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Native American and American Literature

When discussing American literature, we often forget that five groups once occupied what is now the United States of America. These groups were representative of those from Great Britain, those who left Europe and became the Colonial-Americans, the indigenous Native Americans, those brought from Africa to be made slaves, and the Latin Americans from California and Texas once these became states. Each had their own philosophy of how to live, how to worship, and their cultural practices. Their varying literatures reflected their cultures, telling the story of how each people faced their own trials, accomplished their own goals, and practiced their own beliefs. Some of these literatures also reflected the interaction between these varying groups. American literature today should reflect these five cultures, and yet, the dominant literary tradition is Anglo-American.

Many of the scholars in this essay feel, as I do, it is vital to include more Native American literature in the American literary canon and not just a sampling, as from the Iroquois, Navajo, a couple from the Cherokee, and then several from the varying Sioux nations of which are currently printed in the first three volumes of the *Norton Anthology* and *Heath Anthology*. Even though these literary works are included and they are often required reading for the student, but when it comes to the study and discussion of these works, teachers and professors spend limited class time reviewing them, again, marginalizing the importance of these Native American works. In my own experience, our literature class spent more time on the captive narrative story

of Mary Rowlandson than the five other Native American stories combined in the same book. Therefore, it is crucial to have a basic understanding of Native American cultural practices, religious beliefs, and the change from an oral culture to a written culture. Without having the background knowledge of the Native American people, viewing the literature through a critical lens is pointless, and in the case of the Trickster Tales, becomes no different than reading Aesop's Fables or American Folk Tales.

Authors who emphasize the need for more Native American literature to be incorporated in the canon include Kenneth Roemer, Eric Cheyfitz, Kenneth Lincoln, Paul Lauter, Sherman Alexie, Joel Martin, Joseph Coulombe, M. Scott Momaday, and John Purdy and James Rupert. Other give examples of the types of Native American literature and the reason for their being placed into the anthologies and these are the writings of Susan Feldman, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Wallace Chafe, and Toni Morrison calls attention to the seemingly exclusivity of the canon. Understanding culture and background of the Native Americans is necessary in order to be able to interpret and comprehend the literature of the Native American people. Several authors contribute to this knowledge in my essay, i.e. Stand Watie, Gertrude Bonnin, Frank Waln, and Jennifer Graber.

By analyzing some of the works included in this essay, i.e. trickster tales, creation stories, and the mission schools, my emphasis is in the comparison and resemblances of the works included in the standard American literary canon, such as the *Norton* and *Heath* anthologies, containing fourteen different tribes in three volumes, and those from one of the anthologies of Native American literature, *Nothing but the Truth*, containing twenty six different tribes. These two anthologies contain much of the same type and style of literature; however, the former contains comparatively fewer Native American literary works than those of the white authors. If

we compare the entries, of these canonical texts, we see that in the *Norton Anthology*, volume C, of the 1300 pages, approximately 100 pages are devoted to Native American literature and the majority of that text is from the Lakota-Sioux nation.

In the Introduction of his book, *Native American Literature*, Roemer declares, “But how can one voice represent more than 560 federally recognized (and several hundred hoping-to-be-recognized) tribes” (19)? Arguably, it is not practical for any American literature book to include a story from each of the five hundred plus recognized tribes, but using only a few stories written by Native Americans, and limiting the entries to a couple of different tribal nations, I believe, does not give an accurate view of Native American literature. To gain a better overview, would be to include a dozen or more pieces from fifteen to twenty tribes and place them in the anthologies and other literature textbooks used by students, especially in the secondary and university levels, thereby giving a more accurate account of what makes up American Literature and American history.

The argument of some literary critics is that we include Native American literature in the American literary canon and many will point out that the anthologies do contain Native American texts; however, in this case size does matter. I concur with the literary scholars, who include: editor, Eric Cheyfitz, author, Kenneth Lincoln, editors, Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, and editor, Paul Lauter. When publication of the new edition of the *Heath Anthology* was being considered, Lauter, the general editor commented on the incorporation of additional Native American literature in the anthology,

Changes [...] are relatively few but draw on the latest scholarship to update translations and headnotes as well as enrich our offerings from Native and Spanish America. [...] capped by introductory headnote[s] that discusses the

many interrelations among these figures across tribal affiliations and the larger cultural movements they shaped [...] continue integrating Native American writing and oratory [...] with new selection that include excerpts from Black Hawk and Mary Jemison [...] as an exploration of complex and often misunderstood Native identity (xx-xxi).

The point Lauter makes and the new entries in the reprinting of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, re-emphasizes the need for having a basic comprehension of the Native American cultural viewpoint. Without this understanding, the literature is still being viewed through the Anglo-American lens.

In a telephone interview with Doris Dorrough, Senior Sales Representative for the W. W. Norton & Company, on April 7, 2016, changes have taken place in the ninth edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Added to this new publication, are 23 Native American authors from 20 tribes which includes both men and women; along with the Native Americans, 39 African and Caribbean authors, nine Latino and Latina and five Asian authors. Dorrough states that when comprising the new version, the editors discussed which pieces of literature at the respective colleges and universities in their service district, do the professors teach and which ones would the professors want to teach.

Kenneth Lincoln compares in his book, *Speak Like Singing*, “an academic civil war, the tribe’s own people get trapped behind the Buckskin Curtain or outside its essential tarp” (3). This declaration illustrates that when teaching Native American literature, even as Lincoln terms them, “bi-literate professors,” are few in number, thereby making it difficult to teach literature from the Native American perspective. This comment, by Lincoln, could explain some of the reasons for the brief coverage and discussion of Native American literary text. Stressing that

literature of Native Americans written in English was “long overdue,” Roemer breaks down the progress of this genre of literature. He gives a basic timeline, “the study of American Indian literatures has progressed from invisible to marginal to expected status” (1). This statement interpreted, as with any new topic or genre, the basic steps follow what would be considered invisible is unknown, marginal is introduced, and the last step is expected, meaning the fury surrounding the newly found has worn off and now is at a standstill.

Native American literary works have been marginalized and can be compared to the fractional illustration by Sherman Alexie, who is of Spokane and Coeur d’Alene heritage, in his poem, “13/16.” He describes the idea that he is no more than a number “I cut myself into sixteen equal pieces keep thirteen and feed the other three to the dogs” (416). He goes on to elaborate other items, which leads one to believe that he feels he is no more important than to be comparable to the commodities provided by the government to those living on the Reservations. Many Native Americans feel the same way as Alexie expresses, that they are just pieces of their present environment, governmental oppression, cultural oppression, as well as just a piece of their ancestral heritage, of which much has been lost for many, rather than feeling as though they are a part of a whole person and a member of the entire Native American cultural nations. Though many of the ancestors were not able to hold on to the traditional ways of their past, these people did survive their assimilated lives in fragments, but it is their future generations who continue to fight and reclaim the ways and customs of their heritage and their Native American ancestors. American literature anthologies need to more fully represent the various Native People’s heritages.

The early Native Americans practiced an enormously complex spirituality and many traditionalists still do, although with the influx of the early settlers who came to America, many

Native Americans converted to Christianity. In his book *Native American Religion*, Joel Martin expounds on this complexity, “in Native American religions [...] Little is separated from religious influence. Their spirituality can affect how they cook, eat, dance, paint, tell stories, mold pottery, dye clothes, decorate their bodies, design their homes, organize their villages, court lovers, marry, bury, dress, speak, make love, cut their hair and so on” (13). Cheyfitz emphasizes this knowledge of cultural background as he observes, “the field of American Indian literatures [...] places a strong emphasis on the formal or aesthetic properties of Native texts in limited cultural contexts, while deemphasizing or ignoring the social, political, and historical contexts in which U.S. American Indian literatures take shape” (5). The importance of background is vital to fully understand context, especially in literature. Joseph Coulombe argues in his book *Reading Native American Literature* that when reading through a critical lens, it is important to consider the background of the author. He elaborates on this idea “Words allow people to create and define themselves [...] sometimes literally, more often culturally. The experiences and philosophies that they share with readers are expressions of self-definition and outreach” (1-2). Without knowing the personal history of the author, as to their experiences or heritage, it becomes difficult to interpret or understand the rhetoric of what they are writing.

Martin, Coulombe, and Cheyfitz stress in these quotes that the history of Native Americans is defined not only in their heritage from their parents but also from the stories and legend of who they are as a people, the land where they came from, their culture and the assimilation forced upon them once the Europeans came to America, and the continuation of colonialism on them as a collective people that is still going on today. Thus, the literature is viewed through the Anglo-American lens, making it presentable for the teaching to students in a

pedagogical fashion but not necessarily the truth as it is seen by the Native American People when they read the stories and compare them to the stories passed down from their elders.

With knowing some basic background of the Native American culture, we can move on to the type of literature that typically is anthologized. The *Norton Anthology* and *Heath Anthology* contain a brief portion from one biography of a Christian converted Native American, excerpts from Gertrude Bonnin, who is also known as Zitkala Sa, two creation stories, snippets from speeches of about five Native American leaders, and Trickster tales. Other literary pieces contained in these books are fragments regarding the Battle of Little Big Horn, also known as Custer's Last Stand, the Ghost Dance, which is the ceremony they did prior to the massacre at Wounded Knee, and a short commentary from Stand Watie regarding the "Cherokee Phoenix Newspaper."

As we examine and compare the Native American creation stories to those of the biblical account, the awareness must be kept in the forefront that these stories were not written but oral and because of translation from their respective native tongues into English, this can have altered some details in the stories. Native American stories varied from tribe to tribe regarding where man actually originated. Zuni, Iroquois, and Navajo all tell different stories of how the earth and man began. Nina Baym, editor of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, compares the oral tradition of Native American creation stories to that of the biblical account of the Christian idealism. "Native American creation stories, although not written down or gathered into a bible, serve for Native cultures in much the same way as the Book of Genesis serves for the Judeo-Christian world" (Baym 21).

In the Iroquois Nation, they have a creation story that has some similarities to the biblical account of the beginning of the world. Baym includes the creation story from the Iroquois Nation

in *The Norton Anthology*, volume A. Susan Feldman gathered Native American stories and in her book *The Storytelling Stone: Traditional Native American Myths and Tales*. She includes a creation story from the Blackfoot people of the plains. The Blackfoot Genesis expresses how the land was divided among the different tribes of Native people. The Blackfoot creation story ends with this quote, “Our forefathers gave battle to all people who came to cross these lines, and kept them out. Of late years we have let our friends, the white people, come in, and you know the results. We, his children, have failed to obey his laws” (79). The point of this tale and the ending quote demonstrates the many problems the Native Americans faced, one of which was the insistence by the Americans in assimilating Native Americans into the white culture, this included learning to speak and write in English.

The two stories referenced above were examples as the type of oral literature of the Native American people. Prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these were the way Native American nations would have told these stories because they had a rich oral culture and it was not until contact with the Colonial-Americans that the oral tradition became a written one. This was a result of the American colonies winning their independence from Great Britain in the American Revolution. Once America established its own governing system, then the focus began for the Native Americans to assimilate into the white society. This included the insistence for the oral tradition culture to an English written culture.

Each story told by the Native Americans were oral traditions, meaning that they were not written words but spoken stories passed from one generation to the next. Each Native American nation had their own versions of these stories and many of the stories were told to teach a lesson or tell of a particular tribe’s history were individualized from tribe to tribe within the same nations. These stories were not in written word until the influx of the Europeans. The problem

that developed from oral to written is translation because in many instances, there are no correct words or phrases that can be used from the native speech to the English language and thus causes a loss of emphasis or loss of meaning to the story. Wallace Chafe, author of “About Language: A Richness of Words, A Babel of Tongues,” offers the debate given by those who came to America about the language used by the Native Americans, “Europeans often mistakenly concluded that Indian languages were somehow more ‘primitive’ than those of ‘civilized’ Europe” (150). These examples of language differences relate back to my earlier comment concerning the altering of details in some of the stories in the anthologies.

Because the Native American stories were oral, they were not recorded in written documents; therefore, it was important for the elders to teach them to the next generation. In his lecture at the University of Arkansas Fort Smith on March 15, 2016, Dr. N. Scott Momaday emphasized this point and discussed the importance of the oral in the absence of the written. Word of mouth stories were vital in keeping the history of the tribe and/or the family alive. Yet, as Momaday states, the oral stories are always “one generation away from extinction” (Momaday).

When the American colonies won their independence from Great Britain, the first thing the new country decided to do was to “civilize the savages.” The Americans built missionary schools and would bring the young of the tribes to be educated. Gertrude Bonnin, whose Sioux name is Zitkala-Sa wrote a story titled “The School Days of an Indian Girl.” Her story is told in the *Heath Anthology* and in it Bonnin tells about the mission school. This Native American girl returns to her people on summer break after her third year in the missionary school but she realizes that she does not fit into either her own native world or the white world. “Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor

a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory “tenth” in a girl’s years” (Bonnin 330).

The National Education Association believed the education of Native American children was not a good practice and could even to be detrimental to the children.

NEA’s Department of Indian Education, established in 1899, researched how the government’s policy of isolating and assimilating the American Indian nations negatively impacted their education. Indian children attended the White-run reservation schools, or boarding schools, where they were systematically stripped of their language and culture. (Holcomb, Part2)

This disservice to the Native American children is noted to have caused these indigenous youth to be less skilled in their own language than in English and according to Eric Cheyfitz, editor of *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literature of the United States Since 1945*, “have been exposed to the Western literary traditions and likely made to memorize many of the popular poems, such as ballads, sonnets, and narrative poems, of the Western canon” (189). Cheyfitz and the comment by the NEA adds credibility and underscores the story written by Gertrude Bonnin and her experience in the mission school.

Trickster tales, published in Feldman’s book, are lessons taught by Native Americans about being cautious or careful and not to be misled or fooled into being cheated. These beings are described as “hero-transformer-trickster, a being who combines both human and animal traits and is at once demiurge, culture hero, marplot, and buffoon” (Feldman, 16). Among the Native American people, these tricksters are heroes in the perspective that sometimes, they accidentally do good things and create positive aspects of the nature and the earth, such as the creation story

by the Iroquois of the bad brother creating mountains. At other times, this creature is a swindler who only cares for his own needs.

Those stories are much like the same situation that numerous Native American tribes' faced with the American government, especially in negotiating land treaties. Nations would argue and blame each other and even the various leaders within the tribe would negotiate treaties without other leaders present, which would cause each to blame the other. Taking a direct quote in the Menominee story from Feldman's book sums up part of the problem of the arguments within the Native American community, "Raccoon then remarked to them, 'I have played a nice trick on you; you should not find fault with each other so easily'" (Feldman 155). Once the Native People began fighting within their tribes and communities rather than banding together, being removed from their homes and ancestral lands became easier for the American government to accomplish.

Treaty after treaty was made with the Native American people and according to Dr. Robert Willoughby of the University of Arkansas Fort Smith, he paraphrased the land treaties stating "the Native Americans had the right to do what they wanted with those who come into the lands uninvited" (Willoughby lecture). Lines were drawn between Indian lands and the colonists but when retaliation was carried out by the Native people, the United States government, being its own entity after 1776, stepped in and redrew the lines, thus breaking the treaty between the United States and the Native American people.

Once the Native Americans were relocated to Indian Territory, it became necessary to divide the land, at least in the eyes of the American government. This was done because many of the tribes were still practicing the old customs of community land plots for farming. The government thought it was necessary to divide the land and enforce the use of the land assigned

would be lost. This piece of legislation is what became known as the Dawes Acts. Once each family member had been signed on the Dawes Rolls, the land deed then would be given to the head of the household, which was approximately 160 acres.

Coulombe gives the example of the autobiography of William Apess, a Pequot Indian which was written in 1829, and his later writings after conversion to Christianity. By the time that Apess writes his first novel and his following novels, the Indian removal was taking place despite the many treaties which promised the Native Americans would be able to stay on their ancestral lands. Coulombe notes “The history of broken treaties is not only another unfortunate testament to US hypocrisy, greed, and racism, but it is also an essential backdrop and contest for reading Native American literature. Even when not mentioned explicitly, the history is never far below the surface” (22). Knowing the devastation that the Native Americans felt in leaving the familiarity and the sacred lands of their ancestors, believed to have been given to them by the Great Spirit, the comparison of autobiographies of William Apess or Samuel Occum cannot be viewed through the same critical lens as reading the biography of Benjamin Franklin or even the letters between John and Abigail Adams.

Remarks by Old Man in “The Blackfoot Genesis” story, Raccoon’s words to the two blind men in the trickster tales, and comments by Apess in his biography are all illustrations of how the broken treaties and land agreements have made their way into the writings of the Native American people. History shows the settlers made agreements with the indigenous people of the area and each group agreed to share the land and grow the crops needed to feed their people. When the time came to expand the shared land for farming, the settlers would sell/buy or bargain for more land for the new settlers and the Native Americans would lose out on land. The other situation which arose was in the land negotiation treaties between the American government and

the Native Americans. In the case of the Cherokee people of Georgia, Stand Watie, John Ridge, Major Ridge, and Elias Boudinot signed a treaty that agreed to move the Cherokee People to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. However, these men did not have the authority to do so because the true tribal leader, John Ross, was in Washington D.C. trying to establish tribal sovereignty and negotiate to remain on Cherokee ancestral lands in Georgia. This type of land and treaty negotiations happened quite frequently with other tribes as well.

Stand Watie mentions, in his newspaper the “Cherokee Phoenix” the desire to survive as a people rather than risk losing their identity and the inevitable war that would ensue by resistance. Watie makes a plea in the newspaper,

Let the public but consider our motives, and the design of this paper, which is the benefit of the Cherokees, and we are sure, those who wish well to the Indian race [...] and give prompt support to the first paper ever published in an Indian country, and under the direction of some remnants of those, who by the most mysterious course of providence, have dwindled into oblivion [...] in an attempt to rescue, not only us, but all our kindred tribes, from the impending danger which has been so fatal to our forefathers [...] will consider us as co-workers [...] pledge ourselves to encourage and assist them, in whatever appears to be for the benefit of the Aborigines [this newspaper] will be published in English and Cherokee. (358-359)

The commentary Watie makes continues to expound, in detail, issues to which the newspaper will be designed to deliberate. His main objective in printing this newspaper was the expectation to encourage Native American readers, as he puts it, to rise “Phoenix like, from their ashes”

(Watie 360) and assimilate to the American culture and customs. This was the first newspaper that was printed in both a Native American language and in English.

Removal and resistance of the Native Americans is known in history but mostly focused in the early 1800s, however, removal happened on more than one occasion and these events were written about by the Native people throughout their history. Accounts of removal take place in the 1960s with a group of Native Americans that became known as the American Indian Movement and there was a stand-off at Wounded Knee between this group and American government agents, one of those armed Native Americans was actor, musician, and activist, Russell Means. He was perhaps best known for his role as Chingachgook in the movie, *Last of the Mohicans* and the voice of Powhatan in Disney's *Pocahontas*. According to John Purdy and James Rupert, they tagged this era as the Native American Renaissance because of the "Native cultural (re)awakening and empowerment movement" and the publication of "N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* in 1968 along with *Black Elk Speaks* [...] primes a broad general interest in American Indian peoples and cultures, indicative of an ebb and flow of general public attention to Native cultures and issues" (2). Native Americans began speaking out about the problems and the plight they faced and one way they addressed these issues and making them known was in their literature. With the American Indian Movement and an enlarged reading audience that included the "baby boomers," Native Americans addressed the oppression of the past, Indian removal, and the resistance to the changes taking place against them and their culture.

As mentioned, Native American people had an oral culture prior to contact of the colonists and part of this oral culture included drawings and paintings that were used as visual depictions along with these oral stories and while still not a written literature, these paintings

should be included to illustrate the grandeur of the oral tradition. Art painted by Native Americans, is the illustration by Jennifer Graber in her article, “Religion in Kiowa Ledgers: Expanding the Canon of American Religious Literature,” in the *American Literary History Journal*. Ledgers were a way to refer to Native American pictorial accounts of many historic events either of the tribe, a family, or a person. These ledgers were drawings and paintings used as oral visual aids rather than a written word such as a diary before the Native American written language.

To quote Graber regarding these paintings, “If Anglo-Americans viewed ledgers as windows into a glorious past that was passing away, the artists who created them understood them differently” (43). The basis of these paintings, as with so many other Native American paintings and drawings, were used to tell stories; the subjects of these pictographs were histories of the tribe and even some specific moments in time, as in a calendar, such as the “dramatic meteor shower in 1833 or the smallpox outbreak of 1861” (Graber, 43). Not only did the tribe keep track of such events, but members of the tribe also had their paintings and drawings that would include the family history, battles the men would engage in with their enemies, moments in which they would meet with sacred creatures, and the recounting of visions they experienced. Although these paintings are not by definition “written literature,” they demonstrate the oral cultural tradition of the Native American people. These pictorial images are used to enrich the spoken word told by the elders to the young ones in order to keep the history and culture of the respective nation, tribe, or family alive from generation to generation.

Just as these paintings are historical records, they are also a cultural record. Graber denotes these are artistic interpretations of “encounters with the supernatural [...] include depictions of communal rituals for seeking spiritual power [...] speak to traditional understanding

of spirit beings” (45). Many tribal members also had stories of the creation on skins that they used to relay the story to the next generation of how the world and people came to be, just as the other religions have the biblical creation story.

Looking at Native American literature, we see a common thread between them from the oral to the written to the modern. The commonality is what Dr. N. Scott Momaday terms “racial memory.” Stories of this type are those, specifically but not limited to, the oral, which includes the drawn and painted pictures, the ceremonies and songs, and other types whether they are oral or written, either in English or the native language, which are passed from generation to generation.

The examination of *Nothing but the Truth*, edited by John L. Purdy and James Ruppert, includes an essay of nonfiction by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn regarding Native American writers. Cook-Lynn comments that many Native American writers get questioned regarding what and how they write,

as a result of editorial and agented assistance in getting their manuscripts accepted, assume that under such strict circumstances their own efforts toward the recovery of memory through writing seem thwarted, selective, and narrowly interpreted within the imposed context of Western knowledges and aesthetics.

(25)

According to Cook-Lynn, these authors are asked how they can make their works more accessible to readers, but when Native American writers use words of Native American origin, editors want glossaries included in the book and sometimes, pedagogical standards are in question.

If we were to contemplate as to what types of Native American literatures should be placed in the canon, we would have to agree to add some of the pictorial tales, such as Graber elaborates above and oral translations and interpretations that accompany them. We have sermons and speeches currently in the anthologies but Kenneth Roemer insists that among the entries other documents should be included, “treaty / council documents [...] humor [...] histories, and journalism” of the Native Americans (6). Roemer also cites Chadwick Allen in his book *Blood Narrative* (2003) that treaties influenced the rhetoric of fiction and poetry. Being part of the tribal culture in this way makes these pieces worthy to be included in the canon and/or anthologies for study.

The millennial generation of the Native American people have begun calling themselves the 7th Generation; this reference is to the three generations before them and the three generations after them. Many of them have been taking the history of their past, the current situations they face and the desire to reclaim their heritage and setting it to music. Some of those are Frank Waln, Nataanii Means, Cody Coyote, and Drezus. Frank Waln who is a Sicangu Lakota born on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, uses music as a voice for not just the people of his particular tribe but to publicize the problems and issues facing the Native American people of America. Although musical lyrics are often overlooked because they are not what is viewed as traditional, in many instances, they too could become part of the literary canon and anthologies. Many of these types of lyrics follow the same rhyme and meter style as traditional poetry and in the case of Waln and other musicians like him, they have a story to tell. In an interview in *Native Peoples Magazine*, Waln discussed the difficulties he has seen within the Native American Community.

Today I still struggle, but music and spirituality pull me out of that. I don't talk about this a lot outside of Indian Country. But I feel like it's my responsibility to talk about some of these issues—domestic violence, the environment, suicide, media representation of Natives. I have a platform and I have the responsibility to use it to help solve some of these problems. If we as Natives don't talk about this, who will? (Walker, NPM)

Although Waln's medium of choice for voicing these tribulations is music, primarily rap, he is an activist for not only the Sioux but Native Americans in the United States. This is the way these people get their message out, especially to the young people. The call to speak out is from the influence of the past and betterment for the future of the seven generations, meaning great grandparents, grandparents, parents, the children, their children, the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren. The concept behind this is much like that of the 1960s, it is a cultural awareness and to make known the plight of the Native Americans.

Momaday created a story, *Man Made of Words*, which relays a story his father had told him of a Kiowa Arrowmaker and the importance of language, of words. The Arrowmaker and his wife were in their tent one evening and he noticed that they were being observed but not knowing whether this was a friend or an enemy, he told his wife about it. The husband and wife continued what they were doing and then the Arrowmaker spoke to the person outside the tent. Speaking in their native language, the Arrowmaker says to the person while aiming the arrow through the small hole in the tent, "I know that you are there on the outside, for I can feel your eyes upon me. If you are Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak your name" (Arrowmaker 91). After no response the Arrowmaker, taking an arrow and his bow, the

Arrowmaker aimed it for the hole in the tent, let go of the bow string and the arrow pierced the enemy outside the tent and the man and woman were saved.

Joy Porter points out the importance to the emotional and sacred ties of the Native American people to their ancestral lands,

Balance is linked to the survival of a community within specific landscapes. [...]

Place, self, and community are so intimately linked that loss of territory is a deprivation of psychic strength. Oral traditions involve more than just what is spoken, they are a living dynamic practice that includes an interactive and spiritual relationship to specific places (43)

Momaday makes the statement about being tied to the land and that it is a part of the consciousness and identity. Allen clarifies this tie to the land when he commentates on Momaday regarding a “compelling autobiographical strand” that runs through his work. In essence, Allen states that Momaday, like many Native Americans before and even their descendants, the identity of one’s self is “these processes for establishing a meaningful place-identity involve a generational perception of American landscapes, reserved in what he calls the ‘racial memory,’ passed down in the oral tradition” (213). These statements of the Native Americans and their ties to the land, by both Porter and Momaday, reflect Roemer’s early quote of why treaties need to be included in the literary canon.

Eric Cheyfitz reiterates this sentiment as well and this is what Porter is talking about in her statement above. When we include only a fractional number of these literary works in the canon we are projecting the image that these cultures are not worthy, that they do not matter in the overall literary history of America, even though they are a large part of the literature and

history of America. To limit these is as Toni Morrison declares in her essay, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”

Canon building is Empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature, and range (of criticism, of history, of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, the humanistic imagination), is the clash of cultures. And *all* interests are vested. (132)

Morrison goes on to elaborate and expand on these points. She comments that while in the beginning of early American literature, many of the Native American and African-American cultures were oral, it is understandable that the mainstream literature would not have to worry about the competition, so to speak, of other cultures and their literatures. I agree with Morrison on these points and would state, as she does, that now because we have translations, albeit English rather than in the native languages of the Native Americans and the African-Americans, it is only right and fitting that we re-examine the canon and consider what is included in the anthologies for the quality of the literature and the voice of the authorial content rather than, as Morrison puts it “cultural (whitemale) purity.” (139)

I can empathize with Alexie, Momaday, Bonnin, and Waln, and even Morrison, as well as others who have told their stories. As a young child, I often felt torn between the pieces of myself and being a statistic, especially in school. Each year, we had to fill out paperwork regarding our family and our heritage, but most of these types of questionnaires are no longer used in schools. At the time, I always felt conflicted because part of my ancestry is Cherokee and the other part is Scot-Irish. Much of my family history and heritage has been lost, as has my husband’s, because our ancestors chose the path of assimilation rather than fight what they

believed to be the inevitable. My mother and others of her family, relay the story that when my great-great-grandfather and his family were approached regarding signing the Dawes Rolls, these were the documents that registered the Native Americans. My ancestors refused saying “White Man hasn’t given me anything he hasn’t taken back” and they left Georgia before the Trail of Tears and the push to Oklahoma. (Nolan Dixon, personal interview). For this reason, I too, feel that it is necessary to include more than just a few pieces of Native American literature and place them in the canon. In the book *Nothing But the Truth*, Momaday idealizes, “We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined” (87). How can it be argued that students study American literature when so much of what truly makes up American literature is left out of these studies?

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