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**FROM MISREPRESENTATION TO MISAPPREHENSION:
DISCURSIVE RESISTANCE AND THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT IN
NATIVE AMERICA**

A Thesis in

Comparative Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

The very real social and political problems on reservations (like poverty, alcoholism, and suicide) will never be solved so long as these issues are elided by essentialist discussions of culture. Romanticized conceptions of Native cultures elide the facts of racism, bureaucratic inefficiency, and purposefully systematized erosions of Native sovereignty. In the process of these elisions, blame for social problems is laid on the culturally “atavistic” and “inept” (savage) victims for problems that stem, in reality, from an ongoing colonial relationship.

By taking on various popular myths about Native cultures (the myth of the Vanishing Indian, the idea of the Nature-Indian, or the myth of the White-Indian), and by setting Native voices in opposition to those myths, this dissertation attempts to demystify the politics that lie behind public discourses on and by Native peoples. Moreover, it seeks a better understanding of the ways Natives are denied political agency through public discourses that attempt to represent *indians* in romanticized, overtly cultural, and ultimately apolitical terms. This is not a project of “understanding” Native cultures; rather, it is a project of understanding how Native cultures are constituted, and why they are constituted as such, in the mythological discourses of a national public. Furthermore, it serves to recognize how those same cultures are reconstituted through the critical responses of Native voices to those national mythologies.

Here, I begin to unravel the relationship between culture and politics and, more importantly, to uncover some of the more popular cultural assumptions still working today to displace Natives themselves and to undermine Native politics. My point is that cultural essentialisms come to stand in for political realities; and it is imperative that we

come to understand the political basis of Native misrepresentations and misapprehensions. It is also imperative that we give due attention to those Native literatures that insinuate themselves into the contest of representational politics that inform public policies.

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Introduction

FROM MISREPRESENTATION TO MISAPPREHENSION

In the summer of 2005, in a course titled Introduction to the Literatures of the Americas, I had the opportunity to teach Gerald Vizenor's¹ *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* to a classroom full of freshmen. My expectation was that the text would be mostly inaccessible to such a young audience and that, inexperienced as they were with the cultural theory Vizenor's work is so heavily invested in, we would spend a good deal of time just teasing out what the text was saying. For the most part my prediction was on the mark; but I was pleasantly surprised at the interest that the text generated among my students in spite of its difficulty for them. In fact, nearly 90 percent of the students opted to write their unit responses on Vizenor's book that week. What struck them the most, it seemed, was that they themselves could be, and had been, duped by the ministrations of manifest manners. In terms of their knowledge about other cultures, and especially about Native American cultures, they had been misled by "the course of dominance, the racist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as 'authentic' representations of *indian* cultures" (Vizenor i). In short, they were disappointed at how little they knew, how inaccurate a picture was comprised by what they did know, even more so at the idea that they could be fooled in such a way, and that they were complicit themselves in sustaining these racist notions.

Such epiphanies among a teacher's wards are very satisfying professionally; but, in this case, their sudden illumination also opened up another problem. For all their interest in teasing out the stereotypes that they had been inculcated with since childhood, it became clear to me that speaking of stereotypes alone was insufficient. We simply

couldn't come to terms with the politics involved in such misapprehensions by chalking them up to stereotypes and moving on. Rather, what was necessary in our classroom was a set of terminologies that would allow us to deal with "stereotypes" in a historical way, a mechanism by which we could trace the genesis of these clichés to their original political contexts. It was evident to me that my students' ignorance of Native cultures, and the conventions they maintained in consequence, were not immediately motivated by politics. This is to say that they themselves had no obvious political stake in misrepresenting Native Americans; but, at the same time, it was imperative for me that they come to recognize that most of the preconceptions they harbored about *indian* culture(s)² had their origins in political conflict.

The idea of the movement from misrepresentations to misapprehensions that constitutes the title of this dissertation is an attempt to get at this problem of origins. At a fundamental level it seeks to trace the morphology, or evolution, of "stereotypes" from their inception as political misrepresentations to their current avatars as cultural misapprehensions, which in turn perpetuate misrepresentations. Through that process this project seeks to reinvest those misapprehensions with the political charge inherent to their conception.

The first two chapters deal with the ideas of the Vanishing Indian and the *indian* as Natural or Nature-Man respectively. The aim of these chapters is to examine how cultural misapprehensions tend to pre-empt, or displace, political claims. In the case of the myth of the Vanishing Indian, discursively constituting the inexorability of *indians'* disappearance renders that disappearance inevitable in public discourse and lays the groundwork for, and serves to excuse, any violences toward that end in actual practice.

In the case of representations of the *indian* as the spiritual steward of the earth, any political claim to the land as commodity is displaced to a metaphysical plane by constituting *indian* relations to the land in purely spiritual, that is to say, immaterial, terms. In both cases, “de-materialized” Natives are denied political agency through public discourses that attempt to represent *indians* in romanticized, overtly cultural, and ultimately apolitical terms.

Such misrepresentations are a hemispheric phenomenon. They are, for the most part, not unique to North America, for example, but are an extension of the so-called natural histories that were born of Europe’s period of global exploration and conquest. In their full political bearing in the Americas, such strategic misrepresentations originate in colonial discourses and extend through the nationalist expansion of newly born republics in the 19th century. Finally, these misrepresentations re-emerge even today in the political discourses surrounding the many land-claims and casino battles in North America and the many indigenous struggles for land and political autonomy in South and Central America. It is important not to level out the often very different colonial relations between Natives and Europeans throughout this hemisphere. At the same time, however, one can clearly identify certain representational commonalities and historical constants in colonial and national discourses throughout the Americas. The misrepresentation of *indians* in public and political discourses is a comparative phenomenon and it is an ancillary goal of this project to expand indigenous studies beyond the national margins that hem them in by engaging Native American Studies in a more comparative way.

This project is about historical and cultural misrepresentations and the contemporary misapprehensions that result from *indians*’ being configured in public

discourses in ways that are influenced by political expediencies. Public conceptions of what the *indian* is result almost entirely from the misrepresentations by European cultures with a will to dominate through ideologically sustained stages of invasion, settlement, and occupation. This is evidenced in colonial conceptions of *indians* as the lost tribes of Israel, in *indians*' being cast as mindless and savage animals, and in *indians*' being romanticized (in absentia, once eradicated) as the foundational basis for national identity in the 19th century. As political instruments, these public conceptions are inevitably colored by the neo-imperialist/colonial politics they advance. Moreover, such misrepresentations, as well as fresher versions of them that nonetheless capitalize on and propagate public misapprehensions, are put to the service of political imperatives even today.

However, we have today the benefit of a substantive enough body of writing by this hemisphere's first-peoples to constitute a counter-discourse. In the wake of the so-called literary renaissance of the mid-20th century, a renewed European interest in America's indigenous cultures, and the increased visibility and viability of indigenous political groups across the hemisphere, a discursive body has emerged in dialogue with, and often in contestation to, the discourses of manifest manners. The second goal of this dissertation, in addition to tracing the morphology of misapprehensions, is to situate certain indigenous texts in response to the misrepresentations of dominating cultures. In this way, we can identify a *re*-representation and a *re*-apprehension of Indians in the Americas that operate through the primary channels of public discourse (the publication industry, film media, the internet) and coalesce as a literature of resistance. This project, then, seeks to identify a series of nodal points in the struggle over indigenous identities in

the public domain. It will trace the contours of a series of discursive constellations within a historical and comparative context. These are contestatory discourses in the sense that they emphasize, and attempt to counteract, the violences of misrepresentation and that they assert the vitality of indigenous cultures by engaging those misrepresentations in the realm of public discourse itself. As if to accentuate a continued presence of America's Natives as both cultural and political forces in contemporary society, these discourses emerge in opposition to totalizing discourses that seek to mythologize and paralyze Native cultures through proliferating misrepresentations and political expediencies.

Chapters one and two, as mentioned, each point up a specific instance of misrepresentation and outline its historical contexts and political antecedents. Then, each chapter presents a constellation of Native writers whose work defuses, contradicts, or resists those misrepresentations. Chapter one explores the myth of the Vanishing Indian that proliferates in public discourses, rooting the now-popular assumption that *indians* are dead or dying in the politics of displacement that characterizes the five hundred or so years since contact and conquest. Chapter two discusses the assumption that all Natives are somehow intimately and spiritually in tune with nature and the land. Its point is to understand how a sole and relentless emphasis on *indians'* spiritual relation to the earth pre-empts political claims to the land itself.

What is important to recognize is that my goal is not necessarily to deny outright any truth, or partial truth, at the bottom of these claims. It is true, for example, that Native communities were the victims of terrible programs of genocide, and some communities did not survive. It is also true that many Natives feel an attachment to the land that is unique in its cultural expression. The point, though, is to recognize how these

kernels of truth are manipulated in public discourses and come to stand in as fixed Truths about all *indians* regardless of whether they fit the pattern or not. These Truths become self-evident when they are re-constituted as monolithic realities in discursive politics that turn into real violences. In the cases I explore here, the origins of these over-generalized misconceptions can be traced to the instrumental violences of colonial politics.

The third chapter is focused on the work of Sherman Alexie,³ one of the most widely read members of a new generation of Native writers who set out explicitly to re-represent Native identities (and politics) in the face of what he calls “the expected idea.” This chapter takes on the issue of authenticity and the sustainability of claims to authenticity as the basis for political resistance. By exploring Alexie’s critical response to non-Native representations of Native experiences in Hollywood films as well as fictional and academic writings, I seek to understand the ways that instrumentalizing “authentic” identities can actually re-inscribe, rather than undermine, the violences of representation. In the first part, I use Alexie’s film *Smoke Signals* (directed by Chris Eyre) to deconstruct traditional Hollywood representations of *indians*. Then, by outlining the strategic deployment of Queer and Native identities in his last film, *The Business of Fancydancing*, I seek to uncover the contradictions inherent to film representations of *indians* that occur in the overdetermined spaces of a capital-driven marketplace such as Hollywood. I argue that his strategic use of a gay protagonist to represent Native issues works to complicate traditional fixed notions of both gay and Native identities, but also replicates the commodification of “fetish cultures” in capital-driven Hollywood.

In the fourth chapter, I explore the issue of “wannabe”-*indians*, and especially the problematic assumption that one can become Native simply by claiming to be. At issue

here is the co-optation of Native cultures by non-Natives and the ways that such co-optations perpetuate romantic notions about *indians* and also undermine Native politics. Finally, I explore the issue of non-Native academics and their capacity to represent Native cultures in the academic world, especially in the wake of a long history of misrepresentations of the sort we see in chapters one and two. This debate over who is “authentic” enough to represent is of signal importance to the burgeoning field of Native Studies in the academy today; and this second section represents an attempt to come to terms with the politics of representation as well as the personal gains at stake in the institutional policing of the borders between Native and non-Native identities.

This dissertation, I hope, will serve as a reminder of the true politics at the heart of Native-White relations. Most people I encounter can easily recall some vague sense that there was an old injustice done; but most popular conceptions about *indians* are romanticized and stereotypical hand-me-downs, inherited perspectives that are more often than not taken as true without any thought to their origins. So, the tragedized and romantic image of the Vanishing American, the proud-but-doomed noble savage, or the image of the *indian* as ward of nature overshadow and occlude the colonial politics that originally spawned, and continue to promulgate, such conceptions in the popular imagination. I want to call those origins back to mind and emphasize the violent politics that lie at the heart of conceptions that, today, are merely taken at face value, as natural, or as cultural facts that most often “go without saying.” This is a project that is, in the simplest sense, concerned with tracing stereotypes, in demonstrating how the tactical lies of yesterday become the strategically wrought ignorance of today. But the ultimate goal is to recover the political significance of those misapprehensions and, therefore, to re-

politicize contemporary indigenous responses to those figurations. It isn't just about manifest manners, though Gerald Vizenor's critical term and its insight are the starting point for me. It is also about recognizing the ways in which inherited ideas about what *indians* are and what *indians* do tend to deny political agency at the same time that they serve, and have always served, the political interests of an invading and today majority population bent on expansion, expropriation, and domination.

In the process of this writing I have been constantly mindful of Robert Warrior's insistence that Native voices be privileged in any discourse on Native culture or politics. I have tried, whenever possible, to do exactly that; however, to a certain extent, I have had to give space to non-Native scholars because they have had important things to say about the issues at hand. I will say, by way of apology, should it be necessary, that I am motivated to recognize a dialogue between Native and non-Native figures in this text. I prefer to think that, rather than privileging one above the other, I have understood a conversation to be taking place. One latent function of this dissertation is to recognize a critical mass of Native writers who are in dialogue with traditional representations of Native cultures (I understand criticism and contestation to be dialogue). That such communication has not always been, and may yet not be, an even or symmetrical process makes understanding the dialogic nature of this scholarship all the more important.

Mindful of perspectives like Warrior's and hearkening to the necessities of the authenticity debate now raging within the discipline of Native American Studies, it is also incumbent upon me to insert a declaration, or a caveat, as to my own positioning as an academic in the field. While acknowledging that "authenticity" in its metaphysical sense is an ideal which can only be imagined and never really obtained, identity politics

nevertheless play an important role in academic inquiry and especially in the ethos of any writer in the field.⁴ Because much representational violence has been done to Native communities over the past few centuries (indeed, that violence is the primary focus of this dissertation), it is understandable that many in the discipline are very cautious, even suspicious, of claims to represent Native communities. I make no such claims. I am not a “Native informant” and the ideas that I represent here, as invested as I am in their truth, should not be construed as the perspectives of an “authentic” *indian*. My own claims to that identity, steeped in the mystifications of adoptive erasures and clouded familial histories, are genealogically complex and claims of authenticity would be specious indeed. Consequently, the arguments laid out in this dissertation should be taken on their own merit as the products of academic inquiry, performed in as responsible a manner as possible, but not as the representative claims of an official authentic Native subjectivity.

Since I am on the trail of the requisite academic apologies, I should also make the case for my choice of terminologies. Like Sherman Alexie, I have always liked the idea of maintaining the term “Indian.” Rather than expiating White guilt by jettisoning a term that is emblematic of representational violences against Natives, I prefer to keep the term precisely because it continually reminds us of its own illegitimacy. The word forces us, each time it is used, to reckon with a long history of misrepresentation and violence. At the same time, it is true that the use of the term enacts a certain type of erasure. Given the choice, one should always heed the specific terminologies the Native peoples in question use as self-descriptors. At times, especially in a document such as this one, it is necessary to generalize beyond tribal monikers, however. As such, I have opted to

cannibalize Gerald Vizenor's strategy for naming the *indian* in *Fugitive Poses*. Vizenor defends his choice this way:

The simulation of the *indian*, lowercase and in italics, is an ironic name in *Fugitive Poses*. The Indian with an initial capital is a commemoration of an absence—evermore that double absence of simulations by name and stories. My first use of the italicized *indian* as a simulation was in *The Everlasting Sky*. The Natives in that book were the *oshki anishinaabe*, or the new people. Since then, Natives are the presence, and *indians* are simulations, a derivative noun that means an absence, in my narratives. (15)

In my own text, I have italicized *indian* according to Vizenor's prescript as a method of retaining it as a reminder of representational violences and also a recognition of the term's political baggage, which not only renders Natives as "simulations," in Vizenor's term, but that strategically turns Native peoples into simulacrums. I have capitalized Native instead of leaving it lowercase to provide a certain consistency with racist grammars that capitalize White when it refers to an ethnic or racial category. In a few rare cases, I may revert to the term "Indian" because what I am countenancing is a White description of Natives. I have, of course, also maintained whatever usage the original author chose in all citations from the works I examine.

Notes to the Introduction

¹ Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa) has enjoyed an academically illustrious and productive career as a Native writer. He has published short story collections, poetry collections, novels, and academic volumes, and often conflates each genre in his Postindian “trickster” stories. Among his many publications are *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1978 and 1990), *Landfill Meditation: Crossblood Stories* (1991), *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (1998), *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1994), *Wordarrows: Native States of Literary Sovereignty* (1978 and 2003), and *Shadow Distance: A Gerald Vizenor Reader* (1994).

² Like many people, my students were initially quite comfortable with ascribing singularity to indigenous cultures. The idea that “Indians” were actually comprised of many heterogeneous and often starkly different groups of people spanning the entire hemisphere simply didn’t (or couldn’t) occur to them. Taking my cue from Gerald Vizenor, I use the italicized form of *indian*, with lower case “i,” to designate this heterogeneous plurality and its historical and cultural connections.

³ Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Cour d’Alene) is the author of two novels, *Reservation Blues* (1995) and *Indian Killer* (1996), as well as numerous collections of poetry. He has also written several short story collections, including *Ten Little Indians* (2003), *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), and *Toughest Indian in the World* (2000).

⁴ I deal with the issue of authenticity and academic authority in more detail in chapter three.

Chapter 1

NATURALIZING THE INDIAN: DEPOLITICIZED NATURES AND EMERGENT
RESISTANCE IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

“And, are you Native American?”¹ our guide asked halfway through our tour of the museum. “I hope you didn’t mind my asking; it’s just that you look . . . earthy, like an Indian.” I have been described with many adjectives—some not very flattering—but until that moment, I had never been called “earthy.” I was a bit perplexed as to what it meant to be “earthy” and, more so, about what it meant to be “earthy, *like an Indian*.” My eight year-old daughter, being perhaps excessively proud of my very tenuous claim to that identity, was quick to assert that I might, indeed, have Native blood running through my veins. But she did so without reflection on our guide’s curious use of the adjective. Being a student of literature and perhaps excessively attentive to the choice of one particular adjective over another, I was unsure about being called earthy, not offended, necessarily, but somewhat nonplussed.

The use of “earthy” as a descriptor perhaps should have come as no surprise, since the commonplace association of Natives with the land, nature, and the earth is a fixed-idea of long-standing and somewhat historically central position in the non-Native imagination. It is an extension of a now venerable discourse that posits the *indian* first as “savage man,” then as “natural man,” and finally, in its current avatar, as “nature-man,” the apparently earthy figure somehow intimately related to nature. It seemed to matter little that I was dressed in shorts and a México soccer jersey purchased at Target, and was sporting Nike tennis-shoes bought in an urban shopping center. Our tour guide, symptomatically from a few hundred years of cultural conditioning, could think of

indians (or what she had imagined was an *indian*) in no other way. Such associations have become naturalized components of the American story about what an *indian* is.

In his book *On the Rez*, Ian Frazier remarks somewhat sarcastically on the fixational fantasies that seem to settle the account of *indian* identity in the Americas:

The excitement of new discoveries in the Americas fired all sorts of fantasies about Indians in the minds of Europeans, and Indians remain the objects of fantasy today. The current fantasy might be summed up: American Indians were a proud people who believed in the Great Circle of Being and were cruelly destroyed. (10)

Frazier's choice of adjectives is every bit as telling as our tour guide's. That European, and contemporary, fantasies about *indians* are "fired" in his description—as if solidified through a kilning process—is an intuitive, if not intentional, acknowledgment of the immutable character of such fixations. Such fixed concepts render the *indian* a true object in the Foucauldian sense: a figure subjected to discourses that deny agency and identities. What should be added to Frazier's summation is that the *indian*, in addition to having been always-already cruelly destroyed, is also on undeniably intimate and strangely spiritual terms with nature and the landscape. The *indian*, in short, is "earthy."

The point here is not to argue that Native cultures don't often feel they have an especially intimate relation to the territories they inhabit. The fact is that many, if not most, Native cultures do feel a distinct relation to the lands their ancestors have occupied for uncounted generations, as is surely the case with any peoples autochthonous to the lands they inhabit. Furthermore, this relation is, arguably, different in many ways from the relationship non-Native cultures might have to the land. The point, however, is that such notions of identity with the land often become *essential* to non-Native concepts about *indian* cultures. These notions then become fixities that define and order what an

indian is without acknowledging the fluidity and complexity of contemporary Native cultures.² Moreover, such fixed notions of *indian* identity often, though not always, deny any political power to Native invocations of the land by mythologizing and romanticizing that relationship as a purely spiritual phenomenon.

One needn't look too far to recognize such fixationalist gestures in contemporary popular culture or within the critical corpus that takes Native cultures as its objects of study. The stock Hollywood *indian* is not only stoic and humorlessly inarticulate, but also enjoys an intensely intimate relationship to the natural environment that borders on the uncanny. Witness, for example, the way a film like Disney's Pocahontas predisposes its viewer to understand its protagonist. Pocahontas's frequent communion in the film with her Grandmother Willow—quite literally a talking tree that serves as her spiritual guide and admonishes her to follow her heart—fixes the image of the *indian* as privileged acolyte of nature firmly within the consciousness of the world's children. Later in life, they are witness to the *indian*'s appearance in World War II films as the “Tonto-like GI who helped save the platoon through his animal sense of sniffing out for miles any Nazi or Jap” (Kaufmann 31). This is to say nothing, likewise, of films such as *Thunderheart*, *The Missing*, or *The Last of the Mohicans* which reflect a protracted history of representations of the *indian* as earthy child of nature.

Nor has academic work on Native cultures been left too far behind in the scramble to perpetuate these stereotypes. Much ink has been spilled in the interest of delineating the place of landscapes and nature in Native fictions. And while these works tend to treat the issue of geographies in tandem with other expected ideas in Native American letters—the plight of the half-blood, alcoholism, and fragmented identities along with

ceremonial healing—, the general tendency is to individualize the Native writer’s treatment of the land in a romanticizing gesture that renders those geographical invocations as spiritually apolitical, at worst, and germane only to the resolution of identity conflicts, at best. Moreover, the *indians’* status as “masters of the wilderness” (Berkhofer 98) goes unchallenged even in early Native texts of the Native American Renaissance,³ which in much of the critical exegesis would require the reintegration of the Native into nature as part and parcel of his being able to heal his fragmented identity.⁴ Whether in the academic imagination or in the popular conception of White(r)-America at large, *indians* have always been very much “exotic folk with quaint customs, heroic acts, and alive to the impressions of nature surrounding them” (ibid 88).

There is no denying that the land emerges as an important element in Native American literatures. For that matter, geographies and landscapes are fundamental to many literary traditions around the globe, and in European and American literatures in the 19th century especially. The real irony in the reification of *indian* geographies in the public imagination is in its persistence even today in spite of historical fact. In an interview with Dale Seeds, published in a special edition of *MELUS* on Native American Literature, John Smelcer remarks on the endurance of *indian* stereotypes, and the stereotype of the nature-loving *indian* in particular:

I ask my Native American literature students during the first class to come up with a working definition of what or who they think is Indian. The discussions always begin with stereotypes: Indians are red-skinned (I’ve never seen a red-skinned person in my life except for extreme sunburn victims); they lived (yes, past tense) on reservations; they have long black hair and dark eyes; they are spiritually attuned to nature . . . Truth be told, Indians don’t all have black hair . . . [and] most of the Indian authors I know have never been alone in the forest and find nature alien and frightening. (141)

The fact that over 66% (Norrell) of Natives in the United States live in cities like Los Angeles, Portland, Denver, or Chicago seems to do little to stem the tide of stereotypical conceptions of the Native American as a land-lover with an extraordinary spiritual affinity for the earth-mother.

Since it seems obvious that thus tying the *indian* to the ground is an important cultural (and perhaps political) move, one has an almost ethical obligation to ask after the effects of such representations of Natives' relationships to the earth. How is it that such images persist in spite of actual realities of contemporary Native experiences? To what end does American culture cling so adamantly to such mythologizing impulses? The answer, I suspect, is to be found in a process W.S. Penn⁵ calls "mythologizing" the Native, a process that has to do, essentially, with non-Native (once White) fantasies that replace the political realities of Native experiences with romantic, apolitical hallucinations. Speaking of his ancestor, Joseph, famed orator of the Nez Perce, Penn describes a process by which the Native Chief is ennobled and tragedized in the various discourses of manifest manners⁶ as a means to appeal to "White hearts, to their need to feel those twinges of sin and guilt and remorse *without redress*" (45 my italics). The upshot is that, in the midst of this tidal wave of guilt and remorse, the Native himself is lost, a castaway on the forgotten shores of history along with the guilt that was expiated in the cathartic orgies of White-myth:

Take one chief, reinvent him, ennoble and tragedize him even to the extent of mythologizing the doctor who diagnosed the cause of his death at a distance of a hundred miles from the corpse,⁷ name him Joseph, and you can forget about the man, himself. (44)

This process of mythologizing the *indian* takes place not only in fanciful historical accounts of leaders like Chief Joseph but also, and especially, in popular culture such as

novels, drama, and films. In these venues, according to Vine Deloria Jr.,⁸ “the image of Indians has radically shifted from any reference to living people to a field of urban fantasy in which wish-fulfillment replaces reality” (“American Fantasy” ix).

What is significant is the vast difference in political quality between the reality and the fantasy that replaces it. Liberal America figures *indians* in a way that essentializes and fixes them, as though in memoriam, as a strategy for expressing and coping with guilt over the historical mistreatment of Native peoples. Simultaneously, their being managed through such romantic discourses serves to defuse any real activism on behalf of Natives by positing them as too far gone to rescue. “Chief Joseph [now an alibi for every *indian*] was noble, it is true; but he is dead, after all; and there is nothing we can do about it now” seems to be the refrain supported by the mythologizing gesture. The mythologizing impulse displaces the political reality of the Native onto a metaphysical plane. In terms of the pattern within these discourses that emphasizes the *indian*’s spiritual relationship to the land, we have a case where a political attachment to territory is rendered as simply romantic and nothing more. This romanticization displaces the political to the realm of the spiritual, defusing, or making diffuse, any potential for political resistance based on originary title to the land. Theirs is a spiritual attachment, not a political one. In short, Nature in Native American letters “embod[ies] life and spirit, a vision of the sacred” (Wilson ix), but rarely, if ever, politics in the strictest sense.

Vine Deloria Jr. reminds us that “during the first three centuries of contact between Indians and Whites, the image of the Indian, although confused and fictional, nevertheless had an empirical reference point—the people on the frontier who encountered Indians [. . .]” (“American Fantasy” ix). It is, in fact, on a frontier much earlier than Deloria recognizes in this particular essay that we begin to see the germ from

whence the tension between spiritual and political attachments to the land arises. We can see in the discourse of the Puritan fathers in North America and the Catholic fathers of South America a similar depoliticization of the *indian's* attachment to the land, a depoliticization that serves as rhetorical and ideological justification for European appropriation of that land.

Diego de Landa (1524-1579), a Franciscan missionary to Mexico in the 16th century, is often counted among the Natives' most adamant protectors. Nevertheless, in the conclusion to his *Relación de Cosas de Yucatán* he clearly justifies the many abuses endured by the "salvajes" on the basis of the spiritual benefits they received from the Spaniards. He argues that, in spite of their women's having been killed in plain view of their children, for example, the *indians* benefited more than they lost because, after all, they not only acquired iron tools and machines from the Spaniards but, more importantly, they received that one favor they could never repay: Christianity (*Relación* LII). They may not enjoy the fruits of this life, but the Spaniards, in their Christian munificence, ensured that they would enjoy eternal life.

Likewise, in the sermons of John Cotton, the preacher of His word undoes Native ownership by spiritualizing the link between the Natives and their land. The Puritan conscience won't allow a crassly unjustified imperialist invasion into Native lands (that will come later, of course, built on the founding rhetoric of these texts); rather, intrusion is only legitimate if God "appoints the place" for His righteous:

We may not rush into any place, and never say to God, *By your leave*; but we must discern how God appoints us this place. There is poor comfort in sitting down in any place, that you cannot say, *This place is appointed me of God*. Canst thou say, that God spied out this place for thee, and there hath settled thee above all hindrances? Didst thou find that God made room for thee, either by lawful

Descent, or Purchase, or Gift, or other warrantable Right? [. . .] This we must discern, or else we are but intruders upon God. (God's Promise 6-7)

Notwithstanding the obvious self-righteousness by which His chosen people are always-already “appointed the land,”⁹ it is interesting how propriety is shifted to God. If they are not attentive to the manner in which the place is appointed to them—which is to say, for example, if they illegitimately invade Native Territory¹⁰—it is not that they are intruders on Native lands, but that they are trespassers against God. Ownership of the land is an issue that is displaced to the spiritual realm, thus robbing the Native of his political claim to the territory he has inhabited since time immemorial.

Like Diego de Landa, the Catholic missionary to the south, Cotton is quick to assert the value of the trade for the Natives. Though they will be sharing the fruits of their land—indeed, they will eventually “share” it in the ultimate sense of its being almost wholly appropriated—they receive something invaluable in return:

And lastly, *OFFEND NOT THE POOR NATIVES*; but as you partake in their *Land* so make them partakers of your *precious faith*; as you reap their *Temporals*, so feed them with your *Spirituals*. Win them to the love of Christ, for whom Christ died. They never yet refused the Gospel, and therefore hope they will now receive it. Who knoweth whither God have reared this whole Plantation for such an end? (19)

Following the pattern of his southern counterpart, Diego de Landa, John Cotton here proposes a trade, even-up: you give me your “temporals,” I’ll give you my “spirituals.”

In both these cases, we see a process by which the Native proprietor of the land has his originary claim appropriated and his resistance to such theft undercut politically by displacing the issue to the realm of spirituality. The conflict of ownership, a properly political and economic issue, is overwritten, with political justification masked as

religious ideology, in a palimpsest of violence that would later prove nearly fatal to the continent's first peoples.

Of course, the line between spiritual and political was less clear to America's Puritan and Catholic forbearers than it is to some of us today. Moreover, the idea that the *indian* was capable of engaging in politics likely never occurred to them anyway. In large part, much of the original discourse that merges the *indian* with nature occurs in the Euro-American dichotomy between nature and civilization. It is in this conceptual dualism that the *indian* is first cast in North America as "natural man" or "savage man," a characterization which, over the centuries, will persist and morph eventually into its current manifestation as the "earthy" *indian*, spiritually inalienable from the landscape he inhabits.

In the colonial discourse, as in the popular consciousness of today, that landscape inhabited by the *indian* is, of course, singular. Michael Paul Rogin notes, in his extensive survey of Andrew Jackson's relation to Native affairs, that, during the 19th century, "their connectedness to nature in no way restricted Indian freedom, in the White view. Aborigines were free to wander from place to place without losing the tie to nature" (114). One could live his life in cities, wear t-shirts celebrating Mexico's soccer team and Nike shoes, for example, yet still be earthy and attuned in some hyper-natural way to the land. This conception of the *indian* as natural-man, sometimes simply natural, like any other animal, is instantiated in almost every mention of the *indian* in texts ranging from the colonial period to the present day. The colonial mentality often oscillated between celebrating this natural state and deploring it; but in the primitivist's mind the *indian* was always "dwelling in nature according to nature" (Berkhofer 72).

From the earliest moments of the Europeans' history in the New World, this state of nature in which the *indian* was fixed was used as justification for pressing him farther and farther to the West. According to their plan, *indians* would eventually be disappeared from the continent altogether. At the heart of this movement was the land—the land as a political and economic object. The preoccupation with the land, and with de-legitimizing aboriginal claims to the land, weighed heavily on the minds of European immigrants to the New World; so much so that leaders such as John Winthrop developed extensive politico-religious philosophies concerned with the issue of land-ownership. His distinguishing between “natural right” and “civil right” to the land is a meaningful case in point.

The difference between John Cotton's and John Winthrop's concern with justifying the Pilgrims' presence in these territories is often subtle, but significant. Winthrop's sermons and writings incorporate a far heavier emphasis on civil contracts and legalistic and pecuniary concerns than do the predominantly religious justifications of John Cotton. His insistence on the distinction between natural right to the land, granted the Natives by virtue of their having been natural to the territories, and civil right to the land, granted Winthrop himself by providential dispensation and an impulse toward cultivation, creates a differential in which the civil right of the Pilgrims trumps the natural right of the Natives.¹¹ Civilized people made better use of the land and, therefore, had better claim to it than “natural” people. It mattered little that many of the Native people in the east were agricultural tribes; they were nonetheless men without civilization, natural men tied to the land without being in control of it. The *indian* would

never maintain proper claim to the land so long as he exhibited no impulse to control it according to European conceptions of civilized use.

Nor are such conceptions of civil right to the land unique to Winthrop's day. The Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, in addition to being a barely veiled attempt to appropriate more Native land, was predicated on precisely the same dichotomy between civilized man and the natural *indian*. If the *indian* is to be made worthy of land title, he must first break his animalistic habits of communalism and assert proper husbandry over nature.¹² This pattern of continually thinking the *indian* as part of nature re-emerges today in popular representations of the *indian* as somehow romantically attuned to nature in a way that non-Natives, as civilized communities outside of nature, could never be.

Throughout this long history, the *indian* maintains his attachment to the land in the non-Native mind. But the nature of his relationship to the land is peculiarly apolitical. He is a wandering figure living off the natural bounty of the earth with no impulse to assert dominion over the land. Rogin articulates this conception of the *indian* in terms of the mother-child relationship that he maintains was so forceful a figure in the consciousness of the 19th century:

The American family began, in the ante-bellum White imagination, with the mother and child. Indians were "the children of nature," "the sons of the forest." They were children because of their unrestrained impulses, and because *they remained unseparated from nature*. Indians, in the White view, had never severed the maternal tie. White metaphors resemble, to their details, psychoanalytic descriptions of fantasies of the oral stage of infant bliss. (114 my italics)

Whether simply a savage beast occupying the lands destined to be overrun by the righteous, or a noble animal suckling at the breast of mother earth, the *indian* is, in any case, as natural as any creature could be, never really in control of the land to which he is

tyed in some remarkably spiritual way. In the public consciousness, this spiritual bond with nature transcends time, space, and the vicissitudes of cultural history; it is immutable, and obtains even today.

In the mind of the colonizer, the land becomes a symbol of the struggle between Civilization and Savagery; overcoming nature is necessary in order to overcome the savage self. In this way, the *indian* comes to be a visible synecdoche of nature and an emblem of that which must be overcome in the name of God and prosperity. We learn from Winthrop Jordan that

The Indian became for Americans a symbol of their American experience; it was no mere luck of the toss that placed the profile of an American Indian rather than an American Negro on the famous old five-cent piece. Confronting the Indian in America was a testing experience, common to all the colonies. Conquering the Indian symbolized and personified the conquest of American difficulties, the surmounting of the wilderness. To push back the Indian was to prove the worth of one's own mission, to make straight in the desert a highway for civilization. (qtd in Rogin 7)

At the heart of this tension between civilized man and natural man, or the savage *indian*, lies a more fundamental cultural conflict. The issue, rather, is over competing ways of life and the politics of cultural dominance (Limerick 27). These politics are discursively encased in contradictory notions of how best to use the land. Like the playground child who accommodates his own lack of self-esteem by insulting others, the European intruder on the land assuages his guilt by relegating the land's rightful proprietors to the status of natural man, making of him yet another parcel of nature to be dominated.

In this history of conquest, then, the land itself is a figure that is fundamental to the development of a national consciousness in the United States. Frederick Jackson Turner will admit, at the end of the 19th century (1893), that the frontier as an open space

was fundamental to United States Americans' understanding of themselves as national subjects:

The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development. [. . .] In this advance, the frontier is the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilization. (1-2)

It matters little whether, like Turner, we see the frontier as a *process* that is fundamental to national consciousness—the process of expansion into “virgin” territory—or, like other historians, we would prefer to think of the west in terms of a specific space. In any case, as a humanesque projection of those natural landscapes, the *indian* figures in those discourses first as a savage, natural being destined to be overcome by European civilization, then as a noble savage to be admired as a natural exemplar of proper behavior in regard to the land.

The noble savage, then, functioned as a critique of civilization in addition to serving as its foil. As early as the late 16th century, European scholars began constructing the noble *indian* as a critical commentary on European manners (Berkhofer 75). In the early phase, the natural wisdom of the noble savage was constructed by figures such as Montaigne as a critique of institutional Europe and especially of the social inequalities that obtained there. According to Berkhofer, later 18th-century writers such as Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, and others “had but to continue a tradition well established by their day of using the Noble Savage in general and the American Indian in particular for their critical moral and political purposes” (ibid.). Even today, images of the *indian* in popular culture serve as the basis for exploring the problems of White America. According to Vine Deloria Jr.

A review of the various images and interpretations of the Indian, therefore, will give us a fairly accurate map of the fragmented personality that possesses the American White man. One can start at almost any point and list the collective attributes, attitudes, and beliefs about the Indian and then strip away the external image to reveal the psyche of the American White. (American Fantasy xi)

In this sense, the *indian* as noble savage was always, and still remains, a figure that says more about White Europe than it ever really did about Red America.

The frontier itself, from the very beginning, was viewed as an open space that served as a haven to which the European cast-off could flee in order to escape the problems of civilization. John Smith, in his *Description of New England* (ca. 1615), for example, goes to great lengths to justify investment in North American exploration on the basis of that geography's capacity to serve as a release valve for pressures brewing in Europe. It was an open and abundant territory where the excess populations of Britain, and especially the idle and degenerate sons of rich men, could go in order to turn productive and find their place as useful citizens within society. The problems of poverty and disease could be displaced and resolved in the New World. Annette Kolodny tells us that "Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden, in short, all the backdrops for European literary pastoral, were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship, as opposed to the grinding poverty of previous European existence" (6). Nor was this conception of the frontier as panacea to society's problems unique to the early years of European imperialism. The national consciousness of American expansion after the revolutionary war held that the West "was the place where one escaped the trials and burdens of American civilization. [. . .] Repeatedly, Americans had used the west as a mechanism for evading these 'problems'" (Limerick 291). Nowhere is the displacement of political and social tension more evident, of

course, than in *indian* removal, which sought to alleviate the conflict between the rightful owners of that “open” space and the imperialist aggressors in the land by displacing Natives ever further west through the use of treaties and other promises that would never really be kept.

In later years, the use of the *indian* as a critical figure for regulating White behavior took a decidedly ecological turn. It was not long before the White(r) American’s penchant for development weighed heavily on the land. In the early years, a farmer could exploit the land with crops until the nutrients were sapped and the land failed. With innumerable acres of virgin territory opening daily to the west, he could simply find new fertile lands on which to farm again. Industrialization also took its toll on the land:

Colonization brought with it an inevitable paradox: the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally, an urban nation. As a result, those who had initially responded to the promise inherent in a feminine landscape were now faced with the consequences of that response: either they recoiled in horror from the meaning of their manipulation of a naturally generous world, accusing one another, as did John Hammond in 1656, of raping and deflowering the “naturall fertility and comelinesse,” or, like those whom Robert Beverley and William Byrd accused of “slothful Indolence,” they succumbed to a life of easeful regression [. . .] despoilation of the land appeared more and more an inevitable consequence of human habitation. (Kolodny 7)

Once the American pastoral was thus despoiled in reality, the virgin body of Eden raped and mutilated seemingly beyond repair, its soul would be rescued through art, and especially through painting, which was assigned the task of preserving America’s natural beauty even as industry and use destroyed it (Kolodny 7 and Rogin 104). In this artistic recuperation of the despoiled land, the *indian* would eventually become a figure of

ecological restraint and primal wisdom (Limerick 338), the emblem of nature's friend and the model of her just treatment for American industry. By the 1920s this image of the *indian* as wed to the land and exemplar of ecological responsibility was a strong conviction held by many, including John Collier, the reformist Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who

was certain that all Indians held within them a latent impulse for unity and tribalism; [and] he was equally certain that Indian ways represented the true spirit of conservation, the "reverence and passion for the earth and its web of life." This was the core of what White people should borrow from the Indians: "will we learn from the Indian the age-old knowledge we now, through our acts, reject—the knowledge of the interrelatedness of life, of reciprocity and cooperation between man and nature, and between man and man?" (Limerick 206)

In the 20th century, the trend of using the *indian* as a mechanism for critiquing American culture at large was in full swing. This was especially so in the 1960s when the early writers of the Native American renaissance began to meet wide acclaim and when the hippie culture of the United States was ripe and ready for the appropriation of the *indian* as an anti-institutional symbol.¹³ In this context, the image of the *indian* as natural man persisted. In 1972, the Cherokee actor Iron Eyes Cody was used in a public conservation campaign by Keep America Beautiful, Inc., in which he was seen in an extreme close-up view shedding a tear over the mistreatment of land by White industrialism. As Berkhofer notes about the ad, it "depends on the use of two standard images of the Indian: the image of the stoic Indian (who never weeps) and the image of the Indian who respects nature and possesses an ingrained sense of ecology" (*The White Man's Indian*, center photos).

The political power of such characterizations of the *indian*, and especially of the noble savage of the 19th century, was, and still is, enabled by the power of colonial

European pastoral fantasies at work in the popular consciousness of early America. From Columbus's initial contact with the New World, articulated in terms of the woman's breast, to Sir Walter Raleigh and Robert Johnson, who articulated the New Continent in terms of as-yet unpossessed maidenhead (Kolodny 11), the initial impulse was to see America in terms of a virgin mother at whose abundant and nurturing breast the European immigrants might regain the biblical paradise. The vestiges of that pastoral fantasy survive yet today as a spectre in popular images of the *indian* and the land.

Given the historical context of Europe's conception of the New World as an abundant, open, and inviting virgin nature in which the garden of Eden could be reconstructed, the ascription of a hyper-spiritual relation to the land in the 19th century and later seems to be a projection onto Natives of White America's own obsession with the land and their own reversionary impulses encoded in biblical landscapes. In the end of all this, the ascriptive notion of the *indian* as natural man becomes, through the repetitions of discursive history, a descriptive fact.¹⁴ Micheal Paul Rogin prefers a Freudian interpretation of this regressive impulse, asserting that through the process of "replacing Indians upon the land, Whites reunited themselves with nature," from which they had been alienated in civilized spaces. In his description American "liberal culture lacked libidinal ties [to 'the exuberant bosom of the common mother'] to replace those forsaken in childhood" and "the encounter with Indians and the virgin land returned America to the natural world." In short, "[r]eplacing Indians upon the land, Whites reunited themselves with nature" (9).

To thus psychologize the nature of White America's fraught relationship to the earth elides, to a certain extent, the starkly political nature of land-grabbing in North

America. The flight into virgin territory by the pioneers—whether they be the pilgrims from Europe in the 16th century, or the western frontiersmen of the post-revolutionary United States—had everything to do with oppression, taxation, and other political pressures of so-called civilized society. Moreover, the government’s legitimation and sponsorship of those infiltrations into Native territories demonstrates an economy of values that prized the land as a political commodity, not as a Freudian symbol. White America’s preoccupation with surveying and dividing property, and its obsession with acquisition, are evidence enough of the very pecuniary nature of their conception of the land. Patricia Limerick reminds us that

If Hollywood wanted to capture the emotional center of Western history, its movies would be about real estate. John Wayne would have been neither a gunfighter nor a sheriff, but a surveyor, a speculator, or claims lawyer. The showdowns would occur in the claims office or the courtroom; weapons would be deeds and lawsuits, not six-guns. Moviemakers would have to find some cinematic way in which proliferating lines on a map could keep the audience rapt. (55)

In the 19th century especially, the way to make your fortune was to speculate, as the great figures such as Andrew Jackson had done, or to be trained as a surveyor, for whom there was endless work to be performed in the open lands of the western frontier. At best the Freudian symbolism Rogin reads into White conceptions of the land, and *indians* as emblems of it, was a political expediency, a discursive device proliferated by public cultures in the interest of appropriating resources that were not rightfully theirs. The idea of the Euro-American’s alienation from and reconnection to the earth only distracts from the real issue at hand: *indians* were constructed as “natural” men in order to justify their mistreatment at the hands of White invaders.

It is in this legacy that the description of the *indian* as of-the-earth is born and such characterizations are borne by literature of the day as well as by more popular media such as the theater. After the romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, representations of the natural *indian* were naturalized permanently through the discourses of popular media such as the novel and drama. Textual renditions of the *indian*, from whence we glean many of the popular stereotypes of the red man today, were wildly popular in print and on stage. Part and parcel of these images was the idea that the *indian* is somehow hyper-naturally connected to the land. It is useful, then, as a political imperative, to track the morphology of these images, as we have been doing all along, from the purely savage *indian* of the early colonial period, through the romantic celebration of the noble savage in the 19th century, and into the present day where these images, especially the romantic ones, are replicated, often with little re-articulation of the *indian's* place in regard to the natural landscape.

The tropes of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* are immanently familiar, for example, so an in-depth re-reading of the novel is unnecessary to prove my point. Suffice it to say that there are innumerable instances in the text where the *indian* is portrayed as uncannily in-tune with nature. It is sufficient for our purposes, however, to recapitulate only a couple of early scenes in the novel that seem particularly relevant to our discussion of the *indian* as natural man. Witness the appearance in only the second chapter of the novel of the now-too-familiar picture of the White caravan tramping through the woods unsuspecting of the *indian* stalker, so naturally attuned to the land around him that he is able to follow silently for miles unnoticed by their untrained senses:

The calvacade had not long passed, before the branches of the bushes that formed the thicket were cautiously moved asunder, and a human visage, as

fiercely wild as savage art and unbridled passions could make it, peered out on the retiring footsteps of the travelers. A gleam of exultation shot across the darkly painted lineaments of the inhabitant of the forest, as he traced the route of his intended victims, who rode unconsciously onward [. . .]. (22)

This type of scene is common to virtually every colonial tale and remains a stock image in popular representations of *indians*. It is penned in awe of the natural sensibility of the savage and in frustration at the invaders' unfamiliarity with the land they traverse. The familiarity of its original inhabitants with the landscape in such scenes is transmuted into a spiritual, here demonic, affinity with the earth and nature.

In another moment in the novel—only one chapter later—we find yet another now-familiar representation of the *indian's* uncanny sensibility in nature. When we first meet our hero, Hawkeye, and his compatriots, Chingachgook and Uncas, they are philosophizing on the nature of White-*indian* relations in the Northeast. A bet ensues between Uncas and Hawkeye on whether the White hunter can kill a mostly hidden deer some distance off. After giving way to admonishments not to fire his rifle at a deer so as to avoid the notice of enemy Maquas they know to be in the woods, Hawkeye remarks that “these Indians know the nature of these woods, as it might be by instinct!” (31). As if to re-inscribe this notion of his companions' natural instincts in their Native woods, one page later Hawkeye defers to the senses of Chingachgook:

“By the Lord, there is a drove of them [deer]!” exclaimed the scout, whose eyes began to glisten with the ardor of his usual occupation; “if they come within range of a bullet I will drop one, though the whole six nations should be lurking within sound! What do you hear, Chingachgook? For *to my ears* the woods are dumb.” (31-2 my italics)

In response, Chingachgook is able to discern the sound of footsteps, which he easily identifies as “the horses of White men,” by putting his ear to the ground. The idea that

Chingachgook, unlike the scout Hawkeye, is able to perceive things in nature, and things alien to it, underscores the idea that the *indian* inherently possesses sensitivity to nature that cannot be learned through experience in the woods, but is an inherited trait of the North-American *indian*. Replicated throughout the text, and in the public discourses that would later model Cooper's representations of the *indian*, such subtle and naturalized conceptions etch the image of the *indian* as natural man into the imagination of White(r) North-America.

Such images, we know, are not unique to Cooper's fictions, and neither are they unique to the genre of the novel. Perhaps even more effective than such texts as Cooper's in impressing the image of the natural man into the popular consciousness were the dramatic performances of the day. Much in the same tradition as Cooper's novel, tragedies such as *Metamora; or The Last of the Wampanoags* (1829)¹⁵ were wildly popular throughout the 19th century. This play, very much emblematic of most dramatic representations of the *indian*, extends the same image of the natural man. In the prologue to the version of the play I am reading, Mr. Prosper M. Wetmore clearly sets the tone of these representations when he proclaims that the writer "Led by the guiding hand of genius on, / He here hath painted *Nature on her throne*; / His eye hath pierced the forest's shadowy gloom, / And read strange lessons from a nation's tomb" (xi my italics). Again, it is not very long into the play before we see and hear *Metamora*, the *indian* hero, rhapsodizing in that familiar manner on nature:

The red man's heart is on the hills where his father's shafts have flown in the chase. Ha! I have been upon the high mountain top where the grey mists were beneath my feet, and the Great Spirit passed by me in his wrath. He spake in anger and the old rocks crumbled beneath the flash of his spear. Then I was proud and smiled, because I had slain the great bird whose wing never tires, and whose eye never shrinks; and his feathers

would adorn the long black hair of Nahmeokee, daughter of Miantonemo, the great hunter. The war and the chase are the red man's brother and sister. The storm cloud in its fury frights him not. Wrapt in the spoils he has won, he lays him down and no one comes near to steal. The Great Spirit hears his evening prayer, and he sleeps amidst the roar of a mighty cataract. (5-6)

As we might expect from such a natural man, all *Metamora's* speech is replete with references to nature. It is almost as though the *indian*, in this vision, cannot conceive a thought without encasing it in earthy terms. We learn that he has been pliant, "very yielding like the willow that droops over the stream" (11), that the *indian* has been caused to fall away from nature by the Whites, and that he "moves in the region his proud fathers bequeathed him, not like a lord of the soil, but like a wretch who comes for plunder and prey" (19). In another play, *The Indian Princess; or La Belle Sauvage* (1808), also known as *Pocahontas*, John Smith is a gallant knight (621), a Hercules or a Hector; but our *indian* hero, *Metamora*, is a willow or a rock, not a hero of civilization, but a hero of nature.

Neither has this imagery changed much up to the present day. In the 1990s film adaptation of Cooper's novel, *Last of the Mohicans*, we see the same imagery of the *indian* as natural man, in spite of other attempts at dressing up the content to make it more politically correct. Ennobled perhaps even further in this text than in the original, the *indian* still remains remarkably attuned to nature. Hawkeye, now the adopted son of Chingachgook, is even more *indian* than he was in the novel.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is the *indian* alone who is familiar enough with the land to pass freely into and out of the besieged forts on the frontier; and the familiar scene of the *indians* silently stalking the White caravan obtains still.

The natural wisdom of the *indian* is much in evidence in other films as well. In *Red Blood*, an *indian* in the city is caught up in a mob hit gone wrong. Targeted by the Mafia, his only recourse is to flee to the reservation where the help of his family and their intimate bond with nature allow them to defeat the city-boy thugs who are unfamiliar with and alienated from the land. In films like *The Missing*, it is only with the help of an *indian* versed in the workings of nature, that a father adopted into the *indian* ways can rescue his kidnapped daughter and her children. In *Renegade*, the most recent Hollywood parasite on Native spirituality, we have the mystical *indian* magician who rescues Mike, the would-be *indian*, by first speaking to the serpents that surround him, then by spiriting him away to the hallowed ground of the *indian* temple secreted beneath the cascading falls of the Sacred Mountains. The eagle— with whom the young medicine-man, Runi, is able to converse in his own tongue and through whose eyes the *indians* are apparently able to see—underscores a familiar pattern that accentuates the fact that there is something mystical, supernatural, and ultra-spiritual in the *indian's* relation to nature. In any one of these films, and countless others, the image of the *indian* as nature-man is maintained and perpetuated in spite of present cultural realities. Almost irreparably infected by this centuries-long history of ideological training in regard to the *indian*, the public imagination simply refuses to admit any representation of the *indian* that is otherwise than romantically attuned to nature.¹⁷

Not merely a simple geography, the land was always a pivotal figure for Europeans in the New World as an ideological and political entity. From the very beginnings of their experience here, the land was both a spiritual and a political phenomenon in the European consciousness in North and South America. Djelal Kadir

reminds us of as much when, in a discussion of Gonzalo Fernández de Oveido, whom he credits with having “overtly politicized” the notion of divine right to the lands in the New World, he maintains that

The idea that in the divine dispensation that brought the New World to Europe’s attention God was restoring lost lands and relapsed peoples to be salvaged by the righteous and redeemed for God’s flock is argued by canons and conquistadors early in the sixteenth century. The notion would become a commonplace for Catholic missionaries and Puritan divines alike. (130)

The curious interpenetration of the spiritual and the political demonstrates the ease with which metaphysical religious concerns are turned toward the ends of political expediency.¹⁸ What is key to our discussion here is that the fluidity of the borders between the spiritual and the political allowed to the Christian colonizers seems to be shut off to the Native writing on nature. This is to say that, while the Puritan fathers and the Catholic conquerors freely conflate the spiritual and the political, the Native who spiritualizes nature is, more often than not, confined to the realm of the metaphysical and purely natural. In short, Native invocations of landscapes and nature are too often read as solidifications of the idea of the hyper-natural Native and are not often enough read as political statements on the history of colonialism in the New World.

The fact that the *indian* is not allowed a political claim to the land in addition to a spiritual connection to it has everything to do with the discursive politics of conquest and their echoes in the neo-colonial cultural politics of today. The fact is that, given the now familiar history of colonial politics and violence in the New World, there is no way to responsibly think of Native exhortations of the land and nature as anything less than political. The connection to the land may well be a spiritual one, it may well even be essential to Native identity (though this I doubt); but it is also always-already a political

affinity because it resounds within a history of contact and conflict that, regardless of how it was couched in spiritual terminologies, was always about the political contest for the land.

From the Puritans in North America who rationalized their theft of land from the Natives on the basis of their improper husbandry¹⁹ to Fray Diego Durán's treatise proving that the *indians* were, in fact, not autochthonous to the New World but were actually the lost tribes of Israel who migrated here earlier,²⁰ the colonial consciousness was fixated on the land, and especially on rationalizing its theft through legitimating discourses. It isn't unreasonable to assume, then, that the land would also be a potent and vital figure in resistances and contestations to European oppressions. In this sense, we might read every invocation of the sacrament of nature in Native writing, both past and present, as a political act of severance from the original Christian ideology at the foundation of American territorial politics. Every mention of nature, and especially of landscapes, in Native letters comes as reminder of, and a rebuttal to, the politico-religious claims to the land proliferated by the first Europeans, perpetuated with little alteration through the nineteenth century, and surviving still in more or less subtle forms today. Natives' stubborn resistance to the individualistic habits of the European invaders, their unwillingness to relinquish their holding of lands-in-common throughout the years of allotment, for example, is bound up in this politics of resistance that is grounded in nature, the land, and a way of life.

Still, this politics of nature is often elided in popular conceptions of the hyper-natural *indian*; or, worse yet, its political power is co-opted by environmentalists who wish to put the stereotype to use for their own political ends. The tradition of ecopoetry

has done as much as, if not more than, any other contemporary discourse to perpetuate the conception of the American *indian* as nature's guardian. Especially since the 1970s, when these discourses began to proliferate more widely, the *indian* has become a symbol and hallmark for right behavior in regard to nature. The conservationist effort is surely one that most Natives might have sympathy toward, or at least as much sympathy as anybody else; but that is hardly the point. The point is that these eco-poetical discourses pirate the conventional image of the *indian* in the process of their political endeavors without thinking what one might term "*indian* conservation" from within the context of sovereignty debates over land and resource rights on reservations. The fact is that any characteristically Native conservation effort, to the extent that we might identify such a thing, necessarily entails a political context that pertains specifically to Tribal-Government relations and is bound up in a history of colonial politics. In the process of capitalizing on *indian* stereotypes in the battle against the exploitation of the natural world, the discourses of eco-poets tend to perpetuate stereotypes and mischaracterizations of the *indian* that maintain the *indian's* position as natural-man, thereby eliding the truly political and economic materiality of Natives' relations to the land.

As the very embodiment of this type of poetic de-materialization of Native culture, we might examine the critical treatment of Pulitzer Prize winning eco-poet, Gary Snyder. Snyder is not a new target for disgruntled Natives by any means. In her essay "An Old-Time Indian Attack Conducted in Two Parts" Leslie Marmon Silko²¹ criticizes Snyder's seemingly unselfconscious inhabitation of the *indian* mind—as though a White poet could indeed know enough to actually be *indian*.²² She blames him for even going so far as to disguise his own origins in order to co-opt hers (214). Finally, she indicts him

on the grounds that although he “goes on at length about the land, the earth, and the Native Americans’ relationship to it, he [. . .] intellectualizes his complicity in the land theft by enthusiastically quoting the pre-Columbian notion that ‘the land belongs to itself’” (214). In his manifesto, “Four Changes,” Snyder asks his reader to “master the archaic and the primitive as models of basic nature-related cultures” (*Turtle Island* 102) when, in actuality, his work ends up “mastering” *indian* Culture (in the capitalized singular here) by inducting it into a discourse that solidifies naturalistic and romantic conceptions of “The Indian.”

Here we might take the poem “Anasazi” as an instantiation of Snyder’s mastery of the *indian* through the imagery of the hyper-natural nature-man:

Anasazi,
Anasazi,

tucked up in clefts in the cliffs
growing strict fields of corn and beans
sinking deeper and deeper in earth
up to your hips in Gods
 your head all turned to eagle-down
 & lightning for knees and elbows
your eyes full of pollen

 the smell of bats.
 the flavor of sandstone
 grit on the tongue.

 women
 birthing
at the foot of ladders in the dark.

trickling streams in hidden canyons
under the cold rolling desert

corn-basket wide-eyed
 red baby
 rock lip home,

Anasazi

This poem is composed almost entirely of nostalgic stereotypes; and, what's worse, it's a nostalgia for something that is not even his own. Needless to say, even Native women don't necessarily want to give birth in the dark at the foot of some outside ladder. Furthermore, if any do so yet today, it is more likely due to the impoverished conditions on our reservations and the woeful lack of good medical facilities in some areas than to any romantic affinity for nature that compels her to give birth "primitively and archaically" as Snyder suggests here. When fit into Snyder's larger goal of conservation and "ancient solidarity" (*Turtle Island* introductory note), this nostalgia becomes a co-optation of Anasazi culture for his own political ends. In the end, such imagining of the Anasazi, in Snyder's work emblematic of "everyNative," does much damage in the way that it serves to perpetuate received stereotypes and formulaic conceptions of modern Native cultures.

A poet like Gary Snyder makes it ever more difficult for Native writers to be read outside the narrow context of nature. Indeed, much of his popularity might consist in the fact that he is a parasite on Native spirituality and that his work concedes to, and advances, the most persistent clichés of *indian* cultures. Not only are various Native cultures' claims to landscapes de-politicized in his hippie-esque emphasis on spirituality and nature-love, but non-Native readers, already long accustomed to cannibalizing *indian* cultures, are lured by the possibility that they, according to the dust jacket of the text, "might [even] become Natives" themselves.

In the wake of appropriations such as Gary Snyder's, a tradition of reading Native American literature as eco-texts alone is born. Writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko or

Linda Hogan²³ are read as eco-poets in a move that re-politicizes their work and submits it to the mantle of nature writing. Indeed, a writer like Silko or Hogan might not object completely to being read as stewards of nature; but it is regrettable that the subsumption of these poets in critical anthologies such as *The Ecocriticism Reader* puts such writers' texts to work in a way that pulls them out of their cultural complexity and original political context. It often appears that such anthologies appropriate *indian* texts because they lend some sort of mystical and mythological credibility that is alluring to the romantic sensibilities of eco-critics and their predominantly non-Native audiences. An eco-criticism reader that includes a Native American text instantly gleans from it a deeply-rooted historical basis for "Barry Commoner's first law of ecology: 'everything's connected to everything else'" (Glotfelty xix).

In the same way that early nationalist texts, like James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, would plunder Native cultures as a means to establish national identities somehow distinct from the colonial powers they just cast off,²⁴ eco-criticisms often appear as little more than parasites on Native texts and cultures, desperately grasping for historical ethos by way of mytho-poetic appropriations bound up in *indian* stereotypes. As a result, entire cultures are put to the service of the eco-critics' search for "an alterNative view of existence that will provide an ethical and conceptual foundation for right relations with the earth" (Glotfelty xxi). In the process of this search, *indian* cultures, regardless of how sympathetically they are treated, are reduced to hyper-natural stewards of the wild lands. It is a shame that a field like eco-criticism, which is becoming so complex in terms of its science, methodologies, and foci, would still permit such cannibalizations of culture to occur in its newly-proliferating discourses.

It is not eco-criticism alone that falls prey to the impulse to romanticize and mythologize *indians'* deeply-rooted and apparently mystical relation to the earth. Even when literary criticism on Native texts moves beyond or aside from nature and landscapes, the phenomenon of the *indian* as natural-man still remains a spectre. It hangs on as an emblematic reference in book titles like *The Nature of Native American Poetry* (my emphasis) that stubbornly cling to invocations of the earthy *indian* and capitalize on the White impulse to see *indians* as always-already natural. It is as if the *indian's* "natural" quality goes without saying. It is naturalized in the popular conception of *indians* through an indefatigable litany of discourses that either posits directly or simply assumes the *indian's* intensified relation to the earth, a relationship that, paradoxically enough, is deemed natural but at the same time immaterial.

Even critical essays on Native American literature and art seem to find much difficulty in sustaining a conversation about the historical materiality of a politicized relationship between *indians* and the land. Kate Morris begins her essay, "Picturing Sovereignty: Landscape in Contemporary Native American Art," by examining the notions of sovereignty and the many political battles being fought by Natives in courts across the hemisphere over land claims. But even with such a beginning she cannot break out of the ideology of the predictable idea about Native art. Hers is an entire essay built on her wonderment at why the expected idea doesn't obtain in the artwork she has seen. She is incredulous that "even in exhibits devoted to the subject of land, there is a dearth of paintings that might reasonably be defined as landscape paintings" (187). How could it possibly be that landscape painting, of all things, could absent itself from *indian*

art—especially given the fact that “a people’s occupation of, and connection to, the land is the defining aspect of the words indigenous, aboriginal, and Native” (ibid.)

In spite of the dearth of landscape paintings in the artworks she reads, Morris is nonetheless able to engage a long discussion of the ways that *indian* landscapes differ from European landscapes. Her first point, in fact, is one worth noting because, while it doesn’t extend far enough to do the political work itself, it still provides us with an avenue for thinking politically about Native representations of the land. Morris maintains that European landscape paintings were, more often than not, tourist art. Landscape painting as a genre had always been an integral part of the “scientific” documentation of exploratory voyages by colonial powers, but it also boomed in the 18th century as part of the “era of the Grand Tour.” The argument is that “landscape paintings were not unlike the spears, shrunken heads, and other trinkets” brought home as souvenirs of travels abroad (189). Given this status of landscape paintings as “tourist art,” it isn’t surprising that there should be no equivalent in the artistic production of Natives. Natives, after all, are not tourists to these lands.

In spite of the uncomfortable desire to naturalize *indian* art, Morris makes a valuable contribution to our thinking of landscape painting when she outlines the three principle functions of landscape art in Europe: as descriptions of unseen lands, as status objects, and as objectifications of possessive desire. In this critique, she demonstrates the way in which landscape paintings were “irrevocably bound to a prevailing historical process: colonialism” (190). Likewise, the land as a figure in Native American art, whether visual art or literature, is also irrevocably bound up in the very same historical process. When the land does arise as a figure, it does so not only as an indication of

some mystical relation to the earth-mother, but as a reminder of a fraught history of dispossession and violence.

Like Morris, the editors of the *Norton Book of Nature Writing*, John Elder and Robert Finch, were amazed at the absence of Native nature writers before N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko. This deficit might well have been taken as evidence of the inadequacy of totalizing conceptions of the nature of *indian* character; but, in spite of their surprise that the expected idea was not fulfilled, they still maintain that it is there, canonizing Momaday and Silko as Nature Writers in the process. The great irony of Elder's and Finch's vision of the *indians'* part in the great quest of "rediscovering our wholeness as beings in nature" (21) is historical. At the same time that the early environmental movement's two "most influential American voices," John Muir and John Burroughs, were writing to preserve a nature threatened by colonial industrialism, what remained of the Native tribes in the United States were in a life or death struggle to retain the western lands promised them by treaty with the U.S. government. If there were no Native Nature Writers before Momaday or Silko, perhaps that is because the Native people were too distracted with their struggles to keep the land to have much time to rhapsodize romantically on it. It was left to other poets to imagine what the *indians* would be writing if they weren't otherwise indisposed; and it is those imaginings that Elder and Finch seek vindication for in the literary record. That their search was somewhat unsuccessful is easily dismissed as a problem of translation rather than a problem of colonial politics and irresponsible representation.

Also like Morris, Elder and Finch develop an "excursionist" thread that seems to bind the very diverse group of American Nature Writers (24). Where Morris relies on the

idea of landscapes as tourist art, Elder and Finch borrow Thoreau's term "excursions" in order to understand the impetus behind much of modern nature writing. The Native writers they canonize in their anthology, of course, fail to fit the model of excursionists. Or, at the very least, to read them as such is to ignore the historical circumstances of colonialism in this hemisphere. When, and if, a Native chooses to write about landscapes, it is immediately invested with a politics unique to Native experiences in the Americas. The political and historical context of such invocations goes well beyond the expectations of the hyper-spiritual naturalism supposed to obtain in *indian* art by some anthologizers of eco-criticism and nature writing.

To somehow imply that Native writers can be included under the aegis of excursionists seems disingenuous given this history. Moreover, the complete surprise at the lack of landscapes in artistic traditions that, by all expectations, should exhibit them belies a representational politics that seems able to understand the *indian* only in terms of nature. So, when Morris declares that it is rare to find political content in Native American landscapes (203), it is perhaps because Native landscapes are always-already political invocations. To elide this fact by emphasizing a mystical relation to the land is an oversight, in more than one sense of the term, which many critics, and most laymen, find it difficult to avoid.

Such elisions are all too common in exegeses of Native literature. In a reading of James Welch's novel, *Fools Crow*, Blanca Chester offers a typically de-politicized reading of *indian* landscapes. Chester develops a telling distinction between the way that Whites and *indians* perceive the landscapes in the novel, asserting finally that the "sense of isolation and alienation from the physical world, Welch implies, is a White dis-ease"

(103). Here, the White characters' dis-ease with the land is read as a simple foil to the *indians'* intimacy with the same earth as though such an idea is important in and of itself. But, Chester misses a great opportunity to use this juxtapositioning of *indian* intimacy and White dis-ease as a politicized critique of colonialism, a critique which is certainly latent in Welch's novel. Instead, Chester wends toward auto-ethnography as a means to understand their difference in affinity for the land.²⁵

Some critics have even gone as far in asserting the natural qualities of the *indian* as to suggest the utter incapacity of *indians* to survive in cities. Contrary to Smelcer's assertion that most of the Native authors he knows "have never been alone in the forest and find nature alien and frightening," William Oandasan maintains that urban spaces are always dislocations for people like Simon Ortiz's Acoma, "who have educated themselves to live in harmony with the land according to tribal ways in a rural environment" (27). Even if the impulse behind them is more sympathetic toward *indian* cultures than has been the case traditionally, such totalizing representations perpetuate the nature-civilization dichotomy of the past few centuries. In reality, Natives can, and do, live in cities and often the social problems they endure in that context could be attributed to more material factors than spiritual dislocation. For example, the realities of poverty, racism, and disparate work skills may have much to do with the problematics of city-living for Natives in the same way that they are problems for many other minority groups. Moreover, many of the social problems associated with Natives living in urban centers obtain on reservations as well; and their origins are at least as much political as they are spiritual. On the other hand, we would do well to remember that many Natives are living out successful and fulfilling lives in urban contexts.

That the *indian* must necessarily enjoy a particularly intense relation to the land is an academic and popular platitude that seems impossible to shirk. It should come as no surprise that this is the case since the most common way of teaching Native literature is to emphasize spiritual naturalism and eco-sensitivity over politics. At times the assumption borders on the ludicrous in the methodologies that are used to teach such literatures. In a context where she is teaching a mixed group of Native and non-Native students, Norma Wilson claims: "I often encourage Native American students to write about their cultures, their stories, *their land*. To be fair to non-Indian students, I also require Native Americans to respond to the literature directly, to demonstrate their reading and understanding of assigned works" (85).

In the literature classroom it is important to give non-Native students every available opportunity to learn about Native cultures. Moreover, structuring the class in this way may well be a productive avenue for engendering realistic exchanges between students. I would imagine, however, that such exchanges would be impossible to avoid in a mixed group in those circumstances; and to maintain a double-standard that "encourages" Native students to write about their land, for example, seems to assume a distinct, special relationship where none may exist at all. The pressure exerted on Native students to write toward the expected idea in the classroom may well do more harm than good. Even the Native students' responses to Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, which are reproduced in Wilson's article, seem less attuned to the "power of the land" (87) than she makes them out to be. If a White student were to have a tortoise-shell comb, or were to die and be buried on a bluff overlooking a river, no special relationship to nature would necessarily be implied. However, when an *indian* has a tortoise-shell

comb, or is buried on a bluff overlooking a river, then those are taken as reified signs of her very special relation to the earth and her sensitivity to natural landscapes.

In his book, *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction*, Robert Nelson also writes about the difficulty of teaching Native American texts to non-Native students who often, if not always, lack the cultural knowledge necessary to access the material. His response is to fall back on the physical landscape as emblematic of identity in order to avoid the problem of inaccessibility on the part of culturally illiterate readers. *Indian* texts can be universally accessed, the argument goes, through the “proposition, generally encoded in many Native American cultural traditions themselves [. . .] that ‘life’ is a ‘property’ of the land as well as of the life forms occupying it” (3). In this scenario, Nelson falls back on the idea of the hyper-natural *indian* as a means to frame his students’ readings of culturally alien texts. I have no doubt that this method often engenders very productive discussions; but Nelson’s tack seems to give way too easily to an unrefined sense of the *indian* as steward of the land. In his class discussions, he prefaces conversations about *indian* attachments to landscapes with a brief history of existential alienation and postmodern angst. *Indian* landscapes, then, present an “old-fashioned looking, but rather potent vaccine [to that alienation and angst]: geographical realism” (6). In Nelson’s scheme, *indians* have maintained, like the faithful primitives they are, a tradition of “literary realism” long abandoned by Euroamerican writing.

In this faithful maintenance of a primeval tradition, Nelson argues that “it was also being maintained by Native storytellers (albeit rarely enough in print) that cultural identities, like individual identities, emerge not from class struggle but rather from the

land” (7). Romantic as such ideas are—and I don’t deny that many Native writers of the mid-twentieth-century might agree with such a statement—the reality of Native identities is not so simple. To thus try to separate class struggle and the land in discussions of Native cultures is a blatant elision of political facts and historical materiality. The truth is that the land itself was always at the very center of class struggles in colonial America, at least as far as Natives were concerned. It isn’t so much that the sum total of Nelson’s reading is wrong or useless; but what is disturbing is the way that such a conception of the land in Native literatures becomes a platitude (or relies on and defaults into a pre-formed platitude) that elides the fraught history and violent politics of the land. In the end, these fraught histories and violent politics had, and still have, as much to do with Native identity formation as any other cultural phenomenon.

In the end, there is something very positive we can glean from Nelson’s emphasis on landscapes. I like the way he re-roots his reading of the novel in actual geographies rather than a mystical or supernatural nature. In the case of *Ceremony*, the actual geographies are Mount Taylor, the red flatlands, Pa’to’ch Butte, and the sandstone mesas of Silko’s home. By underscoring the configuration of the land itself as a means to gain access to the world of the novel, Nelson demystifies Native relations to landscapes, re-grounding his students’ conceptions of Native cultures in real geographies and opening the way for a re-politicized reading of nature in Native literature. Nelson claims:

The existence and shape of this landscape, its text and texture, so to speak, is real in the sense that it can be said to exist outside the subjective consciousness of Tayo, outside the collective consciousness of the People his ceremony will finally redeem, outside the creative consciousness even of the author in charge of fabricating the fiction we read. (13)

Nelson does much to demonstrate that the actual land exists *outside* a great many places; but the fact remains that the land exists *inside* the politics of colonialism and neo-colonialism essential to understanding Native experiences in the U.S. (and even elsewhere in the Americas).

When Nelson explores the idea that Tayo's ceremony of redemption is guided by a "constellation" of events and places (12), it is a rehearsal of the familiar argument that Tayo is charged with bringing the world back into balance through the completion of Betonie's hybrid ceremony. The final act of this ceremony, his recovery of the speckled cattle, is often read in the light of his sexual relationship with the spirit-woman, taken by Nelson as a human avatar of the very land itself (21). What is too often elided in this segment of the novel—what Nelson begins to hint at before quickly moving on to the land-spirit Tayo conjugates with—is the very political nature of his recovery of the lost cattle. The "high fence of heavy-gauge steel mesh with three strands of barbed wire across the top" (qtd in Nelson 20) is much more than a "spiritual counterforce" in the context of the novel. The fence itself, Tayo's crossing that boundary, and the two range-riders he meets, are all emblematic of a historical context that reaches far outside the novel and intersects with the real-life issues of land-theft, land-use, possession, and sovereignty that bear so heavily on Native cultural politics today.

In Nelson's reading, possession itself is a White disease. The "spirit of possession (and hence deprivation)" is, to him, a counterforce of the *indian* ceremony. Such a reading denies possession to the *indian*, then, by denying that the *indian* wants to possess. It may well be that Native cultures had and have a different conception of the land than Whites. The more "communal" sense of possession that is heralded as

characteristic of *indian* cultures may well obtain; but there can be no doubt that there has also always been a clear sense of belonging to a place, a sensitivity to violent encroachments on that space, and a sense of the validity of originary claims to land, along with a keen notion of treaty guarantees that assured Natives free reign over certain areas. It is clear that the idea that Floyd Lee would pay “a thousand dollars a mile to lock the mountain in steel wire to make the land his” (qtd in Nelson 20) is a testament to a history of possession and dispossession of Native lands that forms a fundamental part of the novel as a whole and this section of it in particular.

The uranium mines that appear in the novel also function as real-world reminders of a (neo) colonial experience. Where Nelson reads the segment of the novel that takes place at the Jackpile Mine as emblematic of the conflict between the regenerative and destructive forces both inherent in the earth (34), we might do better to think it in terms of the political contests over land-use rights and sovereignty on the reservations. Aside from its historical use as part of the Manhattan Project and its destiny to participate in the realization of the destructive capacity of the natural world when appropriated for political ends, Jackpile Mine is also an emblem of the exploitation and mistreatment of reservation lands both by the national government and private industry alike.

In an article on Linda Hogan, which I will discuss in more detail later, Emily Hegarty provides a very succinct and telling outline of the condition of this exploitation of Native lands:

Although these are alarming figures for everyone, environmental racism exacerbates Native American concerns. Native American reservation lands, primarily Navajo, contain half of the known uranium deposits in the United States but well over half of the uranium mines. Since the 1960s, improperly disposed radioactive wastes from these mines have seriously contaminated Navajo and Lakota lands and water supplies. The

contamination is increased by nearby nuclear missile sites and alleged nuclear waste dumping by the U.S. military, often on land held to be sacred. A radioactive accident on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico in 1978 caused greater contamination than Three Mile Island. The cancer rate for Navajo teenagers is seventeen times the national average. In Nevada there have been at least one thousand atomic explosions on Shoshone lands. Nor is all the contamination in the western deserts. In upstate New York a leaking Superfund site on reservation land has resulted in a 200 percent greater concentration of PCBs in the breast milk of Mohawk and Akwesasne women than in the general population. (164-5)

These figures, of course, are only a small hint at the reality of environmental racism in Indian Country. Navajo groups, like the Eastern Navajo Dineh Against Uranium Mining, are actively lobbying against federal subsidies for uranium corporations that continue to pollute and poison Native lands (Norrell "Toxic Uranium"). The federal Department of Energy has even admitted to fabricating data in environmental impact studies in order to maintain nuclear waste storage facilities in Nevada (Norrell "Yucca Mountain"). Ian Frazier notes ironically that the BIA funds allotted in 1998 for school repairs and improvements (\$32 million) amount to *almost* enough money to "buy two-thirds of a Nighthawk Stealth airplane" (89), the likes of which are constantly flying low over reservation lands and occasionally crash there, exposing the populations to burning poisons. He notes that the reason so many military bases are close to reservations is that the "same remoteness, emptiness, and general unfarmability that resulted in the reservations being where they are proved ideal for the training purposes of the Army and Air Force" (88). Like Vieques in Puerto Rico, reservations in the United States have been the areas of choice for dumping the nation's toxins and testing the nation's bombs. Native tribes are waging constant battles for the preservation of their lands and health in a

struggle that is more political than spiritualized readings of the *indian* affinity for nature make it seem.

It is in precisely this context that Silko's episode at Jackpile Mine should be read. If the episode represents Tayo's needing to make a choice between annihilation and regeneration as Nelson suggests, then it is also representative of the politics of land-use on reservations and the choice being made already in favor of the annihilation of Native territories by big-business and the national government of the United States. What is read in the novel as a personal reconfiguration of Native identities also resonates outside the context of the novel with real-world conflicts that pertain less to spiritual and romantic affinities for the land than they do with maintaining the health of entire peoples in the face of genocidal environmental racism. Eco-politics, governmental appropriation of lands for military use, and the politics of Native survival are all pivotal discussions that pertain to the landscapes of Silko's novel. But, instead of reading the text in such a way as to make these invocations work politically, we read about "the capacity for love that he [Tayo] has drawn from the land" (Nelson 37).

Silko is probably the most anthologized Native writer today, both in volumes on eco-poetry and nature writing, as well as in "mainstream" anthologies looking to include their token *indian* writer. Aside from the immense popularity of *Ceremony*, among the more widely known of her writings is "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," republished in her collection of non-fiction essays, *Yellow Woman*, as "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories." In the introduction to this volume, Silko is clear about the general politics of her writing. In it she situates her own writing in the context of childhood memories of a land-claims lawsuit filed by the Pueblo against

the state of New Mexico (18-19). She decided to attend law-school herself. Disillusioned by the protracted time it took to settle the claim, by the inadequacy of the settlement itself, and by the “injustice [that] is built into the Anglo-American legal system” (19), Silko decided that “the only way to seek justice was through the power of the stories” (20). Clearly, then, the landscapes invoked in her writing are more than simply spiritual geographies, in spite of the ease with which they might be read as such. The lawyer-side of Silko is acutely aware of the political dimension of landscapes that works as a complement to the spiritual. When she claims later that her book of essays begins with the land, she is not speaking in the reductive spiritual sense (21). Two paragraphs later, she talks of Diego de Landa and the way that the *indian*, in the European mind, was made to be equivalent with the land:

Except for a few fragments, the magnificent folding books of the Maya and Aztec people were destroyed in 1540 by Bishop de Landa, who burned the great libraries of the Americas. Europeans were anxious to be rid of all evidence that Native American cultures were intellectually equal to European cultures; they could then argue to the Pope that these indigenous inhabitants were not fully human and that Europeans were therefore free to do with them *and their land* as they pleased. (21 my italics)²⁶

Clearly Silko is attempting to situate herself, as a Native writer, in dialogue with this long tradition of denigration. For Silko, “the representation or portrayal of Native Americans was politicized from the very beginning and, to this day, remains an explosive political issue” (*Yellow Woman* 22). Moreover, the politics of land, culture, and representation inherent to the European discourses are very much at issue in her texts as well.

In spite of the fact that it is most often anthologized in a romantic fashion as an emblem of the *indian*'s special relationship to the earth, the essay “Interior and Exterior Landscapes” is an excellent instantiation of the politics invested in Silko's work.²⁷ In it,

for example, Silko includes a quick discussion of the importance of deer-hunt stories as more than strictly entertainment. She argues that “these accounts contained information of critical importance about the behavior and migration patterns of mule deer. Hunting stories carefully described key landmarks and the locations of fresh water. Thus, a deer-hunt story might also serve as a map” (32). Likewise, we might also consider Silko’s own fictions as maps, of a sort. They are not only maps of actual geographies, as Nelson so aptly suggests; but they are also maps of Pueblo identity and, more to the point of this argument, are political maps that serve as a mnemonic device for tracing the contours of colonial politics from the Native side. If the Mesa just southeast of Laguna that Silko describes in “Interior and Exterior Landscapes” stands as a physical marker in stories that recall the day Apaches attacked her people, then the landscapes invoked in *Ceremony*, for example, must also stand also as reminders of the fraught politics of contact between Whites and Natives and the extension of those problematic encounters even today.

For Silko, at least, landscapes are always also about the land, and spiritualism is always also about politics. This is why she weaves into her essays recollections of legal battles and assertions that the Pueblo people “have always been extremely reluctant to relinquish their land for dams or highways” (43). Bound up in this reluctance is a long history of illegal appropriations of Pueblo lands and the disastrous effects of the Jackpile mines on what used to be hundreds of acres of orchards and melon patches (44). Silko’s stories tell the tale not only of ecological destruction, lamenting the loss of spiritual landscapes; but they also serve as memoranda for the blatant theft of sovereign territories and corporate exploitation of Native resources. The earth, the landscapes themselves, do contain the memory of communal identities so often emphasized by Native writers and

especially by critics of Native American literature. But they also contain the memories of economic and political incursions into Indian Country as well as the memories of violence, theft, dispossession, and exploitation:

By its very ugliness and by the violence it does to the land, the Jackpile Mine insures that, from now on, it, too, will be included in the vast body of narratives that makes up the history of the Laguna people and the Pueblo landscape. And the description of what the landscape looked like *before* the uranium mining began will always carry considerable impact. (44 italics in original)

Like Silko, Linda Hogan is another poet who gets much attention as an *indian* eco-poet. Because conservationism is a cause very close to her heart, the label is perhaps more appropriately applied to her than to any other Native American writer in the United States. At the same time, it is dangerous to fall into the trap of assuming nature to be her only concern. As Emily Hegarty explains, Linda Hogan forms in her poetry a strong interface between, on the one hand, the politics of genocide and racism in Native America and, on the other, the politics of “extinction posed by the destruction of the global environment” (162). It isn’t that conservationist politics eclipse the politics of Native survival in Hogan’s poetry, making it a matter of co-opting *indian* culture as a front-man for ecological sensitivity. Rather, Hogan’s poetry lives in the nexus between these two politics and advances its own awareness of the articulation between a violent racial history and a politics of the land.

Hegarty herself is very careful not to succumb to the lure of reading Hogan’s eco-poetry as a romanticized, hyper-spiritual attachment to nature. She continually reminds us of the very political disposition of Hogan’s invocations of nature throughout her literary work. When Hegarty reads Hogan’s poem, “The Other Side,” for example, it is with a clear sense that the piece comes as part of a tradition of environmental poetry, but

that its politics is very much Native-centered. Hegarty notes that, in her description of “tainted landscapes” in the poem, “Hogan is determined to speak over the denial that allows [both] physical and cultural destruction to go unchecked” (165). Here, the juxtaposition of the dying landscape against her father’s hospitalization calls to mind the link between cultural genocide and the exploitation of the land. Hogan’s politics is holistic, to be sure; but she doesn’t pirate ancient *indian* cultures—articulated mostly as stereotypes—for the expediencies of eco-politics like Snyder does. Instead, her work treats Native politics and conservationist politics as intertwined aspects of the age-old conflict over the land and the maintenance of culture in the face of colonialism and exploitation.

Much of her work does indeed delve deep into Native American spiritualism, especially as a critique of medical discourses (Hegarty 166), and she does her fair share of rhapsodizing on nature. But, her poetry is clearly more than simply spiritual; it is consciously, rather than symptomatically, political. Hegarty maintains that Hogan’s poetry, like much of Native American writing, “eschews the ‘vanishing Indian’²⁸ and ‘ecological Indian’ stereotypes in favor of addressing the root causes of genocide” (169). In her reading of the poem, “Bees in Transit,” as a comparison between “Osage women murdered for their oil-rich land and doomed bees that have escaped from hives being transported by a truck” (ibid.), Hegarty clearly establishes Hogan’s poetry as a form of resistance to a White politics of erasure and exploitation. It is a form of resistance that is rooted in landscapes of abuse and that displays a historical sense of urgency in the struggle to remedy colonial policies, past and present, bent on the destruction and erasure of Natives and their sovereign spaces. The poetry refuses to elide originary claims to the

land and refuses to permit amnesia of the politics of violence against Natives in favor of spiritualism and a hyper-natural conception of *indian* cultures.

In Hogan's poetry, the line between the spiritual and the political is fungible. She would not likely deny that her writing is infused with a spiritual connection to the places her family has survived and a deep identification with her ancestors and the earth they are a part of. At the same time, the stories her poems tell are clearly about more than that. They also tell the story of political struggle, destruction, violence, and ultimately even survival. In the introductory remarks to her collection, *Red Clay*, Hogan notes that

Our story, of which I am only a small part, is a history both of Oklahoma's Indian Territory and of the hard road of political betrayal that led us here and that led some of us to other lands, places where our uprooted lives have felt broken. It is also the story of an incredible will of survival, how some of us fell through history alive. (1)

The sense of political betrayal noted here is an undercurrent throughout her poetry; and, to trace every instance is a task beyond the scope of anything less than a book-length study. However, by looking at a few poems, beginning with "Going to Town" (11-12), we can glean a clear sense of the politics at work. The story of silences and disappearance haunts the background of this poem. From the two daughters who "ride silent / because the old man has paid [them] / dimes not to speak" to their sense that they are traveling through a dark place "where [they] have disappeared," the poem is one that speaks volumes about a history of erasure and dispossession. The culmination of that history as a history of violence occurs in the penultimate stanza of the poem:

What do we have left
except the mirage of sound,
frogs creaking over the night land.
The black walnut trees are gone,
stolen during the night
and transformed

into the handles of guns. (12)

The great irony is that the disappearing trees, which represent at the same time the violation of the land and the genocide of a people, are industrialized into the very rifles which will be used to kill off the people who are the rightful inhabitants of this land. Here, the holistic sense of nature, the circle that connects all things, is historicized within the context of the various colonial violences of industrialization and genocide. The very next poem in the volume, “Stolen Trees,” replicates the same trope of the trees being slaughtered in order that they might be transformed “into the sleek handles of rifles” (13).

In the poem “Blessing,” Hogan’s analogy between her hospitalized father and an injured animal comes as more than a rhapsody on nature; rather, it is a political invective on the problematic of class and color in United States society:

[. . .]

work he says
all your damned life
and at the end
you don’t even own a piece of land.

Blessed are the rich
for they eat meat every night.
They have already inherited the earth.

[. . .]

Perhaps we can go live in places
a rich man can’t inhabit,
in the sunfish and jackrabbits,
in the cinnamon colored soil,
the land of red grass
and red people
in the valley
of the shadow of Elk
who aren’t there. (30-31)

The incantation that mimics, or mocks, the Biblical blessing comes as a reminder of Cotton Mather’s call for his puritan brethren to “bless” the *indians* with their religion in

repayment for the land that they have stolen.²⁹ In light of a poem such as this one, it is nearly impossible to sustain an argument for Hogan as simply a nature poet or an eco-poet. To do so would ignore the viability of a body of work that functions as a politics of nature and continually reminds its reader of the past, and often present, history of violence bound up in every invocation of nature in Native poetry.

In the volume *Savings*, we find another instance where nature serves as a reminder of “the things that happen” in colonial politics. The poem “All Winter” (6) deploys a nature conceit in order to remind its reader of “the things we might forget.” As a clue to the referent of this mnemonic, we might cull from the poem several keywords that focus the reader’s attention on nature as a vehicle for politics rather than, or in addition to, an essentializing figure in Native history. Those things we might forget are guns (used to kill and colonize on Native lands), buffalo (decimated by White hunters in an attempt to drive Natives off the Plains), vanishing horses (recall Custer’s killing of Black Kettle’s pony herds), and voices gone underground. Hogan’s poetry not only reminds us of those things, but also gives new voice, through a politicized nature, to those “gone underground.”

Not just Nature, as in trees and animals, but landscapes themselves are important political figures in Hogan’s poetry. In *Seeing Through the Sun* Hogan develops a cutting critique of White urbanism and a Euroamerican obsession with possession and allotment of the land through her use of poetic landscapes. In “Heartland” (11), when the narrator hears the muffled voices of Native lands and culture calling out from beneath the concrete buildings and cement walks of the city, we see an urban landscape superimposed on the natural landscape of the Native. This supersession of the urban over the rural in

the poem should be taken less as a nostalgic longing for past times than a criticism of the colonial politics of erasure inherent in the process of writing the new, White, and industrial over the original, indigenous, and natural. Hogan's cityscape in this poem serves as a reminder of industrial colonialism in the same way that Mexico City, that other urban palimpsest, serves as a continual reminder of the great Aztec cities (here Tenochtitlán) on whose ruins the cities of "conquerors" were erected.

Similarly, the poem "Wall Songs" comments on the politics of allotment inherent to the colonial enterprise in the New World. Beginning in the southern jungles, Hogan forms a web among the various natural landscapes that the colonizers rape in their push toward industrialism. By likening the roads they build in jungles to the fences that "rise up like teeth out of the land," Hogan is able to shift her reader's attention to the other walls—the social, racial, and class barriers—that rise up alongside industrial colonialism. She is also able to critique the erasures that seem to inevitably ensue from such colonial ventures by speaking the "voices of [her] evicted grandmothers / walking a death song / a snow song / wrapped in trade cloth / out of the Mississippi." Finally, she invokes the final frontier, that one border which the colonizer has not yet learned to cross and control—her own body: "And the confines of this flesh / were created by my grandfather's song / No Whites May Enter Here."

That Hogan invokes the southern jungles in this poem should come as no surprise given her environmental activism. Her concern, in fact, for indigenous politics across the hemisphere and, indeed, across the globe, is noteworthy. When she edits the volume, *The Sweet Breathing of Plants*, with Brenda Peterson, she is careful to include Latin American women in her section on Native Women as keepers of the plants. Of particular

interest to me is her inclusion of Rigoberta Menchú's³⁰ chapter, "Maize," from *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. Menchú's work is interesting in this context because she also invokes an "indigenous" nature and landscape in that text. Moreover, probably due to the nature of the book itself as an expression of solidarity with the Native struggle in Guatemala's genocidal civil war, the natural landscapes she calls forth are every bit as political as Hogan's. The landscape itself, and especially the *altiplano* Menchú's family calls home, functions as a base for resistance in various ways. Primarily it ensures, to a certain extent, economic and physical survival because it is a place of their own where the community can produce survival and cash crops, even if in limited amounts. Secondly, the land serves as a haven for self-defense against the national military. In the end, the land itself, and their conception of themselves in relation to it, is fundamental in Menchú's text to the indigenous struggle for rights in Guatemala.

For Menchú, the *altiplano* stands very much in opposition to the *finca*, which itself represents hardship and the exploitation of indigenous laborers by the rich landowners. In contradistinction to her professed love for the *altiplano* (25), Menchú recalls her being dragged crying to the *fincas* as a child:

Desde Chiquita, me llevaba mi mamá cargada a la finca. Ella decía que, cuando yo tenía más o menos unos dos años, obligadamente me llevaban al camion porque no querría entrar. Era a la mitad del camino cuando ya me cansaba de tanto llorar, porque me daba miedo. La ida en el camión es de lo que me recuerdo. Es algo para mí que no sabía ni como era y me daba tanta pena porque soy yo una persona que me hace mucho mal el mal olor y todo eso (42).

[From when I was very tiny, my mother used to take me down to the *finca*, wrapped in a shawl on her back. She told me that when I was about two, I had to be carried screaming onto the lorry because I didn't want to go. I was so frightened I didn't stop crying until we were about halfway there. I

remember the journey by lorry very well. I didn't even know what it was, but I knew I hated it because I hate things that smell horrible (21).]

For Menchú, life in the *altiplano* was hard, but happy; and the mountains provided sustenance and succor for her and her community. The harvest ceremonies performed at the end of the planting-year were every bit as much celebrations of nature's bounty as they were articulations of their happiness at not having to once again travel to the *fincas* for work (78).

In this scheme, communalism and the land emerge as fundamental figures in the survival of a disenfranchised people. All of chapter IX in Menchú's biography is ostensibly about the natural world and the Earth-Mother. Yet, the lessons imparted there have everything to do with survival against the backdrop of indigenous oppression. Water and corn are sacred parts of their lives not because they are romantically attached to these natural commodities, but because their very livelihood in the *altiplano* depends on clean water and the crops (80). Menchú herself even has trouble equating such a sense of natural necessities to nature worship: "de que nosotros adoramos, no es que adoremos, sino que respetamos una serie de cosas de la naturaleza" (80; We worship—or rather not worship but respect—a lot of things to do with the natural world, 56). This "respect" for certain things of nature arises from the fact of survival and, at best, any romanticized sense of nature is a reification that arises after the physical fact. You can see in her description of their respect for water that waste and necessity are the primary reasons for their honoring it. Given the context of the oppressive policies of the *Ladinos* and landowners in regard to their indigenous labor, and given the contrast between the *fincas* and the *altiplano* in Menchú's representation, the physical facts behind the Native's relation to the land are also clearly bound up in a colonial politics.

In one of the ceremonies that Menchú describes, the marriage rites, they even invoke the name of Columbus in reference to the colonial tradition that they see as the hallmark moment that led to their current oppressions:

Y hacen un poco un recorrido al tiempo de Colón, donde dicen ‘Nuestros padres fueron violados por los blancos, los pecadores, los asesinos’. Y que nuestros antepasados no tenían la culpa. Nuestros antepasados murieron de hambre porque no les pagaron. Nosotros queremos matar y acabar con esos ejemplos malos que nos vinieron a enseñar y que si no hubiera habido esto, estaríamos juntos, estaríamos iguales y así no sufrirían nuestros hijos ni habría necesidad de que nosotros tuviéramos un mojón de tierra (92).

[They refer back to the time of Columbus and say: ‘Our forefathers were dishonored by the White man—sinners and murderers’; and : ‘It is no the fault of our ancestors. They died from hunger because they weren’t paid. We want to destroy the wicked lessons we were taught by them. If they hadn’t come, we would all be united, equal, and our children would not suffer. We would not have boundaries to our land (67).’]

The land is ceremonial, certainly, and their relation to it is often conceived in spiritual terms; but here at least, with the invocation of the boundary stones, the land emerges as a political figure as well. When we are told later that before Columbus arrived the Natives were much closer to nature, that their medicine was the plants, and that they enjoyed a much closer and friendly relation to the animals (94), it is a political naturalism that contextualizes their relationship to nature within the context of a colonial history, a history of racial violence that still obtains.

In a ceremony that mirrors in many ways the planting ceremony, in which Menchú’s community asks the earth’s permission to sow their crops, they also ask the natural world’s consent to use her as a means of self-defense against the state police (151). This confluence of traditional practices of honoring the earth with the necessities of self-defense of indigenous communities marks an important nodal point in our

discussion of the political function of nature in Native cosmologies. It is insufficient, both in the south and in the north of the American hemisphere, to understand the role of nature as a purely romantic and spiritual figure in the context of indigenous struggles over life and property. In the end, there seems to be less of a tradition of romanticizing the Latin American *indians'* relation to the earth than there is in the North, and especially in the United States. Yet, the invocations of the land that we see emerge in Menchú's biography are parallel in many ways to the cultural invocations of nature inherent to Native literary cultures in North America. In both cases, nature and landscapes figure as dominant motifs in the political lives of the indigenous communities that invoke them in the interest of resistance. It is disappointing that so often the truly political side of Native naturalism goes unremarked while the hyper-spiritual relation to the land remains as an essential emblem of romanticized *indian* identities. This dematerialization of indigenous history functions strategically to render Native claims and political realities immaterial.

Native writers themselves can also be drawn into the trap of feeding, and feeding on, the hysterical tendency to romanticize earth-relations in Native America. Paula Gunn Allen³¹ is a Native writer who receives much attention for her critical and creative work. In her oft anthologized essay, "Iyani: It Goes this Way," she goes to great lengths to establish the very different sensibilities of Whites and Natives in regard to nature:

We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea embedded in Native American life and culture in the Southwest. [. . .] the land is not really the place (separate from ourselves) where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies. It is not a means of survival, a setting for our affairs, a resource on which we draw in order to keep our own act functioning. It is not the ever-present "Other" which supplies us with a sense of "I". It is rather a part of our being, dynamic, significant, real. [. . .] The land is not an image in our eyes but rather it is as truly an integral aspect of our being as we are of its being. And the integral nature of this

fact continues beyond mortal dissolution of bodies—human, beast, or plant. (191)

This representation is an understanding of the land based, ultimately, upon an understanding of what non-Native culture understands about the land. This paragraph belies the dichotomy being constructed between non-Native and Native conceptions of the land that will be taken up by students of *indian* literature, romanticized, and filtered into popular consciousness as another example of the mythologized spiritual relationship between the *indian* and the earth. Here we see the southwest *indians*' relation to nature according to what it is not; and what it is not, is White.

What is most disturbing is not the truth that Allen tries to represent in her discussion of nature, but the way that such representations so easily give way to being read out of their historical and political contexts. Instead of being read as a political opposition, an alterNative to non-Native ways of seeing and acting in the world, which I believe is what it really is, this passage can be readily taken up as proof from the mouth of a Native informant of the already common perception of the *indian* as natural man. But even Allen's dichotomizing Red and White relations to the earth has to be understood from within the matrix of colonial histories. The politics of distinction are politics nonetheless.

In large measure, I think this is why certain Native writers are more popular than others. Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, Linda Hogan, and to a lesser degree today, N. Scott Momaday all enjoy a privileged position in the canon of Native American literature at least in part because it is easy to identify tenets of the expected idea in their work. These writers will probably always be more popular in the mainstream, always appear on more Introduction to Literature syllabi, than a writer like Sherman Alexie, for

example, for two reasons: 1—they are women who inflect their stories with feminine (maybe feminist) politics. With the exception of Momaday, theirs is a female inflected Native Americanness. 2—they write according to the expected idea. I don't want to say that they capitulate to the stereotype, because there is a verifiable referent for their representations and because each of them does much in the way of trying to overturn clichés of the *indian*; but these figures are easily read within and according to the preconditioning of a non-Native audience that is trained to see certain essential things as *indian*. In their appeals to ceremonial spirituality and in their invocations of landscapes and nature, they are *recognizeable* as truly *indian* according to the predispositions and ideological suppositions of a non-Native audience that sees the only authentic *indian* as one who is ceremonial and natural, and, preferably, supernatural. N. Scott Momaday is, perhaps, the other Native writer who comes closest to these appeals, lacking only in regard to gender. A Sherman Alexie, or a Simon Ortiz,³² is relegated to the margins of the margin because they feel the impulse to represent a more realistic and fluid reality than White audiences are willing to admit into their conceptions of *indian* cultures. In short, they are decisive breaks from the fixationalist fantasies of White(r) America. As such, they may become more and more interesting to academics, but remain still on the edges of mainstreamed Native American letters. Myths about *indians* are so pervasive that often Natives are forced to live the myths in order to gain purchase in the broader cultural sphere and as a tactic of survival.

Here, I need to emphasize the fact that I don't have a problem with writers like Linda Hogan, Paula Gunn Allen, or Leslie Marmon Silko representing nature and tradition in Native cultures. Rather, the danger I am identifying lies in the way that these

texts have been, and might still be, consumed according to a historical pattern of fixing the *indian* in nature and denying the entry of economics, history, and politics into conversations about Native landscapes. The issue is less about how these writers represent, because we already know that their representations are always-already political; rather it is about the way they are taken up as representative of certain essentialist elements of *indian* identities. A writer like Sherman Alexie, who is very much interested in writing against the expected idea, is less recognizable as authentically *indian* to non-Native audiences. “If it acts like an *indian*, it must be Indian,” the popular wisdom goes. The question becomes, “what does an *indian* act like?” In the popular conception at least, an *indian* loves nature and landscapes and is obsessed with ceremonial songs. Silko is definitely an *indian*, then, regardless of the revolutionary quality of her songs and their hybrid content. That’s all irrelevant, more or less; what’s important is that she has plenty of songs and nature in her writing.

We can now begin to see the naturalized and naturalizing impulse to read Native texts as purely spiritual as part of a long-standing tradition of reading the Native out of politics and the politics out of the Native. The tragedized and mythologized *indian* is a much easier figure to deal with because such pathos and its depoliticized conceptions offer the non-Native American’s conscience a way of remembering “The Indian” while at the same time forgetting his or her own part in the violences waged against Native people. It is far easier to get lost in the poetic imagery and to imagine a fanciful and romantic attachment to the land in an ahistorical vacuum than it is to face the brutal fact that land was, and still is being, stolen and abused. The process of mythologization allows the non-Native consumer of these texts to sanitize or forget that past, or at least

allows them to reify the *indian*, to expiate their own guilt without any political pressure to do anything about it. In this imagination, the land becomes “landscape,” the natural becomes supernatural, and the political becomes spiritual.

Often it is difficult to tease out what is true about such conceptions of the *indian* as natural man, and what comes down as the legacy of deeply-ingrained traditions. The fact is that Native writers such as Hogan, Silko, Allen, and others who write very emphatically about their own intensely personal relationships to the earth, often only exacerbate the problem of separating the romantic from the real. Does a writer like Allen inhabit the space of the natural Native because it is in her blood to do so (Momaday will argue at times that it is); or does she inhabit that space because it is the space that she has been expected to inhabit by a dominating culture that frames the cultural discourse and its history? Is there a possibility that both can be true?

If the ascription of the part of natural-man to the *indian* is a projection of Europe’s own obsession with nature and the land, and a projection of Euroamerica’s own reversionary impulse encoded in Biblical mythologies of the land, then contemporary Native literature’s taking up that mantle, at least in the early years, could well represent an internalization of those ascriptions over time. But, because of the fact that everybody lives in it, every culture has a way of relating to the land. The Native way of relating to the earth is encoded in a culturally unique way and in the context of a specific colonial history. For non-Native aggressors, that unique relation became, in one moment, cause for castigation and a savaging of the *indian*; in another moment, it became cause for romanticizing the *indian* to similar ends. At the same time, that unique way of relating to nature, whether a position inhabited strategically, inhabited by training, or inherited by

blood, has become a mechanism for resistance for many Natives who would critique or reject the manners of a dominating culture. The phenomenon of nature and landscapes in Native letters is a case where a characteristic common to many cultures has accrued excess political value because of the confluence of various cultural and political discourses bound up in the colonial histories of an entire continent.

What is clear, at the end of all this, is that the image of the “earthy *indian*” is a much more complex figure than is often admitted. Moreover, a sound recognition of the politics of the land is essential to understanding invocations of nature and landscapes within Native literatures of both North and South America. We now have a critical corpus of Native writers in dialogue with the colonial tradition that is substantive enough to support a new reading of Native natures. In order to avoid the perils of denying political agency to writers who demand it from their readers, we must reconfigure our conceptions of the earthy *indian* and Native American relations to the land with the materiality of history and its politics in mind.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ It is only very rarely that anyone actually asks if I am Native; ordinarily people simply assume it. Moreover, this assumption has normally preceded negative reactions, like sending my mother and me away from voting booths or searching my clothes for shoplifted merchandise. Since moving east from South Dakota, the response is generally more positive. For example, on the rare occasion that someone asks after my identity, seldom is the word “Indian” used. The guilt of the term’s historical mis-association apparently weighs too heavily on the White conscience to be brought to mind through use—as though excising the term from our lexicon will also excise the historical violence it calls to mind.

² I’d like to think of Stonehenge in this context. Europe has had its druids and its Stonehenges; but nobody conceives of the European as fixed by those cultural phenomena. I have never told a European person that he/she looked “druidic”; nor have I ever told a Nordic person he/she looked like a Viking.

³ This explosion in Native literary production, its beginnings usually marked with the publication of N. Scott Momaday’s novel, *House Made of Dawn*, was ostensibly the mark of a new era in Native representation. Clearly some ideas took firmer hold and were excised less easily than others. It’s difficult to discount the fact that writers like Momaday were writing from “recovered” traditions, by which I mean that, for them, it was necessary to recover their own Native traditions through research, through academic rather than “cultural” means. This might explain, to a degree, the persistence of certain

ideas even in Native works. In short, they were ideas that were expected, that people were conditioned to see, and writers were conditioned to write.

⁴ See, for example, N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* or Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. I discuss this issue at more length later in this chapter.

⁵ W.S. Penn is descended from the famed Nez Perce, Chief Joseph, and has written several books including *Feathering Custer* (2001), *Telling of the Word: Native American Stories and Art* (2000), *This is the World* (2000), *As We Are Now: Mixed Blood Essays on Identity* (1997), and *All My Sins are Relatives* (1995).

⁶ This is Gerald Vizenor's phrase, and it refers to the "racialist notions and misnomers sustained in archives and lexicons as 'authentic' representations of *indian* cultures" (viii).

⁷ The doctor proclaimed, dramatically, that Chief Joseph had died of a broken heart (Penn 40).

⁸ Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) has been among the most prolific of writers and activists in Native affairs. His books, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969) and *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1973) are foundational texts in Native Studies. Outside of those texts, he has published on virtually every aspect of Native culture and politics in many forums.

⁹ The several ways God appoints the land to His people are such that legitimation after the fact is a simple matter of feeling oneself entitled by the Holy hand of God—which, of course, the Puritans did.

¹⁰ Again, it bears mentioning that this case could never really arise since illegitimate invasions have already been pre-empted by the righteous provision of their claim by God.

¹¹ For more on Winthrop and natural versus civil right see Kadir, especially chapter VI, “Divine Primitives.”

¹² Secretary Carl Schurz, in 1877, avers that “the enjoyment and pride of the individual ownership of property [is] one of the most effective civilizing agencies” (qtd in Otis 5). Furthermore, the act itself clearly states that its enactment is for the purpose of facilitating agricultural husbandry on Native lands:

[. . .] the president of the United States be, and he hereby is, authorized, whenever in his opinion any reservation or any part thereof of such Indians is advantageous for agricultural and grazing purposes, to cause said reservation, or any part thereof, to be surveyed [. . .] to allot the lands in said reservation in severalty to any Indian located thereon [. . .]. (Otis, Appendix A, 177)

Any left over lands, of course, would go up for auction to non-Indian interests.

¹³ Simon Ortiz’s short story, “San Francisco Indians,” interrogates the aberrant nature of popular appropriations of *indian* culture. In the same collection, he explores the complex problematics of representation in such contexts in “You Were Real, the White Radical Said to Me.” This story will be dealt with in more detail in my fourth chapter.

¹⁴ Because of the fraught history of such descriptive characterizations, however, these notions of identity with nature often became self-descriptive as well, opening the way for political resistances rooted in invocations of the natural landscape by Native writers of the 20th century.

¹⁵ Note the redounding theme of the disappearing *indian* in these titles. In these memorializations of the *indian*, every Native, it seems, is the last. For a more in-depth discussion of the Vanishing Indian myth, refer to my second chapter.

¹⁶ Another hallmark of the 20th-century preoccupation with the *indian* is the irrepressible desire on the part of the non-Native (usually White) man to become an Indian. One is hard-pressed to find a film on Native Americans from the past fifteen or twenty years that hasn't made its hero of a White man who becomes, or tries to become, *indian*. More will be said on the issue of White-Indians and "wannabes" in my final chapter.

¹⁷ The films of Sherman Alexie are, of course, exceptions to this rule. But these are independent films and are created with the motive of disrupting these very stereotypes in mind.

¹⁸ In the following chapter, "Divine Primitives," Kadir discusses the manner in which these spiritual justifications are codified in the political realm through legal covenants and compacts. See especially page 160.

¹⁹ See especially John Cotton and his understanding of the several ways that God "makes room" for his people in a new land in "God's Promise to His Plantations." Among the rationalizations is the idea that if the land is not being used according to a Puritan idea of good use, then it is up for grabs.

²⁰ The implication of Diego Durán's argument is that the land can be rightfully taken from the Natives since they, after all, have no more legitimate originary claim to the land than the conquerors.

²¹ Leslie Marmon Silko (Pueblo Laguna) is the author of *Ceremony* (1986), among the most widely read Native novels. In addition to several articles on world events and social issues, she has published several books including *Storyteller* (1981), *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), and *Yellow Woman and the Beauty of Spirit* (1996), and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999).

²² In addition to Silko, other writers have targeted Gary Snyder for his problematic representations of Indians. Most notably Wendy Rose, in “The Great Pretenders: Further Reflections on White Shamanism,” and Ward Churchill, in *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians*.

²³ Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) is a prolific poet, short story writer, and novelist. She is the author of many collections including *The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Memoir* (2001), *The Sweet Breathing of Plants: Women Writing on the Green World* (2001), *Solar Storms: A Novel* (1996), *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (1995), and *Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals* (1998). She is primarily read as a feminist and nature writer.

²⁴ Mário de Andrade’s *Macunaíma* operates in this tradition as well. Though Andrade, unlike Cooper, appropriates Native cultures ironically and with a critical awareness of himself as “cannibal.”

²⁵ This move is not necessarily unwarranted; and I don’t wish to insinuate that what Chester does say is somehow illegitimate. But to thus elide the political nature of Native relations to the land seems somehow unsatisfying in a reading of a text that gives us so much in the way of such critiques.

²⁶ The historical accuracy of Silko's account is off here. In truth, the conquest of Mexico had not yet begun in 1540 and some of her assertions are clearly colored more by political interest than actual fact. This rhetorical inaccuracy only provides further evidence of the politics at stake for Silko.

²⁷ The version of the text I will refer to here is that included in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996). To my knowledge, it is the latest version of the essay to be printed. The essay appeared in more or less the same form under the title, "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination" first in a special issue of *Anteus* (1986) entitled "On Nature," then it is canonized as "Nature Writing" in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing* in 1990, and becomes part of ecocritical theory in 1996, when it is included in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, before appearing in revised form in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (Lioi).

²⁸ I will treat the idea of the vanishing *indian* in more detail in chapter 2.

²⁹ I cite this part of Mather's sermon earlier in this chapter. "[. . .] *OFFEND NOT THE POOR NATIVES*; but as you partake in their *Land* so make them partakers of your *precious faith*; as you reap their *Temporals*, so feed them with your *Spirituals*."

³⁰ Rigoberta Menchú (Quiche/Mayan) won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her activist work on behalf of Guatemalan Natives. She is considered among the most notable activists for Native rights not only in Guatemala, but internationally.

³¹ Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna, Metis, Lebanese) is a writer of both fiction and criticism. An important figure in Native feminism, perhaps most important among her innumerable

writings is *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986).

³² Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) speaks English as a second language. Yet, he is a masterful writer of that language, penning such works as *The Good Rainbow Road* (2004), *Out There Somewhere* (2002), *Men on the Moon* (1999), *After and Before the Lightning* (1994), and more. He is among the most influential of Native writers and is still at work today writing poetry and short stories.

Chapter 2
VANISHING THE INDIAN: THE DISCURSIVE POLITICS OF A DISAPPEARING
ACT

“Face to face we speak together,
But we cannot speak when absent”
—Song of Hiawatha

When I went to the library to do research on the American Indian Movement for a project I was working on, I had no idea that I would have such an informative conversation with my librarian. After thoughtfully examining my stack of books on AIM, and especially the Wounded Knee occupation of the 1970s, she admitted that she was somewhat jealous that I was involved in such fascinating reading. We exchanged a couple of words while she checked my books into the computer system and, as I stowed the newly acquired materials in my bag, she made the most peculiar and ironic statement possible considering the subject of the day’s research: “It’s a shame that their languages are all gone.” It was probably the totalizing quality of her statement that made the most impact and I had to ask exactly what she meant by such a broad claim. She responded only that she felt horrible that both the languages and the very cultures of American *indians* were so irretrievably lost. I tried to explain that, although her guilt and shame over the treatment of *indians* in the United States was certainly warranted, it was perhaps a bit premature to sound the final death knell on the many different civilizations and hundreds of linguistic groups that constitute what are now called American Indians. I assured her that, while there were a few cases of entire language systems having disappeared completely, the fact was that many, if not most, Native languages were being spoken more and more and that one could actually find people, in the Southwest for example, who spoke their indigenous tongue before they learned English. (The Acoma

writer, Simon Ortiz, was the example I gave her as evidence.) Undaunted by what I thought was a more reasonable perspective, my librarian assured me in turn that she had it on good authority—namely, a friend who was a graduate student in linguistics—that their languages and, by extension, their cultures were indeed disappearing, if not already gone.

I left the conversation at that because it appeared that there was little to be gained by arguing the issue further. Indeed, it wasn't until some time later that I really began to reflect on the exchange and recognize the significance her perspective had in historical, cultural, and political terms. The idea that the *indian* (always singular in such representations) has been, or already is, disappearing has been an important cornerstone of White conceptions of *indians* since even before the moment of contact. Moreover, the myth of the Vanishing Indian is not unique to the United States; it has been part and parcel of colonial, expansionist, nationalist, and neo-colonial ideologies throughout the entire hemisphere. The inevitability of the *indian's* passing is a hallmark of his existence that has survived its origins in colonial politics and, by virtue of its repetition in the various American nationalist mythologies of the 19th century, has emerged as a naturalized fact of history. At least as much is evidenced in my librarian's adamant denial of the linguistic, and to a certain extent cultural, vitality of Native cultures today.

My librarian's lament was certainly not the first; furthermore, the others I can think of were clearly more politically motivated denials than hers. I am reminded here of Lewis Cass, speaking on the issue of the Cherokee removal in 1830, who, in spite of his just having entertained evidence to the contrary, still maintained that the *indians* were vanishing:

The Cherokees were “in a state of helpless and hopeless poverty,” all told a “wretched race.” In presuming the official figures on Indian population [which noted both increasing population and wealth among the Cherokee people], he noted that precision was both “unattainable” and, since the principal facts were “indisputable,” quite “unimportant.” “The Indians have gradually decreased since they became first known to the Europeans,” he wrote, and “there is no just reason to believe, that any of the tribes, within the whole extent of our boundary, has been increasing in numbers at any period since they have been known to us.” So well entrenched was the notion of the Vanishing American that Cass simply dismissed the evidence for Cherokee increase with the remark: “That the Indians have diminished, and are diminishing, is known to all who have directed their attention to the subject.” (Dippie 44)

Even as late as 1986, the president of a subcontractor for Mobil Oil Company in Colorado declared the Navajo *indians* “members of the vanquished and inferior race” in a statement in which he refused to recognize the legality of the Navajo Preference in Employment Act of 1985 or, in fact, any of the Navajo Tribal Code (Nichols 206). In both these cases, the politics behind racist assertions of death and disappearance are motivated by land and money. In Cass’s case, it is the relocation of the Cherokee and the appropriation of their land that is at stake and, in the case of the oil man, it is the inconvenience of fair labor practices that occasions such remarks. It is, perhaps, because racisms of this sort are so convenient to pecuniary interests that they have been so persistent in the Americas. (Neo) colonial politics, it seems, is the primary reason that the “mundane truth” of Native vitality “has failed to dislodge a tradition rich in pathos and older than the [American] republic[s]” (Dippie xi).

It is difficult to be surprised by such obstinacy, however, considering that most people rarely read an account of *indians*, especially today, that doesn’t emphasize regression, loss, death, and disappearance. In many cases, the fact of the *indian*’s disappearance is so natural as to only serve as backdrop, an unassailable truth that

warrants little narrative development. Take, for example, the astoundingly popular novel, *Cien años de soledad*, by Gabriel García Márquez. This text is often read as a fictional reflection on the whole of Latin-American history;¹ and, as such, it is a telling reference to the myth of the disappearing *indian*. Barely a presence in García Márquez's history, the *indians*, Cataure and Visitación, are emblematic of a traditional reading of indigeneity in this hemisphere that accentuates a pattern of erasure and displacement. The siblings, a Guajiro prince and princess, arrive in Macondo as they are fleeing an insomnia plague that has been afflicting their people for some years. The most devastating effect of the plague is a loss of memory that culminates in an absence of awareness of one's own being—in short, an erasure of and from history. Tellingly, the *indian* characters themselves seem to fade out of the novel and recede into non-being in a manner emblematic of the receding histories of Native Americans in this hemisphere. What this subplot in the novel represents is an understanding of the continental history of Native Americans that emphasizes recession, absence, displacement, and loss without hope of resistance or recovery.² It is an image of the *indian* as a helpless victim of western progress and the hopeless figure of absence in modernity.

Such ideologies proliferate throughout the hemisphere and its history. In 1891, after the massacre at Wounded Knee, the humorist Bill Nye reflected a traditional public sentiment about the necessary and inevitable disappearance of the *indian* when he made the following prophecy: “Adieu, red brother! You are going to join the Mastadon and the Scthyasaurus” (qtd in Frazier 6). Similarly, in his introduction to her volume of poetry, *Flint and Feather*, the British literary critic, Theodore Watts-Dunton, describes E. Pauline Johnson³ as “daughter of the soil” and “the voice of Red man's Canada.” At the

same time, he insistently eulogizes that Native presence, calling her the poet who will record *for posterity* the *memory* of a “great primeval race now so rapidly vanishing, and of the greater race that has supplanted it.” The use of the present perfect tense, “has supplanted,” denotes an already completed erasure. Like so much of the rhetoric of the conquest, it represents an already-successful eradication of the *indian* always in the past tense. While much damage had certainly been done to Native populations in North America by 1913 when this volume was published, their presence was still more than simply a memory (her writing, at least, should have been evidence of that). Such public declarations of the *indian*’s inevitable demise is emblematic of a tradition in the Americas of thinking the *indian* already dead and gone, the unwitting and innocent victim of an undeniably cruel and equally inevitable destruction at the hands of European immigrants to the New World.

It’s nothing new to say that the destruction of the *indian*—first his physical erasure through genocide, then his assimilation and subsumption into dominating cultures through social programs such as termination or the celebration of *mestizaje*—has been an almost universal project for colonial and so-called postcolonial governments across the history of this hemisphere. Moreover, the idea of the *indian*’s disappearance has formed a major part of nationalist literary ideologies in postcolonial America. In Brazil, the nationalist novel, *Macunaíma*, represents in its last moments the ultimate assimilation of the Native into the manners of Europe. Likewise, *Aves sin nido*, a Latin American novel apparently committed to rectifying the unfair treatment of the indigenous peoples in Peru, clings tenaciously to the idea of assimilation as the key to progress for Natives. In both these texts, in fact, the *indian* is not only to be educated into dominant society, but will

also be bred into dominant society by dilutions of blood that, clearly, will end in the functional disappearance of Native cultures except as spectral myths in the complex of national histories. That these novels advance a more or less positive representation of the *indian* does little to disguise the fact that they imagine, without reservation, the eventual disappearance of indigenous cultures through their assimilation into the manners of the dominating society.

From their beginnings, these vanishing acts were guided by, and were an integral part of, public discourse. The colonial ideologies that worked so hard to produce the various violences of conquest required political and literary discourses as instruments, means by which the public could be drawn into the project of colonialism and by which guilt over such violences could be expiated through their legitimation and naturalization. Karl Kroeber divides the history of White-*indian* relations in the Americas into three phases. The first phase, from 1492 until the mid-19th century, he calls the phase of “conquest and destruction of Native peoples” (2). The next, running from the mid-19th century until the mid-20th century, he calls the ethnological phase, characterized by an obsessive recording of the lost victim of the first phase. The final phase, beginning mid-20th century and including today, he calls “resurgence.” Kroeber is quick to assert that “little need be said about the more than three centuries of conquest and destruction, except that it was, with very few minor exceptions, a process of duplicitous genocide” (3). It is a pity to thus dismiss those important centuries, however, since they represent not merely “a process of duplicitous genocide,” but also because they are the centuries in which the foundations of ideological misrepresentations of *indians*, and especially the myth of the Vanishing Indian, were laid. The strategic misrepresentation of indigenous

peoples—who first stood in the way of European expansion in the New World, and later stood in the way of nationalist expansion during the 19th century—was, and to a certain extent still is an integral part of the colonial process.

My goal in this chapter is three-fold. First, I seek to understand the way that the myth of disappearance served to legitimate attempted genocides by casting the death of the *indian* as inevitable, either as the will of providence, as in the case of early colonial ideologies in both North and South America, or as part of a natural, evolutionary process, as in the case of mid-19th-century nationalist ideologies. Second, I aim to trace the morphology of these political misrepresentations from their origins as the expediencies of expansionist ideologies that in their current manifestations circulate as accepted cultural truths, usually deployed in ignorance of their political genesis. Finally, I shall attempt to resituate contemporary Native struggles within the context of this political history. In other words, to understand the indigenous writing of today as something more than the exoticized and romanticized ministrations of a tragic and still-dying race; rather, to see these discourses as direct, politically charged, responses to the misrepresentations of dominating cultures.

The Myth of the Vanishing Indian is a backdrop, a constant and tactical referent in the many discourses on the indigenous Americas. As such, it is an important figure in the representational contest being waged since the first contact between Europeans and those they would call *indians*. The *indian*, by his very existence, would always be an important presence, even if a ghostly one, in the White imagination; but, almost from the very beginning, it would be a presence in absence. The earliest accounts would posit Native lands as *despoblado*, as *terra nullius* and *vacuum domicilium*, inhabited only by

animals. Successive discourses would predict the inevitable demise of the *indian*, usually as the will of God on behalf of His chosen people. Later discourses would eulogize the *indian* as a means to establish a national identity, and even later discourses would romanticize and eulogize the *indian* as a means to satisfy a desire to behold the exotic. In each of these successive formations, the *indian* has always been a spectral presence in the cultural discourses of the Americas. The *indian* has always been a “visitation,” as the name of García Márquez’s *indian* character in *Cien Años* would have it. Rarely, if ever, in these discourses does the *indian* emerge as a real presence or as a thriving culture.

Gerald Vizenor refers to such discourses as the *simulations* of manifest manners. These simulations in themselves ultimately represent an absence, the absence of the real. The preponderance of discourses that proliferate the delusion of the *indian*⁴ as a doomed race constitutes the *indian*’s destiny of disappearance as real. In the discourses of erasure and displacement, Natives really do disappear. They disappear as real cultures and as real communities and what emerges in their place is that which is not there: the spectral *indian* as a figure of White/European/dominant fantasies. Here, the reality of presence, the reality of real and viable indigenous communities and cultures, is displaced by a discursive reality of death and ghostly haunting. What is most important about this displacement is that it is not an innocent fantasy that is being constructed in the absence of the real. Rather, the fantasy of the *indian*’s disappearance becomes an ideological instrument for the de-realization of a people in real life. It isn’t just that the colonialist mind imagines the *indian* as dead and gone, but historically there have been and still are literal and figurative armies standing ready to make those fantasies a reality.

In this way, the myth of disappearance works not only as justification for violence, but it also makes ready for the *indian's* disappearance beforehand by inuring Europeans to the political fact through discourses that posit genocide as inevitable. During the nationalist era of the 19th century, a similar preparatory logic prevailed. In both cases, the ideological machinery of public discourse works in tandem with the war-machine. The true magic of the Vanishing Indian lies in the way such conceptions paved the way, through discourse, for an attempt on Native lives in reality; and as with any magic, one hand is always at work while the other draws attention to itself.

European accounts of the conquest in Latin America abound with such legerdemain. Among the earliest, and most telling, quests after the origins of the *indians* in New Spain is Diego Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España y Islas de la Tierra Firme* (1581). Here, the intentions of the good friar are clear: to demonstrate that the *indians* in New Spain are not indigenous to that region at all; rather, they are the lost tribes of Israel who commuted to America after the loss of the original promised land. His own summary in the first chapter makes Durán's intentions clear:

1. Para tratar de la cierta y verdadera relación del origen y principio de estas naciones indianas a nosotros tan escondido y dudoso, que para poder poner la mera verdad fuera necesaria alguna revelación divina, o espíritu de Dios que lo enseñara y diera a entender. Empero, faltando éstos, será necesario llegarnos a las sospechas y conjeturas, a la demasiada ocasión que esta gente nos da, con su bajísimo modo y manera de tratar, y de su conversación tan baja, tan propia a la de los judíos, que podríamos ultimadamente afirmar ser naturalmente judíos y gente hebrea. Y creo no incurriría en capital error el que lo afirmase, si considerado su modo de vivir, sus ceremonias, sus ritos y supersticiones, sus agüeros e hipocrecías, tan emparentadas y propias a las de los judíos, que en ninguna cosa difieren. Para probación de lo cual será testigo la Sagrada Escritura, donde clara y abiertamente sacaremos ser verdadera esta opinión, y algunas razones bastantes que para ello daremos (13).

[In order to discuss the real and truthful account of the origin and beginnings of these Indian nations, so mysterious and remote to us, and to discover the real truth about them, some divine revelation or spirit of God would be needed. However, lacking this, it will be necessary to make conjectures and reach conclusions through the many proofs that these people give us with their strange ways and manner of conduct and their lowly conversation, so like that of the Hebrews. Because of their nature we could almost affirm that they are Jews and Hebrew people, and I believe that I would not be committing a great error if I were to state this fact, considering that their way of life, their ceremonies, their rites and superstitions, their omens, and false dealings, so related to and characteristic of those of the Jews. The Holy Scripture is witness of this and we shall use it as our testimony (3).]

The “proofs” provided in the ensuing paragraphs that the *indians* are actually Jews note that they, newly arrived like the Spaniards, came from strange and remote regions; that they, like the Jews in Exodus, made a long and arduous journey to these lands; and that said journey took many years.

Notwithstanding the supreme self-righteousness inherent in Durán’s assumption that it is he, an alien invader to these lands, who is best qualified to tell the “real truth” about the origins of the *indians*, and notwithstanding the fact that such an equation between *indians* and Jews capitalizes on European anti-semitism so as to justify genocidal violence, Durán’s history is an early example of textual erasure. In a curious sleight of hand, Durán proves to the western world that the *indians* are Jews and, therefore, that the *indians*, as Natives, do not exist. This discourse absents the Native not by claiming that they have disappeared, but that they never really existed as such at all. By drawing the *indian* into the mythologies of Judeo-Christian Europe, Durán unseats the originary claims of America’s indigenous inhabitants and underscores the inevitability of their destruction by equating them with the Jews, who must be converted or killed before judgement day (Kadir 179).

Djelal Kadir tells us that one difference between the colonialisms of Spain and England was that “the Catholic Spirituals took the assimilationist tact . . . [while] the Puritans took the ‘eliminationist’ or exclusionary tact.” The result is that the Spanish said much more about *indians* than did the Puritans (178). Yet, as we can see in the example of Diego Durán, what both discursive traditions have in common is the disappearance (as a verb, and as a verbalizing process) of the Native American as such. In the case of Diego Durán, the *indian* is then reconstituted as that which he is not (a Jew) as a means for advancing his destruction and displacement, regardless of what or who the *indian* really is. Moreover, it is precisely this materialist end, appropriation of the land and its resources along with displacement of the Natives, that is obscured in colonial discourses on *indian* origins and later discourses on their “actual” disappearance.

It is important not to trick ourselves into thinking that textual erasures in the Puritan vein, that is to say by simply not mentioning the *indian*, never occurred in Spanish letters, however. Many written accounts of the conquest contain telling omissions that serve to bolster later claims as to the disappearance of the *indian*. In his book, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, Matthew Restall deals, in separate chapters, with two very important misconceptions about *indians* that result from strategic textual omissions. The first of these he calls the myth of the White conquistador. The second, he calls the myth of Native desolation. Both myths interact in such a way as to later legitimate myths of the Vanishing Indian.

The myth of the White conquistador presents us with an all too familiar image: “thousands of Native warriors swarm like bees upon the vastly outnumbered conquistadors, who against all odds fend them off and survive to fight another day”

(Restall 44). Pizarro's conquest of the Incan empire is one example of such myth-making. The difficulty with historical accounts of this part of the conquest, however, is that they tend to ignore the good political fortunes of Pizarro, who advanced into the Andes while the Incan Empire was divided by civil war. In addition, they also tend to ignore the presence of a good number of indigenous allies who are elided from the historical records.

In his *Historia general del Peru* Garcilaso de la Vega relates the entire intrigue of the Incan civil war and Pizarro's place in it. Of particular relevance is his 21st chapter, in which the numbers of Pizarro's soldiers are given in contrast to the men at Atahualpa's command during their first meeting. We learn from El Inca that Pizarro heads 60 horsemen and 100 infantrymen and, in fact, must array them strategically so as to maximize the effect so few men could have on their adversaries. Atahualpa, on the other hand, brings with him four companies of 8,000 men each, for a staggering total of 32,000 men. The ensuing violence is rendered all the more impressive since, in spite of the incredible disproportion in numbers, Pizarro's men are able to hold off the Native onslaught and even successfully kidnap their leader.

Of course, the veracity of such an account must be questioned by any reasonable reader. Even considering that most of the men in Atahualpa's retinue were apparently unarmed, it is fantastic indeed that 160 men could so easily prevail over 32,000.⁵ Clearly, though, what is elided in Garcilaso's account is the presence of Native allies under Pizarro's command.⁶ Though it is uncertain how many Native soldiers may have been in the compound at the time, it is likely that Native allies from the northern reaches of the Incan empire (from Ecuador and northern Peru, for example) numbered in the

thousands. According to Restall, throughout Latin American “the search for Native allies was one of the standard procedures or routines of Spanish conquest activity” (47); yet the so-called histories of the conquest rarely fail to vanish these allies.⁷ It is a great irony that a text whose ostensible goal was to augment Spanish accounts of the conquest of Peru with indigenous sources, which only Garcilaso de la Vega had access to, would render thousands of *indians* invisible in the rhetorical interests of peninsular record-keeping. Such elisions contribute in a significant way to the myth of the Vanishing Indian and its insistent erasure of such unmentionables.

Accounts such as Garcilaso’s contribute to the myth of the Vanishing Indian not only in their refusal to acknowledge the Native’s presence in the conquest, but, more to the point, they propagate what Restall calls the “myth of Native desolation” (102). Garcilaso’s history makes Pizarro’s kidnapping of Atahualpa appear to be the heroic feat of 160 exceptional Spaniards over the seemingly insurmountable forces of a vast, yet ultimately inferior, Native army. That Atahualpa’s retinue was so easily overcome by so small a force validates later conceptions of the conquest as a wholesale slaughter of defenseless *indians* at the hands of Europeans. Acting on the “facts” such discourses provide, and relying as well on the racist and culturalist arrogances of European nations, people begin to “take it for granted that Native cultures were destroyed, unable to withstand the onslaught of European invasion” (Restall 102). In ensuing centuries, the idea of the Natives’ death and disappearance grows tenacious enough to hold sway even in the face of scientific proof and documentary evidence of Native survival.

Even later texts bent on salvaging the *indian* in conquest histories tend to replicate the same mythologies. Restall mentions briefly Miguel León-Portilla’s anthology of

Nahua conquest histories, *Broken Spears* (1962), as an example of a modern text that perpetuates an ancient misconception (101). Because the text has been such an important reference for scholars and students over the past four decades, its focus on “literary remains” (xxviii) rather than living histories ensures that an entire generation will continue in its certainty that *indian* cultures have indeed disappeared for good. His principle contribution with this text is the idea that Native histories are not well known, but are nonetheless plentiful. In other words, these histories are not non-existent, but have simply been ignored. He presents an autopsy on *indian* remains rather than an argument for the continuance of Nahua culture. In the copy of the text I borrowed from the library, a telling emphasis was placed on this very assumption. Among the very few portions of the text underlined by an irresponsible reader was the line describing the most “impressive and tragic” event of Nahua and Mayan history as “the fall of their civilization at the hands of strangers, ending with the destruction of their ancient ways of life” (153). This mundane expression of the effects of ideology on reading praxis underscores the writer’s, and at least one reader’s, sense that “no matter how hard they tried to save themselves, [*indians*] could find no escape” (ix) from their doom.⁸ What is accentuated in León-Portilla’s commentary, and is apparently deduced as well by his reader, is the idea that Aztec cultures of the conquest era represented “the *last phase* of a long cultural sequence” (x my italics). That is to say that, after the conquest is complete, cultural continuity is disrupted and, upon the fall of the Aztec empire, those *indians* that comprised it simply ceased to exist.

Like the colonial histories that León-Portilla’s work purports to counteract, *Broken Spears* is symptomatic of the ideological training of a society that can only

imagine *indians* as dead and gone. In spite of its noteworthy attempt to refocus our histories and scholarship on indigenous accounts of the conquest, it still cannot but participate in the much older process of disappearing the American *indian*. This scholarship lives at the outer reaches of a political representation that has survived itself, that has successfully re-birthed itself to serve nearly five-hundred-years-worth of political expediencies and has now firmly established itself as true mythos, as the stuff of history. The myth of the Natives' eradication is problematic because, as we have seen already, it lent itself all too readily to confirming the projects of violence imagined in Europe and carried out in the New World. Beyond that, it continued to serve, some three-hundred years after Columbus, similar ends for the various nationalisms that would need to co-opt indigenous cultural histories in the interest of unifying nations while at the same time legitimating the theft of Native lands and the genocidal erasure of Native peoples.

James Fenimore Cooper's novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), is often considered among the most representative texts of the expansionist era in the Americas. It earned this reputation by its emphasis on the vanishing point of the frontier and the relentless advance of "civilization" Westward, pushing in front of it both the *indians*—destined all along to make way for the White man—and half-civilized pioneers and woodsmen like Hawkeye, who paradoxically make way for that advance as they retreat before it. It has been noted that in such accounts there are essentially two types of *indians*: the "Red Devil" and the "Noble Savage," each serving its own ends in the romances of Native disappearance. Brian Dippie has this to say about this "polemical" *indian*:

When the Indian is depicted as a red devil, that fiend of the captivity narrative and the frontier romance, his passing is not mourned. "Of such a

race of miscreants we are almost ready to say—‘Perdition catch their souls!’” Joseph C. Hart exclaimed in his 1834 novel *Miriam Coffin*. [. . .] One does, however, mourn the passing of the noble savage. Of “a truly godlike Indian” in *Miriam Coffin*, Hart was willing to say “with fervor—‘REQUIESCAT IN PACE!’” (23)

This bi-polar conception of *indians* seems at times paradoxical; but it is quite common. Moreover, it is easy to account for such oscillating perceptions of the *indian* by noting their authorship by non-Native men with little awareness, and with little desire for true knowledge, about the complexities of Native identities and political positions in colonial contexts. But beyond willful ignorance, the byproduct of cultural arrogance and racist pride, the ambivalent nature of non-Native responses to Natives can be attributed to the complex politics of nationalist expansion in the 19th century. Each image, the Red Devil and the Noble Savage, has its own political context; and, simply put, whether *indians* are devils or noble depends primarily on whether, or how adamantly, they resist domination. More to the point, however, is the fact that regardless of whether they are Red Devils or Noble Savages, the *indians* must disappear. When they are stubborn, subtle, and politically savvy like Magua, then they are damned to perdition. When they are more or less resigned to the fact of their displacement, like Tamenund and Chingachgook, then they are eulogized as the tragic figures of country romance. In either case, inevitable doom is the one common ground between the Delewares and their enemies, the Huron.

Another aspect of the *indian*'s split-identity in the non-Native imagination has to do with the propensity for using the *indian* as a foil to civilization. During the 19th century, what the dominant U.S. national culture labeled “progress” was considered universal (Dippie 29). The *indian* was often seen by that same culture as exactly the

opposite of progressive and, therefore, must retreat before the inexorable push of civilization. The *indian* was imbued with opposite qualities to the White man and so the *indian* must disappear, if not in reality, then in discursive fact. *Indians* must disappear because *indians* are made to represent the symbolic antithesis to White cultural values. *Indians* signify the conflict between the old and the new in a progressive society, the conflict between traditional history and progress, the conflict between stasis and expansion. Real Natives, of course, disappeared in such rehearsals; they were represented as disappearing in discursive simulations, and would in fact be made to disappear in the political violences that ensued.

Even in the instances where the *indian* was used as a method for critiquing progress, he would become an emblem of all that was good, idyllic, and ultimately left behind in the progressive new age. The alcoholic *indian*, still a mainstay of culturalist romances today, would come to symbolize the rough road to civilization and the incapacity of the *indian* to pass along that road successfully. Brian Dippie calls these *indians* a “judgement on New World civilization. The Vanishing Americans in literature were dying not of their own vices, but of the White man’s” (23). In reality, though, neither is true. Because *indians* are nothing more than an emblem in these critiques of progress, the Vanishing Americans in literature do not die of the White man’s vices, but of the White man’s voices. As real as the many attempts at killing off everything Native were in the history of the Americas, the death of the *indian* is only a discursive reality that has taken an impressively strong hold on the popular imagination because it is more comforting than facing the reality of ongoing injustice. Take, for example, the rhetorical and philosophical gymnastics necessary for a perspective like Thomas Jefferson’s in the

19th century: “While they are learning to do better on less land [. . .] our increasing numbers will be calling for more land, and thus a coincidence of interests will be produced between those who have lands to spare, and want other necessities, and those who have such necessities to spare, and want lands” (qtd in Dippie 5). The reason, of course, that *indians* would need less and less land is that they will be systematically eradicated by an expansionist government. Ignoring the real-world political causes of Native regression, and founding his assumptions entirely on the idea of *indians*’ disappearing, Jefferson sets up an equation that is balanced by a decrease for *indians* and an increase for the nation. Jefferson is often ranked among the most optimistic supporters of *indian* rights; and even he could not avoid posing the infirmity of the *indian* in opposition to the vitality of the (White) nation.

Out of these polarizing discourses of the 19th century, *indians* clearly begin to emerge more as representations than as real populations. George Catlin, portrait painter and 19th-century preserver of the *indian*, put it best when he maintained that, although on the verge of extinction, “phoenix-like, they may rise from the ‘stain on a painter’s palette,’ and live again upon canvas, and stand forth for centuries yet to come, the living monuments of a noble race” (qtd in Dippie 27). The blood-stained images on Catlin’s palette, of course, were no more real *indians* than Grant Wood’s *Parson Weem’s Fable* pictured the real Washington.⁹ Both are reifications of iconic objects naturalized as realities through their proliferation as the cultural artifacts of mythical truths. In representations like Catlin’s, which abound in the 19th century and still do so today, the *indian* becomes malleable in a way that real people stubbornly refuse to be, and is often

conveniently depicted in ways that serve the ideological interests of a dominating majority.

Karl Kroeber asserts that “Cooper’s romanticizing of *indians* was entangled with enough realistic criticism of White Americans to dramatize some parts of the essential tragedy of the *indians*’ victimization and that victimization’s countereffects upon the *indians*’ destroyers” (4). Notwithstanding the subconscious perpetuation of the myth of destruction conveyed syntactically in this statement, Kroeber keys us in to a very important aspect of Cooperesque mythologies: namely, that they create the illusion of critique. Romances are great for a guilty conscience if the onus for action, for redress, is defused through the text’s constituting the act as complete. Witness the final words of Chingachgook at the funeral of his son:

“Why do my brothers mourn!” he said, regarding the dark race of dejected warriors by whom he was environed; “Why do my daughters weep! That a young man has gone to the happy hunting-grounds; that a chief has filled his time with honor! He was good; he was dutiful; he was brave. Who can deny it? The Manitou had need of such a warrior, and He has called him away. As for me, the son and the father of Uncas, I am a blazed pine, in a clearing of the pale-faces. My race has gone from the shores of the salt lake, and the hills of the Delewares. But who can say that the Serpent of his tribe has forgotten his wisdom? I am alone—” (423)

A novel like Cooper’s seems to say, “it’s horrible what has been done and we should feel bad about it; but they are all gone now. So, sad as it is, there’s nothing we can do.” Rather than critique, such admissions of national wrongdoing serve more as remorseless time in the confessional, as though speaking out its sins will automatically absolve a nation of them. The novel, in the end, presents no call to action, only the inevitability of the *indian*’s disappearance.

The manner in which the novel's most sympathetic *indian* characters seem to acknowledge the unavoidable nature of the enterprise lends extra credibility to the idea that, sad as it is, the *indian* must go. When Magua petitions Tamenund, the patriarch of the Delewares, for the return of his White prisoners, he mentions Tamenund's people by name. The chief responds, "Who calls upon the children of the Lenape! [. . .] Who speaks of things gone! Does not the egg become a worm—the worm a fly, and perish? Why tell the Delewares of good that is past? Better thank the Manitou for that which remains" (364). In this scenario, as in others in the novel, the supremacy of the Delaware people is no longer in evidence, which serves as a testimony to their fading before the power of the White man. Their ultimate disappearance is not yet come to pass; but Tamenund himself, with all the credibility of a "real" *indian* chieftain, makes clear that such a regression is as inevitable as the life-span of a fly. Later, when he learns the true identity of Magua's captive, Uncas, Tamenund casts his sentiments in terms of the day's now finally having come to night (373). And, even later, at Uncas's funeral, he maintains that the Manitou's face has hidden behind the clouds (413). The last of the great line of Delaware chieftains has been broken.

Cooper's own confusion in this last episode over whether to consider the funeral rites a eulogy or a lamentation is telling (*ibid*). The novel itself is a eulogy of the *indian* insofar as it is the "good speech" said over the corpse; and Uncas's body comes to stand in as the textual remains for entire peoples that must make way in the 19th century for the White man to fulfill his destiny to overrun a continent. Any of the lamentational quality of the novel, and of this scene in particular, is undone by the alimentative nature of the same *indian*'s death. The graves of Natives become the paths which White men will

follow to the western reaches of the continent, the co-opted mythologies of the *indian* will feed the new nation's hunger for an autochthonous identity, and Cooper's novel will be the platter on which such a funeral feast is served up.

Cooper's novel, of course, has its counterparts in Latin America as well. Perhaps foremost among them is the Brazilian novel, *Iracema* (1865), whose author was almost immediately criticized for imitating Cooper when the novel was first published (Lindstrom xiii). In fact, what Cooper's and de Alencar's writing have in common is the search for roots. Both authors pen their mythologies in a period of intense nascent nationalism and each is paving the way for a national identity based on identification with *indians*. Relying on the nationalist theories of Benedict Anderson, Susan Scheckel maintains that the primary problem in the U.S. in the 19th century was where to locate a truly unique and unifying identity:

Envisioning the English as historical forebears would lead to a sense of patricidal guilt, for a patrimony (of nationhood) gained through violence against the fathers could not be considered legitimate. [. . .] the revolution itself, representing a quintessential act of discontinuity with the past, provided [. . .] what many Americans feared would be a legacy of instability and discontinuity: the threat of repeated revolution. Locating the beginnings of nationhood in the recent Revolutionary War still left Americans without that sense of connection to the "immemorial past" which Anderson identifies as so crucial to the idea of the nation (16).

The same held true for nascent nations in South America as well. The similarities in content and execution between Cooper's work and de Alencar's should come as no surprise since the question of origins serves as the primary motivation for both. Interestingly enough, the answer to the question of origins in both cases is the displacement of *indians* and the subsumption of their histories and identities within national mythologies.

In her introduction to an English translation of *Iracema*, Lindstrom claims that “in his Indianist novels, [de Alencar] sought to create allegories of the genesis of the Brazilian people. Indian tribes particular to Brazil were useful in illustrating the uniqueness of national history” (xii). She notes also that, in a bold comparison between de Alencar and Machado de Assis, Gilberto Freyre accords a higher honor to de Alencar as a truly Brazilian writer because his Indigenist focus represents a decisive break from Europe-centered, or “Aryanist,” writing in Brazil (xvi). In this way, the Indigenist movement operates on the shaky ground between visibility and disappearance. While the obsession with *indian* origins and their appropriation in the service of nationalist histories ensures that *indian* cultures will never recede completely into obscurity, those mythopoetic exercises like de Alencar’s at the same time continually constitute the *indian* as a receding presence, as a disappeared and displaced population, and as little more than a spectral heritage of national identity.

If, according to Scheckel, Cooper’s *The Pioneers* (and I would add *Last of the Mohicans*) is “about the desire of 19th-century Americans for an originary myth upon which to found a sense of national identity” (15), then *Iracema* also represents a nationalist myth of origins built on the ghosts of *indians* running from, but never escaping the end of history. In her introduction to the translation, by contrast, Lindstrom describes the novel as a “story of a doomed amorous relationship” (xvi). Such a description is unfortunate because it tends toward eliding the real story the novel represents: the gradual, generational displacement of Natives in the New World. More than simply the tale of a doomed love between Martim and his Tabajara “princess,” the novel tells of a doomed people destined to recede before the presence of a superior,

European cultural power. In fact, both Cooper's and de Alencar's novels desperately need the *indian* to disappear so that he can be replaced by the newly-Native White man.

The final lines of the novel are quite telling in this regard. "Tudo passa sobre a terra" (189; "On earth, all things pass away," 113) is more than a dramatic philosophical statement on love; rather, it is the announcement of the passing of the *indian*, of what came before, and the entrance onto the American scene of a new Native, Martim, and especially his half-breed son, the legacy of the affair between *indian* and White. Iracema herself, an unmistakable anagram for America (the old America), must die in order to make way for the new American. Her passing, and her figuration as an alibi for America itself, comes to embody a history of displacement in the hemisphere: the *indian* dies while the White man, socialized in the manners of the *indian*, and his half-breed child set off for Europe only to return and appropriate not only indigenous cultures and histories, but also Native land, in the interest of building a new nation.

This displacement, of course, requires more than just the death of the *indian*. It also requires that the White man be assimilated into, and adopted by, *indian* culture. Martim, like almost every protagonist of Indianist romances from the 19th century and into today, is just such a White man. Martim's marriage to Iracema is less important in this regard than his relationship with Poti, his Pitiguara friend and adopted blood-brother. It is Poti's friendship that makes possible Martim's adoption into Native society; and it is Poti who officiates the rites that make such an adoption legitimate:

Foi COSTUME da raça, filha de Tupã, que o guerreiro trouxesse no corpo as cores de sua nação. [. . .] O estrangeiro, tendo adotado a pátria da espôsa e do amigo, devia passar por aquela cerimônia, para tornar-se um guerreiro vermelho, filho de Tupã. Nessa intenção fôra Poti se prover dos objetos necessarios. [. . .]

—Meu irmão é um grande guerreiro da nação pitiguara; êle precisa de um nome na língua de sua nação.

—Coatiabo! Exclamou Iracema (153-4).

[It was the custom of the race, the children of Tupã, for the warrior to wear on his body the color of his nation. [. . .] The foreigner, having adopted the homeland of his wife and his friend, must pass through that ceremony in order to become a red warrior, son of Tupã. With that intent, Poti had gone to find the necessary objects. [. . .]

“My brother is a great warrior of the Pitiguara nation: he needs a name in the language of his nation.” [. . .]

“Coatiabo!” exclaimed Iracema (81-2).]

For those of us living in the 21st century, the image is familiar. The non-Native (usually White) adoptee is inducted into Native culture, culminating in his receiving his “Indian name,” thereby laying claim to that culture and any benefits appertaining thereto. Here, legitimacy is lent to the proceedings by their being held under the auspices of Poti and Iracema. Moreover, if Iracema is an embodiment of Native America as a whole, a position vested in her by anagrammatical authority, then Martim, even in his martian name of Old-World warrior, must represent what is still strange to that land, all of Europe. The benefits of his ritual adoption, then, are extended to all those fresh immigrants to the New World who, like Martim, look to conquer and make it their own. Such people are, therefore, by legitimate adoption, beneficiaries not only of a cultural estate but of real estate as well. As is the case with most bequests, the death of the antecedent is a precondition to inheritance.

Poti and Iracema, our antecedents, each die different deaths. While Iracema dies, quite literally, in child birth, Poti’s is a death by assimilation. In the actual history on which the novel is based it is Poti, rather than Martim, who will assimilate. From the novel itself, we come to expect that the adopted brother will be assimilating more to

indian manners. He does, after all, make very touching claims as to his attachment and dedication to all that is Native:

Martim uniu o peito ao peito de Poti.
 —O coração do espôso e do amigo falou por tua bôca. O guerreiro branco é feliz, chefe dos pitiguaras, senhores das praias do mar; a felicidade nasceu para êle na terra das palmeiras, onde recende a baunilha, e foi gerada no sangue de tua raça, que tem no rosto côr do sol. O guerreiro branco não quer mais outra patria senão a pátria de seu filho e de seu coração (151).

[Martim touched his chest to Poti's chest: "The heart of husband and friend have spoken through your mouth. The White warrior is happy, chieftain of the Pitiguaras, lords of the sea beaches; happiness was born for him in the land of the palms, where vanilla perfumes the air; and it was generated in the blood of your race, whose face bears the color of the sun. The White warrior desires no other homeland but that of his son and of his heart" (79).]

Evidently the land itself is more significant than the *patria*, for in the true history Poti will be adopted into the White national culture and will take a Christian name (*Iracema* 192). The discursive reality of the novel, in this case, masks the culturalist realities of actual colonial processes. Much of the colonial projects throughout the New World were founded on the idea of the slow, but inevitable disappearance of the *indian* as such. The idea of disappearance through conversion, assimilation, and dilutions of blood has as its fundamental goal *indian* acculturation, which entails their disappearance as *indian* and their ultimate displacement by Whites, who then assume the status of indigene in the Americas in their place.

In her reading of Cooper's *The Pioneers*, Susan Scheckel demonstrates this displacement of the *indian* quite well. Her claim is that "Cooper attempts to purify the national inheritance of violence and guilt that undermine legitimacy [. . .] through a series of displacements that set the stage for a ritual mourning of the ancestors, both English

and Indian, who willingly bequeathed their authority and property to the new nation” (25). In the novel, Oliver, the White grandson of Major Effingham, who was the adopted son of Chingachgook, protests his claim to lands being appropriated by Judge Temple on the basis of the rights of inheritance (Scheckel 21). The lands were gifted to Effingham by Chingachgook’s tribe and will rightfully pass down to his grandson, Oliver, who now stands in for the *indian* as legitimate claimant to indigenous property. The adopted son phenomenon is almost necessary here because it establishes inherited right, both legal and moral, to appropriated lands. The novel legitimates conquest and appropriation by positing the transfer of lands as not only legal, but with *indians* as voluntary participants in the bequeathing processes.

The problem with such a scheme is that it raises important issues about the legitimacy of Native claims to the land—which were significant political concerns during the time the novel was published. Scheckel claims that Cooper must find some way to contain the threat of violence occasioned by thus acknowledging the legitimacy of Native claims to the land. In this sense, the danger in co-opting *indian* identities in the interest of national unity is that such a move ensures that there will always be a discursive reminder of the violences of conquest and appropriation. The true violence of *indian* removal lies too distinctly behind this façade to be veiled completely and these national romances continually call those violences to mind if one is attentive enough to read beyond the artifice. The guilt of conquest, theft, and attempted genocide is too insistent to disappear; so, the *indians*’ disappearance as an inevitability steps in to compensate for the spectre of guilt that necessarily remains in such historio-cultural appropriations. The disappearance of the *indian*, his ultimate death, is a strategy for defusing the threat to

legitimacy in the nation. Conveniently, the guilty conscience of White America can be eased once it becomes clear that the *indian* is dead and has happily bequeathed his land, his history, and his heritage to the new nation. If they are dead, in the popular imagination at least, then there is no reason not to take up the mythical past, and the lands, that they aren't using anyway.

For this expiation of guilt to take place, however, it is necessary for the discursive reality to firmly take hold in the place of actual truth. In addition to the White displacing the Red in discourse, those very discourses must displace truth in the nation's mind. The gap between historical reality and the discursive "truth" of the *indian*'s disappearance is simply too big to ignore. So, in an astounding display of selective memory and willful ignorance, the myth comes to stand in for history as truth. Paradoxical and fraught as such truth-making enterprises are, they are nonetheless necessary to the nation for maintaining a stable, unified identity in the face of fragmented demographic realities. The practice of making *indian* histories their own has taken on various forms throughout time. We have seen the way that Fray Diego Durán's "history" defuses indigenous claims to territory by making them Jews; through the romantic literatures of the 19th century we have seen Whites become *indian* in order to become Native; but what remains constant in these discourses is that, whether by death, by disappearance, or by rhetorical magic, the Native is no more.¹⁰

After the sentimental eulogizing of the *indian* in tales such as Cooper's and de Alencar's, it was only a matter of time before public attention would turn eventually to salvaging the *indian*. In fact, if the *indian* serves as a foundation for national identity, then the project of rescuing him from oblivion must itself become a national priority. It

might appear at first that the simultaneous disappearing of the *indian* in discourse and his salvation in other discourses is somewhat paradoxical. But, it is important to recognize immediately that it is not actual Natives that are being saved; rather it is the *indian* as archive, as historical source, that must be rescued. In the wake of the romanticizing gestures of obsessed indigenist nationalisms, projects to salvage the *indian* reached a fervent pitch toward the end of the 19th century when anthropologists and artists like George Catlin would turn their attention toward preserving the history of the *indian*. Clearly such movements were less interested in rescuing the Natives as a population of real people from the trials of dispossession and actual oblivion than they were with preserving a historical record of the *indian* (Dippie 27). In many ways, such projects could be considered more a eulogy before the fact than actual recoveries. What's more, the obsessive recording of the *indian* toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries would bring new attention to the myth of the Vanishing Indian and lend it institutional credibility. The literary discourses that would follow, the primary of which we shall explore shortly, lent the myth the celebrity status it needed in order to set itself firmly and irremovably in the public imagination

The ostensibly more objective salvationist projects of anthropologists and other scientists tended to go more or less in hand with those ostensibly more imagiNative discourses like nationalist novels. In fact, scientific inquiry after the *indian*'s condition more often than not underscored the myth of the Vanishing Indian and added to the idea of its inevitability by inscribing it within evolutionary theory. Whereas, at one time, the *indians* were to disappear in obedience to the dictates of Providence and Divine Law, now God himself is displaced and science comes to occupy his throne. Finally, that the

message of the *indian's* demise remains relatively stable and constant through this transfer of power is of signal importance.

Among the most notable seers of the *indian's* demise was the illustrious humanist Comte Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon. Dippie claims that, in his zeal to prove, through observation of the natural world, the innate superiority of Europe over America, “Buffon had cited Indian decline in Spanish America as evidence for his theories that the Native American was congenitally inferior to the European, and, lacking even the desire to propagate, consequently doomed by a sexual inertia that amounted to racial suicide” (33). What at one time was attributed to Divinity by the Puritans, namely the death by plague of thousands of Natives, here is attributed to nature by Buffon. In both cases political and imperial consequences are attributed to natural, or supernatural, causes. In these discourses, it wasn't the Puritans' bringing over European sicknesses, and often purposely infecting *indians* with them through gifts of diseased blankets, that killed off the *indians*, it was God acting on his promise to make way for his chosen people. Likewise, the death of *indians* in Spanish America had nothing to do with warfare and the violences of conquest; rather, they died off so rapidly because nature made it so. The discourses of inevitability attributed to providence and nature what actually resulted from disease, forced labor, and poverty that accompanied incessant defensive wars, displacement, and administrative callousness. Later, these political causes will be mourned, but always with the sense that they were unavoidable and are irreparable. *Indian* deaths are the result of inevitable evolutionary processes out of the control of man and government. These naturalizing claims of emergent sciences are, in part, what authorize Bill Nye's comparison of his “red brother” with the Mastadon and the

Scythaurus, thus casting the massacre at Wounded Knee as the inevitable end of evolution itself (qtd on pg 2). In this way, evolution is posited as a basis for both assimilation and extinction. Science itself serves to reify the myth of disappearance and, in the process, elides the politics of *indian* removal and legitimates genocidal violence. In the progressive atmosphere of the 19th century, evolution carries with it a positive connotation: It isn't wholesale slaughter and blatant land-grabbing after all; it's evolution!

Some time after Buffon, anthro-conservationists sign on. After the Civil War, anthropologists began to sense that their opportunities for field-study on Native cultures were waning. Operating on the warnings of notable figures such as Lewis Henry Morgan and Daniel Wilson, a new move toward preserving the disappearing *indian* cultures of the United States got underway. The impetus for this new dedication had its origins in the fear of the *indians'* disappearance (Dippie 229). Morgan himself would lament that "the ethnic life of the *indian* tribes is declining under the influence of American civilization, their arts and languages are disappearing, and their institutions are dissolving" (qtd in Dippie 229). The thinking went that it was necessary to rescue Native artifacts, histories, and records of *indian* cultures because in a very short time those things would all cease to exist. While the army was moving in, intent on eradicating the *indian*, and "friends of the Indian" were intent on his assimilation, anthropologists were moving in, intent on preserving the *indian* as museological specimen and as part of an archival record.

Part and parcel of this new anthropological focus was the assumption that any change in Native cultures was negative. Franz Boas lamented the "decaying" state of Native languages and almost everyone else in the national majority would follow suit.

As Dippie argues, “the emotive language of decay and death set a tone in perfect harmony with popular opinion” (233). Such an emphasis, made all the more attractive because of its tragic romance, belies that age-old assumption that the *indian* is the exact opposite of civilized and progressive. The *indian* is a fixed category—an immutable object—so that adaptation renders him no longer *indian* at all. This conception holds to the extent that, even today, it is difficult for people to imagine an *indian* adapting and surviving without lamenting that adaptation as a loss of cultural identity. Another myth claims that there are no urban Natives today, for example, because *indians*, by definition, are not urban animals.¹¹ Rarely has there ever been a sense in the popular discourse that Natives could be progressive, that *indians* could or should adopt and adapt. The ethnic life is the only life for an *indian*, after all; and if not ethnic and exotic, then he isn’t *indian* at all.

While in the context of anthropological rescue missions assimilation represents an irrecoverable loss of culture, the idea of assimilation as death was a cornerstone of policy on *indian* education from very early on. In order for unity and harmony to obtain in the nation the disappearance of the *indian* was necessary. However, as Jean-Jacque Simard tells us, “it was not as *people* that the Indians had to go [. . .] but as *Natives*” (italics in original 337). As we are well aware, “going as Natives” often meant eradication by the military machine; but, just as often it meant being assimilated into White(r) society, it meant being, as first-nations, transformed so that new nations could be raised. In many perspectives assimilation or removal were seen more as euthanasia than anything else. Commenting on the idea of repealing the Indian Civilization Act of 1819, the Committee on Indian Affairs maintained that

Such is their condition, at present, that they must be civilized or exterminated; no other alternative exists. He must be worse than a savage, who can view, with cold indifference, an exterminating policy. All desire their prosperity, and wish to see them brought within the pale of civilization (qtd in Dippie 55).

When *indians* were thus given the choice of either civilizing or being exterminated, the civilization project appeared to be the most appealing. (However, the exterminationist policy was not yet given up for good as many of the Native massacres we remember today occurred since 1821 when this report was given.) In this sense, in order to avoid being killed as a person, the *indian* must die as an *indian*; or, as the once-popular saying goes, “kill the Indian, save the man.”

Once the inevitability of the *indian*'s demise is accepted, then removal and assimilation become sound policies. As solutions to the problem of violence, each has its own logical merit. Of the two, removal, of course, is the most expedient. Why assimilate, after all, if the *indian* is only going to die. Rather, it makes more sense to move the *indian* out of the way and let him waste away in peace while the nation continues to “progress” on Native lands, also peacefully now that the *indian* is no more. The idea of the *indian*'s inevitable death gives removal a “humanitarian veneer” (Dippie 71). The reservation system itself, then, serves the dual purpose of getting the *indian* out of the nation's way while also, ostensibly, offering him a place of peace and repose. Of course, the nation's rapacity for more and more land rendered such peaceful repose a fantasy; but at the start of the 19th century the idea of removal seemed appealing to most Whites, and to some Natives as well. So, reservations were located, in the beginning at least, well “away from the main immigrant trails and mining areas” (Nichols 152) and on land for which the government didn't foresee an immediate need. These locations, in the

southwest and Dakota, otherwise known as Indian Country, were convenient for three primary reasons. First of all, it was worthless land, or at least the government saw it as such at the time. Second, *indians* could be controlled better if they were secluded and contained. Finally, it was best if the *indians* remained unseen by settlers. The reservation system, in this way, went far toward advancing the notion of the Vanishing Indian because it ensured that Natives would remain, for the most part, unnoticed by a majority of citizens in the United States. Being out of sight would put *indians* out of mind, making way for a variety of discourses that consummated *indians'* disappearance altogether.¹²

Taking their cue from the anthropologists at work in the field salvaging *indian* cultures, artists would also dedicate themselves to the project of ensuring the *indian* his extension into the next generation, as artifactual evidence of a dead heritage at least. Among the most romanticized, and wildly popular, images of the Vanishing Indian is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. This "epic" poem, first published in 1855, did much to advance the misapprehensions of a society whose romantic obsession with the American *indian* would soon border on psychosis. It is true, that because the poem is first seen during a period in U.S. History when politicians and settlers were particularly hostile toward *indian*, it was greeted with reservation at first. Nonetheless, it didn't take long before the irresistible pull of the noble savage seduced the imagination of an entire country (Jones). Much of the seductive quality of the verse, in fact, lies in the poet's artful manipulation of the *indian* as a typology rather than a living entity. The "Introductory Note" to the 1968 Doubleday edition of the poem comments on both Longfellow's and his illustrator's talent in this regard:

For as Mr. Longfellow was more careful of the Indian type than exact in a consistent portraiture of one personage, and used his imagination to emphasize the central truths of his poetic interpretation of Indian life, rather than sought to follow scrupulously the lines of the archeologist, so the artist, reading the poem, has made a series of pictures which have a basis of reality from his long and close study of the Indian in many situations, but sometimes are fanciful in their treatment (x-xi).

What is intended here as an apology, or justification, for poetic license is in reality an alibi for telling lies and advancing stereotypes. Under the banner of sympathy, the poet and his illustrator are complicit in the discursive processes of erasure. That the “Introductory Note” is adamant about the illustrator’s and the poet’s long study of the *indian* (it is mentioned in other places than this) belies not only the artists’ disingenuous treatment of *indians*—if they truly were students of *indian* culture, then they ought to have known better—but also the 20th-century editor’s guilty concern over the manipulation of a culture within the romantic discourses of America’s literatures.

In the case of “Hiawatha,” we will see that the “central truths” of the poet’s imagination do much to originate and protract the many myths about *indian* cultures, foremost among them being the myth of the Vanishing Indian. Hiawatha serves as the *indian* everyman in the poem, his fate and his feats representing the collective fortunes of his people. Gitche Manito, Longfellow’s version of the Great Spirit, tells the *indian* people that Hiawatha is sent as their prophet, advising them that their destiny is attached to his:

“I will send a prophet to you,
A deliverer of the nations,
Who shall guide you and shall teach you,
Who shall toil and suffer with you.
If you listen to his counsels,
You will multiply and prosper;
If his warnings pass unheeded,
You will fade away and perish (11).

Thus constituted as the *indian* Christ, we know from this moment in the piece that Hiawatha must be sacrificed before the poem is through. In fact, the poem builds toward that final moment where Hiawatha will indeed disappear, simply moving west and leaving his people in the hands of the missionaries, their new protectors (225-6).

Hiawatha's two friends, Chibiabos and Kwasind, are pivotal to the poem's progression toward recession. They both die in the course of the poem; and the loss of Hiawatha's friends foreshadows his own fate and the fate of his people, marking the imminent decline of *indian* culture. In the chapter titled "The Famine" his wife, Minnehaha, dies as well, a victim of the famine and fever plaguing his people. We find also that, soon after, Hiawatha himself will follow:

Soon my task will be completed,
 Soon your footsteps shall I follow
 To the Islands of the Blessed,
 To the Kingdom of Ponemah,
 To the land of the Hereafter (207).

Curiously enough, the land of the hereafter is apparently in the west, whence Hiawatha will remove in the final strains of the song. The west, not coincidentally, is constituted as the resting place of the *indian* in a discursive move that is sure to resonate with the removalist instincts of the poem's 19th-century audience. The romance of the poem parallels the actual removal of *indians* to the west in the expansionist period of the 19th century.

This removal, or regression, is foreseen by Iagoo, the storyteller. Presaging the appearance of European explorers, Iagoo tells the story of his having traveled to see the ocean and upon it great ships belching thunder and lightning. Within those ships come a hundred warriors with hairy chins and White-painted faces. The people to whom he

relates his tale are unbelieving until Hiawatha intervenes with an account of his vision, from the Gitche Manito, of the White-men's presence (215). His advice is to befriend the White men; but his vision also includes the inevitability of the *indian's* recession before their advance:

"I beheld, too, in that vision
 All the secrets of the future,
 Of the distant days that shall be.
 I beheld the westward marches
 Of the unknown, crowded nations.
 All the land was full of people,
 Restless, struggling, toiling, striving,
 Speaking many tongues, yet feeling
 But one heart beat in their bosoms
 [. . .]
 Then a darker, drearier vision
 Passed before me, vague and cloud-like;
 I beheld our nation scattered,
 All forgotten of my counsels,
 Weakened, warring with each other:
 Saw the remnants of our people
 Sweeping westward, wild and woful,
 Like the cloud-rack of a tempest,
 Like the withered leaves of Autumn!" (216)

Thus, Longfellow masks the violent realities of *indian* removal within the romance of their own mythologies. Hiawatha's vision establishes an air of authenticity and inevitability in the advance of Europeans in the "New World" as well as the retreat and ultimate doom of the *indian*. In the complex of New World mythologies, it is significant that not only has the Christian God dictated the recession of the *indian*; but Gitche Manito has decreed it as well. And who, after all, can argue with the dictates of two divine ordinations in agreement.

In many ways, the primary goal of Longfellow's poem was the preservation of an *indian* heritage for the nation. In this light, the chapter "Picture Writing" is an important

figure in the myth of disappearance as it is redacted in this text. There, Hiawatha laments the fact that the dead of his people have no signs painted on their graves marking who they were. More than that, he is concerned with the fact that the dead have no mechanism by which to ensure that their voices live on in posterity (143). Although Hiawatha invents a system of writing in response to this concern, it is Longfellow's poem that is to actually ensure the *indian* a life beyond death. That the primary function of writing within the poem is to mark the graves of the departed is of signal importance, for it is the poem itself that marks the graves of Longfellow's dead *indians*. The poem, then, identifies and preserves certain *indian* types, thus destined to become stereotypes of the *indian*. The surviving *indian* heritage, ensured by the poem's inscription, inscribes the myth of disappearance as a *fait accompli* and as historical reality.

Some years after Longfellow's poem, and especially during the 1890s, there is an explosion in *indian* presence throughout the Americas. The problem, of course, is that, like in Longfellow's poem, the *indian* will only enjoy a presence in absence. This is to say that the *indian* will remain a receding figure in the newly prolific artistic discourses on his culture. In addition to the many anthropological studies, a preponderance of both stationary and traveling exhibits, public parades, works of art, and fictional accounts all focused on *indian* cultures spring up across the hemisphere and, in all of this, the Native disappears as a real, living entity and re-emerges as a discursive form. Moreover, this discursive form usually appears in the same guise as a spectral image, always vanishing, receding inevitably into the past, a relic of a lost, romantic age preserved only in mythical histories as the basis for leisure reading and a foundational identity for the nation.

The massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 was considered by most to be the end of Native resistance. As such, after that event, the nation was free to think of the *indian* in purely romantic terms. No more would a poem like Longfellow's have to be received with austerity because it was too sympathetic toward a population who stood in obstinate opposition to the nation's continual appropriation of their land. The ostensible end of systematized violence at Wounded Knee did not mean the end of the *indian's* disappearance, however. In fact, it is in the moments around the turn of the century that the true paradox of the myth begins to emerge more strongly. In the earlier three-quarters or so of the 19th century, there was a true political motivation behind constituting the disappearance of the *indian*. The *indian* had to disappear in order to make way for White(r) men, in order to make way for a rapidly expanding nation. Moreover, the *indian's* eradication in reality was made inevitable by his discursive disappearance. By the end of the 19th century, however, those politics were moot. It was no longer an issue of needing to make way; so, the artistic mind was now free to immerse itself in the sheer romance of the *indian* eulogy and the exoticism of an Other culture. The artists' enclaves at Taos, New Mexico, the photography of men like Edward Curtis, and the novels of writers like Zane Grey would ensure that the romance of the disappearing *indian* would not die out even after national politics no longer required it.

Primary among these early 20th-century figurers of the *indian* was Dr. Joseph K. Dixon, who published his pseudo-history of the *indians*, *The Vanishing Race*, in 1913. The text itself is a record of the last great Indian Council, which included representatives from nearly every reservation in the U.S. The book records the speeches made by those chiefs, stories from their lives, and supplemental introductory materials from Dixon

himself. I call Dixon's text a pseudo-history because the volume is not a simple transcription of the event, but a poetic re-rendering of it. Therefore, even though much of what is recorded there is quoted directly from the sources present, much is also embellished and glossed (over) by the author himself. Of particular concern in this regard is the introductory chapter, "Indian Imprints: A Glimpse Backward," which frames the historical content of the text, and the final chapter, "The Farewell of the Chiefs," which describes, in excessively romantic and over-sentimentalized terms, the parting ritual of the participants.

The dedication and concept of the book should serve as the most potent foreshadowing of things to come. In his dedication, the author constitutes his "brother the Indian" as "now a tragic soul haunting the shores of the western ocean." To thus begin a record of the *indian* is to constitute him, from the outset, as finished already. Even as the words are committed to the page, the historical figures they describe are no more. They have sung their last farewell and are already ghosts. Immediately following the contents pages is "The Concept," written by Rodman Wanamaker, who is responsible for the photographs that accompany the text. There we learn that the goal of the book is to preserve the history of the *indian* as a token to U.S. unity. The council included 32 Native chiefs in a public event marking Washington's birthday, dedicating an *indian* memorial to be erected in New York Harbor (Concept). Wanamaker's description goes as follows:

Here, under the blessing of God, on the shores of our beloved country, where the red man first gave welcome to the White man, this Memorial will stand in eternal bronze, in memory of a noble, though vanishing race, and a token to all the world of the one and indivisible citizenship of these United States (Concept).

Amid the blazing irony of this statement is the fact that Natives had not yet even been granted full and automatic citizenship to the nation (that wouldn't happen until 1924). Beyond that, it is unclear whether it is the statue itself, or this text, or both, that is to serve as the memorial of the now vanishing *indians*. Upon reading such a clear and unbridled enthusiasm for the death of the *indian*, it's difficult not to wonder whether the chiefs present thought of the proceedings as anything but ironic while they "hoisted the American flag, the first time in their history" (Concept).

What follows the dedication and concept of the book is no less elegiac. The "glimpse backward" begins with a romantic vision into the "immemorial past" that is the constituent present of the *indian*:

We are exchanging salutations with the uncalendared ages of the red man.
We are measuring footsteps with moccasined feet whose trail leads along
the receding sands of the western ocean. A bit of red colour set in
immemorial time, now a silent sentinel, weeping unshed tears with eyes
peering into a pitiless desert.

[. . .]

We have come to the day of audit. Annihilation is not a cheerful word, but
it is coined from the alphabet of Indian life and heralds the infinite pathos
of a vanishing race. We are at the end of historical origins. The
impression is profound (3).

One cannot help but admire the pathos of the author's language; and what is even more impressive is the fact that such a highly sentimental tone can be maintained for so many pages without ever sinking out of the romantic heights of elegiac myth. Annihilation is not a cheerful word; but its alphabet is a roman one and this text constitutes it, once and for all, as a finished event. The occasional critiques of conquest that emerge in the text are acceptable because, on the whole, they are depicted as completed events, tragic and irreparable. When the author beholds "a dead sea of men under the empty and silent morning, a hollow land into which have flowed thousands upon thousands—at last the

echo of a child's cry" (4), it is clear that it is not the "morning" but his mourning that is "empty and silent." The violences of annihilation, wrought from the alphabet of a nation bent on land-theft and cultural supremacy, are inscribed here as not simply inevitable, but already finished. They, like the *indians* the book describes, are nothing more than memories, empty and silent.

"Farewell to the Chiefs" is the coda referring the reader back to the incipient eulogy of the introductory chapter. As if the echo of the child's cry in the first chapter were not enough to make clear the disappearance of the *indian*, we find here his "muffled footfalls reaching beyond the margin of an echo" (222). The final words of Dixon's eulogy reiterate and re-inscribe the romance of recession, sending the *indian* even further into oblivion than simple mourning can, and itself echoing the text's incipient encomium. The echoes in the first and last chapters are of signal importance for two reasons. First, if something is repeated often enough, and with enough grace, then people will believe it. Second, the echo of Dixon's voice throws the irony of his own call to silence into sharp and ironic relief. While watching the chiefs say their final farewells, the author maintains that "to utter a word would be profanation" (212). Yet throughout the introduction and the conclusion he utters thousands of words in one of the most profane pieces of ideologically debased sentimentalism witnessed in American public discourse. In this way, the text participates in, and perpetuates, a characterization of *indians* that is often violent, always irresponsible, and ensures that such profanation will "echo in the tomb of time" (3).

Twelve years later, Zane Grey would add to this reverberation with the publication of his novel, *The Vanishing American* (1925).¹³ The novel is, in fact, quite

overt in its critique of *indian* affairs, and especially the corruption of White officials on the reservation. However, as the title denotes, such criticism comes at a cost. Grey's book simply refuses to function without the added tragedy of the Vanishing Indian scheme; and, again, any critique that is leveled is defused by the text's insistence on the fact of the *indians'* inevitable disappearance. At its core, Grey's story contains two moralities that are mutually exclusive. It is a text that cannot come to terms with itself. On the one side, the novel is clear in its displeasure with missionaries and government officials like Blucher and Morgan. But, on the other, it maintains the inevitability of political and racial corruption in Indian Country. In the end, the corruptibility of the administration is left more or less intact and the real victory of Nophiae's struggle is that he finally settles the interior conflict between his *indian* heritage and his White education and acculturation. This anagnorisis, of course, occurs on his death bed, just as "the last flickering of his spirit" fades away (328). In other instances like this one, the fact of the *indian's* disappearance is amplified on virtually every page of the novel. Tracing out every reference would be a daunting, protracted, and in the end excessive task indeed. But an examination of three of the novel's main characters, Mrs. Withers, Marian, and Nophiae himself, should suffice to point up the persistence of the Vanishing Indian theme over and against the ostensible criticisms the book attempts to level at White authorities.

Though she is allowed few lines relative to other characters in the novel, Mrs. Withers is nonetheless a central figure. As a committed "noble friend of the Indians" (43), and an experienced resident of the reservation who possesses a unique intimacy with its Other inhabitants, she provides the reader with a unique insight into the *indian* condition. It is clear that the author wants his reader to sympathize with this character

and he uses her as a mouthpiece, of sorts, from which to voice certain philanthropic ideas on *indian* affairs. This philanthropic sentiment embodied by Mrs. Withers, like most philanthropy, unfortunately condescends at times¹⁴ and, in the end, capitulates to the inevitability of her wards' demise. It is Mrs. Withers, in fact, who first educates Marian on the ways and manners of the *indians* and the nature of reservation life:

“Listen. All my life I’ve been among the Indians,” said Mrs. Withers, in her low voice. “I loved Indians when I was a child. I’ve been here in this wild country for many years. It takes years of kindness to study and to understand the Indian These Indians here have come to care for me. [. . .] And the more I learn of them the more I love and respect them. Indians are not what they appear to most White people. They are children of nature. They have noble hearts and beautiful minds. They have criminals among them, but in much less proportions than have the White race. The song of Hiawatha is true—true for all Indians. They live in the mystic world of enchantment people [sic] by spirits, voices, music, whisperings of God, eternal and everlasting immortality. They are as simple as little children. They personify everything. With them all is symbolic.”

[. . .]

“For a good many years, this remote part of the Indian country was far out of the way of White men. Thus the demoralization and degradation of the Indian was retarded, so far as this particular tribe is concerned. This Nopah tribe is the proudest, most intelligent, most numerous, and the wealthiest tribe left in the United States. So-called civilization has not yet reached Kaidab. But it is coming. I feel the next few years will go hard with the Indian—perhaps decide his fate” (42-3).

If we accept Mrs. Withers’s description of the noble Nopah savage, and her ironic assertion that Longfellow’s typology holds true for every *indian*, then it is also true that the *indian* cannot survive. Her beloved Nopah will inevitably suffer at the hands of an ever-advancing civilization. Heartbreak is inevitable and, as we learn from Mrs. Withers, “when an Indian’s heart breaks he dies” (44). His fate has been decided.

Marian herself will soon come to possess the intimate knowledge that Mrs. Withers has of the *indian* people. She too will grow to be the mystical White priestess

and guardian of the *indian*, possessed of a Native knowledge of the Native in spite of her skin. Of course, her cultural predisposition toward romanticizing the *indian* (inherited, no doubt, from the author's own) manifests itself in a fascination with forecasting his doom. The idea that these two women, outsiders in the beginning, could somehow come to be almost *indian* themselves is curious. Apparently, a quick love relationship with Nophaie at a boarding school in the east is the only prerequisite to becoming a woman who "loved and knew the souls and lives of Indians" (53). Likewise, the fact that, after one visit to the canyon home of her lover, she is possessed of "the knowledge of this lonely and beautiful land, seen through the eyes and soul of an Indian" (85) gives her perspective on the *indians'* ultimate death an air of authority. Like Mrs. Withers, Marian will speak from within the guise of Native knowledge and predict the inexorable debasement and death of the *indian*.

Almost every sentiment that we learn of in regard to Marian, in fact, portends tragedy. Her love relationship with Nophaie is based on the constant sense of imminent loss. She is in love, no doubt; Nophaie "satisfied some long unknown yearning in Marian's heart" after all. But the fact that "even the suggestion of the tragic was not discordant" with that fulfillment signals that a sense of misfortune is a foundational component of her love (84). At their first reunion in the novel, there is already a sense of sadness and separation for Marian. After a long day, Nophaie said good-night and "vanished from sight" (89) in a way clearly intended as emblematic of the novel's title, *The Vanishing American*. Marian is, from the very beginning, already resigned to Nophaie's death, to his being "nailed to his Indian martyrdom" (*ibid.*).¹⁵ Like her Biblical namesake, Marian is willing to give up her love for the salvation of his people.

But salvation in this case is already impossible, for already “in Nophaie’s look and voice, and the condition he confessed, she had read catastrophe for the Indian” (89). By now, it should be clear that the confusion over whether “the Indian” refers to Nophaie alone or to “the Indian” in general is not coincidental. Like Hiawatha in Longfellow’s poem, Nophaie comes to stand in for every *indian*, whose lamentable destiny is recession and death. Meditating on the strange landscape of her lover’s home, Marian “cried out in pity for the Indians [this time in plural] that *must* be driven from this world, so still, so solemn, so awful, yet a refuge and an abode of life” (106 my italics). Clearly Marian refers not to a single *indian* here, but to all *indians*. Moreover, the “world” to which she refers means more than simply the reservation itself, but also represents the world as a whole, which every *indian* is doomed to be driven from. In moments such as these, tragedy becomes inevitable in the proleptic workings of the fiction itself, and Marian takes the position of seer alongside Mrs. Withers, presaging the inevitable disappearance of the *indian*.

If Marian is thus an emblem of Nophaie’s martyrdom, then Gekin Yashi, the young woman he rescues from the mission school, is emblematic of his martyrdom’s ultimate futility. Gekin Yashi, in danger of being molested by the missionary, Blucher, is spirited away by Nophaie in hopes of saving her soul. Before setting off on the rescue, however, Nophaie reflects on his mission:

Nophaie yielded to the instinct that impelled him to reach for a sprig of cedar. He added his stone to the monument and spoke a prayer for his adventure. The idea seemed beautiful to him. He was the Indian chief faring forth on an enterprise of peril. The dream—the fancy—the faith of the red man! But futile was his simple and instinctive abnegation of the White man’s knowledge. Swiftly it flashed back to reveal the naked truth. His quest was to save the soul of Gekin Yashi. He would be too late, or if

not too late, he could only delay a crime and a tragedy as inevitable as life itself (123).

It isn't the rape, necessarily, that is constituted as inevitable in this passage. Rather, it is the *indian's* losing her proverbial "virginity" to the White man that is inevitable. Ultimately, the savage innocence that characterizes the *indian*, and is epitomized in the young, beautiful Gekin Yashi, is what will be lost. Later, when he leaves Gekin Yashi in the safekeeping of the Pahutes, "what was it that he saw in her dusky eyes? Shadow indeed of the Indian's doom" (144). By thus imagining Nophaie's salvatory enterprise as fruitless and vain, the author emphasizes both the romantic tragedy of *indian* existence as well as the inevitability of his passing.

In another moment, Nophaie is conversing with Do Etin, Gekin Yashi's father. In response to Do Etin's refusal to send his daughter to the missionary, Blucher, Nophaie again gives in to frustration:

"Do Etin, we are in the power of White men," he said, earnestly. "But there are good White men who believe in justice to the Indian. There are many good missionaries. Still, we must look far ahead. The Indian will merely be pushed back upon the barren lands and eventually swept off the earth. These things we strive against, as the Nokis fight being cheated out of their water and land, or as our efforts to save Gekin Yashi—these things are nothing but incidental to the whole doom of our people. We must resist, but the end will come, just the same" (141).

That Nophaie himself reads in Gekin Yashi's look, and into the situation of the *indian* in total, only doom is telling. One might expect a figure like Marian, infatuated as she is with her *indian* lover and the romantic tragedy of his life, to emphasize the painful inevitability of loss. But for Nophaie, the *indian* hero, martyr, and warrior of his people¹⁶ to capitulate to defeatism is curious. He himself attributes this pessimism to "the eighteen years' education forced upon [him] by the Whites" which "enables him only to

see the pitiful state and the doom of the Indians” (16). If a sense of credibility is lent to the myth of the Vanishing Indian by its being voiced through Marian and Mrs. Withers, the intimate, would-be *indian* informers, then to hear it at the lips of the martyr himself renders the myth all but gospel.

The apotheosis of Nophaie’s fatalism comes when he scales the Silent Walls of the canyons in which he is hiding out. Bruised and weary from the successful ascent, he stumbles, limp-bodied back to his camp and reflects on his life as an *indian*:

Utterly impossible for him was a life among White men. He had been wronged, robbed, deprived of his inheritance. He saw the incredible ruthlessness and brutality of White men toward his race. He saw that race vanishing. He was the Vanishing American. He had no God, no religion, no hope. That strange hope born there in the canyon had been burned out in the fire kindled by Marian’s offer of love. Nature had fostered that hope. It had deluded him. [. . .] Benow di cleash [Marian] had loved him and he must break her heart. But grief would give her strength that his burden could never give. Nature in her inscrutable way had drawn the White girl and Nophaie together; and no doubt that merciless nature divined a union which would further her evolutionary designs. Nature recognized no religion, no God. Nature desired only birth, reproduction, death, in every living creature (220).

Here, the passing of the *indian* is constituted as the inevitable decrees of an unfeeling and progressive nature. The *indian*’s death is seen as the necessary result of evolutionary design.

Nophaie’s capitulation to romantic hopelessness in this episode is also driven by the conception, inherited from Whites, of the *indian* as a fixed cultural phenomenon, an anachronism, a primitive people that simply cannot survive alongside the more progressive and civilized White race. The *indian*, in a sense, is doomed to extinction because of this fixationalist sensibility. As soon as an *indian* moves outside the preconceived notion of “Indian,” as soon as he adapts or changes, like Nophaie, he is

considered lost. As disappeared is the only way that such fixationalist discourses can see the *indian* because they cannot allow the *indian* to possess culture, the hallmark of which is fluidity, motion, adaptation, and unending change. Nophaie's hopelessness becomes a testament, then, to the inexorable demise of a primitive race. In the end, though, this demise is nothing more than the romantic product of the author's deluded mind, a mind bent on eulogizing the *indian* before his death in order to speak him away. The author's thus vanishing the *indian* also vanishes responsibility, distracting both himself and his readers from the political battles that were being waged in Indian Country in 1925 and that are still being waged today.

Eventually, Nophaie will come to recognize and resolve the inner conflict that frustrates him at the Silent Walls. Later, when he is hiding out at the mountains of Naza, he gives in again to desperation, claiming the inevitability of the *indian*'s absorption into the White race and that he would have been better off dying in the plague that wracked his people (313). A moment later, however, the White reason he learned at school wins out over that "Indian fatalism" (314) and Nophaie realizes his own strength, his own capacity for resistance. Conflicts such as this one, played out in the psyche of the *indian* character, serve to mask as *indian* fatalism what is actually a non-Native idea. They serve as projections of a White fantasy onto an *indian* character, thereby lending it a voice of authority. It is fortunate that Nophaie does appear to emerge from this nihilistic moment, seemingly stronger; but that will be only a short time before his death. Plus, his newly acquired optimism, voiced at the end of this chapter, will be couched in romantic, atavistic terms and will rely fundamentally on the age-old idea of isolation. When "the tragic fate of the vanishing American, as he had nursed it to his sore heart, ceased to

exist” (322), it did so only as a component of Nophaie’s realization that the *indian* belonged to nature and, as such, would continue to live as long as the earth itself survives. Such an epiphany is heart-warming and romantic, to be sure, but ends only by eliding the truly political nature of the conflict and does little to unsettle the idea of the *indian*’s inevitable disappearance.¹⁷

The Vanishing American is certainly less reductive than other texts on the disappearing *indian*. It includes much in the way of critique and also headlines many good non-Native people, sympathizers with the *indian* condition. In the end, however, it never questions the inevitability of the *indians*’ demise. Moreover, the idea of inevitable death is endemic to both the structure of the novel—the text begins with a sunrise and ends with a sunset, for example¹⁸—and is a theme that permeates the relations of almost every character, and especially the love relationship between Nophaie and Marian. In this way, the book is a startling capitulation of the idea that *indian* resistance is entirely futile; and it emphasizes a sense of completion in place of the reality of Native survival. Ironically, the “friend of the *indian*” is also disappeared in such discourses. If the finality of the *indian*’s disappearance is thus firmly established, then his philanthropic supporters are no longer needed. The novel seems to say, “they did what they could, bravo! But now that the *indian* is gone, it’s all over . . . go home.” This constituted reality obscures real suffering and eases the onus for redressing wrongs by establishing the finality of conquest.

However, we must come to recognize, like Marian realizes early on in the novel, that books do “not always ring true to life” (20). The copyright page of this very text reminds us that “this is a work of fiction” and that “the characters, incidents, and

dialogues, are products of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real." Texts like *The Vanishing American*, *The Vanishing Race*, and *The Song of Hiawatha* would have us imagine the *indian* as fading gracefully off into the sunset—each text, in fact, ends with that very image. In the world of these fictions, the *indian* can simply disappear; but we know that, in reality, Natives have to go somewhere. Fictions of simplified regression, then, are imagiNative indeed; moreover, the truly sick nature of their imaginations is fully evident only if the world can come to realize that such mythologies are ultimately untrue. The unfortunate fact, however, is that this realization all too often fails to obtain in the popular imagination.

Not only does the realization of Native survival often fail to take hold in the popular imagination, but the naturalized impression of *indian* disappearance often serves as a romantic emblem in conservationist politics. In such instances, *indians* are linked to nature, and the romantic tragedy of *indian* regression is used as an emblem of the havoc civilized man wreaks on his natural environment. Such accounts are, more often than not, very sympathetic toward *indians*, entertaining strong criticisms of the inhumanity of non-Native progress, denouncing both the destruction of the environment and the destruction of its Native inhabitants at once. Furthermore, they often hold up ancient Native cultures as examples of "right ways" of living in relationship to the land—in contradistinction to the ways of progress. In spite of their sympathy, though, conservationists' general tendency toward spiritualizing every *indian's* relation to the landscape, and their impulse toward romanticizing *indians'* disappearance, both capitalize on and extend the essentialisms of past generations while putting those misrepresentations and misapprehensions to work for their own political causes. The

causes themselves may be worthy, and their intentions in cannibalizing Native cultures may be noble, but the images maintained in such activism do a disservice to living cultures who often cannot afford to be thought of as either atavistically nature-centered, or as vanished or vanishing.

An example of one such activist work can be found in Chilean writer Luis Sepúlveda's novella, *El viejo que leía novelas de amor*. The book's politics are made clear from the very beginning when the author gives co-credit to his friend and fellow conservationist, Chico Mendes, for the Tigre Juan Prize won by the text shortly after Mendes's death in the Amazonian jungles. The book is also dedicated to Miguel Tzenke, "sindicó shuar de Sumbi en el alto Nangaritza / y gran defensor de la amazonía" ("Shuar union leader from Sumbi in the upper Nangaritza and great defender of Amazonia"). The text itself comments on the split between the civilized and the natural, formulating the opposition of the two in the figures of Antonio José Bolívar Proaño, the book's *indian*-identified (but not Native) protagonist, and the local mayor, unnamed except by choice epithets, described as: "[el] único funcionario, máxima autoridad y representante de un poder demasiado lejano como para provocar temor" (23; "the only civil servant, supreme authority, and representative of a power too far away to inspire fear" 12). The mayor, in large part, represents the expansion of civilization into the hinterlands, the extension of progress and government into the jungle. His fruitless endeavors to sell hunting and fishing licenses and his mania for imposing taxes on people who were "ingobernable" (24; "ungovernable") exemplifies the slow but persistent advance of civilization into the wilderness. Bolívar Proaño, by contrast, is Cooper's Hawkeye translated into the South American jungle. He is the figure in the novel most possessed of natural knowledge, the

legacy of his once-intimate relationship with the Shuar *indians*: “era como uno de ellos, pero no era uno de ellos” (50; “he was like them, and yet was not one of them”). As such, he stands in the middle-ground, again like Cooper’s Hawkeye, between the White world of progress and destruction and the Red world of Native knowledge and regression.

Bolívar Proaño’s quest to kill the jaguar terrorizing the settlers comes to represent, in large part, the inevitable taming of the wilds. That a man of Native understanding takes this task upon himself is significant; and his hesitant assent to the undertaking masks the cruel inevitability of progress to the detriment of the natural world and its inhabitants. Those inhabitants of the natural world are both the animals, like the vengeful Jaguar who kills the settlers apparently out of revenge for her dead mate, and the Shuar *indians*, who also represent this same natural world. Bolívar Proaño, at first, finds himself trying to mediate between the advance of civilization—gold prospectors, settlers, and oil men with no respect for nature—and the ever-receding natural world destroyed by them:

Tanto los colonos como los buscadores de oro cometían toda clase de errores estúpidos en la selva. La depredaban sin consideración, y esto conseguía que algunas bestias se volvieran feroces.

A veces, por ganar unos metros de terreno plano talaban sin orden dejando aislada a una quebrantahuesos, y ésa se desquitaba eliminándoles una acémila, o cometían la torpeza de atacar a los saínos en época de celo, lo que transformaba a los pequeños jabalíes en monstruos agresivos. [. . .]

Antonio José Bolívar se ocupaba de mantenerlos a raya, en tanto los colonos destrozaban la selva construyendo la obra maestra del hombre civilizado: el desierto (60).

[Both the settlers and the gold prospectors made all kinds of stupid mistakes in the jungle. They pillaged it unmercifully, so that some animals turned really hostile.

Sometimes, to gain a few yards of flat land, they felled trees at random and exposed a bone-cruncher, which then took its revenge by killing one of their mules, or they were foolish enough to go after peccaries in the

mating season, and that turned the small boars into aggressive monsters. [. . .]

Antonio José Bolívar tried to keep them at bay while the settlers destroyed the jungle and constructed that masterpiece of civilized man: the desert (49).]

The conflict between civilization and the natural world, which Bolívar Proaño attempts to mediate, is settled finally by the myth of the Vanishing Indian:

Pero los animales duraron poco. Las especies sobrevivientes se tornaron más astutas, y, siguiendo el ejemplo de los shuar y otras culturas amazónicas, los animals también se internaron selva adentro, en un éxodo imprescindible hacia el oriente (ibid).

[But the animals were soon done for. The surviving species became more clever, and, following the example of the Shuar and other Amazonian cultures, the animals, also forced to join the exodus to the east, went deeper into the jungle (50).]

The likening of the *indian* to the animals—albeit among the most astute of the animals—and their voluntary self-internment in the west romanticizes the *indian* presence in the novel and constitutes it primarily as an absence. There are, of course, the Jibaros; but they are the assimilated outcasts set against the authentic Shuar. They, as the victims of the vices of civilization, emblemize the recession of the *indian* as well. The closest thing to an actual Native, outside of being a simple memory, a ghost of Bolívar Proaño's past, is Antonio himself, who, as we know, was “like one of them, but not one of them.”

In this scheme, the conservationist, Sepúlveda, laments the passing of the *indians* because they are emblematic of the disappearing jungle. Caught up in environmental politics, the *indian* is misrepresented as a receding, vanishing presence, fleeing, like the animals, before the advance of civilization. The very presence of vociferous activists like Miguel Tzenke, the Shuar to whom the novel is dedicated, should be sufficient to dispel such a myth. But, ironically, a text that is undoubtedly devoted to the preservation of the

Amazonian environment, and that is very much sympathetic toward the *indians* there (who are also waging a political battle in their Amazonian homeland), ends in romanticizing a political presence as an absence. One has to wonder if such conceptualizations of Native inhabitants don't do more harm in terms of representation than they do good in terms of raising awareness. In any case, it is clear that such texts exploit and perpetuate certain myths that have hung around the New World almost since the very first contact between Natives and Europeans.

In order to recognize the insistence of such myths, in fact, one need not look too far beyond the rash of modern films that seem to inevitably reconstitute the romance of the Vanishing Indian in the most natural ways. In only the past fifteen or so years, a slew of popular films have emerged that re-enact the myth. The popular *Dances with Wolves* ends with the *indians'* migration ever further westward and their displacement, constituted as inevitable, by White soldiers whose job it is to make way for settlers. The only *indian* character in the *Young Guns* films is Chavez, the half-Mexican, half-*indian* who is torn between his friendship with Billy and his gang of outlaws and his own need to move west to California in order to bring back to life his tribe, all of whom are dead except Chavez himself. And, lest we forget, there is the blockbuster remake, in film, of James Fenimore Cooper's novel, *Last of the Mohicans*, which maintains the same romantic fascination with *indian* death that the original did—even down to the last moments where Chingachgook, played by Russel Means, makes his dramatic and heart-wrenching appeal to the myth of the dying race.

Perhaps foremost among these films, in terms of its appeal to the myth of the Vanishing Indian, is the popular family film, *The Last of the Dogmen*, which, as its title

alone indicates, will replicate the same worn-out clichés of the vanishing, or in this case, vanished *indians*. In the film, a police tracker and an anthropologist stumble across artifactual evidence that there is a lost tribe of Cheyenne *indians*, Dog-Soldiers, running around in the furthest recesses of the Oxbow in Montana. Invisible for hundreds of years, this lost tribe represents all that remains of the Dogmen. Apparently the descendants of Lone Wolf, who escaped the massacre at Sand Creek with 20 men, the *indians* were able to remain invisible to the world and aloof from civilization, maintaining their primitive ways in relative isolation and comfort.

Most interesting about the film are the conversations between the tracker and the anthropologist about the *indians*. Both are clearly sympathetic toward *indians* and both are clearly legatees of the many romantic notions about *indian* life. Their conversations tend to do two things: first, they tend to refer constantly to *indians* in the past tense and, second, they tend to regurgitate the inevitability of *indian* disappearance. A telling conversation about the origins of Dr. Sloane's *indian* obsession takes place between the tracker and his accomplice. Here she explains why it is that she loves to study *indians*:

–Because I admire them; and because we owe them a tremendous debt.

–How's that?

–Oh, they gave us romance, myths, legends. They gave us . . . they gave us a history. The Indians shaped the character of our entire nation.

–We picked a hell of a way to say thank you, didn't we?

–What happened was inevitable. The way it happened was unconscionable.

The voluntary past-tense in this dialogue belies the assumption that *indians* no longer contribute, that *indians*' legacy is a legacy of the past and what has been given is precisely that: a gift that *has been* given. Moreover, the final lines of Dr. Sloane's reverie

constitute, yet again, the sense that history could have gone no other way. Lamentable as such violences were, the displacement of the *indians* was nonetheless unavoidable.

Although the film does mention reservations, and the deplorable conditions there, at a couple of points, the only *indians* actually visible in the film are the Dogmen. These invisible men are the “real” *indians*, after all; not like the ghosted ones back on the reservations who are only vacant shadows of the true Native wandering, primitive and untouched, among the mountains of the Oxbow. This is, of course, why Dr. Sloane resolves to stay with them in the end: because they are a living record, a memorial to the last of the Red Race. She is able to maintain, without any sense of irony, that she belongs with them because she sees them as lost and herself as responsible, as an anthropologist, for recording them. In the end, the White guy, of course, becomes a Cheyenne *indian*, the anthropologist’s dream comes true, and they are both able to keep the “civilized” public away from the lost tribes by collapsing the cave that serves as passage between the two worlds. The result is that the Dog-Soldiers disappear for a second time in the world of the film, re-enacting that first and inevitable disappearance that resonates so strongly with the romantic notions of a viewing public that is so accustomed to eulogizing the *indian*. As always, the disappearance of the *indian* comes as a happy ending to a White romance.

Nor is the mythology of the Vanishing Indian simply a figment of the poetic imagination. In fact, it is endemic, as well, to much of the critical literature on Indigenist works. In a recent article on Cecilia Vicuña, published in the October 2005 edition of the *PMLA*, Juliet Lynd cannot help but read “quipodem” in terms of *indian* regression. Partially this results from the fact that Vicuña’s poem relies heavily on the myth of

disappearance; but it is disheartening that a scholar would not be slightly more critical of such constitutive acts. The paradox of Lynd's reading lies in the way that she can regard *quipus*, Andean weaving projects traditionally used for numerical and historical accounting, as simultaneously serving a ritual function in Native communities today, yet not surviving "as a means of representation" (1591). The *quipu*, as Lynd sees Vicuña seeing it, is "a mystery for the western imagination and a cultural loss for the subordinated indigenous world [. . .] quipus connote an irrecoverably lost way of life" (ibid). The irony of this perspective is that it recognizes the presence of *quipus*, and the Native ways it represents, as still being around, but asserts nonetheless that they are gone. Her assertion is that Vicuña's work, like the work of Pablo Neruda or Ernesto Cardenal, "write[s] the silenced voices of the indigenous into the history of the Americas" (ibid).

There are, of course, two ironies in such an assertion. The first is that inscriptions of the indigenous written by non-Natives actually re-inscribe silences and absence. This is not to say that writers like Neruda, Cardenal, or Vicuña shouldn't write about Natives; rather, it is to say that we shouldn't confuse such writings—sympathetic, politically useful, or responsible as they may be—with "palpable presence." The second irony is that Cecilia Vicuña herself has done much in the way of anthologizing actual indigenous writers, thus aiding in the establishment of a material presence in the popular imagination of Native voices. That she could, on the one hand, be useful in raising awareness of real Native poetic voices (some of which we shall hear shortly), and at the same time appropriate *indian* aesthetics in a way that is "remarkably removed from the sociopolitical realities of the marginalized communities represented" (ibid) is a testament to the troubled waters of a non-Native writer's voicing the silences of the Native.

In the end, Lynd's reading of the poem does more to re-constitute the myth of the Vanishing Indian than it does in the way of voicing silences. The emphasis in the piece on indigenous cultures as "no longer existent functional context[s]," "irrecoverably disappeared" (1593), or impermanent "doomed objects" (1594), re-figures the *indian* as forever lost. The problem with Lynd's assertion that the poem "evokes the threefold sensation of what certainly existed, what no longer exists, and what is seen now as a replica after the original work of art has ceased to exist" (1594) is that it elides the fact that indigenous peoples do exist still. In this reading, and in the poem itself, the *quipu* comes to stand in for the *indian*; and both are seen as disappearing, no longer functional, and simply memories to be toyed with philosophically. The *indian*, then, is emblem of "precariousness," teetering on the edge of history, kept from tumbling completely into oblivion only by the imagination of the poet and the critic. In reality, though, the status of the *indian* as precarious is itself in part a product of the poet's and critic's imagination. As much is testified to by the newly burgeoning Native literatures and the many indigenous resistance groups alive and well across the Americas.

Because of its continual and obsessive reiteration in public media, political discourses, poetry, fiction and film, the myth of the Vanishing Indian has become a mainstay of popular imaginations throughout the hemisphere. If the myth of *indian* absence is indeed the most formidable and persistent conception in the popular imagination, then the first step toward affirming self-wrought Native identities and social, cultural, and political autonomy is to reaffirm presence itself. Therefore, the myth of the Vanishing Indian should be a primary target for any study interested in indigenous politics in the Americas. Presence itself is a fundamental requisite to resistance and to

assert that presence is a necessary first step in the march toward autonomy. What we as literary scholars have traditionally seen as a “Native American Renaissance,” then, needs to be reconceptualized. Thinking in terms of renaissance is misleading because the explosion in indigenous literary production over the past 60 years is not a re-birth. Such a conception capitulates to the idea of a death, calling back to mind George Caitlin’s idea of the *indian*-phoenix’s being resurrected by the salvaging discourses of anthropologists and writers. Rather than re-birth, this explosion in literary production should be seen as an act of resistance to the easy and ancient idea of the disappearing *indian*. There can be no re-birth because there was, ultimately, no final death. There was violence, cataclysmic violence, attempted genocide, and all kinds of horrific acts; but in the end, *indians* in general have come out alive and continue to struggle against the legacy of that violence and against “new” political violences that continue to obtain today. These literatures are better seen as survivances, to use the coinage of the Chippewa writer Gerald Vizenor—as rebellious resistances to the discursive figurations of political expediencies and reactions against the apologies and justifications of colonialist violence.

There are, of course, two sides to this resistance. There is the strictly literary side, motored by Native writers seeking to re-legitimate, and sometimes rediscover, their tribal heritages. Then there are the militant and activist groups, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) or the American Indian Movement (AIM), whose public presence takes the form of political activism. In the end, however, these separate spheres inform one another and operate sympathetically so that the EZLN, for example, begins to wage its revolution, once a military campaign, as a public relations campaign, capitalizing on mass media such as radio and the internet in its struggle for indigenous

rights in Mexico. Such struggles are fundamentally informed by the myth of disappearance. The EZLN's communiqués frequently address the idea that the indigenous peoples of the world are silenced in public discourses, directly contesting the idea of the Vanishing Indian by refusing to inhabit the position, as indigenous, of vanquished and desolate peoples. Take, for example, Comandante Marcos's self-description of the EZLN from part 1 of "Chiapas: La treceava estela":

Estamos en tierras rebeldes. Aquí viven y luchan éstos que se llaman "zapatistas". Y muy otros son estos zapatistas... y a más de uno desesperan. En lugar de tejer su historia con ejecuciones, muerte y destrucción, se empeñan en vivir. Y las vanguardias del mundo se mesan los cabellos, porque en el "vencer o morir" estos zapatista ni vencen ni se mueren, pero tampoco se rinden y aborrecen el martirio tanto como la claudicación (ezln.org).

[We are in rebel lands. Here live and fight those who are called "zapatistas." And these zapatistas are very otherly and they despair of more than one of them. Instead of weaving their history with executions, death and destruction, they insist on living. And the vanguards of the world tear at their hair, because, as for "victory or death," these zapatistas neither vanquish nor die, but nor do they surrender, and they despise martyrdom as much as capitulation (ibid.).]

Such a vision of the indigenous insurgents as "neither vanquishing nor dying," as resistant to destruction and surrender, flies in the face of common wisdom, which holds that the Native peoples of this hemisphere already lie beyond the pale of rescue, the last remnants of a vanishing and subsumed race destined to live on only as the basis of romance. As early as the second communiqué of the revolution, the general command of the EZLN makes its nod toward insistence, opening with the lines "Here we are, the dead of always, dead again, but now to live" (6 Jan, 1994). Even though they are often mentioned only in passing, such references to survival and persistence represent attempts

to undo, or reconfigure, the perception of indigenous peoples as dying and complacent figures in colonial tragedies.

Further to the south of Chiapas, other indigenous peoples are struggling to represent the reality of their enduring vitality through poetry. Cecilia Vicuña's anthology, *Ül: Four Mapuche Poets*, collects the work of four important indigenous writers who do much to counter the myth of the Vanishing Indian. As if their presence and visibility as writers is not sufficient in itself to dispel such myths, the preconception is targeted directly in the poetry itself. These poets, in fact, operate within the tradition of Teiller, self-proclaimed "Araucanian and miner," who in the 1960s began to rewrite the history of the Vanishing Indian in South America as a story of survival (Vicuña "Ül of Today" 21). To read any of these poets only in light of the Vanishing Indian motif would, of course, be a disservice to the complexity of their voices; nonetheless, their insistent presence in public letters and their contestatory insistence on presence in public letters are of signal importance.

Elicura Chihuailaf's¹⁹ poem, "Sueño azul," for example, emphasizes the continuity and resurgence of Native life. His memories in this poem are of long nights spent with his grandfather learning the history of his people, or with his grandmother learning the art of weaving:

Como mis hermanos y hermanas—más de una
vez—intenté aprender ese arte, sin éxito
pero guardé en mi memoria el contenido
de los dibujos
que hablaban de la creación y resurgimiento del
mundo mapuche
de fuerzas protectoras, de volcanes, de flores y aves²⁰ (*Mapuche Poets* 44)

[Like my brothers and sisters—more than once—I tried
to learn that art, without success

But in my memory I kept the content of designs
 that spoke of creation and of the resurgence of the
 Mapuche world
 of protective powers, of volcanoes, of flowers and
 birds]

At the same time that this poem engages the issue of loss, and especially of ancestral memory and the tenuousness of its transmission in the wake of cultural violence, it also refuses to capitulate to regressive imaginings. Rather, its emphasis in these lines and others is on survival and continuity. The poet sees resurgence in place of disappearance and, with that vision, echoes the sentiments of his first poem in this volume. There, the poem's narrator makes clear the reasons he still wants to dream in this valley, emphasizing memory, return, and how the living blood of his ancestors still runs deep in the land he now occupies:

En la energía de la memoria la tierra vive
 y en ella la sangre de los antepasados
 ¿Comprenderás, comprenderás, porque
 –dice
 aún deseo sonar en este valle? (ibid 28)

[Through the power of memory the land lives
 also the blood of the ancestors
 Can you see, can you see why,
 he asks
 I still want to dream in this valley?]

Likewise, Leonel Leinlaf²¹ writes of violence and loss in his poem “Volveré.”

Again, like Chihuailaf, the emphasis is on return rather than recession:

Volveré a decir que estoy vivo
 que estoy cantando
 cerca de una vertiente.
 ¡Vertiente de sangre!

La preguntaré al sol de dónde
 viene
 y si pasan los años repetiré

lo mismo.

Vengo de las tierras de Alepue, dire
 avanzo, avanzo
 quiero llegar muy lejos
 más allá del umbral de las estrellas. (ibid 76)

[I will return to say that I am alive
 that I am singing
 beside a spring.
 Spring of blood!

I will ask the sun where
 it comes from
 and if the years pass I will ask
 again.

I come from the lands of Alepue, I will say
 I keep on, I keep on
 I want to reach a farther place
 beyond the threshold of the stars.]

Here, the future tense is telling. In contrast to the ever-present past tense of much work *on indians*, this passage represents a future oriented vision *by* a Native. The spring of blood can be read as either the blood of his ancestors springing forth life in the form of his own blood, or the blood of his ancestors spilt in attempted genocide. In either case, the future-looking poet inscribes the permanence of himself and his people, those from the lands of Alepue.

This play between violence, loss, death, and survival is also a key component of Graciela Huinao's²² poem, "La voz de mi padre:"

EN LENGUAJE INDOMITO
 NACEN MIS VERSOS
 DE LA PROLONGADA
 NOCHE DEL EXTERMINIO (ibid 124)

[IN UNTAMED LANGUAGE
 MY VERSES ARE BORN
 OF THE PROLONGED

NIGHT OF EXTERMINATION]

Perhaps somewhat reminiscent of Caitlin's phoenix, the poet's voice, rather than vanishing as a result of violence, is actually born out of "extermination." Here, as in all the poems I have cited, the memory of violence and the possibility of loss are not elided; but, the survival of, and the extension beyond, such a past is the underlying vision.

Farther north, in the United States, the counter-point to the Vanishing Indian motif is often manifest in humor. Sherman Alexie, in a short story that levels a pointed critique of anthropological "knowledge" about *indians*, assumes a mocking tone when he entertains the idea of the *indian's* purported disappearance. In the following quotation, Etta Joseph, a member of the Spokane tribe living in a retirement community, is being interviewed by Dr. Spencer Cox, an anthropologist doing research in the year 2052 on the influence of European ballroom dancing on traditional fancydance. After defusing the authority of Dr. Cox by refusing to state her name for the record until he does so first, Etta introduces herself this way:

A: My name is Etta Joseph. I was born in Wellpinit, Washington, on the Spokane Indian reservation on Christmas Day, 1934. I am one hundred and eighteen years old and I am the last of the Spokane Indians.

Q: Really? I had no idea you were the last.

A: Well, actually, I'm not. There are thousands of us. But it sounds more romantic, enit?

Q: Yes, very amusing. Irony, a hallmark of the contemporary indigenous American. Good, good. Yes. So, perhaps we could officially begin by . . . (Alexie 190)

Throughout the piece, and especially in this section, the interviewee indicts and makes a mockery of non-Native knowledge on Native Americans. Etta's playful teasing, and outright refusals, of Dr. Cox during the interview accentuate her confidence in her own knowledge of her own self. Moreover, the idea that Dr. Cox, "the leading authority

in the field” (194), could be so easily confused as to the real presence of Spokane *indians* speaks volumes about Alexie’s response to a motif that is so firmly rooted in the non-Native imagination with regard to the United States. Here, he indicts, through humor, the romantic notion of disappearance and replaces it instead with the living personality of Etta Joseph.

Of course, Sherman Alexie is not the first Native writer in the U.S. to thus resist the stereotype of the Vanishing Indian. The Cherokee, in 1829, reacted to the popular assumption of *indian* disappearance by posting this rejoinder in their periodical, the *Cherokee Phoenix*:

The causes which have operated to exterminate the Indian tribes, that are produced as instances of the certain doom of the whole aboriginal family . . . did not exist in the Indians themselves nor in the will of Heaven, nor simply in the intercourse of Indians with civilized man; but they were precisely such causes as are now attempted by the state of Georgia; by infringing upon their rights; by disorganizing them, and circumscribing their limits (qtd in Dippie 71).

The question remains as to how such myths can persist even in spite of such remonstrations, in spite of even dead facts. How is it that such misconceptions can still hold sway when, even over a hundred years after the final strains of the *indian* symphony on this continent were sounded, we still hear the songs of Native voices? Partially, they persist because public sentiment is too often informed less by the rigors of academic inquiry (which itself is not always reliable) than it is by the routines of massifying culture. The proliferation of this myth, its simple repetition as well as its romanticized and nationalized appeal, brings a level of cultural capital to texts like Zane Grey’s or Dr. Dixon’s, allowing them to shape public perceptions, under the guise of education or entertainment, in what often turns out to be dangerous ways. In the end, the artifactual

historicity of such fictions is too readily taken as actually historical in a problematic conflation of art and fact. Simply put, the political and social realities of Native survival are often elided in favor of the stultifying and romantic illusions of aboriginal doom. What makes this process even more frightening is the fact that political expediencies often dictate the messages of self-echoing media.

The answer to the conundrum of the myth's persistence, then, lies at the convergence of political discourses bent on then legitimating, now justifying, the colonial violences of yesterday and the intellectual comfort of a society that values the ease of romantic mythologies over the difficulties of reparation—especially when those mythologies of justification can be rekindled, when and if they are needed, and put to the service of new political expediencies. Take, for example, the few people in the 19th century who insisted that Natives were not, in fact, disappearing. “Race educators” like Samuel Armstrong, O.O. Howard, and Richard Pratt (Dippie 130) had much difficulty convincing anybody that Natives were not disappearing primarily because they were delivering their messages at a time when the country desperately needed for the *indians* to disappear. They were trying to undo the myth at the same time that the “Indian Wars” in the west were going full-tilt. The nation needed land and resources to fuel expansion; and it simply wouldn't do to be undoing a myth that goes a long way toward justifying those violences just yet. In a curious sleight of hand, the issues of Native rights and their legitimate political claims are defused by public mythologies that constitute such problematics as issues of the past, regrettable, but very much complete and, therefore, irremediable. In the interest of political expediencies, the *indian* is disappeared, and

along with him goes the guilt of an ostensibly conscionable society over the atrocities of colonialism very much in evidence in the past and to a degree still in evidence today.

After the “Indian Wars,” which presumably ended with the massacre at Wounded Knee in the 1890s, the population at large could go on to forget the continuing presence of *indians* and fall comfortably back into their romantic mythologies, while publicly invisible administrative apparatuses (of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and of various Congressional committees) dealt with the continuing problems of administrating Native affairs. The tribes themselves could “disappear” for a rest from conflict. But, again, they had to go somewhere. Natives, of course, have not disappeared. Natives have been here all along, struggling at times, to be sure, but also adapting, surviving, and very much alive.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ Its redaction of the various political struggles between “liberal” and “conservative” factions in the 32 uprisings of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, for example, could be taken as emblematic of a protracted history of revolutions and counter-revolutions in Latin America. Moreover, the novel’s development of the shifting fortunes of Macondo, as the town endures the processes of modernization and the cultural incursions of Europe and the United States, also instantiates a general pattern of political, economic, and cultural imperialism in this hemisphere.

² Cataure runs from the plague when it arrives in Macondo while his sister, Visitación, is resigned to the inevitability of the insomnia’s catching up with them eventually.

³ E.P. Johnson (Tekahionwake) is a Canadian Poet of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She was born in Canada on the Six Nations Indian Reserve. Most of her work was published in periodicals; but three volumes of poetry are extant and identifiable. They are *The White Wampum* (1895), *Canadian Born* (1903), and *Flint and Feather* (1912).

⁴ “Indian” itself is a simulation, according to Vizenor. The name itself “insinuates the obvious simulation and ruse of colonial dominance. Manifestly, the *indian* is an occidental misnomer, an overseas enactment that has no referent to real Native cultures or communities” (vii).

⁵ Garcilaso seems satisfied to explain this apparent discrepancy by the fact that Atahualpa ordered his men not to attack.

⁶ It is also likely that perhaps a dozen African slaves were among them, also unmentioned.

⁷ Restall also gives Cortez's invasion of what is today Mexico as an example: "According to prominent Conquest historian Ross Hassig, the final siege and assault on the Mexica capital was carried out with 200,000 Native allies, 'even though they went virtually unacknowledged and certainly unrewarded'" (Restall 47). Also missing from these accounts are the many African slaves that would have accompanied the missions either as porters or soldiers (cf. Restall).

⁸ This quotation was taken from an indigenous account of "the terrible slaughter perpetrated by Pedro de Alvarado in the patio of the main temple in Tenochtitlan" (León-Portilla viii). Its inclusion, and its conclusion, emphasize the inevitability of the conquest.

⁹ The painting represents, in a cartoonographic style, the old myth of a young Washington cutting down the cherry tree.

¹⁰ Brian Dippie dedicates a section of his book, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*, to talking about the various hypotheses on the origins of *indians* in the United States. Apparently there was such an obsession with hunting out origins that John Adams would complain, "I should soon suppose that the Prodigal Son, in a frolic with one of his Girls made a trip to America in one of Mother Carey's Eggshells, and left the fruits of their Amours here, as believe any of the grave hypotheses and solemn reasonings of Philosophers and Divines upon the subject" (qtd in Dippie 16). Such a theory as the one Adams describes seems every bit as reasonable as Durán's in

retrospect and, in fact, was put forth by the royal historian and court chronicler of Charles V in the 16th century (q.v. Kadir 1992).

¹¹ My first chapter deals with the myth of the “natural” *indian* in more detail.

¹² Eventually, of course, the nation would expand to the point where this utter isolation was impossible and, inconveniently enough, the uncooperative *indian* had not yet died off. Confronted with the “Indian Problem” once again, assimilation would again be official policy. More specifically, allotment and termination are the official avatars of that same policy. In every case, the assumption is that what is best for the *indian* is to become White and, of course, give up his land in the process.

¹³ The difference in titles, from “race” to “American,” can perhaps be accounted for by the fact that one year before Grey’s novel was published Congress granted *indians* automatic citizenship. Therefore, by this time, and not when Dixon was writing, they truly were American in the official sense.

¹⁴ “‘This is the desert,’ she tells Marian, ‘you are among primitive peoples. There is nothing complex out here. Your sophistication will fall from you like dead scales’” (43).

¹⁵ Later in the same chapter, Nophaie’s martyrdom is re-inscribed: “That was the shibboleth of her joy—the inspiration of her endeavour. Would not her love for him and faith in him somehow gladden the dark days of his martyrdom? For she considered his life no less” (110). The shibboleth of the *indian*, then, is his disappearance.

¹⁶ According to his letter to Marian, his name means “warrior” (16).

¹⁷ For more on the way that emphasizing the *indian*’s spiritual connection to nature serves to undermine political claims to land see my first chapter.

¹⁸ Let us not forget that, according to Nophaie, sunset is ““the end of the Indian’s day!”” (105)

¹⁹ Elicura Chihuailaf is a Mapuche poet, trained as an obstetrician at the University of Concepción. His volumes of poetry include *En el país de la memoria* (1988), *El invierno su imagen y otros poemas azules* (1991), and *De sueños azules y contrasueños* (1995).

²⁰ With the exception of Leonel Leinlaf, each of the poets composes primarily in Spanish. They all often translate, or issue bilingual editions of, their poetry in both Spanish and their Native languages. While Vicuña provides their poetry in this volume in Spanish, English, and Mapundungun, I have opted to use the Spanish versions because it is the tongue in which they each conceive their work. In the case of Leinlaf, according to Vicuña, he is unique among the four because he conceives his poetry both in Spanish and in Mapundungun. As I do not have the Native tongue, my work is based on the Spanish versions—which I have included here.

²¹ Leonel Lienlaf is a Mapuche poet who writes his poetry originally in his Native tongue, Mupudungun. He has won many prizes and international notoriety for his poetry and is author of *Se ha despertado el ave de mi corazón* (1989).

²² Graciela Huinao is of mixed descent and defines herself as Huilliche. She is a relatively new writer and has published poems in various journals and pamphlets in Chile.

Chapter 3

RE-REPRESENTING THE INDIAN: “THE KIND OF INDIAN THEY ARE”

In a 1997 interview with John Purdy, published in *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Sherman Alexie asserts that the problem with Native 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 literature (and its criticism) exerts a certain violence on the lived experience of the *indian* by confining 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 the sphere of criticism where 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 the *indian*. 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 experiences as Native Americans. 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 engaged in embodies an attempt to break out of representations that feed American culture's fanciful stereotypes of the *indian*. Given the intensified consumption of Native American literature by non-Native audiences, this project of representing other realities of contemporary Native Americans' experiences is necessary in order to disrupt the tendency for outside audiences to essentialize cultures other than their own.

At the same time, Alexie's reconfiguring of Native representations relies in large part on the notion of more and less authentic authors of Native experience. In this chapter, I will explore the way in which Alexie, through his work in the film industry, bases his own representations on the idea of "authentic" reporting by a "real" *indian* over and against the "inauthentic" representations of Hollywood "outsiders." Specifically, this chapter deals with traditional Hollywood representations of *indians* in opposition to Sherman Alexie's own, and ostensibly more authentic, representations in *Smoke Signals* and *The Business of Fancydancing*.

Latent to Alexie's criticisms of Hollywood *indians* is the spectre of authenticity, which serves as the foundation for his critique. The following two sections are concerned with film representations of *indians* and the viability of claims to authenticity when they occur in the overdetermined spaces of a capital-driven marketplace such as Hollywood. What is at issue is whether Alexie's filmic ripostes to traditional Hollywood representations represent, as he would hope, significant revisions of that tradition, or if they don't simply become ideologized hegemonies of their own, inserting Alexie's own *indian* images in place of traditional, non-Native images rather than overturning

hegemonic structures of representation altogether. In this case, there is a slight tension between Alexie's purported project to "authenticate" Native representations by filming "the kind of Indian they are" and Alexie's personal stake as a professional writer, director, and producer working in an institutional space known for its capacity for cultural overdetermination.

Alexie operates in a very sensitive context, a context in which his Native identity has become a commodity. The question is whether any more valid and valuable representation of Native politics and identities can emerge in such a situation. The commodification of Native identity may well represent another mechanism for co-opting suffering and political claims by individualizing them into a celebrity personality, here the token *indian* Alexie, and containing possible resistances by reifying and commodifying his work. For all his effort, we have to wonder to what extent Alexie is able to truly represent "the kind of Indian they are" while capitalizing in a personal way on his own commercial success. Beyond that, we have to wonder if the notion that there really is a "kind of Indian they are" is rendered completely obsolete given the hegemonic basis of any claim to "represent," even and perhaps especially, when that claim is rooted in an appeal to authenticity.

I won't go so far as to suggest that Alexie is a "sell-out." In fact, part of the point that needs to be made here is that stark terms such as these are insufficient for understanding the complexities of market overdetermination and its effects on personal and communal identities. Instead of marking him as a sellout, we might better think of Alexie's work in terms of its being symptomatic of the processes of commodification latent to a capital-driven marketplace. Beyond that, in spite of its constitution from

within the fraught institutional spaces of the public market, Alexie's work still presents a positive reconceptualization of Native identities and often levels incisive critiques of traditional representations. In the process of instantiating a history of misrepresentation and Native displacement in Hollywood, Alexie's work balances that ledger of displacement with the critical perspective of one Native writer's reaction to the neo-colonial histories reconstituted in Hollywood film. In this way, Alexie's work allows us to contextualize the themes of authenticity and representation as issues, and assertions, of cultural sovereignty articulated through an apparently autonomous self-representation that, nonetheless, can be problematic and ambivalent in and of itself.

Smoking Out the Truth: Alexie's Indians and Modern Film

In each of the two preceding chapters I have mentioned how modern films have taken up the mantle of misrepresentation over the past century. Acting, perhaps, under the aegis of the wildly popular stage shows of the 19th century—plays such as *Last of the Wampanoags* or *The Indian Princess; or La Belle Sauvage*—modern film has tended toward replicating the more romantic ideas of *indians* than representing any real experience. In fact, rather than being novel in their approach, modern films often copy directly from the romances of the past. As much can be seen in the “reinvention” of James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* in the early 1990s, or the reprisal of the Indian Princess role in Disney's *Pocahontas*. This is not to mention the strong tradition of films in the Western genre that, more often than not, reduce the *indian* to an inarticulate sidekick with a hypernatural capacity for tracking, an excessively tragic history, and a satisfyingly spiritual familiarity with the land. From mainstream films

such as *Dances with Wolves* and *The Missing*, to less well-known films, such as *Renegade*, recent public perceptions of *indian* cultures have been shaped almost exclusively by the movies. Perhaps more than any other modern media, film and television have played a pivotal role in perpetuating misapprehensions of Native cultures today.

However, it is not only in film and television, but also in video games that these misrepresentations are transacted. Capitalizing on the popularity of western films and television serials, multi-media companies have produced at least three video games in the western genre over the past five years. Rockstar North's *Red Dead Revolver* and Activision's *Gun* both resurrect classic western plots, putting the player in the shoes of the western anti-hero.¹ In both cases, not surprisingly, *indians* play a role in the plot development. Also not surprisingly, these games make all the stock representations of Western films "real" for the gamer, etching the romanticized, often violent, representations of *indians* firmly in the mind of the player. The result is that the conventions of the western film are extended and intensified for the gamer who experiences "first-hand" the action of the western and internalizes its conventional representations of *indians*.

Gun tries to situate itself in the context of colonialism and the intense exploitation of Natives; but it ends up attributing colonial horrors to the psychoses of a single villain and, along the way, re-inscribes most, if not all, the traditional elements of *indian* figures in the western genre. Throughout the game, the player has to repel *indian* attacks on the towns' White citizens, escorting stagecoaches through "Indian Territory," protecting Chinese bridge-builders from *indian* assaults, and exterminating various other

autochthonous threats to White survival. The plot twists about halfway through the game, when Colton finds that he is actually half-*indian* himself and dons a “traditional” *indian* outfit in his battle against the arch-villain who is in search of *indian* treasure. *Indians* themselves are characterized in the expected manner, speaking always in dramatic overtones and occupying their familiar roles as incidents to the half-breed cowboy-hero, Colton.

Red Dead Revolver has a less developed plot line than *Gun*, but still includes the obligatory stage-coach level where the player has to protect the travelers from attack by blasting away at the *indian* hordes along its route. Later, the gamer gets to play a level as an *indian*, trading in the rifle and six-gun of the White hero for the bow and arrows of a “traditional” warrior. Predictably, this level is played in the mountains and the character is able to slink along silently, finally battling a bear-like super enemy that is, apparently, the caricature of an *indian* shaman.² A short time later, after befriending Red, the main character of the story-line, the *indian* dies in battle defending his new “brother” from his enemies.

It bears repeating that these games replicate the stock elements of the traditional western plot and are firmly rooted in the Hollywood tradition of the genre. Like the films on which they are based, games such as these re-condition the player to expect the “expected idea,” thus perpetuating a cycle of misrepresentations to which we are exposed almost daily. Each of the plots’ various turns is recognizable from any number of western films of the last half-century and the games are clearly a re-inscription of, rather than a novel approach to, *indian* representations in the western movie genre. Their popularity, and in fact their very existence, is a testimony to the perennial cultural capital that

western films enjoy and to the salience of traditional movie misrepresentations of *indians*.

There have been a few Native films since the 1970s that have challenged this tradition, however. *Powwow Highway*, for example, is often billed as the quintessential Native buddy-film and has enjoyed a wide viewing among Native audiences. And, more recently, films such as *Black Cloud*, the story of a reservation *indian's* path to becoming an Olympic boxer, attempt a "fairer" representation of Natives in film. Moreover, the increased presence of films being written, produced, and directed by Natives themselves is promising and holds the possibility of undoing much of the representational violence perpetrated by Hollywood's version of the *indian*.

Sherman Alexie is perhaps most eloquent among the many critics of film representations of Natives, and is perhaps also foremost among the pioneers of Native films that seek to undo the stultifying representations of *indians* in American popular culture. Alexie continually undermines and mocks the representational authority of popular media within his written fiction as well as in his own films. At the same time, his work attempts to fashion a critical re-representation over and above the misrepresentations of Hollywood. These re-representations, moreover, are distinct primarily in their refusal to simplify *indian* identities into filmic caricatures and their obstinacy in presenting a fluid and complex matrix of characters that function to represent more truthfully the complexities of Native identities in the modern world. Alexie's work, then, represents an important attempt at recovering the *indian* from Hollywood by interjecting himself into what is undoubtedly the most influential

representational medium of our time, a medium that Natives have long been denied access to as critics, writers, producers, and directors (Cobb 206).

Alexie's short story, "Dear John Wayne," is a focal point in his critique of Hollywood simulations and their bearing not only on *indian* identities, but also on a general audience's search for foundational realities in the information age. "Dear John Wayne" is, in many respects, less about uncovering the "truth" behind Hollywood's lies than it is about recognizing the dangers of movie magic, not only for misrepresented minorities but for all sectors of a society dominated by the constitutive realities of media simulations. It brings to light certain critical disjunctures that occur between the "realities" constituted through film and the realities they purport to represent. The first of those disjunctures comes to light when Etta, a Spokane woman being interviewed by an anthropologist, asks her interviewer:

A: Have you ever seen a John Wayne movie?

Q: Yes, yes, I have. Most of them, in fact. I was quite a little cowboy when I was a child. Had two Red Ryder six-shooter pistols. They shot these little silver pellets. I recall that I killed a squirrel. I was quite shocked. I had no idea the pellets were dangerous [. . .] (191).

Perhaps more dangerous than the pellets an ignorant, albeit young, Dr. Cox fired at squirrels who were, in all likelihood, pretend *indians*, are the films that naturalized killing behavior for him without speaking to the dangers of such behavior. The real danger of the movies, it seems, is that they allow, even encourage, the viewer to believe their make-believe.

The ramifications for *indian*-White relations are pretty clear: training a child to play at killing *indians* is acceptable behavior and, ironically, teaches the child to dissociate the violence he re-enacts from the actual realities of colonial histories that are

the ostensible bases for the films themselves. The cowboy, master of the wild plains and subduer of *indians*, becomes the hero of a child who is taught to ignore the realities of colonial expansion and the heinous violences perpetrated by the racist establishment through the six-guns of real cowboys. The violence is dissociated to the extent that the child is surprised to learn that things will actually die if you shoot them.

This irony, of course, is fairly straight-forward in the text. What is interesting is the way that Alexie turns the irony of representation back on its authors and their discursive legitimators (the anthropologist, Dr. Cox, in this case) by recognizing how filmic simulation is a double-edged sword that negatively affects not only misrepresented minorities, in this case *indians*, but also disrupts the capacity for White subjects to apprehend stable identities except as they themselves represent them. The real irony of these simulations, then, is the effect they have on John Wayne himself:

John Wayne wept.

There in Navajo Monument Valley, John Wayne wept. His tears fell to the sand and flooded the desert.

“Nobody knows me,” he cried. “Nobody knows me.”

He was so afraid! Etta was shocked into silence. This was the great John Wayne and he was afraid.

“But, but, but,” Etta stammered. “But you’re a star.”

“John Wayne is the star. I’m Marion, I’m just Marion Morisson.”

She held him for a good long time (200).

The pretender himself falls victim to his pretensions here, and the vicissitudes of Hollywood’s simulations are laid bare. The imagiNative worlds of film take their toll by obstructing Marion’s, and by extension White-America’s, ability to define even itself. At the same time that they have trapped the *indian* in a stultifying web of caricaturization, Hollywood simulations have also denied Marion Morisson/John Wayne the luxury of a viable personal identity outside that caricaturization. The real person, Marion Morisson,

the very sensitive man who was afraid of horses and cried every time he made love (201), is driven into the closet and must give way to the persona, John Wayne, his simulacrum in Gerald Vizenor's terms. The personal crisis that ensues is emblemized in his desperate pleas to Etta to call him Marion, rather than John Wayne, when they make love.

In spite of his expanding the critique of Hollywood simulations beyond the scope of *indian* misrepresentations alone, it is still very clear that Alexie is particularly interested in the ways that movies and television shape popular conceptions of *indians* for the worse. In one scene of the movie Etta appears in as an extra, Jeffrey Hunter inadvertently trades his hat for a Navajo wife ("Dear John Wayne" 198). Such apparently humorous occasions reinforce the idea of infantile *indians*, laughable in their innocence and ignorant of the discrepancy in exchange value between a hat and a human. Thus, if one danger of film and television lies in the ways that such media make us believe their make-believe, then we should be particularly cautious about what these fictions ask us to believe about others. The real dangers are the truths that are constituted in the fictions and the way that such truths are naturalized as commonplace markers for real identities. Etta comments ironically on the representational claims of Hollywood westerns like *The Searchers* when she thinks about Jeffrey Hunter's part in the film:

But here he was playing an Indian, a half-breed Cherokee, so perhaps Jeffrey himself was part Indian. After all, Etta had thought, why would they cast a White man as an Indian if he didn't have some Indian blood himself? Otherwise, the movie would have been a lie, and John Wayne didn't lie. And judging by the kindness of his eyes, by the graceful turn of his spine, by the way he waved his sensuous hands when he talked, Jeffrey Hunter was no liar either (198).

The young Etta's unselfconscious optimism in Hollywood ethics should not be confused with Alexie's own. The clear sarcasm is made more evident when we finally discover

that Jeffrey Hunter wasn't as nice as he looked, snubbing Etta when she tries to talk to him. Jeffrey Hunter does, in fact, lie. His entire role in the film is a lie. John Wayne lies as well. He lies to the world, he lies to the America that supposedly needs him (205), and he lies to his wife, who is unaware that he is having a love-affair with Etta Joseph, an extra on the film set. The entire story is very much about truth and lies.

Smoke Signals, Alexie's first filmic response to Hollywood simulations of *indians*, is also about truth and lies. The plot, based on Alexie's short story *What It Means to Say Phoenix Arizona*, follows Victor Joseph, the reservation bully, and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, misfit storyteller, on a trip to Arizona to recover the ashes of Victor's dead father, who also saved an infant Thomas from a house fire he started. The film has traditionally been read as a story about father-son relationships and healing the rift between alienated family members. (Arnold Joseph's dog is named Kafka, a clear indication that such a reading is being elicited from the viewer/reader.) It is also, in large part, the story of rebuilding friendships; and the relationship between Thomas and Victor, and its retrenchment on the road, is part of the appeal the film has to general audiences. But on a deeper level, the film is compelling because it is about epistemologies. The film is concerned precisely with the types of representations that have been interrogated in the first chapters of this dissertation, and the ripostes of Native voices to those representations. It is, above all, about stories, about lies and delusions, and it is about uncovering the truths behind those fictions.

All of the stories Thomas tells in the film are exaggerated and each time he tells one, somebody is there (usually Victor) to expose it as "bullshit." When Velma and Lucy pick up Victor and Thomas to give them a ride, for example, Thomas tells them a story

about Arnold Joseph's being a hippie and protesting the Vietnam War. At the end of his story, which ends with a photo of Arnold on the cover of *Time* magazine holding a rifle above his head about to pummel a National Guard soldier, the veracity of the tale is undercut:

Lucy

(to Victor)

Jeez, did your dad really do that?

Victor

No way, Thomas is full of shit (screenplay 39).

Later in the film, after they meet Arnold Joseph's friend, Suzy Song, in Arizona, Thomas tells her a story about Victor's mother's "frybread magic." In a spoof on the biblical tale of the loaves and fishes, Thomas tells of the time when Arlene had only 50 pieces of frybread to feed 100 hungry people. In order to stave off a riot, she holds a piece of frybread over her head and, dramatically, tears each piece in half, "magically" providing for everyone. When Suzy asks, "Oh, that's a good story. Is that true?" Victor smiles (according to the screen play, he does so "in spite of himself) and responds again, "No, it's not true. You're so full of shit, Thomas" (77).

Thomas isn't the only one to tell stories, though. Suzy recalls a story Arnold told her about Victor before she dies. In that story, Victor makes a dramatic, warrior-like, game-winning point in a basketball grudge match Arnold and Victor were playing against two Jesuit priests. After hearing the great tale, we learn that it is, at least in part, made up:

Victor

So, my dad told you I made that shot?

Suzy Song

Yeah.

Victor

Well, I missed that shot. I lost the game.

Suzy Song

You mean your dad lied to me?

Victor

Yeah, a lie that made me look good.

Suzy Song

He was a magician, you know? (screenplay 88-9)

When, at the end of this scene, they agree that Arnold was a “magician,” they seem to be referring to more than just the magic tricks he does for people, more than just the illusions he manufactures. In a way, they are talking also about Arnold’s being a magician in the same way that Thomas is a magician. They are talking about the way his story, in spite of its not adhering entirely to historical fact, still produces a truth about his feelings for his son.

These are the kinds of moments where the film makes us realize, of course, that the line that divides lies from truth may be more fungible than we would like to admit. In this sense, the story is about disintegrating the dichotomy between truth and lies. The stories Thomas tells are exaggerated, maybe even untrue by some standards, but the memories that they communicate are very real indeed and come to constitute other truths, for better or for worse, about lives and experiences on the reservation. After the story about Arlene Joseph’s “Jesus frybread,” Thomas asks Suzy to tell a story. She asks him if he would like the truth or lies. His response is only that he wants both, because for Thomas, truth can be found in fictions. The vicissitudes of storytelling that are exposed in these scenes could be taken as an account of Native oral traditions and their importance, even today, for Native cultures. I would argue, in the end, for their importance to all cultures; but, in this case, there is a definite sense of stories, especially in their oral transmission as “orature,” possessing a characteristically Native cultural

capital. In a remarkable, and remarkably appropriate, statement about Native storytelling, Severt Young Bear makes the following claim:

In stories, songs, speeches, jokes, whatever, we take ideas and give them shape, a body through the human voice. Through lively and creative language we give life and color to ideas. Through that language we make those ideas walk and fly and shine; we share our feelings and our knowledge and our memories. Our stories and songs, we should remember, also teach us lessons. Sure, dates and facts are often missing, sometimes they're not accurate in the way historians and anthropologists like it, but our oral tradition tells the truth and the heart of the meaning stays alive from mouth to ear (16).

So, when Velma calls Thomas's story about Arnold's hippie days a "fine example of the oral tradition" (40), it isn't only joking. Rather, it's a call to recognize that stories, "true" or not, are the vehicles for important ideas that weigh heavily on our collective minds and bear the weight of constituting and reflecting cultural realities.

Smoke Signals is a film, then, that is not as interested in telling "true" stories as it is in trying, self-consciously, to constitute more representative histories of Native life through a medium that has been dominated historically by the cultural realities of a White(r) society bent, reflexively by now, on representing only romances about *indians*. The film's primary function is to superimpose an image of Native Americans over these romances, an image that is produced from inside that culture and reflects its own cultural realities rather than those imposed from without. It is about replacing the "truths" of Hollywood's *indians* with a different set of "truths," with representations that are ostensibly more true by dint of their emanating from and centering on Native lives and the problematic nature of outside truths.

Much of the humor in the film, in fact, centers on making fun of Hollywood's traditional tropes on *indians* and its general bent toward over-dramatization. When

Thomas first confronts Victor with his offer to pay for the trip to Arizona, for example, there is a sideline joke that makes light of the familiar, romantic notion of the poetic *indian* and his magical ability to commune with the natural world:

Thomas

I'm sorry about your father.

Victor

How'd you hear about it?

Thomas

I heard it on the wind. I heard it from the birds. I felt it in the sunlight. And your mother was just in here crying (screenplay 22).

Many other examples are in evidence of Alexie's toying with traditional filmic representations of *indians*. The twice-repeated spoof of the stoic *indian's* "sometimes it's a good day to die" speech is another example,³ and the song Victor and Thomas sing on the bus about John Wayne's teeth, and Thomas's assertion, based on films and books like *Last of the Mohicans*, that when *indians* go away, they don't come back.

Finally, one has to ask after the viability of Alexie's critique of Hollywood culture in such a complex nexus of constituted realities. By undercutting Hollywood truths in the way he does, Alexie also undercuts his own truths, themselves transacted from within the very same institutional sphere he seeks to deconstruct. Likewise, by trying to legitimate his own truths, based as they are on the idea of authenticity, he also legitimates, in a roundabout way, those other truths which are no more or less imaginary or discursively constituted than his own. Hollywood fictions tell us much in the way of truth about White, non-Native, (neo) colonialist fantasies about Native people. Alexie's stories, and his films, are similar diagnostic tools, telling us much in the way of truth about his own personal fantasies about Native people. In the end, Alexie's own fantasies may be, and I would argue that they are indeed, preferable because they are identifiable by Native

audiences. However, we must be sure that we don't confuse them entirely with an objective, verifiable, and absolute reality in the way that "authentic" discourses such as Alexie's seem to ask us to do.

In the end, *Smoke Signals* is a story about stories, and about the fictions we constitute as truth in our everyday lives. Beyond that, it's about the struggle to constitute truths for ourselves as autonomous subjects. The distinction, then, between the reservation and the outside world of the United States of America is pivotal. When Velma and Lucy ask Thomas and Victor if they have their passports and vaccinations in order, it is a means by which Alexie re-centers the marginal space of the reservation, overturning the traditional, outside-centered reference points in films on *indians* and replacing them with his own Native fictions. That Victor eventually finds out his own conceptions about his father (a drunk, irresponsible, abusive father who abandoned his son) were only one facet of Arnold's true identity is telling. It brings to light the necessity for de-centering our perceptions of others and the responsibility we have as film viewers, as readers, and as individuals to reject those stultifying and romantic caricaturizations of other cultures, the likes of which are found in most Hollywood representations of *indians*.

Interpenetrating Codes and the "Truth" about Spirits

Alexie's second film, *The Business of Fancydancing*, attempts to represent a different type of truth about Native lives. While retaining the humor in evidence in *Smoke Signals*, this film, written, produced, and directed by Alexie, resembles his written production more closely in its hard-hitting critical style. The film explores the

complexities of reservation life, the guilt of escaping such places, the ties that keep Native subjects coming back, and the perils of being Native in a White world, all through the story of a gay poet, Seymour Polatkin, who must return home for the funeral of his friend and cousin, Mouse.

Given Alexie's impulse toward de-representing the "expected idea" in Native 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 Native American women writers such as Louise Erdrich and Leslie Marmon Silko, more and more is being written about the issue of sexuality in Native American literary criticism. While this is certainly laudable, it is interesting that very little, if anything at all, has been written about homosexuality within that same analytical corpus. 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 have tended to romanticize or otherwise misrepresent the experience of the *indian* who is not heterosexual. In their introduction to the anthropological text, *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*, 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 cultures have always made, and therefore still do make, space—institutionally, communally, and spiritually—

for the non-heterosexual subject. Jacobs, et al. 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 reductivism also runs the risk of ignoring the current circumstances of the non-heterosexual Native American. New studies in anthropology—such as the one pioneered by Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang—seek to revolutionize our conceptions of Native sexualities and represent the reality of the gay, lesbian, trans-gender, or third-gender experience within a contemporary, non-essentialized Native American cultural context.

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, and especially since the Native American Renaissance of the mid-20th century which still draws so much attention from critics. 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 Langs’ attempt to de-essentialize our notions of Native American sexualities resembles in many ways 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 texts. It is a call to begin reading these texts with an eye toward modernizing 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 Sherman Alexie.

In the spirit of rising to that call, my discussion here seeks to queer the Native sphere by engaging in a reading of Alexie's film that deals with the issue of Native American sexuality—and homosexuality more specifically. 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 re-inforce one another in order to open up the viewer's understanding of cultural conflict. At the same time, this infusion of one sphere with the other also involves a conscious marketing practice that capitalizes on the salability of marginal identities in the liberal context of independent film production.

It comes as somewhat of a surprise to me that this sort of project has not yet been launched since the issue of homosexuality has been an underlying theme in many of Alexie's short stories and especially after the release of the film. My discussion here, then, has a dual purpose. The first is to come to a fuller understanding of the place of homosexuality within Alexie's work—especially the film, *The Business of Fancydancing*. 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

that live their lives in the atavism of an academic discipline that is often slow to acknowledge the changing contours of contemporary Native American cultures.⁴ Along the way, we will have the opportunity to interrogate the manner in which Alexie's inter-coding the Native and Queer is bound up in the economics of authenticity manipulated and controlled by Hollywood's capitalist culture of entertainment.

In his book, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions From Queer Latino America*, 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:

[. . .] 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 treated it systematically in the course of their writings. However, though many of the Queer writers dealt with in *Tropics of Desire* likely 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 the 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 context through surreptitious codes than it is an issue of forging an interface between the Native and the Queer spheres. It represents, in many ways, an interpenetration of codes between the discreet 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 see, then, that Alexie—most notably in his film, *The Business of Fancydancing*, but also in many of his short stories—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.

In the same interview I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Alexie draws a metaphor for a Native 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 Native 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, *The Business of Fancydancing*, 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 pre-figures 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 on a personal level. This is, I think, precisely what Alexie hopes his Native 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 that a White audience might find themselves identifying with as they view the film. 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 different 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 culture—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 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 the leather jacket with the "cock-ring" looped onto the shoulder. Few viewers outside the queer community are likely to know that this is a signifying practice within some gay circles before hearing Evan Adams say so in the commentary on the DVD.⁵ 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, et al. 2). Its occurrence at 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.

It should come as no surprise—given the title of the film—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—without scenery, 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 dancing the Shawl Dance—which is intended to be performed only by women.⁶ 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 under-rides 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 attains even greater 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 to mourn the passing of his cousin, Mouse; and his "emergence" at the end of the film is emblemized in the scene in which he sheds his dancer's clothes 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 at least 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,⁷ and that of the homosexual male selling-out his gender. The scenes in which we find Seymour dancing the Shawl Dance situate him on the borders of multiple, overlapping communities. Moreover, this double-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 Native and Queer codes, he attempts to mediate between still treating the important political and cultural themes that affect Native lives while resisting idealistic, romantic, and essentialist readings that would fail to acknowledge the

full and fluid complexity of Natives' lives and experiences. There are, for example, a series of themes that Alexie explores in the film which 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, inter-racial 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, a leader famous for his friendly relations with White, European invaders during the 19th century. Many residents of Seattle might know the story behind the man who gave that city its name and his reputation as an *indian* leader trying to mediate between the Native world and a White colonizer. As such, the impulse to read Chief Seattle as a sell-out to White power is reasonable. 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 a Native 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 Native and the Queer serves to establish a frame for Seymour's betrayal of his kin. Moreover, it does so in a way that underscores the significance of selling-out as a Native 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 racio-sexual tension inherent to the relationship between Steven and Seymour surfaces at a couple of key moments in the film and keys the viewer in to the very public politics of inter-racial and intra-sexual 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 larger cultural context of the homosexual relationship between Seymour and his White

lover. In the film, the complex history of violence between the Native and the White man 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 desire 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).

We see embodied in the relationship between Steven and Seymour, then, a playing out of these historical contexts. Alexie uses Seymour and Steven as mechanisms for bringing to light the charged political and social relationship between Native 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. When Seymour admits to his being ashamed of Steven (by his refusal to allow him to return to the reservation for Mouse’s funeral), and justifies that shame based on the idea that Steven is “the opposite of friends,” it signals a double-edged shame. Steven is the converse of friendship, in fact, both 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 in this regard could be read as a tacit acknowledgement of his conditioning as a self-loathing sell-out. Moreover, 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 café 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.⁸ Darieck 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:⁹

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.

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 in this reading would emphasize the redemptive quality of their relationship (redemption being the quality of Christ). In this sense, it would be the interracial, homosexual bond that bears the salvation of subjectivity from the reductive 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 Native in this poem—the racial and cultural specificity of the lovers.

It is the maintenance of cultural specificity, and especially the politics involved in retaining the specificity of these two particular cultures (the Native and the Queer), that arouse suspicion, however. The danger is that thus casting Native and Queer identities as interpenetrations, Alexie himself writes yet another reductive idealization of complex histories. In this sense, his film might be yet another replication of essentialist reifications that misrepresent and misapprehend historical realities of conquest, exploitation, and hegemony by romanticizing the love relationship between Steven and Seymour. Moreover, the facts of the film's circulation history belie the economic stakes at the heart of Alexie's own idealizations and confluences of sexuality and ethnicity in the film.

The circulation history of the film is pivotal to the transaction of coded references within *The Business of Fancydancing*. 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 and to its status as “representational” fiction. 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 that I introduced earlier, Alexie speaks quite clearly about the intentions behind his forays into cinema. In the conversation below, he is referring to his experience writing and co-producing *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 a Native 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—a Native audience. His attempts to make his fiction pertain to the lived experience 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 life to and for Native American audiences. His ideas are reborn in a medium that he believes is more likely to reach Natives than his written works have proven to be.

Of course, Alexie also has a personal stake in the potential monetary benefits of thus expanding his “readership” by venturing into film. One has to wonder if Alexie isn’t fooling himself, and trying to fool us as well, by couching his film success primarily in terms of community service. While I don’t want to stumble into the dangerous terrain of asserting that Alexie’s film represents a crass conspiracy to make a personal fortune off the backs of his own people, I do want to draw attention to the personal investment he has in such posturing. By criticizing a writer like Vizenor for being inaccessible (one has to wonder what, exactly, a “12-year-old kid living on the reservation” would think about a film such as *The Business of Fancydancing*) and attempting to legitimate his transition into film production, Alexie runs the risk of being condescending. His project of “representing” to a larger Native audience than Vizenor’s theoretical works can access seems, on a certain level, to be an infantilization of Native culture and his readership. Beyond that, *The Business of Fancydancing*, for all its representational quality, seems to do more in the way of transforming his “Indian people” into a “niche market” or the commodified fetish (Queer this time) of a “niche.” In this way, rather than conspiring to sell-out for personal gain alone, Alexie’s liberal sympathies are commodified in the marketplace and he is rendered symptomatic of the co-optational processes of capital-driven Hollywood.

In spite of Alexie's purported goal to reach a broader Native audience, 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; and, in spite of the claim that the film "is not a gay film" (DVD commentary), that niche market has largely become a Queer one. A quick glance at Falls Apart Production's Reviews page shows that the primary reviewing audience is White and Gay. The film was reviewed nationally, but a large number came from the West, especially in San Francisco and Seattle; plus, many of those appearing elsewhere were written for Queer publications such as *Planet Out*. Furthermore, out of the five awards listed for *The Business of Fancydancing* on the Internet Movie Database's page, 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 (IMDB, Awards Page).

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 must also be aware that his own viability as an *indian* commodity lies in that outside market. 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 audiences; and the nexus between these spheres becomes a playground for intercultural

codes that disrupt the normalizing effect of fixed identities as well as the basis for market expansion.¹⁰

In its apparent push to unseat rigid categories of identification, Alexie's film is very much like Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Beet Queen*, which, according to Julie Barak, "supports the social constructionist claims that any identity category is inherently unstable" (Prince-Hughes 7). Tara Prince Hughes is critical of Barak's reading, though, arguing instead that a work like Erdrich's novel (and I am arguing, by extension, Alexie's film) "demonstrates that for her characters, alterNative genders are expressed as relatively stable identities" (8). In a way, both perspectives might be true, however. The point in Alexie's film, and I would argue in *The Beet Queen* as well, is not that gay or cross-gendered characters don't possess stable identities as individuals; rather the point is that their stable identities as individuals are independent of the categories projected onto them by the normalizing standards of a White, patriarchal, or hetero-sexual society. For these writers, an unseating of rigid identity category does not mean unseating stable identities; rather it means liberating those identities and allowing them to congeal organically and under the unique authority of the individual. In this sense, sexuality for Erdrich and Alexie is about autonomy, about cultural and personal sovereignty.

The sustainability of this position, this posturing, is questionable, however, when we consider it from within the context of market economics. We can never really know if the discursive fungibility of Queer and Native identities, as it is instantiated in *The Business of Fancydancing*, is yet another reductive illusion, yet another simulacrum with a market value as commodity of the hegemonic cultural politics of the United States, and Hollywood's capitalist culture in particular. If "Queer" sells, and apparently it does (see

Brokeback Mountain), and “Indian” sells, apparently it does as well considering the new explosion in *indian* commodities, then does “Queer Indian” promise to sell twice as much in Hollywood economies? A writer such as Alexie, positioned as the “authentic” voice of Native America, is set to profit the most when Wounded Knee meets *Brokeback Mountain*. Given this context, one has to ask after the viability of revolutionizing aims such as Alexie’s when they are articulated from within the overdetermining spaces of a Hollywood marketplace.

Still, 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” (DVD commentary). 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 a 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 indeed 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 Natives by White men—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 her White lover (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, 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, might be 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, would participate in an economy of acknowledgement that advances a call for acceptance through a tacit presence. But, we can never really ignore the fact that a gay character such as Seymour Polatkin has the potential to enhance, and in fact did enhance, the marketability of *The business of Fancydancing*. For a film that tries its hardest, according to Alexie and Adams, to not be a gay film, it certainly does capitalize on its own appeal to that market.

In any case, there is 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, renders Seymour’s sexuality indispensable to Alexie’s

project of authenticating our conceptions of the contemporary *indian*. The film is not intended as a means of “outing” someone as gay—or even outing somebody as *indian*—; rather it is an instrument for 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 Native; who sees a different film than does the Queer Native. In this sense, it instantiates the borders between White and Native, between straight and gay, while simultaneously problematizing those categories through a series of interpenetrating codes. It also provides an excellent economic strategy for the release of an independent film in a very competitive market.

We must give due credit to Alexie for his opening up Native representations beyond the “expected idea” of Hollywood *indians*. But, in doing so, he also opens up another dimension of problems in representational media: the problem of commodification. In the end, Alexie’s project of “authentically” representing the realities of *indian* experiences over and above the traditional misrepresentations of Hollywood runs the risk of simply writing his own hegemonic representations over their older, antecedent versions. In his attempt to mediate between Hollywood images of the *indian* and his own “authentic” images, Alexie encounters the problem of contextual overdeterminations that jeopardize his own autonomy by subjecting his representations to the faddish impulses of the Hollywood marketplace. Thus, what began as an exercise in autonomy and self-wrought representations is all too easily twisted, via market economics, into yet another simulation, this time under the authenticating aegis of the “Native” writer/director/producer. Ironically enough, since Alexie is somewhat critical of him, Gerald Vizenor’s concept of *indians* as simulations, in the absence of the real,

seems to be the most appropriate assessment of Alexie's re-representation of the authentic Native experience. The "real" *indian* that Alexie expects to find behind the "expected idea" appears to be an impossibility; and his interpenetrating codes, in this sense, only render the quest for "real" identities a more complicated impossibility. Moreover, I worry that his expectations of the "real" could well be symptomatic of self-interest and niche-marketing stratagems more than the products of any universal Truth about Native lives.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ *Dead Man's Hand* is another title released exclusively on the X-Box gaming platform. It appears that this game was somewhat less popular than Activision's and Rockstar North's ventures into the western genre since information about the title is much sparser. As such, I know little about the game except that it is a first-person shooter that follows the story of El Tejon, a gunslinger set on a path of revenge against a gang of outlaws.

² I say "apparently" because, to be quite honest, I'm not really certain what this level was supposed to be doing for the game, or what exactly this particular enemy was supposed to be. It was clearly bear-like and either a man pretending to be a bear or an *indian* spirit with bear qualities.

³ "Yeah, sometimes it's a good day to die. Sometimes it's a good day to play basketball" (17). "Sometimes it's a good day to die. Sometimes it's a good day to have breakfast" (53).

⁴ It is possible that this disciplinary state can be traced to the fact that Native American studies in general—and Native American literary studies in particular—have only recently begun to take hold in the academy. Moreover, its presence there 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's article, "We're Not There Yet, Kemo Sabe: Positing a Future for American Indian Literary Studies" and Philip J. Deloria's piece, "American Indians, American Studies, and the ASA."

⁵ 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.”

⁶ 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.”

⁷ 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 fancydance / from powwow to powwow” (Fancydancing). These lines read as a commentary on the commodification and commercialization of *indian* dance traditions.

⁸ Recall as well the scenes where Seymour reads publicly. The camera pans around to show completely White audiences for all his performances.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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. This “dissolution” could just as

easily be read as a pastiche of cultural diversity intended to capitalize on the liberal sympathies of the film's larger audience, sympathies that valorize and commodify suffering and exploitation.

Chapter 4

NON-NATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF *INDIANS*: WHITES ON NATIVE
GROUNDS

The commodification of culture in evidence in Hollywood representations, and re-representations, of *indians* is also in evidence elsewhere. The publication industry, like the film industry, is an ambivalent arena in which both misrepresentations of *indians* and Native critical responses to those misrepresentations are given space. These industries, to borrow the terminology of Louis Althusser, represent institutional apparatuses that serve to contain contests over identity and the resources that are distributed as rewards in those contests. As such, they are overdetermining spaces that also contain the possibility for true resistance against the hegemonic structures that order Native identities as commodities. Thus contextualizing representational politics in Native America presents the opportunity to think about misrepresentations and misapprehensions of Native cultures within the context of *White-indian* political relations and a history of displacement contained and ordered by marketplace economics.

Resistances to misrepresentation that are based on authentic identities, resistances such as those voiced by Sherman Alexie, for example, capitulate to certain market forces and, in doing so, perpetuate key misrepresentations and erasures of their own. This chapter seeks to uncover those ostensibly “subversive” moments in Alexie’s work in which misrepresentations and misapprehensions of Native lives by non-Natives, either non-Native pretenders to Native identities or non-Native academics, are interrogated, mocked, and deconstructed. At the same time, it seeks to understand the way that appeals to a commodified authenticity are deployed strategically to establish authority, and the

ways in which Alexie's instrumentalization of "authentic" *indian* identity serves to reinscribe hegemonic representations of Native experiences.

In contra-distinction to political strategies such as Alexie's, I will posit an alterNative Native perspective voiced by Gerald Vizenor. As a counter-point to Alexie's politics of authenticity, Vizenor will at times underscore and authenticate Alexie's critiques and, at others, will oppose his politics. In terms of their resistance to non-Native pretenders, "wannabes" in the popular jargon, in their stubborn indictment of New Age appropriations of Native spiritualism, and in their decidedly disdainful attitude toward anthropologists and other imperialist academics, Alexie and Vizenor are very much in agreement. The primary distinction, as we will see, between the philosophies of these two Native writers lies in Gerald Vizenor's adamant refusal to capitulate to the commodification of cultural identity by giving in to victimry as a foundation for authority. Identity politics of the sort that Alexie and others play, often as self-interested policings of authenticity, tend to posit suffering and victimry, rather than survival and political viability, as the bases for the authority to criticize. In doing so, they perpetuate the discourses of absence and debility that have been such a venerable tradition in representations of *indians*.

Indian Wannabes and "Other" Displacements

Influenced by Vine Deloria Jr.'s commentary on the idea in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, there was a running joke between myself and a core group of friends that one in every ten random people in the United States would claim *indian* ancestry. Like Deloria Jr., we discovered in informal testing that, more often than not, the connection will be

maternal, usually through a grandmother, and they will be Cherokee.¹ In many cases, of course, this ancestral tie may have been real, and our lark was never taken so far as to question the validity of individual claims. At the same time, however, the startling number of *indians* at large in the U.S. seems to fly in the face of traditional wisdom, which holds that the *indian* is already gone. The object of our humor, it seems, is really part of a larger phenomenon wherein White(r) America grasps onto an imagined indigenous legacy in order to form a sense of belonging to this space and in order to satisfy individual longings for romantic, or exotic, identities. In this sense, there is a real intersection between the politics of displacement that have been at the heart of colonial and national projects in the Americas and the exoticized images taken up by many as a means of appropriating a cultural or spiritual identity. The phenomenon of the “wannabe Indian” is the end product, in fact, of a few-hundred-year history of political displacements.

We saw in chapters one and two that the politics of displacement are what lie at the political core of colonial caricatures of the *indian*. At the leading edge of these misrepresentations, then, lies the ultimate displacement: non-Natives becoming Native. Becoming Native, in the Americas, has been a key object of nationalist enterprises and, in the process of becoming Native, colonial powers have often (always?) misrepresented the colonized. Much attention has been paid in colonial and postcolonial studies to the “Whitening” of minorities through educational apparatuses bent on making the Native European. But American *indians* are unique in colonial histories in the fact that they are a colonized population that came to occupy the colonizer’s romantic imagination to such a degree that the colonizer would eventually want to be the colonized. Both the myths of

the Vanishing Indian and the myth of the Nature-lover have at their core the attempt to legitmate the displacement of Natives from the land. The cultural end of all this is the complete displacement of the Native not just as a landed class, but as an autochthonous subject aboriginal to that land. We all become Native, and in that way nobody has to worry about what belongs to whom.

This displacement has manifested itself in different forms throughout American history and across America's nations. Steeped in the idea of *mestizaje*, the Mexican government has appropriated Aztec mythology in the interest of founding a national identity.² Hippie and New Age subcultures in the U.S. have always been obsessed with the romantic notions of Native spirituality and somehow becoming, spiritually at least, indigenous. In the context of American cultural politics, professionals have manufactured *indian* identities in order to secure positions both in academia and in business. Countless instances of non-Natives being adopted as *indian* occur in the literatures of many American nations. And, finally, Hollywood has no end of films wherein Whites become *indian*. In the end, the colonial conscience and its vestiges, still surviving in the popular imagination, have trained America's citizens to believe either that they are indigenous already or that they can become so at will. It's only a simple matter of claiming it.

The dangers of this identity appropriation are as numerous as the possible motives for such proprietary claims. When it is motivated by the desire to claim an exotic past, it serves to perpetuate romantic notions about Native life at the expense of realities and, in doing so, draws attention away from real problems that indigenous groups face today. The desire to be *indian* only extends so far as the romance; but the reality of social and

political conditions in Indian Country is not often so desirable. Non-Native people don't want to be the starving, alcoholic *indian*; they want to be the romantic, stoic, noble *indian*—or his heir at least. In addition, “authenticity,” and the ability to prove it, is important for political reasons in the U.S. and Canada. There are certain rights—not privileges as the racialists might suggest—accorded to Natives by treaties that rest on the basis of proven identity.³ If that identity is co-opted, then those rights may well disappear. If anybody and everybody can become Native, then Natives themselves, as an actual population and political entity, will cease to exist.

Many Natives may well be justified in being wary, and often derisive, of wannabes, of non-Natives who are so enamored of *indians* as to want to become one. After enduring a couple hundred years of attempted genocide at the hands of Europeans, to then be subjected to another hundred years of appropriation by their American heirs is enough to make even the most stoic of *indians* weary and wary. This section, then, is an attempt to come to terms with the various frustrations at non-Native appropriations of Native identities voiced in Native literature, and in Sherman Alexie's writing in particular. In the process of exploring those literary moments where “wannabes” are tolerated, ridiculed, or even physically assaulted, the goal is to connect the phenomenon of racial and cultural appropriation to the politics of displacement, to posit such appropriations as the end result of several hundred years of misrepresentation and misapprehensions of Native cultures, and to interrogate the non-Native's capacity to define and inhabit the Native position. Moreover, by treating the various moments in Native letters where such misappropriations are exposed, we can outline the contours of Native resistance to identity theft.

The stakes of that resistance are clearly quite high. Rayna Green, writing about “the tribe called Wannabe,” asserts that “the living performance of ‘playing Indian’ by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the death, of real Indians” (31). While this perspective is a politically charged one, and therefore limited in some ways by its own defensiveness, there is still something to her allegations. As we will see shortly, when we read about Alexie’s pretend-*indian*, Jack Wilson, wannabes often require living *indians* as a means to justify their pretense. They often need acceptance from “real” *indians*. Displacement, then, doesn’t necessarily entail death in the corporeal sense of actual genocide; but the results are no less sinister for their being consequences that play themselves out in cultural, as opposed to physical, ways. The real violence of such performances today lies in the elision and caricaturization of actual Natives. Moreover, the arrogance of presuming to know entails the substitution of outside knowledge about *indians* for the inside knowledge of Natives themselves.⁴ Such erasures are untenable because they disrupt the contest for political and cultural sovereignty being fought by Native communities and people today.

There are two facets of this contest over *indian* identities that we will deal with here. The first has to do with non-Native acolytes of *indian* spiritualism. Here, we will refer to Hippie and New Age spiritual movements that attempt to appropriate supposedly authentic *indian* spiritual experiences as well as those “wannabes” who long for the exoticism of *indian* otherness in order to offset their own perceived lack of cultural mystique. Related to this issue is a celebrity culture, indicted in Alexie’s poem “Tourists,” that glamorizes cultural appropriation. In the second case we will explore the issue of non-Native writers performing *indian* identities in their fictions and pretending to

represent actual Native communities under the guise of being authentic *indians*. In each of these cases, we will be dealing with the perspectives of certain Native writers on issues of representation and the politics of appropriation and cultural sovereignty embedded in the act of playing *indian*.

In *Men on the Moon*, Simon Ortiz includes a couple of stories that treat Native political struggles in the civil-rights era of the United States. Of particular interest to me is “San Francisco Indians,” which tells of a Native man who travels to San Francisco in order to find his granddaughter, once a student in Oakland. The grandfather, of course, is not the only one looking for *indians*. Chief Black Bear and his pale tribe of wannabes are waiting at the Indian Center for a “real Indian” to happen by so that they might avail themselves of his ceremonial knowledge. Since the center is closed, the grandfather accompanies the “Tribe” to their apartment on Haight Street with the promise that they will help him find an *indian* who might know his granddaughter. Once he arrives, he discovers that the real reason Chief Black Bear wanted him to come along was so that he might lend an aura of authenticity to the ceremonial initiation of a another White girl into the tribe:

“Hi,” she said. “I heard Chief Black Bear found an Indian. Are you the Indian he found?”

“I’m an Indian,” the Indian said.

The girl looked at him. She seemed to study him. And then she smiled. “I’m glad,” she said. And then she studied him again.

After a long quiet moment had passed, she said, “We have some peyote from Mexico.”

The Indian did not say anything.

“We have songs,” she said.

The Indian still did not say anything. But he looked like he was also studying the girl.

“I’m not a member of the Black Bear Tribe. But Chief Black Bear told me that when we have the ceremony, I will join the tribe,” the girl said.

The Indian man saw that the skin of the blonde girl was very White.

“I asked Chief Black Bear to find an Indian to guide us in the ceremony. So it can be real when I join the Tribe.”

The Indian man did not know anything about peyote. He had heard some songs and prayers for the ceremony, but he did not know anything about the ceremony. And he did not know how a person could *join* a Tribe (120-1).

At issue here is the idea, first of all, that having any *indian* participate in the ceremony is enough to make said ceremony “real” in some way. That the grandfather has little knowledge of peyote ceremonies demonstrates not only the laughability of such an enterprise, but more importantly the superficiality of what is a bogus ceremony from the outset. That in the first pages of the story, there is some confusion over whether Chief Black Bear and his Tribe are actually *indian*⁵ emphasizes the way that New Age and Hippie romances about, and appropriations of, *indian* cultures tend to confuse any stable notions of authentic Natives that might have obtained. Such confusions end in disappearances, Native disappearances. Chief Black Bear repeats the motif of the story a final time when he reports back to the grandfather that “[he doesn’t] know where all the Indians are” (121). Finally, the grandfather himself disappears, continuing his search for his granddaughter and leaving us with the girl’s “anguished cry, ‘I want it to be real’” (*ibid.*).

Aside from being a mere fashion of Hippie culture, tribalism during the sixties was often a mode of resistance to capitalism and war-time policies. Rebellious leftists would look to Native cultures for tribal alterNatives to the apparently destructive qualities of traditional non-*indian* social structures. This appropriation would give way all too easily, of course, to overly romantic conceptions of *indian* cultures and, sympathetic as such politics might have been toward *indians*, would also do much in the way of eliding

Native political issues. One of the primary dangers of such appropriations of tribal culture during the sixties is voiced by the storyteller, Thomas Builds the Fire, in Alexie's film, *Smoke Signals*. When he tells the story of Arnold Joseph as the ultimate Hippie (because he was already a "real" *indian*), Thomas notes that "he was always wondering how anybody would recognize when an Indian was trying to make a social statement" (screenplay 38). The question is whether any real Native social movement could be possible when Native culture was already co-opted and put to the service of Hippie politics. In his own way, Alexie presents us with a response to that very question:

In that photograph [printed on the cover of *Time* magazine], Arnold is dressed in bell-bottoms and a flowered shirt, his hair in braids, with red peace symbols splashed across his face like war paint. He holds a rifle above his head, captured in that moment just before he proceeded to beat the shit out of the National Guard private lying on the ground beneath him. Another demonstrator holds a sign that is just barely visible over Arnold's left shoulder. It reads MAKE LOVE NOT WAR (screenplay 39).

The irony of Arnold's violence against the backdrop of the peace movement demonstrates the ultimate incompatibility of Native social politics and the Hippie movement. That the two should be made co-essential through tribal appropriations seems entirely inappropriate and an assault on the integrity of Native social politics in general, which require an autonomous articulation separate from the politics of a predominantly White left wing.⁶

Drew Hayden Taylor,⁷ a Canadian-Anishnawbe writer, takes a more light-hearted approach to the issue of ceremonial appropriations than Alexie. He seems more curious than anything at those figures he and an Elder friend call "wannabes, groupies, and do-gooders." He paraphrases their stock introduction this way: "I really-respect-and-honour-your-culture-and-want-to-be-a-part-of-it-so-please-let-me-participate-and-learn-from-

your-sacred-and-ancient-ceremonies-so-I-can-understand-your-ways-this-isn't-just-a-phase-I'm-going-through-I-really-mean-it-so-can-I-huh (108)?" The real confusion they have about would-be Natives is exactly what they hope to learn from Native cultures:

My Elder friend and I sat around for a good forty-five minutes trying to figure out what, specifically, they wanted to "understand?" Why we eat so much macaroni and tomatoes; why seventy-five percent of the Native population doesn't vote. And why we wear buckskin on hot summer days? (I haven't figured that one out yet myself.) (108)

Such romantic obsessions perpetuate the more idealized notions that assume *indian* cultures, and by extension any *indians* themselves, are treasure-troves of some sort of mystical knowledge. What they tend to suppress is the fact that many Native people have the same concerns as any other people and that there are certain realities, both social and political, that are erased by an emphasis on exotic and ancient ceremonial knowledge.

Taylor, in the end, presents us with a more nuanced view of *White-indians*, though, noting that not all *White-indians* can be criticized for their assimilation into Native cultures. He claims, for example, of his aunt that:

she didn't show up on our reserve all those years ago to "understand." She just fell in love and couldn't have cared less if my uncle was Indian. Many other family members and friends fit into this category. They accept us as who we are, but they don't want to be us. Who can argue with that? (109)

This perspective throws into sharp relief those less responsible appropriations of Native culture that are shaped more by essentialized and exoticized obsessions with Native identities and their appropriation for non-Native politics. Taylor's somewhat flippant solution is to recognize that both non-*indian* and *indian* cultures have their pretenders, that there are Whites who pretend to be *indian*, and there are *indians* who pretend to be

White. He finally lands on a cultural exchange: “ship ours back, and we’ll ship yours back too” (110).

Taylor’s style of writing is less hard-hitting than it might be, and therefore is easier for non-Native readers to digest without offense. This is not necessarily the case with Sherman Alexie’s work, which is intended to bring to light all those nasty ideas about cultural sovereignty and non-Native delusions that many are unwilling to mention. This is why a poem like “Tourists” is useful in a conversation about non-Native appropriations of Native identities. In it, Alexie very clearly points out the problems and dangers inherent in non-Native pretensions to indigeneity, dangers that cannot be dismissed by simply “shipping them back”:

James Dean has never seen
a powwow, but he joins right in, dancing
like a crazy man, like a profane clown.
James Dean cannot contain himself.
He dances in the wrong direction. He tears
at his hair. He sings in wild syllables
and does not care. The Indian dancers stop
and stare like James Dean was lightning
or thunder, like he was bad weather.
But he keeps dancing, bumps into a man
and knocks loose an eagle feather.
The feather falls, drums stop.
This is the kind of silence
that frightens White men. James Dean
looks down at the feather
and knows that something has gone wrong.
He looks into the faces of the Indians.
He wants them to finish the song (91).

In this section of the poem, James Dean practices his hand at appropriation by interjecting himself into a Native dance. When he ends up botching the dance, knocking other dancers over and silencing the drums, it is a clear sign that such appropriations are not appropriate. James Dean represents a celebrity culture that makes cultural

appropriation fashionable. But he, like Janis Joplin and Marilyn Monroe in the other sections of the poem, clearly does not belong in this context and his insistence on making himself belong ends only in ruin.

Alexie also represents other public figures bent on appropriating Native cultures. This cast of non-Native writers pretending to be *indian* might even be considered more dangerous than celebrities who glamorize other cultures because theirs are pretenses perpetrated in earnest, with an express intention of claiming for themselves an “authentic” Native identity in order to substantiate their own representations of, and on behalf of, real *indian* communities. Alexie’s character, Jack Wilson, in *Indian Killer*, is an emblematic figure in the contest over *indian* representations and he represents the quintessence of the non-Native author usurping the role of Native informant.

Wilson, a retired police officer who became a writer of *indian* murder-mysteries, claims to be Shilshomish through an imagined relation to Red Fox, a medicine man of that tribe (*Indian Killer* 158). Gaining in popularity as a writer, his goal, ironically since he is not in fact Native, is to “write the book that would finally reveal to the world what it truly meant to be Indian” (338). The “real” *indians* in the novel do not react sympathetically toward Wilson’s attempts to represent for “his people.” The *indians* he meets regularly in Big Heart’s Soda and Juice Bar, an *indian* hangout he frequents in order to glean information about *indians* and to try to get a sense of belonging to the community he claims as his own, uniformly treat him with contempt. They tolerate him as long as he is buying them drinks, but refuse to take him seriously at all, finally reacting violently to his pretensions:

In blissful ignorance, he figured he fit in fine, though the skins in Big Heart’s knew that he was just another White guy trying to become Indian

by hanging out in an Indian bar. Wilson thought he was charming, but he had become an expected figure of Big Heart's, a cheap sort of entertainment, and all the Indians called him Casper the Friendly Ghost (180).

When he finally disturbs his "friends" at the bar by asking too many questions about the "Indian Killer" (a serial killer in Seattle who scalps his victims and leaves owl feathers on their bodies), they react unkindly because they know "that Wilson was probably trying to write some book about the scalping. And he'd get it wrong. Wilson didn't understand anything about Indians" (185).

What Wilson understands about *indians* comes, in fact, from his readings in history and the tradition of fanciful and romantic notions about *indians* that are so rampant in this country. He knows, for example, that *indians* are supposed to pay attention to their dreams (338), and that true *indian* men were tall medicine men with extraordinarily long, black hair who women fall in love with because they are "emotionally distant and troubled," quiet warriors with good hearts (162). This is, in fact, the *indian* that Wilson writes in his novel and, not coincidentally, part of the reason that Native characters in the story react to him so negatively.

Principal among those negative reactions are Marie Polatkin's, who objects to his being on the syllabus for a Native American literature course she attends at the university. Her argument, in the end, is that Wilson is more of an "Indian killer" than anybody else because his books write a non-Native conception of Native experiences over the more authentic representations of real Native writers:

"Well, for somebody who is supposed to be so authentic and traditional, Wilson sure doesn't have much to do with Indians. I mean, there are so many real Indians out there writing real Indian books. Simon Ortiz, Roberta Whiteman, Luci Tapahonso [. . .] Why teach Wilson? It's like these books are killing Indian books" (67-8).

Marie eventually stages a protest at one of Wilson's readings and circulates a petition demanding that he stop writing about *indians*. In spite of her insistence on an authenticity that may not really exist, Marie's point is still valid. The types of representations written by Wilson are not responsible by any stretch, and the fact that so many Natives resist his pretension to *indian* identity is telling in that regard. At the very least, her criticism should stand as a call for some sort of accountability for writers who pretend to be what they are not.

John Smith, the suggestively-named primary character in the novel, also reacts negatively to Wilson. He hatches a plan, eventually aborted, to kill Wilson because he is considered by John to be "the White man who was responsible for everything that had gone wrong" (276). John, a Native man adopted at birth by a White family, is himself psychologically unstable, off his pills literally. Yet, as a person who has had to recover his knowledge of *indian* culture (ostensibly his own culture) through texts like Wilson's, John is keenly aware of its falsity. His identity crisis, a primary theme in the novel, culminates in his kidnapping Wilson and, instead of killing him, scarring him so that everyone will be able to identify him as a pretender. When asked by Wilson what he wants, John replies, "please [. . .] let me, let us have our own pain" (412). John's response calls to attention the way that suffering and injustice become the bases for resistance. Ethnic identity and colonial histories, in this way, come to represent the foundations of political resistances. When figures like Wilson, with little or no real understanding of those experiences, co-opt that suffering, they also co-opt the authority to critique, denying the foundations of identity and resistance to those who actually need it.

Such a basis for authority might make it appear that writers like Alexie are policing the borders of indigeneity in order to protect their own resources and power; and, to a certain extent, this may be true.⁸ Janet Blumberg cites Alexie's especially vociferous attacks on "eyedropper Indians" and other pretenders such as Jack Wilson, noting that

he thinks every non-Native writer about Native experience cuts into the market for this kind of writing, and that the least such writers can do is to donate a percentage of their royalties to Indian colleges, to help produce genuine Native writers in the future. "That would be a very Indian thing to do," Alexie comments wryly, "and we could admire them for it" (127).

Clearly what is at stake here is the viability of Native authors in the public sphere and their capacity to dictate how Natives are represented there. Alexie also insists that "Indian physiognomy and Indian experience distinguish the authentic voices of Native American experience. [And] their opportunity to address the larger society must not be encroached upon by non-Native writers, however able and sympathetic such writers might be" (ibid.).

It seems at times that Alexie is being somewhat sanctimonious about his "victimry," placing too much emphasis on an "authentic" Native experience. My own experience might be a case in point. Although I have never claimed an authentic *indian* identity, I have nonetheless felt the pain of being discriminated against on the basis of assumptions about my being *indian*.⁹ As a junior high-school student in Rapid City, South Dakota, I was assaulted for being *indian*, I have been called a "Prairie Nigger" once, was regularly stopped by security at the local mall, and one time was turned away from a voting booth with my mother because they refused to listen to her name as Youngberg rather than Young Bird. Thus, even while being non-Native in strict terms,

and certainly not having been raised thinking of myself as *indian* (I couldn't likely count the number of times my mother and I denied it), I still share in some of those experiences Alexie might consider truly Native. Still, Alexie's point is a good one. To what extent should people be allowed to claim Native identities simply by stating it, especially people like Jack Wilson who have no real sense of the problems that can come along with being *indian*? It appears that too many people attempt to benefit from the "boon" available (however scant even today) as a result of real suffering by Native communities.

Unfortunately, such judgements on the veracity of claims to *indian* identity also spill over into debates over who is more or less *indian* among even those writers with legitimate claims to Native heritage. Once the original critique is launched on the basis of identity, the debate over "authentic" representations gives way all too easily to internecine wars over who has more or less *indian* blood, or who was brought up how close to "real" Native cultures. Vizenor responds to Alexie's authenticity politics this way:

Sherman Alexie, who seems to be obsessed with the politics of terminal identity, declared the third literary war in Native literature. He is critical, for some obscure reason, of Native authors who do not live on or near reservations, and yet, as he strains for tradition he writes back the stories of simulations and silhouettes. Alexie poses close to the ancient bones, but is his pose a nostalgia for victimry? He clicks an electronic mouse with a common touch, creates postindian stories, and then scorns other authors. These are tiresome *indian* poses in the literary wars (*Postindian Conversations* 150).

His pose, of course, is not "nostalgia for victimry" in the strictest sense. Rather, it is a pose that capitalizes on the valorization, and valuation through commodification, of victimry in an industry that rewards tragedy and foundational appeals to authentic suffering. Alexie has a personal stake in victimry and these poses are not done for the

sake of nostalgia, but for the sake of putting food on the table and a nice car in the three-stall garage. In the process, his capitulation to identity politics sustains and perpetuates fixed notions of *indian* identities in the larger context of the National public sphere. The notion that there is an “authentic” *indian*, and that he “poses close to the ancient bones,” is re-inscribed in the public imagination and, thus, undermines Alexie’s own project of re-imagining the Native outside the ossifying parameters of popular conceptions.

In a recent article published in *Time* magazine, Alexie has occasion to comment on non-Native writers’ appropriation of Native identities. The piece is about Nasdijj, author of the popular memoir *The Blood Runs Like a River Through My Dreams*, who was recently embarrassed by information that his authentic *indian* identity was a complete farce. In it, Alexie claims that the real problem with these pretensions is that they serve as an insult to real people who have suffered real injustice by reducing that suffering to a literary style:

So why should we be concerned about his lies? His lies matter because he has cynically co-opted as a literary style the very real suffering endured by generations of very real Indians because of very real injustices caused by very real American aggression that destroyed very real tribes. He isn't the first to do it. In 1991 the American Booksellers Association gave its book-of-the-year award to Forrest Carter's Cherokee-themed memoir, *The Education of Little Tree*, despite the documented fact that Carter was really Asa Carter, a rabid segregationist and the author of George Wallace's infamous war cry, "Segregation today! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" (*Time*, Jan 29, 2006)

Here, the foundations to representational authority are clearly based on an appeal to authenticity that is itself dictated by quantity and quality of suffering. Any plea to “leave us our suffering,” of course, rests on shaky ground already because it posits, in the place of structured resistance based on sovereignty and virility, a discourse of debility and victimry.

Identity and authority based on victimry is a dangerous road. In *Wordarrows: Native States of Literary Sovereignty*¹⁰ Vizenor relates the story of a Native couple who visited his office at the American Indian Employment and Guidance Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota where he was director. I will quote the story at length:

The man was a mixed-blood Native with bright blue eyes. His face and hands were weathered, marked by scars and he seemed to bear an enormous sense of personal disaster. The Native woman wore an oversized shirt that was stained, smeared by vomit. She was drunk, undernourished, ancient from abuse, and when she moved her mouth to speak, the creases on her face sagged under an enormous cultural burden. The fetid odor of her slow breath and the vomit on her clothes permeated the office. The man blamed racialism and the dominant culture for his problems, and that included alcoholism, the moment, motive, and mark of poverty. Adversely, he seemed to be secure in the tragic summons of victimry.

I was not in the mood at the end of the week to listen to mundane racial stories about White demons in the city. Native shamans on the reservation were more treacherous. I told him in a rather nasty tone of voice that some shaman might take back his Native blood one night and that would solve all of his many problems (xi).

Vizenor, here and elsewhere, insists on Native identities separate from suffering because its co-optation in a liberal marketplace that rewards commodified victimry with public sympathy (and the more pecuniary gains associated with it) fosters dependency rather than sovereignty. The woman's standing up at the end of Vizenor's story and, against the remonstrations of her husband, singing a traditional honoring song marks, for Vizenor, a moment of "literary sovereignty" because it represents a pride in personal identity rather than a capitulation to victimry and helplessness. Secure Native identities are those that refuse to capitulate to helplessness, and especially dependency, by blaming Whites for every personal problem. Struggles for sovereignty and independence require strength of character founded in righteous cause rather than victimry. It is an issue of battling against structural inequities through situational political engagements without relying on

romanticized (but still real) appeals to suffering, which is itself an instrument of erasure in the way it heralds disappearance as a tragedy of history rather than constituting survival in the historical present. One is an assertion of weakness and debility while the other is an assertion of strength and virility.

For Native writers, though, there is more at stake in the contest over authentic identities than co-optations of suffering. White imposters often write the expected idea under the guise of being Native, lending credibility to debilitating representations that fix *indians* in romantic pasts and elide present struggles. Moreover, those writers then establish certain expectations that Native writers are often forced to live up to in order to maintain viable careers. Drew Hayden Taylor recalls:

I once wrote an episode of *Street Legal* and accidentally caught a glimpse of a memo from the producer to a story editor asking him to rewrite the dialogue of my Native Elder to “make him more Indian.” I guess as a Native person, I don’t know how real “Indians” talk. Bummer. These are just a few examples of the battle Native writers often face (68).

A certain type of reality is constituted by non-Natives who write the expected idea of *indians*, and especially non-Natives who pretend to be and are taken as authentic representatives. This scenario creates an environment in which Natives, in order to be accepted, must write according to those preconceptions, or face a long, hard battle toward recognition in the public sphere. Worse yet, they may be criticized, ironically enough, for being inauthentic.

Taylor finally asks what must be in evidence for a story to be “Native enough,” responding that “maybe I’s got be good writer like dem Indians whats W.P. Kinsella writes about. It no sound like any Indian I ever hears, but what the hell, I maybe win bunch of awards. On second thought, you never mind. I get headache trying write like

this” (69). Alexie also answers his question in the final lines of his poem “How to Write the Great American Indian Novel”: “In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, / all of the White people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be / ghosts” (95).

The sum of this displacement is the ultimate misrepresentation of *indians*. The Native dissolves out of the equation in a slew of political, cultural, and historical elisions. More importantly, *indian* problems have a tendency to be erased. Real *indians* and real *indian* issues cease to exist, displaced by romantic pretensions that often focus on the images of an idyllic, and more often than not imagined, past; and, when they do not focus there, they cannot be taken as serious critiques because they are ultimately embedded in lies. What Alexie’s character, John Smith, tries to prove is what Rayna Green also asserts: “For Indians to be Indian [. . .] in the historical future, non-Indians must give up the role” (50).

Even Vizenor agrees with this danger. He remarks, in an interview with A. Robert Lee, that:

The New Age movement is a market courtesy. Yes, and the courtesy, in turn, embraces an *indian* mystery. Yet the only real mystery, it seems to me, is why the sale of books by Native authors has never been as great as by those who write about *indian* simulations. Obviously, readers are better acquainted with the simulations of an *indian* absence than with the presence of Natives in original stories. These simulations serve an eager audience, and many writers deliver *indian* simulations without a trace of irony (*Postindian Conversations* 165).

The simulations of the publishing industry, interested more in selling books than it is in truths, are subject to the demands of the marketplace. That marketplace is, in turn, dominated by a long history of misrepresentations and misapprehensions that transmogrify themselves into expected ideas. When those expected ideas are not in evidence, they turn

against the marketability of “genuine” products. “To create *indians* as some strain of true wisdom derived from arcane healers in hidden places is a deception, but this is not the first time, of course, that publishing has made millions on simulations and deceptions” (Vizenor, *Postindian Conversations* 165).

At the same time, however, Vizenor refuses to posit authenticities, and their debates, as the solution to these problems. The reason is that “identity inquisitors,” as he calls them, problematically assume a “real” authority based on authenticity when they should be questioning the very notion of authority itself. Sovereignty is about the authority to self-represent, and that authority is undermined by Native appeals to “authenticity” just as much as it is undermined by non-Natives’ pretensions to that identity.

Anthropologists and “Other” Academics

Authors who pretend to *indian* identities are not the only White professionals targeted as being inimical to the establishment of autonomous Native identities. Alexie’s work in particular often expresses frustration with the academy, and specifically with non-Native academics, for doing much representational damage to Native cultures. Ultimately, it appears that Alexie sees little hope for non-Native representations of Native communities, especially in the academic arena, where his mistrust of White scholars in Native Studies is most salient. Alexie levels a blistering critique of anthropologists in his fiction through Dr. Stephen Cox (“Dear John Wayne”) and even reserves special vituperation for literary critics through his anthropologist-cum-literary scholar, Dr. Clarence Mather (*Indian Killer*). At issue in these critiques is not only the

irresponsibility in terms of representational quality of much of the scholarship on Natives during the past few centuries, but more importantly the question of who has the authority to write about Natives and where that authority should be located. Also bound up in these debates are the matters of the responsibility and accountability of presumed representatives of Native cultures.

Vine Deloria Jr. dedicates an entire chapter of *Custer Died for Your Sins* to anthropologists in Indian Country. “Anthropologists and Other Friends” indicts certain scholarly representations of *indians* on the basis of a self-serving professional structure that encourages misrepresentation in the name of scholarship. His descriptions of anthropologists on reservations are not very flattering:

INTO EACH LIFE, it is said, some rain must fall. [. . .] But Indians have been cursed above all other people in history. Indians have anthropologists.

[. . .]

The origin of the anthropologist is a mystery hidden in the historical mists. Indians are certain that all societies of the Near East had anthropologists at one time because all those societies are now defunct.

Indians are equally certain that Columbus brought anthropologists on his ships when he came to the New World. How else could he have made so many wrong deductions about where he was (78)?

Deloria’s primary criticism of anthropologists is that they do too much to perpetuate inaccurate ideas about Native cultures and that those misrepresentations come to form the basis of policy decisions on Native affairs. Moreover, those misrepresentations come to stand in for realities, being constituted as truth on the basis of academic authority to the extent that Natives themselves begin to parrot those ideas “in an attempt to communicate the real situation” (82).

Vizenor will articulate his own critique of anthropological misrepresentations in the terms of “manifest manners.” In his parlance, manifest manners are the “structural

conceits of savagism and civilization” that objectify the *indian* through simulations, academic and otherwise, that serve the interests of dominating hegemonies and effectively erase the Native by substituting simulated knowledge in place of what might otherwise be called the “real” (preface to *Manifest manners* vii). Vizenor is particularly critical of anthropologists and other social scientists who take Native cultures as their object of study:

“I have not been fierce enough about anthropology. [. . .] Consider the arrogance of a culture that believes in outside experts, the experts who create simulations, and consider the culture that believes in such experts over Natives, over the wit and wisdom of Native stories, and the cultural predators who reduce the original, mythic, and ironic perceptions of Natives to mere material evidence. Consider the cruelty of a culture that converts Native reason and tricky stories into dumbwaiter theories and celebrates museum simulations over a Native presence. Who are these agents of manifest manners? Well, none other than anthropologists with no culture of their own” (*Postindian Conversations* 90).

The arrogance of assuming knowledge and authority over “other” cultures, of course, is not the only danger of anthropological optimisms. Vizenor claims also that “anthropologists have used the inventions of ethnic cultures and the representations of the tribes as tropes to academic power in institutions” (*Manifest Manners* 76). Thus, anthropology perpetuates in its very disciplinary assumptions imperialist notions of authority and also serves as a systematic means of capitalizing on that authority through the professionalization of epistemological arrogance.

More significantly, however, it posits its own knowledge, often inaccurate, fixationalist, and romantic, in place of the real, effectively erasing the Native and positing in its place the *indian*. In his claim that “foundational theories have overburdened tribal imagination, memories, and the coherence of natural reason with simulations and the cruelties of paracolonial historicism” and his parallel assertion that “anthropologists, in

particular, were not the best listeners or interpreters of tribal imagination, liberation, or literatures” (*Manifest manners* 75), Vizenor cites Clifford Geertz’s *Words and Lives*: “to put it brutally, but not inaccurately, Lévi-Strauss argues that the sort of immediate, in-person ‘being there’ one associates with the bulk of recent American and British anthropology is essentially impossible: it is either outright fraud or fatuous self-deception” (*Manifest manners* 76).

Still, it is important to recognize that Vizenor does not posit an “authentic” Native in place of the simulations of manifest manners. In fact, the Postindian, Vizenor’s “storiers of presence,” are also simulations. They are Native simulations that serve to counteract the absences constituted through and by the discourses of manifest manners. He avers, “Simulations are neither good nor bad, but are masks with nothing behind them. Postindian simulations are another kind of mask that obscures the real” (*Postindian Conversations* 86). Any positing of “real” or “authentic” identities must either be ironic, as is the case in the simulations of the Postindian, or, if unselfconscious, are themselves servants to and perpetrators of manifest manners. In this scheme, any notions of authentic, real, monolithic, or essential identities, even if posited by Natives themselves, are not only suspect but dangerous because they objectify and hem in identities. Even strategic essentialisms, when deployed unselfconsciously and without a sense of irony, imprison rather than liberate.

Many other Native writers consider anthropologists to be the principal perpetrators of the cultural erasures of manifest manners as well. This is probably due, in part, to the fact that anthropologists have been so visible on reservations and no less instrumental in forming the popular concepts of *indian* cultures or in the formation of

governmental policies by which “Indian Affairs” are administered. In his fiction, Sherman Alexie expresses a deep preoccupation with, and suspicion of, representations of indigeneity within anthropological discourse. In the story, “Dear John Wayne,” Alexie specifically identifies the genre of the ethnographic interview—this seat of authority for the anthropologist—as a problematic site for the production of knowledge on Natives.

In “Dear John Wayne” Alexie manipulates the interview form in order to destabilize both its authoritative claim to objectivity and its “legitimacy” in the epistemological construction of the subject. What I’m arguing, then, is that Sherman Alexie continually undercuts the foundations of academic authority through his reformulation of the interview in this story. In “Dear John Wayne” we see the objectivity of the anthropologist deconstructed and his authority defused by an uncooperative interviewee, Etta Joseph, who from the outset resists the patterned and presumptive questioning of the interviewer. This strategy of rewriting the ethnographic interview in the story represents a resistance to “objective” forms of knowledge that have been deployed in the service of cultural domination and erasure. It’s a counter-discourse in the sense that Helen Tiffin (1987) understands counter-discourse: not as a discourse that seeks to supplant the dominant, to take its place, but as a discourse that seeks to expose and erode the biases of an ostensibly objective field of knowledge, namely anthropology. This is an essentially deconstructive project; but we will find, I hope, that something more than simple deconstruction is going on.

One of the formal methods Alexie deploys in the story in order to undercut and deconstruct the interview process, is that the questions and answers in the text are continually confused. Etta’s responses to Dr. Cox’s prompts, noted in the trans-script as

A: (for “answer”), are more often than not actually questions. These are the moments where Etta redirects the conversation Dr. Cox is trying to have and constitutes, in place of his plan, the driving impulse for the path the interview takes. Essentially, she usurps the role of the interviewer. The question that I want to focus on here has to do with books, academic discourse, and the constitution of truth:

A: Why are you really here?

Q: Well, I was trying to get into that. I wanted to talk about dance and the Indian . . .

A: You’re here about John Wayne, enit?

Q: Excuse me?

A: You came here to talk about John Wayne.

Q: Well, no, but the John Wayne mythology certainly plays an important role in the shaping of twentieth-century American and Native American culture, but . . .

A: Have you ever seen a John Wayne movie?

Q: Yes, yes, I have. Most of them, in fact. [. . .]

A: I used to be an actress.

Q: Really? Well, let’s see here, I don’t recall reading about that in your file.

A: What are you doing?

Q: Well, I’m reading through the file, your profile here, the pre-interview, some excellent books regarding your tribe, and a few texts transcribed directly from the Spokane Tribe oral tradition, which I must say, are quite . . .

A: Just put those papers away. And those books. What is it with you White people and your books? (191)

At the moment that Dr. Cox begins to leaf through “the file,” we have our answer to Etta’s question as to why he is there. He is there so that he can pack his files with more books. What we need to understand is what the purpose, or function, of those files and books that the anthropologist packs with his knowledge is. In the simplest sense, we understand Dr. Cox to mean a dossier when he refers to Etta’s file—what at one time was a *filum*, a string or a wire on which documents were hung for easy reference. This is the literal meaning from the Latin *filum*, a thread, which also gives us the sense of a

teleological thrust to the knowledge Dr. Cox constructs. The intent of this “thread” is to provide a coherent, predetermined tenor or path for a discourse (be it an argument or a story or whatever). The function, then, of Dr. Cox’s files, his books, is not to produce new knowledge, meaning knowledge that is not collaborative or does not conform to what is on file already. In short, its function is to record, safeguard, organize, or structure old information. Likewise, the interview he is conducting with Etta will eventually become a file itself, another document strung on the thread that perpetuates the truths and protocols achieved in his academic discourse. We can see as much if we look quickly at the assumptions Dr. Cox makes about the conversation he is having with Etta. In the citations below, we find that Dr. Cox is quite confident about what he already knows about Etta.

Q: Yes, very amusing. Irony, a hallmark of the contemporary indigenous American. Good, good. So, perhaps we could officially begin by [. . .] (190)

Q: Oh, I see, okay. Formality. Yes, quite another hallmark of the indigenous. Ceremony and all. I understand. I’m honored to be included. [. . .] (ibid.)

Q: Okay, wait, I think I understand. We were participating in a tribal dialogue, weren’t we? That sort of confrontational banter which solidifies familial and tribal ties, weren’t we? Oh, how fascinating, and I failed to recognize it.

A: What are you talking about?

Q: Well, confrontational banter has always been a cultural mainstay of indigenous cultures. In its African form, it becomes the tribal rite they call “doing the dozens.” You know, momma jokes? Like, your mother is so fat, when she broke her leg gravy poured out. It’s all part of the oral tradition. And here I was being insulted by you, and I didn’t recognize it as an integral and quite lovely component of the oral tradition. Of course you had to insult me. It’s your tradition (193).

That Dr. Cox’s authoritative knowledge about Native cultures is reliant on exotic notions that have little or no bearing or basis in reality should be quite clear. And, in case it is not, Etta responds accordingly:

A: Oh, stop it, just stop it. Don't give me that oral tradition garbage. It's so primitive. It makes it sound like Indians sit around naked and grunt stories at each other. Those books about Indians, those texts you love so much, where do you think they come from (ibid.)?

Vine Deloria Jr. forges a similar description of anthropologists and likewise criticizes the knowledge they produce:

An anthropologist comes out to Indian reservations to make OBSERVATIONS. During the winter those observations will become books by which future anthropologists will be trained, so that they can come out to reservations years from now and verify the observations they have studied. [. . .] You may be curious as to why the anthropologist never carries a writing instrument. He never makes a mark because he ALREADY KNOWS what he is going to find. He need not record anything except his daily expenses for the audit, for the anthro found his answer in the books he read the winter before. No, the anthropologist is only out on the reservation to VERIFY what he has suspected all along—Indians are a very quaint people who bear watching (79-80) .

Here, one can see the thread of anthropological knowledge on *indians* being woven into a tapestry, or better yet, a star quilt. One can see Dr. Cox and Deloria's anthropologists filing the *indian* away for easy reference in anthropological museums and scores of authoritative books on Natives.

Etta Joseph, of course, is quite clear about what Dr. Cox's "files" actually contain; and this is the turning point in this argument since her aetiological account of Dr. Cox's books calls into question the system Dr. Cox has for producing and archiving knowledge about *indians*. Etta tells us, finally, that his files, his books, and the thread of knowledge that they represent, contain lies. She eventually harangues Dr. Cox into defending his professional reputation, which he does by appealing to the authority of the books he has read and written. And her response is this:

A: No, no, no, those books started with somebody's lie. Then some more lies were piled on top of that, until you had a whole book filled

with lies, then somebody slapped an Edward Curtis photograph on the cover, and called it good (193).

This counter-interrogation, obviously, is going to unsettle our poor anthropologist, and he ends up asking what to us is another immensely important question. His pivotal question is actually the same question Etta asked him before: “Tell me then, why are you here?” (195). Given the objections she raises to his academic authority, Dr. Cox wants to know what it is exactly that Etta is proving by consenting to the interview. What can Dr. Cox possibly learn from her that could help him with his work? We learn a couple of pages later that Etta was a horrible powwow dancer, which Dr. Cox admits won’t do much to advance his prefabricated thesis about the influence of European ballroom dancing on the *indian* fancydance tradition. It’s clear, then, that what Cox is supposed to be learning has little to do with what he intended to learn when he arrived—or, what he intended to verify when he arrived. What Etta demonstrates is the utter incapacity of Dr. Cox’s attempts to know, or at least the utter inadequacy of his system to the production of knowledge about others. There is a palpable tension, instantiated in the long moments of silence throughout the interview, between Etta’s attempts to teach Dr. Cox something about herself, as an individual and a Native subjectivity, and something about himself as well—especially about his claims to authority, which she unhinges from the very beginning of the interview when she refuses to identify herself until he identifies himself first. Hers is a refusal to divulge herself in and on his terms, a refusal to be woven into his tapestry, or strung up on his *filum*.

Her refusal, in fact, amounts to more than just that. Rather than simply being obstinate and negating Dr. Cox’s patterning of the *indian*, which she could have done by simply refusing to be interviewed (a tactic which Vine Deloria Jr. actually recommends

in his chapter), Etta shows the anthropologist—and, more importantly, the reader of the story—something more about herself as an *indian*. Specifically, she relates the story of her love affair with John Wayne. It isn't a matter of simply deconstructing anthropology, though that certainly is the starting point here; but it's also an issue of her trying to push beyond the epistemological limitations of anthropological methods of knowing. It's a revision of manifest manners that refuses to jettison contact altogether. The idea that Dr. Cox can learn something about Etta, about himself, and about his relation to *indians* is maintained in the story. There are grounds for producing knowledge about the other; but there are also specific rules about how that knowledge can be produced and about who is qualified to produce it. That's why Etta brings up the story about her affair with John Wayne. There is hope that translation can occur.

I use the term translation here for a specific reason. When Arnold Krupat develops his theory of anti-imperial translation, he is thinking more or less in specifically linguistic terms. The idea is that European conquest of the Americas can be characterized by a series of historically specific violences in translation. It is a theory that claims that indigenous peoples in this hemisphere “entered European consciousness only by means of a variety of complex acts of translation” (74). These translations, then, invariably privileged European conceptions of culture. Although he maintains this theory primarily in terms of language itself, Krupat mentions briefly in the essay, “Postcolonialism, Ideology, and Native American Literature,” that he really does envision this theoretical construct to extend beyond linguistics into “cultural translation.” Krupat's theory helps us to think about Dr. Cox's academic practice as a type of imperial translation—cultural rather than linguistic. He is translating Etta's existence, he is

accounting for her according to a predetermined logic, according to a file, or an archive that already assumes it knows her. Moreover, the mechanics of the interview itself imply a superior and inferior knowledge. Etta is to identify herself, while Dr. Cox remains anonymous. His books have already told him what he needs to confirm, and he cannot conceive that she has anything new to teach him.

By extension, I want to think of Etta's uncooperative attitude toward the anthropological interview as counter-imperial translation. Not only does she resist, successfully, the imperialist attitude of her interviewer—embodied and perpetuated in the imperialist structure of the interview form itself—, but she attempts to bridge the gap between Cox and herself by inserting real knowledge about herself as a person rather than as an “Indian,” as that term signifies in Cox's professional parlance. She poses, then, for Dr. Cox, a reality of her existence as human agent over and against his disciplinary, and imperial, conception of the “authentic” *indian*. At the same time, Alexie's story itself is, on a metafictional level, a re-translation of the imperial form of the interview. Sherman Alexie is instantiating a counter-discourse in his own text. By writing this account of Etta's anti-imperial translation, he is formulating a counter-discourse of his own in terms of the genre he pirates for his story (his polyglot, or heteroglossic text, if you will).

One might finally be tempted to ask why Alexie needs to say this all again—especially since it's almost axiomatic now that conquest entails this sort of representational violence. But the idea that the ethnographic interview is a problematic mechanism for gleaning new knowledge is a platitude that has become dangerous because we can easily dismiss the observation as common knowledge (this is an issue I raise here because it comes up with my students, for example). It's altogether too easy

for them to say, “oh, yeah, it’s problematic; everybody knows that already” as a means to move on quickly to their textbooks, which have their own genesis all too often in precisely this sort of representational constitution. What Alexie reminds us of in his work is the fact that there are material effects of the problematic nature of ethnographic methodologies. He reminds us, through Etta, that these effects bear heavily on those “others,” the would-be objects constituted through anthropological discourses.

Vine Deloria Jr. offers us a workable account of the way that anthropological discourses come to be translated into material effects, and effects that bear heavily on *indians* in particular:

After the books are written, summaries of the books appear in the scholarly journals in the guise of articles. These articles “tell it like it is” and serve as a catalyst to inspire other anthropologists to make the great pilgrimage next summer.

The summaries are then condensed for two purposes. Some condensations are sent to government agencies as reports justifying the previous summer’s research. Others are sent to foundations in an effort to finance the next summer’s expedition west (79).

[. . .] In Washington, bureaucrats and Congressmen are outraged to discover that this “berry-picking food gatherer” has not entered the mainstream of American society. Programs begin to shift their ideological orientation to cover the missing aspect which allowed the berry picker to “flourish.” Programs and the people they serve thus often have a hidden area of misunderstanding which neither administrators nor recipients realize (82).

The idea, of course, is that the lies perpetuated by anthropological work have their first and greatest effect in the realm of public policy. Specifically, the misguided policies of government are misguided precisely by this sort of academic imperialism. The point Deloria makes is that this is not just a bunch of people talking. There are consequences of this talk. For *indians* the consequences lie in the ways in which these discourses translate into public policy on the “Indian Problem” (itself a construct of academic and

political discourses). Finally, the solutions to the “Indian Problem” are often based, as we learned from Etta, on lies, mistakes, and exaggerations. As Deloria sums it up: “behind each successful man stands a woman and behind each policy and program with which Indians are plagued, if traced completely back to its origin, stands the anthropologist.”

Alexie’s other anthropologist, Dr. Clarence Mather, makes his appearance as the instructor of Marie Polatkin’s Native American Literature course in *Indian Killer*. In the story, Dr. Mather comes to be the arch-nemesis of Marie, who is determined to undermine his authority as a White professor of *indian* literature. In truth, Dr. Mather’s arrogant assumption that he knows more about being *indian* than even *indians* do is problematic. In reflecting on his troubled academic and personal relationships with Marie and her cousin Reggie (who was expelled for assaulting Dr. Mather), “Mather knew he could teach both of them a thing or two about being Indian if they would listen to him, but it seemed all the Spokanes were destined to misunderstand his intentions” (135). Misunderstanding his intentions, as they are represented in the novel, is not very difficult. He is indeed guilty of being “full of shit” as Marie and Reggie both claim. From the very beginning, for example, he refuses to concede that Jack Wilson and Forrest Carter, both proven frauds as White writers pretending to be *indian*, should not be taught as Native writers (58). His first lecture in his Native Literature course is, in fact, a celebration of the long tradition of Europeans adopted into *indian* tribes (61). Dr. Mather represents everything that is, or would be, dangerous about having a non-Native instructor holding forth on Native cultures; and Marie sets it as her goal to “challenge Mather’s role as the official dispenser of ‘Indian education’ at the University” (58).

Of course, Marie herself is convinced of Mather's irresponsibility even before she meets him. That she is proven right doesn't negate the fact that she is contentious from the beginning and even admits herself that "she'd found an emotional outlet in the opportunity to harass a White professor who thought he knew what it meant to be Indian. [. . .] She needed conflict, and in those situations where conflict was absent, she would do her best to create it" (61). The volatile mix of a contentious student, already self-conscious about her own status as an *indian* insider,¹¹ and a contemptible professor, too arrogant in his presumptions to knowledge, renders the issues of authority and representation in conflictive terms and precludes from the start any possibility that a real conversation about these issues will take place in the novel. That both characters are precisely that, characters, is heartening if only because it reminds us that in the world outside the novel, a world no less inhabited by "characters," there may yet be hope for resolving these issues.

The novel, in fact, intersects with the outside world insofar as the conflict between Marie and Dr. Mather reflects the ongoing debate within the discipline of Native Studies over the position of Native and non-Native scholars vis-à-vis the field and one another. Alexie has clearly aligned himself with those protectors of Native sovereignty who believe that non-Native scholars should defer to Native informants if they are to speak at all of Native issues. His primary complaint in this regard is: "Indians rarely get to define our own image, and when White people do it, they often get assigned all this authority, and I guess that's what my problem is, that Indians are never allowed the authority to self-define" (qtd in Hollrah 31). His response, then, is to defer to those who have status as cultural insiders.

That solution, of course, is problematic in and of itself, because it leads to a seemingly endless contest over who is more or less Native. Alexie himself has come under attack for not being truly representative of Spokane culture. As Susan Bernardin explains:

Bird [Spokane artist and writer] fears that Alexie's literary and media success encourages readers to treat the Spokane reservation of his fictional terrain as ethnographic or sociological truth, thereby "mistaking it for complete representation." By claiming that in *Reservation Blues* she finds "no evidence of Spokane culture and traditions or anything uniquely Spokane," Bird underscores the danger she sees in the popularity of his fiction and in Alexie himself serving, even if unwillingly so, as a contemporary "race representative" (166).

What emerges once the focus in Native studies is riveted on issues of authenticity is a circular, and ultimately unproductive, battle over who gets to represent. The struggle for power, intellectual sovereignty, and the space to self-represent quickly devolves into essentialisms and ethnic sanctimonies, as contestants for that power become mired in ad hominem debates over blood quantum and who has a better right to represent suffering.

Clearly, non-Native domination of the academy is a problematic situation. But simply barring all those deemed "inauthentic" by the culture-police, whoever it is that arrogates to themselves the authority to perform that role, hardly seems a right course. There certainly need to be corrective measures in place to ensure that academic work is being done in a responsible way; and Native perspectives in the academy are fundamental and necessary to those ends. But to assume that it takes nothing more than blood quantum and a house on the reservation to create sound academic work is a bit glib. Likewise, to assume that White(r) skin and a house in the city automatically renders academic work irresponsible is self-righteous at best and racist at worst.

Recognizing the limits of knowledge as outsiders to the cultures we study is fundamental to good academic work; but excising ourselves from conversations simply because we have the wrong color skin, or the wrong sexual organs, can be dangerous as well. Djelal Kadir finds himself in a similar position when he intervenes in the “critical minefield” of “feminist discourse” (179) in his book *The Other Writing*. I include his response to the conundrum enacted in the counterpoint between Patricia Meyer Spacks and Alice Walker at length because it represents a balanced and eloquent position on the issue of intellectual interventions into spheres of knowledge outside one’s “identifiable” experience:

I have no theory to offer of Third World female psychology in America . . . As a White woman, I am reluctant and unable to construct theories about experiences I haven’t had.

— Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, 1976

Spacks never lived in nineteenth-century Yorkshire, so why theorize about the Brontës.

—Alice Walker, “One Child of One’s Own—An Essay on Creativity,” 1979

[. . .]The lesson I derive from this counterpoint leads me to the conclusion that, in my own critical practice, between neglect and intrusion I must opt for intruding. I follow the more hazardous path of intervention, keenly aware that all of our acts may inevitably be as interventionist as they are exclusionary. I find the risks of intervention preferable to the safety of supervention. Supervening, in the final analysis, is a supreme form of willful neglect, if not righteous ignorance. By “supervention” I understand a self-removal to the security of a superior venue, to a self-serving higher ground.

Persuaded, then, by the wisdom of Alice Walker’s riposte to Patricia Meyer Spacks, I have sallied into the perilous terrain of the other [. . .] My own critical sense of cultural ethos dictates that who we are not is infinitely greater than whoever we may be; that any self-salvaging from solipsistic self-aggrandizement resides in our capacity to countenance the possibilities of who and what we are not. Thus, to ignore the resonances that Alice Walker’s contestation finds within me would mean succumbing to the logic that spawns ghettos—ghettos of mind, of socioeconomic practice, and of institutional subdivisions (*The Other Writing* 179-80).

Native Studies, as a maturing discipline still in the process of gaining its foothold in American institutions, cannot afford to build for itself a ghetto by enforcing “supervention,” in Kadir’s terms. The health and credibility of the discipline demands that it incorporate Native scholars, maybe even that it be controlled and guided by them; but it also needs to be open to dialogue outside its own borders with non-Native voices unless those Native voices want to reside in the dusky basement building in some campus corner yelling only to themselves and the conference-room walls.¹²

Even as he launches strong criticisms of manifest manners, and the academic arrogances and unselfconscious representations that perpetuate them, Vizenor resists devolution into the trap of allowing what he calls the “identity inquisitors” to either confirm or withhold authority based on ethnic identity. Capitulating to authenticity politics in the institutionalized spaces of the academy risks institutionalizing racialism itself:

True, the “concept of ‘race’ or ‘ethnic origins’ means different things in different contexts,” wrote Douglas Benson and John Hughes in *Ethnomethodology*. However, when the tropes to academic power are tied to the simulations of nativism and tribal identities, the context of racialism is prescribed as both essentialist and political in institutions (*Manifest manners* 101).

Ethnic identities, in such cases, are too intimately tied to discourses of victimry, which are themselves instruments of manifest manners. The work of the “identity inquisitors,” especially when it involves internecine battles over who is more or less *indian*, and therefore entitled to more or fewer of the pecuniary benefits of being *indian*, represents a capitulation to the simulations of manifest manners and the commodifying processes of academic capitalism. “Only the identity inquisitors are into the blood politics of envy

and separations,” he maintains in *Postindian Conversations* (151). Separatism is the unproductive opposite of “love, hate, and tricky stories of survivance,” which themselves form the common bond that sustains sovereignty and humanity (ibid.).

Both Dr. Cox and Dr. Mather are types, representing all that is worst in academia. For Alexie to represent academics in such a way might be unfair to a certain extent, but it is understandable considering the long history of “academic” violence against Native cultures and communities perpetrated over the centuries. One can hardly be insulted that Native communities and writers often express distrust, dismay, and even outright disgust at the idea of being objectified and represented by a non-Native scholar. Even if academic study has progressed over the past few decades, at the behest of a growing number of “minority” and “ethnic” voices making their way into academic discussions, that history is one that is not easily forgotten. Moreover, we can’t assume that history has been superceded in the present either.

Consequently, even if we can’t consider Drs. Cox and Mather to be truly representative of the mainstream of academic work today, they still serve as important calls to self-reflection for those of us who choose to interject ourselves into a field whose subject-position is not really our own. Alexie may well have intended them to be a call for the banishment from academia of everybody he considers unfit to perform the duty by dint of their being inauthentic representatives of Native cultures. Such a polemical perspective would be unfortunate indeed. Nevertheless, his redaction of the conflict over authority does much in the way of reminding us of our responsibilities as intellectuals and as scholars making interventions into areas of study that bear heavily on the experiences of living people.

For all his posturing about overturning faulty, inauthentic representations of Native experiences, Alexie's politics are nonetheless invested heavily in the idea of authenticity and especially in policing the borders between what/who is "in" and "out" in Native representation. In many ways, this posturing is understandable and even productive since it can bring to light certain critical problems with non-Native representations of *indians* of the sort I have been interrogating all along in this dissertation. Still, this posturing on the basis of being a real *indian* runs the risk of ideologizing authenticity, positing as more credible what is in reality simply another simulation. All too often, such appeals to authenticity simply replace one hegemonic vision with another, catering to the self-interest of those who obsessively hold out the notion of something authentic in their own representations. When you factor in the economic stakes of authenticity, the issue becomes even more complex. Rather than serving to overthrow hegemonic systems which reward authenticities as commodities, such posturings actually re-inscribe them by perpetuating the contest over who is more and who is less "real." This type of competition contains resistance, and manipulates the fabrication of identities, by shifting the terrain to a struggle over rewards that are themselves a product of an overdetermining marketplace.

Alexie points out for us a series of nodal points in the contest over Native identities and describes the political spaces where the struggle for autonomous self-representation intersects with the appropriative aims of an American culture's will to dominate. The cache of Native intellectuals, whose leading edge I have considered Alexie to be emblematic of, tries hard to avoid the slide into formulaic conceptions of Native identities, refusing to capitulate to, and often working to counter-act, the politics

of misrepresentation that feed off of and feed misapprehensions about Native lives in the modern world. But, as the explosion in the consumption of Native literatures continues, more attention must be paid to the ways in which Native experiences are being instrumentalized in the self-interest of those who are positioned to capitalize on Native identities, whether they be non-Native pretenders to Native identity or Native informants who make their livings off their own identities.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ Deloria came to the same conclusion, maintaining that “all but one person I met who claimed Indian blood claimed it on their grandmother’s side. I once did a projection backward and discovered that evidently most tribes were entirely female for the first three hundred years of White occupation” (Custer 3). Deloria attributes this feminine phenomenon to the idea that the *indian* princess is a romantic figure who helps feed the European immigrant’s obsession with royalty, while the *indian* brave “has too much of the aura of the savage warrior, the unknown primitive, the instinctive animal, to make him a respectable member of the family tree” (ibid.).

² Mestizaje is not a biological fact. There are truly indigenous populations, even in Mexico. But the Mexican national mythos holds that all of Mexico is indigenous. Rayna Green talks about her “cocktail party” relations, arguing that this type of assumption is widespread and that mestizaje is all in the imagination (46). She specifically notes that it is interesting how in Latin America people refer to Aztec or Taino roots (both being extinct populations) versus claiming Mayan roots (the Maya being in evidence as a biological and political entity). The idea that anybody can claim indigenous roots is a colonial idea, and an arrogant one at that. Make the Native White so that Whites can become Native. See also Natividad Gutiérrez’s *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities: Indigenous Intellectuals and the Mexican State*, in which she outlines Mexico’s constitution of national identity based on the appropriation of Aztec culture to the detriment of other Native cultures, which end up being erased in the mythos of *mestizaje* (3-4).

³ The emphasis on blood-quantum in this case is an imperial construction, a racialist measurement imposed and institutionalized by the legal apparatuses of a colonial government that needed to structuralize a method for containing *indian* identity in order to manage Native lives. Authenticity wars, whose combatants are struggling for limited resources, will then be fought on this very terrain. The field, however, is already overdetermined precisely because it is pre-invested with an institutional authority that, ironically, once served to marginalize and now serves to legitimate identities.

⁴ Some might object to the re-inscription of an inside-outside dichotomy here, arguing that such oppositions rarely, if ever, hold true. I am sympathetic to such claims; but regardless of how fungible those borders might be, there are still political reasons for maintaining them in some form because they are founded in the life world of the historical present. Some people are clearly Native, some are clearly not, and some exist in gray areas between. In this way, the dichotomy is disrupted. But because Native political battles today are centered on issues of sovereignty, both political and cultural, some sense of an inside and an outside must be maintained, as ironic as such delimiters are in the end.

⁵ In addition, anybody with some relevant historical knowledge would be familiar the enclaves of Hippies in San Francisco that built communities around an appropriated “Native” tribalism. It is such communities that are “on the block” in Ortiz’s tale.

⁶ Please refer again to chapter one for an exploration of the way that Native cultures have been exploited in the interests of eco-politics.

⁷ Drew Hayden Taylor (Canadian-Anishnawbe) is a professional screenwriter and dramatist. Among his plays to be produced in Canada, the United States, and in Europe are *The Bootlegger Blues* and *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth*. He has also contributed editorials to various magazines.

⁸ I will say more on this issue in the next section of this chapter.

⁹ I am quite reticent about claiming Native identity since my mother was adopted and the identity of her “real” father is unclear, based as it is in the nexus of a family scandal involving my grandmother, who would never speak on the issue. In situations such as these, however, what or who one actually is matters less than what one is perceived to be.

¹⁰ 2003. Originally published as *Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade* in 1978.

¹¹ “Because she could not dance or sing traditionally, and because she could not speak Spokane, Marie was often thought of as being less than Indian” (34).

¹² Part of the reason that Native panels at major conferences are marginal, as is often complained about in Native Studies journals, is no doubt due to the fear many academics harbor of treading into the dangerous waters of ethnic literature, especially when they are policed by “authentic” guards. This, incidentally, is also why Native Studies needs to become comparative, opening its critique to cross-cultural, cross-continental, and trans-oceanic study. We need to understand the rightful place of Native literatures, for example, within the complex of World Literatures and as an integral thread in that web. The languages and (de)limiting structures of authenticity pose a critical challenge to those ends.

Conclusion

CULTURAL CAUSES AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS

Last June, when I was making a return visit to my home in South Dakota, I stopped off in Pierre to see my grandparents. As several of us sat for lunch at the Ramkota, the conversation turned to my studies at the university. Everyone at the table (none of them Native) was interested in my choice to study Native literatures, especially since South Dakota is home to two of the largest reservations in the country, and the politics of *indian*-White relations are always at issue. Eventually, the conversation came around to how to solve certain social problems on the reservations, a new version of the discussions of the “Indian Problem” that have haunted United States history ever since first contact. I was stunned, though in retrospect I should not have been surprised, to hear one of our companions claim unselfconsciously that the reason the reservations in South Dakota were having so many problems was that the *indians* there had no culture. She maintained that, in contradistinction to the *indian* people near her winter home in Las Cruces, New Mexico, who made pottery and all kinds of arts and crafts, the *indian* tribes in South Dakota only wanted to “jump on their horses and hunt buffalo.” After a stunned silence, I brought up the fact that just around the corner the hotel had set up a glass display showcasing Native artists and that behind the capitol building in Pierre there was a Native History museum whose gift shop sold only artwork created by “authentic” Native artisans. I suggested, as gently as I could, that her perspective was racist and that the real problem had more to do with perspectives like hers that sought to erase political issues by focusing on cultural essentialisms that are, for the most part, racist products of the imaginations of people like herself.

What I realized from that conversation, which served as part of the impetus for my writing this dissertation the way I have, is that the very real social and political problems on reservations (like poverty, alcoholism, and suicide) will never be solved so long as these issues are elided by essentialist discussions of culture. What my dinner companion had done was to attribute political problems to cultural causes. She had erased the historic and ongoing facts of racism, bureaucratic inefficiency, and purposefully systematized erosions of Native sovereignty in the process of blaming the supposedly culturally atavistic and inept victims for problems that stem, in reality, from a continuing colonial relationship.

What I have attempted to do in this dissertation, then, is to begin to unravel the relationship between culture and politics and, more importantly, to uncover some of the more popular cultural assumptions still working today to displace Natives themselves and to undermine Native politics. My claim is not that politics and culture are separate spheres, and that the one matters little while the other is primary. Rather, my point is that cultural essentialisms come to elide political realities; and it is imperative that we come to understand the political basis of these misrepresentations and misapprehensions, and also that we give due attention to those Native cultural artifacts, literatures here, that insinuate themselves into the contest over the representational politics that inform public policies. We have seen, for example, how cultural misrepresentations have been instrumentalized in the service of colonial politics. We have seen, as well, how Native writers have used print culture as a means to combat those misrepresentations. The cultural sphere, in this way, stands as an important arena that influences political contests over Native sovereignty. Mine has been an approach, therefore, that refuses to discount either politics or culture and that recognizes the ways in which the two fields inform one another.

By taking on various popular myths about Native cultures, and by setting Native voices in opposition to those myths, I have attempted a de-mystification of the politics that lie behind public discourses on and by Native peoples. This has not been a project of “understanding” Native cultures; rather, it has been a project of understanding how Native cultures are constituted, and why, in the mythological discourses of a national public. Discourses that purport to “understand” the *indian* say more, in fact, about non-Native colonialist cultures than they do about Native cultures themselves. They are myths that constitute an understanding of the other in order to reflect back on themselves. This dissertation has been in part an attempt to understand how the myths of the Vanishing Indian, the Natural Indian, the White Indian, the Hollywood Indian, all serve to legitimate and justify non-Native neo-colonial practices, both political and cultural at once. It has also been an attempt to understand the part of Native voices in the constitution and deconstruction of those national myths.

A myth is a set of beliefs that accrues as a mechanism for explaining or justifying cultural phenomena. In early English another word, from the Old Icelandic “meith,” could be a verbalizing process whereby one showed or demonstrated something to be true. In both senses, and especially in regard to the American aetiology of the *indian*, the word itself is ontological, concerned with manufacturing knowledge of an Other from within the political context of colonialism. Because the myths of the Vanishing *indian* and the nature-loving *indian* seek to justify the colonial cultures from whence they are born, and insofar as they tend to ignore Native knowledge, the mythomania concerning *indian* subjects equals misrepresentation. Even to ascribe mythological status to American discourses on the

Vanishing *indian* or the nature-loving *indian* is to reify that knowledge and elide the political nature of such misrepresentations.

I have placed those “documents of discoveries, cultural studies, and surveillance” that for Gerald Vizenor constitute simulations of the *indian* in juxtaposition to the complementary notions of Native “transmotion and sovereignty” (*Fugitive Poses* 15). I have done so in order to recognize the contradistinction between the imagiNative discourses of manifest manners, those public assertions that misrepresent and perpetuate public misapprehensions of Natives, and Native discourses of survivance that, by dint of their very presence, deconstruct and disobviate those colonialist assertions. Thus, each of the writers I have set over and against the myths of chapters one and two, and Sherman Alexie, along with Simon Ortiz, Gerald Vizenor, and Drew Hayden Taylor, who I explored in greater depth in chapters three and four, are emblems of the obstinacy of true Native voices in opposition to the politics of displacement and erasure.

Non-Native political consciousness and received wisdom represent *indians* in terms of traditionalism and fixity. Indigenous cultures, in fact, have always been very fluid and adaptive. This is what writers such as Sherman Alexie are demonstrating in their fictions, which, like the critical writings which we have examined, adamantly refuse to capitulate to the fixational images of non-Native perusers of Native cultures. Native cultures have been adaptive to a remarkable extent, and this has been the key to Natives’ capacities to survive the genocidal policies that have been a constant fact of life since the European invasion in the 15th century. Karl Kroeber comments that “what is most impressive about the survival of American Indians, their success in not vanishing, is that they resist not merely by clinging to the past but by changing, accepting, and even welcoming at least part of the present” (11).

Native cultures have been adept at maintaining a balance between traditional life and the new; and often what appears to be conflict between tradition and progression is actually a cultural mediation. These tensions, too often considered a sign of deterioration, are actually a sign of health. The best way to describe *indian* cultures, and any other culture for that matter, is as incorporative, rather than traditional. Fixity has been a reality only in the imaginations of those who would fix Native cultures into manageable stereotypes; and all too often those images have been instrumentalized in the service of political domination and economic exploitation.

Forms of oral tradition that have found their way into scriptive and graphemic textuality, as is the case of the texts we have examined, are illustrative of this. Writers such as Alexie are constantly re-working their poems, often changing them from one reading to the next, so that the performance of the work comes to be an integral, and fluid, part of the work itself. In fact, the only way that a written tradition can overcome fixity (and it must overcome it, because cultures cannot remain fixed without violence and violence itself unseats fixities) is through proliferation. Like any ritual culture, Native cultures continually re-write, or amplify, themselves in order to keep abreast of the constantly metamorphosing historical life they seek to record and reflect.

Far from being atavistic and primitive, Native traditions, like the cultures they represent, are forward-looking and progressive because they allow for and incorporate cultural change in real-time, with changes manifesting themselves at specific cultural moments and in specific cultural spaces. Culture is always-already up-to-date, it is the ultimate “local,” always in context and always reflective of that real context. It is reflections on culture that lag, and especially reflections that deny culture (such as my lunch

companion's assertion that *indians* in South Dakota have no culture because they only want to hunt buffalo), or reflections that fix culture for political reasons (like the mythologies dealt with throughout this dissertation). But when we see culture, and Native cultures in particular, for what they are (fluid, adaptive, and political), then we come closer to understanding the nature of *indian*-White relations and the true versatility and viability of Native communities as well as their true place in our National histories.

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Publications

"Interpenetrations: Re-encoding the Queer Indian in Sherman Alexie's *The Business of Fancydancing*." Forthcoming in *Studies in American Indian Literatures (SAIL)* 20.1 (Spring 2008).

"Morphology of Manifest Destiny: The Justified Violence of John O'Sullivan, Hank Morgan, and George W. Bush." *Canadian Review of American Studies*. 36.2 (Winter 2006): 315-33.

"Nature and Unity in William Carlos Williams's *The Red Wheelbarrow*." *The Explicator* 58.3 (Spring 2000): 152-3.

"The Sensitive Swift: Coming to Terms with the Dean's Beneficent Satire." *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Northern Plains Conference on Earlier British Literature*. Ed. Robert J. DeSmith. Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College, 2001. 33-38.

Professional Papers

Society of American Indian Literature panel at the 16th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association in Boston, Massachusetts, May 26-29, 2005: "Queering the Native Sphere: *The Business of Fancydancing* and a New Reading of Sherman Alexie's Codetalk."

American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting: Imperialisms—Temporal, Spatial, Formal at The Pennsylvania State University, Pennsylvania, March 2005: "The Indian Interview as Counterconquest: Sherman Alexie and the Anthropological Encounter."

Eighth Annual Northern Great Plains Conference on Early British Literature at Dordt College, Iowa, April 2000: "The Sensitive Swift: Coming to Terms with the Dean's Beneficent Satire."

Black Hills Research Symposium at Black Hills State University, South Dakota, April 1999: "A Collaborative Website: Experiencing Shakespeare Through Technology" (with Roger Ochse, Holly Huffman, and Karin Malkowski).

Honors and Awards

Institute for the Arts and Humanities Dissertation Fellow, The Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2006.

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