out the nationalist, historical agenda that Cook-Lynn envisions. Covering 156 years of Anishinaabe history, from the arrival and murder of the first priest in 1800 to the hopeful affirmation of Native survival by the novel's protagonist in 2018, the novel traces the historical realities that confront contemporary Anishinaabe decolonizing endeavors. Divided into five parts, the novel's first section, "The Refuge," shows the decimation of the Anishinaabeg during the period of 1800–1930; "The Re-Awakening" covers 1960–1990, when tribes came out of termination and began to seek redress in the courts; "The Occupation" portrays the growing use of civil action among nationalistic Native groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s; "Oshki Anishinaabeg [the New People]" as the title indicates, conveys a strong nationalist identity reflected in revised community systems that integrate Anishinaabe tradition with contemporary tribal life; and "Epilogue," set in 2018, where the narrator, Ishkwegaabawiikwe (Last Standing Woman), discusses the importance of storytelling, remembrance, and activism to tribal sovereignty.

Episodically structured, the narrative charts key historical events in the colonization of North America generally, and for the Anishinaabegs in particular. Ishkwegaabawiikwe witnesses the 1862 hanging of her husband and other Dakota resistance warriors—the same event that Cook-Lynn discusses. LaDuke describes the ways that U.S. government and church agencies collaborated to dismantle the political, religious, economic, and cultural systems of the Anishinaabes, forcing them to conform to and obey federal laws. The Anishinaabegs are subject to scientific exploitation as well as economic and religious persecution. Consistent with the turn-of-the-century scientific methodology, anthropologists visit the reservation and study the cranial capacity of many tribal members who

are coerced into cooperating by the Indian agent through illegal methods. The results of the anthropological study are used to determine who is authentically Indian, results that were typically inaccurate. When an individual was labeled a “full blood” Anishinaabe, he or she was usually found “incompetent” to hold or manage tribal land. Only mixed-bloods cooperating with the Indian agent and local logging companies were deemed competent to hold land. Hogan recounts a similar scenario in *Mean Spirit*. This story is painfully familiar to readers of Native literature and history; however, LaDuke devotes some eighty pages detailing the systemic attempts to conquer and destroy the Anishinaabe over 130 years’ time in order to inform all readers of the continuing history of Western dominance over Native nations.

LaDuke’s novel is more history than fiction, more fact than fabrication. With depictions of historical subjugation of Native cultures, along with contemporary movements of repatriation, land appropriation, and economic projects of self-sufficiency, LaDuke models the kind of novel that Cook-Lynn imagines and calls for. LaDuke always writes about the individual’s responsibility as it is realized in a communal context. Does LaDuke’s adherence to Cook-Lynn’s model make for good fiction, for good “art”? The first half of *Last Standing Woman* recounts the cultural, religious, and political atrocities of colonialism. It is the events and conditions that LaDuke wishes the reader to know. The events are all “true,” historically verifiable through tribal and government records. This section of the novel serves as a clear introduction to the history of Indian-white relations. As history, it is persuasive and clear. As a work of fiction, the novel vitalizes the events that the majority of Native nations experienced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The narrative becomes more lively when LaDuke moves to the present, covering the occupation in the 1980s and its results through the imagined future in 2018. These are events that LaDuke herself has experienced and has helped to determine. In an interview with the *Utne Reader*, LaDuke reports that she wrote her novel sitting at her kitchen table over several years’ time, with the material coming

to her in pieces. LaDuke is interested in reading and writing “complicated books about peoples’ personal contradictions and struggles” that are politically rather than romantically motivated (Steiner 98). Despite her expressed preference for nonfiction, LaDuke’s choice to publish a novel allows her to reach a wider audience, thereby producing the reform most important to her. Using a genre different from her previous work, LaDuke incorporates similar themes of political activism into a form that is more popular than the political essay.⁶ Because students understand *how* to read LaDuke’s novel, they recognize why her analysis is important.

Although Cook-Lynn is an accomplished poet and essayist, she experiences problems in her novels—a problem that she has acknowledged. *Aurelia: A Crow Creek Trilogy*, which contains *From the River’s Edge*, *Circle of Dancers*, and *In the Presence of River Gods*, examines questions of survival and justice for the Crow Creek Sioux of South Dakota. Set in the late 1960s through the present, the novels trace the effects of damming, land appropriation, and cultural disintegration on the Crow Creek Sioux. Despite some 460 pages of text, Cook-Lynn fails to convey adequately the ideas that she so adamantly outlines in her many essays on nationalistic literature. Writing about her trilogy, Cook-Lynn observes, “there is an intellectual uncertainty in its whole which is an appalling and unexpected flaw in the imaginative work of a daughter of tribal politicians, men and women for whom there was no ideological ambivalence concerning nationhood” (“American Indian Fiction Writer” 30). True, Indian nationhood does appear uncertain at the trilogy’s ending, as does a clear intellectual perspective or model for possible action. While this political and intellectual ambiguity may trouble the author, it may accurately reflect the artistic difficulties inherent in ideological fiction and does not necessarily signal an aesthetic lack.

What Cook-Lynn provides is a thoughtful exploration of the difficulties surrounding Indian survival and the future of tribal sovereignty. That she does not provide a solution to these problems may trouble Cook-Lynn as a writer and intellectual whose nonfiction demands that writers produce such solutions; however, for the reader, Cook-Lynn’s difficulties may be viewed as representative of

the challenges confronting Indian nations themselves. The lack of resolution to ongoing issues makes for a more intellectually interesting text. There is little ambiguity in LaDuke's novel; in Cook-Lynn's text, as in Hogan's *Power*, ambiguity and the lack of closure abound. Cook-Lynn concludes the trilogy thus:

This has not been a story about murderers and rapists. Nor is it a story about a specific crime. It is not even about a particular victim. It is a story that gives a frame of reference for those interested in how it is that a memory-laden people live their lives; a context, if you will. It is a story about myth, a story that Aurelia Blue has told to others and that has become the stuff of history, an ingredient of the oral narrative poetry transmitted by word of mouth from one singer, one teller of tales, to another. (455)

Cook-Lynn tells us that her novels do not outline facts of Sioux history; instead, her work offers a context in which to read and understand the Crow Creek Sioux culture, however ambiguous that may be. She instructs the reader *how* to read her work and why it is important.

We might ask, then, does the uncertainty evident in *Aurelia* mark Cook-Lynn's novel as a failure? If so, a failure as what—a realistic novel, a historical novel, an ideological novel, a novel of nationalism? Is the application of Susan Suleiman's trope of the ideological novel useful to comprehending Cook-Lynn's work? Certainly when we consider *Last Standing Woman* as an ideological novel, we see how often it conforms to the model Suleiman outlines. The novel presents us with colonial histories "realistically" told from the point of view of the colonized speaker; it seeks to inform us of events that we have previously not known and to validate the Native ideologies represented. In *Last Standing Woman*, the "truth" of history, along with the constructive elements of Native culture, are affirmed as absolutes. The author wants us to "see" the "truth" of Native history and share her worldview. That LaDuke generally succeeds in this endeavor affirms the power of her novel.

The ideological novel "flourishes in national contexts, and at

historical moments, that produce sharp social and ideological conflicts—in other words, in a climate of crisis” (Suleiman 17). The genre exists in “a cultural tradition that fosters the involvement of writers in social and intellectual debates or problems” (Suleiman 16–17). Like the *roman à thèse*, the novels of LaDuke, Hogan, and Cook-Lynn arise from the economic, cultural, and spiritual crises of Native Americans. As Indian writers, they work within traditions governing Native storytellers—to set the record straight, thereby preserving their cultures’ integrity—and they serve as actors in social and intellectual debates within their cultures just as Suleiman describes.

The ideological novel embodies and confronts several problems. The novel’s desire to prove something, its claims of verisimilar representation, have made it suspect within literary criticism. The ideological novel is often dismissed as propaganda and deemed artistically invalid (Suleiman 3). The more a text adheres to the rules of the ideological novel, “the further away it moves from Literature with a capital L” and the less interesting it becomes to contemporary critics, thereby signaling the “aesthetic flaw” that Cook-Lynn describes (Suleiman 8). The ideological novel’s desire to convey a stable meaning to the reader, to “communicate” a message, arouses the suspicion of modern criticism. Also problematic, the genre’s issue-specific nature potentially limits the life of the text. Because the *roman à thèse* seeks to redress a specific political issue, it becomes irrelevant once that issue has passed. Its brief shelf life further undermines the ideological novel’s artistic value. According to Suleiman, modern literary criticism privileges a text’s “aesthetic function” over its “communicative function” (20–21). Citing Roland Barthes as an example, Suleiman writes that modernist texts seek to “multiply meaning or to ‘pulverize’ it” (22). That is, they embrace hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and focus on the reader’s process of making meaning. They are examples of the cosmopolitanism that Cook-Lynn derides. Because the *roman à thèse* is an “authoritarian genre,” appealing to the need for certainty, stability, and unity, it cannot tolerate the ambiguity and open-endedness encouraged in a modernist text.

The overtly ideological nature of LaDuke’s work and Cook-Lynn’s

prose may explain the dearth of criticism surrounding their work as well as the noncommercial presses that publish them. LaDuke's novel suggests that there is a single way to interpret the colonization of Native groups. Cook-Lynn's discussion of the Indian artist/intellectual and nationalistic versus cosmopolitan literature suggests a similar monologic viewpoint.

Another difficulty inherent in the *roman à thèse* is the tension between the novelistic aspects of the text and the ideological aims of the piece. As a work of fiction, the novel affords the writer unlimited opportunities of invention and imagination; however, as the articulation of a set ideology, the genre demands an adherence to verisimilar representation—the very opposite of invention. As an “impure, unstable genre, rent by contradictory desires,” the ideological novel is “perhaps condemned to missing its aims, either on one side or on the other” (Suleiman 23). This conflict is evident in Cook-Lynn's trilogy. While she calls for total closure on the single topic—Indian nationalism—Cook-Lynn confesses her ambivalence. As the excerpt I examine above reveals, Cook-Lynn is not content with a single reading of her work. She advises us that the trilogy is not about any one act or theme; nor does it provide complete closure. Instead, she ends her work instructing the reader to think contextually or referentially about the Crow Creek Sioux, a much more interesting and complicated approach. LaDuke's novel adheres most fully to terms of the *roman à thèse* that Suleiman outlines. Her text represents a problem and outlines a solution, offering the reader a blueprint for Indian activism and self-sufficiency, rather than a work of imaginative creation. As a result, the reader learns about political and historical elements that are crucial to Anishinaabe and—on a larger scale—North American Indigenism; however, *Last Standing Woman* is not a novel that requires a second or third reading to satisfy aesthetic criteria. Rather, it informs readers and potentially shapes a group of activists concerned about Indian sovereignty and Indigenism.

I have focused less on Hogan's novels in this discussion because they do not adhere completely to the model of the ideological novel, although they do share thematic elements of the genre. All three novels realistically represent the encroachment of the white world on the

Native. *Mean Spirit* shows the calculated murder of Osage individuals who own oil-rich land, the illegal seizure of their land allotments, the theft of Osage federal payments, and the ultimate failure of the American justice system to protect Osage interests and lives. *Solar Storms* depicts the irrevocable damage from flooding Native lands, the illegal persecution and harassment of the grassroots movements protesting the dams, and the failure of the justice system to protect tribal interests. *Power* also examines the destructive results of Western hegemony, focusing on the tribes of the Everglades, citing Columbus, Darwin, the Seminole chief Osceola, and the decimation of the sacred panther as contexts. After enduring a state trial that denigrates their traditions, the Taiga characters most concerned with tribal survival reject the white world in favor of their own; they retreat to the depths of the Florida swamp.

Hogan's texts all end with the promise of human redemption and connection with the natural world. She ends *Solar Storms* thus: "Something beautiful lives inside us. You will see. Just believe it. You will see" (351). Echoing Suleiman's observations, Hogan insists that we "see" and share her worldview. Reading her texts, we too can be redeemed. Similarly, LaDuke ends *Last Standing Woman* with words taken from the protagonist's journal. Written first in Ojibwe and then in English, Ishkwegaabawiikwe writes: "I wrote this because I am called to write . . . [t]o understand our relationship to the whole and our role on the path of life. We also understand our responsibility. We only take what we need, and we leave the rest" (299).

Ishkwegaabawiikwe's didacticism is aimed at a reader she hopes to convert. Her words and their sentiments are shared by many Native women writers. Interestingly, Ishkwegaabawiikwe's journal ends in 2018, suggesting that LaDuke hopes to avoid complete narrative closure and wants the reader to read beyond the ending. The date also conveys LaDuke's optimism that Anishinaabe culture will survive, that their stories will continue.⁷ Like Cook-Lynn's ambiguous conclusion, LaDuke's writing beyond the resolution of the events she describes reflects the desire shared by both authors to keep their novels relevant and free from time constraints. Cook-Lynn and LaDuke express a hope that their novels avoid the fate that dooms

the *roman à thèse* to obscurity once the crisis depicted has passed. Their rejection of a linear, finite timeline, along with their insistence that history remains a vital part of the present and future, represent their efforts to maintain the life of their novels. In this manner, they work within a timeframe of many Native writers, one that is cyclical rather than linear, one that, they believe, defies Western modes of interpretation.

Instead of interpretation, then, the critic's work is one of contextualization, of exploring why these works are important to Native intellectuals and activists. The works of all three authors seek to persuade their readers of the value and authority their fictions represent. They provide a realistic representation of what contemporary Native life *is*, along with a vision of what can be achieved. Sometimes didactic in tone, often persuasive and visionary, these works insist upon the engagement of the reader in the ongoing project of Indian sovereignty.

NOTES

1. Hogan's poetry, however, is published by smaller houses such as the Coffeehouse Press and the Greenfield Review.

2. LaDuke observes that Indian reservations are targeted as sites for sixteen proposed nuclear waste storage facilities; over one hundred proposals have been made in recent years to dump toxic waste in Indian communities, and seventy-seven sacred sites have been disturbed or desecrated through both resource extraction and development. The Western Shoshone land in Nevada has sustained one thousand atomic explosions over the last forty-five years, making it, according to LaDuke, "the most bombed nation on earth." More than one thousand slag piles and tailings from abandoned uranium mines are located on Diné (Navajo) land, emitting radioactive material into the air and water. The largest coal strip mine in the world is located nearby and gives rise to cancer rates in teenagers that is seventeen times the national average (*All Our Relations* 2–3).

3. In the trilogy *Aurelia*, Cook-Lynn addresses the question of individual survival with more anxiety than is evident in her essays. The Crow Creek Sioux protagonist John Tatekeya, embroiled in a futile court case over stolen cattle, worries over the future of his tribe: "His fear than an honorable life for his people was no longer possible rose in this throat. There were so many

things that he had not paid attention to, and he knew now what terrible risk there was in such inattentiveness" (70). Cook-Lynn has since criticized her position in this novel; I discuss this at greater length later.

4. The fragmented individual is familiar in contemporary American literature generally and in Native literature in particular. Omishto becomes an integrated individual once she rejoins the Taigas of Kili Swamp and leaves the white world behind; this choice of binaries seems to suggest that Omishto becomes integrated only through choosing one identity over another.

5. "White Earth: A Lifeway in the Forest," in *All Our Relations*, and "The White Earth Land Struggle" are good examples.

6. I have taught *Last Standing Woman*, *All Our Relations*, and Cook-Lynn's *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner* in different courses of undergraduate literature. Not surprisingly, students initially favor the novel over the essay collections.

7. It is not random chance that LaDuke chooses the year 2018; it is the year that the 189 United Nations Member States have pledged to meet eight overarching goals, labeled the UN Millennium Development Goals, which include eradicating "extreme poverty and hunger," achieving "universal primary education," promoting "gender equality" and empowering women, and ensuring "environmental sustainability," along with other reform plans, all reflecting the Indigenist agenda that LaDuke and others promote. As a delegate of the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference and member of the Indigenist Women's Network, LaDuke is very aware of and committed to these goals. For more information about the development goals, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.html.

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Will Rogers's Indian Humor

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By the time of his death in 1935, political humorist Will Rogers had become one of the most famous personalities in the United States. Through his syndicated weekly articles and daily telegrams, films, and radio broadcasts, Rogers reached an estimated audience of forty million. Because of his deft use of the venues of mass entertainment—from the vaudeville stage to Hollywood—and the consequent mainstreaming of his act, it may be easy to pass over the side of Rogers that was not so mainstream: born in 1879 in Indian Territory, Rogers was a member of the Cherokee Nation for the first twenty years of his life. He became a naturalized American citizen after the 1898 Curtis Act brought the disbanding of tribal government and the allotment of land in severalty to the Five Tribes. Billed as a cowboy from Oklahoma and as a self-made diplomat to the president, nominated for the presidency because of the broad appeal of his home-spun humor and common sense, Rogers's commercially crafted all-American public identity is a simplification of a complex personal and national history.

Rogers's humor has been discussed as the American-grown cracker-barrel humor originating with Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard. "Horse sense," as Walter Blair wrote in 1942, is that "good, sound, practical sense" that Will Rogers shares with Franklin, Josh Billings, Davy Crockett, and an assortment of other American humorists (vi). While Blair sees horse sense as peculiar to North America, he does not attribute any part of Rogers's humor to the part-Cherokee identity Rogers claimed as his own. This failure to

acknowledge the tribal specificity of Rogers's humor is probably due to the stereotype of the stoic Indian—the “granite-faced grunting redskin,” as Vine Deloria Jr. puts it in his study of Indian humor *Custer Died for Your Sins* (148). A biography of Rogers, written immediately after his death in 1935, exemplifies the influence of this stereotype. The biographer, P. J. O'Brien, parcels out Rogers's talents among his three lines of descent: his humor is Irish; his business sense, Scotch; his “dignity and reserve,” Indian (24). It may be that because no one looked for an Indian sense of humor in Rogers, his audiences missed the sting of his jokes. This obliviousness to Indian humor may have actually contributed to Rogers's mainstream appeal as well.

In a larger sense, Rogers has been appropriated not only as an American humorist but as a mythic American figure. William R. Brown has posited Rogers as an embodiment of four basic cultural myths—the innocent “American Adam” (37), the egalitarian “American democrat” (91), the resourceful “self-made man” (161), and the technologically savvy “American Prometheus” (209). Although Rogers's Cherokee ancestry is featured in Brown's study, Brown mainly wants to incorporate Rogers in a broad American framework, similar to Blair's framework of general American humor, denying Rogers any kind of cultural or political specificity that may endanger this abstract all-American representativeness.

Furthermore, because Rogers was an acculturated mixed-blood, his Native side has not been taken seriously. One biographer, Richard Ketchum, quotes Rogers's son as saying that his father and grandfather were “upwardly mobile” and chose to accommodate white ways rather than traditional Cherokee culture (58). Will Rogers was connected to the Cherokees even less than his father because he married a white woman and lived away from the territory of the Cherokee Nation. But “he became too much of a showman not to realize the appeal an Indian background had for an audience” (Ketchum 58). The implication is that because Rogers was not traditional, he was not a real Indian; he used Indianness simply as a market ploy.

As a result of this mainstreaming, Rogers has long been denied a prominent place in Native American literary history. Recently, however, Native scholars have called for a reassessment of the proper

subject of Native American studies. Robert Warrior encourages a broader approach to Native American writing—open to a greater variety of genres, to issues other than essential identity and survival, and to earlier periods of forced acculturation (xix–xx). Warrior suggests that the reintegration into Native American studies of Will Rogers's political humor would avoid the essentialism that assigns to Native Americans unchanging traditional values and beliefs and the expression of them within certain limited venues.

Craig Womack calls for a “literary separatism” that would look at literary production not simply as a reflection of culture but as a reflection of sovereignty. Like Warrior, he challenges the stereotype of the traditional Indian as the only real Indian because this stereotype denies Native cultures the ability to change and still preserve their separate political identities. According to Womack,

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

What Womack proposes as an answer to the vexed question of Native identity is ultimately a politically committed criticism that

roots literature in land and culture. This criticism emphasizes unique Native worldviews and political realities, searches for differences as often as similarities, and attempts to find Native literature's place in Indian country, rather than Native literature's place in the canon. (11)

Rogers's acculturation may explain the ease with which he became a popular hero, but it obscures his vocal identification as a Cherokee and the subtleties of his Indian humor. His direct involvement in U.S. politics, as an ironic commentator, places Rogers within the framework of Native intellectual independence advocated by Warrior and Womack. Rogers writes from within a tradition of Native intellectuals who engage critically with U.S. political and patriotic dis-

course. In fact, Womack claims that Rogers is “the next link” after the Creek journalist Alex Posey “in developing a unique brand of Indian humor” (172).

Like Posey, Rogers commented repeatedly on U.S. Indian policies: allotment, American Indian citizenship, the integration of Indian Territory into the state of Oklahoma, the dissolution of tribal governments, and the participation of Indians in U.S. national politics. Posey wrote the *Fus Fixico* letters for a Creek audience and chose not to seek mainstream acceptance (Womack 140). In contrast, Rogers took his political commentary to the national media and addressed it to a larger predominantly non-Native audience that grew to love him.

Yet there is no denying that Rogers wrote from a position inherently antagonistic to his audience. He played on his audience’s nativist prejudices and used American patriotic rhetoric successfully to reassert its very negation: the Native right to land possession and independence. When he billed himself as an American, Rogers was aware that as a naturalized citizen of the United States he was less than 100 percent American by the standards of exclusive nativist organizations. He considered himself American in a very different sense. Rather than vying for a spot among the mythical Pilgrims who came to America on the *Mayflower*, some of Rogers’s ancestors on both sides of his family tree were indigenous to the continent now called North America. Among its other strategies, nativist writing in the 1920s sought to legitimize European Americans as descendants of the supposedly vanished American Indian; it used the trope of “the vanishing American” to channel its paranoia of continuing immigration (Michaels 32, 29). Rogers’s political satire thus could tap for material at the very mainsprings of U.S. nativism.

I have chosen as the main criterion for evaluating the indigenous aspects of Rogers’s humor Kenneth Lincoln’s observation in *Indi’n Humor* of the special “rootedness” of Indians (and Indian humor) in the continent of North America (215). In its claim to land possession, Indian humor is, I believe, irreducibly antagonistic to the integrationist categories proposed by Walter Blair but also implied in Lincoln’s conclusion that “tribal humor stitches the frayed cross-cultural fabric of multiethnic America” (313)—that is, that Indian

humor ultimately performs a restorative role within the nation at large. If my study stops one step before reconciliation and integration, it is mostly because the understanding of Rogers's humor appears to have suffered from this desire to assimilate it rather too quickly within the larger category of American humor.

Drawing on Native scholars' rationale for exploring the intellectual production of American Indians, I focus on Rogers's response to the conditions that brought him into the fray of U.S. politics: the succession of allotment acts meant to assimilate American Indians, the inclusion of Indian Territory into the state of Oklahoma, the naturalization of American Indians as U.S. citizens, and their participation in U.S. politics. These processes that cut at the root of Native political and territorial independence in the early twentieth century are alluded to in Rogers's humorous comments about his American citizenship and in his nostalgia for the days of tribal sovereignty.

Rogers's *Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President* appeared in 1926, two years after the passage of the last Indian Citizenship Act.¹ Initially the articles comprising the text ran as dispatches from Rogers's European trip to the *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post*, whose editor, George Horace Lorimer, had suggested both the trip and the title (Yagoda 228). What is particularly interesting about this series of letters is not so much Rogers's commentary on European politics and culture but the question of his legitimacy as an American diplomat, a position that carries a citizenship requirement. While the title of the series humorously suggests a breach of appointment procedure, in the very first letter the self-made diplomat raises the question of his status as an American citizen.

The title was developed by analogy to Lorimer's own successful series "Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son," first published anonymously in the *Post* in 1901–02 and then issued as a bestselling book. This series of fictional letters expressed Lorimer's belief in traditional American business values and fit squarely into the myth of the self-made man. The humor, the southwestern flavor, and the provinciality of the merchant's speech (Tebbel 29–30) were very similar to Rogers's own anti-intellectual, anti-eastern establishment pose as a cowboy from Oklahoma. The title of Rogers's series

was most probably an attempt to cash in on Lorimer's earlier contagious success.² While the title and the idea for the series were not Rogers's, the change of subject—from business to politics—changes the meaning of self-making, and while Rogers and Lorimer may have had some very similar views and ways of expression, Rogers's relation to the presidency and to American citizenship is peculiarly his own.

The title of Roger's series is humorous because it implies the self-made diplomat's illegitimacy, since diplomats are as a rule officially appointed. The political connotation of self-making is different from the economic, because within the myth of a classless *laissez-faire* society, the insistence on the possibility of economic self-making and self-reliance is actually one of the basic means of legitimizing the existing social order. Political self-making, however, especially in relation to the admission of Native Americans (and other marginalized groups) to American citizenship, is a much more controversial issue. The "Author's Note" humorously explains the legitimacy of the self-made diplomat on the basis of his "intimate understanding" of President Coolidge's wishes so that the latter did not even have to ask him to go on the trip (5). Because American Indian citizenship supposedly "destined" Indians "to live on the fringes of civilization" (Hoxie 96), Rogers claims an ironic position of intimacy with the U.S. president. He rhetorically occupies the center rather than the margin.

The first article goes on to question the citizenship status of the self-made diplomat and the reality of his "intimate" relationship with the U.S. president. No longer at issue is the breach of appointment procedure in diplomatic circles but the legitimacy of the procedure for granting American citizenship, as steeped as it is in ideological mystification. In his first letter as a self-made diplomat, Rogers gives a Native American treatment of the question "What makes an American citizen?"

The letters pretend to be a running commentary on Rogers's trip to Europe in the vein of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, but with a focus on "the pressing foreign policy issues confronting the nation" (*Letters* xix). They begin with a commentary on an important domes-

tic issue, or depending on one's interpretation of Native sovereignty and the persistent duality of Native American citizenship, this issue may be viewed as one of foreign policy as well. The attempt to ascertain Rogers's American citizenship runs into a problem characteristic of the period of mandatory assimilation. Upon applying for a travel passport for his European trip, Rogers is asked to produce his birth certificate, a standard bureaucratic procedure for ascertaining identity and citizenship. Rogers interprets the formality as a paradox—not as proof of his identity, but literally as proof of his birth, and therefore of his existence, implying that his presence in front of the official is not sufficient evidence that he was born at an earlier point in time. The humor of the situation is produced by the confrontation between the official's supposedly unreasonable demand and the “early days of the Indian Territory” (*Letters* 12) when one's presence was sufficient evidence for one's alleged birth.

When Rogers refers to Indian Territory, he refers to the time before the dissolution of tribal governments when he would have been a well-to-do member of a fully functional Cherokee Nation. The Rogers family lost a great deal of their large estate in the process of allotment.³ While the Cherokees adapted to allotment and Oklahoma statehood, in his writing Rogers often bemoans the loss of Indian Territory and satirizes the interests that created the state of Oklahoma. Part of his sentimentality and nostalgia may be for a simpler agricultural past, but it is also nostalgia for a state of affairs that involved the hope and efforts until 1907 that the disparate Indian tribes that had been removed to Indian Territory over the course of the nineteenth century may be allowed to form their own state. In a weekly article of January 24, 1924, Rogers writes:

There is a good deal in the papers about giving my native state of Oklahoma back to the Indians. Now I am a Cherokee Indian and very proud of it, but I doubt if you can get them to accept it—not in its present state.

When the white folks come in and took Oklahoma from us, they spoiled a mighty happy hunting ground, just to give Sinclair a racing ground, and Walton a barbecue. (WA 1:185)⁴

Rogers here responds to the mainstream quip that when something does not work it should be given back to the Indians, implying either that it was defective to begin with or that it has malfunctioned and is discardable now. Although he deflects from the political import of his writing with the stereotypical description of Indian paradise as a “happy hunting ground,” Rogers is clearly separating the Indian Territory governed by Indian tribes from what he sees as its subsequent corruption by white entrepreneurs and politicians. There is a sense in this passage that before Indian Territory was incorporated into the state of Oklahoma, it was Indian not only in name; it actually belonged to the Indians.⁵

This emphasis on Indian possession of Indian Territory is evident in Rogers’s writing on a number of other occasions as well. On March 7, 1926, Rogers admits, “Really at heart I love ranching. I have always regretted that I didn’t live about 30 or 40 years earlier, and in the same old Country, the Indian Territory. I would have liked to got here ahead of the ‘Nestors,’ the Bob wire fence, and so called civilization” (WA 2:160). Significantly, in the first decades after the Civil War (roughly the period to which Rogers alludes), the few whites in Indian Territory were an underclass of tenants to wealthy Indian ranchers (Zissu 16). Rogers obviously regrets the passing of this economic and political dominance of Indians in Indian Territory.

The Cherokee Nation is also a referent in the passport scene of the first letter of the self-made diplomat. After Rogers’s initial “naive” misunderstanding that his birth certificate is the only way to verify his existence, the female bureaucrat is forced to clarify that she needs the certificate to ascertain Rogers’s American citizenship. Rogers writes:

That was the first time I had ever been called on to prove that. Here my Father and Mother were both one-eighth Cherokee Indians and I have been on the Cherokee rolls since I was named, and my family had lived on one ranch for 75 years. But just offhand, how was I to show that I was born in America? The English that I spoke had none of the earmarks of the *Mayflower*. (*Letters* 12)

The opposition that Rogers sets up is between the myth of America as an immigrant nation and himself as an enrolled Cherokee Indian, who was born on Cherokee land and therefore on the contested territory of North America. His status as a Cherokee is not in question, but his status as an American is. He does not qualify under the nativist theory that the only true Americans were of Anglo-Saxon descent and derived from the Pilgrims on the *Mayflower*. Rogers may be native to North America, but he is still outside the ideological parameters of the United States. He does not dwell on the legal complications of his case—that it was because he was allotted land that he became an U.S. citizen in the first place.

During the film version of this scene in *So This Is London* (1930), Rogers adds that his ancestors actually “met the boat,” and “it is to the everlasting discredit of the Indian race that they ever let the Pilgrims land” (May 31; *The Story of Will Rogers*). According to this version, the Indians at a certain time in history had the power to make the decision of who belongs in North America that now is in the hands of the bureaucratic descendants of the Pilgrims. Rogers draws an opposition between Native Americans, the true Americans if citizenship is guaranteed by place of birth, and all immigrant Americans, including the Pilgrims. If it is a matter of precedence that established the *Mayflower* passengers’ claims to authenticity over later immigrants, Native Americans have the advantage of being the first known settlers of North America.⁶

Rogers satirizes not only the Pilgrims but also the current uses of them by people like President Coolidge, who built his credentials on being their descendant and named his boat the *Mayflower*. Addressing the president, Rogers writes: “So as you sail down on the *Mayflower* tomorrow to keep away from the Congressmen I will be on the *Leviathan* with my oldest son of 14—who is also a naturalized American citizen” (*Letters* 13). Rogers distinguishes himself not only from the original Pilgrims but from the president he addresses: they are sailing on different ships (“ships of state” being a metaphor for political government). In this statement, Rogers acknowledges clearly what he refused to admit earlier: that he was a naturalized American citizen, that is, that the U.S. government treated the indig-

enous people of North America no differently than the first-generation immigrants to the continent. Such an acknowledgement shows his awareness of the actual legal procedure of granting citizenship to Indians. This awareness, however, is slipped very discreetly in a joke that focuses on the parodic regurgitation of nativist myths.

Since immigration is the main reason for regulating travel to and from the United States, and since naturalization works the same way for both Indians, who are native-born to the American continent, and immigrants, who are not, Rogers raises the issue of the similarity between Native Americans and the new arrivals to the big cities on the U.S. eastern seaboard: "It was as hard to find an American in New York as it was to get a passport" (*Letters* 13). Nativists like Lothrop Stoddard claimed that "the Nordic native American" was disappearing because of the influx of immigrants, who may have become American citizens but could never become Americans in the narrow ideological sense in which the nativists defined their entitlement (Michaels 29). In this sense, Rogers spoofs the nativist paranoia about the changing character of the nation. In another sense, Rogers comments on his own isolation in New York—away from his own nation and in the heart of the United States, where there is no one to authenticate him as an American. While he sets an opposition between himself and the recent immigrants, Rogers also understands the similarity of their situation when confronted with the exclusive category of 100 percent Americanism. The witness he finally finds to prove his birth tells him: "Why, sure I knew your Father well, and I know that you are an American. Not 100 percent ones like the Rotarray's and Kiawanises and Lions, but enough to pay taxes" (*Letters* 13).

Rogers explains his sailing on the *Leviathan* as a further justification of citizenship in terms of concrete civic actions that merit recognition: "Being not what is proclaimed as a 100 percent American, I went over on an American boat. The 100 percenters all go on English or French, such as Hotel Men and Rotary Associations" (*Letters* 15). Rogers here draws a distinction between birthright and commitment to one's country, or earning one's citizenship, that is reminiscent of the call for a committed Americanism in the Progressive Era before World War I.

The self-made diplomat's earnest protestations betray an uncertainty about his own status as a naturalized citizen of the United States. Indians, according to Rogers, seem to have remained permanently outside the Union. He suggests as much in his comment on the backwater habits of the Kentucky mountains: "It's the last stand of primitive and hundred per cent Americanism (leaving out us Injuns, which of course they always do. Left 'em out so long till they are perpetually out)" (WA 5:234). In its gist, the 100 percent Americanism is what unites the members of the exclusive Rotary Club and the mountain hicks of Kentucky. The joke pokes fun not only at the social pretenses of the exclusive nativist clubs but also at Rogers's own position as a mock political commentator, an equal to American presidents, even a mock candidate for the presidency. In spite of all these self-appointed roles, Rogers is unsure about his precise status in the United States; yet he is certain about belonging in North America.

The forced remaking of Native Americans into American citizens was never a completely successful process, but it brought enough Native public figures within the halls of the state and federal senates and involved them directly in American policy making. As a rule, the engagement with U.S. politics was the domain of the mixed-blood Native elites. Will Rogers's father, Clem Rogers, made the transition from the Cherokee tribal government to the state government of Oklahoma. During his tenure as a political commentator, Rogers covered the careers of Native politicians like the part-Cherokee U.S. senator from Oklahoma Robert Owen and the part-Kaw Kansas senator Charles Curtis. Curtis was directly involved in the setting of U.S. Indian policy with arguably disastrous results for American Indians. Yet he was nevertheless hailed as a success and a hope for change by his own tribe and by Rogers, who appears to have been unaware of the precise role Curtis played in forcing the Five Tribes into allotment and into the state of Oklahoma.

Senator Curtis of Kansas was of a mixed Kaw, Osage, and French descent, and like Rogers and other Indians involved in politics at the time, he belonged to an already acculturated Native elite. William Unrau, in *Mixed-Bloods and Tribal Dissolution*, argues that in push-

ing through his allotment bill Curtis was motivated by his desire to show that mixed-blood children should have equal rights to tribal property. Curtis set out to prove the importance of mixed-bloods to the U.S. government, thus turning a personal issue into a political program. Unrau describes the contradictory nature of Curtis's claims and actions in relation to the passage of his bill:

Before 1898, Curtis had complained about the Dawes Commission's intent unilaterally to abrogate time-honored Indian treaties, but in fact this was precisely what the bill that he wrote accomplished. By abolishing tribal courts, by instituting civil government in Indian Territory, by requiring that tribal individuals submit to allotment regardless of the consequences, and by providing the guidelines for political union with the state of Oklahoma, the act was far more radical than the one that the Dawes people envisaged prior to 1898. The very title of the law, "An Act for the *protection* of the people of the Indian Territory and for other purposes," was a clever deception, designed to give the impression that the exploitation of the Oklahoma Indians was a thing of the past. (123; emphasis in original)

To Unrau, the Curtis Act was the response of a conservative Republican to the potential threat of the formation of a separate Indian state in Indian Territory that would be democratic and would oppose the big business interests in the area (121–23). This part of Curtis's resume was not advertised during his electoral campaign as Herbert Hoover's running mate. His part-Indian background could be safely exoticized because in the 1920s Curtis was not really interested in the state of Indian affairs and made no campaign promises for a change in federal policy toward the Indians (161, 163). Rogers's support of Curtis's electoral campaign in 1928 shows how much his impression of the politician's character is influenced by media reports as well as the spin Rogers puts on those reports.

Rogers never gives up his belief that Curtis will represent Indian interests. What seems even more important to him is that Curtis is at least part-Indian and successful in politics. His bid for Curtis

shows Rogers's anxiety about anti-Indian discrimination. But most important, Curtis seems to have fascinated Rogers because his political aspirations provide material for a joke that Rogers savors repeatedly. He follows the forced assimilation of Native Americans to a self-destructive end: if an Indian becomes an American president, then he could dismantle the institution of the presidency and the United States as a whole.

On June 9, 1928, he reminds the Republican Convention about their obligation to Curtis's candidacy:

And don't forget Charley Curtis. You Republicans owe him more than you do anybody outside of your Campaign contributors. The trouble is he is so faithful that the chances are he will never be rewarded. He has stayed with you through all your disgraces and never got mixed up in any of them. He is an Indian. I wish he would get in. Us Indians would run these White people out of this country. (*More Letters* 91)

After Curtis is nominated, Rogers writes in a telegram dated June 15, 1928:

I been telling you for days that Curtis would be the one. He is a Kaw Indian and me a Cherokee and I am for him. It's the first time we have ever got a break—the only American that has ever run for that high office. . . . Come on, Injun! If you are elected let's run the white people out of this country. (*DT* 1:223–24)

Rogers advances these propositions as jokes, and their humorous threat is deactivated anyway by the complicity of mixed-blood Indian politicians in destructive U.S. Indian policies. The point, however, is that this type of humor cannot be written off as an example of all-American humor because of its peculiar anti-United States intent, especially because, for Rogers, America and the United States are not synonymous.

In December 1928, Rogers was disappointed at seeing Curtis "set . . . back to nothing but a Toastmaster" (*WA* 3:235–36), and in a 1930 radio broadcast on Curtis he repeats the relative unimportance of the vice presidency and of Curtis's role, which he turns into a joke:

"When he is not asleep in the Senate, he is at the races" (*Radio* 19). While Unrau attributes Curtis's ineffectiveness to his lack of interest in Indian affairs, Rogers gives Curtis the benefit of the doubt, describing him as a victim of political machinations. Despite his disappointment, in 1930 Rogers returns to his initial humorous proposition, albeit in a slightly different form: "So good luck to you, Charlie, old Injun, and I hope you are elected President some day and we will run the White House out of this country" (*Radio* 20). In this version, Rogers uses a pun to produce the mixed effect of both conducting and ending American presidential politics, much in the same way as his earlier joke hoped that Indian involvement in American politics would bring an end to the non-Native occupation of North America.

In different versions, this joke has proven a favorite among Native Americans, who have adapted it to changing historical circumstances. Deloria provides two later adaptations of it. In a poll during the Vietnam War, which characteristically shows Native Americans not following the antiwar protests of the period, "only 15 percent of the Indians thought that the United States should get out of Vietnam. Eighty-five percent thought they should get out of America!" (Deloria 157). The second version is Clyde Warrior's response to the argument that, since 70 percent of Americans live in the cities, the bid for traditional Native life seems behind the times, "Don't you realize what this means?" Warrior asks. "It means we are pushing them into the cities. Soon we will have the country back again" (168). Rogers tells a wide variety of other jokes that Deloria has identified as central to Native humor; these include jokes about Columbus, Custer, broken treaties, and land theft.⁷ They all place Rogers squarely within the tradition of Indian humor and outside mainstream American humor.

Rogers keeps open the hypothetical possibility for rhetorical mastery of such concepts as the vice presidency and the presidency. He often toys with the idea of running for president himself; yet it is interesting that when his mock candidacy was picked up in 1928 by the editor of the humorous *Life* magazine, Rogers participated only half-heartedly in the election campaign on his behalf.⁸ It may be

true that, as his editor says, the mock campaign gave Rogers another opportunity to mock politicians (*He Chews* ix); yet Rogers scorned any serious suggestion that he run for president since he believed that the United States was not as desperate as to elect its comedians.

Thus in an early 1925 self-nomination, Rogers simply spoofs President Coolidge's candidacy by claiming that if he were elected, Rogers would show Americans "some life"; he would liven up the inauguration by bringing to Washington Cherokees, cowboys, movie stars, and aviators, that is, all groups with which he was closely associated (WA 2:1–3). Rogers's view of the presidency here is detached not only because his attitude towards U.S. politics is not simply that of an American citizen but also because as a humorous commentator, he is above all an entertainer. He is thus twice removed from U.S. politics. Since the Cherokees are "the most highly civilized tribe of Indians in the World . . . they could have stood it a few days in Washington even among those low brow surroundings" (WA 2:1). The implication of this statement is double: that Rogers, as a Cherokee, could not have survived long in Washington and that the civilization of the Cherokees is different and superior to the political and social climate in the capital (even though the Cherokees were named a "civilized tribe" precisely because of their adoption of some of the trappings of white political culture early on in their history).

Will Rogers died in a plane crash in the summer of 1935. His sudden death did not allow him to comment on the reform of federal Indian policy begun by John Collier. Nevertheless, on June 8, 1934, he recorded briefly his appreciation of Collier's efforts: "If that Wheeler-Howard Indian bill don't pass there is no justice. I think we got a real Indian agent in this man Collier. The Indian has just lost 100 years in his civilization, and Collier is trying to get him back" (DT 4:182). Ten days later, the Wheeler-Howard bill, a greatly modified version of the Collier bill, became the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), a major piece of legislation under which "any tribe or the people of any reservation could organize themselves as a business corporation, adopt a constitution and bylaws, and exercise some form of self-government" (Deloria and Lytle 5). The law also provided for the end of allotment and for the restitution to tribes of unallotted

lands (Prucha 323). As usual, the act was applied to the Five Tribes in Oklahoma with some delay in the modified form of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936. While the modifications of the original bill and the problems of administration of the reorganization acts themselves took away the radical edge of Collier's original proposals, the IRA and its modifications nevertheless brought back to the fore the viability of Native sovereignty. When he went to Oklahoma to explain the original bill in March 1934, Collier was met with great resistance by the Five Tribes in the eastern part of the state, which were weary of reorganization (Prucha 327). Rogers, however, had already commented approvingly on the bill. That as an acculturated individual, living away from his homeland, Rogers could appreciate the importance of the future IRA is telling of his abiding interest in Indian affairs, not as an exotic component of American life and a boost to his own career, but as a civilization in need of independent existence.

His commentary on U.S. politics gives the sense that, for Will Rogers, Native tribes are both at the center of North America and somehow outside of the United States. This special place from which the Native humorist speaks contributes to his particular brand of humor despite the many concessions Rogers necessarily makes to his audiences. If his political humor, then, is to be acknowledged as American humor, it will have to be accepted with its call for the end of both U.S. politics and non-Native possession of the land on this continent.

NOTES

The following abbreviations are used in citations throughout: WA for Rogers, *Weekly Articles*; DT for Rogers, *Daily Telegrams*.

1. The program of Indian assimilation was initially advocated by missionaries and politicians, mostly in the eastern United States, who felt that the integration of individual Indians into American society, as American farmers and citizens, would solve the "Indian problem." To this end, boarding schools were set up to take Indian children away from tribal lands and reservations in order to educate them in English, Christianity, and basic industry, domestic and agricultural. The program of assimilation is also known for

the passing of allotment acts, which were meant to break up lands held in common by tribes and allot these lands to individual Indians while appropriating the remaining land and opening it for settlement by non-Native farmers. The first allotment act was passed in 1886 on suggestion of Senator Dawes from Massachusetts and is therefore known as the Dawes Allotment Act. This act, however, did not extend to the Five Tribes in Indian Territory. It was only with the passing of the Curtis Act in 1898 that Rogers's Cherokee Nation was included in the allotment program.

Besides the allotment acts, Indians were admitted to American citizenship through the campaign that the Society of American Indians launched for citizenship rights of Indian soldiers returning from World War I. Giving Indians citizenship through the final Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 was therefore more of a symbolic than practical gesture on the part of the U.S. government. In many states Indians could not vote, and, as Frederick E. Hoxie claims, by the early twentieth century citizenship had been devalued from ideals of equality to second-class citizenship bolstered in part by the industrial boarding schools preparing Indian children for menial jobs: "The successful Indians of the early twentieth century were not the teachers, ministers, or yeomen farmers promised by the nineteenth-century reformers. Now the highest praise was saved for hired hands and construction laborers" (96). Furthermore, the citizenship acts did not solve the problem of Indian identity. As Francis Paul Prucha points out, "The complete transition from tribal status to individualized citizenship that the Dawes Act reformers had had in mind when they talked about citizenship did not occur. The Indians were both citizens of the United States and persons with tribal relations" (273).

2. As his Boston editor had written Lorimer in 1903, the humorous letter series vogue had caught on in the Boston press, with title variations from "Letters from a Son to His Self-Made Father" to "Letters from a Taylor-Made Daughter to a Home-Made Mother" (Tebbel 31).

3. Rogers's father, Clem Rogers, a prominent Cherokee politician, initially objected to the infiltration of whites in Indian Territory but eventually capitulated before the Curtis Act and the statehood of Oklahoma and after the dissolution of the Cherokee government went on to serve in the Oklahoma Senate (Wertheim and Blair 148–50).

4. Rogers began writing his weekly articles in December 1922. The feature was syndicated and eventually carried by six hundred newspapers around the country. The articles began as transcriptions of Rogers's stage gags and progressively developed in style. His editors did not correct Rogers's writing idiosyncrasies. The misspellings, malapropisms, dialectisms, and grammatical errors were considered crucial to his style.

The first daily telegram was sent to the *New York Times* during Rogers's European trip in 1926. Like the weekly articles, the daily telegrams were circulated by the McNaught Newspaper Syndicate in hundreds of periodicals until Rogers's death in 1935.

Sinclair was an oil producer involved in the Teapot Dome oil lease scandal during the Harding administration. Jack Walton, a Democratic governor of Oklahoma, had given a barbecue at the beginning of his administration, only to be later impeached and convicted on "eleven counts of high crimes and misdemeanors." WA 1:377n1, 395n3.

5. The extent of political independence and control the Five Tribes enjoyed in Indian Territory before its incorporation into Oklahoma may not have been as uncomplicatedly absolute as Rogers remembers, but his memories importantly refer to the sovereignty of Indian nations. Louis Owens defines the term "territory" negatively as "clearly mapped, fully imagined as a place of containment, invented to control and subdue the dangerous potentialities of imagined Indians" (26). However, he remembers hearing his relatives refer to "growing up in what they insisted on calling the 'Nation,'" meaning, as Owens later realizes, the Cherokee Nation (150). His relatives' cherished memories of growing up in the "Nation" are of the same order as Rogers's memories of growing up in Indian Territory: they insist on the recognition of the sovereignty of the Cherokee Nation.

6. Rogers engaged again the issue of nativism in an article from March 13, 1927:

Why, the Astecs and the Cliff Dwellers, existed and had civilization before the Meades, and the Persians, and the Gauls . . . had even taken out their citizenship papers in Rome or Greece. . . . Why this country out here was established so long ahead of that back there, that they ["Columbus and those gangs from Europe" who "commenced to squat in this country"] were like a bunch of Tourists visiting a country after these old Pioneers out here had blazed the trail so far ahead of that Columbus bunch that the trail had grown up with Century plants in the meantime.

Why, if Columbus had landed at Galveston and marched inland to Santa Fe, New Mexico he would have been met by the Cliff Dwellers commercial Club, a delegation of modern "red men of the world," and the Astecs Rotary. They would have apologized to Columbus for the primitive looks of the old end of town. (What they called Old town.) "We can't get some of our old settlers here to change their ways, they want to live like their great, great, great, grandfathers have

lived here before them." Columbus would have remarked, "Pardon me gentlemen! I didnt discover a Country, I am just here paying my respects from a young country, to an older one." (WA 3:4-5)

Rogers's stated goal is to chastise Americans for their obsession with European antiquities and to attract them to visit Arizona and New Mexico. What he actually achieves is a simultaneous critique of the myth of Columbus's "discovery" of North America and of nativist definitions of modern American citizenship. Writing in terms reminiscent of the passport scene in *Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat*, Rogers builds up a humorous effect by transposing twentieth-century realities (passports, tourism, nativism, and 100 percent Americanism) back into the past. The indigenous population of North America is described in the spirit of pioneer mythology with its emphasis on precedence in time and on the staking of unclaimed land. His description of the old settlers' unchanging ways spoofs the genealogical frenzy of tracing back one's ancestors to North America as a proof of authenticity. Ultimately, he shows that nativist claims to North America are poaching on a terrain that rightfully belongs to the indigenous population of the continent. Rogers speaks from a kind of Native nativist position that invalidates the claims of his nativist contemporaries on their own terms by claiming the self-righteousness of precedence.

7. Rogers adds to the lore his mock-sympathetic understanding of Columbus's human error by reversing the myth of discovery when he, a Native American, pretends to believe to have discovered the modern American city of St. Louis during his first visit there: "Every guy thinks the first time he sees anything, that that is the first time it ever existed. I will never forget the first time I went to St. Louis. I thought sure I was the first one to find it. But Lord, here it had been reclining there in its own way for generations" (WA 3:5).

In a February 13, 1927, article, he satirizes land speculation by retelling the story of the American Revolution as a competition between Washington and Jefferson for a piece of real estate, the Virginia Natural Bridge (WA 2: 305-06).

8. As a result of this mock campaign, Bob Sherwood, the editor of *Life*, who wrote most of the material run under Rogers's byline, was dismissed, which shows the ultimate unacceptability of the campaign. The undifferentiated Sherwood-Rogers coauthored essays have been published among the writings of Will Rogers because, in Steven Gragert's defense of his editorial decision, "Their humor and thrust bear his trademark" (*He Chews* xv).

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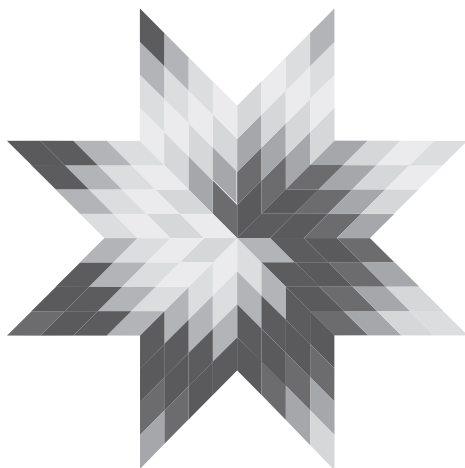
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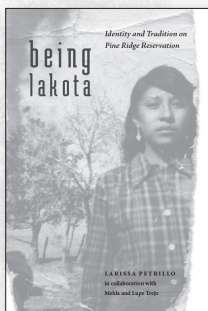
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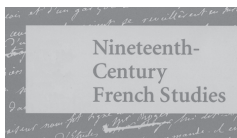
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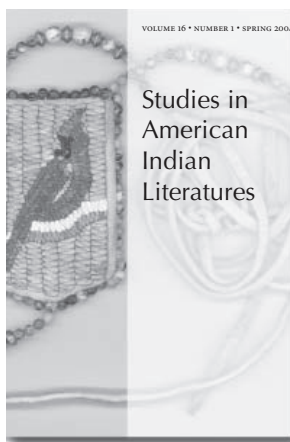


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