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FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* marks a historical milestone in our field and a personal crossroads for us. Regarding the former, *SAIL* has been the primary scholarly venue for the study of Indigenous literatures of the United States and Canada now for thirty years. Along with the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures, the journal has helped to shape the contours of this vibrant field, opening up critical conversations between readers, community members, and scholars, and it has made a growing audience aware of texts and authors that had often been forgotten by time and scholarship.

On a more personal note, we come on board as coeditors of the journal having been influenced by its presence from the very beginning of our work in Native literature. As graduate students at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, under the fine tutelage of our mentors Frances W. Kaye and, later, the inimitable Malea Powell (Eastern Miami-Shawnee), we were among the first generation of graduate students who could take a degree that was entirely focused on Native literary studies. We each saw our first published essays find print in the pages of *SAIL*, and we have served in various capacities with both the journal and the association since that time. We count among the *SAIL*/ASAIL community some of our closest friends and most influential intellectual mentors, as well as a growing group of younger scholars who continue to give us great hope for the future intellectual rigor, ethical engagement, and imaginative range of the field.

It is thus with a mingled sense of excitement and accountability that we begin our tenure as coeditors of *SAIL*. With new editors comes a new direction, a new vision, but certain things have not changed from the strong intellectual foundation put in place by Malea Powell, John Purdy, and the other editors who came before us. We're still very much committed to publishing the best scholarship being written today and to furthering the vital critical conversations and debates that have been so important to the healthy development of what is arguably one of the most provocative, contentious, and demanding fields in literary studies. We're still committed to the journal serving as a link between the work of critics, Indigenous writers, and Indigenous communities. And we're still committed to being a venue for both emerging scholars and more established critics to engage in constructive discussions from various interpretive perspectives.

Our editorial emphasis will be on those discussions and in having *SAIL* serve not just as a site of scholarly publication but as a space of debate and analysis where readers can take the current pulse of the critical conversations in the field. We want readers to be fully engaged, both intellectually and emotionally. We envision a battered and well-worn journal with articles that are dog-eared, coffee stained, and scribbled in; with issues that end up thrown against the wall or given to friends, colleagues, family members, and students; with ideas that cause people to question, to argue, to laugh, to *understand*. We want every issue to have at least one article, interview, commentary, or review that stays with you, that makes you look at the texts or ideas differently than you did before you picked it up. We want to start the next thirty-year publishing cycle with a gaze that looks at the ideas of today as well as those of yesterday and tomorrow, for we're in an exciting time in the field, and there's a lot to be talking about.

Toward those ends, and because of the increasing volume of work required by the journal, we've separated the editorship into two offices: one to focus on the submission and review side of the work and the other to focus on the publication and printing process. Daniel has been greatly assisted in the former by the very

organized Kyle Wyatt, a PhD student at the University of Toronto with whom many of you have already had the pleasure of corresponding; if you haven't heard from him yet, you likely will! Work on the journal has proceeded at Austin for the last year, too, where James has been assisted by two PhD students, Lydia A. Wilmeth and more recently Alberto Varon. All three assistants have provided invaluable service to the journal.

Jane Hafen continues her work as book review editor, with a standing mandate to find great reviews for the newest work being published, while also keeping our readership aware of reprints of major works that have had an influence on the field. We've significantly enlarged the editorial board to include a diverse range of scholars from different generations, institutions, geographical regions, and backgrounds. You'll see more voices and representation from Indigenous literary contexts in Canada, and we hope to have growing representation from Indigenous literatures in Mexico as well. In addition to catching up on our backlog of older book reviews, we're actively soliciting provocative review essays for forthcoming books that promise to shake up the field and to get folks talking *before* those books hit the shelf. We want to encourage both analyses rooted in Indigenous intellectual and critical traditions and conversations with other fields and interpretive schools.

In short, to follow Craig Womack's recommendation of the future of Native literary studies, we want to see "more and funkier" work. This issue's themed cluster on the intersections of queer studies and Native literature is a good move in that direction. The field is strong and getting stronger, and we fully intend that *SAIL* will continue to lead the way into the next thirty years. We look forward to sharing this journey with you.

Daniel Heath Justice

I want to echo Daniel's thoughts about the importance of this journal for which we now have the privilege to serve as coeditors. *SAIL* stands for scholars of American Indian literatures as the

most significant written history, the most significant archive, of our contemplation of the issues that Shari Huhndorf identifies in her 2005 *PMLA* article “Literature and the Politics of Native American Studies” as central to our field: “the connections between cultural production and anti-colonial politics, the relation between Native American writing and other literatures, the contemporary significance of traditions, and the task of the critic” (1619). Alberto Varon, one of *SAIL*’s new editorial assistants, spent the fall of 2007 producing a spreadsheet that allows us to search the entire *SAIL* archive based on author, work, and historical period. For example, the *SAIL* archive of approximately four hundred articles total in series 1 and 2 tells us that a small group of authors elicits most of our attention as scholars as we explore the issues outlined by Huhndorf. No matter how Alberto and I count the kinds of work *SAIL* publishes, Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich are always at the top of our list, with approximately twenty articles on the work of each author—ten percent of the total number of articles that we have published in the last thirty years. We are *really* devoted to Silko, whose novel *Ceremony*, blurbed on the back cover by Sherman Alexie as “the greatest novel in Native American literature [. . .] one of the greatest novels of any time or place,” shares with us a thirtieth anniversary this year. *SAIL* published Robert Sayre’s review of *Ceremony* in series 1, volume 2, issue 1 in Spring 1978. If we look only at articles, Gerald Vizenor joins Silko and Erdrich at the top of the list along with Alexie, Paula Gunn Allen, Linda Hogan, N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Louis Owens. We have devoted more than one hundred articles to this group of nine authors. Scholarship on works published after Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn*, soon to have its own fortieth anniversary, dominate the pages of *SAIL*, but we have published approximately thirty articles on American Indian literatures before 1900 and another thirty on literatures between 1900 and the late 1960s. Gertrude Bonnin and D’Arcy McNickle are the two pre-Renaissance writers to make a list of the twelve authors most frequently covered in articles published in *SAIL*.

The last fifteen years in American Indian literary studies have

been an age of recovery. During this time scholars have found previously unpublished work, such as Earnest Gouge's Creek stories (2004), John Milton Oskison's novel *The Singing Bird* (2007), and the play *Out of Dust* by Lynn Riggs (2003); reintroduced works such as *Green Grow the Lilacs* and *The Cherokee Night* (2003), also by Riggs, as well as Bertrand Walker's *Tales of the Bark Lodges* (1995), Todd Downing's *The Mexican Earth* (1996), S. Alice Callahan's novel *Wynema* (1997), Dallas Chief Eagle's novel *Winter Count* (2003), and Joseph Nicolar's *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man* (2007); and edited the collected writings of William Apress (1992), Joseph Johnson (1998), Samson Occom (2006), and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (2007). During approximately the same period of time, scholars such as Lisa Brooks, Daniel Heath Justice, and Robert Warrior have been recovering and foregrounding Native intellectual traditions and tribal nation contexts in their literary critical practice. For Craig Womack, one of the goals of the forthcoming collection *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* is "to mark a certain historical threshold, to celebrate a turning point" in 2002, the year in which it became possible, Womack says, "to teach a course on Native literary criticism using all Native authors" (150). *SAIL* has been an important agent in creating scholarly and institutional contexts much more amenable to these recovered writings and the books of literary criticism by American Indian authors.

As the incoming coeditor of *SAIL*, I'm particularly excited to see scholarly work on these recovered authors and texts and to hear us discuss what all this writing means for our understanding of the familiar critical modes that guide us and issues that motivate us: ethnocriticism; mediation; cross-cultural interaction and translation; cosmopolitanism; intellectual, political, and cultural sovereignty; communitism; literary nationalism; literary separatism; pantribalism; intertribalism; tribal nation specificity. Even more specifically, I'm interested in what all this writing—and more pre-1960s writing by authors such as Ruth Muskrat Bronson, Todd Downing, and Will Rogers—means for our understanding and our discussions of the "Renaissance."

Finally, I am honored to be the coeditor with my friend Daniel, to be following as coeditor with Daniel our mentor Malea, and to be inheriting the legacy of *SAIL* from LaVonne Ruoff, Karl Kroeber, Helen Jaskoski, John Purdy, and the sometime coeditor with the latter two, Robert Nelson. Thank you for entrusting it to our hands.

James H. Cox

THEMED CLUSTER

Queering Native Literature, Indigenizing Queer Theory

Daniel Heath Justice and James H. Cox

Two analytical issues guaranteed to raise questions, eyebrows, hackles, and other bits and bobs are *sex* and *nationhood*, and both issues elicit a wide range of intellectual and emotional responses. The unstable tension between the public and private—and those texts, ideas, and acts variously deemed socially acceptable or deviant—is magnified in the complicated relationships between *bodies* and *communities*. Just as the increasing presence of Native literary studies in the academy has been fueled in part by broader intellectual, social, and political struggles of Indigenous peoples and their communities outside of academe, so too has queer theory emerged from similar currents of activism among feminists and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed, and allied critics.

The history of the relationship between these two larger interpretive fields has yielded mixed but increasingly encouraging degrees of success. A number of Native writers are queer, and others are queer-friendly allies, and that supportive pattern is replicated in the scholarship, yet homophobic erasures or dismissals can still be found in literature and criticism, and homophobia remains a lived reality for many queer/two-spirited Native folks throughout North America. Although older scholarship in queer studies has suffered from racist assumptions and projections (the use of the term “berdache” being a case in point), appropriation, and sexism,

the increasing diversity of scholars utilizing the interpretive methods of queer theory, such as Craig Womack, Qwo-Li Driskill, Mark Rifkin, Bethany Schneider, and Lisa Tatonetti, among others, has resulted in much more thoughtful, attentive, and rigorous scholarship that includes Native subjectivities at the center of analytical concern, not just the margins to reinforce the “normalcy” of white queer expression.

As scholars, writers, and readers in these two fields continue to communicate across difference, they move toward a more inclusive and mutually respectful understanding of the literary intersections of race, nationhood, sexuality, gender, genre, and aesthetics. The three essays in this issue’s themed cluster engage these various points of connection in significantly different but equally compelling ways. Sophie Mayer carefully considers the representational politics of recent Native erotica in both anthology and film and uncovers a passionate and ethically complex textual relationship between the private, the public, and the pubic in the processes of community making. Michael Snyder makes a provocative argument through nuanced close reading and convincing historical scholarship for a necessary queer reconsideration of one of the great and often overlooked classics of the field—John Joseph Mathews’s *Sundown*—and its curiously detached yet consistently “fascinated” protagonist, Chal Windzer. Moving forward again to a more contemporary text, Quentin Youngberg tackles the multilayered queer and Indian coding practices in Sherman Alexie’s controversial and sometimes problematic film, *The Business of Fancydancing*, interrogating the interpenetrated expectations and projections of text and reader/viewer.

Taken together, these three essays engage Native literature with a challenging respect, and they ask difficult but necessary questions of both the texts and their audience. In each case, they reach far beneath the interpretive surface to the deeper currents of significance, making honored, honest space for voices and experiences too often silenced . . . or willfully unheard.

This Bridge of Two Backs

Making the Two-Spirit Erotics of Community

SOPHIE MAYER

TALKING CIRCLES: GOING PUBLIC WITH
INDIGENOUS SEXUALITIES

Esselen/Chumash poet Deborah A. Miranda's 2002 groundbreaking essay "Dildos, Hummingbirds, and Driving Her Crazy" begins with a conversation about the erotic in a classroom—a conversation about private or intimate matters in a public space. In a graduate class on women's erotica at the University of Washington, Miranda found herself "Searching for American Indian Women's Love Poetry and Erotics," which gives her essay its subtitle. Her professor first denied the existence of Native women's erotic writing, and then, when Miranda materialized "volumes of the stuff," the instructor excluded it on the basis that there was no critical treatment (135). Miranda's essay focuses on a specifically lesbian Indigenous erotics in the work of Menominee poet Chrystos. Her emphatic making public—in the sense of literary publication and political declaration—of private desires (as linked to national identity) lies at the heart of my essay. Her essay places her own poetics of Indigenous sexuality in a community or continuum that includes Chrystos, Muskogee Creek poet Joy Harjo, and Anishinaabe poet Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, a communitarian model of imagining both literary and erotic culture that provides the methodology of this essay and that is emblemized in Miranda's essay by a utopian project: an anthology of Indigenous erotica being collected by Akiwenzie-Damm.

Akiwenzie-Damm's anthology *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica* was published in 2003, its historical proximity to Miranda's essay suggesting a zeitgeist. Indeed, it includes many of those same voices that Miranda quotes—and many others. Akiwenzie-Damm's anthology contains—or rather, can barely contain the energy of—Indigenous writers from Turtle Island, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, and the Pacific Islands, all speaking of and from the specifics of an Indigenous experience of sexuality. The erotics of the anthology are therefore implicit in the act of collecting and moreover in the collection's structure: unlike traditional anthologies where work is grouped by theme and each author's work lies chastely alone with itself, *Without Reservation* is an anthol-orgy. There are connections from work to work, but no teleological narrative; writers may have several pieces in different locations in the anthology, and in each place, our reading of their work is affected by that of the writers who lie on either side of them. This pattern of distribution also awakens the reader's *active* desire: if you like Gregory Scofield's work, you either have to seek him out across the book or wait, tantalized, for his reappearance.

Scofield, a Métis poet who copresented "Beneath the Buffalo Robe" on CBC Radio with Akiwenzie-Damm, is one paradigmatic figure for this anthol-orgy, as his work is literally "without reservation," weaving bisexual desire and the urban rez into evocations of traditional medicine songs scented with muskeg. The shifting pronouns in his poems—"you" is sometimes "he," sometimes "she," sometimes both or neither—act as a model for the overall structure of *Without Reservation*, in which heterosexual, same-sex, bisexual, transsexual, and pansexual narratives and images are set alongside one another. By including a number of well-known writers, such as Chrystos, whose work has previously been read through the term "two-spirit" (by Sue-Ellen Case among others), alongside pieces that explore desires and bodies considered non-normative by dominant culture, written by writers who do not self-identify as queer or two-spirit, Akiwenzie-Damm mobilizes an Indigenous sexuality that forms a spectrum opposed to the dominant binaries of gender and sexuality.

As a transnational, as well as pansexual, anthology, the collection does not recognize imperialist nation-states but rather Indigenous national affiliations. In so doing *Without Reservation* heeds Andrea Smith's call in *Conquest* that to address Indigenous sexuality is to multiply decolonize: the lands overtaken by white settlers; the sexual Puritanism, capitalism, and heteronormativity that necessarily accompanied colonization and that continue as the dominant cultural form in postcolonial societies; and the Indigenous cultural and social histories overwritten by self-serving missionaries and politicians and further obfuscated by well-meaning academics who believed the words of the former. The term "two-spirit" is part of this decolonization: not an unproblematic term, it refers, in a pan-Native discourse, to the recovery of national traditions regarding people whom dominant medical and social discourse would label intersex, trans, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer.

As Terry Tafoya illustrates in his essay "M. Dragonfly," there is an uncertainty about any Indigenous erotic inheritance, produced not only by the propagandist criminalization of Indigenous peoples through a Christian language of sexual sin but also by the vagueness of the condemnatory language used. As he says, "it is possible that the Spanish used such accusations as 'they are all sodomites and practice that abominable vice' [. . .] to justify their conquering efforts. [. . .] Who knows how many of those accused or noted as hermaphrodite, transvestite, or homosexual were what are now labeled as two-spirit?"—or, indeed, were simply inconveniently occupying much-desired land (198). The perversity of the imperialist desire for the Other, with its devastating equivalence of land and body as possessions, is projected onto the desired/despised body as perverse desire, regardless of Indigenous practice. The obsessive recounting of nudity and open sexuality by invaders from Columbus on suggests the powerful fear of sexual/erotic desire in Eurowestern culture that led to the conversion of desire into capitalism.

Colonialism depends largely on the ideal of the individual: land or woman held singly in deed. Thus, the motivation for this project of anthologizing is distinctly small "c" communist, implying not

only share and share alike but also the ability of differences to exist side by side. The erotics of anthologizing are implicit in the acts of collecting and of making public. Miranda writes:

In my search for the invisible American Indian erotic self, I have discovered that there are no collections of American Indian erotica in existence. One poet I know, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, an Anishnawbekwe Indian, has been collecting Native erotica writings for almost ten years but has not been able to sell the idea to any publisher, large or small. (139)

She adds that, “it is not that American Indian women have chosen to keep erotic writing closeted; as Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm’s unpublished anthology attests, the willingness to go public is there” (146). Miranda identifies a tension between public and private that is central to erotic experience and writing in general and to that of oppressed groups in particular. In Judeo-Christian cultures, the erotic is shamed into private space, especially (but not only) for women. Thus, for an Indigenous person to speak or act erotically in public is an act of resistance to dominant culture. Miranda notes that

it may be that a crucial level of physical safety must be reached before erotica can be publicly shared by an oppressed population. Created by people of color or sexual minorities, poetry can be dangerous: Living the erotic (as do women of color who break stereotypes such as gender roles, sexual orientation expectations, or silence) *within your poetry* can limit your ability to earn a living, or even get you killed. (142)

The anthology form offers a space that is at once safe—in numbers—and at the same time public.

In *Conquest* Smith notes that a 1990 state government decision to leave open a burial ground in Dixon, Illinois, “conveyed the message to Indians that being on constant display for white consumers, in life and in death, is acceptable” (12). This enforced publicity—an implicit extension of highly sexualized displays of captive Indians in the nineteenth century—places a different valence

on the contestatory public intimacy of *Without Reservation* compared to, say, the kiss-ins of Queer Nation and Act Up!. Visibility, as both Smith and Gerald Vizenor argue, does not necessarily mean uncomplicated presence in terms of Indigenous representation; rather, it often means substitution: the image for the (disappeared) individual or community. In a chapter titled “Spiritual Appropriation as Sexual Violence,” Smith exposes the fallacious assumption that it is possible to “know” indigeneity from the outside (120–21). Looking at the Hebrew etymology of “to know,” she argues that Eurowestern thought systems make all knowledge intimate knowledge, and therefore acts of knowledge appropriation are acts of sexual violence (119).

The relationship between silencing as an oppressive strategy of dominant culture and strategic silence used by marginal or oppressed cultures as a response to the demand to be “known” is central to Susan Schultz’s poetic essay on Hawaiian poetry that introduces her book *A Poetics of Impasse*. A footnote to the essay suggests a contingent way out of this impasse that identifies a resistant circulation of knowledge at once public and private. She notes that the Hawaiian phrase “da kine,” which means “you know, that kind of thing,”

originated on the plantations, where speaking in code was an important strategy for avoiding notice by the “luna,” or field boss. Hence “da kine” is a phrase that refers to something both speaker and listener understand, but an outsider might not. [. . .] *Da Kine* is the name of a Hawai’i gay publication, and reveals another use for this language of secrecy. (218n8)

The relationship between colonially induced secrecy, silence, and shame—as well as a powerful resistance to them—is implied in Schultz’s comment. I want to suggest that this is how the texts I analyze here operate, calling out “da kine.”

Without Reservation makes Indigenous sexuality public knowledge through a “da kine” strategy. Akiwenzie-Damm’s anthology was never published by a mainstream publisher but rather by Kege-donce, the press she founded and runs from Neyaashiinigiimiing, on

the traditional territory of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation. Small presses, as Miranda argues, act as mediators between the public marketplace of commercial presses and the private closet. Yet they are not unproblematic: “Native women poets continue to be published mostly by small and/or feminist presses. [. . .] Small presses often close up shop, remainder an author’s books, or—as is the situation currently faced by Chrystos with Press Gang—simply stop publishing” (137). This situation risks a second erasure and silencing.

This is one of the reasons that Miranda’s call for a critical culture is so significant. Journal reviews and articles act as a framework that maintains the presence of alternative works that have fallen out of print—after all, quotation in scholarly texts is how the majority of Sappho’s poetry was preserved. *Without Reservation* was also carefully embedded in larger public discourses: not just reviews but “Beneath the Buffalo Robe,” broadcast on the Canadian Broadcasting Company’s (CBC) First Voice program in February 2003, in which Scofield performed two poems from *Love Medicine and One Song*, both of which speak queer desire in a Métis-specific vocabulary and form, including Cree words, on national radio. The program documented the two writers’ search for and celebration of a postresidential school Indigenous erotic that spanned the spectrum of desire.

Going public with Indigenous sexuality in the Canadian national media carries overtones—explored by the program—of public revelations about generations of sexual abuse of forcibly removed Indigenous youth in residential schools. Discussing *Kuper Island: Return to the Healing Circle*, their film about the revelations in one community, the Penelakut Coast Salish Nation on Kuper Island off the east coast of Vancouver Island, Christine Welsh and Sylvia Olsen recount the way in which the abuse silenced its victims from speaking out. Welsh, an experienced Métis documentary filmmaker who accepted the community’s invitation to film a healing circle for survivors at the Tsartlip Coast Salish Nation, argues that “the camera seemed to act as a kind of catalyst, inspiring them with a sense of purpose and resolve that came from the knowledge that

their voices would be heard—not just within the circle but beyond” (Welsh and Olsen 149). The survivors went public in two contexts: that of the supportive healing circle where they were surrounded by friends and relatives with similar stories to tell, and that of the film that, because it was funded by the Canadian National Film Board, would carry their stories to a national public.

Welsh comments that the healing circle that gives the film its form “is often called a talking circle, but it is really a listening circle” (146). This observation suggests a participatory role for the film’s viewers, as listening members of the healing circle—a model in which the diverse viewers constitutive of the National Film Board’s audience become members of the Kuper Island community, rather than the Penelakut speakers becoming part of Canada as constituted and made public by the NFB as an organ of government.¹ Like the small-press anthology, the talking circle sits on the boundary between private and public as a “safe” space in which complex and painful issues of sexuality can be brought forward. The filmmaker’s camera and the press both ensure that “*their voices will be heard*.”

The healing circle, with its give-and-take of listening and hearing, not only suggests a model for encountering texts about Indigenous sexuality but also offers a persuasive argument for the centrality of the erotic to the lives of individuals and communities. Miranda quotes Audre Lorde, from *Sister Outsider*, foregrounding

“the erotic as a form of communication between human beings. The sharing of joy,” she explains, “whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.” (146)

It is perhaps this bridge of joy that surfaces in the title of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking anthology of writings by radical women of color (including Chrystos, Barbara Cameron, and Naomi Littlebear) whose title influences mine. Yet the anthology, which covers radicalism,

racism, and homophobia, does not foreground love or the erotic. *Without Reservation* shares a number of contributors with both *This Bridge* and Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird's anthology *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, which contains "no section titled, 'Love Poems,'" as Miranda points out; "love poetry in general," she continues, "is absent from the collection" (141). Akiwenzie-Damm's anthology thus operates as a healing circle in which shared contributors, alongside others, can speak and listen in a space both private and—on their own terms—public.

PRESENT YOURSELF: COMING OUT AS A COMMUNITY

The publicness of the work here ties in with Beth Brant's idea of "presenting" oneself rather than "coming out." In her essay "Recovery and Transformation" in *Writing as Witness*, Brant claims the phrase "present yourself" from a story told by another conference participant about taking part in the Sun Dance as a gay man (45). Presenting oneself denotes an intracultural act with a ceremonial aspect that of necessity includes "a full knowledge of who [one] is and what [one] is to [one's] community" (45). As an anthology published by an Indigenous press representing Indigenous writers to the Canadian public, *Without Reservation* is necessarily an artifact of a public—that is, a communal—culture, as well as an artifact of national culture as heard on CBC, but it is one in which individual difference—for example, same-sex desire—is embraced rather than excluded.

Without Reservation illustrates that a community-building project begins, as Akiwenzie-Damm begins her introduction, by "thinking about sex. Seriously [. . .] thinking seriously about sex and sexuality" (xii). Rather than leading to a homogenized account or single vision of sexuality, Akiwenzie-Damm's serious thinking is invested in the plural. John Bierhorst concludes his essay "American Indian Verbal Art and The Role of the Literary Critic" by sensibly suggesting that the (white) critic give up Jungian analysis (which reads all stories in the same way to locate the same meaning) and look to "native criticism—that is, those texts referred to

by folklorists as ‘variants,’ for it is the variant by its very nature that constitutes a gloss and is of course our best [. . .] source of native commentary” (85). By foregrounding the variant, which is usually suppressed, collated, or neglected, and suggesting that Native narrative practices formulate their own criticism, Bierhorst points to the very features that make *Without Reservation* both valuable and representative. Rather than offering a “representative” gay Native story or a “representative” (rather, tokenized) Native lesbian poet, Akiwenzie-Damm structures her collection to militate against receiving any one voice as representative and thus to encourage us to listen to and for detail.

Devon Abbott Mihesuah writes eloquently about creating a balance in Native women’s studies between individualism and collective consciousness: “Knowledge of these complexities of value systems and personalities is crucial to understanding the rationales behind the Native voice the scholar listens to, in addition to knowing that it is not representative of all Natives” (7). Intersecting lines of difference, such as tribal affiliation, generation, gender, and sexual orientation, multiply to infinity, but within the anthology, they also multiply to affinity. *Without Reservation* is heavily invested in the variant—variant sexualities, variant narrative practices, even variant versions of the same story—and both point to variation as the key that enables us to read them.

What Bierhorst does not demonstrate but Akiwenzie-Damm does is that variants are necessarily produced by communities who share “common ground,” in J. Edward Chamberlin’s term for a community constituted by shared narratives. Many of the writers who present themselves within the context of the anthology have been published elsewhere, although few by mainstream presses (Sherman Alexie and Witi Ihimaera are notable exceptions). Clint Alberta’s documentary *Deep Inside Clint Star*, produced, like Welsh’s documentary, by the National Film Board of Canada, raises the question of how one presents oneself in the context of a national cinema. Alberta, who was also known by the last names Morrill (his birth name), Star, Torangeau, and Karatechamp, investigates Indigenous sexual identities, based on a series of inter-

views with friends in the Métis community, as a way of exploring his own complex identity (as his changeable name suggests).

The interviews take place in a series of locations that (re)define Canada as Indigenous territory: contemplative tracking shots of the Alberta landscape through a car window reveal an Indigenous absent presence refigured by interviews that locate Alberta's subjects variously and playfully. Harvey, who is dealing with his homosexuality, is filmed at a deserted rodeo, superimposing both his indigeneity and his sexuality onto the white heteronormative setting, while Tawny Maine, who is as conflicted about her Indigenous identity as Harvey is about his sexuality, is shown shoe shopping in downtown Toronto as she talks about coming to terms with her body and identity—deliberately framed within the space of dominant, commercial culture. Alberta's film queers Canada through its implicit expression of Indigenous *sexuality* as radical, different, and originary.

It also works to queer/indigenize documentary and NFB/nationalist conventions of documentary in particular. Unlike in Welsh's films, the "talking circle" is informal and (dis)located from the rez, while the personal narrative is not constructed through archival research or oral storytelling but through Gen X-style music video and conversation. At the center of the film is a sequence that intermixes the conventions of the video diary and distinctly non-NFB forms such as soft porn and music videos to frame Alberta—"playing" "Clint Star"—as an object of desire. This section is ironically framed by its title "Why I never get laid," whose flipness is more suggestive of *Queer as Folk* than the NFB. The insistent intimacy reinjects a sense of the private into the documentary as public discourse. The section and the film as a whole suggest that both external and internalized racism and homophobia partially answer the section's question. Alberta presents himself as queer and asks male interviewees Harvey, Gerald, and Michael whether they identify as gay. In a sense, the film starts as an extended flirtation, a first-person video for a dating site, that deepens into a representation of community as Alberta recognizes the context in which he presents himself.

Clint Star shows filmmaking as in itself an erotic act that draws others into community. The film meets Sharon R. Sherman's concept of folkloric film, which engages with the specific, intimate, ritual, or individuated aspects of a given culture or subculture and which is frequently produced by an insider. The term, with its resonances of storytelling and listening, is less ideologically loaded, perhaps, than Mary Louise Pratt's "auto-ethnography," with its suggestion of using the master's tools. The folkloric documentary, often made with community involvement, creates not only a reader/writer or filmmaker/viewer community but also a community within the text itself. In the case of *Clint Star*, this community is shown self-consciously to be involved in the production of the film. An initially reluctant interviewee, Becky talks about being part of the team and says that she associates pursuing making the film with pursuing the reawakening of her desire. Alberta's interviews with Harvey, a conflicted gay man who has been gay-bashed, and with commitment-phobic Hugo and his pregnant girlfriend, suggest that the filmmaking process, as in *Kuper Island*, acts as a form of talking therapy in which the intervention of the camera can produce change as well as reflect the community.

There is a fascinating tension in the documentary between its somewhat tongue-in-cheek focus on "Clint Star" and the moments of community building through discussing love and sex. Reviewer Dennis Lim of *The Village Voice* found it narcissistic, calling Alberta a "first-person camera hog." Documentary theorist Jim Lane argues that embodiment is central to the truth-claims of autobiographical documentary in which the narrator appears before the camera, as Alberta does (and as Akiwenzie-Damm can be said to do, as both editor and anthologized author): "The views are ascribed to a *body*. [. . .] The exchange of the camera becomes an exchange of views, views anchored in an understanding of who people are. [. . .] The camera is no longer a free-floating omniscient machine whose presence is absented by continuity editing" (30). Not only is Alberta present as a *body* before the lens, but the subject matter of the film causes him to repeatedly draw attention to his presence before the lens, both as subject of the documentary and as

its director. At various moments, we hear him correcting the cameraman's technique or making suggestions.

In doing so, Alberta contravenes cinematic conventions in which seamless editing maintains a suspension of disbelief and thus the distance between (passive) audience and (active) text. He also purposely includes what appear to be errors—in focus, editing, color correction, and so on—of the kind made in home movies, further blurring the boundaries between the professionalized public arena and communitarian, private documents. Error becomes a kind of signature, a reminder that we are witnessing something intimate:

“He believed the lower the format, the more accessible the documentary,” says Jeff Sterne, a filmmaker and production manager on the film. “I did sound on some of it, and he wanted the microphone and the sound person in the shot. He didn’t mind glitches, he believed the glitches and the mistakes were all part of the process.” Once the camera’s auto-focus went haywire, and Morrill’s response was, “Perfect.” (Tillson F9)²

Error’s “perfect[ion]” creates access: that is, it creates a way of listening respectfully because it “presents,” connects to, the individual and community responsible for making the film. Formal “errors” such as a visible boom are complemented by Alberta’s investigation of embodied variance and “error,” with a particular focus on incidents of sexual violence. When Harvey postpones an interview after the gay-bashing, Alberta substitutes a video confessional, as he waits in a hotel room with poor light conditions that give the film a lurid, noirish look. Thus shadowed as an investigator caught in a seamy drama, he wonders how Harvey’s injuries will look on film. In the subsequent interview at the rodeo, a site of colonial violence, he points out the bruises, telling the cameraman to get a close-up. In doing so, he turns Harvey’s erroneous and variant appearance, as classified by dominant culture’s aesthetic values, into a study of the erroneous beliefs and actions embedded in that dominant culture (not least the association of violence and gay sexuality). As Miranda says, expressing Indigenous sexuality is

dangerous; even as it is celebratory, the film does not pass over the threat.

The intersection of violence and sexuality recurs throughout the film, as evidence of the connection that Smith draws between colonization and Eurowestern metaphors and practices of sexual violence. Tawny Maine, who dyes her hair blonde and tells the camera that she has identified as Egyptian, among other ethnicities, in the past, says that she hates people to see pictures of her. She also admits that her white boyfriend is ashamed to be seen in public with her, implicitly classifying Indigenous people as disruptions of the visual field. In his second interview with Tawny, on a bench in the curve of a bridge, at once a public space and the suggestive scene of a private assignation, Alberta tells the cameraman to restart the scene so that Maine is fully in shot. Despite her pronounced discomfort with being filmed, this allows her to open up about her sexual experience, not least because the repositioning means that Alberta, in order to be in shot, is looking off-screen rather than at her.

Alberta does finally break his strict off-screen gaze, turning to face her and then hug her after she narrates her experience of gang rape. He uses this physical turning away from the gaze organized by the camera to a gaze inspired by human pain/love to end the interview with affirmations of his friend, telling her she is great. Many of the interviews are two-shots (for example, with Gerald in the car, with Becky in the field, and with Harvey at the rodeo ground) rather than the traditional “talking-head” or shot/reverse-shot formats—Alberta does not separate himself physically from his interviewees, and thus he implies that good documentaries, like good sex, involve mutually committed partners.

Both Alberta’s and Akiwenzie-Damm’s texts connect the mutuality and consensuality of producing communal artistic productions and healthy sexual relationships. Consensual sexuality, as described in both texts and replicated by their collective form, suggests a political model in which desire *a priori* recognizes the other as an individual possessed of equal rights to the desiring person, marking common ground by building a bridge that needs (at least) two backs.

COMMUNITISM: FROM FUGITIVE POSES TO
 “A MACHINE CALLED LUVIN”

That bridge, as Jace Weaver argues in *That the People Might Live*, is built through cultural texts as much as political negotiations. He proposes the term “communitist,” a fusion of “community” and “activist,” to refer to texts that have a “proactive commitment to Native community” (xiii). Discussing literary practice, he notes the ways in which many of the writers he addresses “reinvent the enemy’s language” as part of this proactive commitment, which again both marks and blurs the public/private boundary, making the texts “more accessible” to the community that shares the language in which the Indigenous worldview is represented. Gerald Vizenor, whom Weaver cites as one of the primary practitioners of this reinvention, offers his own complex terminology for the ways in which Indigenous writers refuse what he calls “fugitive poses,” the stereotypes produced by ethnography (157). Both *Clint Star* and many of the pieces in *Without Reservation* explore, parody, and critique these poses by adopting, reshaping, and discarding them as a form of foreplay, an erotics of the Other that seeks to undo the erotic charge underlying many ethnographic depictions (for example, as Miranda cites, the buck and the squaw).

In a short sequence that foregoes many of the conventions of documentary rhetoric—coherent narrative structure, clarity of image, preference for information over style—Alberta intercuts extreme close-ups of his face with short captions detailing Indigenous-settler history, referring to oppression and then to the banality of white Canadian culture, and finally exhorting that the viewer begin their tentative search, *in conjunction* with the subjects of the film, for a narrative based in healthy sexuality. The use of close-ups and impressionistic sound rarely located in the diegesis form a communitist and communitarian surround that inducts the viewers into the private space of the film, rather than insistently placing the film in the (nationally defined) public space of cinematicity. The slogans reappropriate and rewrite dominant stereotypes of Indigenous identity, replacing them with telling clichés about settler culture. Vizenor argues that dominant culture produces

stereotypes through “occidental surveillance,” and Alberta specifically critiques white people’s obsession with making machines that watch people (such as closed-circuit TV cameras in banks) but that really express their own deep desire to be watched.

Instead, the impressionistic collage ends with the slogan “Let’s build a machine on this land and call it luvin’.” *Clint Star* is a model for this “luvin’,” as opposed to looking, machine, a common ground centered on the universality of desire and our constant arousal by its narrative specifics, a model for turning the camera into a partner instead of a judge. By presenting multiple narratives framed by diverse, formally innovative techniques—particularly in terms of framing faces in off-center and canted close-ups, reordering narrative through jump-cuts, changes in film stock and camera angle, and foregrounding the process of filmmaking—Alberta fulfills feminist documentary maker Jill Godmilow’s call to “reformulate [. . .] visual language. [. . .] To poke holes in the existing language [of documentary], to make spaces, so there is a possibility for imagination and action to work through it” (Godmilow 181; qtd. in Rabinowitz 31). In centering this on the body—not the “fugitive pose” of the historical, ritual body that is the exploited center of ethnographic film, but the consenting, present everyday body that can parody the poses of music videos and porn—Alberta suggests a specifically Indigenous formulation of both film and sexuality that does not base its distinctions on sexual preference or orientation but on socially framed individual experience.

Akiwenzie-Damm similarly classifies the writers she collects “as we are: people who love each other, who fall in love and out of love, who have lovers,” rather than classifying by the gender of lovers or nature of the sexual act (xii). This suggests two possible readings, which I want to hold out simultaneously: firstly, the suggestion that within the multiple and diverse Indigenous cultural worldviews presented, desire is commonly not arranged by binarism or difference, and this both produces the inclusion of writers of diverse sexual identities and inflects the work of *all* the writers included to produce a fluid vocabulary of desire. Secondly, that all the work here is fluid, or what we could call “queer,” because it

opposes and subverts a whitewashed dominant economy of desire. All the voices speaking here are Indigenous, and many of the subjects spoken about are Indigenous, canceling the colonialist suppression and division of nonwhite desire. Akiwenzie-Damm connects this outspoken, “outrageous” sexuality to *humanity*, arguing implicitly that to desire and be desirable is a fundamental human right. Including an unshameful sexuality in human rights is indeed an “outrageous” move, and it is one that is repeated again and again by the writers here to form an implicit politic, which itself implies an audience.

Without Reservation demonstrates that choosing to speak about something as personal as sexuality is *still* a political move, particularly if that sexuality does not fit the dominant mold and if the discussion is held in public. The autobiographical pieces in *Without Reservation* describe experiences that are intimate by nature and therefore lost to the historical record, but particularly contextualize them in/as nondominant cultural practices. Aboriginal Australian Kenny Laughton’s “Master Bates,” a witty autobiographical essay about masturbation, observes that “[s]ex was a taboo subject in my childhood [. . .] good solid Anglican Christian upbringing I had,” before going on to speculate iconoclastically about Jesus’ sexual behavior (in Akiwenzie-Damm 157). Laughton identifies the prohibition on pleasure with colonialism, commenting that “Master Bates, sounded more like an elderly English Butler” (157). He is also critical of the unnatural “bald pussy” white women in the porn magazines that he finds (160). Despite the colonial and religious authorities, Laughton found not only pleasure but also a language in which to describe it joyously in his later life (thus also breaking the taboo on older people’s sexuality).

His experience of self-pleasure, like the anthology, takes place on the unstable border between public and private. This connects back to Smith’s observation that the colonizer controls the public sphere and that visibility is thus deeply problematic. Marxist theorist John Berger, observing shantytowns abutting a walled-off urban area, writes that “the word ‘private’ has a totally different meaning on the two sides of the wall. On one side it denotes prop-

erty; on the other an acknowledgement of the temporary need to be left, as if alone, for a while" (98). "Public," likewise, has two meanings, and the "need to be left alone" in a way that retains connection to community is a repeated theme in the anthology. Laughton writes: "Privacy in a small house with a family of six was not always easy to find [. . .] the only sanctuary being the outside 'Dunny'" (159). The late Inuit fantasist Alootook Ipellie also sites his first solo orgasm away from the family house, in an outside area, while Sherman Alexie listens in on the orgasmic sounds of an "Urban Indian Convention Hotel Room Sonata" (in Akiwenzie-Damm 153–56; 120). In fact, Ipellie's piece directly precedes Laughton's, creating a mutual masturbatory literary experience between "the Great White Arctic" and the Australian outback of chooks and redback spiders (153; 159).

One of the anthology's strengths is that it can suggest similarities across Indigenous cultures—for example, in terms of the embrace of the erotic—while presenting, and indeed, playing with, cultural difference. Within single texts, this can be humorous and incidental, as in the Dogrib versus Rosko pseudorivalry in Dogrib novelist Richard Van Camp's "Let's Beat the Shit out of Herman Rosko!"; or it can mark the very source of desire, as in Chrystos's "Song for a Lakota Woman" (in Akiwenzie-Damm 111–17; 129). In Van Camp's story, two young Dogrib men deal with the presence in their community of a university-trained Native sex therapist, Herman Rosko, who is returning their women to full sexual power. Clarence, the more obtuse of the two, wants to "trauma-hawk" Herman (115), whereas the savvier Grant invites Clarence's "Indian ass" to "a talking circle for men" run by Herman (117). Part of the pleasure of Van Camp's story is its reinventive English, which often coins words for bodies—"Indian ass"—and what they do to each other—"trauma-hawk" being, presumably, some kind of violent gesture. This reinventive language of embodiment mirrors the reinvention of erotic language between bodies that Herman is working to bring. Through Van Camp's work and humor, lines of gender, sexuality, and nationhood entwine, and sexual pleasure takes precedence over violence. The pleasure may be heterosexual,

but the talking circle suggests, potentially, a nonsexualized homoeroticism, a comfort level far different from the power plays of white masculinity.

And Van Camp's randy Dogrib boys coexist comfortably alongside Chrystos's defiantly woman-centered words. Chrystos's poetic forms contrast with heteronarrative works such as Van Camp's, and they also share a vocabulary with them: they both "reinvent" the word "cunt" in a spirit of celebration and explore the specific erotics of the meeting of two nations. Chrystos's lover is named in the poem's title as Lakota. She in turn names Chrystos in the poem, saying in Lakota: "*Winyan Menominee / Anpetu Kin Lila Wasté*" (the footnote translates this as "Menominee woman, you are good and beautiful"). Here, the counterpoint of nations—Menominee and Lakota—opens to the erotic, the surprise of the Lakota words rising like desire in the midst of the English. The specificity of Lakota, like the specificity of gender, is part of the arousal; Chrystos responds to her lover's words by singing this poem that recognizes her lover as Lakota, as her lover recognized her as Menominee. It is a recognition that dismisses the charge of narcissism laid against homosexuality, a recognition where difference is the erotic. The English is a footnote, the dominant tongue moved to the margins.

The margins of this book are a rich area for investigating cultural specificity. Some writers, such as Chrystos, include their national and sexual identity explicitly in their work; others use suggestively different vocabularies. No writer uses the word "two-spirit," focusing instead on nation-specific genders and sexualities within the communitist space. The only time two-spirit appears in the text is as a translation footnote for the word *fa'afafine* used in Dan Taulapapa McMullin's "The Bat" (35–36). The two *fa'afafine* characters in the poem are referred to as "they" until one, Lolo, kills the other, and then McMullin uses the pronoun "she" to refer to Lolo, for the most part, although Lolo is also occasionally "he." The footnote states that a *fa'afafine* is "a two-spirited man from Samoa." This both clarifies the pronoun play and challenges the reader to understand or discover the culturally specific Samoan

two-spirit identity.³ In the poem it is clear that the fa'afafine are sexually attracted to men, but not in what way they might inhabit the pronoun "she" (or "he"). Nor does McMullin's other anthologized work, "Sinalela and the One-Eyed Fish," shed any light, except to affirm that this form of two-spiritedness is culturally specific and carries its own mythic, cultural, and social freight (137–38). There are strong associations between fa'afafine and the animal world: Lolo turns into a bat, and Sinalela into a spider. Both transformations produce love stories, as Lolo falls in love with a boot and Sina bites a beautiful boy, becoming a tattoo on his hand. Fluidity is not just across or between genders but within all orders of being, always predicated on narratives of desire.

Sinalela, McMullin's short film of Sinalela's story, which provides the genderqueer cover image for the anthology, makes it clear that Sinalela is a Samoan Cinderella, waiting for her prince. "Everyone was a queen except me," Sinalela comments mournfully at the start of the film, undercutting the association of Sina's female-dressing fa'afafine identity with Eurowestern notions of camp. Rather than the San Franciscan sailor she dreams of emigrating to find, her prince arrives in the form of a traditionally tattooed Samoan warrior, summoned by an *ariku* spirit. Unlike the Christian Anglican upbringing that threatened to close Laughton off from his sexuality, and the destructive Catholic and Anglican residential schools that facilitated the sexual abuse of many Indigenous people, Sina's traditional beliefs, which are closely connected to the natural world, not only include her identity but also grant her a lover. The appearance of Sina's lover is presaged by a one-eyed fish, and the fa'afafine's relation with the natural world suggests that fluidity across genders and sexualities is part of a continuum in which not only human but also animal, plant, and mineral bodies are intrinsically related and can thus transform into one another.

Heterosexual poets evoke the natural world when inhabiting a similar erotic fluidity: Cree poet Randy Lundy's poems are mostly nonspecific, even when, as in "body song," he is explicitly "nam[ing] the places of your body / your body of lands and skies and seas" (146). The repetition of "your body" suggests a differ-

ent approach to metaphor than in Eurowestern writing: his lover's body is both a human body and a natural, global body. Miranda reflects that, particularly in terms of the female body,

Indian writing has often been stereotyped as “nature poetry,” leaving Indian poets to wrestle with this problematic imagery. We know that if we use natural landscape as metaphor, we are being predictable, but on the other hand, these are not “just” natural images to us. Often, the natural world contains much religious, culturally specific importance that is impossible to ignore but difficult to negotiate. (144)

It is therefore important to recognize that the beautiful bodies of these poems *are* bodies “of land and skies and seas” and that the fluidity of that parataxis—at once land *and* skies *and* seas—relates to the inclusive erotic creating not only human community but also a recognition of the (erotic) relation between all living things.

Scofield draws on the nonhuman world to celebrate and sanctify sex as grounded in a traditional worldview. The gender indistinctiveness in “Ceremonies” is noteworthy as the poem foregrounds a ceremonial human-nature relationship, ending:

nicimos, for you
I drink blessed water
chew the bitter roots
so the medicine is sweet,
the love, sacred. (Akiwenzie-Damm 41)

Culturally specific Cree practices (sweats, fasting, medicines) are referred to, and yet—or, and so—the identity of Scofield's partner is ungendered, in defiance of dominant culture's love of category. The footnote to *nicimos* once again reveals a gap between English and Indigenous cultures and practices. The translation offered is “sweetheart or lover,” words from seemingly different English registers, where “lover” can include sex but not love, and “sweetheart” often love but not sex. Eroticism here is instead *without reservation*: separated neither from emotion nor from ribaldry.

There is a sense of respect for the powers of desire, its ability to

integrate self and world, in even the most explicit pieces. In Ipellie's work, for example, both graphicness and respect are cultural—whether he is writing about the orgasm-starved Inuit sea goddess Sedna or about his neighborhood lovers, his desire is in awe of “that sacred spot [. . .] right between their beautiful writhing legs / [where] The Party Eskimo Girls hold the secret to the survival of the Eskimo race” (153). For Marilyn Dumont, the collision of explicitness and sacredness is in

this
place, secret in the garden,
flowering vulvas, host-
white tulips

where sexually suggestive blooms are set scandalously against the virginal pallor of Christian tulips (78). Ipellie and Dumont both voice a self-love, an eroticism of their own bodies, which further erases the line between hetero- and homosexual. Their desire is inclusive and outspoken, and I want to posit that this investment in “presenting oneself” as both desiring and desirable *across* the anthology suggests an integrated community. Through the celebration of sexuality as exciting *because* diverse, “two-spirit” becomes a footnote to a sexuality that encompasses without reservation.

The anthology proudly stakes its claims as being part of that presentation. From the gender-ambiguous image on the cover, the works here seek to balance specificity and commonality as a strategy for undermining binaries. In Dumont's suggestive image, the book is a diversely planted garden where the connection between nature, sexuality, and poetic language is celebrated, reclaiming the originary meaning of the word *anthology*: a garland of words. Yet the writers resist any fixity—the growth of this garden is a process, and the waste laid previously to the land that is being replanted is not denied. Instead the challenge of regrowth is an erotic in itself, a call to remake through desire that which has been damaged.

As Maori writer Witi Ihimaera describes in “Dio Mi Potevi/The White Man is My Burden”:

our lovemaking is disjunctive
 my desire quickened by Empire's ghosts
 a postcolonial quest to subvert
 your orthodoxies. (95)

Naming himself "Polynesia [. . .] Africa [. . .] the Indies," he claims "the desire to hurt / the penetrative wounding [. . .] / opening the way to my own / mythic origin" (95–96). There are specific histories of oppression and resistance encoded in each naming, each sexual performance, but they are all aimed towards the "white man" who is unnamed, claimed as "my burden" in an inversion of the usual anonymity of nonwhite objects of desire claimed by a highly individualized white narrator. The poem's queerness once again resides in the refusal of gendered pronouns, in its envisioning of desire through discourses usually kept separate from eroticism in white culture, even as they underscore it: politics, critical theory, violence.

Ihimaera's openness about the erotics of his desire to inscribe colonialism back on the skin of the white oppressor is as startling as his juxtaposition of the vocabularies of critical theory and erotica, as he ends:

At the intersections of body, sex & history
 we negotiate headlong race, gender & language
 within the seductions of closure
 our complicit entanglement you & I. (96)

The supposedly neutral terms of postcolonial and poststructuralist theory are still complicit in the violence of the colonizing, erotic gaze. Yet they also create this potential space of negotiation through desire. The complicity of desire complicates lines drawn around race and gender, both by dominant culture *and* by postcolonial politics. Desire is thus inclusive—it even extends to the colonizer, even if it asks him to take off his shoes and walk in bare footnotes. Rather than being a force of division and conquest, in the works presented here, desire brings together.

"COM/PASSION": SHAPING AN EROTIC DEEP
INSIDE AND WITHOUT RESERVATION

In William George's poem "UNITE," he opens up the word "com / passion": to feel together (136). The anthology, like *Deep Inside Clint Star*, is "a machine called luvin'." Alberta's skilled but deliberately skewed handling of the camera, like Akiwenzie-Damm's creation of a press to combat oppression, decolonizes the "machines" of capitalism, making them potent tools of resistance in the hands of Indigenous communities *because* of their formal resistance to the mainstream. The heady confusion and collision of desires in *Without Reservation* relates to the profusion of genres parodied and collaged in *Clint Star*. The formal choices made by individual authors in the anthology, such as eschewing capitalization as Haunani-Kay Trask does, inventing words as Van Camp does, or employing macaronics (the mingling of two or more languages in a single text) as Chrystos and Scofield do. *Da kine*: these practices are coding that re-embodiment the connection of communitist knowledge and erotic community to erase the destructive association of appropriative knowledge gathering and sexual conquest charted by Smith. *Da kine*: that known thing is known in its ability to be multiply specific without classifying, whether referring to *fa'afafine*/two-spirit/Eskimo Party Girls, to Clint Alberta/Star/Karatechamp, or to the body of writers collected in an anthology.

My argument is that it is the multiplicity of the erotic that inspires and frames these formal variants as they "reinvent the enemy's language" and summon "fugitive poses" into the present. Vizenor identifies the quality of "transmotion," a moving across/between that is a denial of binaries, essentialism, and settled culture, in the Indigenous texts he reads. The slash that George places in "com/passion," like the shaky, solar-flared traveling shots that punctuate *Clint Star*, could be seen as a kind of "transmotion," creating new meanings from a single word or a cinematographic convention. Embedded within it is a "compass," suggestive both of the spectrum theory of gender and sexuality and of Vizenor's "Native virtual cartography [. . .] creative connections of *anishinaabe* stories, totemic souvenance, natural reason, and a tricky sense of

native presence" (173). That tricky sense relates to the celebration of embodiment that Miranda seeks, that Alberta attempts and problematizes through his own body, and that Akiwenzie-Damm collects. In each case, their work begins with com/passion, a gathering together of a multiplicity of feeling that suggests the erotic is communitist and intrinsic to indigeneity. Miranda quotes Joy Harjo's profound statement that, "To be 'in the erotic' [. . .] is to be alive [. . .] the dominant culture can't deal with a society of alive people" (Coltelli 108; qtd. in Miranda 145). *Without Reservation* and *Clint Star* use communitist strategies, suggestive of the healing circle, to summon "a *society* of alive people." Com/passion is about the multiplicity of getting on together and the consequent mutuality of getting it on together.

NOTES

1. Heather Norris Nicholson's "Introduction to Part Three" usefully charts the National Film Board's involvement with Indigenous filmmaking in Canada, with particular reference to Canadian federal policies of multiculturalism.

2. Tillson's focus on Alberta's interest in error is deeply problematic as it acts as a framework for an obituary in a conservative Canadian national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*. It suggests that Alberta's suicide is in some way a willed aesthetic and social error or an extension of his refusal to engage in cinematic convention. As there is little critical writing on Alberta's work, it is difficult to critique and recontextualize Jeff Sterne's comments more fully, and any explanation or discussion of Alberta's suicide in relation to the complex discourses surrounding the discussion of his sexuality and Indigenous identity in the film is beyond the scope of this paper.

3. *Fa'afafine* are, in Eurowestern terms, chromosomally and genitally biological males raised as culturally female. In traditional Samoan culture, they were not perceived as transsexual but as female. This is an example of the way in which a pan-Native conception of two-spirit lived experience and praxis extends both historically and sexually beyond conventional Western conceptions of gender and sexuality that are reliant on the essentialization of two biological sexes and culturally constructed genders.

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“He certainly didn’t want anyone to know that he was queer”

Chal Windzer’s Sexuality in John Joseph Mathews’s *Sundown*

MICHAEL SNYDER

In the field of Native American literary studies, far too little work has been done that examines sexuality in Indigenous poetry, drama, and fiction. Moreover, little critical attention has been given to two-spirited,¹ gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer Native writers and characters. For example, representations of two-spirited characters in certain works of canonical, straight-identified Indigenous authors, such as Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* and Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, deserve critical scrutiny. And while some (but not enough) critical essays and chapters have been devoted to two-spirited women writers and poets, such as Paula Gunn Allen and Chrystos,² less attention has been given to the output of gifted male two-spirited or queer novelists and poets such as Craig S. Womack, Maurice Kenny, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Chip Livingston.

In fact, critical discourse on textual representations of Indigenous male same-sex desire is quite rare, whether referring to representations within works authored by two-spirited or avowedly heterosexual Indians. The very idea of Native male same-sex desire has proved to be challenging and subversive, in that “gay” or “queer” does not seem to correspond with the popular image of the Native American. Craig S. Womack writes, “the queer Indian, even more than contemporary Indian culture generally, defies the stereotypes of the stoic warrior, the nature-loving mystic, the vanishing American. [. . .] a queer Indian presence [. . .] *fundamentally* challenges the American mythos about Indians in a manner that the

public will not accept" (*Red* 279–80). The consequence is that two-spirited people have found themselves virtually invisible in literary and cinematic representations of Native Americans, whether produced by indigenes or not. This absence, in reinforcing Euroamerican heteronormativity, contributes to what Qwo-Li Driskill has called a "colonized sexuality [. . .] in which we have internalized the sexual values of dominant culture" (54). Identifying and discussing same-sex desire in the corpus of Native American literature, especially in places where it has been neglected or seemingly "hiding in plain sight," could facilitate decolonization by emphasizing the continuity of two-spirit traditions across the centuries, even when acculturation seems to have rendered it invisible. Such an endeavor may promote a movement toward what Driskill has called a "Sovereign Erotic," an "erotic wholeness" brought about by "healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations" (51).

I therefore reinvestigate John Joseph Mathews's 1934 novel *Sundown*—which has received significant critical attention and is not infrequently taught in Native American literature courses—to illuminate its queer dimensions. Despite the novel's familiarity in the extant scholarship, only one critic has even mentioned the queer reverberations in the novel.³ Yet *Sundown* subtly engages with issues of Native American male same-sex desire, despite almost total critical neglect of this facet. This engagement suggests that such concerns are more typical of Native literary production than it might at first appear; hence, more investigation needs to be done within Native studies. Since *Sundown* is a canonical Native novel, the absence of discourse on Chal's sexuality indicates a problematic silence and taboo surrounding same-sex desire within the community. Craig S. Womack's statement about interpretations of the closeted gay Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs is equally applicable to the work of Mathews, who was Riggs's classmate at the University of Oklahoma: "we need to challenge the assumption of a heterosexual sovereignty that has long held creative responses to his [work] in check" (Rev. 121). While I will argue that Mathews's novel with-

out a doubt carries queer traces, I do not posit that its author was necessarily queer, in spite of oft-noted parallels between the trajectory of the protagonist and Mathews (see Keresztesi; Warrior; and Wilson). That said, Mathews's philosophy of sexuality is an area that demands further biographical and archival research.

Protagonist Chal Windzer's same-sex desire is signaled by two recurring words, the adjective *queer* and variants of the infinitive *to fascinate*. *Queer* is a word that pops up frequently and in contexts demanding scrutiny throughout this novel. Although the earlier meaning of *queer* was "strange" or "peculiar," the homosexual connotation of the word was known to many Americans by the early twentieth century. For example, a 1914 article in the *Los Angeles Times* reporting on a scandalous trial over secret gay men's clubs in Long Beach where sex acts were performed refers twice to "the 'queer' people" who attend these "drags" and "orgies" ("Long"). This article is cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which also furnishes examples of quotations using the same-sex connotation from 1915 and 1919, along with an example from W. H. Auden dated 1932 ("Queer"). Thus the gay context of *queer* was being used and published during the time frame of the novel and was well known by the time of its composition. In the novel Mathews's use of the word more often than not holds a double valence, often connoting Chal Windzer's same-sex desire along with his feelings of peculiarity. My own deployment of the word is in the context of its contemporary critical sense, via queer theory. The term *queer* was "reappropriated as a positive self-designation by gay or queer militants in the early 1990s" ("Queer," *Dictionary of Critical Theory* 321). Gay activism, led by Queer Nation and inspiring countless other groups, created a "mini-gay renaissance" out of which emerged queer theory (Turner 106–07). Resisting fixed categories, queer theory emphasizes the instability of, and slippage between, the polarized categories *heterosexual* and *homosexual* (along with *male* and *female*). The contemporary critical sense of *queer*, therefore, connotes a resistance to stable definitions and stable categories of sexual identity, which I see as applicable to Chal Windzer.⁴

Another encoding word is *fascinating* and its variant *fasci-*

nated; this word is especially interesting because of its etymological meaning of being held under a spell or charmed despite one's will ("Fascinate"). Mathews's use of this word suggests much about the mysterious nature of desire, that cathexis upon a person of one's own sex is not necessarily a choice one makes. Given the homophobia of Chal's environment, which will be discussed, it is not surprising that a young man unconscious of his desires would be described in these terms.

Queer and *fascinating* are frequently found in conjunction with what I take to be homoerotic or queer scenes in the novel. *Sundown* evinces an undercurrent of homoeroticism and male attraction, most pronounced in the relationship between Chal Windzer and Professor (later Major) Granville, but observable elsewhere, too. Chal's sexuality, while sometimes superficially directed toward women, points to deep but unspoken relationships with, and attractions to, other men. Reinforcing the queer elements of the novel are Chal's deep ambivalence toward women and the fact that Chal is never interested in a sustained relationship with any young woman, Native American or white. Ultimately, he does not take women seriously as candidates for a relationship. Rather, the person who fulfills this role for Chal is the recurring figure of his mentor, the Englishman Granville, who takes Chal under his wing. This relationship reveals the unconscious or disavowed homoeroticism that underlies homosociality, as theorized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*.

In *Sundown* Chal receives Osage influence due to the fact that his mother is a traditional full-blood and his father is a mixed-blood. Yet his mother is frequently silent, and his father follows "progressive" views that some feel are overly aligned with white settlers' interests. Chal experiences three sets of influences: the whites, the mixed-bloods (who are close to the former ideologically in some ways), and the traditional full-blood Osages. In such a context, Chal would absorb proscriptions about homosexuality from the whites, from the mixed-bloods influenced by Christianity and "American" values, and maybe from some full-bloods too. Any expression of nonheterosexual desire in this climate would have had to be relatively clandestine.

Yet, in many traditional Native American cultures can be found an antecedent of contemporary two-spirited people. Brian Joseph Gilley writes, "at one time in the history of Native America, mostly before European contact, sexual and gender diversity was an everyday aspect of life among most indigenous peoples" (7). In the Osage tribe, men referred to as *mixu'ga* took on women's gender roles and socialized with women, and they typically did not engage in warfare alongside the men. The Osage word means "instructed by the moon"; Osage men who dreamt of a Moon being or a hoe (a woman's implement) would sometimes receive the message that they were to live as women for life (Fletcher and La Flesche 132–33). Sabine Lang states that a "standard" vision prompting Osage men to live as women is of "a female supernatural being" (64). Broadly speaking, the earlier model of Native queerness was what French traders, anthropologists, and other Western writers would call the *berdache*, an inaccurate and controversial term meaning something like "kept boy" or "sex slave boy" (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 3). This figure, known by various tribal names, appeared in many western and southern tribes. Often he was a man who identified and dressed as a woman, fulfilled women's roles in the tribal community, and in some cases held special spiritual or medicine-touching roles, which gave him a recognized status in many tribes. He would typically be referred to as a woman and would have sustained relationships with men (Williams 127). Yet it should be clarified that not all tribes have clear historical roles for queer expression, and the meaning of this depends on a tribal-specific context.

Positive roles associated with same-sex desire would be eroded or proscribed by Euroamerican and Christian influence. Duane Champagne claims that two-spirited American Indians' "religions traditionally reaffirm, respect, and honor their being" (xviii). However, as white and Christian influences grew, Indian attitudes toward queerness in many communities became less favorable. In *The Sacred Hoop* Paula Gunn Allen argues that homophobia among groups of Indians is linked to the degree of Christianization and colonization that a particular tribe experienced (198). Gilley writes, "From the time of the first contact with Europeans, gender diver-

sity and same-sex relations were repressed by religious condemnation and violence” and even “became a central reason to justify the conquest of North America” (13). Indeed, at the dawn of the French presence in North America, “missionaries tried to prevent male-male sex” and impugned the “close special friendships among native men” (Williams 182). Eventually, Gilley notes, “once Indians began to convert to Christianity en masse, they also accepted ideologies about the sinfulness of same-sex relations” (15).

These relationships were therefore disapproved of by many during the time Mathews (and the fictional Chal) were growing up in the early twentieth century. The antipathy toward queerness that was felt by some Osages in the twentieth century is suggested by a story that an Osage woman told Mathews about Claremore Mound. Mathews writes in *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters* that circa 1817, at a time when the Osage warrior men were away, Osage women, children, and old men were slaughtered, and on Claremore Mound boys were emasculated and girls raped at the hands of Cherokees and their allies (423–24). In 1959 “a woman of the Eagle [clan] of the Little Osages, said in her beautiful, low voice, that no young man dares to climb Claremore Mound. ‘There is something there,’ she said sadly, ‘*mi-ah-luschkas*, I guess, but a young man going up there will lose his virility, or maybe, he will become—what you call homosexual” (424). Such a phobic attitude, which seems to have internalized the midcentury psychiatric assumption of a link between effeminacy and male homosexuality, perhaps says much about the effects of homophobic Euroamerican culture.

Such a connection was already being made by European observers who remarked upon the Osage *mixu’ga*. Early nineteenth-century travelers were told by white informants that *mixu’ga* were compelled to take on women’s roles because they had been cowardly in war; such is the case with Englishman John Bradbury, who visited Osage land in 1811 (Bradbury 40–41). But these explanations can be taken with a grain of salt, since these Euroamericans were applying their culture’s gender and sexuality template to a culture whose customs were radically different in many ways. For exam-

ple, a Baptist missionary was so revolted by the *mixu'ga*, whom he called "wretches," that he "made few inquiries about" a "tall, lean, [. . .] ghost-like" Osage youth he saw (Williams 182). These writers either did not ask questions or trusted their white informers as credible. Contrary to descriptions of two-spirits as "cowardly," Walter Williams tells of a successful Osage warrior who followed a vision telling him to take on women's roles and clothing. "But he loved warfare so much," Williams writes, "that he periodically put on men's clothes and led a raid" (68). Victor Trixier, who lived with the Osages from 1839–40, was repulsed by what he took to be the homoeroticism and bold advances of the Osage men, which I will expand upon in a moment (Trixier 182). Interestingly, while Mathews in *The Osages* does not dispute the old "cowardly in battle" assumption, he does implicitly contradict the notion that such men were *compelled* to take on women's roles when he says, "Quite often the homosexuals [. . .] did decorate themselves as women, and really enjoyed the company and conversation of women" (400). This suggests that *mixu'ga* rather chose this role willingly. Moreover, the fact that Mathews offhandedly describes these men as "homosexuals" suggests that such men were a normal part of tribal life.

In *Sundown*, while Mathews certainly never describes Chal as "homosexual," the protagonist is throughout his life consistently *fascinated* by the bodies of other boys and men. In one early scene, young Chal plays tag with his Osage friends when a posse of pale boys comes near them and strips off their clothes to go swimming. Chal is curiously attracted yet repelled by the boys. They are loud and annoying, yet the Indian boys cannot resist listening; they "pretended not to see them, but were so *fascinated* by some of the things they heard that they lost interest in their game" (36). Chal gazes upon their bodies, which compel yet disturb him. "As they undressed and revealed white, glistening bodies, they kept using *fascinating* words," Mathews writes. As Chal "watched them come up to the bank one at a time and dive in, or push each other in and roar with laughter, he had a feeling that their white bodies were indecent in some inscrutable way" (36). Chal is fixated upon the

white boys' bodies yet feels a shame in enjoying them, and part of him wants these "indecent" bodies covered, projecting his shame upon them. Granted, some of his fascination comes from their novel whiteness, but homoerotic reverberations can be felt.

This combination of male curiosity and attraction at the swimming hole has its precedent in Victor Trixier's writing about his experiences living among the Osages in 1839–40. Trixier was troubled by what he perceived as the queerness of the Osages: "The warriors bothered us with indiscreet questions," he wrote, "If we swam beside them, they asked us to let them examine our bodies; we had to tell them very sternly to be of more decent behavior" (182). Here more than gazing is seemingly attempted, causing Trixier to become troubled by the Osage men's "habits of sodomy, which their curiosity seemed to announce and which they exercise, according to what they say, on their prisoners. These sons of nature are extremely lascivious" (182). Chal, having been influenced by Western sensibilities, can only stare, but male homoeroticism is a part of his tribal legacy, not just in the *mixu'ga* but also in regular "warriors."

These scenes of males bathing together bring to mind the motto that Mathews adopted for his country life, painting it above his fireplace in his house called Blackjacks in Osage County, after seeing it on the ruins of an ancient Roman officers' club during an excavation in North Africa: *Venari Lavari Ridare Occast Vivere* (To Hunt, to Bathe, to Play, to Laugh—That is to Live) (Warrior 23). Mathews's appropriation of a Latin phrase that appeared hanging over a strictly male homosocial milieu, the Roman officers' club, is revealing. Of ancient Rome, Gregory Woods writes, "This is a society which took for granted what we now know as 'bisexuality'" (32). Moreover, major Roman poets evoked the bodies of youths spied naked at the Roman baths, leading Woods to conclude, "it is clear that the baths, which men visited daily, offered opportunities far beyond those of personal hygiene" (36). He shows that in the work of Roman poets Martial and Catullus, "the existence of male-male desire is taken for granted as a rewarding and necessary aspect of life, to be enjoyed both first- and second-hand, by lovers and gossips" (35).

Another Roman connection aids in establishing Chal's queer disposition. Mathews tells of how Chal becomes interested in Jesus and Christianity because of his father's female cousin (17). Chal becomes obsessed with one card in a series of picture cards with religious tableaux. The card picturing the crucifixion "*fascinated* him so that he couldn't look away from it, although he wanted very much to do so"; his attention is riveted upon "that soldier in those short skirts, with his beautifully muscled legs and arms" (19). This Roman soldier, masculine yet feminized and eroticized by his "short skirts" and beautiful legs, becomes very disturbing to Chal. Could these skirts also suggest the woman's dress of the *mixu'ga* to Chal? The card exerts the same fascination as the white boys' bodies. He is so obsessed and disturbed by it that he buries the picture in the yard, but "all day he thought of that Roman's face" (19). When he unearths it and finds the same soldier with the same expression on his face, Chal is so shaken that he takes a pencil and tries to obliterate the soldier. But nothing works to get the soldier and his attractive legs and sardonic face out of his mind. Such guilt-ridden attempts to purge same-sex desire are all too typical of queer youths growing up in homophobic environments.

Yet in some ways, Chal's attitudes about sex and desire seem to be influenced positively by Osage tradition. For Chal, sex is just a part of life, and there is no need to blush, giggle, and whisper about such phenomena. In the same scene discussed above, while the white boys are swimming, there is a commotion. Chal's friend's pinto stallion whinnies and begins mating with a little mare that one of the white boys rode. This is very exciting for the white boys, who begin to behave strangely. They come to the shore, still naked of course, and start to shout. But the white boys feel like they are doing something dirty in watching the horses copulate: "several of them looked around at the undergrowth as though expecting someone to come and catch them in some crime" (37). Then, strangely, "two of them shouted and hugged each other and danced in circles" (37). Robert Dale Parker explores the connotations of the horses' coupling:

The horses figure sex between men and women and between whites and Indians, both because an Indian owns one horse and a white owns the other, and because the Indian pinto couples with the white sorrel. And in the context of the white and Indian boys' half-repressed stares at each others' glistening bodies, and the two white boys' eager desire to deny their repression by nakedly hugging and dancing, the horses also figure breaking the taboo against sexuality between men. (35–36).

Chal, perplexed, sees sexuality as a normal part of life:

Chal was mystified. He couldn't understand what made those white boys act that way. [. . .] the impression of that day was deep and he remembered the incident for the rest of his life; that impression of the white man making so much over the very unimportant matter of the possibility of another horse coming into the world. (37)

Prior to their mating, the two horses had carried on “an amorous flirtation” (37). For Chal, this is the natural and obvious conclusion; where there is mutual desire, this leads to physical love. Chal is also “mystified” by the sight of two naked boys embracing each other and dancing. It seems that these two white boys desire each other and are excited by one another's naked presence, but it takes the “naughty” sight of horses mating for them to be able to express their attraction for each other in a physical way. To Chal, such behavior, typical of white American culture's hang-ups, sexual guilt, and shame, is absurd. Instead Chal associates both free desire and aestheticism with his Osage tribal heritage.

Similarly, when Chal is a student at (what is understood to be) the University of Oklahoma, he is nonplussed by his fraternity brothers' suggestive jesting about sex and marriage. Again, this exemplifies “the strange attitudes of the white people” about desire and sex (139). This fraternity house, full of virile young men, is a hothouse of desire, revealing the homoeroticism underlying homosociality as theorized by Sedgwick. While most of the men are probably heterosexual or at least would see themselves as such,

this constant sexual frisson suggests that mutual attraction swells inside the fraternity house. For Chal desire is just “a part of the nature of things” (139), and there is no reason for these men to be secretive and giggly about it. Just like the younger white boys, these white fraternity men “laughed and looked as though they were secretly enjoying something that was forbidden” (140). Just as in the incident where the naked boys hug each other, these eroticized exchanges seem to indicate an overflowing of desire, wherein one man might embrace another, but in their code this is strictly forbidden; so if they can't have sex with each other, they can at least talk excitedly *about* sex with each other, sublimating their desire into socially sanctioned “brotherly” talk. The women's bodies discussed by the young men stand in for an actual woman in a homosocial triangle; the homoerotic subtext is present, but on the surface the boys subscribe to compulsory heterosexuality. In both the swimming hole and the fraternity house, the boys or men act like they are doing something forbidden, and indeed any overt queer desires are strictly *verboten*.

Clearly Chal experiences this forbidden desire, revealed by his relationship with Chick Talmadge. In one scene fraternity brother Chick walks into Chal's bedroom wearing only a towel: “Chal admired Chick's physique, but he wouldn't admit the fact to himself” (114). Such a feeling underscores the homoerotic aspect of Chal and Chick's relationship and how they repress these feelings. Chick's name even humorously feminizes him, echoing the “chickens,” or prostitutes, sexual objects to which the frat boys allude; *chicken* is also gay slang for a young gay male.⁵ Chal and Chick sustain for a period a homosocial triangular relationship with Blossom Daubeney, known as Blo, an attractive and popular sorority woman who becomes the third-party intermediary. As Sedgwick discusses in *Between Men*, the crucial desire in such a triangle is the disavowed desire between the men. When Chick finds out that Chal has been set up on a date for a dance with Blo, Chick remarks, “Say, frosh, that's too rich for your blood—say, lissen, that little fairy can put her shoes under my bed an-ee time” (115). Chick's insinuating statement about his sexual desire for a “little fairy” perhaps says

much more than he intended.⁶ Then, flirtatiously swiping Chal's pack of cigarettes, he urges Chal to "come up sweetly" to him during the dance and let him have some dances with Blo. Just before leaving he threatens to give Chal a spanking, using a pet name that Chal becomes associated with: "Lissen, Redtail. Don't forget—it's the old paddle, see—I can swing a mean one" (115). Chick's use of the name refers to Chal's "redness," his Indianness (red and redness are a motif throughout the novel), and his buttocks, the tail Chick teasingly threatens to paddle red if Chal isn't "good."

Later, Chick has planned a date with Blo but must cancel, and he offers the date to Chal; again Blo is the intermediary passed back and forth between the men. Chick and Chal are clearly interested in each other but cannot act upon the attraction, which may not even be fully conscious to either of them. As with Chal's relationship with Granville, this dynamic is typical of homosociality. Much of the homoeroticism in homosocial relationships is deeply sublimated and not consciously acknowledged. When Chick asks Chal to be his proxy on the date with Blo, Chick shows his racism, but on another level of interpretation he also seems to realize that Chal is no real rival when it comes to women. Chick understands that Chal is not really serious about pursuing women in any long-term fashion when he selects Chal: "You'll do—matter of fact, I want you. I don't want any uh the others." Again, we can easily take Chick's words to express more than he intends. With perhaps an intimation of Chal's queerness, Chick concludes that he is "[n]ot afraid of ole Redtail fleeing with the future Mrs. Talmadge" (155). In fact, other fraternity brothers, like Nelson and Harkins, have noticed something "queer" about Chal, which I will address later when I focus on the appearance of that word in the novel. Moreover, another brother who catches Chal's queer eye is Rusty Carson, a "hard, stocky" masculine working-class tough guy from the industrial part of a city: "Chal watched the stocky, sweaty figure [. . .] calling the signals, bending, unbending, looking half around and walking with short steps that gave the impression of latent power and speed [. . .] Chal was *fascinated* by him" (109; emphasis added). Chal, who has never had to work because of the

flowing Osage oil money, sees this strapping, hard-bodied laborer as a dazzling, exotic other.

While Chal rejects his white peers' attitudes and hang-ups toward sex and desire, unfortunately many Euroamerican puritanical ideas, such as those regarding the expression of homosexuality, bisexuality, and any number of queer behaviors, have worked their way into Chal's consciousness. Chal's struggle with his sexual identity, his repression of desire for other males in the face of social proscriptions of queerness, should be added as another layer of complexity to existing criticisms of *Sundown*, such as Louis Owens's important exegesis in *Other Destinies* that deals with Chal's frustrations as attributable to issues of cultural identity. This approach helps to fully explain why Chal is so unable to articulate his frustrations, the pent-up emotions he cannot name, and the seemingly strange, erotic means by which he attempts to purge them.

Though, as we will see, Chal seems perfunctorily attracted to women, his queerness is something that he keeps bottled within; it is a disturbing power that he cannot consciously understand or express. As Chal hits puberty, "a disquieting thing [. . .] flooded him and urged him to some kind of action" (69). He senses a "devilish urge" within himself now, whereas when he was a boy, he felt he was in harmony with his surroundings (69). "But now," Mathews writes, "there was something within him which was much more painful at times than his old desire to fly. He felt that there was something within him which must come out, and unable to find any other expression, he took action as a means" (69–70). Chal's urges that he cannot name plague him, and his response, couched in Mathews's sexualized language, is telling. "One day," Mathews writes, "he removed his saddle when the rain started, undressed, and raced naked, but even then he had not got rid of that thing [. . .] within which he couldn't satisfy" (70). On another occasion Chal dances naked in a storm; at other times he swims naked until he is spent. In these attempts to purge these frustrating desires that he cannot articulate, Chal repeatedly gets naked and exerts his body to frenzy, trying to reach a climax, but he continually fails to be able to confront or name his sexuality to give relief to his

troubling feelings about his sexual identity. There is no resolution to his disturbing feelings. In his adolescence Chal time and again suffers from these “intense urges” that paradoxically “made him deliciously unhappy” (73). Owens’s explanation, that this behavior is the product of Chal’s Osage identity struggles, is only partially satisfactory. Without also considering Chal’s repressed queerness, it is hard to understand why this struggle would be consistently manifested in nakedness and corporeal frenzy.

These frustrations and urges would normally be written off as normal adolescent angst about emerging sexual feelings toward the fairer sex. But starkly contrasting with Chal’s interest in male bodies is the distinct ambivalence, and sometimes disgust, he feels toward women’s bodies. As a boy, an incident occurs that colors his view of women forever; it “disturbed his whole life” (14). Chal, through memory and what his mother has told him, has pieced together the incident, which he concludes must have been on a Fourth of July celebration. He remembers walking along, with a “har’d [hired] girl” holding his hand protectively. But suddenly she is gone, and a scary woman is confronting him:

a towering, disheveled figure came toward him; a mad woman with her iron gray hair flying, cursing as she strode toward him. Her face was distorted and ugly and her eyes were gleaming. As she reached him she swung her great arm and knocked him sprawling. [. . .] burnt forever in his memory was the intense emotion of that moment; so intense and so searing that it affected his whole nervous system, and the picture of that wild white woman with iron gray hair and eyes flaming with hate and madness, had ever the vividness of a white scar. (14)

This scene symbolically implicates the grasping, intrusive whites who have come to get a piece of the Osage oil money. Also, due to the U.S. Independence Day setting, the United States of America’s federal policy impinging upon the Osages is recalled.⁷ This traumatic incident, never to be forgotten, inaugurates Chal’s ambivalent or even negative view of women. Mathews’s narration indi-

cates that Chal believes that behind the surface of every woman lies a potential witch or hysteric: "Always thereafter, when the veneer dropped from a woman and she became excited and angered, he was suffused with that which seemed to be a strange chemical running through his veins, and he felt sick and his knees grew weak, and dejection sat on his spirit like black wings hovering" (14). This incident goes a long way in explaining Chal's ambivalent, sometimes disembodied, idealizing attitude toward the young women in his life. We see this same attitude a few pages later, when we learn that Chal feels "an intense dislike" toward his father's cousin, a white woman, for no apparent reason. Even though he is interested in her, "he eyed her with suspicion when she attempted to get him to sit on her knees" (16). Chal prefers to keep his distance, as he will with coed Blossom "Blo" Daubeney.

Chal maintains this distance in college, where he initially seems to be attracted to women but ultimately does not pursue them. Chal only "sometimes goes through the motions of obligatory heterosexuality" (Parker 36). Either he watches and admires from afar, idealizing the relationship, as is the case with Blo Daubeney, or he deliberately ends the relationship, when the woman seems to be getting overly emotionally involved, as is the case with Lou Kerry. Chal is not interested in a serious relationship with any woman and "never shows any interest or disinterest in marriage, not even other people's marriages, or any interest or disinterest in having children" (Parker 36). Unlike many of his male peers, who start dating young women and later form relationships, Chal reveals his lack of interest and failure to see women as equals to men:

He thought that the coeds were glorious creatures when he first came, but after a while [. . .] he gradually lost interest in most of them. The older girls at the university held no fear for him as they did for other freshmen. In his simple, inherited philosophy, a woman who was not pretty or graceful in some physical way, was not to be considered, and he couldn't help feeling that ill-favored women were on the plane with all women and less important in the scheme of things than men. However, he worshipped beauty. (142-43)

That Chal privileges men and worships a nongendered “beauty” is telling. Perplexingly, time and again Mathews suggests that Chal’s love of beauty and trivializing attitude toward women is a part of his Osage heritage: “He wondered why he had a feeling that was something like a religious emotion when he thought of Blo. Of course it never occurred to him that it might be the tribal heritage of religion associated with beauty and dreams” (155). So while Chal is interested in Blo’s beauty, he never really has anything to say to her, not being able to conceive of anything else of interest to him, which is frustrating for them both.

This doesn’t stop Blo from taking an interest in the Osage undergraduate, however. Blo is a very popular young lady; clutching an overloaded date book, she is always surrounded by other students and is the talk of the Oklahoma campus (145). Blo is frustrated that Chal rarely speaks, but in spite of all the fellows pursuing her, she thinks of the mysterious “Japansey” Indian: “Chal was good lookin’ and rich too, she guessed. She had heard that Osages were rich. [. . .] Chal would call, she thought, and when he called she could arrange a date for him. [. . .] maybe Chal had a big car at home and would bring it down next year” (130–31). Granted, Blo thinks of other boys too, but she considers Chal seriously as a potential partner.

Chal, however, doesn’t call, preferring to “have” Blo in his fantasy world, failing to pursue her in the flesh. He thinks of her often; in his hazy thought the “dream woman of his childhood” takes on Blo’s face (137). Yet while Blo would accede to a request for a date, “he had no desire to call her” (145). Chal’s attitude really doesn’t make sense until one thinks of his childhood experiences and his feelings of desire for other men. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why he doesn’t pursue this beautiful, vivacious, popular young woman who likes him, who even asks him over to her sorority house for dinner (147). Ultimately, he dates Blo three times, but never once does he ask her for a date himself.

Marie Fobus is but one of the young women with whom Chal associates back in Kihekah, Oklahoma (understood to be Pawhuska). Chal left school to become a pilot in World War I, and afterward he

returns to his hometown. The setting is the twenties and oil money has been flowing in Osage country, a time in which Mathews came to adulthood and later labeled "The Great Frenzy" (Warrior 17). This money brings much expenditure, revelry, and dissolution, not to mention violence, treachery, and exploitation by white interlopers. In the later chapters Mathews depicts Oklahoma's own alienated, disaffected "lost generation" right smack in Indian Country. Rita Keresztesi writes, "Chal's story is an Indian's take on the alienation and escapism of the Lost Generation" (153). Chal's hometown female friends seem to be caught up in the action, and as usual Chal cannot take any of them seriously, denigrating them in his mind. Chal "thought he had never seen anything so ungraceful as Marie when she sat down" (247). He is repelled by her "glazed look" and her "cigarette-stained fingers" (251). Marie's friend Jean, who is also white, takes an interest in Chal ("she liked this fellow") that is not really reciprocated (259).

Marie is not the only female object of scorn; young Indian women also receive disdain. An Osage woman who has become rich, Little Flower, is described in grotesque terms: "Chal saw that the left side of her face had a great spot of misplaced rouge, and that the spot on the other side of her cheek was smaller and too high on the cheek bone. He noticed that her legs seemed too small and bowed in her short skirts [. . .] her fingers long and thin seemed too weak to hold up the cluster of diamond rings" (255). Another group of Indian girls "had rouged their lips ludicrously, and Chal felt that they certainly looked barbaric; girls attempting to imitate white girls always seemed barbaric to him, and he didn't like their short skirts bobbing around their bony knees and their crow-black hair bobbed 'windblown' style" (256). The "short skirts" and "beautifully muscled" legs of the Roman soldier had fascinated him, but these women's "short skirts" and legs repel him. None of the women in Oklahoma, white or Native, can hold any serious interest for Chal.

During his days preparing for war, during pilot training, he has an affair with Lou Kerry, a woman involved with another man. He enjoys the adventure of the affair, sneaking out in a plane to see

her, landing the “big bird” on the beach late at night. He visits her hotel room on multiple occasions, but he grows tired of her even though the affair is “hot”; their meetings “grew monotonous and he tired of them” (230). To Chal’s peers, his attitude toward Lou, as was his attitude toward Blo, might seem strange. Interestingly, Chal tells Lou that he is Spanish; he is essentially “passing” as Spanish just as some light-skinned African Americans would pass as white (a subject treated in Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*). Another kind of “passing” is gays passing as straight, and Chal’s racial passing could also be a coding of his sexual-orientation passing. In Robert Scully’s novel *Scarlet Pansy*, published a year before *Sundown*, the protagonist says that “passing is the only way” for gays to receive respect in the community (qtd. in Levin 34). Chal enjoys the attention that he receives from other men more than Lou Kerry herself, who hangs around and sends him notes. Kerry, as Blo did before, takes on a role in a homosocial relationship between Chal and his male colleagues whereby Chal receives prestige and is envied. As in his childhood and adolescence, Chal cannot understand why the white men make such a big deal over women and sex, and sometimes wring their hands with guilt and shame (229), but he loves the attention he receives from these men: “His vanity was fired by their allusions to Lou’s visits. [. . .] They became more interested in him and admired his indifference which they thought was cleverly assumed. ‘Say, that sure is one good-looking woman,’ they would say of Lou, and at such times Chal felt his importance” (230). But meanwhile, though he basks in this male attention, he is giving Lou the cold shoulder: “Lou couldn’t understand why he avoided her, but she must know that he did. She could not understand that there was no beauty now outside the beauty of that moonlight night. That adventure when there was zest in deceiving the authorities at the field and the people at the hotel” (230).

While none of these women can sustain Chal’s interest, a certain man can. The person with whom Chal has a much deeper, more significant, and more meaningful relationship is his professor and later superior officer, Granville. Chal’s relationship with

Granville is peppered with interesting, revealing uses of the word *queer*, so I want to look first at the various usages of the word in the novel first with regard to Chal, leading up to a discussion of Chal's most significant object of desire.

The first use of *queer* comes in reference to loquacious Nelson. Nelson is a self-confident young white man from Kihekah who travels with Chal on the train bound for their freshman year of college at the University of Oklahoma. "Chal had always been inscrutable to Nelson," Mathews writes, "and he was ever careful in his relationship with him. *He thought him queer, just as everyone else thought*" (92; emphasis added). Chal makes Nelson "feel uneasy" because "you never knew what he was thinking" (93). Not being sure of Chal's sexuality, Nelson figures the best thing to do is be the opposite of "gay": "he took careful pains to be very serious" (93). The next usage comes in a homoerotic scene foreshadowed by Chick Talmadge's flirtatious threats in which Chal allows his ass to be paddled in his fraternity's hazing ritual—unlike his full-blood friends, who see this as a last straw and leave the university. There is one peculiar frat boy named Harkins, a sophomore who derives a great deal of pleasure in spanking the bare asses of freshmen pledges. Mathews notes Harkins's "desire to use the paddle on freshmen" and indeed his "delight" in the spankings. Mathews admits that Harkins's queer predilection to some might suggest "sadistic tendencies," and his characterization of Harkins definitely suggests something is odd about this guy: "Brother Harkins came to the door and leered. [. . .] He stood for some time with a satyr expression and enjoyed the effect of his sudden appearance. He looked from face to face, then he said slowly and with deep meaning, 'Come on, you birds—little party downstairs'" (106). His reference to Chal and his Indian friends as "birds" suggests a feminization, bringing to mind the British colloquial for "girls." His "satyr expression" is also telling, since satyrs, half-man and half-horny goat, were friends of Bacchus and known to be lecherous. This leering and mention of a "party" speak volumes about Harkins, who is later seen standing erect, suggestively "brandishing his paddle" (106). Harkins "leered at the Kihekah delegation,"

vowing, "I'm going to do a little rear end work [. . .]—bend over" (106–7). As Chal is about to receive his spanking, "Harkins looked at him in a queer manner" (107). Earlier in Chal's experience at the University of Oklahoma, the Chi fraternity brothers tried to get him to agree to pledge to their house, and Chal is recalcitrant. After he says "I can't" and bolts out the door, Chal senses chilliness from the others, and he despairs, "convinced that his queerness had finally resulted in disgrace" (104). His feeling of queerness, of feeling "out of step" (98), derives not only from his cultural and ethnic difference but also from his disavowed same-sex desire. On some level Chal is concerned that his desires have outed him. These references to queerness, usually given an erotic charge, extend beyond the older connotation of the term.

Geology professor and Englishman Mr. Granville is the queerest character in the novel, and fittingly he is beloved by his student Chal. Mathews's narrative strongly suggests an unspoken intensity of feeling between the younger and older man. Granville "really interested him. In fact, he *fascinated* Chal with his beautiful words; English that flowed softly and was almost lyrical. At least Chal thought it was lyrical" (172). Chal is attracted to what other students at the University of Oklahoma mock: Granville's queerness. Because of Granville's voice, his English reserve, "and his queer actions, Chal had been drawn to him" (172). Granville, the subject of much whispered innuendo and rumor on campus, is perceived as a recluse and eccentric: "They said at the University that he was queer because he took long walks by himself, wouldn't accept dinner invitations, and lived by himself in an old stone house" (172). The first attribute is clearly one that endears Granville to Chal. The third is a quality that described Mathews himself for at least a decade. Moreover, the professor wears "short pants like the old knickerbockers the boys used to wear, and gay stockings"; therefore "students thought he was crazy" (172). Not only are his clothes "gay," but they are also reminiscent of English schoolboys, bringing to mind the common homoeroticism among English schoolboys and young collegians. At this retrospective glance at Granville, the reader realizes that Chal has long been a secret admirer of his geology professor.

This attraction is sustained beyond the university. One day in the summer following his freshman year at the University of Oklahoma, back at home Chal spies a male figure coming across the prairie—Mr. Granville, who as a geologist is coincidentally (or is it?) doing some work in Chal's neck of the woods. The Englishman approaches Chal standing by a tree and sits down and says hello. They sit in comfortable silence for some time before Granville begins discussing a red-tailed hawk they spy circling overhead: this bird has been an emblem of Chal previously associated with his homosocial relationship with Chick Talmadge. Interestingly reappearing here with Granville, the reference titillates Chal: "A thrill came over Chal," and "he was filled with pleasure" at Granville's talk of the red-tail (173). Granville's interest in the bird gives them another bond, and Granville along with Chal becomes emblematically connected to the hawk: "Certainly it was his beloved *buteo borealis*, the red-tail, but—but—who would have thought that anyone else could have been interested in the fact besides himself" (173). In many parts of the United States, the red-tailed hawk is known as a "chicken hawk," and indeed Chal laments that Granville is the first non-Osage he has ever heard refer to it by its correct name instead of classifying it with other hawks as a "chicken hawk" (in gay slang a "chicken hawk" is an older gay man who is interested in young gay males, and the label could be applied to Granville in his interest in Chal). Enthralled, Chal becomes nervous and rises, moves around aimlessly, pulls out his knife and pockets it (173–74). Chal "wanted Mr. Granville to stay there, even if they didn't say a word" (174). When they do talk, Chal gets "embarrassed" and nervous still, and "he felt ashamed of the disturbance on his inside," his affection for Granville (174). Indeed "Chal was more *fascinated* than ever" and reflects how Granville places no divisions between the two of them. Granville, speaking of the Osage hills, calls the land "wilder," "virginal," and "untouched," looking at Chal carefully and, perhaps, insinuatingly (175). Chal invites him to lunch to get him to stay longer—"he certainly wanted Mr. Granville to come over"—admiring this man who, unlike Chal's contemporaries, "certainly thinks of everything—sees everything," perhaps even Chal's concealed, unconventional sexuality (176).

Granville embodies so many things that John Joseph Mathews loved: England, geology, close observation of the natural world, reflection, intellectuality, and so forth (see Warrior; Wilson; and Mathews, *Talking to the Moon*). When Chal takes Granville to the ranch house, he is protective of the Englishman, fearing that the uncouth Carroll family will barrage his mentor with probing, curious questions, nervous about how he will be received by these rough-and-ready Okies (179). After the afternoon meal at chapter's end, the reader is left with the image of Chal heading back with Granville to his temporary place. "I shall be glad to have you," Granville tells him, "I should like to have you stop with me a little while at my digs" (185–86). What happens there is left to the reader's imagination.

Back at the University of Oklahoma the next semester, Granville extends another invitation to Chal to take a walk to study nature, and nearing his house, he again invites Chal inside (189–90). Granville reveals a special interest in Chal by asking him what he plans to do about the war in Europe, since the United States is "getting into the show." Knowing of Chal's interest in birds and flight, Granville recommends the air service for Chal, who takes to the idea with a feeling of happiness and answers "as though he had planned the thing for months" that he is "going into the air service" (191). The incident reveals the genuine caring and respect between the two men. Granville had already written a letter of recommendation for Chal to his friend Captain Lloyd. Chal in turn was willing to accept the idea fully and immediately, trusting his beloved Granville.

Granville becomes one of the few characters in the novel who recurs in different scenes. Mr. Granville becomes Major Granville, who appears at the pilot-training site to evaluate Chal's flying. It turns out the Englishman had been "in the show for some time—invalided here so as to be available when your people should come in," he laughs and says, "Almost a spy, you see" (212). This confidential jest between Chal and Granville about Granville being "a spy" under cover suggests how he is a gay man "passing" and working among straights, going about in disguise. (The Oklahoma students' reactions to him, however, might suggest that his disguise

is not working so well.) Granville creates a very supportive, casual atmosphere for the flying test. Their response to one another reveals their mutual tender feelings: "He smiled, and Chal felt that the smile which came to his own face must have flowed up from the bottom of his stomach, as it seemed to warm every vein in his body" (211). After the test, Chal lands the plane but doesn't see Granville at first. Then, suddenly, like a lover, "he approached Chal with a flower in his hand" (211). Granville has found a flower that interests his "friend" General Allenby, who had told Granville to search for it; the general is writing a book on flora and in fact "has some very queer theories" (211). Chal thinks back fondly upon this experience with Granville and upon their deep connection and difference from other men: "He recalled Major Granville striding up to him carrying a flower, and about General Allenby studying the flora of Palestine in the middle of the greatest war in history. [. . .] He guessed the reason why he had liked Major Granville, and the idea of a great general writing a book on flora, was because he was queer himself" (216).

Ultimately these three major scenes between Chal and Granville show the depths of their feeling for one another, and they represent a much deeper relationship than any Chal has had with a woman in the novel. The fact that this sustained romance has been invisible to virtually all critics reveals the reluctance or inability to associate "Indian" with same-sex desire. Because of the disapproval that he has internalized from the white and mixed-blood worlds, Chal cannot really understand or articulate his desire. This repression is part of "this ugliness which white men seemed to produce," which Chal sees in the homes and towns in Oklahoma (90). But he can't ever voice his feelings on this and the more personal matter of his sexuality: "He almost despised himself for the feeling deep within him which feebly remonstrated. He kept this feeling subdued; kept it from bubbling up into the placid waters of his consciousness. [. . .] He certainly didn't want anyone to know that he was queer" (90).

In a 1976 letter Mathews claimed that he wrote *Sundown* rapidly at his publisher's insistence after the success of his first book *Wah'*

Kon Tah, “without any inspiration,” since he really preferred to be hunting instead. He also stated in 1972 that he never read the novel after its publication (Parker 200). It is intriguing to consider that Mathews, writing in a frenzy of unselfconscious prose, seemingly motivated by a desire to fulfill the promise that he made “in the confusion” following the success of his first book, wrote a novel suggesting so strongly Chal’s same-sex desire—perhaps without, or despite, his conscious intention. His disavowal of the novel’s importance, to him and to the literary world, is also significant in that it suggests that he may have become aware of the novel’s homoerotic resonances subsequent to its publication and sought to disown the novel, as a homophobic father might disown a son who reveals that he is queer.

Yet despite Mathews’s disinterest, as readers and critics well know, the novel is rich and complex. The fact that it wasn’t until the early years of this current century that same-sex desire was remarked upon in the novel reveals the virtual silence in Native American literary studies surrounding this issue (until recently) and the inability of non-Native critics to discern “a queer Indian presence” (Womack, *Red* 280). To discover the queer Osage man “hiding in plain sight” in a canonical work of Native American literature could be a step toward “decolonizing the mind” in that it suggests the historical continuity of Indigenous same-sex desire. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm writes, “To reclaim and express our sexuality is part of the larger path to de-colonization and freedom [. . .] when Indigenous people de-colonize ourselves we’ll not only free our minds, we’ll free our bodies, our spirits, our whole selves” (151). A perception of Chal’s struggles with his queer sexuality and Native identity in the early twentieth century could show young two-spirited people facing a hostile environment that they are not alone, that they are part of a tradition, and that many others in the past have faced similar repression and turmoil. On the whole, much more work needs to be done on same-sex dynamics in Native literature, authored both by queer- and straight-identified writers.

If what Louis Owens says is true, that *Sundown* “introduced the modern American Indian novel” and established “a pattern for

novels by Indian writers" (*Other Destinies* 49), then we ought to find same-sex desire interwoven in the pattern of many subsequent novels. Even frequently treated, canonical novels such as N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Vizenor's *Bearheart* are by no means exhausted when it comes to considering this topic. In the final chapter of his seminal critical work *Red on Red*, titled "Lynn Riggs as Code Talker: Toward a Queer Oklahomo Theory and the Radicalization of Native American Studies," Womack offers a queer reading of Riggs's plays. Womack shows us one way to perceive submerged or repressed queer content in Native literature. Such disruptive readings are a part of his larger project for Native studies, which he feels should "challenge the nature of what we have inherited in the discipline" (303). Part of what has been inherited and must be challenged is this problematic silence on Native queerness. I have simply followed Womack's lead in my reading of *Sundown*. The theory, precedent, and texts are available; all that is lacking is the will to follow this "new trail," in the words of Charles Eastman, "to the point of knowing" (16).

NOTES

1. In their introduction to the seminal anthology *Two-Spirit People*, Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang explain how the term "berdache," which will be discussed, is problematic and offensive. Rejecting this term, many "urban Native Americans [. . .] have come to refer to themselves as 'two-spirit people,' a term that is the result of research by them into traditions of gender diversity and homosexuality in their respective tribes. 'Two-spirit' is used to include mainly Native American gays and lesbians as well as those individuals who identify with traditional tribal gender categories, as opposed to Western gay and lesbian identities" (6).

2. The work of Beth Brant and Janice Gould, however, deserves more attention than it has received.

3. That one critic is Robert Dale Parker, whose *The Invention of Native American Literature* discusses Chal's queerness.

4. Although I feel that "two-spirit" is a positive contemporary term, I don't feel it is appropriate to use it in reference to Chal, who, having expe-

rienced the influence of Euroamerican neighbors, peers, and classmates, is not yet aware enough of his Indigenous tradition to know of positive tribal precedents. Plus “two-spirit” is a problematic term in the sense that it is not necessarily transferable to Osage or other tribal epistemologies and sexual/gender understandings.

5. This slang term, along with *queer*, was used during the 1914 Long Beach trial over gay clubs. A *Sacramento Bee* reporter was told about a party that had occurred recently: “fourteen young men were invited [. . .] with the premise that they would have the opportunity of meeting some of the prominent ‘queers,’ [. . .] and the further attraction that some ‘chickens’ as the new recruits in the vice are called, would be available” (Ullman 64).

6. The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows that the “homosexual” connotation of *fairy* was well established in the 1920s (“Fairy”).

7. This chain of associations is emphasized later: “An evil white man with a white apron around him was standing at a hot-dog stand decorated with red-white-and-blue cheesecloth” (214). Rita Keresztesi calls Mathews’s depiction of the Fourth of July celebration “a hateful reminder to U.S. Indian policies” (159).

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Interpenetrations

Re-encoding the Queer Indian in Sherman Alexie's
The Business of Fancydancing

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In a 1997 interview with John Purdy, Sherman Alexie asserts that the problem with Native American literature is that it has been stymied for the past few decades around a fixed idea of traditionalism. Moreover, this fixation on tradition entails a representation of the modern Indian that focuses on what Alexie calls “the expected idea” (8)—an academic project in which Native American literature (and its criticism) becomes tautological, exerting violence on the lived experience of the Indian by limiting it to “traditional” themes such as the Native American’s intimate relation to the landscape and an emphasis on ceremonial spirituality. This phenomenon plays itself out not only in the sphere of literary production but also in criticism when academic readings of Native texts, perhaps following the cues of the literature itself, largely focus on the familiar themes of the mixed-blood Indian and his fragmented identity, alcoholism, and the return to the reservation, all infused with a healthy dose of ceremonial songs and a spiritual love for the land.

Alexie is interested in unfixing such representations, which give way all too easily to rigid stereotypes of Native people. He sees promise, in fact, in a new generation of writers who are turning away from these more traditional representations and are beginning to write against the expectations of the reading public in an attempt to represent the full, fluid, and complex realities of their own experiences as American Indians. In his own words:

I’m starting to see it. A lot of younger writers are starting to write like me—writing like I do, in a way, not copying me,

but writing about what happens to them, not about what they wish was happening. They aren't writing wish fulfillment books, they're writing books about reality. How they live, and who they are, and what they think about. Not about who they wish they were. The kind of Indian they wish they were. They are writing about the kind of Indian they are. (Purdy 9)

This new kind of writing that Alexie and others are engaging embodies an attempt to break out of representations that feed American culture's fanciful stereotypes of the Indian. Given the intensified consumption of Native literature by non-Native audiences, this project of representing other realities of contemporary Native Americans' experience is necessary in order to disrupt the tendency for outside audiences to essentialize cultures other than their own.

Given Alexie's impulse toward de-representing the "expected idea" in Native American letters, the presence of homosexuality as a thematic undercurrent to much of his work is particularly interesting. Partially as a result of the burgeoning popularity of feminist criticism, and partially as a result of the popularity of women writers such as Louise Erdrich and Leslie Marmon Silko, more and more Native American literary criticism is focusing on sexuality. While this certainly represents a positive critical direction, it is interesting that very little, if anything at all, has been written about homosexuality within that same body of analytical texts. Indeed, little has been written at all about homosexuality in the broader field of Native American studies outside those authored by white anthropologists and historians who tended to romanticize or otherwise misrepresent the experience of Natives who were not heterosexual. In their introduction to the anthropological text *Two-Spirit People*, Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang refer to an

idealizing view [that] has led to a relatively recent romanticization of purported positively sanctioned pan-Indian gender or sexual categories that do not fit the reality of experiences

faced by many contemporary gay, lesbian, third-gender, transgender, and otherwise two-spirit Native Americans who have had to leave their reservation or other communities because of the effects of homophobia. (5)

What they are referring to is the anthropological notion that Native American cultures have always made space—institutionally, communally, and spiritually—for the nonheterosexual subject. Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang note that the danger in conceptualizing sexuality on such terms lies in the temptation to “seek the primordial bliss of the supposed acceptance or even revered status of ‘berdaches’ in Native American cultures” (5). This amounts to a reductive, atavistic, and essentialist view of Native cultures and the way that they mediate “deviant” sexual identities. This academic reductionism also runs the risk of ignoring current, and often negative, circumstances of the nonheterosexual Native American. New studies in anthropology—such as the one pioneered by Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang—seek to modernize our conceptions of Native American sexualities and represent the realities of the gay, lesbian, transgender, or third-gender experiences within a contemporary, nonessentialized Native American cultural contexts.

Part of the reason that issues of homosexuality have not been widely treated in the critical literature may well be that the issue has not been broadly treated within the tradition of Native American letters, especially since the mid-twentieth century, the period that still seems to draw the most attention from critics in general. As I mentioned earlier, these literatures, for the most part, have centered on other cultural and political issues in Native America that were, at the moment, perhaps more immediate concerns. Sherman Alexie’s work, however, comes as a glaring example of a body of literature that takes homosexuality as a leitmotif at the very least and, finally, culminates in the full thematic incorporation of the issue of homosexuality into his latest film, *The Business of Fancydancing*.

Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang’s attempt to de-essentialize our notions of Native American sexualities, in many ways, resembles Sherman Alexie’s project of modernizing Native American representations within the literary sphere. Moreover, both these projects

represent a call-to-action for literary critics producing scholarship on Native American texts. It is a call to begin reading these texts with an eye toward modernizing both critical and popular conceptions of Native American literary culture that entails, for example, reading and writing about issues of homosexuality as they arise in the work of writers such as Alexie.

In the spirit of rising to that call, this article seeks to outline a process in which Alexie “queers” the Native sphere. Here, I understand the “Native sphere” as a culturally specific space constituted primarily within the film itself and therefore a contingent discursive formation. That such a notion of a Native sphere occurs as a contingency of this film or Alexie’s imagination, however, does not mean that it is without resonations outside the film. Rather, such contingencies participate in a larger process of manufacturing ostensibly absolute cultural domains (sex, gender, ethnicity, or race, for example) in order to complicate those absolutisms in their own ripostes. This queering process, itself involving much more than sexuality alone, is enacted by dealing with issues of Native American sexuality—and homosexuality more specifically—in a way that serves to collapse the apparent dichotomies between the hetero- and homosexual. Along the way Alexie also complicates certain ethnic absolutisms transacted, in much the same way that gender absolutisms often are, in Native cultural contexts. I argue that, through the use of cultural codes endemic to the film’s “text,” Alexie situates the issue of Indian homosexuality within a nexus of other themes in a way that renders an understanding of sexual conflict as indispensable to understanding the racial tensions in the film. In the end *The Business of Fancydancing* enacts a process of interpenetration between Indian and queer coding practices that mutually reinforce one another and serve to complicate the viewer’s understanding of cultural conflict by dramatizing an intersection between ostensibly separate cultural phenomenon, namely ethnic and sexual identities.

This project, then, has a dual purpose. The first is to come to a more complete understanding of the place of homosexuality within Alexie’s work and especially the film *The Business of*

Fancydancing, which will serve as the focus of this study. The second purpose is to use this reading of Alexie's work as a mechanism for expanding more traditional accounts of Native American literary texts, accounts born of academic disciplines that are often slow to acknowledge the changing contours of contemporary Native American cultures.¹

In his book *Tropics of Desire*, José Quiroga speaks at length about a queer code—or, more appropriately, a language (both a language in the literal sense and in the sense of a thematic language)—infused into Latin American literature that, through coded innuendos and linguistic devices accessible only to certain audiences, marks that literature as queer. I quote Quiroga at length:

literary history reminds us that even before the most important nuclei of openly gay and lesbian writers in Latin America came onto the scene during the thirties, there was already a language of homosexuality—and by language here I mean much more than simply a code: it was a library as well as a semiotics, a roster of themes and a manner of public behavior. [. . .] It may be that we have no access to the diacritical marks of the code. But there was no doubt as to the fact that the code was there. (39)

The origins of this code might be traced to the devastating consequences awaiting those writers who declared their sexuality publicly or who treated it systematically in the course of their writings. However, though many of the queer writers dealt with in *Tropics of Desire* certainly felt pressures, both political and social, to keep their sexuality hidden, for Quiroga the presence of this code amounts to something more than simply keeping an “open-secret.” Furthermore, identifying, or uncovering, this code amounts to more than simply “outing” a writer by deciphering the coded spaces within her or his writing. Rather, both practices—the encoding and the decoding—are part of a project of “queering” the public sphere: a practice that brings that which is queer into the heteronormative realm of public letters, thereby unseating, or troubling, the easy

boundaries between the hetero- and homosexual. In this way these coded texts follow Quiroga's prescriptive claim that "all politics is, or should be, Queer politics, just as all forms of artistic expression should aim to Queer the public sphere" (8).

Quiroga's concept of codes and coded language within queer Latin American literature is also a useful construct for reading Sherman Alexie's work. Alexie's film *The Business of Fancydancing* represents a queering of the Native sphere in the sense that it foregrounds the issue of homosexuality within the context of Native American artistic production. In Alexie's case, this coding is less an issue of smuggling the queer into the Native American context through surreptitious codes than it is an issue of forging an interface between the domains of the Native and the queer, often imagined discursively as separate terrains of conflict within our national public culture. Alexie's work represents an interpenetration of codes between the ostensibly discrete spheres of the Native and the queer. In this light, one might identify a double valence in Alexie's coding practice since there is, in the film and in his fiction, both a Native American and a homosexual code operating simultaneously. We will see shortly that in his film, Alexie has begun a process of queering the Native sphere at the same time that he continues to participate in his long-standing project of "Indianing" the (white) literary sphere.²

In the same interview I mentioned in my introduction, Alexie draws a metaphor for an Indian code that he tries to develop within his literary work:

SA: I'd also like to publish poems that people will not get, at all.

JP: Insider jokes.

SA: Yeah, I load my books with the stuff, just load 'em up. I call them "Indian trapdoors." You know, Indians fall in, White people just walk right over them.

JP: I thought it was supposed to be the other way around. Hmm.

SA: Ah. So that's the kind of thing I'm imagining. Poems that work in all sorts of ways, but I really want the subtext for Indians. (15)

Alexie's "trapdoors" serve to make the literature familiar to the Indian reader in such a way that maintains the boundary between the outside and the inside, yet without completely alienating other audiences to the text. The film extends these trapdoors in very interesting and significant ways insofar as it offers up a queer subtext as well as a Native subtext and, perhaps more importantly, often conflates the two.

The way these codes are figured into the text prefigures how a certain audience will read the film based on their own position vis-à-vis the cultural subtext. Being able to access different coded meanings within the film doesn't so much determine *whether* the viewer will arrive at the pivotal issues the film raises as much as it determines *how* the viewer will arrive at them—and, obviously, the degree to which the viewer will be able to contextualize those themes culturally. In any case, having access to the full range of codes deployed allows for a depth of understanding that I would imagine is very satisfying on a subjective level—a satisfaction that might translate into a more intense identification with the film at the personal level. This is, I think, precisely what Alexie hopes his Indian audience will glean from his work.

At the same time, the film draws its "outside" audience into the coded space by foregrounding their lack of access. This occurs most noticeably in the character of Teresa, Mouse's white lover in the film, played by Cynthia Geary. There is, by the very nature of her whiteness, an acute sense of her position as an outsider-inside with which a white audience might find themselves identifying. As if to accentuate that particular audience's partial access to the film's code, Alexie uses Teresa as occasion to introduce, and gloss, the term *suyapi*. She relates the story of how she and Mouse met at the dock, where he walks up to her while playing his violin and says, "What're ya' doin' here, *suyapi*, and when're ya' leavin'?" While the film's general audience may not know the term's literal meaning, given the context it is still quite clear that it is a pejorative term for a white person—or at least an outsider. The presence of this episode, and the way that it brings all audiences in on the joke, serves to foreground the fact that the film is deploying differ-

ent codes that offer different opportunities for access. Moreover, it produces the possibility that the viewer will wonder what other “trapdoors” they are simply wandering over without recognizing their presence.

Like the word *suyapi*, many of the other subtextual, or coded, references in the film pertain in particular to Native American cultures—maybe even specifically to the Spokane. For example, the references to working in the uranium mines in the opening scene of the film would strike a chord with many people familiar with reservation politics. The uranium mines, aside from being a very specific reference to the mines found on the Spokane Indian reservation, embody a more general phenomenon on reservations nationwide where corporations exploit the land for resources to the detriment of the environment in which Native people live. Likewise, certain codes in the film pertain in particular to homosexuality—for example, when Seymour Polatkin returns to the reservation wearing his leather jacket with a “cock-ring” looped onto the shoulder.³ On the other hand, some references in the film are both queer and Native at the same time. For example, Seymour refers to himself as “two-spirited” at one point—a terminology that assumes at least an indirect familiarity with the third Native American/First Nations gay and lesbian conference, held in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1990. This is where the term “two-spirit” was coined in response to the descriptive limitations and inherent racism of anthropological language within the study of Native American sexuality (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 2). Its coming from the lips of Seymour Polatkin also marks the confluence of queer studies and Native American studies at the level of popular culture by virtue of its having found its way into the parlance of this film. Whether or not Native Americans at large, outside the academy, are already familiar with this terminology—in truth, there is no reason to believe that many would not be—its transaction through the film still marks a pivotal moment in the process of its circulation into popular culture as a coded identity reference.

Given the title of the film, it should come as no surprise that dancing is among the most central mechanisms by which Alexie’s

cultural codes are transacted. From the very first scenes of the film, various characters—and especially Seymour Polatkin—are seen dancing. We find Seymour periodically dancing traditional dances alone (often without scenery and with only a black space around him), dancing traditional dances with other characters, or dancing in clubs (presumably gay nightclubs). Furthermore, the dances that Seymour performs are integral to the advancement of the film's plot and thematic content because of the way they signify to an inside audience—in this case, a viewing public that is familiar with the dances performed. Because of the way that they are positioned in the film, the dances carry additional meaning for an audience that is in on the code.

The Shawl Dance, performed in the opening scenes of the film, comes as the most salient example of how a reference can carry surplus meaning for audiences with the cultural knowledge necessary to decipher the code. In this case, Seymour, the gay male, literally becomes a woman through his performance of the Shawl Dance, a dance that is intended to be exclusively in the cultural sphere of women.⁴ In a sense, the viewer who is familiar with the tradition of fancydancing is aware of the theme of homosexuality before a viewer without access to that knowledge. Given the fact that homosexuality is a theme that underwrites the entire film, this reference is meaningful enough in its own right. However, if one is familiar with the historical origins of the Shawl Dance, its use in the film accrues even more symbolic weight.

Many believe that the Shawl Dance originated as a variation of the Butterfly Dance, a traditional dance that honored women who had lost husbands in battle. The movements of this dance emulated the woman's mourning, symbolized by her taking refuge in the home—likened analogically to the butterfly's cocoon. Later there is an emergence meant to signify the end of mourning and her celebration of new possibilities in life. The link to the film comes at the moment of this "coming out," and this historical genealogy of the Shawl Dance opens up a new dimension for reading the queer code within the film. Seymour progresses through an analogous process of returning to the sheltered space of the reservation, and

his “emergence” at the end of the film is emblemized in the scene in which he sheds his dancers’ regalia and returns to the bed of his white lover, Steven. Because Seymour remains a sell-out to his people, however, the film problematizes this emergence by referring it back to the sexual and racial tensions in the film.

The Shawl Dance itself was invented only recently and is popular at powwows today. Possibly the most modern of fancydances, it was conceived in the 1950s as a flashy addition to competitive dance. In the Northern Plains, it was also intended to draw larger tourist audiences from outside Native American circles. In this sense, one familiar with the Shawl Dance’s history might read it as connected to the theme of selling out that also surfaces in the film. In this context, the Shawl Dance itself is essentially an Indian enigma that carries queer inflections. Because its meaning within the film is situated at the confluence of Native American and homosexual cultural codes, the Shawl Dance comes as a bearer of the sell-out theme in two senses: that of the Native American poet selling out to the white world outside the reservation, and that of the homosexual male selling out his gender.⁵ The scenes in which we find Seymour dancing the Shawl Dance situate him on the borders of multiple, overlapping communities. Moreover, this valence of signification depends upon the presence of an audience with very specific cultural knowledge—a knowledge that enables this meaning to be transacted.

Alexie’s mediation of audience access through encoded meanings has a double-edged effect. At the same time that his interpenetrating codes represent a method for queering the Native sphere, they also enact a process of “Indianing” the white and queer spheres. Moreover, the interpenetration between these categories is important to his overall project of breaking out of traditional practices of reading and writing the Indian. By infusing his stories with both Indian and queer codes, he is able to mediate between still treating the important political and cultural themes that affect Indian lives while resisting idealistic, romantic, and essentialist readings that would fail to acknowledge the full and fluid complexity of Indians’ lives and experiences. There are, for example, a series of

themes that Alexie explores in the film that are pivotal to the lived experience of many Native Americans on and off the reservation. These include but are certainly not limited to the issues of selling out to white culture, interracial romance, and how the Native American subject mediates his attachment and cultural responsibility to the reservation and his position in the national context outside those boundaries. Seymour's sexuality, then, becomes a very important dimension of these conflicts insofar as it allows for a thematic interpenetration that renders the borders between the queer and the Native soluble within the larger thematic contexts of the film. Moreover, this interpenetration complicates any reading that might reduce these themes to either Native American or queer concerns alone.

One of the first scenes in the film, for example, shows Seymour Polatkin advancing on a bust of Chief Seattle in a public square and kissing his lips—a kiss somewhat more intimate than a respectful *bise*. Access to the subtext of this scene requires some familiarity with the figure of Chief Seattle (Sealth), a Suquamish and Duwamish leader famous for his friendly relations with European invaders during the nineteenth century. Many residents of Seattle might know the story behind the man who gave that city its name and his reputation as an Indian trying to mediate between the Native American world and a white colonizer. Thus the impulse to read Chief Seattle as a sell-out to white power is not unreasonable. This scene anticipates Seymour's struggle with his fame as a "Token Indian Writer" and underscores his tense attachment to the reservation and his family, still there, whose lives are co-opted to provide him with the stories and poems he writes.

What is most significant is that the scene cannot work as simply an Indian code; rather, its success as a prefiguration of the sell-out theme in the film depends on a queer subjectivity. Simply put, the scene's power rests on the representation of a homoerotic act—the kiss between Seymour and the statue. This intersection, in the opening scenes of the film, between the Indian and the queer serves to establish a frame for Seymour's betrayal of his Indian kin. Moreover, it does so in a way that underscores the significance of

“selling out” as an Indian issue while simultaneously drawing it into the queer sphere. In this movement the issue takes on another valence—that of the gender sell-out—marking a very complex and realistic confluence of racial and sexual tensions within the film.

Another locus for the confluence of race and sexuality lies in the relationship between Seymour and his white lover, Steven. The ethno-sexual tension inherent to their relationship surfaces at a couple of pivotal moments in the film and keys the viewer in to the very public politics of interracial and intrasexual romance. In his article “Jungle Fever? Black Gay Identity Politics, White Dick, and the Utopian Bedroom,” Darieck Scott makes the following assertion:

The history of the relationship between people of Color and Whites *is* a violent one, and if we are going to deal with that relationship as a subject (and not repeat the mistakes of *Guess Who's . . .*), then somehow that violence must be confronted within the narrative. [. . .] There is rarely the option of representing an interracial relationship cloaked in the gauzy fiction of private romance; on the contrary, as a phenomenon it is thoroughly public, saturated with social and political meaning that must be dramatized in blood. (316–17)

While in this piece Scott is interested specifically in the interracial, homosexual relationships between black and white men, the idea he advances here refers also to the context of the homosexual relationship between Seymour and his white lover. I make no assumption that critical works on one ethnic text work equally well in any other ethnic context. However, there are certain common grounds among ethnic groups in the United States in terms of their standing in relation to white culture. Certain phenomena translate well between different ethnic communities, and the racialization and sexualization of power is one such phenomenon. The point I'd like to use Scott to make, then, is that in *The Business of Fancydancing* the complex history of violence between Indians and whites on this continent cannot be extricated from the desire of these two men for one another. This much is evidenced in the scene where

the phone rings while Seymour is working and Steven is trying to sleep. A brief argument ensues over who should answer the phone:

STEVEN: It's not for me.

SEYMOUR: How do you know?

STEVEN: Because white people don't call each other at three a.m.

SEYMOUR: Only a white person would say something like that.

STEVEN: Funny how that works, isn't it: you being a racist jerk and yet still finding the need to get me naked?

SEYMOUR: I just pretend you're Custer.

The reference to Custer is repeated at various moments in the film, but in this particular scene it serves as a poignant reminder of the doubly transgressive nature of Seymour's relationship with Steven. As a white male, Steven is both lover and enemy to Seymour. This love-hate tension in their interactions accentuates the difficulty of such relationships and the manner in which social and political conflicts almost always inhere in relationships of desire.

In "Jungle Fever?" Scott also perceives a latent function in reductive conceptions of interracial relationships. Specifically, he notes that "suspicious" or "disapproving" readings of interracial relationships—in spite of their all-too-easy critiques of the "self-hating" person of color—are productive in the sense that they have taken desire out of the purview of simple romance and have relocated it in the realm of politics. In his own words, these readings have

rescued desire from the mysterious realm of romance, where all that occurs is deemed to stand apart from and often to be arrayed against social convention (i.e., "they just fell in love": being "in love" as the universal solvent, the unquestionable, at once natural and supernatural, justification). [Interracial desire] can now be situated within a social, political, and *historical* context—and that history, frequently and justifiably told as a tale of victors and vanquished, villains and victims, is anything but romantic. (301)

Such ethnohistorical conflicts are played out again or manifested in the relationship between Steven and Seymour. Alexie uses Seymour

and Steven as mechanisms for bringing to light the charged political and social relationship between Indian and white cultures. The history of violence shared between whites and Indians is superimposed onto the love relationship shared between these two men.

In many ways it really is tempting to read Seymour's relationship with Steven as self-loathing—especially given the context of the sell-out theme that is interrogated throughout the film. Seymour admits to being ashamed of Steven when he refuses to allow him to return to his reservation for Mouse's funeral and justifies that shame based on the idea that Steven is "the opposite of friends." Steven is the opposite of friends because he is white and because he is Seymour's (male) lover—both being circumstances that might occasion embarrassment for Seymour when he returns to the reservation. His shame here could be read as a tacit acknowledgement of his own conditioning as an ethnic token, always teetering on the edge of self-loathing. Seymour's flight away from the reservation itself is often articulated in the film as a sense that the world outside is reserved for those who are better. He even says as much when Aristotle comes to him in the cafe at the university and asks him to return home. What comes off as arrogance and a pathological superiority complex here and in other places in the film might be read in the context of the interracial love relationship as a complete denial of the Native and a fixation on whiteness.⁶ Scott characterizes such a reading in the following way:

The black [in this case, red] partner in the couple, it is assumed, does not value, indeed detests, blackness [redness], and therefore detests his brothers and hates himself; he is beguiled, enchanted, by a White standard of beauty, by "Whiteness" itself, and consequently has an exclusive desire for a lover with Nordic features. Moreover, his political, social, and cultural allegiances are to "White" gay politics, to White gay men, and to "White" cultural forms. (300)

However tempting such a reading might be, though, it is, in the final analysis, insufficient for understanding the complexity of such relationships. Furthermore, the film resists in other places

any reading that would reduce the love relationship between Steven and Seymour to a simple matter of self-loathing.

Accordingly, Scott's reading of interracial romance as "self-affirmation" rather than "self-denial" (310) seems more appropriate to the context of Alexie's film. The film treats the love relationship between Steven and Seymour in such a way that it formulates a link between politics and desire and, in doing so, demonstrates the complexity of identities (sexual, racial, social, and political) in lived experience. Take, for example, the poem Seymour delivers to his lover from the bathtub:

O, let me sing to the Jesus
Of strong shoulders and thin hips.
Let me sing to the Jesus
Of brown skin and full lips.
If God created Jesus in God's image,
Then let Jesus be the bodies
Of a brown man and a white man entwined,
Let Jesus be a three-in-the-morning joyful cry.
O, Lord, there's nothing so white
As the white boy an Indian boy loves.⁷

The optimistic side of me wants to read the interracial relationship in the film as an overturning of rigid, foundational identities; and this scene, at least, seems to bear that out. Rather than carrying the sense of self-loathing, the poem emphasizes the redemptive quality of their relationship (redemption being the quality of Christ). In this sense it is the interracial, homosexual bond that bears the salvation of subjectivity from the confines of prescriptive identities that would stifle and elide the real-life complexities of race, desire, and politics as they inhere in personal relationships. While doing so, the film is also careful to maintain—and even emphasize, through coded humor (such as the Custer jokes) and through the juxtaposition of white and Indian in this poem—the racial and cultural specificity of the lovers.

The circulation history of the film itself is also pivotal to the transaction of coded references within *The Business of Fancydanc-*

ing. Where and by whom the film was seen—and by whom it was intended to be seen—are central to the coding strategies of the film. It is fairly clear that Alexie's intended audience for the film is Native American. That he has always wanted his fiction to reach a Native American audience is attested to by his premeditated attempts at writing in "trapdoors" for Indians. Moreover, that this intent transfers over to the film as well is attested to by the fact that the film is, in large part, based on his fictional works. Finally, in the interview with John Purdy, Alexie speaks quite clearly about the intentions behind his forays into cinema. In the conversation below, he is referring to his experience writing and coproducing *Smoke Signals*, but the philosophy behind his doing films obviously pertains to *The Business of Fancydancing*—which, at the time of the interview, was a book but not yet a film:

The scary thing is that it was so fun, and so intense, so immediate, that if I start doing really well at this, I might wind up being a good screen writer. [. . .] I'm scared that if I make it I'll give up writing books. [. . .] The thing I think about is that probably five percent of Indians in this country have read my books. *Maybe* that much. Probably more like two percent, or one. You take a thing like *Pow-Wow Highway* and 99% of Indians have seen it. (Purdy 3)

Later in the interview, Alexie talks about his frustration with Gerald Vizenor and how he is not accessible to an Indian audience:

If Indian literature can't be read by the average 12-year-old kid living on the reservation, what the hell good is it? You couldn't take any of his [Gerald Vizenor's] books and take them to a rez and teach them, without extreme protestation. What is an Indian kid going to do with the first paragraph of any of those books? You know, I've been struggling with this myself, with finding a way to be much more accessible to Indian people. (Purdy 7)

Clearly Alexie is dealing with the issue of how to reach an audience that he considers central to his work—an Indian audience.

His attempts to make his fiction pertain to the lived experiences of contemporary Native American communities represent one strategy for connecting with that audience; writing in his “trapdoors” is another. Finally, the translation of his work into film represents an extension of his project to represent the realities of Native American lives to and for Native American audiences. His ideas are reborn in a medium that is more likely to reach Indians than his written works have proven to be.

In spite of Alexie’s goal to reach a broader Indian audience, however, the film’s primary public has been queer. Alexie made a conscious decision to produce an independent film so that he could have more artistic control over the film’s content, and the final distribution rights for the film were given to Outrider Productions. Outrider Productions describes itself as a distributor that finds creative ways to bring films to niche markets; in spite of the claim in the DVD commentary that the film “is not a gay film,” that niche market has largely become a queer one. A quick glance at FallsApart Productions’s reviews Web page shows that the primary reviewing audience is white and gay.⁸ The film was reviewed nationally, but a large number came from the West, especially in San Francisco and Seattle; plus, many of those elsewhere were written for gay publications such as *Planet Out*. Furthermore, out of the five awards listed for *The Business of Fancydancing* on the Internet Movie Database, three were won at gay film festivals—the L.A. Outfest, Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film festival (“Awards”).

At the same time that he undoubtedly still harbors a fierce desire to write for the “average 12-year-old kid living on the reservation,” Alexie must also be keenly aware that his work is circulated primarily outside that sphere. He is aware of his popularity off the reservation and that any attempt by him to reach an Indian audience will also, simultaneously, serve as a bridge between them and an outside audience. This is why the interpenetration of codes within *The Business of Fancydancing* is so interesting. At the same time that he increases the potential for reaching a Native American audience, he also increases the potential for reaching other audi-

ences, and the nexus between these spheres becomes the playground for intercultural codes that disrupt the normalizing effect of fixed identities.⁹

Still, in the DVD commentary, Sherman Alexie and Evan Adams both comment that *The Business of Fancydancing* is not about homosexuality, maintaining that Seymour's sexual identity is incidental and that this is "not a gay story." In addition, many reviewers of the film make similar claims as to the place of queerness in the piece. In his review of the film, Jonathan Curiel correctly notes that Seymour's sexuality is never an issue when he returns home for Mouse's funeral and that he never really encounters homophobia in the film. Yet encountering homophobia is not the sole criterion for a "gay" film, and even if Seymour's sexuality is not considered a material plot element, it is certainly pivotal to the way that meaning is transacted in the film. It is impossible to decontextualize homosexuality from the content of the story because Seymour's sexuality carries with it a code that interpenetrates and renders more complex all the other elements of conflict within the film.

One might be tempted to criticize Alexie for his not having interrogated the idea of homophobia on the modern reservation. That Seymour is homosexual, and that the issue never rises to conflict, seems to be an elision of the modern reality of homophobia in Indian cultures that mirrors the elisions enacted by those early anthropological studies of the North American "berdache" criticized by Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang. In many ways we might consider the film to be complicit in the act of circumventing responsible explorations of homophobia on the reservation. This is especially true when we consider Alexie's theory that homophobia was brought to the Indian by the white man—a view that is elucidated, for example, in the final moments of his short story "Indian Country," where the father asserts that his daughter was not lesbian until she met the white woman (146). One might expect that the issue of homophobia would be treated in more depth in the film given that the issue punctuates much of Alexie's other work. On the other hand, one can't reasonably expect a film to do everything all at once; and perhaps it is a significant statement in itself that Alexie chooses to have a homosexual character in a film that

doesn't make his sexuality a foregrounded issue. Alexie's refusal to elaborate on homophobia and conflicted sexualities within the film, whether intentional or not, is a discursive strategy that seeks to unseat the polemic into which issues of "deviant" sexualities tend to fall. *The Business of Fancydancing*, in this regard, participates in an economy of acknowledgment that advances a call for acceptance through a tacit presence.

In either case there is still no denying that Seymour's sexuality plays an important role in the way we, as viewers, come to the "text." The development of the codes surrounding his sexuality and the way that those codes come to be embedded within the other codes and conflicts within the film render Seymour's sexuality indispensable to the project of modernizing our conceptions of the contemporary Indian. It is, in the final analysis, not an issue of outing someone as gay, or even outing somebody as Indian; rather, it is an issue of interpellating audiences in different ways. The straight white viewer sees a different film than does the gay white viewer, who sees a different film than does the straight Indian, who sees a different film than does the queer Indian. Moreover, the strategy of the "trapdoor" deployed in *The Business of Fancydancing* amounts to something more for the critical reader of the film than simply an opportunity to trace out the symbolic references and pedantic minutiae. Rather, it represents a conscious project of modernizing representations of the Indian in popular culture by instantiating the borders between white and Native, between straight and gay, while simultaneously problematizing those categories through a series of interpenetrating codes. Johnny Satter, who worked as an artist on the set, perhaps best sums up the end result when he claims, "this movie is going to be too white for Indians, too Indian for white people, and too gay for everybody" (qtd. by Alexie, DVD commentary).

NOTES

1. It is possible that this disciplinary state can be traced to the fact that Native American studies in general—and Native American literary stud-

ies in particular—have only recently begun to take hold in the academy. Moreover, the field of Native studies has been dominated by scholars with limited access to the actualities of the Native American experience as it is lived at ground level. For two explorations of these problems within the institutional apparatuses of the academy, see Daniel Heath Justice and Philip J. Deloria.

2. It is worth noting that this film is not the first instance of curiosity about homosexuality that Alexie has manifested in his works. His stories “Indian Country” and “The Toughest Indian in the World” both broach the subject in their own way. This film is a signal moment, though, because it is his most focused and concentrated attempt to treat the themes of homosexuality and ethnicity together.

3. The “cock-ring” is a code that lets other people know one’s preferred position—which shoulder the ring is worn on becomes a clue as to the wearer’s preference of “top” or “bottom.” Some viewers may be unaware that this is a signifying practice within some gay circles without hearing Evan Adams say so in the commentary on the DVD.

4. There is a later scene in which Seymour and his friend, Agnes, dance the Shawl Dance together. On the commentary to the DVD, Alexie glosses the scene by calling them “the girls dancing.”

5. For an interesting perspective on Alexie’s view of fancydancing as a way to get money, one need only read the poem that gives the film its title—especially the lines, “Money / is an Indian boy who can fancy-dance / from powwow to powwow” (*The Business of Fancydancing* 69). These lines read as a commentary on the commercialization of the Indian dancing tradition.

6. Recall as well the scenes where Seymour reads publicly. The camera pans around to show completely white audiences for all his performances.

7. This is one of the poems written specifically for the film, rather than being taken from the collection of poetry that gives the film its name.

8. The single review I found that was written by an Indian writer, Elena Azul Cisneros, was for Reznetnews.org, a Web site developed by the University of Montana School of Journalism to provide a national outlet for Native American news.

9. Thematically, this dissolution of easy borders between separate identities is driven home by the multiplicity of identities carried by the characters in the film. Agnes, for example, is both Jewish and Spokane—she identifies herself as such when she and Seymour first meet in the student union at the university. Moreover, the words that she says over Mouse’s

body are Yiddish, and the funeral ceremony itself is Unitarian. The Yiddish is recognizable to anyone familiar with the language, but Alexie also makes these admissions in the commentary section the DVD.

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Book Reviews and Reprints

REVIEWS

Joanne Barker. *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2005. 235 pp.

Joseph Bauerkemper, *University of Minnesota*

Should those of us working in the various subfields of Indigenous studies consider sovereignty a vital and righteous pursuit, or should we understand sovereignty to be a misguided accommodation of colonial-state hegemony? When taken as a whole, the collection of essays that comprise *Sovereignty Matters* answers this question with a resounding “YES!” and it is in this self-conscious ambiguity where the key strength of the text resides.

Springing from a conference titled “Sovereignty 2000: Locations of Contestation and Possibility,” *Sovereignty Matters* investigates varied approaches to and understandings of sovereignty existing within various Indigenous communities. While the collection’s most nuanced essays are reprints and can therefore be found elsewhere, editor Joanne Barker certainly provides a valuable service by placing these works in fruitful conversation with one another and with new offerings from both within and beyond the academy. The contributions—covering topics arising from across the Americas, the Pacific, and the Caribbean—come from scholars working in various disciplines, including history, jurisprudence, political sci-

ence, and anthropology, as well as from Indigenous activists and writers.

Barker opens the text with an effective and concise account of the historical and juridical genealogies of sovereignty, offering an illuminating explication of the theological discourses out of which the concept emerged. She goes on to delineate the political developments and manipulations that established the parameters within which colonial states attempt to regulate Indigenous sovereignties. The collection continues with a well-known piece from Taiaiake Alfred in which he both outlines his thorough critique of “sovereignty” as inseparable from the frameworks of colonization and asserts his corresponding call for the decolonization of Indigenous approaches to governance. While recognizing that the “sovereignty paradigm” has facilitated “significant legal and political gains,” Alfred maintains “‘Aboriginal rights’ and ‘tribal sovereignty’ are in fact the benefits accrued by indigenous peoples who have agreed to abandon autonomy to enter the state’s legal and political framework” (39). Ultimately, Alfred claims that “‘sovereignty’ is inappropriate as a political objective for indigenous peoples” (38). Reflecting many of Alfred’s philosophical positions in his look at the prospects and possibilities for sovereignty in Guam, Michael P. Perez observes the inherent problems with colonial-state-sanctioned sovereignty. He forcefully reminds us that Indigenous self-determination need not be “legitimized by the very colonial structures that native peoples resist” (186).

While Alfred and Perez underscore the intimacies that Indigenous sovereignties often share with colonial power, they by no means tell the whole story. Several contributors to *Sovereignty Matters* offer case studies concerning circumstances and political developments in which Indigenous sovereignties have been successfully pursued amidst—and sometimes with the “help” of—colonial-state policies. One piece goes so far as to suggest that the tactic of accommodating colonial states for the benefits of fiduciary regard should be exemplary. While this is certainly an extreme example, through its discussions of case law, whaling rights, genetic engineering, and post-World War II decolonization movements, *Sov-*

ereignty Matters stops far short of condemning any and all negotiation with colonial national governance.

Perhaps unavoidably, the collection's diversity of perspectives brings with it a handful of slight weaknesses. Some of the pieces will likely frustrate readers with generalizations and oversimplifications, while others veer off toward the esoteric. Moreover, some pieces lamentably depend upon Eurocentric categories, definitions, and frameworks when Indigenous epistemologies could have been effectively deployed. For example, rather than relying on *Webster's Dictionary* and European sociology to define "culture," one might more insightfully and effectively consider how this notion is understood by the people being discussed. Finally, it quickly becomes clear that the collection is not geared toward a consistent audience: several of the essays should prove relevant for seasoned scholars in the field, while others might be more appropriate for undergraduate courses. (This issue, of course, could be understood as a positive attribute depending on one's interest and intended use of the text.)

Aside from these flaws, *Sovereignty Matters* remains a text worthy of consultation, especially by those working in the loosely defined subfield of American Indian literatures. The variously abstract and concrete discussions of sovereignty in its pages commendably address both theory and praxis in relation to Indigenous self-determination. The ubiquitous and often vague references to sovereignty in recent critical work and during academic conferences on Native writing are clear indicators that we as a community of scholars committed to the efficacy of Indigenous literatures could certainly benefit from exposure to sincere and ethical explorations of what sovereignty is, what it can be, and why it matters. In her introduction, Barker writes, "[S]overeignty can be both confused and confusing, especially as its normalization masks its own ideological origins in colonial legal-religious discourses as well as the heterogeneity of its contemporary histories, meanings, and identities for indigenous peoples" (1). The central strength of the group of essays that follow is that, instead of trying to clear up this confusion by rigidly defining and delimiting sovereignty and its potential (or lack thereof), it seems to embrace the contradictory

and multivalent character of the various discourses surrounding the category “sovereignty.”

I find that a dynamic and indeterminate understanding of sovereignty is imperative for those of us working to create, critique, and consider the lessons of American Indian literatures. As Robert Warrior asserts in *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, “if sovereignty is anything it is a way of life. [. . .] It is a decision—a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies—to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process” (123). When we call upon Native writing to place sovereignty in the heart of its narration and when we work to explicate the narrations of sovereignty that we locate in literary texts, we must avoid being prescriptive and prohibitive in our approach to this category. By bringing together a discussion voiced from various perspectives that will benefit students and scholars interested in opening their minds to the complicated and multivalent discourses regarding Indigenous sovereignties, *Sovereignty Matters* deserves commendation.

Stephen Graham Jones. *Bleed into Me: A Book of Stories*. Native Stories: A Series of American Narratives. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2005. 144 pp.

Barbara J. Cook, *Mount Aloysius College*

“His name was Aiche, like the letter. And, all he ever meant to do that day was drive down to Great Falls and pawn the rifle. [. . .] But things happen” (11). In this collection of short stories, Stephen Graham Jones (Blackfeet) captures what it often means to be Indian in the twenty-first century. This is a world where things seem to happen almost randomly as his characters struggle to break the circle of violence, alcoholism, and broken families that confine them. In a clever play on a stereotype, “Captivity Narrative 109” follows Aiche as two white children mistakenly climb into his red pickup truck and he decides to take them to school. Throughout the story he is chased by their uncle and the police, and ultimately

he is pulled over “for Driving While Indian, more or less” (19). Everyone he encounters assumes he is guilty of abduction.

The final story, “Discovering America,” also draws on stereotypes, recounting some of the assumptions whites place on Native Americans. Jones writes, “Because I’m Indian in Tallahassee Florida the girl behind the counter feels compelled to pull the leather strap (\$1.19 per foot) around her neck, show me her medicine pouch, how authentic it is” (139). The young drifter internalizes each humiliation he encounters as the travels west across the United States—Tallahassee, Little Rock, Odessa, Carlsbad. New Mexico is as hot and dry as his coworkers have pointed out, and just as he finishes the play he has been writing, much needed rain falls, but the narrator tells us it is not because “I danced it up, but because I brought it with me” (142). However, Jones does not just play on stereotypes in these stories; he captures a world that is both gritty and slippery.

So slippery, in fact, that they are often disorienting to the reader. This technique requires the reader to slow down and travel with the characters along the nearly invisible edge within each story. Jones draws us into a world that reels between turmoil and calm, despair and hope. Although his narratives are at the edge of reality and ordinary experience, each of his stories makes a human connection; each character is very real. In “Halloween,” a domineering father teaches his young sons to drink beer, smoke cigarettes, and shoot beer cans on holidays. Their father was “a man of observances” who only smoked on the Fourth of July and drank beer on New Year’s. “His monster mask, though. He wore his monster mask every day of the year” (3). In “To Run Without Falling,” teenage boys get high, wrestle, and fight in a handicapped playground. The injuries they sustain eerily connect to their lives as grown men whose children will play on the same playground years later. It is just “Another Friday night” (22).

Many of the stories seem to blend time and space, looking into the future or into the past through a skewed lens. In “Episode 43: Incest,” Laurie “looks across the pasture but can’t quite see to last night, when Jim her husband had the car” (30). These worlds are

fractured in more than one way, and Jones captures them in crisp and metaphorical prose. In the same story Jones describes another woman as “unmarried enough that there’s mesquite growing up through the ruts of her driveway” (30). In “Venison,” Jones writes that the wrecker driver’s wife is “nine months past words already” (6). In “Bleed Into Me,” a young boy’s future is forecast by the description, “when he was more a rumor than a brother” (99). Violence permeates this story as it does most of the characters’ lives in these tales. As a father holds his son’s broken face, he tells him it will be all right, just bleed into him (109). In another story, a boy who has watched his grandfather shoot a horse that has broken his leg later reacts violently as he watches his grandfather approach with the same rifle when he himself has fallen and broken his leg. Another character sinks to his own alcoholic self-destruction as his father lies dying of cirrhosis of the liver. In town to watch his father die, he drunkenly goes on “the slick roads and shattering glass of the night,” with “the hospital somewhere in the city, around every next corner” (49–50).

Bleed into Me is a strong collection that provides provocative messages, told in language that will haunt the reader. These are brief, powerful narratives.

Jones is an associate professor of English at Texas Tech University. He is also the author of three novels, *The Fast Red Road: A Plainsong*, *All the Beautiful Sinners*, and *The Bird is Gone: A Manifesto*. Jones has won an Independent Publishers Award for Multicultural Fiction (2001), and he received a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2001 and a Writer’s League of Texas Fellowship in Literature in 2002.

Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie. *Native American Studies*. Ethnic Studies Series. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2005. 160 pp.

Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie provide a concise, relevant, and thought-provoking book on the growing field of Native American

studies. Kidwell's expertise on the history and culture of American Indians and Velie's keen insight and understanding in American Indian literature complement one another in a work that addresses not only the basic historical components of Native American studies but also current issues facing the discipline today. According to Kidwell and Velie, Native American/American Indian studies programs are continuing to find their "voices within the academy" by possessing "basic assumptions about the nature of knowledge." In this regard, the authors challenge "traditional disciplinary divisions of knowledge within academia" with a "new epistemology" that centers on the "interconnectedness of ideas about American Indians." These "ideas," or "intellectual premises," include the significance of land, historical agency, tribal sovereignty, the significance of language, and the role of aesthetics (xii).

Using Cherokee, Pueblo, and Lakota stories to demonstrate the connection between land and Indian identity, Kidwell and Velie contend that "what makes Indians distinctive" is that their "relationship with the environment is the essential aspect of social organization and intellectual development" (12). Although many American Indians today do not live on the land of their ancestors, the authors note that "knowledge and understanding of the association of one's ancestors with a particular homeland" is an important component in a Native American studies curriculum (22). For American Indians the idea of land extends well beyond the physical world. When Europeans first arrived in North America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they understood land in monetary terms, but American Indians associated land with the very essence of their being. Furthermore, in Native oral traditions, land holds a fundamental and sacred role in Creation stories, which often include other objects of nature such as animals, insects, and birds.

In addition to the significance of land, Native American studies programs are by nature rooted in history and center on the various historical developments that have affected both Indians and Indian/Euroamerican relations. Although American Indian history has often been told and written by non-Indians, Kidwell and Velie do not advocate a "complete counter-narrative" based on a

purely Native point of view. Instead the authors promote a balanced approach that portrays “both sides” of the complex story. While Kidwell and Velie advocate “balance,” they nevertheless argue that the portrayal of Indians as “helpless victims” fails to acknowledge or understand Indians as “active agents” who were and continue to be involved in their past, present, and future affairs (12). Native American history also encompasses written documents and oral stories that originate from American Indian people. According to the authors, using the “oral tradition” in history has proven to be a “challenge” for Native American studies, especially when attempting to legitimize Native ways of “telling their own histories” (55).

Furthermore, a correct understanding of American Indian history is critical to the preservation and practice of tribal sovereignty. Kidwell and Velie correctly observe that Indian sovereignty is an “inherit right,” which enables tribes the right to “determine membership, the right to tax their members, the right to regulate internal civil and criminal matters, and the right of sovereignty immunity” (61). Although tribes continue to maintain their sovereignty, this “right” is constantly being redefined by Indians and non-Indians alike. Perhaps this is most clearly seen in the area of jurisdiction, which the authors argue is an “essential element of sovereignty” (71). Indian identity and tribal sovereignty are also closely associated with language. Considered a “key to understanding Native world views,” American Indian languages serve as windows by which Native cultures can be understood (83). While the vast majority would agree with Kidwell and Velie’s perspective on the importance of Native languages, the authors hardly address the idea of including specific Native-language courses within a Native American studies curriculum. A discussion on this particular issue would be beneficial for students and professors who are involved in the formation of Native American studies programs.

Closely connected with language, American Indian literature, or “literature by Indians about Indians,” is an important component in American Indian studies (100). By providing a brief summary of American Indian literature since 1768, Kidwell and Velie demonstrate how Indigenous songs and stories have affected Indian lit-

erature in English. The immediate success of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), a book that won the Pulitzer Prize and started the "American Indian renaissance," encouraged other Native writers such as James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko to contribute to the field of Native literature. Furthermore, Kidwell and Velie contend that literature written by Indians is unique from non-Indian literature in English. This is clearly evidenced by the inclusion of American Indian worldviews and the "traditional tribal" languages used in James Welch's *Fool's Crow* (1986) and Louise Erdrich's *Last Report of the Miracles at Little No Horse: A Novel* (2002).

With sixteen color plates and a semicomprehensive bibliography for recommended reading, *Native American Studies* will serve well as a required text for an introductory course on American Indian studies. However, the reader should also recall that studies involving the history and culture of American Indians did not begin with academia. Many years before Europeans and Americans established the first formal colleges and universities, Indian people all across the continent participated in the study of their culture and the ways and customs of other Indigenous people. Although Indians did not view their "study" as an academic "discipline," a categorization created by non-Indians, they nevertheless valued knowledge about their culture and the world in which they lived. This realization is crucial to understanding American Indian studies from an Indigenous perspective, and while Kidwell and Velie do not address this at length, they nevertheless provide a remarkable book on the field of American Indian studies.

With sorrow we publish this last book review by Bernard “Bud” Hirsch, respected scholar, beloved colleague, friend, teacher, and mentor, who passed on September 3, 2006. Reprinted from *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39.2 (Spring 2006). Copyright NOVEL Corp. © 2006. Reprinted with permission.

Arnold E. Davidson, Priscilla L. Walton, and Jennifer Andrews.
Border Crossings: Thomas King's Cultural Inversions. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003. 223 pp.

Bernard Alan Hirsch, *University of Kansas*

If Robert Frost is right that there is something “that doesn’t love a wall,” that “something” lives in Thomas King’s stories; humor is King’s version of the “frozen ground-swell” that undermines and eventually topples it, and we, as readers, become part of that ground-swell. King’s stories do not merely seek our imaginative engagement; they require it. They cross borders, dissolve boundaries—or at least compel us to question their wisdom and challenge their authority—and by so doing reveal often unexpected likenesses and relationships. King tells his stories through novels, short stories, photographs, a children’s book, a popular radio program, film, critical articles, and television appearances. The authors of this valuable study of King’s creative *oeuvre* reveal with precision and thoroughness the ways in which King uses humor to blur the boundaries that restrict and compromise not only the physical and spiritual lives of Native peoples but also the intellectual and creative potential of all of us.

King’s “pan-Indian self-positioning” is crucial to this endeavor, a “powerful tool, which acknowledges post-contact interaction with non-Natives, yet focuses on the experience of contemporary Natives.” “I think a lot of people think of pan-Indianness as a diminution of ‘Indian,’” King has said, “but I think of it as simply a reality of contemporary life.” Though his pan-Indian stance “makes him vulnerable to exclusion from both Native and non-Native arenas,” Davidson, Walton, and Andrews (hereafter referred

to as “the authors”) tell us, “[i]t is our goal to explore the richness of this positioning and the relevance of his various border crossings” (28).

King’s pan-Indian positioning is not only rich in imaginative potential but also essential to his interrogation of the artificial, self-imposed tyrannies of the various boundaries he crosses, such as gender, race, nation, and genre. Separate chapters deal with King’s perception of the nature and consequences of these boundaries and the different ways he uses humor to obscure them, such as his use of “trickster discourse.” Coyote, for example, in King’s second novel, *Green Grass, Running Water*, and several short stories, exposes the binary thinking that underpins categories such as race and gender. Coyote teaches us “how to survive and celebrate the disorderly aspects of life” and “embodies the resistance and endurance of Native North American communities, whose belief systems have been marginalized or suppressed by White institutions” (34). King, in effect, creates his own trickster discourse through comic inversion; he “incorporates elements of paradox, irony, and parody” not only “to undermine some of the standard clichés about Native peoples” but also to “dismantle the hierarchical relationship between Natives and non-Natives living in Canada and the United States” (35). Ultimately, King’s comedy is a force that “takes on a life of its own in a Native North American context by bringing communities together, facilitating conflict resolution, and establishing a common bond between otherwise divided nations” (35).

Border Crossings is especially strong in its treatment of the intentions and variety of King’s comic strategies and in the insight it provides into the vast scope of his comic endeavors. His humor targets not only what we think but also how we think, Natives as well as non-Natives, and the laughter it provokes allows readers a productive, relatively painless way to engage in the self—as well as social criticism necessary to promote understanding and improve communication between Natives and non-Natives. At its best, it advances the decolonizing process by opening all minds to the rich potential of the imagination, intellect, and perspective of Native cultures to create a better place for all peoples.

That potential resides in the inclusiveness of Native cultures, which have traditionally fostered dialogue, consensus, and harmony between individual desire and personal fulfillment and the communal good. The authors' consideration of King's sense of audience—and his relationship to his audience—points to this inclusiveness, and it is another real strength of this book. King has fun with his audience by, ironically, complicating the relationship between readers and text. He plays with audience expectations regarding gender and genre, exposes their preconceptions, and exaggerates and mocks their ignorance, yet, the authors maintain, he gives them a way out, at least for readers who “get the joke” and thus gain “insider” status. But even those who don't get it may be disarmed by King's humor, rendered less defensive by the laughter he provokes and perhaps more amenable to self-scrutiny. Self-scrutiny requires crossing borders, breaking boundaries, and such actions complicate life and lives. But King complicates relationships in ways that ultimately clarify them by involving his readers in text making, by insisting that they participate in the creative process and take some responsibility for acquiring new and necessary knowledge. The oral tradition has always required such involvement, and King embraces that demand.

Inclusiveness is another strength of *Border Crossings*. Sections on King's photography, his work as a writer and sometime actor in television and in a movie based on his first novel *Medicine River*, his children's book *A Coyote Columbus Story*, his short stories, his CBC radio show *The Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour*, and his three novels illuminate both the variousness of King's voice and the fluid consistency of his thought. Every aspect of King's creative work has as its aim the exposure of Western arrogance, the dimensions of Western ignorance and the thought processes underlying it, and the capacity of Native creativity of mind, heart, and spirit to overcome and sometimes even transform them.

There is a problem, though, with the authors' treatment of King's three novels, which at times is prone to the kinds of assumptions and preconceptions that King, as the authors so effectively argue, strives through his humor to contest. We are told, for example, that

Will, the narrator and protagonist of *Medicine River*, “has rejected his Native heritage and lived in the world beyond the reservation” (62). The second part of this statement is true, but to assume that it implies a rejection of heritage is not—as the experience of many “urban Indians,” King himself among them, would testify. Will is certainly detached from his heritage, though not because of any act of will, as “rejected” implies, but rather due to the exigencies of circumstance and Canadian law, which forced his mother from the reserve when he was a boy. Again, in *Medicine River*, discussing the significance of David Plume’s AIM (American Indian Movement) jacket, the authors maintain that “although there is some question about David’s actual activism, the jacket does serve as a way of asserting resistance” and thus functions as another way in which King undermines “reductive stereotypes,” such as those implied in Ray Little Buffalo’s caustic assertion that AIM stands for “Assholes in Moccasins” (65). The authors too quickly dismiss the question about David’s activism. While the jacket could potentially serve the symbolic function they ascribe to it, the context within which King places it, consisting of both David’s “questionable” activism and his divisive, self-aggrandizing attitude, lends some credence to Ray’s assertion and, more importantly, renders “more-Indian-than-thou” poseurs like David a target of King’s satire. The authors here fall prey, I think, to their own theoretical predilections.

As they do when discussing Lionel Red Dog’s ostensible reformation in *Green Grass, Running Water*. Given a birthday gift by the four Indian elders (the buckskin jacket worn by his idol John Wayne—and perhaps by Custer at Little Bighorn), Lionel finds that it “becomes increasingly uncomfortable to wear” and “happily removes it” (66). Such “performative acts,” the authors maintain, on Judith Butler’s authority, “can become radical gestures within a matrix of power relations.” “By rejecting the jacket and all that it represents,” we read, “Lionel begins to accept the culture he has been taught to repudiate” (66). Lionel, however, has been “taught” no such thing. His parents live on the Blackfoot reserve, his father, early on, tried to wean him from his John Wayne fetish, and his aunt Norma is a bastion of Blackfoot cultural authority. Moreover,

nothing in the novel suggests that Lionel's "act of removal" is a willful repudiation of "Eurocentric values." The authors seem to confuse Lionel here with Judith Butler. The authors also misrepresent the Eli-Karen relationship in that novel by subordinating King's narrative to superficial assumptions about racial otherness.

Discussing the title of King's third novel, *Truth & Bright Water*, the authors write that "The title of the novel couples the Canadian town of Bright Water with the American town of Truth, ironically locating the source of 'truth' south of the Canadian border, and thus reminding readers of the colonial perceptions that still circulate in Canada regarding American superiority" (141). This is fine, as far as it goes, but King goes much farther. The association of "truth" with America is certainly ironic, but in a way that undermines the very concept of "truth" itself, at least in a Western sense, which is akin to what Gerald Vizenor calls "terminal creeds." As the narrator tells Coyote in *Green Grass, Running Water*, "There are no truths, Coyote, only stories" (432).

I question the authors' readings of these aspects of King's novels not merely because I disagree with them but because they reflect a blind spot apparent in some King criticism, namely that academic predilections and critical methodologies are among the targets of King's satire, especially where certain kinds of reading have become formulaic and reductive. The authors display that blind spot at times in their treatment of the novels, needlessly confining the scope of their analysis—and of King's satiric intent—in a way that undercuts their own argument on the nature and value of King's work.

Still, these shortcomings do not significantly compromise the overall excellence of this study. This first book-length treatment of King's work is a fine beginning, and it will no doubt stimulate further critical interest in this unique and powerful voice in the field of Indigenous literature. For readers unfamiliar with King's work, this book is a superb introduction. For those of us already immersed in it, it is expansive and invigorating and, not least of all, a good read.

Text by Laura Tohe. Photographs by Stephen E. Strom. *Tséyi/Deep in the Rock: Reflections on Canyon de Chelly*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2005. 45 pp.

Delilah G. Orr, *Fort Lewis College*

Tséyi/Deep in the Rock: Reflections on Canyon de Chelly, text by Laura Tohe and photographs by Stephen E. Strom, is respectfully reminiscent of American Indian canonical works such as N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*, and Luci Tapahonso's *The Women Are Singing* and *Blue Horses Rush In*. Like Tohe's predecessors' works, her narrator's journey is mythical, historical, and personal, and her inclusion of Indigenous history, language, and stories is skilled and sincere. However, what *Tséyi/Deep in the Rock* adds is the playfulness of the Diné language, a razor-sharp political/historical edge, and a narrator who is simultaneously Rainbow Woman, a nineteenth-century refugee, and a twenty-first-century citizen.

Tohe offers her bilingual readers an opportunity to delight in the subtle wit of the Diné language. For example, she translates *jini*, the title of one of the prose poems, as *they say* (11). This term, which is repeated later, can also mean *it is said* or *it has been said* and is often used when telling stories of the past. Furthermore, as Tohe puts it, "We accept *jini* as part of our stories on simple faith" (11). It is enough that *someone said it*. Tohe further uses this turn of phrase to establish that her postmodern narrator is a storyteller who is continuing the tradition of Diné storytelling, albeit transforming its orality into textuality as in "Text by Laura Tohe" (cover page). In addition to Diné wordplay, Tohe's work includes politically pointed references to the failure of nineteenth-century governmental policies that were carried out to remove the Diné from their homeland.

Tséyi, or Canyon de Chelly, home to the Diné before European recorded history, has been the site of numerous attempts to dispossess the Diné, first by the Spanish and later by the United States. Canyon del Muerto, or Canyon of the Dead, is one of Tséyi's three major canyons: Canyon de Chelly, Canyon del Muerto, and

Monument Canyon. A daylong battle with a Spanish expedition in 1805 in Canyon del Muerto ended in over one hundred dead men, women, and children, and numerous prisoners of war. Then in 1864 the United States instigated a “scorched earth” policy, burning Diné farms and orchards in Tséyi. In her poem of the same name, “Canyon del Muerto,” Tohe conflates both instances into one genocidal incident. However, her narrator notes in several poems that while many family members died, individuals survived the periodic purges and systematic kidnappings to return home, to retell their stories, and to reaffirm their identity and kinship to the land.

Canyon de Chelly’s red earth symbolizes not only Diné death and bloodshed but also Diné rebirth and survival; its deep canyons are doorways that open into the past, present, and future; and its transplanted Russian olives denote that while other peoples may have lived in the canyon before the Diné, the Diné are rooted there now. Neither floods nor fire (as in the scorched earth policy carried out by the infamous Kit Carson) will remove them, as these lines in “Deep in the Rock” emphasize: “Someone lights a match to them. Too late, / their roots have memorized the canyon’s endoderm” (9). In the same manner, “A Tree Grows near the Road,” “Refugees in Our Own Land,” and “Canyon del Muerto” speak to “the blood memory” (19) of past death and destruction and continued existence and prosperity. However, Tohe’s narrator’s ambivalence about the economic benefits of tourism on both Tséyi and the Diné is clearly expressed, when she wryly observes how “tourists must love the authenticity of ‘Real Indians’” (who sell “sodas and turquoise jewelry” under the “cottonwoods at Antelope House” [13]), where Diné blood once flowed in those same canyon trails.

Tohe’s text, which is accompanied by Strom’s photographs, maintains the visual elements of traditional storytelling. On occasion, Diné storytellers will accompany their storytelling with string and/or shadow figures. Strom’s visually powerful photographs such as “Water-streaked Canyon Wall” (14), “Canyon Wall near Canyon Mouth” (18), and “Ice on Frozen Stream 1” (28) draw attention to Canyon de Chelly’s geography, liminality, and magni-

tude. Moreover, the photographs of intricate ice patterns in streams created by winter, the abstract designs in the rock walls created by spring runoff, the shadowed red rocks created by summer sunsets, and the autumnal glory of the cottonwoods underscore the textual movement from the past to present, the shifts in the narrator's guises and points of view from first to third person, and the confluence of myth, history, and the present. However, while Strom's photographs portray Canyon de Chelly's meditative multidimensionality, too often they are rim rather than deep-in-the-canyon shots.

What works well in *Tséyi/Deep in the Rock* is Tohe's narrator's movement in and out of spatial and temporal frames in the same and in different poems as she changes from Rainbow Woman to the refugee to the ironic observer of Diné daily life. What works exceptionally well is Tohe's ability to rise above the typical dualities of past and present, tradition and modernity, the uncanny and the authentic. She deftly makes evident that the past is powerfully present, that it is possible to be simultaneously traditional/tribal and modern/global, and that deep in the rocks the authentic is uncanny.

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Major Tribal Nations and Bands Mentioned in This Issue

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

We make every effort to provide the most accurate and up-to-date tribal contact information available, a task that is sometimes quite complicated. Please send any corrections or suggestions to *SAIL* Editorial Assistant, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Department of English, University of Toronto, 170 St. George St., Toronto, ON M5R 2M8, Canada, or send an e-mail to sail@chass.utoronto.ca.

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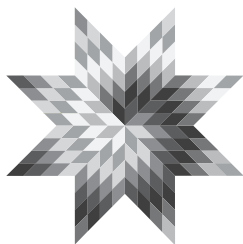
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