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Native Voices in English-Canadian Literature: Ancient and Contemporary

In the history of official English-Canadian literature, the Indian has long served as the white man's totem. Leslie Monkman, in *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*, has traced the portrayal and use of the aboriginal figure by non-native writers and has concluded:

In each era of Canadian literary history, writers have turned to the Indian and his culture for standards by which to measure the values and goals of white Canadian society, for patterns of cultural destruction, transformation, and survival, and for new heroes and indigenous myths.¹

By now, Monkman's thesis is well known. A corollary of Canadian history, Canadian literature has mirrored white culture's struggle for civilization in a fearsome landscape. Here the Indian has stood in a variety of ambivalent poses, as the savage antagonist and foil to white desire for settlement and Christianity in the likes of early narrative immigration poems and conversely as romantic symbol of freedom in nature for later writers antipathetic to the values and virtues of civilization. The 'red' man in literature, then, has been 'the other' by which white culture could achieve its authority, measure its objectives and even critique itself.

The white man's Indian and the white man as Indian are two important, if simplified, features of mainstream writing. The latter is theatrically illustrated by the Grey Owl phenomenon of the nineteen-thirties when Archie Belaney, a British immigrant, assumed the persona of an Ojibway Indian and as writer, speaker and conservationist enchanted Canadian audiences and readers who believed him to be an authentic Indian and embraced him as a national hero. The appropriation of the Indian by white culture through Grey Owl is on one level an expression of a popular imagination informed by a history of conquest. On another, it suggests a

1 Leslie Monkman, *A Native Heritage* (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1981) 3.

desperate, mythopoeic longing on the part of an immigrant population for an ancestral past in a new land, a longing which is continuous in white fictionalizing, as writers continue to people their visions and shape their fictions through an aboriginal heritage. Monkman explains:

Red heroes fill the vacuum created by the absence of white aboriginal traditions on this continent, and the dream of a distinctive national literature focuses on the history and heritage of the red man. In Indian myths and legends, white writers find a new understanding of the landscape and its gods and discover rhythms, images, and structures that enable them to communicate in a new and powerful idiom. (5)

The white writer as red shaman is most strongly felt in contemporary writing on the Western prairies. Here a relatively recent history of multicultural immigration and direct meeting between newly arrived whites and surviving Indians in a slow-to-develop industrial environs has insisted on communication. Articulating West, prairie writers such as the late George Ryga and Margaret Laurence, Sheila Watson, Rudy Wiebe, W. O. Mitchell, Andy Suknaski, Eli Mandel and Robert Kroetsch know in their art not only the native as hero or victim, as illuminations on white society and its institutions, but his art forms and cultural heroes as their own, and their mutual experiences as paradigms for regional or national Canadian culture.

Bernard Selinger assesses prairie writers in just this way when he outlines their meeting of the native in fiction on mutual ecological prairie ground and applauds them for absorbing the "rhythms and values as indigenously fashioned by centuries of prairie Indian experience with the land." By so doing, claims Selinger, white prairie writers have given the West the "opportunity to lead the rest of the country into a more creative, ecologically-minded way of being."² And when Robert Kroetsch suggests a paradigm for Canadian culture in the central symbol of Sheila Watson's Indian-inspired *The Double Hook*, which is "the total ambiguity that is so essentially Canadian... two solitudes, the bush garden... the pattern of equally matched opposites" he is including in these polarities, suggests Leslie Monkman, the interface between red and non-native cultures (164).

Unfortunately for the Native people, "the pattern of equally matched opposites," the double hook eulogized by non-native writers and critics has failed to materialize. If, in the ironic words of Midnight Sun, the native as alcoholic has been a profitable "natural resource" for mainstream culture, providing thousands of jobs for whites in the liquor trade, treatment

facilities and correctional institutes,³ he has been equally a natural resource, however unintentionally, for white authors. Margaret Harry's outrage at the invisibility of Indian writers and the indifference of white readers to Native writers, who cannot get published without 'white' market appeal, has, in the recent past, at least, been well taken: "For most English-Canadian authors and readers, the Native peoples of Canada are either invisible or stereotypes; what the Indians and Inuit have to say for themselves is suppressed or ignored." She rightly asks: "Where are the Indian and Inuit writers?"⁴

That the Indian will no longer accept his role in mainstream society as cultural artifact, museum Indian and fictional totem, that his voice is becoming increasingly vehement was dramatically illustrated prior to the Winter Olympics held in Calgary in February 1988. The exhibit of Indian treasures, collected world-wide by the Glenbow Museum, "The Spirit Sings," drew Indian leaders from across the country who protested not only the imperialistic display of their material culture, but the lack of government action over the unresolved land claims of the Lubicon Lake Indian band in Alberta. The tone of Mohawk Chief Billy Two Rivers's protestation of unfair treatment: "We gave you this land. We gave you passage... now that you are the dominant society, you're behaving as the savage" is one that has been adopted by contemporary Native leaders, who as political activists, speech-makers, and writers are attempting to sound pan-Indian grievance wherever they can make themselves heard and read. Nonetheless, Native literature, whether politically or aesthetically motivated, finds its expression at the periphery, largely via small presses, academic journals and special anthologies of native writing. There is, however, a reclamation of a Native literary tradition well under way in the cumulative interest and support of professional folklorists, literary critics and sympathetic non-white writers whose best motive may very well be that demanded by Alvin Wanderingspirit in the Glenbow protest, that is "to share the shame."⁶

One significant and useful work in the field of Native literature has been Penny Petrone's *First People First Voices*, an edited selection of writing and speeches by Canadian Indians from the 1630's to the 1980's. Included in this volume are pieces by some of Canada's most visible contemporary authors such as Chief Dan George, Duke Redbird, Basil Johnston, George Kenny,

3 Midnight Sun, "Canada's Natural Resource," *A Gathering of Spirits: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women*, ed. Beth Brant (Rockland: Sinister Wisdom Books 1982) 79.

4 Margaret Harry, "Literature in English by Native Canadian Indians and Inuit," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 10.1-2 (1984): 146.

5 "Indian Chiefs Show Anger at Opening," *The Calgary Herald* (January 15 1988): 1.

6 Ibid. 1.

2 Bernard Selinger, "Canadian Prairie Writing: Taking on the Tribal Voice," *Foothills* 3.2 (March 1987): 15.

Rita Joe, Midnight Sun, Daniel David Moses, Alanis Obomsawin and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. More importantly, this volume is an invitation to mainstream culture to appreciate the oral/aural origins of a native literary tradition. The reproduction of speeches from a variety of sources, including the *Jesuit Relations* is a tribute to the orality of Native culture and the rhetorical abilities of Native speakers. The eloquence of the 'savage,' first noted by missionaries and explorers, is recorded here (and in earlier works such as Kent Gooderham's *I Am An Indian*) as rhetoric of high classical order. Even in translation, a short speech such as that by the Montagnais chief, Capitaneal (1615-34), responding to Champlain's complaint about the Montagnais trading with the British, is an example of a disciplined appeal to the pathos, ethos and logos of traditional rhetorical art. Capitaneal establishes his ethos carefully as he begins his speech, strategically assuming an inferior status, and insinuating a subtle emotional appeal in his veiled reference to the fact that his father had been killed at Champlain's side in a raid against the Iroquois.

I am a poor little animal, crawling about on the ground; you Frenchmen are the great of the earth, who make all tremble. I do not know how I dare to talk before such Captains. If I had some one behind me who would suggest what I ought to say, I would speak more boldly.... I am bewildered; I never had any instruction; my father left me very young....⁷

Employing a number of tropes, including metaphor, that frame of mind and figurative construction that characterized not only Aristotelian rhetoric but Native speech makers in their councils, Capitaneal demonstrates the consummate skill of the Indian rhetorician.

The study of the rhetorical Indian, however, is not without its dangers for the contemporary student. In mainstream literature, the Indian has tended to be presented in this very way. Kept at arms length as external and rhetorical, he has been a convenient dramatic *figure* for white culture's objectives. This danger is minimized when contemporary speeches, which are not filtered or censored through translation, or coloured with the white historical bias of the romantic aboriginal as outsider, are juxtaposed with ancient voices. For example, the passionate insistence of a speech like that of Mary Two Axe Early's, demanding rights for Indian women and presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs in 1979, is undeniably the projection of an authentic Indian personality; at the same time, Two Axe Early's performance as a rhetorician is clearly a tour de force of traditional rhetorical structures and devices. Beginning with logical, intellectual appeals to an educated

audience, the speaker shifts into a dramatic metaphor of rape, and a rhetoric of cohesiveness in her balanced, parallel exhortations:

Fourth, we are stripped naked of any legal protection and raped by those who would take advantage of the inequities afforded by the Indian Act. Raped because we cannot be buried beside the mothers who bore us and the fathers who begot us. Raped because we are subject to eviction from the domiciles of our families and expulsion from the tribal roles. Raped because we must forfeit any inheritance or ownership of property, raped because we are divested of the right to vote... Raped because we are unable to pass our Indianess and the Indian culture that is engendered by a mother to her children. Raped because we live in a country acclaimed to be one of the greatest cradles for democracy on earth offering asylum to Vietnam refugees and other suppressed peoples while within its borders its Native sisters are experiencing the same suppression that has caused these peoples to seek refuge by the great mother known as "Canada."⁸

Two Axe Early's inclusion and repetition of the phrase "the great mother known as Canada" is also a striking reminder of the fundamental orality of Native cultures and the astonishing persistence of its communal memory. The language of treaty-making of Alexander Morris's rhetoric of paternalism in 1873, when he coined such phrases as "children," "father," "great mother" and that archetypal phrase of trust for the Native imagination, "as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow" has survived even to the present day.

The oral literature of the Native peoples includes not only speeches but songs, chants, and narratives: folktales, legends and myths that were collected, transcribed and translated in Canada by the Jesuit fathers and later by anthropologists, sociologists and folklorists. Scores of anthologies of the narratives of the eleven cultural areas of North American Indians exist today, and, as literature, have been a primary interest of folklorists who, typically, describe and index Native folklore under such motif headings as creation myths, trickster tales, test and hero tales, journeys to the other world, and animal wives and husbands.⁹ Although Canadian Native writers and visual artists such as Carl Ray in *Sacred Legends of the Sandy Lake Cree* or Norval Morrisseau in *Legends of My People* have sought to reclaim the spiritualism of the tribal story-telling they are familiar with, as well as the scatological humour that reformist Christianity in the past has excised, the world view of the Cree or the Ojibway that informs these narratives remains difficult to re-invent. Without the full knowledge of the culture systems that

8 Mary Two Axe Early, Zonia Keywan, and Helen Potrenbenko, "Ethnicity and Femininity as Determinants of Life Experience," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XIII.1 (1981): 37.

9 See Stith Thompson, *The Folk Tale* (Berkeley Los Angeles: U of California P 1977) 197-359.

7 Penny Petrone, ed. *First People First Voices* (Toronto: U of Toronto P 1983) 5.

Indian folklore reflects, the reader is faced with a transcribed oral literature that need stand on its own and to some degree, is left with Diamond Jenness's original assessment of it for white European readers:

Our psychological background does not permit us to adopt the attitude of the Indian and to look for supernatural interferences in the most pedestrian events... most of us have outgrown the stage of enjoying mere anecdotes and prefer literature of a less superficial character. Doubtless certain animal tales are suitable for children, and some of the traditions provide excellent material for a writer of romances who can select what he pleases and build up the remainder according to his fancy.¹⁰

Although Native folklore as literary genre and art, if studied at all, is indeed usually relegated to the paraliterary field of children's literature, an interesting new development in the methodology of the folklorist, that of ethnopoeitics, predicts exciting new possibilities.¹¹ In translating the spoken narratives of the Zuni Indian to the printed page, Dennis Tedlock in *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of Zuni Indians* determined that no orally presented speech is in prose form. Folklorist Pauline Greenhill explains: "[Tedlock] maintains that people speak in poetic lines, not sentences, and he distinguishes such lines by pauses in speech."¹² Insisting on 'total translation,' then, on the inclusion of both sound and silence in spoken literature, Tedlock upholds poetry, not prose, as the most appropriate written medium for native narrative:

The spoken narratives of the Zuni Indians (like those of other tribal peoples) are events, not just verbal descriptions of events. They sound like poems and plays, but because they are spoken rather than sung or chanted they have always been treated in translation as if they were equivalent to written prose. If one 'listens' only for meaning (in the ordinary sense), it is easy to fall into this trap; but if one listens to the sounds (with more than the narrow phonetic ear of the linguist) and to the intervening silences, it becomes clear that what has been widely called 'oral prose' is in reality

10 Diamond Jenness, *Indians of Canada* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, rpt. 1977) 195.

11 George Cornell has recently argued that Tedlock's methodology remains an imposition of Western literary forms on native American oral traditions, and that a genuine appreciation of oral narratives can only be fully appreciated by a thorough understanding of cultural systems. See George L. Cornell, "The Imposition of Western Definitions of Literature on Indian Oral Traditions," in Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy, eds., *The Native in Literature* (Downsview: ECW 1987) 174-87. One useful text that includes Ojibway narrative in a larger exploration of Ojibway culture is Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1987).

12 Pauline Greenhill, *Lost of Stories: Maritime Narratives* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, Paper 57 1985) 5.

dramatic poetry. Indeed, there is ample reason to believe that 'prose' has no existence at all outside the written page.¹³

With appropriate aids to reading, including instructions that loud words and passages are indicated by CAPITALS, soft ones in parenthesis, lengthened vowel sounds indicated by _____ etc., Tedlock begins his transliteration of Andrew Peyneta telling the tale of *The Boy and the Deer*. "Eeso" has the affect here of "ah yes" and is the audience's standardized response in the spoken narrative tradition.

THE BOY AND THE DEER
by Andrew Peyneta

Zuni

SON'AHCHI.

(audience) Ee—so.

SONTI LO—NG AGO.

(audience) Ee—so.

THERE WERE VILLAGERS AT HE'SHOKTA
and

up on the Prairie-Dog Hills

the deer

had their home. (*Shaking the Pumpkin*, 95)

The reshaping and revocalization of traditional myth and legend is also the province of a new generation of Native writers. Finding their roots in a Native literary heritage, some of these authors weave intriguing tales of such cultural trickster heroes as Coyote and Raven in popular English idiom, with a slight nod even in the direction of the postmodern writer and his concerns with the fictiveness of fiction. In "Coyote Meets Raven" Peter Blue Cloud brings Coyote to visit British Columbia where he meets Raven in a contest for authority and power. While this tale is clearly in the realm of the fabulous where, for example, the animal transformation mythology of native belief holds sway: "On the second night Coyote began growing bored and decided to leave his body and travel around. He left his gambling

13 Jerome Rothenberg, *Shaking the Pumpkin: Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas* (New York: Alfred Van Der Marck 1986) 368.

concentration in a hollow hallucination of empty skin and took off,"¹⁴ the tone is tongue-in-cheek, the perspective that of the fictionalizer making his reader acutely aware of the art of fiction-making itself. Similarly, Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst in "The Raven and the Big Fisherman" conclude a suspenseful, bawdy tale of Raven's greed and sexual chicanery with a fictional signpost about fiction: "Then they paddled him [Raven] far out to sea where they dumped him overboard, into the next story."¹⁵

The distance of these writers from fictional form and subject is obviously also that of the semi-acculturated, a theme that George Kenny explores through Native legend as subject in a narrative that is more closely modelled on the short story form of white fiction writing. In "Soft and Trembling Cry" a thirteen-year-old Ojibway girl, culturally influenced by both a white urban lifestyle and Native ways, is sent by her Kokum (grandmother) into the forest to kill the Death-bird who, if left alive, will predict a family death. When she and her brother shoot — and miss — the awesome black bird, both she and the reader are left in a desperate ambiguous vacuum, wondering at the prophecy of the Death-bird, and the authenticity of native belief as fact or fiction.¹⁶

The struggle of these contemporary Native artists is, clearly, not only to force the mainstream official literary culture to acknowledge their presence, but to settle on literary genres that are natural to their experience and creative sensibilities. Not surprisingly, autobiography, memoirs, reminiscences and retrospectives, genres that inevitably spring into place as a culture moves from orality to literacy, are favoured.¹⁷ The more sensational of these, such as Maria Campbell's life as a Métis, *Half Breed*, command a wider reading audience than quieter stories of personal success, such as Eleanor Brass's *I Walk in Two Worlds* or retrospects on a vanished life, such as Beverly Hungry Wolf's *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. All, however, contribute to realizing a Native point of view.

14 Peter Blue Cloud, "Coyote Meets Raven," *Earth Power Coming: Short Fiction in Native American Literature*, ed. S.J. Ortiz (Tsaile, Ariz.: Navajo Community College Press 1983) 120.

15 Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst, "The Raven and the Big Fisherman," *Whetstone* (Spring 1985): 76.

16 George Kenny, "Soft and Trembling Cry," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 36/37: Special Issue of Fiction in Translation from the Unofficial Languages of Canada (Summer 1980): 21-25.

17 For an exploration of the nature and function of autobiography and biography for native women, see Barbara Godard, "Listening for the Silence: Native Women's Traditional Narratives," Thomas King, Cheryl Calver, and Helen Hoy, eds., *The Native in Literature* (Downsview: ECW 1987) 133-58.

A second favoured form for contemporary Canadian-Indian authors is that of poetry. In an early collection, *Many Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Indian Poetry* (1977), David Day and Marilyn Bowering quite rightly stress the eclecticism of theme and technique amongst Native poets writing today. Outside the mainstream, these poets are individually subject to a variety of influences, yet all are distinguishably native in voice. The more traditional of them unearth Native songs and chants or weave native mythology, custom and religion into verse. The more modern experiment with the likes of imagistic, found, and concrete poetry. Themes of social protest, melancholy displacement and collective grief re-occur and a Native transcendentalism — a mystical merging of the self with nature — is ever-present in increasingly sophisticated verse forms and techniques. Chief Dan George's apparent simple lyricism, for example, in this second stanza of a four stanza poem

O cloud
for the blood
in my body
I thank Thee.¹⁸

is eclipsed, at least for non-native readers, by the metaphorical synthesis of body, river, land and season in "Some Grand River Blues" by Daniel David Moses.

SOME GRAND RIVER BLUES

Look. The land ends up
in stubble every
October. The sky
today may feel as

empty. But just be
like the river-bend
and reflect it. Those
blues already show

through the skin inside
your elbow — and flow
back to the heart. Why
let a few passing
Canada geese up
set you? Just remind

18 Chief Dan George, *My Heart Soars* (Surrey: Hancock House 1974) 35.

yourself how the land
also renews. Don't
despair just because
they're already too
high to hear. Your heart
started beating with
their wings the moment
you got sight of them
— but that's no reason
to fear it will still
when they disappear.
Look away now. Let
loose. See? The river's
bending like a bruise.¹⁹

Notably, several of the rising stars among the new generation of Indian poets fit easily into mainstream development. Narrative poetry, while natural to the native as storyteller and rhetorician and magical in the hands of Micmac poet, Rita Joe (whose eulogies to a lost Indian past in *Poems of Rita Joe* recur in spirit and theme in the work of younger poets) has a special presence in contemporary prairie poetry. Anecdotal poetry of conversational tone and folk idiom characterizes the work of Andy Suknaski who, suggests critic Stephen Scobie, "has had an immense influence upon the development of prairie poetry."²⁰ The work in this vein of the Blood poet, Makweeneski, in Alberta, is extraordinarily vital, as in the following ironic and subtle comment on Indian affairs in "Old Buddy."

Hey Buster!
Where you been you ol' son a bitch!
where's you whiskey?
Ol'lady t'rew me out
on a count a my trinkin',
she say I gotta choose what
I luf more, her or da boddle,
Crazy womin!
Hell, you look like Big Susie
she ran over you.
Gimme a trink

19 Daniel David Moses, "Some Grand River Blues," *Whetstone* (Spring 1985): 49.

20 Stephen Scobie, *The Land They Gave Away* (Edmonton: NeWest Press 1982) 13.

An' I'll sink you a real goot
forty-niner.

Hay ya hay ho!
If you really luf me
hon-ey,
hay ya, hay ho!
Bring back
Six pack!
hay ya hay ho!
and I'll take you home
in my one eyed ford
hay ya
hay ho!

Gimme nudder trink
an' I'll tell you goot story
'bout when Blackjack an' me
stol' a car an' Big Susie
she drive
all a way to Crow Indian Day's
an' Big Susie she find nudder guy
an' we gotta find nudder way home.

By Golly! 'tsgoot to see you.²¹

Feminism, too, provides a space for Native writers. Kate Shanley, an American Indian raised on the Fort Peak Reservation in Montana, in "Thoughts on Indian Feminism"²² worries about the tension between being a feminist and an Indian woman because, among other things, Indian women are committed to pursuing the goal of tribal and racial sovereignty. Indian authors, however, who write eloquently or satirically about the plight of Indian women or from a female perspective and sensibility can command, at the very least, a feminist audience. Thus works by Canadian natives, Emilie Gallant, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and Midnight Sun are included in the anthology *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art By North American Indian Women* and Eleanor Crowe's striking imagistic poem of maternal despair over racial genocide, entitled "Shadows" is anthologized.²³ In the spirit of

21 Makweeneski, "Old Buddy," *Whetstone* (Spring 1985): 43.

22 Kate Shanley, "Thoughts on Indian Feminism," *A Gathering of Spirit: Writing and Art by North American Indian Women* (Rockland: Sinister Wisdom Books 1984) 213-15.

23 Eleanor Crowe, "Shadows," *Many Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Indian Poetry*, eds. David Day and Marilyn Bowering (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd. 1977) 36-38.

contemporary feminist scholarship that continues to recover feminist texts, written within and without the mainstream, there has even been some attempt to reclaim the ancient voices of Indian women. Anne Cameron in *Daughters of Copper Women* retells the oral tales of the Secret Women's Society of the Nootka Indians of Vancouver Island and discovers quite a different body of Indian legend and myth from that of traditional patriarchal collections.

Native theatre, too, is also enjoying something of a renaissance. As Sadie Worn Staff of Spirit Song Native Indian Theatre Company has pointed out, dramatic expression is not new among Indian people. "Storytelling and powwows have a strong dramatic element, and the masks and screens used in potlaches are undeniable evidence of powerful staged events."²⁴ This ancient native tradition of dramatic staging is currently finding its way onto the Canadian mainstage, largely in the interest of social protest, and as an affirmation of cultural identity. *Nô Xyâ* (Our Footprints), for example, is an eighty minute play tracing the history of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people of northwestern British Columbia, who were in 1988 fighting the biggest land-claims court battle in Canadian history. Written by non-native David Diamond in collaboration with the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council, *Nô Xyâ*'s theme is that of Native land rights. Reputedly well received by non-native audiences, the play's troupe, Vancouver's Headlines Theatre, was scheduled to perform in thirty-one locales across Canada in the spring of 1988.²⁵ Three experimental Native plays, which are anthologized in *The Land Called Morning: Three Plays*, and which have been performed by Native actors in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta, are also issue-oriented, with dramatic emphasis on such themes as the plight of Native youth and Native land claims.

In conclusion, it is clear that in Canada today, there are some pressures from within the Native community, and to a limited degree, from within the academy, to unearth and promote a Native 'literary' tradition as a separate aboriginal literary system. At its most extreme, the plea for sovereignty, echoed here in the words of writer/journalist Vye Bouvier about Native theatre, insists even on linguistic independence:

Theatre about native people without any native involvement is now history. Theatre about native people with involvement from only one native person is becoming history. Theatre about native people written by native writers including one or two native actors

is the native theatre of the present. The ideal would be a native theatre company doing plays about the white community in a native language.²⁶

At the same time, the work of contemporary Native writers who are experimenting with the literary and dramatic forms of the majority culture is beginning to surface in the artistic mainstream. Indeed, there may even be a remarkable reversal occurring as a new appreciation of the orality of Native culture develops, a movement which, in Marshall McLuhan's mythic and tribal global village with its attraction to the values and perceptions of pre-literate societies, seems willing to accord the Native speaker and performer a new status. In any case, the company that presents *Nô Xyâ* has been invited to perform in New Zealand and Australia; the storyteller Wes Fineday, Keeper of Stories, from the Sweetgrass Reserve in Saskatchewan, who has performed the oral traditions of his people, the Cree, in Europe, has had his recent book *Cree Oral Traditions* translated into Swedish; and other new texts reproducing Native story-telling, such as Freda Ahenakew's *Stories of the House People*, are, at the very least, obvious tributes to native oral narrative.

To date, however, in Canada there is no single Native author who has joined the mainstream as canonized poet, short story writer, dramatist or novelist of Canadian culture. Basil Johnston, an Ojibway member of the Cape Croker Indian Reserve in Ontario, is a remarkable humorist whose comedies of reserve life and satires on Indian-White relations in *Moose Meat* and *Wild Rice* are deserving of high praise, although one suspects that Bill Kinsella's white man's Indian as comic butt and ethnic joke in his several fictions of natives in Alberta remain more acceptable to the non-native majority.

If the invisible Indian has only managed to cast his/her silhouette on Canadian writing today, only time remains before he/she emerges as a full figure of equal and excellent voice. The Montana writer James Welch has proved the potential brilliance of Native fiction in the United States in such minor classics as *Winter in the Blood*, *The Death of Jim Loney* and *Fool's Crow*, novels that are both significant pieces of Indian writing and beautiful, profoundly moving, fictionally innovative visions of human life. As Canadian society moves towards its multi-cultural ideal and recognizes the Indian as legitimate author of his/her own fictions, and as Native writers complement

24 "Editor's Preface," Caroline Heath, *The Land Called Morning: Three Plays* (Saskatoon: Fifth House 1986) vii-viii.

25 Craig Benjamin, "Cry From the Native Land," *Maclean's* (9 May 1988): 67.

26 Vye Bouvier, cited in Caroline Heath, *The Land Called Morning: Three Plays*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House 1986): viii. See also Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters: A Play in Three Acts*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1988).

their oral traditions of rhetorical speechmaking and storytelling with the written word, a Canadian writer of Indian ancestry is sure to follow suit.²⁷

University of Calgary

LORRIS ELLIOTT

Black Writing in Canada: The Problems of Anthologizing and Documenting

I would like to point out that the proper title of this paper should have been "Literary Writings by Blacks in Canada: Anthologizing and Documenting." This paper, based upon my experiences, eventually resulted in the publication of *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada* and *The Bibliography of Literary Writings by Blacks in Canada*, the former published in 1985 and the latter in 1986.

First, I would like to give you some biographical details I consider relevant to this topic. I was born in Tobago, the smaller of the two islands that are now referred to as The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Like all other emigrants from this country, I was subjected to the familiar pattern of colonial education — that included the reading and studying of works by the Great Masters of the English literary tradition. Proudly, I committed to memory hundreds of lines from Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Victorian and the Romantic poets and others of this ilk.

Let me say at this point that I have benefited greatly from this literary grounding. The unfortunate thing, however, was that I never once stopped to question the relevance of such unknowns as the joys of spring, the glories of summer, the fullness of autumn and the trials of winter. Moreover, I never once recognized the significant absence of any material that sprung out of the immediate environment that had bred and nurtured me — the landscape of my consciousness.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, after my arrival in Vancouver as an adult student several years later, I elected to write my B.A. thesis on Joseph Conrad. Eventually, I was introduced to James Baldwin's work by one of my professors, but was forbidden to use him as the focus of my thesis. Baldwin, you see, had not proven his worth as a writer as yet; moreover, he was still alive. After a while, however, I agreed to discuss Baldwin's and Fitzgerald's writings, with special emphasis on the American Dream/Nightmare theme.

At this point of my education, I had not read any books written by my fellow West Indian writers — books which had been published during the

27 Two important works on native writing appeared in 1990. See *Canadian Literature* 124/25: *Native Writers and Canadian Literature* (Spring-Summer 1990) and Thomas King, ed. *All My Relations* (Toronto: McClelland and Stuart 1990). Also, *I Am Woman* by Lee Miracle (Vancouver: Write-On Press 1988) is receiving critical attention.