

First Impressions: Reconstructing Language and Identity in Pauline Johnson's "The Cattle Thief," Jeannette Armstrong's "Indian Woman," and Beth Cuthand's "Post-Oka Kinda Woman"

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Margaret Power, and the memory of my father, Dr. Donald Power. Thank you for your love and support and for teaching me that there is no greater dedication than that of the pursuit of learning.

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Abstract:

In this thesis, utilizing the works of contemporary post-colonial critics and authors, I argue that poetry is a medium through which Aboriginal women can reclaim control over the construction of Aboriginal female identities. I also argue that language has played an important role in the history of colonization. Firstly as a venue in which the colonizers could construct a perception of the world in which an ideological subjugation of Indigenous peoples is not only appropriate, but necessary. Second, as a venue in which Indigenous writers can address the disconnectedness of the colonially constructed reality, and, lastly, as a space in which Native writers can reconstruct history, the world, and Aboriginal identity according to their own multi-cultural and individual perspectives. Through close readings of poetry by three Aboriginal women in Canada, I argue that each poet's active engagement with the socially constructed relationship between signifiers and signifieds allows them to re-codify the English language in ways that accommodate their own multi-cultural and individual perspectives.

Introduction

“As an Indigenous writer, I find writing in the colonizer’s language simultaneously painful and liberating”
~ Janice Acoose

For many Aboriginal authors, writing in English is not so much a choice as it is a consequence of colonization. Kathleen Donovan explores the paradox this situation constructs for Indigenous authors by asking, “When the essence of language is creativity, how does a writer give life to ideas in a medium of death, duplicity and destruction, which the English language has been for Native people?” (146). In addition to the negative associations that English can have for Aboriginal writers are the many negative images and stereotypes of Aboriginal identity. Both the negative associations of English and the production of negative images contribute to the construction of a marginalized position for Aboriginals living in Canada. According to M. Nourbese Philip, for instance, “Scourges of racism and sexism ... create a profound sense of alienation, resulting in what can be best described as a psychic exile, even among those artists who are not in physical exile” (2). Although Philip is discussing racism in Canada in a generalized sense, she includes Aboriginals among those potentially affected by “a profound sense of alienation” (2). As Aboriginal authors in Canada, Pauline Johnson, Jeannette Armstrong, and Beth Cuthand represent a minority that has been dislocated from their language and culture through colonialism and isolated through racism and sexism. As a result, each author represents what Philip has called an “artist in exile” (2). Furthermore, as an “artist in exile,” the desire to express oneself and one’s identity is often difficult as the artist searches for a way to transcend the barriers put in place through colonialism.

Often closely connected to the desire to express oneself is the search for a medium in which to put forth that expression. In this sense, another uniting factor among

Johnson, Armstrong and Cuthand is that each has chosen to express herself through a poetic medium. For many Aboriginal authors, writing represents a powerful assertion of voice as they take control over the discourse used to oppress them. For Johnson, Armstrong, and Cuthand, this assertion of voice transforms their poetry from an exploration of language into a manipulation of language as each addresses her audience in a way that forces readers/listeners into a dialogue with the author/speaker that reverses colonial as well as patriarchal power structures¹. In “The Cattle Thief” by Pauline Johnson, “Indian Woman” by Jeannette Armstrong, and “Post-Oka Kinda Woman” by Beth Cuthand, each author/speaker takes an active role in re-defining her individual as well as cultural identity. At the same time, each poem is, in some sense, “polemical” as the author “chronicles the imposition of non-Native expectations and insinuations (political, social, scientific) on Native communities and the methods of resistance employed by Native people in order to maintain both their communities and cultures” (King “Godzilla vs. The Post-Colonial” 244). Thus, through poetry, each author manipulates language and external/internal images of identity as she confronts the realities of racism, patriarchy and oppression as a means of putting forth a reconstructed self-image with regard to her identity as an individual and as a member of a broader Indigenous community.

While Pauline Johnson has been studied extensively in recent years, her historical and literary location as one of the first Indigenous women in Canada to become a recognizable figure within popular culture should neither be ignored nor dismissed. Furthermore, while biographical works such as Pauline Johnson: First Aboriginal Voice of Canada by Betty Keller, and Flint and Feather: The Life and Times of E. Pauline

Johnson, Tekahionwake by Charlotte Gray may be helpful references with regard to the details and timelines of Johnson's life, they are also representative of a larger critical problem: the superceding of Johnson's personal and public life over her writing. Since the majority of scholarly research focuses upon Johnson's public and private life as an Indigenous woman living in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, the lack of critical attention focused upon her writing, and more specifically her poetry is representative of a much larger gap within contemporary scholarship regarding works written by First Nations women.

Like Pauline Johnson, many Aboriginal authors are themselves being analyzed, theorized, and examined by the critical eye. For instance, within contemporary critical discussions about Aboriginal literature, much of the dialogue is devoted to theorizing the role of critics, the role of readers/audiences, and the role of authors in the production of First Nations literature. Often excluded from these critical discussions are close readings of the literary works of Indigenous peoples. According to Glenn Willmott, although many critics are now interested in investigating Pauline Johnson as "a kind of performance text," among the critics examining her poetry, "there is very little close reading" (45). While Jeannette Armstrong has increasingly become a voice through which multiple Aboriginal concerns in Canada are expressed, (her numerous publications and interviews have shed light on many different issues regarding Native women, identity and the reconstruction of individual Native identities), few critics discuss how these issues are presented in her poetry. Beth Cuthand's work has also received very little critical analysis. As with Armstrong, Cuthand's obscurity within many contemporary academic circles does not reflect the fact that, as Laura Cranmer states, her poetry "establishes

signposts with which to navigate, albeit in a metaphysical way, the difficult landscape of de-colonization” (132). While Armstrong and Cuthand are both frequently anthologized in numerous literary collections, the lack of close critical attention to what these authors are saying, and why and how they are saying it, is representative of the gap that is now apparent within First Nations literary criticism in general.

When re-considering these authors’ poetry, Kim Anderson’s book, A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood, provides an excellent framework through which to understand each author’s poetry. At the heart of Anderson’s research is her view that Aboriginal women often need to take part in an “identify formation process” resulting in the reconstruction of a positive self-image. According to Anderson, this ‘formation process’ has four primary stages: “resisting negative definitions of being; reclaiming Aboriginal tradition; constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of [Aboriginal] communities” (15). On the one hand, viewing the poems through this model provides me with a framework through which I can understand what each author is saying. On the other hand, it emphasizes the fact that, for many Aboriginal women, regaining control over their identities is a powerful and important struggle that often involves a re-examination of how and in what ways signifiers of Aboriginal identity are represented within the language system itself. In this sense, I see Aboriginal women who resist and reconstruct themselves through poetry as engaging in a re-signification process through which they regain control over their identities as women and individuals.

As I discuss active confrontations of Indigenous women against oppression, patriarchy, and colonial misrepresentations, I also need to recognize my own personal/critical location within that environment. In this sense, I will address the issue of who I am and why I want to write about poetry by Native Women. While I do feel that social constructions of class, race and gender in Canada are negative for all groups involved, as a middle-class, white male living in Canada, I am aware that I exist within a privileged position that has been granted to me by a culture founded upon patriarchy and the colonial conquest. There is no question that when I declare my intention to write about texts written by Native Women, I am heading into a dangerous territory, one that has been strongly criticized by many Native as well as non-Native writers and critics. Some of the danger lies in the fact that, regardless of my intentions, I am inserting myself into a position of power over the authors of the texts I am discussing, authors who are Native women. As a result, I control the conversation and, thus, reaffirm the power structures these poets seek to destroy: Man over Woman; White over “the other.”

In searching for a philosophical/critical solution to this problem, I have turned to various authors/critics who are also attempting to understand with the implicit relationship of power, authority, and authorship between artist and audience. In How Should I Read These?, Helen Hoy addresses the issue of non-Native authors discussing Native issues and argues that the problem lies in the fact that “the writer is seen as both displacing the Native author and subject and presuming – and, in the process, producing – knowledge of realities at some remove from his or her own” (8). In other words, she claims that critics who claim that they know exactly what Native authors are talking about not only effectively erase difference by denying that his or her own cultural

position results in a different perspective or experience but are also potentially contributing to the growing spectrum of misconceptions about Aboriginal cultures and people. According to Hoy, this presumption/denial creates a situation in which “the First Nations face a particular, historically grounded insistence by descendants of European settlers on obliterating difference and claiming connection” (9). She explains,

Too-easy identification by the non-Native reader, ignorance of historical or cultural allusion, obliviousness to the presence or properties of Native genres, and the application of irrelevant aesthetic standards are all means of domesticating difference, assimilating Native narratives into the mainstream. (9)

Hoy also argues that this “obliteration of difference” is enhanced in Canada by the increasing “white-Canadian self-image of non-racist tolerance” (9). In other words, the increasing attempt by white-Canadians to construct a fixed Canadian identity, one that sets Canada apart from the rest of the world, results in the absorption of Native literature and culture into a “single story, retold by sympathetic Western critics” (9). Hoy addresses her own position as a non-Aboriginal critic and suggests that she can acknowledge the sensitive relationship between non-Native readers and Native texts by “explor[ing] the problematics of reading and teaching a variety of prose works by Native women writers in Canada from one particular perspective, [her] own, that of a specific cultural outsider” (11). In other words, Hoy sees the addressing and declaration of her own cultural location as an important step toward reading, as opposed to appropriating, Aboriginal texts. The key to Hoy’s reading is her subjectivity as she does not pretend to embrace difference while erasing it under the surface. She addresses her own cultural perspective and how it

inevitably influences her reading, thus recognizing and embracing difference as opposed to attempting to overcome it by providing a so-called 'objective perspective.'

Stephen Morton argues a similar point to Hoy when he states that many of the problems regarding non-Native readers writing about Native literature have to do with "the invisible eye of postcolonial theory" (4). On the other hand, Morton also argues that "[t]o merely assert that [he is] writing from the stance of an English, lower middle-class white male with straight tendencies, for example, does not serve to displace the axes of oppression that circumscribe particular sites of reading" (3). Moreover, Morton also argues that "interrogating whiteness [does not] provide a substitute for effective anti-racist work" (3). Morton explains that one of the most apparent issues regarding the relationship between white critic and native artist, is the critic's desire to contain texts within the context of colonialism, loss and power without recognizing "how texts can also empower individuals outwith the domains of discourse and power" (4). In this sense, Morton suggests that critical discussions which emphasize the 'destruction' of Indigenous languages and cultures lead to a perception of Aboriginal peoples as degraded and demoralized while ignoring the fact that Aboriginal literatures often celebrate the continued, vibrant, changing, and distinct existence of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Morton also suggests that there are multiple topics and audiences for Native authors/stories and to place them all within the same context is to create a canon of Native literature that not only excludes many Native writers but also contains those that are included in a way that misrepresents their words as well as their lives.

Kathleen Donovan addresses this connection between words and lives in her introduction to Feminist Readings of Native American Literature: Coming to Voice.

Donovan relates her experience in a graduate course on Native literary aesthetics as a means of discussing the problematic relationship of the white critic and the Native text. She relates that the class dynamics were such that they allowed for much discussion on a variety of topics regarding Native literature. However, Donovan also recalls the dynamics changing drastically after a guest speaker was brought into the class and it was noted that he had written an essay in which he was very critical of the interactions of white women with his people. The white feminists in the room argued that such a statement was unwarranted and offensive. They felt very strongly that “while white women had indeed been instruments of oppression of Native peoples, they had also been constructed as Other, had also been subjected to the tyranny of patriarchal paradigms” (6). This response led to a dialogue between the Native and non-Native people within the classroom that continued until a Native woman emotionally announced “how it felt for her life to be the object of study” (6). As she continued, she explained that “‘You people’... ‘talk so easily about literary texts and you theorize so easily about these so-called ‘texts’, but you forget, these are our lives’” (6). While her comment alludes to the fact that theorizing about Native ‘texts’ is often a theorizing of Native peoples, this powerful statement from Donovan’s story is also a reminder that many critics approach Aboriginal literature in a way that sensationalizes or dehumanizes Aboriginal peoples.

Greg Young-Ing also comments on the relationship of criticism and Aboriginal literature when he notes that “non-Aboriginal criticism tends to ‘reduce the emotionally, historically and culturally-charged issues [of Aboriginal writing] to dry info-laden legalize and/or academic jargon’” (quoted by Morton 5). In “Oratory: Coming to Theory,” Lee Maracle relates a similar point; she argues that “Theory is useless outside

of human application. If only a minority understand theory, only a minority can execute theory” (10). In this sense, Maracle sees theory as limited in both its effectiveness and application. According to Maracle, this is the result of “[a]cademicians wast[ing] a great deal of effort deleting character, plot, and story from theoretical arguments. By referring to instances and examples, previous human interaction, social events, academics convince themselves of their own objectivity and persuade us that the story is no longer a story” (9). What is left, according to Maracle, is a narrative void of people, passion, and life. It is important to recognize, however, that Maracle is not arguing that there is an essential flaw in the very concept of theoretical discourse. She is arguing that the lack of practical application when it comes to theory is a sign that, if theory is to maintain relevance, it must include that which has been bled out of it by Western-European academics: the connection between words, concepts, abstract realities and the real, lived experiences of people.

With these issues in mind, I have had to ask myself some serious questions about my intentions and my methods. In “Confluence: Confessions of a White Writer Who Reads Native Lit,” David Brundage also searches for a way in which he can read and write about Native literatures while, at the same time, addressing the issue of not only his whiteness, but his maleness. This is not to say that Brundage attempts to, as Morton would say, ‘interrogate’ his ‘whiteness.’ Brundage does, however, attempt to give colour to the ‘invisible eye’ of the post-colonial critic by erasing his anonymity and analyzing the “why and how” Native literature has influenced him. I feel a certain connection to Brundage in that he is a white male reading, loving and talking about Native literature. Also like Brundage, I have discovered that my desire to read and discuss Native literature

is largely connected to a parent². In my case, my influence can be traced to a path of personal discovery as I attempt to learn more about my father.

My father was a professor of Education at Lakehead University who had come a long way from his home in a small Newfoundland community. In his professional life, he was very interested in the presence of stereotypes and negative images within textbooks, curriculum, and the classroom. He was very passionate and somewhat evangelical about his concerns regarding the inequitable treatment and inaccurate representations of minorities within the education system and, from what my mother has told me, his ambition to 'change the world' often resulted in a strained relationship with colleagues and friends. One of the areas in which he found the most resistance was in his desire to, along with some of his Native colleagues, create a Native Teacher Education Program. At home, his emphasis on diversity extended beyond his professional life through a determination to promote acceptance and understanding as opposed to embracing a perception of Canada as a cultural melting pot. In fact, his determination to do so is often at the core of my many anecdotes and childhood memories shared between myself and my siblings regarding my father.

One of my favourite stories is one in which he gave me a quiz on stereotypes of Native Canadians. As an eight year old who was more interested in sports and cartoons than developing a social conscience, I was determined to wow him into leaving the issue alone by getting every single one of those ten 'true or false' questions right. After handing it back to him with an unwavering confidence, I was surprised to discover that I had failed miserably. I was even more surprised to learn that every single statement in that quiz was, in fact, false and a racial stereotype. Sweeping generalizations such as 'all

Indians live in tee pees' and 'Eskimos only eat raw fish' were examples of questions I answered as being accurate and thus, 'true.' At first, I thought that he was wrong. After all, these were things that I had learned in school. Louis Riel *was* the vicious leader of a violent rebellion who, despite the efforts of the ever-so-saintly Sir John A., struck out against a government that had done everything it could to stop him. The contact experience *was* summed up by pleasant images of pilgrims stepping off of a ship and into gorgeous Thanksgiving dinners with cornucopias and curious, smiling Indians while cheerful, singing *coureurs de bois* paddled down virgin rivers in an untouched landscape. What I often leave out of the re-telling of this story is that, when my father handed me back that quiz, his own disappointment seemed to overshadow my own. I also rarely relate that our differing view points about racial stereotypes extended beyond the realm of 'true or false.' For years I refused to see things in his way. When he told me that everyone is racist and that admitting and recognizing prejudice was a step toward managing it, I sarcastically nodded and walked away, choosing to see him as another example of a bleeding heart liberal who could find the good in everyone but himself.

One of my not-so-favourite childhood memories is one in which, at the age of fourteen, I was beaten-up while walking to a friend's house. The group of youth responsible for the attack were around the same age as myself and were mostly, but not entirely, made up of local Native youth. When I returned home, dropped off by a police cruiser with a raging headache and swelling sense of anger, my father questioned me as to whether or not I had brought it on by saying something insulting or demeaning. He asked me if I had arranged the entire thing and was making everything up as a means of hiding the fact that I had lost the fight and saving pride³. When a number of the youth

involved were arrested by police shortly after the fight and I was asked to appear in court, I was confused by the fact that my father seemed to be more concerned with the crown attorney's attempts to have me say that the group was entirely 'Indian' than he was with making sure that I was not nervous or scared. At the time, it seemed to me as though my father's desire to be unassuming about the racial make-up of the group superceded the needs of his son. I was devastated, confused and angry.

Feelings of devastation, confusion, and anger increased later that year when my father passed away after a two-year battle with cancer. While I know that I love my father, I do not know if I ever really knew him. My resistance to what he thought was so important and my accusations that he was a romantic idealist who 'glorified the Indians,' did nothing but prevent me from really understanding who he was. In fact, it took years to recognize what he was trying to do. It was a long time before I realized that his look of disappointment after that quiz was grounded in his belief that my real education was to take place at home, and that my failure to recognize this was a sign that he was not getting through. It was even longer before I began to accept that racism does indeed exist within everyone and when you deny it, you begin to embrace its ideology. It took a reminder from my mother to even remember my father's dispute with the crown attorney and, when I did, I understood that his emphasis on the multi-racial make-up of that group of youth was neither an attempt to be unassuming nor a debate regarding semantics. I also realized that those youth may not have had a specific reason to confront me the way they did but their attack was probably driven by anger. I may not have done anything to antagonize them, but for some, I represented an individual who has benefited from a

culture founded upon their oppression. For others, it might have been motivated by the desire to beat on someone else as opposed to being beaten themselves.

All of these realizations are part of a continual process of awakening. While this process is not limited to discovering and coming to terms with who my father was and what he wanted for his children, with each step, I find myself closer to being at peace with his memory. Thus, while it is essentially a self-serving enterprise, I must recognize and be aware of the fact that, initially, I read these works as a means of facilitating a journey of personal discovery; a journey that I had hoped would bring me closer to a man that I hardly knew. At the same time, however, I am aware that using the texts of Aboriginal women as a medium through which I can gain “access” to my father is an exploitive research practice. Consequently, I also want to emphasize that, while a personal and emotive connection may be what drew me to these works initially, my love of these authors and their works is not limited to what they implicitly remind me of. After all, these works have absolutely nothing to do with my father, me, nor the relationship between fathers and sons. My sustained love for these authors and their works is also resulting from a sincere interest in the issues being discussed and an aesthetic appreciation for each author’s talent.

Before I begin relating close readings of the primary works, I will first put them into context. In chapter one, I will address how and in what ways Aboriginal identities have become signifiers in a colonially controlled linguistic system. Also in the first chapter, I will discuss how these dislocated images of Aboriginal identity have been imposed upon Aboriginal peoples resulting in the collective negative self-image of many First Nations people living in Canada. My discussion of the ways in which identity has

been exploited and reconstructed through colonialism will allow me to further understand why many Aboriginal people are in a fight to regain control over their identities. Finally, in this chapter I will explore how poetry has the potential to be a medium through which Aboriginal women can begin to explore, challenge, reconstruct, and express identity through language. Throughout this chapter, I will rely upon contemporary post-colonial criticism regarding to the foundation and imposition of a negative self-image for Indigenous people. At the same time, I will also rely heavily upon the writing of Indigenous writers with regard to the impact of Euro-imposed ideologies and the differences between Western world views and the cultural view points and practices of Indigenous peoples. Since Rita Joe's poem, "I Lost My Talk," explicitly and clearly addresses the connections between language, identity, and expression, I will use her poem as a framework for the chapter.

In chapter two, I will discuss the rhetorical poetry/story-telling of Emily Pauline Johnson. As most contemporary academic discussions regarding Johnson focus heavily upon her life and biography, I will begin by discussing the evolution of critical perspectives regarding her life and work. With regard to reading her poetry, I will discuss the problematic position of critics who attempt to classify Johnson's work as being either an exploitive or a positive representation of her Aboriginal heritage and identity. In my reading of "The Cattle Thief," I will foreground Johnson's subversion of Euro-Canadian power structures as she re-presents history and directs responsibility for the negative effects of colonization towards her white audience. In her re-presentation of history, Johnson exploits the colonial narrative as a means of subverting it and creating a space in which she can put forth a different view of history. At the same time, a unique feature of

Johnson's poem is her emphasis on a future in which Indigenous/Non-Indigenous peoples are involved in a dialogue void of racial/cultural hierarchies.

In the third and fourth chapters, I will focus on two contemporary Native poets. Jeannette Armstrong and Beth Cuthand both demonstrate that resisting negative images of identity is a practice that extends far beyond the nineteenth-century. I will demonstrate how each author takes a very powerful and personal stance within her writing as she resists negative constructions of history, identity and femininity. In chapter three, I will explore Armstrong's "Indian Woman" and discuss how Armstrong places Native women into a powerful role with regard to challenging constructions of history and identity as well as reclaiming culture and tradition and re-constructing a positive self-image. However, before the poem can begin to discuss these issues, the speaker first confronts the definition of her identity as it is portrayed by Euro-Western media as well as culture. The poem continues in this way until the speaker declares that "Someone is lying" (53). This statement is emphasized by the placement of one of only three periods in the poem and, as a result, the line takes on the role of an emphatic denial or refusal to adhere to the "white-european-christian-patriarchal" construction of Native women. As a result of this refusal, "Indian Woman" moves toward a celebration of what Armstrong sees as the many aspects of Aboriginal female identity. In this sense, Armstrong makes it clear that the path to a positive self-image must pass through tradition.

In chapter four, I will argue that Beth Cuthand's poem, "Post-Oka Kinda Woman," also plays with identity as a construct of colonization, Western culture, patriarchy and the media. However, unlike the explicit references to the construction of a negative native female identity within Armstrong's "Indian Woman," Cuthand chooses to

play with the stereotype of Native people as having to belong to a recognizably pure and ethnic 'Indian community.' Although Cuthand's poem refuses to explicitly describe the negative constructions of Native female identity, references to these constructions lie implicitly within the text as she instead focuses on rejecting the "concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (Bhabha Location of Culture 66). For Cuthand, the 1990 resistance at Oka, Quebec symbolizes the point at which the 'Post-Oka woman' will no longer allow herself to be victimized by negative constructions of Native identity. Oka takes on a similar role to Armstrong's declaration that "Someone is lying"(52) and, consequently, Cuthand's poem begins by focusing on a different portrait of Native female identity. The 'Post-Oka woman' not only rejects Western constructed stereotypes but she also takes on an offensive role in defending her position by invading the colonial domain and incorporating it within her own traditions and values.

In the conclusion, I will summarize and compare the poetry of Johnson, Armstrong, and Cuthand as a means of revisiting how each author resists and reclaims control of her identity. More specifically, within this comparison, I will examine similarities and differences of how each author views resistance and reconstruction. I will also examine how all three engage in an implicit discussion with what they see as a positive future for Indigenous women and their communities.

The ultimate goal of this thesis is to demonstrate how Johnson, Armstrong and Cuthand confront European and patriarchal constructions of Native women as a means of taking part in new constructions of identity. Through poetry, they actively play with colonial assertions of Native identity and take part in constructing new definitions for Native women. All three move back and forth through history and tradition as a means of

presenting Indigenous perspectives as they specifically relate to self-image and then translating this reconstructed self-image into a modern context. Given the importance of poetry to authors forced to communicate in the language of colonization, I believe that it is time for poetry to be emphasized as a powerful and political medium. My hope is that, at the end of my research and writing, I will contribute to an already powerful and important discussion.

Chapter One: Cowboys and Indians: The Foundations of a Negative Identity and the
Tools for Resistance

“The alternate to cultural annihilation begins with acknowledging the erosion of pre-contact indigenous cultures and becoming fully aware not only of post-contact history, but also of the shifting, evolving nature of culture itself” ~ Taiaiake Alfred

In “I Lost My Talk,” Rita Joe addresses the connection between language and identity. As she describes her experience at a government-run residential school, she suggests that this connection has been subverted by those who reprimanded her for speaking her own language:

I lost my talk

The talk you took away.

When I was a little girl

At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:

I speak like you

I think like you

I create like you

The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk

Both ways I say,

Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,

Let me find my talk

So I can teach you about me.

The 'You' Joe speaks to represents many people within as well as outside of government apparatuses. The federal and provincial governments, the church, clergy, teachers and, in many ways, myself, all find themselves within Rita Joe's gaze. After all, I have benefited from the experience she describes and, as a result, share in the responsibility. However, while there are many subjects being addressed by Joe in "I Lost My Talk," the most apparent issue is the loss of language and the subsequent difficulties that this loss represents. Because she was forced to suppress her language and communicate through English at Shubenacadie school, she must now 'speak,' 'think,' and 'create' like the colonizer. In other words, when she is forced to communicate through a foreign language, she is also forced to communicate through foreign constructions of identity, gender, race and ethnicity. This imposition, therefore, allows for barriers to exist between Joe, her culture, and world view. As a consequence, Joe's voice becomes 'scrambled' in a search for words and phrases to communicate in what she perceives as an alien system. At the same time, as Aboriginal peoples are often misrepresented through colonial English, Joe is also in danger of viewing herself through a foreign construction of that identity. In this sense, language is the vehicle through which the colonial imagination can invade her self-image. However, when she asks for the chance to "find her talk" and re-educate her audience about who she is, Joe suggests that language is also the venue in which she can regain control over her identity.

In this chapter, following Joe, I will argue that the battle over who controls signifiers of Aboriginal identity is one embedded within language. In doing so, I hope to

demonstrate that, since images of Aboriginals have been taken up as signifiers of identity in a colonially controlled linguistic system, resisting these images involves an active engagement with the system itself. Using Kim Anderson's model of "resist, reclaim, reconstruct, and act," I hope to show that, as Aboriginal writers challenge colonially constructed assumptions embedded within English, they also reconstruct those systems in ways that allow them to occupy positions of power in relation to their own images. Because the forceful imposition of English is associated with the construction of a barrier against creative expression for Aboriginal writers, I will also argue that, before one can reconstruct the linguistic system, one must find a medium within which this reassertion of power and identity can take place. Due to poetry's emphasis on metaphor, allusion, structure, and form, poetry involves an implicit exploration and play with language and, as a result, it is an important medium for those wishing to challenge linguistically based assumptions about identity. I will also argue that, as Aboriginal writers begin to explore and reposition themselves within what was formerly colonial controlled English, they re-codify that system in a way that challenges Western perceptions regarding both history and genre. As a result, I see some Aboriginal writers as constructing a hybridized language system which transcends the barriers put in place through colonialism by relating concepts and traditions that were previously misrepresented or excluded. Since resistance, reclamation, and reconstruction of power, language, and identity are integral aspects of my readings of poetry by Johnson, Armstrong, and Cuthand, I will first explain how control over images of Aboriginals entered into the hands of Euro-North Americans.

While Joe's poem relates one way in which colonial images can be imposed upon Aboriginals through language, she does not speculate as to the origin of these

misrepresentations. A number of post-colonial critics, however, see a connection between the misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples and the history of colonization. In "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," for example, Abdul R. JanMohamed argues that racial difference in literature is integrally connected to colonial economics. Using an African example, JanMohamed explains that colonial expansionism resulted in an inevitable scenario in which the colonizer's "desire to exploit the resources of the colonies (including the natives, whom Europeans regarded as beasts of burden)" inevitably led to the decision on behalf of the colonizers to encourage "the destruction of native legal and cultural systems and, ultimately, the negation of non-European civilizations" (61). As a result, JanMohamed argues, colonialism can be understood in terms of two different, yet interconnected, modes of domination. He explains, "While the covert purpose is to exploit the colony's natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly through various imperialist material practices, the overt aim, as articulated by colonialist discourse, is to 'civilize' the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of Western cultures" (62). In this sense, constructing an image of indigenous peoples as "savage," "barbarous," and "uncivilized," provides the colonizer with a necessary justification for "imperial occupation and exploitation" (62). Thus, "If [colonialist] literature can demonstrate that the barbarism of the native is irrevocable, or at least very deeply ingrained, then the European's attempt to civilize him can continue indefinitely, the exploitation of his resources can proceed without hindrance, and the European can persist in enjoying a position of moral superiority" (62). The key to colonial success, therefore, lies in the construction of a dichotomy which, in

terms of power, privilege, and moral, ethical superiority, clearly degrades “the native” while favouring the colonizer.

JanMohamed asserts that the construction of this dichotomy starts as soon as the colonizers begin to arrive within what they perceive to be a foreign “material and discursive universe.” He explains that, while “the European theoretically has the option of responding to the Other in terms of identity or difference” (64), both the European’s desire to construct and maintain a recognizable, fixed identity and the desire to interpolate the land and people into the colonizer’s capitalist economy result in the fact that the European has no choice but to define the “Other” in terms of difference.⁴ If the colonizers were to view the indigenous population in terms of likeness, they would be unable to view themselves in terms of moral, ethical, cultural superiority and, thus, would be unable to grant themselves a position of power and authority in relation to the indigenous population. Consequently, JanMohamed explains, “By thus subjugating the native, the European settler is able to compel the Other’s recognition of him and, in the process, allow his own identity to become deeply dependent on his position as a master” (66). Thus, as a means of ensuring and preserving the European self-image of intellectual, moral, and ethical superiority, the Native is defined as powerless, primitive, heathenistic and savage. At the same time, the European is granted privilege and power in the colonization of what is perceived to be an inferior universe.

The effect, JanMohamed argues, can be found throughout literature produced within the discourse of colonialism. Because “Colonialist Literature is an exploration of a world at the boundaries of ‘civilization’, a world that has not (yet) been domesticated by European signification or codified in detail by its ideologies” (65), it provides the

colonial author an opportunity to explore the world outside of his or her understanding and, in the process, grant that world meaning through the pairing of symbols or signifieds to signifiers that, prior to this process, had no such connection. In this sense, as opposed to truly being an 'exploration,' the colonizer's desire to re-write the world in a way that "merely affirms [his] own ethnocentric assumptions" (65) allows colonial discourse to become a breeding ground for misrepresentations which, in turn, act as a source of justification for expansionism. Colonialist literature and the re-signification process which takes place within it, therefore, is that which allows misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples to become embedded within and acted upon in all aspects of colonial culture and policy. Thus, while colonialist policy involves an actual subjugation of indigenous peoples, an ideological subjugation through literature affirms and, thus, makes oppression possible.

Although JanMohamed is primarily referring to an African context, applying his model to a North American context reveals numerous similarities. Terry Goldie, for example, argues that images of the "Indian" in colonial cultures, including Canada, have become so far divided from their referents that they have become signifiers only understood in relation to other signifiers. In Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures, Goldie describes this dislocation of images from their referents as "the Quaker Oats box view of the sign" (4). Goldie explains:

You begin with the picture of the person on the box, who is holding a box,
who is holding a box with a picture of the same person holding a box,

etc. An originary image cannot exist for there must always be another image on the box being held, no matter how small it gets. In the same way, each signifier can refer only to another signifier. There might be an implied signified but it is unreachable. (4)

In this sense, the production of images through colonial narratives results in the construction of a reality that is only relevant to the images which support it. In other words, since the referents for colonially controlled images are both absent and irrelevant in the construction of the colonial reality, the reality through which the Euro-North American views the world has no apparent connection to the world itself.

Goldie argues a similar point to JanMohamed when he states that constructions of Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia and New Zealand can be traced to the colonial confrontation between the European and the 'Other.' According to Goldie, "The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore Alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?" (12). Goldie explains that the Euro-Canadian deals with this paradox in one of two ways. On the one hand, "the white culture can attempt to incorporate the Other, superficially, through beaded moccasins and names like Mohawk Motors" (12). Incorporating the image of the 'Indian' has probably been one of the most effective and, thus, popular methods of answering the paradox created by the non-Indigenous desire to become Indigenous. Patricia C. Albers agrees with Goldie when she explains that "the image of the warrior appears as an emblem in advertising, as a mascot for sports teams, and as a major subject in the bronze statuary of city parks and squares" (2). Daniel Francis also comments on the exploitation of these images when he states that

“advertising created a whole new context for the Imaginary Indian” and that, as a result, “the Imaginary Indian became one of the icons of consumer society” (175). As both Albers and Francis point out, images of the ‘Indian’ are as popular as they are valuable and, returning to JanMohamed’s argument about the connection between colonially constructed images and capitalist economics, it appears as though an ideological subjugation of ‘the native’ in Canada has allowed for images of Indigenous peoples to become valuable commodities within the Euro-North American capitalist system. In this sense, since the colonially controlled image is more valuable than depictions based upon reason or fact, the image of the ‘Indian’ becomes an imaginary figure under the control of the Euro-North American consumer society and, as a consequence, Indigenous peoples themselves are either admired and revered or dismissed and degraded, a choice determined by the degree at which they, like their images, can be exploited by the colonialist economy.

However, incorporating images of the indigene into colonial culture is not the only method through which the colonizer can obtain power. For example, Goldie argues that, as an alternative to incorporating the image, “the white may reject the indigene: ‘This country really began with the arrival of the whites’” (13). As Goldie concedes that the latter option has become “no longer an openly popular alternative,” (13) I assume that he is referring to those who ignore the fact that the history of North America extends beyond the arrival of Europeans. In either case, the image is under colonial control and, as both Goldie and JanMohamed make clear, colonially controlled images of the indigene are more relevant in terms of how colonizers see themselves than as accurate portrayals of colonial relationships.

While JanMohamed, for instance, argues that colonially constructed images are narcissistic in the sense that they assist the colonizers in asserting themselves a distinct and powerful self-image, Goldie argues that both the incorporation and rejection of colonially constructed images are aspects of “indigenization” (13). That is, a process through which colonizers attempt to alienate the indigene as a means of becoming ‘indigenous’ themselves. Like JanMohamed, Goldie also identifies literature as a venue in which the colonizer redefines what he or she perceives as a foreign universe.⁵ This is not to say, as Goldie points out, that colonial writers were actually paying attention to native peoples. As with the image on the Quaker Oats box, the original referent is absent and what is left is a series of images meaningful only in relation to each other. However, unlike JanMohamed, Goldie feels that these images do not appear only through binaries of ‘good and evil’ between colonizers and the colonized (Fear and Temptation 10). Rather, Goldie sees “‘images of the indigene’ as perpetuating a set of “commodities – sex, violence, orality, mysticism, the prehistoric” (17). Because these commodities are constantly determined by the colonizer, Goldie argues that, in colonial discourse, “the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker” (10). Consequently, while the binary between white and other may not always represent one of good and evil, the image of the Other remains trapped in a power dichotomy in which the “white signmaker” determines and attributes meaning.

However, the dichotomy between Europeans and Native peoples may not be the only relationship in which Euro-constructed oppositions can develop. Images of Indigenous peoples have also been constructed in relation to themselves and, in this regard, the most common images are those that portray a very clear dichotomy of the

“good and bad Indian.” In this sense, Aboriginal peoples are either idealized as mystics and noble savages or vilified as heathens and warriors. According to Albers, “In Hollywood movies and Western dime novels the warrior is portrayed clashing with the U.S. cavalry, swooping down on wagon trains, or fighting off the attacks of enemy tribes” while the “equally popular hunter” is “depicted surrounding herds of buffalo or stalking the lone antelope” (1-2). Goldie explains that these images “are poles of attraction and repulsion” (15). In other words, while the unmerciful warrior instills fear, the noble hunter is admired for his aesthetic value, praised for his ‘simplicity’ and pitied for his absent future. In either case, the image of the Indian does not exist independent of whites. Whether ‘the Other’ is in a position of attraction or repulsion, the white character exists in state of normalcy while the ‘Indian’ represents an abnormality. Since alienating the indigene allows colonizers to exist within a state of belonging, colonialist literature in the Canadian context propels both author and audience further in their quest to be indigenized. Both sides of this polar relationship between “attraction and repulsion” are vividly reproduced in the literary works of authors often credited with the historical and literal construction of what can be called a Canadian narrative.

For example, the journals of explorer Samuel Hearne, often revered, and sometimes reviled, for their romanticism and adventure, are representative of an important text within the Canadian colonial narrative. As one of the earliest examples of literature written in, and about, what would eventually become Canada, Hearne’s journals have as much historical as they do literary importance. At the same time, however, Hearne’s narrative provides an example of how Indigenous people in Canada have been unfairly depicted in early Canadian literature. In “A Journey from Prince of Wales’ Fort,”

Hearne consistently romanticizes his Indigenous companions as being primitive survivors who are “at one” with the landscape. Hearne captures the primitiveness and violence of the image of the vicious Indian warrior, for example, in a scenario where two primitive cultures are depicted as vying for survival and dominance. As he describes how his Aboriginal “companions” sighted an encampment of “Esquimaux,” Hearne states that “no farther attendance or attention was paid to [his] survey, but their whole thoughts were immediately engaged in planning the best method of attack, and how they might steal on the poor Esquimaux the ensuing night, and kill them all while asleep” (23). Aside from references to their traditions and cultural practices as “silly notions,” Hearne’s description obviously plays into a construction of the “Indian” as a fearless, illogical, and bloodthirsty in nature. At the same time, the unsuspecting “Esquimaux” are ideal examples of the pitiful “Indian” as their doomed fate is something that they neither could have predicted nor defended themselves against. In his journals, Hearne also describes his Native guides as being “expert hunters” who, in times of need, were “frequently driven to the necessity of eating each other” (20-21). The power of Hearne’s narrative becomes more apparent due to the fact that, “documentary accounts of personal experience [such as in the case of Samuel Hearne], presented as information texts, became a base from which the literary images of indigenous peoples grew” (Goldie 20). It is also clear that the historical and literary evolution of the image of the Indian has had a real impact on both the lives of Euro-North Americans and Aboriginal peoples. The lasting effect of “literary images” of Indigenous peoples as cannibals and “war-mongers” is explicitly present within Lee Maracle’s response to a white school teacher in I Am Woman. Maracle asserts, “You taught my child that, here, on the West Coast, we were cannibals. I

had to tell my daughters that their great-great granny, who was almost a hundred years old when I was a child, had never eaten a single soul" (I Am Woman 79). Maracle's response is a reminder that the relevance of this discussion extends beyond the realm of literary productions and interpretations and that colonially constructed misrepresentations of Aboriginals have had a real impact. It is also an implicit reminder that colonial constructions of the indigene as existing within a dichotomy of good and bad include women as well as men. According to Albers, "The side of Plains Indian life most often seen by the American public is the male half" (2) and, consequently, images of Aboriginal women are often left out or of secondary importance. The absence of Aboriginal women allows the colonizer to view Indigenous communities in terms of Euro-North American hierarchies regarding gender and, in the process, to place excessive focus upon the male chief and warrior while excluding Native women from positions of authority and importance.

At the same time, while she often occupies the background of the constructed image of Native societies, the Native woman⁶ is also depicted within constructions of "good and bad," "attraction and repulsion." Duncan Campbell Scott, a Confederation Poet and early administrator of the Department of Indian Affairs and another contributor to the Canadian colonial narrative, frequently romanticized Native women as woeful, hopeless figures. In "The Onondaga Madonna," Scott constructs an idealized, yet pathetic, image of an Indigenous woman as "She stands full-throated and with careless pose,/ This woman of a weird and waning race" (1-2). As Scott describes the "war and wildness in her veins," he reveals that her blood has been "mingled with her ancient foes" (5-6). In accordance with his political philosophy as an agent of the government, Scott

reveals that this 'mingling of blood' between races is that which has become "the latest promise of her nation's doom" (10). The poem ends with cynicism and hopelessness as the 'Onondaga Madonna' is described holding a child who, "Paler than she [...] sulks, [...] burdened with his infant gloom" (11- 13). Scott's philosophy as a poet as well as an administrator with the government portrays how both sides of the dichotomy for Native women as well as men are *useful* in the sense that they provide the colonizer with justification for colonization. According to Carole Gerson, Scott's poems represent the Canadian modernist erasure of Indigenous Canadians through "the dominant image" of "the Indian as museum piece, a remnant of the past" (97). Gerson explains that "published regularly throughout [Scott's] career, from the 1890s to the 1930s, were poems focusing on Indian women whose intermingling with white men poetically enacts the absorption and miscegenation desired by government policy" (97).

At the same time, Scott's depiction of the silent, defeated, sexualized Native woman is not the only symbol of what Scott calls a "weird and waning race." Rather, she and her mixed-blood son are symbols of assimilation as Indigenous blood lines are slowly phased out through 'mixed-race' relationships. Meanwhile, the presence of "wildness in her veins" and visions of "the primal warrior" within the eyes of her son capitalize upon an image of the primitive, fearless, vicious warrior as an essential characteristic of Indigenous peoples in general. Scott's poem is built upon a notion which presumes that "The indigenes are instinctual, with not even the possibility of deviating from the compulsion of 'their natures,'" (Goldie 25) and, since his political career was largely influenced by his belief that "The happiest future for the Indian race [was] absorption into the general population" (Scott quoted by Monture 126), the intersections

of his poetic and professional actions⁷ are an important example of how a colonially constructed vision of the world can transcend the literary realm.

An example of such transcendence can be seen in the degree to which Scott's infatuation with the image of the "primal warrior," sadly, but inevitably fading away influenced his decisions as a policy maker and agent of the government with the Department of Indian Affairs. In this sense, Scott's oppressive political philosophy is representative of how an ideological subjugation through colonialist literature can become an actual subjugation through colonialist policy. Both Hearne's description of the unmerciful cannibal and Scott's stoic, yet doomed, "Madonna," reinforce and perpetuate the movement of colonial conquest and, in either case, the impact that their constructions have had upon the lives of Indigenous peoples is an example of how Aboriginals as signifiers in colonial narratives influence colonialist practice. As the image of the 'Indian' begins to take precedence over Aboriginal peoples, the colonial conquest is pushed further into the realm of the "white man's burden" and Euro-North Americans construct themselves as embarking on a humanitarian mission to "civilize the poor Indians." In this sense, while government policies which act upon those images may actually be working towards incorporating and exploiting Indigenous peoples within the capitalist economy, on the surface, the salvation of the indigene through the implementation of Euro-North American values and world views is viewed as the primary goal.

For example, according to JanMohamed, relying upon the "native" of colonial imagination in the creation of colonialist public policy is, yet again, another example of both the European's narcissistic search for identity and desire to exploit the land and

people. In addition to re-codifying the world through colonialist literature, JanMohamed explains, “the European colonizers exercise direct and continuous bureaucratic and military coercion of the natives” (61). He further argues that the European “destroys without any significant qualms the effectiveness of indigenous economic, social, political, legal, and moral systems and imposes his own versions of these structures on the Other” (66)⁸. Thus, as a means of further establishing the colonial identity and forcing the Indigenous population into the European capitalist economy, Indigenous ideological and social structures must be presumed to be either absent or inferior and, as a result, existing ideologies and practices must be suppressed. At the same time, the imposition of colonialist cultural and ideological constructions upon Native communities also takes place.⁹ Thus, if applied to a North American context, as “the imaginary Indian” infiltrates government policy, the lives of Aboriginal peoples are governed by the colonialist image.

The effects of such action are found within the words of many Aboriginal writers, activists, and historians. According to Janice Acoose, for instance, “The bad Indigenous woman or squaw (the shadowy lustful archetype) provided justification for imperialistic expansion and the subsequent explorers’, fur traders’, and christian missionaries’ specific agenda” (Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws 44). Taiaiake Alfred explains that, regarding the disruption of Aboriginal systems of governance, the forceful imposition of Euro-North American political and social systems caused corruption within Indigenous communities. According to Alfred, “the imposition of electoral politics in place of consensual models, and the emulation of Western politicians” has resulted in the “disengagement of leaders from their collectives [...] to the extent that there appear two distinct cultures; the interests and attitudes of office-holders often differ radically from

those of the rest of the group” (Peace, Power, Righteousness 45). While Acoose places explicit emphasis upon negative constructions of Aboriginal women as integrally tied into colonialism, Alfred’s belief that there is a “disengagement of leaders from their collectives” emphasizes that colonial impositions continue to have a profound effect upon Indigenous peoples in North America.

Perhaps the most devastating example of government intervention is the removal of Native children from their homes and communities and their placement within government run residential schools. Terry Wotherspoon and Vic Satzewich refer to residential schools as part of a calculated, government-mandated endeavor that sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples into a capitalist labour force:

The new policy was oriented to offer what in effect became a three-step process towards Indians’ assimilation - boarding schools for the young would remove traditional native cultural attributes from the child and provide habilitation into the dominant culture; industrial schools would provide further character formation and controlled work-training skills for the older children who were to be integrated into agricultural work and labour force positions; and day schools would signify the complete assimilation of natives into Euro-Canadian cultural and employment patterns. (120)

In “The Disempowerment of First North America Native Peoples and Empowerment Through Their Writing,” Armstrong describes what this policy has meant for generations of Native people in Canada. She states that “our [First Nations] children, for generations were seized from communities and homes and placed into indoctrination camps until our

language, our religion, our customs, our values, and our societal structures almost disappeared” (239).

While Armstrong’s comments summarize the impact that residential schools have had on Aboriginal peoples in Canada, Rita Joe’s poem, “I Lost My Talk,” provides an individualized account of her experience at a specific “indoctrination camp.”¹⁰ According to Patricia Doyle Bedwell, “Prevented from speaking their language and separated from their families and communities, children at [Shubenacadie school] learned to feel ashamed of their culture and of who they were as Mi’kmaq people” (1). As Joe explicitly makes reference to the loss of language through the imposition of English, the suppression of her indigenous language is equated with the loss of her identity as she must now “speak like,” “think like,” and “create like” the colonizer. In this sense, Joe’s poem is a reminder that “those who lost their languages because of residential school attendance or other pressures to assimilate have felt tremendous loss and separation from their people” (Anderson A Recognition of Being 130). According to Anderson, this sense of loss and separation is further exacerbated by the fact that “when Aboriginal women begin to speak English, the way in which they perceive themselves culturally, racially and as women changes” (Anderson 131). In this sense, being forced to ‘think like’ the colonizer includes changes in self-image as well as world view. Regarding what this change means and how it may be represented, many Aboriginal authors point to the significant differences between Euro-North American and Aboriginal perspectives regarding gender and identity.

According to Anderson, traditional Aboriginal cultures “promoted womanhood as a sacred identity, an identity that existed within a complex system of relations of societies

that were based on balance” (57). Western systems of language and gender, on the other hand, emphasize concepts such as hierarchy and patriarchy and, consequently offer a much more oppressive reality for women. Western critics such as the French Feminists, for instance, believe that systems of difference define Western language and thinking through a series of oppositions. As a result, black is defined in opposition to white, bad in opposition to good, emotion in opposition to logic, woman in opposition to man¹¹. According to Hélène Cixous, “the movement by which opposition is set up to produce meaning is the movement by which the couple is destroyed” (“The Newly Born Woman” 55). In other words, the relationship between the couple is sacrificed for a hierarchy of meaning in which one side of the binary is perceived as an inferior alternative to the ideal. Thus, a language system defined by binary oppositions is integrally connected to the creation of a hierarchy of order in which authority and privilege are assigned to one side. While one side receives privilege, the other becomes relevant only as an antecedent. Julia Kristeva refers to this system as an “anterior code” which, in turn, is responsible for the “frustrations imposed on women” (223). For example, a society which privileges men will define masculinity in terms of activity, intelligence and logic. Thus, as a consequence of the “anterior code” of language, femininity is defined in terms of passivity, simplicity, and illogic. In Western discourse, Luce Irigaray explains, “it is man who has been the subject [...], whether in the field of theory, morality or politics” (236). It is the privileging of that which is deemed to be the masculine side of these oppositions and the belief that this privilege is natural and not constructed that creates “the phallogocentric nature of written language” (Donovan 151). In this sense, as another reminder that the symbolic order extends beyond the abstract, the implicit bias in

language has a significant effect on how Euro-North Americans perceive themselves. In other words, the belief that gendered constructions are essentially linked to physical bodies, negative constructions of femininity contribute to the construction of a negative identity for women. Thus, while 'man' represents an independent and autonomous signifier for identity, 'woman' becomes relevant only as an anterior or inferior alternative to man.

Although Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray deconstruct the systems which construct a male-centred society, Euro-centric ideology lies implicitly within their writing. For instance, feminist critics such as Barbara Godard and Adrienne Rich are critical of the fact that Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray do not examine the effects of race and ethnicity within constructions of meaning and identity.¹² Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray frequently use the universalized term of 'woman' and, as a result, create a generalized sense not only of femininity, but also of what obstacles language presents. This is a critique echoed by many Indigenous women who argue that they have never been welcome within Euro-American feminist movements. For example, Maracle argues that "the dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (I Am Woman 17-18). In other words, while Maracle agrees that women are oppressed by a language system that privileges men, she also argues that racism has granted white women a position of privilege in relation to Native men.

Janice Acoose argues a similar point as she explains that Aboriginal women have been unfairly represented within a colonially controlled linguistic system. Acoose elaborates, however, by arguing that this positioning of Native women is integrally

connected to an internal conflict among white-christian-european colonizers. In Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws, Acoose states that the internal conflict between a “Christian sense of morality” and a “physical attraction for the Indigenous women” resulted in the white-christian-european-male’s decision to “reject his desirous inclinations, project them onto the women he desires, and suggest that it is the women who are lustful and given to prostituting themselves” (42). While Anderson argues that the construction of the “‘uncivilized’ squaw justified taking over Indian land,” (100) Acoose asserts that the image of the ‘Indian Princess’ is connected to the fact that “before a so-called good christian whiteman could have relations with an ‘Indian’ woman ... she had to be elevated beyond an ordinary Indigenous woman’s status” (Acoose 43). According to Acoose, the lives of “Indigenous women are still constructed within this very male-centred white-european-christian, and now white-eurocanadian, ideology. This ideology informs canadian institutions which construct and reproduce stereotypical images of Indigenous women that are based on binary oppositions: good and bad” (42-42). As Native women are forced outside of the language system, the terms “Native” and “woman” as signifiers of identity represent a contradiction in which the only aspect of Native female identity that is permitted within the system is that which has been constructed by the colonizer with no real or positive connection to Indigenous women themselves. Consequently, Maracle explains, “No one makes the mistake of referring to us [Native women] as ordinary women” and that, in relation to white women, “We [Native women] are expected to retain our position well below them, as servants. We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of ‘their movement’ – the women’s movement” (I Am Woman 18). Maracle’s objections make it clear that, while the

“phallogocentric” presence within English has indeed constructed an oppressive reality for women, the hierarchies of language include race as well as gender. Thus, according to Maracle, a gendered-racial identity can lead to even further alienation, exclusion, and, consequently, silence.

The presence of Euro-constructed notions of the vicious Indian warrior, the noble savage, the “shadowy, lustful squaw” and the Indian princess as powerful signifiers of Indigenous identity adds to the oppressive potential of the system of difference. Since this system has been imposed upon Indigenous women through colonialist policies which encourage, if not enforce, the English language, there is little doubt that the ideological subjugation embedded within language has resulted in confusion with regard to the self-images of Aboriginal women. Kateri Damm, for example, speaks of the difficulties associated with language when she argues that “definitions of who we are affect not only First Nations peoples in North America but Indigenous peoples around the world who have been subjected to ‘the White Man’s burden’ of authority and control through domination and assimilationist tactics of colonizing governments” (11). Damm elaborates by explaining that “‘Who we are’ has been constructed and defined by Others to the extent that at times we too no longer know who we are” (11). In this sense, as Indigenous women are forced to suppress a language and culture that provides space for, if not privileges, women as important spiritual/political figures and, in turn, adopt a system that defines women as subjects of a masculine order, confusion with regard to one’s gender, self-image and role within individual, familial, and communal relationships seems to be an inevitable consequence of colonization.¹³

While Damm concedes that colonial impositions have resulted in confusion, she also argues that colonial misrepresentations have resulted in the development of linguistic battles over the control of signifiers of Aboriginal identity. For instance, according to Damm, colonial impositions often result in “confusion, uncertainty, low self-esteem, and/or [the] need to assert control over identity” (11). While Damm describes feelings of loss and confusion, she also describes a desire to re-establish a connection with Aboriginal perspectives and, as a result, reconstruct a positive self-image. Damm’s emphasis on actively confronting negative images is echoed by many Native women who feel that Euro-constructed perspectives regarding race and gender have prevented them from embracing both their ethnicity and their femininity as connected and important aspects of their identities.

Anderson, for instance, proposes that “Native women engage in a process of self-definition that includes four steps: resist, reclaim, construct and act” (A Recognition of Being 15). The first step, according to Anderson, begins with resistance towards “negative definitions of being” (15). In this sense, resistance begins with a recognition of these “negative definitions” and a conscious decision to reject them. The second step involves a “reclaiming [of] Aboriginal tradition” (15). During this phase, Anderson feels that Native women need to understand traditional definitions of Native femininity before they can begin “constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context” (15). In the final step of the process, Native women begin to act “on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of our communities” (16). Returning to the point at which meaning and identity were constructed by the colonial imagination is only a stop on the path towards understanding and embracing a more

positive construction of identity for Native women. According to Anderson, Native women must also re-visit traditional, tribal notions of identity before they can construct themselves in a more positive way. Damm echoes Anderson when she states that “by freeing ourselves of the constricting binds of stereotypes and imposed labels of identity, we empower ourselves and our communities and break free of the yoke of colonial power” (24). According to Damm, since language is the system used to construct negative images and, thus, a negative reality, it can also be used to re-construct a positive one. Damm elaborates by stating that “through the power of words we can counteract the negative images of Indigenous peoples. We can fight words with words” (24). However, it becomes substantially more difficult for Native women to ‘free themselves’ through writing when doing so involves communicating through an acquired language system, especially if that system denies freedom of expression for women.

Since negative impressions of Aboriginal women are embedded within English, it is difficult to see how Aboriginal women can resist oppression in the language that oppresses them. That is, because negative assumptions about Native women are embedded within colonial English language and culture, it seems to be paradoxical that Native women often describe writing as integrally important to the reconstruction of identity. Beth Cuthand, for instance, refers to writing as a way to release the ‘boogies’ that haunt her identity as an Indigenous woman in North America (Lutz 39). Jeannette Armstrong argues that the ‘task’ of Native writers is both “to examine the past and culturally affirm toward a new vision for all [Native] people in the future, arising out of the powerful and positive support structures that are inherent in the principles of co-operation” (“The Disempowerment” 241). She explains that “lies need clarification, truth

needs to be stated, and resistance to oppression needs to be stated, without furthering the division and participation in the same racist measures” (241). Kerry Charnley argues that “In breaking silence [First Nations women] can transform anger and combat racism. The act of writing is an incredibly liberating force” (15). Acoose shares in Charnley’s argument when she states that “For many Indigenous writers, the act of writing thus becomes an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment” (“Post Halfbreed” 33). Armstrong refers to writing as a process of “healing” that allows her to view her own image in more positive terms (Williamson 10). Maracle also describes the impact of colonialism and the desire to write:

The result of being colonized is the internalization of the need to remain invisible. The colonizers erase you, not easily, but with shame and brutality. Eventually, you want to stay that way. Being a writer is getting up there and writing yourself onto everyone’s blackboard. (8)

In this sense, the desire to write is connected to the desire to reintroduce one’s identity.

At the same time, the intense connection between language and culture, and the forceful imposition of English language and culture in the place of Indigenous languages speaks to the difficulties that Indigenous writers can experience when attempting to “write themselves onto the blackboard.” James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson speaks of the difficulties that many Indigenous writers face when he states that, “to acquire freedom in the decolonized and dealienated order, the colonized must break their silence and struggle to retake possession of their humanity and identity. To speak initially, they have to share Euro-centric thought and discourse with their oppressors” (249). Maracle also refers to the difficulty of conveying one’s Indigenous identity and perspective through

English when she asks: “how can one squeeze one’s loved ones small, onto the pages of a three-dimensional rectangle, empty of their form, minus their favourite colours and the rhythm of the music that moves them?” (I Am Woman 3). Both Henderson and Maracle allude to the fact that, while writing may be a method in which Indigenous people can break the imposed silence of colonization, when an Indigenous writer begins to write, he or she will initially be forced to conform to the colonizer’s language, and subsequently, the colonizer’s ideology. As a result of this logical dilemma, it becomes difficult to understand how Aboriginal women can escape the oppressive doctrine of colonialism and express their Indigenous world views in a language that does not necessarily provide space for those perspectives.

This issue of resistance through writing and the complexity involved for Native women becomes especially apparent when one considers the differences between Aboriginal languages and English. According to Armstrong, in Okanagan, for example, “You can’t point to that person and say ‘she’ or ‘he.’ You can only point to that person based on how they are related to us” (quoted by Anderson in A Recognition of Being 130). Since English is a language constructed upon gendered divisions and oppositions, it seems inevitable that something will be lost in translation. At the same time, since language is integrally connected to a spiritual world view, differences in spirituality may also add to the difficulties relating to translation. Gunn Allen, for example, explains that “Christians believe that God is separate from humanity and does as he wishes without the creative assistance of any of his creatures, while the non-Christian tribal person assumes a place in creation that is dynamic, creative, and responsive” (57). She goes on to explain that, “In English, one can divide the universe into two parts: the natural and the

supernatural. Humanity has no real part in either, being neither animal nor spirit – that is, the supernatural is discussed as though it were apart from people, and the natural were apart from it” (60). Conversely, “Indigenous cultures and languages,” as described by Acoose, are integrally connected to the balanced relationship between Indigenous peoples and “the land, ‘the Mother’” (“Post Halfbreed” 35). Acoose goes on to argue that “this maternal language base distinguishes Indigenous peoples’ languages and cultures and therefore, the writing, from non-Indigenous peoples’ language and writings which are rooted in a patriarchal hierarchy” (“Post Halfbreed” 35). In this sense, while English is rooted in a patriarchal and theological hierarchy, Indigenous languages stress community, the role of mothers, and the land as connected and working together.

Finding ways to overcome this paradox of expression is an issue explored by numerous Indigenous writers who also feel that writing can be used to resist the oppressor and reclaim traditional world views. However, the paradox facing the First Nations writer is still present if one considers Basil H. Johnston’s argument that “Language is crucial” (100). For example, Johnston feels that, with the imposition of English and the suppression of Indigenous languages, Aboriginal people “lose not only the ability to express the simplest daily sentiments and needs but they can no longer understand the ideas, concepts, insights, attitudes, rituals, ceremonies, institutions brought into being by their ancestors; and, having lost the power to understand, cannot sustain, enrich, or pass on their heritage” (100). Thus, if language is the key to understanding culture and identity, how is one to explore those areas and re-construct the present when the medium being used represents a colonially imposed barrier suspending both the interaction with and expression of traditional concepts?

According to Joy Harjo, some of the difficulty in relating her Aboriginal perspective through English can be avoided by finding the right medium. Harjo explains:

I think much of the problem is with the English language; it's a very materialistic and subject-oriented language... What I've noticed is that the centre of tribal languages often has nothing to do with things, objects, but contains a more spiritual sense of the world. Maybe that's why I write poetry, because it's one way I can speak. Writing poetry enables me to speak of the things that are more difficult to speak of in 'normal conversation.' (Quoted by Donovan, 146)

Many of the hardships Harjo faces when seeking a venue in which to speak can be attributed to the significant differences between colonial English and the languages of Aboriginal peoples. According to Harjo, English seems to be a language of things while tribal languages speak of the abstract. Thus, one reason why Harjo sees poetry as a medium through which she can transcend these differences may be because poetry is a medium which addresses the abstract. For instance, poetry highlights words visually, syntactically, thematically, and in terms of sound. Consequently, while prose uses words to tell a story, poetry's emphasis upon the abstract, socially and culturally constructed relationship between words and meaning results in the fact that, in a poetic medium, words and ideas often are the story. It is also apparent that because poetry relies heavily upon culturally assumed connections between language and the world, it has the potential to be a medium through which authors can expose and play with the abstract and constructed nature of written language. In this sense, poetry represents a medium through which authors can examine as well as reassign the codified connections between

signifiers and signifieds. Thus, poetry represents a medium through which language can be manipulated as well as explored. For Harjo, this potential for exploration and play with written language represents an opportunity in which she can relate that which is excluded from “normal conversation.”

Armstrong argues that the key to subverting colonially imposed linguistic barriers and re-writing identity is in the subversion of Western genres. She explains that genre “becomes the container, and becomes the criteria by which the work is to be experienced” (Anderson “Reclaiming Native Space in Literature 53). As Aboriginal perspectives do not follow Western criteria regarding genre, categorizing Aboriginal literature in those terms is limiting and difficult, if not impossible. For example, Lee Maracle’s book I Am Woman is an excellent example of an Aboriginal text which combines numerous genres since it includes poetry, sociology, storytelling, and history within the same text. According to Armstrong, there are numerous works by Native authors that defy Western categories by combining various aspects of genre within the same text. She points to Slash, Halfbreed (Maria Campbell) and April Raintree (Beatrice Culleton) as examples of Native texts that combine fiction with non-fiction. Armstrong continues by stating that these are examples of how incorporating “Native traditions” into the English language has resulted in the creation of hybrid genres. Moreover, like Harjo, Armstrong also points to poetry as a medium through which Aboriginal writers can begin to play with genre and explore language through the creation of hybridized media:

We are finding the linkages in the expression of poetry; working at the way poetry occurs, as an expression, as an art form within various First Nations traditions. That is, looking at how metaphor

is used [in Native tradition], and how that is carried through in the way image-making is created as a poetic format. (54)

Armstrong continues by commenting on the specific linkages between poetry and oratory. She points towards the “ability of the orators to create metaphor and symbolism and allegory and parallel, using rhythm and using the backdrop of the sound of music to create rise and fall of measuring in terms of the oratory” (54) as that which demonstrates an explicit connection between oratory and poetry. This connection can also be seen in the similarity between Armstrong’s description of the ‘ability of orators’ and Barbara Drake’s description of poetry as something that “is often said to be inspired, and to be inspired means to be filled with breath” (1). Drake goes on to say that, “however poetry is described and defined, though, the main things that come up repeatedly are rhythm, language, and emotion, and the relations among them” (1).

As poetry is a Western medium with explicit similarities to oratory, it is logical that some Aboriginal writers would choose poetry as a medium through which they can explore language, meaning, and identity. What emerges as a result of this exploration is a subversion of Western hierarchies implicit within language as Aboriginal writers break down negative images and assert control over signifiers of identity and re-write a new system according to their own individual and cultural perspectives. At the same time, what also emerges from this re-visioning of language and identity by Aboriginal writers is an “Aboriginalization of the English language that often needs some translation to non-Aboriginal audiences” (Heiss 213). While some aspects of that message may inevitably be lost in translation to a non-Aboriginal audience, many Aboriginal writers feel that it is of greater priority to direct their message towards other Aboriginal peoples. At the same

time, the accessibility of poetry to a non-Aboriginal audience results in the fact that, as Heiss suggests, “this type of writing plays a number of roles, not only providing a vehicle for the author to learn to write about their own history, but also to educate and often entertain a wider audience who may have a narrow perspective” (220). Thus, the many possibilities implicit within poetry account for the fact that, “in re/visioning, re/claiming and re/voicing history there are a number of Aboriginal and minority poets who address the silences of the past in their poetry” (Cranmer 125). While some translation may be required, the fact that one’s perspective appeals to Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous audiences demonstrates that poetry has the potential to transcend the paradox facing Indigenous writers who believe that, since language is the venue in which they have been misrepresented and exploited, it is also a venue for resistance and reclamation.

Since poetry represents a medium through which Aboriginal writers can both challenge and re-write the codes defining language and identity, in doing so, writers may also construct an “Aboriginalization” of genre. For example, on the one hand, Armstrong argues that poetry’s potential as a medium for resistance and reconstruction is representative of the implicit similarities that poetry has to oratory. On the other hand, however, Armstrong explains that, “while some of the most beautiful oratory occurs in terms of poetry, or what’s understood as poetry [...] in terms of literary categories, clearly, [oratory] is not poetry” (55). Armstrong’s insistence that what a Western academic eye defines as poetry may not be poetry is an explicit reminder that applying Western critical standards and categories to art arising from a different perspective is a flawed enterprise. Anderson, for instance, explains that, in a written format, “oratory extends beyond poetry in its need to interact with, and persuade an audience. It is not

simply political rhetoric, because of its link to traditional story. It is not drama because, at its roots, it is prayer. It is a distinct combination that defies Western genres” (56). In this sense, this blurring of the line between biography, political rhetoric, fiction, prayer, and, at times, even prose,¹⁴ reflects the fact that the art being produced is arising from the intersections of genre, medium, and culture. According to Homi K. Bhabha, art arising from the border line “does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (Bhabha Location of Culture 7). In this sense, Aboriginal writers engaging in a process of re-codifying signifiers of identity and culture are also resisting the grand narratives of history by presenting alternative histories and perspectives within the discourse of the dominant culture. They disrupt and encourage change with regard to contemporary paradigms of race, gender, and culture. According to Heiss, “[many] Aboriginal authors are rewriting the history books that have conveniently left out the facts around invasion, colonization and attempted genocide. Aboriginal people today are documenting the history of a people misrepresented, or not represented at all in history books of the past” (221).

The final two lines of Rita Joe’s poem, “I Lost My Talk” provide a good example of how the desire to re-write history and identity is realized through writing. She states:

Let me find my talk

So I can teach you about me.

In this sense, finding her ‘talk’ will enable her to re-construct a positive Native female identity as well as begin to act upon this re-construction by teaching the colonizers about that identity. However, it is important to recognize that finding her indigenous language

will not necessarily result in her ability to teach 'me' about her as communicating through that medium will inevitably create another language barrier. At the same time, finding her indigenous language, which is so closely connected to her indigenous culture, values and beliefs, will enable her to begin re-constructing those values within a contemporary context. Her 'talk,' as a result, does not necessarily symbolize a literal recovery of language and can also be seen as representative of her Indigenous values, beliefs, sexuality, and identity. Thus, Joe's offer is to teach those that have been brought up within the narrative of colonialism that Euro-constructed notions of Native identity are far removed from reality. At the same time, it is a rejection of the "imposed definitions of a colonizing system which would reduce [Indigenous women] to nothingness with misrepresentative, overly broad or trivializing labels of identification" (Damm 24). As Joe tells a story which was supposed to be silenced, her poetry subverts expectations with regard to history and the present and, as a result, explores the "beyond." Bhabha argues that to do so is "to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond,' becomes a space of intervention in the here and now" (7). In other words, "To touch the future on its hither side" is to re-visit history as a means of creating the possibility of an open future. Since history represents a narrative through which we can make sense of the present, to re-write the past is also to re-write the present. Thus, Joe challenges the terms in which her audience views the present. Telling her story also changes the future.

In the following chapters, I will examine ways in which Pauline Johnson, Jeannette Armstrong and Beth Cuthand are all, in one way or another, also attempting to

find their 'talk' and reach the beyond. While each individual has her own history, language, and culture, these authors are united by the fact that they have been constructed according to the same prejudices and dichotomies by the narrative of colonialism. Thus, in reconstructing their own identities, each author demonstrates that "the silencing of colonized people, either by brutal subjugation or by subtle erasure, does not mean that their voices have vanished" (Cranmer 125). I will also examine the ways in which each author bends and blends the rules and categories which define language and genre. In doing so, each author presents her own version of an "Aboriginalization of English" in terms of the systems which define the language. At the same time, the fact that each author chooses poetry as a medium through which she can construct a powerful message of resistance and reconstruction is representative of poetry's potential to be a medium through which Aboriginal writers can transcend the linguistic barriers put in place through colonial impositions.

Chapter Two: Would the Real Pauline Please Stand Up? Pauline Johnson's 'Borderline Condition'

"Pauline Johnson's physical body died in 1913, but her spirit still communicates to us who are Native women writers. She walked the writing path clearing the brush for us to follow. And the road gets wider and clearer each time a Native woman picks up her pen and puts her mark on paper." ~ Beth Brant

"Although Johnson always spoke of herself as an Indian, her right to the designation has been questioned."
~ George Lyon

As many critics place emphasis upon Pauline Johnson's persona as opposed to her writing, it is often apparent that her complex identity as a woman poet/performer of dual heritage has the potential to overshadow and, thus, silence her words. While some critics do discuss Johnson's dual identity, few examine the degree to which Johnson was aware that a privileging of her identity was taking place and if this awareness was an influence as she published or performed. In "The Cattle Thief," for instance, Johnson's awareness of her audience is evident as she exploits colonial expectations and disrupts colonial narratives by re-presenting history and identity. In this sense, her poem not only reflects her dynamic and multiple identity but also represents a journey of resistance. Thus, while her identity continues to be an issue in her writing, it is her ability to exploit her audience's expectations that is in need of more analysis.

Since understanding the complexity of her life allows for further understanding of her words, I will first put the many critical perspectives regarding Johnson's complex position into context. My first encounter with Emily Pauline Johnson was as an English/Concurrent Education student in a Canadian Literature survey course. While it is difficult for me to state with absolute certainty, I believe that she was the first Aboriginal author I had ever read, and when I first began researching and thinking about this thesis, I looked back to my notes from that class in an attempt to find some kind of starting point.

Among my many scattered notes and scribbles, I located the following ‘summary’ of Pauline Johnson’s life:

- 1816 – 1913
- father – Mohawk
- mother – white Quaker
 - both parents educated
- Pauline – home-schooled
 - identified herself as Mohawk
 - ‘Tekahionwake’ – originally her grandfather’s name
 - aside from poetry, wrote prose, essays
 - supported herself through performances
 - very popular
 - toured England and Canada
 - referred to as ‘The Mohawk Princess’

My notes on her life were simple, linear and clear. According to my narrative, Johnson was a Native Canadian poet who performed on stage and achieved popularity and success in North America as well as in England. Looking more closely at my notes now, the life and legacy of Johnson appears to be much more complex. Phrases that I once accepted as truth and fact, for instance, now appear awkward and ambiguous: “Very popular,” “referred to as ‘The Mohawk Princess,’” “*identified herself as Mohawk.*” In each description of her life I now see the ambiguity of a woman whose popularity, persona and personal/professional/cultural identity have been dismembered by critics and theorists all wishing to expose the ‘real’ Pauline Johnson.

As a result, the linear narrative I once understood to be a factual account of Johnson’s life now contains gaps, contradictions, and ambiguities. My description of Johnson as ‘popular,’ for example, seems to be an understatement of her influence and her legacy. According to Rick Monture, Johnson “rose to prominence at a time when Canada was attempting to create a literature that defined the new country in a way that set it apart from both England and the United States” (119). Monture elaborates by referring

to her as a “pivotal voice in the ongoing history of European-Aboriginal-Canadian relations” (138). Johnson’s popularity and legacy are also documented by Carole Gerson who notes that, “At the popular level, Johnson maintained a presence that kept her books in print and preserved her name in schools, a chocolate company, and almost in a major Vancouver theatre”¹⁵(91). Indigenous writers Beth Brant and Kateri Damm refer to Johnson as a figure of early resistance with regard to Euro-constructed stereotypes. Brant describes Johnson as being “determined to destroy stereotypes that categorized and diminished her people” (176). It is this determination, Brant asserts, that classifies Johnson as a “spiritual grandmother to women writers of the First Nations” (176). Similarly, Damm refers to Johnson as a “pioneer” among the “earliest published Indigenous writers from various colonized countries in the world [who dealt] with issues of cultural/racial identity and mixed ancestry in their works” (17). Connecting the comments of Monture, Gerson, Brant, and Damm is a perception of Johnson as a figure who possesses great historical and cultural importance. At the same time, the spiritual and emotional view of Johnson as a figure of importance for Indigenous writers emphasizes her legacy as an individual who engaged in resistance and reclamation on behalf of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Contrary to this view of Johnson as an important figure and absent from my undergraduate ‘summary’ of her life are the words ‘excluded,’ ‘denied,’ and ‘anomaly.’ Thus, it was initially surprising to me that some critics felt that she “has been ignored and dismissed by present-day critics” (Brant 176). It was also surprising to learn that some critics felt that criticism of Johnson’s talent as a writer and a performer has resulted in a “slighted reputation” (Ruffo 212). Even more surprising was the view held by

contemporary critics who see Johnson as an individual who did little to fight stereotypes and, on the contrary, actually embraced and perpetuated colonially constructed images of the Indian.¹⁶

In many ways, these contrasting views of Johnson as popular and important or slighted, forgotten and/or inauthentic are representative of the critical spectrum regarding her life and work in general. According to Glen Willmott, a wide range of critical responses to Johnson's public image can be found "in such institutions of literary canon formation as British, Canadian, and American reviewers, publishers, schools and universities, and literary elites" (44). He goes on to state that this spectrum is also present "in institutions most often excluded from canon formation, such as the cultural apparatus of the poet's own Six Nations community and those of different Native groups across North America, as well as popular forums such as those of the frontier towns in which she performed, or of the children's literature into which she has been assimilated" (44). However, in spite of the growing spectrum of varying conclusions regarding Johnson's identity, for the most part, critics are largely focused upon and, thus, connected by a determination to fix Johnson onto one side of a "fine line between champion and exploiter of Indian identity" (Aigner-Varoz 51).

For those who choose to see Johnson as exploiting nineteenth-century images of Aborigines, Johnson's childhood often becomes a referent. George Lyon, for instance, questions Johnson's integrity as an artist and as an advocate for Indigenous people in his essay, "Pauline Johnson: A Reconsideration." He begins, however, by stating that "it is difficult to determine what degree Pauline grew up acculturated as a Mohawk" (139). Lyon asserts that at least some of this difficulty has to do with the fact that her

Indigenous father, George Johnson, “had eagerly absorbed white culture, to the point of taking Napoleon Bonaparte as his avowed idol” (139). Daniel Francis also questions Johnson’s “acculturated” childhood by asserting that her father, “was a fervent admirer of Napoleon, and nick-named his daughter after the French emperor’s sister. (He nicknamed his eldest son “Boney” and his second son ‘Kleber’ after one of Napoleon’s generals.)” (116). Similarly, Christine Lowella Marshal explains that, Johnson’s parents “George and Emily Johnson believed strongly that the goal of the Indian should be to adopt and excel in white civilization, and the superiority of white civilization was a fundamental presupposition in their lives” (19). Marshal also relates that “a piano, Shakespeare, dresses and manners were presences in Pauline Johnson’s childhood. She had read all of Byron by the time she was twelve” (18). While Johnson’s education in the Romantic literary tradition and her father’s admiration of European culture are often at the centre of debates regarding the extent to which Johnson “grew up Indian,” some critics move this debate beyond her exposure to cultural traditions and into matters concerning lineage.

Consequently, Johnson’s ‘assimilated’ childhood, as well as the fact that she was, according to one critic, “three-quarters white,” (Chalmers quoted by Lyon 138) have contributed to questions regarding “her right to the designation [of a Mohawk Indian]” (Lyon 138). At the same time, the decision by many critics to remind their readers that “Johnson was more white than Mohawk biologically” (Goldie “Fresh Canons” 381), propels debates regarding Johnson’s ‘authenticity’ as an Indigenous person into debates of her integrity as well as her literary merit. If Johnson did not “grow up Indian,” for instance, one might ask whether she could accurately/authentically represent a Native voice. If Johnson was “more white than Mohawk,” on the other hand, critics ask whether

or not she was “Indian” at all. Both questions have a potentially damaging effect upon how her writing is viewed by modern audiences since many contemporary readings of her work emphasize Aboriginal concerns and culture.

Some critics, however, move debates regarding Johnson’s integrity and literary merit beyond her childhood and lineage and instead point to her marketable persona as the “Indian Princess,” “The Mohawk Princess” and “Indian Poetess.” In this sense, the degree to which critics can determine if Johnson was, in fact, “authentically” an Indian is regarded as irrelevant because, in any case, she was exploiting Indigenous peoples by embracing a colonially constructed image of them and, consequently, should not be viewed as having an authentic Native voice. Goldie, for instance, asserts that Johnson’s marketable persona embraced “the image of the ‘Indian Princess’ employed by white culture as a sexual emanation” (“Fresh Canons: The Native Canadian Example” 379). Lyon also highlights Johnson’s marketable persona when he critiques the stereotypical “Buckskin dress” worn by Johnson while reading selections of her “Indian poems.”¹⁷ He continues by explaining that her costume was “syncretistic to the point of being fanciful; she apparently designed it herself [...] not unlike ‘primitive’ outfits for sale at the Leather Ranch” (139). According to Monture, her dress “provided the audience with an exotic spectacle of the ‘vanishing race’” (123). Johnson’s stage persona became further complicated when, “after an intermission, she returned in full Victorian evening gown attire, as if to demonstrate her dichotomous persona or, for the audience perhaps, to symbolize the process of Native assimilation” (Monture 123). The performance, as a whole, proved to be quite a spectacle and, as a result, many historians and critics suspect that it was Johnson’s persona, as opposed to her poetry which garnered public attention.

Jace Weaver, for instance, argues that “Johnson herself did much to contribute to the view that she was nothing but a ‘celebrity Indian’ who catered to Amer-European expectations and tastes” and that, “as a performer and a writer, Johnson is often mistaken for the quintessential ‘White Man’s Indian’” (82). Francis argues a similar point when he states that Johnson’s audience “paid to see a Mohawk princess as much as a talented writer and recitalist” and that she “recognized that her act depended on its exoticism” (116).

Consequently, many critics ask whether the desires of her audience outweighed her desire to challenge Euro-constructed images of Indigenous peoples (if she did in fact have that desire). According to Francis, for instance, the “need to satisfy the demands of a White audience stultified Pauline Johnson’s development as a writer and limited her effectiveness as a spokesperson for Native people” (120). Furthermore, suspicion regarding Johnson’s childhood, lineage and integrity has caused some critics to view her “as an embarrassment, another early figure who conformed all too easily to the beads and buckskins” (Goldie “Fresh Canons” 382). In this sense, some critics conclude that, regardless of the ties that Johnson may or may not have had to an Indigenous heritage and community, she was first and foremost a conformer who readily and willingly represented a common colonial image.

Following such a powerful and critical inquiry into her Indigenous persona, voice, and identity, it seems inevitable that debates about Johnson’s identity and integrity may have contributed to her exclusion from literary canons. For instance, the most consistently anthologized of Johnson’s poems is “The Song My Paddle Sings.” Brant refers to this piece of verse as “the familiar poem of Pauline Johnson, the one that

schoolchildren, white schoolchildren were taught” (175). Francis also speculates that “it is possible that more Canadian children have memorized it than any other piece of verse” (116). Although there are no obvious ethnic markers in the poem, it is frequently referred to as one of Johnson’s ‘Indian Poems’¹⁸ and, subsequently, its popularity among white audiences is, at least to a degree, integrally connected to the appropriation of ‘Indian’ images for a Euro-Canadian identity.

According to Goldie, images of Indigenous peoples are often incorporated into colonial society as a means of fulfilling the colonial desire to become indigenous. Among the images produced and consumed through this process is “the assumption that all aspects of indigenous culture are in some sense a part of the natural” (Goldie Fear and Temptation 28). According to Goldie, “this process achieves its most varied exposition in a Canadian example, the canoe. Often the canoe is made to seem a simplistic evocation of nature in opposition to white technology” (21). As a result, the canoe and the indigene are often aligned together in a Euro-constructed opposition of nature/indigene versus technology/settler. At the same time, the exploitation of this image does not reflect the fact that, in North America, the canoe has “no apparent connection to contemporary native peoples, or to any ‘productive’ source” (Goldie Fear and Temptation 22). When considering how these images manifest themselves within the literary texts of Euro-Canadians, one must also conclude that the desire to include these images within literary canon formation has affected debates regarding Johnson. For instance, throughout “The Song My Paddle Sings,” Johnson assumes the passionate and intense voice of a solo canoeist moving her way through a series of rapids.

The incorporation of her verse into a Euro-Canadian constructed canon, therefore, ultimately enables the canon itself to be indigenized in the same way that a Euro-Canadian individual progresses by naming his or her used car lot “Mohawk Motors” (Goldie Fear and Temptation 12). In other words, “the love of the princess enabled the white arrivant to become indigenized” (Goldie “Fresh Canons” 379). At the same time, however, while Goldie suggests that the incorporation of Johnson’s verse and image into literary canons may be connected to the desire to be “indigenized,” he does not comment as to how questions regarding Johnson’s authenticity and integrity as a “real-live-Indian” might also affect those in search of an “indigenous” identity. For example, if “the love of the princess enables indigenization,” it seems logical that questioning her “right to the designation” would result in a rejection of that which previously was desirable. In this sense, questioning Johnson’s indigenous identity inevitably contributes to the removal of her work from a white Canadian canon because her image and her poetry are no longer perceived as being authentically ‘Indian’ and, thus, no longer valuable in the Euro-Canadian’s desire to be indigenous.¹⁹

Rejecting Johnson’s work on the basis of questions regarding her “authenticity,” however, does not reflect the fact that any attempt to “authenticate” Johnson’s Indigenous identity will inevitably deny the duality present in her life as well as her work. Due to Johnson’s dual heritage, Aboriginals as well as non-Aboriginals can potentially see her in terms of likeness. At the same time, Johnson’s duality means that she is different, Other, and “not-like-me.” As to what effect this duality might have had on how Johnson saw herself, Lyon speculates that she was often in a state of uncertainty and confusion about her self image. He explains:

One suspects that she called herself 'Indian' simply because the term 'halfbreed' has always been opprobrious and the term 'metis' was applied to French speakers, usually of Cree extraction. Pauline Johnson must have lived with considerable anomie, and though her sympathies for both sides of her ancestry may have been strong and her expressive capabilities genuine, the unavoidable tensions between those conflicting ancestries, not to mention the economic pressure upon the poet, are sufficient to account for the degree of semiotic confusion one finds in her work. (139)

While Lyon describes her duality as an "unavoidable tension between conflicting ancestries" resulting in a "semiotic confusion" found within her work, this view assumes that she was experiencing difficulty in determining her identity and aligning herself predominantly with one particular aspect of her heritage. What Lyon does not reflect on, however, is the degree to which a "semiotic confusion" in Johnson's work is produced by an audience in search of an ethnically pure, racially distinct identity and not by the author herself.

Although contradictions do appear within Johnson's work, these "tensions" may be alternatively seen as a sign of Johnson accepting her "cultural hybridity" (Bhabba 6). For instance, in The Location of Culture, Homi K. Bhabba cites an architectural metaphor in which a museum is configured to represent cultural/racial difference.²⁰ Within the museum, each level represents a different aspect of how Western paradigms categorize identity: one floor, for instance, is labeled "whiteness" while another is labeled "blackness." The titles assigned to each level are arranged according to Western

hierarchies: “whiteness” is on a higher level than “blackness.” However, Bhabba explains that:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (4)

In this sense, the “possibility of cultural hybridity” eludes the dividing lines of Western perception by allowing for space “in-between” those divisions. Hybridity, as represented by the stairwell, allows individuals on one level easily to move back and forth between those divisions which, according to Western perception, essentially divide the human race according to an ‘either/or’ dichotomy. As a result, the existence of “hybridity” rejects the Western-European world view of culture, race, class, and gender as organized through a strict set of binaries and hierarchies by allowing for space in which those divisions do not exist. Bhabba elaborates by explaining that art arising from this “borderline condition,” “does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7). In this sense, as the stories and histories of the oppressed and the colonized interrupt and, thus, challenge the grand narratives of colonialism, “the boundary becomes the place from *which something begins*

its presencing" (5). At the same time, the boundary or "in-between" space of the stairwell allows for difference to be viewed in terms of connection. Bhabba explains that embracing this perception becomes an experience "that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political *conditions* of the present" (3). Thus, what some critics define as inconsistencies resulting in confusion within Johnson's work may conversely be seen as an attempt to inscribe a "'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present" and, as a result, construct "a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation" (Bhabba 7).

The potential of those who write from the "in-between" is echoed by numerous Aboriginal authors in their discussion about mixed-heritage writers. Kateri Damm, for example, explains that "the idea that mixed-bloods have a dual perspective and can bridge the gap between Indigenous and white societies through writing is one which recurs and echoes in the work of many Indigenous writers around the world" (17). As a result, Damm explains that the "voices of mixed-bloods play an important role in the breaking of silences, the telling of Indigenous perspectives, the dispelling of lies and stereotypes, the creating of Indigenous literature" (17). At the same time, Damm's argument is reflective of the fact that "many writers, especially Native writers, have spoken of the exemplary situation of the mixed-blood writer, whose double belonging, but also double alienation, results in a writing or characterization which is a continual self-creation, born out of a continual writing-as-translation between symbolic orders and identities – writing that is often political for its transgression of non-Native concepts of language and identity" (62). Thus, the representation of multiple opinions within Johnson's verse may be seen as an attempt to embrace her hybridity and, consequently,

her duality can be seen as an asset to her political ambitions as it allows her to move back and forth between divisions of race and ethnicity and express that which was suppressed through colonially constructed oppositions.

In many ways, accepting Johnson's duality puts forth a challenge to the dividing line that critics have attempted to draw through her life and her verse. In this sense, Johnson's duality not only allows her to walk "the fine line between champion and exploiter" (Aignor-Varoz 51) but also to move back and forth and, as a result, transform the dividing lines of race and culture into a permeable membrane that denies classification. According to Marilyn J. Rose, reconsidering Johnson's duality allows for a change in perception regarding both her authenticity and integrity. Rose asserts that "a more rewarding way of seeing Johnson is to acknowledge that she was all of the things that others have seen in her, and more – that she is best read as a complex and conflicted personality, a multiplex voice, a myriad poet" (299). At the same time, the complexity of Johnson's life and her exploitation of Euro-constructed images of Native people inevitably results in multiple readings of her work. In other words, Johnson not only was aware of "the power of images and written representations" (Aigner-Varoz 51), but, as Marshall argues, she was also aware that "her most effective response [to these negative images/stereotypes] was to adopt the stereotype for her own ends" (Marshall 28). As a result of Johnson's adoption of these negative images, critics such as Mary Elizabeth Leighton have noted that some critics choose to "read her poetic inscriptions of Native identity as the swansong of a dying race whose death might nobly permit the emergence of a distinctly Canadian identity" (148). According to Monture, Johnson "has sometimes been criticized for writing within a colonialist framework that ignored the real social and

political concerns faced by her people and choosing to convey only a romantic view of the history of the Iroquois" (137). This perception reflects the fact that, as Leighton suggests, it is a common response to see Johnson's stereotypical constructions of Indigenous people in Canada as nothing more than a representation of nineteenth-century image-making of Native people. However, Johnson's use of these images was also "strategically positioned within the conventions of this conflated notion of Native identity in order to underscore Native experiences of land-rights infringements and assimilation policies constructed by the government" (Leighton 148). Thus, Monture also explains that "in a clever manipulation of her audience's belief that 'all Indians are the same,' she used such essentialism to her advantage in order to bring attention to the injustices committed in Canada" (129). At the same time, Johnson's awareness of her audience's expectations would assist her in an attempt to "draw out both social consciousness and social conscience regarding the Dominion's aboriginals and push for a sturdier, hybridized image for Canada" (Aignor-Varoz 37). Being aware of her audience allows Johnson to exploit the image of the Indian as a means of translating a different reality, reintroducing history in the present, and subverting the dividing line between self and Other.

Understanding and predicting her audience's reactions would, in turn, allow Johnson to avoid offending them in a way that would ultimately result in a rejection of her argument. She allows her anger and contempt for colonial injustices to appear along side of grossly misrepresented colonially constructed images and, in doing so, leaves her audience guessing as she cleverly and rhetorically constructs a profoundly anti-colonial message. In "The Cattle Thief," Johnson's determination to resist nineteenth-century

stereotypes about colonial expansionism is implicitly clear. In addition to a general message of resistance, however, the powerful and important role of the Eagle Chief's daughter represents an explicit resistance to nineteenth-century stereotypes of Native women, including the one through which Johnson herself was promoted. In the presentation of her narrative, she allows her audiences to ease themselves into accepted images of the indigene and perceptions regarding colonial relationships before turning this reality upside down and re-presenting history from a different perspective. Although the poem admittedly conforms to the traditional stereotypes of various colonial narratives, Johnson strategically constructs a narrative in which an Indigenous woman's subject position can become the vehicle for change. The first sections of the poem exploit the many different images of Indigenous people as a means of setting up a moment for change. This change is brought about by the appearance of the Eagle Chief's daughter as she actively voices her opinion by providing a different view of history. The poem concludes with a challenge to her audiences to re-evaluate their own perception of history and their relationship with the Indigenous people of Canada. Johnson ends the poem by suggesting that once the faulty dogmas of colonial history/narrative are exposed, the future can be re-envisioned and, in doing so, she ends with optimism as the future is neither fixed nor determined by the past and is, conversely, constructed as open and full of possibility.

Before Johnson can invite her audience into this dialogue, she must first gather their interest and trust. She does so by presenting them with the exotic image of an "Indian princess" telling a tragic/adventurous tale of the wild, wild, west. The first stanza of "The Cattle Thief" follows a stereotypical colonial narrative as Johnson exploits the

image of the courageous cowboy, “galloping hard and fast” (1). Adding interest and emotion to the opening section, she glorifies and romanticizes the settlers by describing them as “desperate riders” who “had sighted their man at last” (2). Also in line with colonial expectations, describing them as “desperate,” places the riders into a sympathetic role in which their conquest is integrally connected to their survival; they are tired, seemingly out of options, and determined to achieve their goal.

Their enemy, “the famous Eagle Chief!” is constructed as more infamous than famous by the repetition of the rhetorical question, “Mistake him? Never! Mistake him?” (5). Johnson adds to the Eagle Chief’s infamy by describing him as a “monstrous, fearless Indian, who lorded it over the plain,/Who thieved and raided, and scouted, who rode like a hurricane!” (7-8). This initial description of the Eagle Chief is a clear example of how Johnson “conform[s] to many of the standard commodities found in white views of Natives in its emphasis on the passionate violence of the Native” (Goldie “Fresh Canons” 380). Describing the Eagle Chief as someone who “rode like a hurricane,” for example, emphasizes more than his supposed power and speed as it also aligns his image with nature. According to Goldie, for instance, “The indigene is often used to present the possibility of nature in a human form. In the same way, the indigene’s closeness to nature is used to justify an emphasis on the indigene as the land” (19). At the same time, Goldie explains, “the search for the elevated indigene, perhaps as a quest for an idealized figure superior to the qualities perceived to be the norm of the existing indigenes” is another common image within colonial narratives (33). Johnson’s choice of an ‘Eagle Chief’ as the character whom the settlers were searching for also reflects the fact that “Chiefs constitute the most dominant symbol” in 19th and 20th century image-making” (Albers 1).

According to Albers, “commonly shown wearing a Plains Indian costume of fringed buckskin and a full-feathered headdress, the chief has dominated classic characterizations of Indians in the mass media” (1). Thus, by exploiting the image of the notorious Eagle Chief, “That terror to all settlers,” Johnson clearly capitalizes on an image of the ‘Indian’ as a figure of fear and ‘repulsion’ in opposition to the courageous “riders.” This binary relationship between the settlers and the Eagle Chief is heightened by Johnson’s description of “that desperate Cattle Thief” (6). Johnson’s use of “desperate” as an adjective for both the settlers as well as the Eagle Chief emphasizes that they exist on an equal level and, as a result, their equality constructs a clear dichotomy of good versus evil. They want the same things and, consequently, the success of one means the failure of the other. In other words, since both are described as “desperately” fighting for survival, it is clear that survival for one will result in the demise of the other. Therefore, while they are equal in the level of their desire, it is what they desire that places them in direct opposition to each other.

Although it is clear in the first stanza as to which side of the good versus evil dichotomy the settlers and Eagle Chief belong, the second stanza begins with subtle hints that their positions may not be fixed and clear. As the settlers catch up to the Cattle Thief, Johnson describes them entering a Cree encampment, “all their British blood aflame,/Bent on bullets and bloodshed [...]” (11-12). On the one hand, her characterization of the settlers emphasizes their rage at having been wronged by the Cattle Thief. Her use of the word “Bent,” however, also signals the inevitability of violence and, in signaling that, Johnson subtly suggests that the settlers are no longer responding in a reasonable way to the wrongs committed against them by the evil Cattle

Thief. In a scenario that is strikingly similar to Samuel Hearne's description of his Native companions after sighting an encampment of "Esquimaux,"²¹ Johnson constructs the settlers as incapable of reason and overwhelmed with a desire for revenge and violence. As a result, the binary of good versus evil gradually begins to unsettle and the dividing line between the settlers and the Cattle Thief becomes less fixed. The narrative, however, continues to cater to colonial expectations with a description of the settlers as "bent on bringing down their game" (12) and of the Cattle Thief as a "lion" that "had left his lair;" (13). Johnson exploits a scenario in which the white settlers must defeat the natural essence of the Eagle Chief as a means of gaining control over nature. In many colonial narratives, Goldie explains, "The defeat of nature is thus a defeat of the indigene. In the same way that historicity makes the demise of the indigene inevitable, white technology *must* destroy the indigene because it must control nature and the natural essence of the indigene is destroyed by this control" (Fear and Temptation 37). On the other hand, Johnson's choice of a "lion" to represent the Eagle Chief glorifies the settlers as big-game hunters in search of an exotic trophy. According to this scenario, the Eagle Chief is a valuable commodity and, for the settlers, finding and killing him represents a certain gain in monetary as well as symbolic power. In addition, portraying the Eagle Chief as a "lion" effectively alienates his character from the land in which he is Indigenous and, in the process, creates room for the fulfillment of her audience's desire to become "indigenized." The overall affect of Johnson's use of the lion, however, remains ambiguous: is he natural and symbolic, strong and exotic, or increasingly rare and pathetic? Consequently, the instability of the image adds to an increasing sense of ambiguity in the narrative as a whole.

The shifting dichotomies and images in the poem continue to signal an inevitable confrontation between the settlers and the Cattle Thief. As the settlers unsuccessfully search for the Eagle Chief, Johnson describes them “curs[ing] like a troop of demons” (14). In doing so, Johnson clearly begins to reposition the characters in terms of the dichotomy of good versus evil. At the same time, however, this shift is arguably still underwritten by colonial ideology. For example, her vilification of the settlers as an army of soulless demons reflects the inverse side of the noble savage dichotomy; attraction for the native’s simplicity outweighs repulsion for his primitiveness. Thus, describing the settlers as a ‘troop of demons’ emphasizes the sad confrontation between white technology and indigenous simplicity. The corruption of the noble savage is inevitable and, when it happens, he will unfortunately die along side his image. The natural primitiveness of the indigene makes him incapable of surviving in a modern world. At the same time, when the settlers enter the Cree encampment and curse at discovering that “the women alone were/there,” (15-16) Johnson’s narrative reflects the fact that “The side of Plains Indian life most often seen by the American public is the male half” (Albers 2). In other words, the settlers’ cursing represents a general impression that, since the only apparent inhabitants are typically irrelevant, the camp might as well have been empty. Although this reaction does reaffirm the “secondary place [of Aboriginal women] in popular myth and stereotypes,” (Albers 2) the “empty” encampment and cursing settlers also continues to foreshadow a violent climax in which the Eagle Chief will inevitably be forced to confront the enraged settlers alone.

This confrontation is made possible as the hiding Cattle Thief is drawn out by the settlers’ critical description of him as a “‘sneaking Indian coward’” who “‘hides while yet

he can” and is “scared to face a *man*” (15-16). Following these statements, the Eagle Chief defiantly shouts back “Never!” and Johnson describes him unarmed, defiantly stepping “right out into the open” (17). As he emerges from his hiding place, he is depicted as willing to do anything in defense of his honour and, once again, is in direct opposition to the “cursing settlers.” At the same time, the contradiction that this image presents in comparison to Johnson’s initial descriptions of the Eagle Chief and the settlers further changes the context of the narrative. Initially, the dichotomy was clear: the settlers were on the side of good and in direct opposition to the evil Cattle Thief. As the narrative continued, this relationship became less clear and increasingly ambiguous. Now, as the cursing settlers violently confront a solitary, unarmed, and stoic Eagle Chief, the dichotomy is reversed completely and, as a result, the ‘reality’ of the narrative begins to unsettle. In other words, with this slipping back and forth of “the basic Christian oppositions” (King The Truth About Stories 110), the narrative unsettles Christian/colonial expectations by suggesting “that there are other ways of imagining the world, ways that do not depend so much on oppositions” (110). This is not to say, however, that Johnson abandons colonial expectations altogether. Rather, she continues to exploit those expectations as a means of further unsettling the reality that they construct.

Johnson further deflates the image of the “monstrous” Cattle Thief from the first stanza by providing a physical description of him. As the defiant, noble Eagle Chief steps out into the open and confronts the evil and imposing pack of settlers, Johnson asks, “Was that the game they had coveted?” (19). Through this rhetorical question, Johnson forces her audience to acknowledge the construction of the Eagle Chief in the first stanza

as hyperbolic and unfair. In doing so, she prepares the audience to accept a different image of the Eagle Chief. She explains:

Scarce fifty years had rolled;

Over that fleshless, hungry frame, starved to the bone and old.

Over that wrinkled, tawny skin, unfed by warmth of blood.

Over those hungry, hollow eyes that glared for the sight of food. (19-22)

While the Eagle Chief's image continues to function differently than it did in the first stanza, the image itself stays within the boundaries of colonial narratives. In many ways, Johnson's very physical description of the "starved to the bone and old" Eagle Chief resembles the nineteenth-century caricature of "Lo, the poor Indian." Goldie explains that, while the phrase from Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man" was originally a "serious comment on the position of the Indian in the universal order," it eventually became a "silly name for the silly literary obsession with the dying Indian culture and, presumably, dying Indian race" (Fear and Temptation 3). While the Eagle Chief is likely constructed in this way as a means of evoking empathy from her audience, the image continues to conform to a nineteenth-century belief that the Indigenous population of North America was, as D.C. Scott described, a "weird and waning race" (Scott 2). As a result, the starving, middle-aged Eagle Chief becomes another symbol of what the dominant population perceived to be his "nation's doom" (Scott 10)²². In addition, it becomes clear that not only has the image of the vicious Cattle Thief been subverted in terms of how his character relates to the settlers, but his physical image has also been subverted through this contradictory visual description of him as old, starved, and frail.

This notion continues into the next stanza as Johnson describes the defiant Eagle Chief “turn[ing] like a hunted lion,” and confronting the bloodthirsty English settlers face to face (23). Once again, he is aligned with the natural and exotic image of the lion. At the same time, Johnson’s description invokes the pathos of “lo, the poor Indian” as he defiantly turns to face those who have come to kill him. Thus, in this context, the image of the lion enhances the romanticized nineteenth-century image of the “vanishing Indian” whose chances for survival diminish as the corruption of “civilization” advances.²³ Consequently, describing the Eagle Chief as exotic, yet increasingly rare, allows Johnson to exploit the image of the “single, heroic Indian (male, of course) [...] who was the last of his race” (King 33). Moreover, since the future for this generalized representative of the Indigenous population is seemingly doomed in the face of a “troop of cursing settlers,” the future for his “race” is also constructed as ominous and futile in the face of colonization.

As the inevitable confrontation becomes a reality, Johnson’s description of the Eagle Chief’s words as “leaping” “from his shrunken lips in the language of the/Cree” (24) further exploits an image of the indigene as a member of a dying, doomed race. In this sense, his “shrunken lips” are as much a signifier for his starving condition as they are a metaphor for his nation’s declining population.²⁴ At the same time, the fact that his words are in his Indigenous language further romanticizes his character in the eyes of a white audience. Within the narrative, however, the settlers would be unable to understand the Eagle Chief’s reaction. Nonetheless, in her verse and on the stage, Johnson “translates” his words into English, and his stoic image is further emphasized through a defiant declaration: “I’ll fight you, white-skins, one by one, till I kill you all” (25). The

juxtaposition of the solitary Eagle Chief with a group of imposing cowboys continues to capitalize on the perception that the increasing Euro-North American population has resulted in the inevitable decline of the Indigenous population. This scenario is also one which highlights the paradoxical “divergence between the terrifying image of the Indian and his actual impotence in the sights of the white hero’s gun” (Maltby 120). While this “divergence” may have been the case according to how the characters were described in the first stanza, Johnson has reconstructed those characters individually and in relation to each other. As a result, it is clear that, in this scenario, the white settler is no longer the “hero” and the “terrifying image of the Indian” has been replaced with the pathetic image of the old and withered Eagle Chief. Johnson further emphasizes the Eagle Chief’s impotence in the face of the settler’s gun as he is mercilessly gunned down by “a dozen balls of lead” that “Whizzed through the air about him like a shower of metal rain” (26-27). According to Goldie, this aspect of the narrative represents “a general assessment in the text that nature and the Aborigine have failed the test of the white onslaught and thus anything ‘natural’ now is ‘odd,’ not belonging in the new context” (Fear and Temptation 37). As the “gaunt old Indian Cattle Thief dropped dead on the open plain./And that band of cursing settlers gave one triumphant yell,” (28/29) his death represents the sad, but inevitable, demise of the “Indian” in the face of progress.

While Johnson continues to exploit colonial expectations, the events which follow the violent death of the Eagle Chief represent a momentary shift away from the colonial narrative. For example, the cruel intentions of the settlers after shooting the Eagle Chief are clear as one of them proposes: “Cut the fiend up into inches, throw his carcass on the plain; Let the wolves eat the cursed Indian, he’d have treated us the same” (31-32). On

the one hand, Johnson continues to utilize the colonial narrative by exploiting the image of the poor, dying Chief who has been corrupted/destroyed by a white onslaught. However, the settler's proposition is unsettling, unexpected, and explicitly brutal. According to Monture, the explicit violence within this passage does more than unsettle the colonial narrative. He argues that "because this poem depicts a reversal of roles in which the 'civilized' society of settlers engages in a kind of violent behaviour usually ascribed to Native peoples, it calls on the audience to consider the violence and racism embedded within Canadian policy as it pertained to the appropriation of Native land" (129). In this sense, the transition becomes an example of how, as Francis argues, "Johnson's stories conform to the melodramatic literary conventions of the period, but with a difference" (120). It is also clear that, as a result of this 'difference,' the reality Johnson has exploited thus far has been shaken and unsettled and the audience is prepared for the presentation of a different version of history.

As a means of bringing a different perspective into the narrative, Johnson introduces the Eagle Chief's daughter who prevents "the first stroke" of the settlers' knives by interrupting their celebratory dismembering of the Eagle Chief with a "strange, wild cry" (34). The fact that her speech is regarded as "strange" and "wild" demonstrates that Johnson's changing narrative is not entirely absent of colonial images. At the same time, as the Eagle Chief's daughter steps "out into the open, with a courage past belief" (35), she is posited onto the same elevated plain of courage and stoicism as the Eagle Chief himself. This connection is emphasized by the fact that, in a manner identical to the Eagle Chief, her words are also described as "leaping" "from her shrunken lips in the language of the/Cree" (35). While the women in Johnson's story are, at first, silent

characters representing nothing more than an aspect of the background, with the death of the Eagle Chief, the white audience's expectation of a defiant, romanticized speech from the noble, withered "Indian wise-man," a sign of the endangered species as a whole, is interrupted, and as a result, Johnson sets the stage for the emergence of a Native woman in a powerful and positive role. Thus, what is unique about Johnson's story in comparison to other nineteenth-century narratives is that the Eagle Chief's daughter refuses to be a silent member of the background ensemble.

As she protects the lifeless body of her father, the Eagle Chief's daughter also takes control of his image from the power of the "white signmaker" (10).²⁵ Consequently, as the narrative begins to focus on her, she is initially constructed according to the stereotype of the mystical, strange and abrasive "squaw." According to Anderson, during the nineteenth-century, the "squalor of the media-driven uncivilized easy squaw was further intended to guard against interracial marriages, thus protecting 'racial' purity in the new country" (A Recognition of Being 104). Anderson argues that the image of the "squaw" was needed in order to "prop up the image of the white woman" (104). Anderson elaborates by explaining that, "where Native women resisted the increasing restrictions and poverty on reserves, white women were expected to be models of domesticity" (104). When the Eagle Chief's daughter steps forward in an act of resistance, Johnson exploits this image of a "Euro-constructed Indigenous woman with her dark ways, her squalor and corruption" (Anderson 104) as she describes the "band of cursing settlers dropp[ing] backward one by one,/For they knew that an Indian woman roused, was a woman to let alone" (39-40). However, with her impassioned speech regarding the "wrongs she had suffered since her earliest babyhood" (42), Johnson

presents an image of a Native woman who defies colonial paradigms and “asserts her Native perspective to set the historical record straight, to challenge the ‘myth’ of the heroic pioneer, taming and settling a land empty and ready for the taking” (Ruffo 213). At the same time, her assertion of a perspective that defies colonial paradigms may account for the fact that her speech is constructed in “a frenzy” that the settlers “scarcely understood” (41). In this sense, the settlers’ difficulty comprehending her speech represents more than the fact that she is “raving” in her Indigenous language.²⁶ For instance, the fact that her logically constructed and clearly delivered speech is described as “frenzied” and “raving” is another example of how Johnson exploits colonial and patriarchal expectations. Thus, in addition to a language barrier, the inability of the settlers to understand her speech also represents an ideological barrier as she exposes the faulty dogmas of colonialism and re-constructs both her father’s image as well as history through the eyes of a Native woman.

One of the most prevalent colonialist dogmas attacked by the Eagle Chief’s daughter is social darwinism. According to Robert Yazzie, one of the primary assumptions of this dogma is “that there are ‘inferior people,’ and history and contemporary practice show that they are women, non-Christian and people of colour. In North America, that includes Indians and other Indigenous peoples” (42). Yazzie explains that, as a result of this assumption about the existence of ‘inferior people,’ the dominant population has felt that it has the right to impose its laws on others as a means of pushing forward the evolution of the human species. Within Johnson’s narrative, the settlers have taken the law into their own hands and punished the Eagle Chief for what they see as a legal and ethical violation. According to the settlers’ perspective, the Eagle

Chief has stolen cattle and is thus responsible for his crime. Justice is served, therefore, when the Eagle Chief is shot and killed. However, the Eagle Chief's daughter challenges the logic of the European's desire for justice when she asserts that, "You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed/him first of bread-" (46). With this statement, the Eagle Chief's daughter begins her re-presentation of history by describing the hypocrisy of colonial mentality. She argues that the white settlers are criminals under their own standards and suggests that, as a result, both the law and those who govern it are corrupt.

Johnson then forces her audience's attention back to the Eagle Chief as his daughter commands the settlers to look at his "shrunken face" (47). The repetition of "shrunken" as a signifier for the Eagle Chief once again emphasizes both his physical state and the presumed state of the Indigenous population as a whole. The difference in this scenario, however, is that Johnson attributes responsibility for his "shrunken" state directly to the settlers and her audience. She states: "- look there at that shrunken face,/ Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your race" (47-48). Contrary to the colonial expectation, this attributing of responsibility does not romanticize and glorify the Eagle Chief as an inevitable casualty of European progress. Rather, the Eagle Chief's daughter constructs a cause-and-effect argument in which the presence of Europeans in North America has resulted in death and sickness for Native people. Thus, according to Ruffo, Johnson's direction of responsibility in "The Cattle Thief" may be read as a Native take on Canadian history, a response to colonial domination well ahead of its time" (213).

At the same time, the relationship between Johnson, performing for a white audience as “The Mohawk Princess,” acting as the Eagle Chief’s daughter and attributing direct responsibility to white settlers demonstrates that the rhetoric within the poem extends beyond the context of its narrative. For instance, when she asks a series of rhetorical questions through the voice of the Eagle Chief’s daughter and directed at the settlers, these questions are also applicable in the context of Johnson demanding an acknowledgement of responsibility from her white audience. In this sense, the poem is both a fictional narrative presented as a poem/performance as well as a political statement. Johnson’s poem is transformed from a colonial narrative into a challenge directed at “mainstream society to question its own structure, its acquisitive individualistic value system, and the false premises of colonialism” (Alfred Peace Power Righteousness 21). At the same time, this challenge comes from a Native woman and, as a result, Johnson’s rhetoric becomes an example of how, as Anderson puts it, “with each act of resistance, Native women can further define and confirm a positive identity and challenge the oppression of Native people in general” (Anderson A Recognition of Being 137). Because most colonial narratives portray Native female characters as either silent, idealized or morally corrupt, the Eagle Chief’s daughter’s emergence as an individual who has the power to reconstruct images of history and identity re-positions her as a vehicle for change.

While Johnson’s rhetoric begins with questions constructed as statements regarding the colonial exploitation of the North American ecosystem, it quickly changes into a strong challenge of the colonial assumption of the “white man’s burden.” For instance, Johnson critiques the exploitation and over-consumption of the landscape by

European settlers by asking “What have you left to us of land, what have you left to us of game?” (49). She then asks, “What have you brought but evil, and curses since you came?/ How have you paid us for our game? How paid us for our land?” (50-51). Her response to these questions, that Europeans arrived with “a *book*, to save our souls from the sins *you* brought in your other/hand” (52), constructs an argument in which the Euro-constructed economy demands that land should be exchanged for salvation. The fact that Johnson refers to the Christian Bible as nothing more than a ‘*book*’ deflates the notion that the imposition of Christianity is really “an opportunity to join a superior civilization” (Francis 53). At the same time, her rhetoric highlights the fact that salvation would not have been necessary had it not been for the imposition of the Euro-constructed/Christian notion of sin. Thus, Johnson speaks to the fact that “Missionaries offered the Indians salvation. They dismissed Native religious beliefs as pagan superstition, describing the shamans as clever charlatans who terrorized the people through a mixture of primitive psychology, folk medicine and magic tricks” (Francis 52). Johnson rejects the notion that colonialism was a duty on behalf of good Christians and forces her audience to become aware of the fact that, as Homer Noley argues, “on the one hand, church denominations geared themselves up to take Native American peoples into a brotherhood of love and peace; on the other hand, they were part of a white nationalist movement that geared itself up to take away the land and livelihood of Native American people by treachery and force” (qtd. in Weaver *That the People Might Live* 30).

The daughter’s re-presentation of history and contact culminates in a set of well constructed assertions. She demands: “Go back with your new religion, and find – if find you can – / The *honest* man you have ever made from out a *starving* man.” (55-56). By

calling Christianity a “new religion,” Johnson deflates the notion that there was no spirituality prior to the arrival of Christianity. In this sense, her emphasis on Christianity as ‘new’ suggests that it is one aspect of spirituality among numerous belief systems already present prior to its arrival. Moreover, it is also a clever reversal of the Euro-constructed label of the Americas as the “New World.” While the daughter’s implication that Indigenous people were ‘honest’ prior to the arrival of Europeans clearly exploits the stereotype of the ‘noble savage’ corrupted by the invading settlers, her message draws attention to stereotypes of Native people as ‘dirty, drunken, criminals’ as well as the belief that this is a sign of their inferior being. As she exploits the ‘noble savage’ image, Johnson demands that her audience re-evaluate their view of crime and abuse as being primarily a Native problem. In fact, Johnson attributes a great deal of responsibility to her white audience by arguing that one’s actions are intrinsically connected to one’s conditions.

As Johnson draws the monologue to a conclusion, the daughter issues another string of demands:

Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game;

Give back the furs and the forests that were ours before you came;

Give back the peace and the plenty. Then come with your new belief,

And blame, if you dare, the hunger that drove him to be a thief.’(59-62)

Her demands emphasize loss as well as the possibility for change. For instance, in her repetition of “Give back,” Johnson emphasizes that much has been taken away from Native people through the colonial economy. At the same time, Johnson is not suggesting that these demands be met in a literal fashion. As Francis argues, “the land may once

have belonged to her people, but she was not asking for it back" (122). Rather, the daughter's demands are more applicable on an ideological level. As the daughter asks the settlers to return with a "new belief," Johnson suggests to her colonial audience that they can change the colonial narrative by re-evaluating the relationship they have with the Indigenous people in Canada. It is also an indication that Johnson did indeed see a future for Native people and was attempting to relate this notion to her audience. At the same time, the future she constructs is one framed by optimism and dialogue and not death, destruction and assimilation. As a result, her conclusion becomes one of hope and not despair.

Although Pauline Johnson may not have been speaking as "The Native voice,"²⁷ her audience often chose to see her as representing all Native people. Thus, while she undoubtedly conforms to many different variations of the colonial narrative and Euro-constructed images of Indigenous people, she "succeeded in capturing White attention, and while she had it, attempted to plead the cause of the Native" (Francis 119). For example, both the fact that her audience is subjected to a repetition of "You" and "Your" thirty-one times during the course of the daughter's monologue and that the collective pronoun "You" is a referent for white society demonstrate how her poetry directly addresses a white audience. Through the daughter's monologue, Johnson ceases to be a recitalist with regard to the poem and becomes a character. In this sense, the division between the Eagle Chief's daughter and Johnson herself as well as that which separates the audience from the settlers becomes less clear. In transcending the divisions between fact, fiction, and identity, Johnson's narrative demonstrates that, as described by bell hooks, "moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the

exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible” (hooks 45). At the same time, Johnson is aware of the many possible responses that her audience may or may not have and she exploits these expectations as a means of providing her audience with a different version of history as well as of the present.²⁸ By embracing as well as defying colonial expectations within her narrative, Johnson re-inscribes the presence of Native women and forces her audience to consider a re-presentation of the historical and ideological implications of colonialist dogmas.

In spite of the many critics who feel that Johnson embraced assimilation by exploiting her image, Johnson’s embrace of her Indigenous heritage is representative of the many “Native women who claim their ancestry in spite of pressures or ‘options’ to deny it” (Anderson A Recognition of Being 144). Johnson could have attempted to deny or downplay her Native heritage by identifying with her white, English background, and according to Anderson, Johnson’s decision represents an instance of “remarkable resistance to racism and assimilation” (144). While some critics argue that nearly everything Johnson did was motivated by her ambition as a poet and a performer²⁹ and that she was aware that marketing herself and her words as typically ‘Indian’ would have a positive affect, they must also admit that neither her ambition nor her marketability has relevance in terms of her identity as an Aboriginal woman. Demanding that every Aboriginal person embrace and portray a positive, culturally relative image of his or her identity places an unfair burden upon Aboriginal people in general. Furthermore, critics must also admit that, while Johnson did exploit her indigenous identity, by utilizing Euro-constructed stereotypes and expectations regarding race and gender she also exploited her

British background. As evident in "The Cattle Thief," Johnson exploits the colonial environment by allowing herself to be marketed by colonial standards as a means of creating an opportunity in which she could interrupt those narratives and insert a different perspective of history, identity, and gender within the discourse of the dominant culture.

Chapter Three: Recovery and Reconstruction in Jeannette Armstrong's "Indian Woman"

The process of writing as a Native person has been a healing one for me because I've uncovered the fact that I'm not a savage, not dirty and ugly and not less because I have brown skin, or a Native philosophy.
~ Jeannette Armstrong

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that, since negative definitions of Aboriginal identity are embedded within language, some Aboriginal authors are exploring ways in which they can use language to reconstruct their identities. In the previous chapter, I argued that, through poetry and performance, Pauline Johnson attempted to initiate a dialogue about the domination of Euro-constructed misrepresentations. In "The Cattle Thief," Johnson exploits the expectations of her white audience as a means of reconstructing history and creating a context for the reconstruction of identity. In "Indian Woman," Jeannette Armstrong also engages in a dialogue of resistance and reconstruction regarding history and identity. In doing so, she deflates Euro-constructed definitions and reconstructs identity in ways that translate as well as transform traditional/personal definitions of self. In "Indian Woman," resistance and reconstruction take place internally as the speaker³⁰ undergoes a transformation with regard to self-image. It is also apparent that the speaker's path towards reconstruction first passes through a recognition of colonialist misrepresentations before a recovery of traditional concepts of self can take place.

The dual structure of the poem is seen in Armstrong's description of "Indian Woman" as a "double-portrayal" of Native female identity (Williamson 9). On the one hand, it demonstrates that the power of Euro-imposed images of Indigenous women can often result in a negative self-image. On the other hand, her poem suggests that the reconstruction of identity begins with the recovery of culture and tradition. Before the

speaker can reconnect with culture and tradition, however, she must first confront the self-image that colonialism has imposed upon her. For instance, in the first line of the poem, the speaker states, "I am a squaw" (1). While the speaker is clearly referring to a Euro-constructed image of Native women as violent, corrupt and as objects for physical and sexual aggression, interpreting the term "squaw" does result in varying conclusions. While Aboriginal critics such as Janice Acoose, Kim Anderson, Jeannette Armstrong, and numerous others refer to the term "squaw" as a derogatory reference to Indigenous women, some Indigenous historians, traditionalists, and linguists offer a positive interpretation. Paula Gunn Allen, for example, argues that the term "is not derogatory in its own language" (273). According to Marge Bruchac, squaw is derived from a "phonetic rendering of an Algonkian word that does NOT translate to a 'woman's private parts'" (1). Bruchac also argues that the term "traditionally means the totality of being female, not just the female anatomy" (1). For the most part, however, critics agree that since positive origins of the word have been found to be Algonkian, a positive connotation is only relevant within that context.³¹ Moreover, many Aboriginal critics also agree that attempting to apply the positive origins of what is apparently an Algonkian word so broadly allows for the term to be re-incorporated into a Pan-Indian reference of Aboriginal women in general. Since Armstrong is an Okanagan Aboriginal and not Algonkian, it is clear that the speaker in her poem is referring to the Euro-constructed definition of "squaw" which signifies the "dirty, subservient and abused tribal female who is also haggard, violent, and eager to torture tribal captives" (Mihesuah 102). In this sense, the beginning of the poem represents the self-hatred enforced upon Indigenous women through the projection of negative images and stereotypes by Euro-North

American “sign-makers.” Thus, the speaker describes herself as a “heathen,” “savage,” and “basically a mammal” (2-4). In doing so, she transforms the implicit connotations of the term “squaw” into an explicit statement. As a result, these first sections of the poem read like a Euro-North American dictionary definition of all that is connotative about the colonially controlled image of the “Indian Woman.” Although these statements could be read as ironic in the sense that they are more relevant in terms of a colonially constructed reality than in terms of any real connection to Indigenous women, the speaker’s first-person assertions suggest that she has internalized that reality and has consequently constructed a negative self-image.

In accordance with the colonial image of an “Indian Woman,” the speaker suggests that her ethnicity takes precedence over her gender to the point that her gender is almost excluded from her self-image. For instance, the speaker refers to herself as a “female/only in the ability/to breed/ and bear papooses” (5-8) and, in this sense, she recognizes herself as a woman only according to a biological definition of what a woman is or should be. In I Am Woman, Lee Maracle refers to the internalization of this externally constructed self-image as the result of “grow[ing] up in a world in which there is no such thing as dark-skinned femininity” (56). In other words, this aspect of the definition reminds the reader that the unique situation facing Native women living under patriarchy and oppression is different from the experiences of non-Indigenous women. Furthermore, the speaker makes clear that the only manner in which she can claim her female identity is through her ability to bear and produce children, and, in this sense, she incorporates a Euro-constructed connotative connection between ‘Indian woman’ and ‘animal’ into her self-image. At the same time, the speaker’s references also demonstrate

that, if she were to have a child, the child's only "choices" are clear: "to be carried/ quaintly/ on a board/ or lost/ to welfare"(9-13). Although the term "quaintly" in reference to how she will carry the child does seem to suggest a sentimental connection between mother and child, since the child is destined to either be "carried" or "lost to welfare," the child is first and foremost a burden. On the one hand, the child is a burden to his or her carrier, and, on the other hand, the child is a burden to society. In both scenarios, the child remains identifiable only by the burden he or she represents. At the same time, as a result of the speaker's obligation to produce children as a means of maintaining a connection to her female identity and the burden that the child represents, the future for mother and child remains hopelessly locked within a cycle of childbirth and dependence.

In the transition that follows this stanza, the speaker both affirms and summarizes that which has been stated thus far in the poem. For instance, the culmination of these aspects of a Euro-dominated self-image is made explicitly clear through the speaker's assertion, "I have no feelings" (14). Both the isolation of the line (separated from the previous stanza and the one that follows) and the statement itself imply an isolation of the speaker. The poem represents what Abdul R. JanMohamed calls the "hegemonic phase of colonialism," a stage in which colonial impositions result in the "natives' internalization of Western cultures" as they begin to "accept a version of the colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality [...]" (62). As suggested in the previous stanza, if the speaker is to be called a woman at all, it is only possible through a biological/animalistic understanding of what a woman is supposed to be and, in this sense, the speaker's

isolated affirmation demonstrates an ideological as well as physical isolation from other women.

At the same time, the summation of these ideas in a one-line statement acts as a transition between stanzas that have similar topics. While the previous section demonstrates that, for the speaker, there is no such thing as a “dark-skinned femininity” (Maracle 56), the next section emphasizes that, in the absence of femininity, the only thing left for her is “dark-skinned sensuality” (Maracle 56). However, the speaker also makes clear that this version of sensuality is relentlessly associated with violence, aggression, and masculine desire. She states,

The sinuous planes
of my brown body
carry no hint
of the need
to be caressed
desired
loved
Its only use to be raped
beaten and bludgeoned
in some
B-grade western (15-26)

The speaker’s powerful words provide an explicit description of the details implicitly present within colonial constructed images of Indigenous women. The fact that she refers to the “B-grade western” as the source of this image seems to affirm that she has

incorporated into her self-image, what Maltby calls, the “three R’s of the Western: Racism, Rape, and Repression” (122). At the same time, the speaker’s statements suggest that these negative images have the power to cross the boundary between ideology and lived experience. For example, the first-person narration of the poem, isolated lines and, in this case, subtle references to the real presence of both racism and violence suggest that colonial ideology has an impact that extends beyond film, text, and language. Maracle, in fact, comments on the frequency of violence involving Aboriginal men and women and asks the question, “How often do we read in the newspaper about the death or murder of a Native man, and in the same paper about the victimization of a female Native as though [Native women] were a species of sub-human animal life?” (21). While many of the reports alluded to by Maracle are accounts of Native women being abused physically and sexually, her comments are also a reminder that media reports often implicitly contain the ideology that acts as the cause of these instances. Maracle explains, “A female horse, a female Native, but everyone else gets to be called a man or a woman” (21). In “Indian Woman,” Armstrong’s speaker both affirms and incorporates the idea that she too is unfit to be referred to as a woman and, thus, accepts an image of her physical body as an object to be violently degraded by declaring that her “body’s only use/to be raped/beaten and bludgeoned/in some/B-grade western” (22-26). Thus, the expectations constructed through film, text, and the media transcend those mediums and manifest themselves within a negative self-image for Aboriginal women. At the same time, there is an implicit irony associated with this incorporation due to the disconnectedness of the colonial reality from Aboriginal women themselves.

Although this reality has no real connection to the world in terms of having referents for the images which make it up, its existence does have real effects. The dangers associated with the transcendence of colonial expectations beyond the text and into reality can also be seen in the 1971 rape/murder of Helen Betty Osborne. According to Janice Acoose, Osborne was “grabbed off the street and forced into a car with four men who were intent on finding ‘an Indian girl with whom to drink and have sex’” (qtd. in Acoose 69) and that, during the abduction, “Osborne was subsequently brutally beaten and sexually assaulted” (Acoose 69). Acoose goes on to explain how an inquiry into the death determined that Osborne’s “attackers seemed to be operating on the assumption that Aboriginal women were promiscuous and open to enticement through alcohol or violence. It is evident that the men who abducted Osborne believed that young Aboriginal women were objects with no human value beyond sexual gratification” (qtd. in Acoose 70). Thus, as the speaker declares that she is only useful as an outlet for masculine sexual aggression, she incorporates the motivations of the men who attacked Osborne into a self image that regards her body as having “no hint/ of the need/ to be caressed/ desired/ loved” (17-21). It is important to clarify, however, that in the case of both Osborne and the speaker in “Indian Woman,” male sexual aggression is not warranted as a result of colonial expectations nor is it justified by the incorporation of these expectations within the self-images of Aboriginal women. On the contrary, both the assumptions of the young men in the case of Osborne and the affirmations of the speaker in “Indian Woman” suggest that violence towards Aboriginal women is often associated with a colonial expectation that encourages a view of Native women as open to, if not in search of, sex, alcohol, and violence. In this sense, I am attempting to understand and

explain how and in what ways negative images transcend the borders between ideology and lived experience as opposed to providing a justification for those who act upon them.

In another summation of the negative images within the poem, the speaker states, “I have no beauty” (29). As in the first example, this line is also isolated in a way that emphasizes both the power of the statement as a summary of what has been stated previously and as a reminder of the isolating impact this image has upon the speaker. The section that follows focuses upon the commercialization of the image of Native woman and the choice on behalf of white audiences to remain distant and removed. The speaker states:

The lines
 cut deep
 into my aged face
 are not from bitterness
 or despair
 at seeing my clan destroyed
 one by one (30-36)

In this section, the speaker assumes the voice of the stoic, silent, “Indian archetype” of photographers such as Edward C. Curtis whose nineteenth and early twentieth-century photographs of Indigenous peoples in North America were carefully constructed to the point that he paid his subjects to dress in a manner that he felt was more aesthetically pleasing by making them look more “Indian.” As King points out, Curtis was not only “fascinated by the idea of the North American Indian [...] he was determined to capture that idea, that image, before it vanished” (The Truth About Stories 32). This is not to say,

however, that Curtis was interested in creating an accurate portrait of North American Indigenous peoples. King explains:

Curtis was looking for the literary Indian, the dying Indian, the imaginative construct. And to make sure that he would find what he wanted to find, he took boxes of 'Indian' paraphernalia – wigs, blankets, painted backdrops, clothing – in case he ran into Indians who did not look as the Indian was supposed to look. (34)

While the demand for such paraphernalia was heightened in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century by the belief that Indigenous peoples were endangered to the point of extinction, Armstrong makes it clear that the Euro-North American desire for images of Native people extends far beyond the days of Edward Curtis. In a statement directed at a non-Aboriginal audience, Armstrong asserts, “we wish to know, and you need to understand, why it is that you want to own our stories, our art, our beautiful crafts, our ceremonies, but do not appreciate or wish to recognize that these things of beauty arise out of the beauty of our people” (“The Disempowerment” 240). In fact, it is the continued desire to own and attribute value to that which is deemed authentically Aboriginal that King describes as an “Aboriginal minstrel show for White North America” (68). Thus, as Armstrong’s speaker describes the “lines cut deep into her face,” she provides a story as well as a voice for the silent, romanticized image that Euro-North Americans desire as an aesthetic commodity. At the same time, the ironic undertone of the speaker suggests that hidden behind the commodification of those images are the implicit histories of the individuals these photos/images capture. However, the speaker also suggests that the interventions of the photographer and the desires of the audience often interrupt the

transfer of what lies implicitly within and, as a result, the images lose their connection to reality and become exotic postcards of a vanished race for a guiltless white audience. Thus, the “despair,” “bitterness,” and “destruction” implicitly present are sacrificed for the romantic exoticism that makes the image valuable within a contemporary capitalist market. What remains in the image, as stated by Armstrong’s speaker, is “here/ to be painted or photographed/ sold/ and hung on lawyers’ walls” (37-40). The history, culture, emotion and individuality of those photos, in other words, are lost as they are incorporated into a Euro-controlled capitalist economy.

In the next transition, the speaker summarizes the implicit connotations of the colonially controlled image of “Indian Woman” with another isolated statement: “I have no emotions” (41). Maracle discusses both the presence and effect of this image of Native women as silent, immovable and apathetic in terms of how Native women are often viewed:

Whereas Native men have been victims of the age-old racist remark “lazy-drunken Indian,” about Native women white-folks ask, “Do they have feelings?” How many times do you hear from our own brothers, “Indian women don’t whine and cry around, nag or complain.” At least not “real” or “true” Indian women. (I Am Woman 17)

The speaker’s affirmations represent her incorporation of such ideology as, up to this point, her identity has been defined through the absence of “feelings,” “beauty,” and “emotions.” According to Maracle, “embodied in that kind of language is the negation of [Aboriginal] femininity – the denial of [Aboriginal] womanhood” (17). It is also apparent that the culmination of these signifiers symbolizes the absence of humanity within the

Euro-constructed image and, as Maracle suggests, this absence results in a paradoxical question of whether Euro-North American discourse allows “Indian” and “Woman” to be signifiers for the same person.

As the speaker suffocates under the power of this Euro-imposed self-image, the perceived absence of feelings, beauty, and emotions leads to an outburst that seeks to subvert the imposed definition of “Indian Woman.” In an emotionally vivid and, in some ways, angry passage, the speaker alludes to the emergence of a different version of identity:

The husky laughter
 a brush of wings
 behind eyes
 soft and searching
 lightly touching others
 is not from caring
 but from the ravaged
 beat of black wings
 rattling against the bars
 of an insanity
 that tells me
 something is wrong here. (40-51)

I have attempted numerous times to make sense of what is happening through this passage, and, aside from the obvious conclusion that it represents a turning point in the poem, I have had very little success in formulating a logical and cohesive interpretation.

As to what Armstrong and, more appropriately, the speaker is trying to get across here, I would have to say that, to borrow a phrase from Helen Hoy, I too am sometimes “‘simply’ suffering from ignorance, unsure of what exactly is being denoted” (132). As an individual from a cultural/racial/gendered location different from that of Armstrong, my inability to interpret the passage may be representative of the speaker’s emergence as an individual who defies and subverts the expectations that often dominate my position. In this sense, it is possible that the passage is supposed to be confusing, elusive and difficult as it represents the emergence of an identity or perspective that, for those who have been interpolated by the colonial system, is foreign and unfamiliar. For the speaker, it is an attempt to escape. Because, for the speaker, it is “an insanity/ that tells me/ something is wrong here” (49-51), it appears as though insanity is what allows her to escape the dominant discourse. As the speaker undergoes a process of de-interpolation, insanity is what enables her to re-assume control over her identity. The insanity, however, is superficial in its construction as, once she has the power to be free of the dominant discourse, she is empowered to recognize that discourse as flawed, and corrupt. For the first time, the speaker arrives at the decisive conclusion, “something is wrong here” (51). This line also includes the first appearance of any punctuation within the poem and, as a result, the appearance of a period at the end of the line represents the end of a colonially controlled sentence that has constructed Aboriginal women through racist and patriarchal ideology.

Armstrong further sets the stage for her own process of awakening with the speaker’s defiant statement, “Some one is lying” (52). Once again, the line is emphasized by the punctuation and, in this instance, the line is further emphasized by its placement as

it is visually divided from the rest of the poem. However, unlike previous isolated statements, this line becomes a symbol of closure as opposed to transition. It is the ultimate recognition of and resistance to that which has been imposed through the colonial narrative. As a result of this statement of resistance, as well as the implicit closure involved through the strategic placement of the period, a new vision of the speaker's identity emerges as the speaker puts forth the affirmation, "I am an Indian Woman" (53). With this statement, the speaker begins to re-define her identity and, as a result of this division, critics such as Janice Williamson refer to "Indian Woman" as a "double poem" (Sounding Differences 8). According to Williamson, "on the left-hand side is a poem of pain, suffering, of deprivation and the degradation of naming the Indian woman 'squaw'; on the right-hand side there's a very powerful invocation of Indian women's strength" (8-9). Armstrong also refers to the poem as being a dual representation of identity. Regarding the first half, she explains that,

[T]he first portrayal is a common, stereotypical understanding that the majority unfortunately has of Native Indian women. The visual images are over-dramatized in terms of their presentation, but basically that's how people look at Indian women in Canada, and I'm talking about all levels of people, from professionals all the way down to the people at street-level. For Native women, this becomes an image of themselves, an image that they take on and help to perpetuate, sometimes in frustration and anger and hostility. (Williamson 9)

Armstrong goes on to explain that negative stereotypes have often resulted in negative self-images and self-destructive behavior. She argues that, "the suicide rates and

problems our people are having are a result of being told you're stupid, ignorant, a drunk, you'll never amount to anything – just because you're Indian. To me, that's the biggest lie of all that needs to be dispelled" (10). Armstrong explains that discovering and confronting the presence of negative constructions of identity is an important part of a continuous "healing process" that eventually allows her to "wake up and think, 'God, I'm glad I'm Indian'" (10). Thus, the "double-portrayal" in "Indian Woman" represents the speaker's own journey through a "healing process" that, at first, begins with a recognition of the harmful effects of Euro-constructed images and, in turn, involves a reclamation and reconstruction of her Aboriginal female identity.

According to Anderson, Native women who are in the process of re-defining their identities with close ties to their Aboriginal traditions and culture often begin by re-examining the roles they play "within the family, community, nation, and all of creation" (A Recognition of Being 193). At the same time, the fact that the speaker emphasizes her individuality by stating that she is "*an Indian Woman* [my italics]" emphasizes that an internal process of awakening must be undertaken before one can begin to take part in the active promotion of that process of identity reconstruction. Armstrong explains that, "Because the women are the central backbone of the family and of the next generation, a healing in terms of ourselves first needs to be understood by Native women and carried out before healing in the family and outward to the rest of the community can take place" (Williamson 9-10). With this in mind, it is not surprising that the speaker would begin her reconstruction of identity with a statement that emphasizes her individuality. In keeping with Armstrong's belief that the recovery of Indigenous traditions is vital to the reconstruction of identity for Native women, her speaker re-defines her self-image in a

way that embraces intensely personal as well as cultural notions of that identity. Thus, to begin her re-construction of Indigenous female identity the speaker describes herself in close proximity to the land:

Where I walk
 beauty surrounds me
 grasses bend and blossom
 over valleys and hills
 vast and multicolored in starquilt glory (54-59)

This vivid description of the speaker, being engulfed by the landscape and all of its features, is reflective of the fact that, in many Aboriginal perspectives, the body, especially the female body, is intensely connected to the land metaphorically and literally. For instance, Anderson explains that “a connection to the land can provide a connection to the sense of the female” (183). Anderson also argues that realizing this connection is essential to reconstructing identity for Indigenous women when she states that a “connection to the land is critical to Native female strength and resistance” (127). Furthermore, Armstrong emphasizes the importance of the land when she states, “I know that without my land and my people, I am not alive. I am simply flesh waiting to die” (Anderson 127). According to Anderson, this understanding is rooted within an understanding of the earth as feminine in that it acts as mother to existence.

In fact, many Aboriginal writers explain that understanding the earth as feminine is a notion integrally connected to ideologies of motherhood within Aboriginal traditions. Armstrong’s reconstruction of identity in “Indian Woman” also implies this connection as the speaker identifies herself as “the keeper/ of generations” (60-61). In this sense, the

speaker alludes to a perception of Aboriginal women as 'mother,' not just to their immediate family, but to the entire community. According to Anderson, "women know they have a responsibility to everyone in the community and are given the authority to exercise that responsibility" (170). This ideology is further emphasized in the poem as the speaker describes her role in caring for all members of the family:

I caress the lover gently
 croon as I wrap the baby
 with quietness I talk
 to the old ones
 and carefully lay to rest
 loved ones (62-67)

In another reversal from the first half of the poem which portrayed the speaker as sharing in the belief that she had "no emotions" and "no feelings," the speaker now displays passion and compassion as she caresses her lover, pays thoughtful attention to the elders, and mourns the loss of those within her community. This passage also reflects Armstrong's own perception of the roles played by Native women with the context of the family. According to Armstrong, her "mother, aunt, and grandmother were the strongest people in terms of the thinking" (Williamson 13). At the same time, this emphasis on women as 'the backbone' of the immediate family extends outwards to the community as the speaker refers to herself as the "strength/ of nations" (68-69). In this sense, the speaker's statements again represent a powerful reversal of that which was portrayed within the Euro-constructed image that dominated the first half of the poem. Although previously in the poem, the speaker spoke of herself as a woman only in the ability to

give birth, her current self-affirmation as the 'strength of nations' demonstrates an elevation of status, responsibility, and power as she moves toward a positive, culturally relative sense of identity.

The incorporation of the role of mother into Armstrong's re-construction is radically different from the solely biological definition offered in the first half of "Indian Woman." In that aspect of the Euro-constructed image, emotions, compassion, and power are void as motherhood is defined only by the physical ability to give birth to children. In this new portrayal, the speaker embraces an Aboriginal perspective in which "producing life and raising children are understood as the creation of a people" (Anderson 170). This perspective is further emphasized as the speaker refers to herself as "the giver of life/to whole tribes" (79-80). On the other hand, Anderson relates, "the Aboriginal ideology of motherhood is not dependent on whether, as individuals, [Aboriginal women] produce children biologically" (171). In this sense, the act of caring and nurturing for all members of the community is seen as an equally important aspect of a mother's role. Armstrong suggests that this ideology even goes so far as to exclude gender specificity. She states that her observance of the females in her family as occupying positions of power is completely relative to her family in particular and that her story is not to be taken as a general example of Okanagan culture as specifically matriarchal. Armstrong relates that, within her community, "there are families where male figures are dominant and do the thinking. But it's not because they're male, it's because they're the best people for that job. In the same way, in those families with dominant females as the powerful part of the family, they're the best people for that!" (Williamson 13). Armstrong also explains that, according to her own cultural traditions, responsibility for the family is shared by all

“sides of the whole family – aunts and uncles and grandparents and brothers and sisters – are all equally responsible” (Williamson 12). In this sense, Armstrong’s reconstruction in “Indian Woman” emphasizes culture as well as choice in the speaker’s role within the family and the community. Whereas she was previously governed by the power of Euro-constructed images of her gender and ethnicity, within this context, the speaker asserts control over her own identity and acts that identity out through the roles she plays within her community.

Among the ways in which the speaker acts out this positive identity is in her active participation in cultural traditions such as song and ceremony. Anderson suggests that “when we think about reclaiming, the first elements that probably come to mind are the ceremonies, the dances and songs, or the languages” (157). Devon Abbott Mihesuah also regards participation in cultural ceremonies and traditions as “a form of worship, healing, and celebration” (154). Similarly, Anderson argues that “Identity recovery for [Aboriginal people] inevitably involves the reclaiming of tradition, the picking up of those things that were left scattered along the path of colonization” (157). The speaker, in reconstructing her identity according to personal and cultural perspectives, embraces these aspects of tradition and sings “to the whispering/ autumn winds” (70-71). In this sense, cultural traditions and customs represent a medium for empowerment and rediscovery. The speaker describes her participation in cultural ceremonies and celebrations as an experience that “slowly fills her body” “with power/feeling it/ knowing it” (75-76). At the same time, the presence of the “autumn winds” and “the snow” as important aspects of those traditions is a reminder of the importance of the land in terms of its connection to Aboriginal traditions, perspectives, and self-image.

While Armstrong clearly suggests that taking part in tradition is an integral aspect of identity reconstruction in "Indian Woman," she also places importance upon the responsibility that one has in ensuring that these traditions are carried on by future generations. Thus, the speaker describes herself as "carry[ing]" "the seeds/ carefully through dangerous/ wastelands/ giv[ing] them life/ scattered among gold and towering/ concrete" (81-87). The speaker, after asserting the close connection between culture, tradition and a positive identity, seems to be dedicated to a role in which she has a responsibility to educate and encourage future generations. In other words, in the same way that Euro-imposed language and images construct the presence of negative and/or disconnected identities for Aboriginal peoples, so the speaker embraces her role in ensuring that future generations are aware that a positive, connected self-image can be attained through active participation in cultural practices and the rediscovery of Aboriginal perspectives. At the same time, the speaker's reference to those who are "scattered/ among cold and towering concrete" (84-87), as well as her commitment to assist them, suggests that re-discovering a positive identity through tradition is not limited to those living on reserves or within established Aboriginal communities. While the urban environment is constructed as sterile and lifeless, the speaker suggests that urban Aboriginals can transcend their surroundings by rediscovering a connection to Indigenous perspectives. The role the speaker has in passing on knowledge is not limited to that of instruction. For instance, the speaker's devotion to "watch them grow/ battled and crippled/ under all the lies" (88-90) also alludes to a commitment to nurture future generations as they take part in their own journey along a path of resistance and reconstruction. Furthermore, the speaker's commitment to those who have been affected

by the power of the colonial reality is also a reminder of the state that she once found herself to be in as a result of negative Euro-constructed images of her identity.

Armstrong's own process of healing extends into her writing; she too feels that she has a "vocation or commitment" to 'dispel' the lies that construct the Euro-imposed self-image of many Aboriginal people (Williamson 10). Armstrong's speaker echoes this commitment through a declaration of intent to nurture and care for those still struggling through their own identity reconstruction process:

I teach them the songs

I help them to hear

I give them the truth (91-93)

While this devotion is another reminder of the important role Aboriginal women play as mothers to the nation, these statements are also a reflection of Armstrong's dedication as a writer. For instance, in relation to the dominance of Euro-constructed misrepresentations about Aboriginal identity, Armstrong feels that "at some point the other image of Native women that is really what being woman and in particular being Native woman is needs to be given to Native people" (Williamson 9). In a reference to "Indian Woman," Armstrong explains, "this is our perspective. I want to be sure that other Native women have an understanding of the perspective I have of myself, so that they can look at themselves in a different way" (9). According to Armstrong, Aboriginal perspectives about Indigenous female identity are what "Native women must portray, understand, and pass on" (9). Consequently, this section of the poem acts as a reminder that Armstrong sees the reconstruction of identity as an internal process of awakening that, in turn, leads to an obligation that the individual must fulfill within her community.

In the same way that Plato's philosopher king has an obligation to return to the cave and enlighten those who have been tricked into viewing images as reality, the speaker has a duty to teach others about the benefits of embracing Indigenous perspectives. Consequently, the speaker realizes that she needs to spread the message that the road to the "truth" is paved by tradition and the "songs."

In the commitment to "dispel the lies" for other Native women there is also an allusion to the fact that the reconstruction of the speaker's identity seems to move away from the individual toward an emphasis upon a broader sense of Aboriginal womanhood. In the concluding two lines of the poem, the speaker provides one last positive affirmation of her identity:

I am a sacred trust

I am Indian woman. (94-95)

The first line emphasizes that the speaker has embraced a self-image that incorporates Aboriginal culture and tradition in terms of her role as a mother to the community and as a link between the past, present, and future. At the same time, the word "sacred," which appears in numerous works by First Nations feminist thinkers, seems to have a different significance to Aboriginal readers than to those who have only been exposed to the Judeo-Christian sense of the word. Gunn Allen, for example, explains that the term has different degrees of significance for Aboriginal people:

The word *sacred* like the words *power* and *medicine*, has a very different meaning to tribal people than to members of technological societies. It does not signify something of religious significance and therefore believed in with emotional fervor – 'venerable, consecrated, or sacrosanct,' as the

Random House dictionary has it – but something that is filled with an intangible but very real power or force, for good or bad. (72)

Understanding exactly what it means to be “sacred” is something that Anderson feels is vital to those in search of a reconstruction of identity. For instance, Anderson explains that an individual’s understanding that she is a “sacred being” is “a key place to begin reconstructing self” (194). Closely connected to this understanding, according to Anderson, is a realization of the connection that Aboriginal women have to all living things:

Many Aboriginal women understand and recognize that all life is sacred, that life is granted to people, plants and animals by the Great Mystery, and that we have an immediate connection to every part of creation because we all come from the same sacred place. When a woman understands this, she can understand and build on the sacredness of her own life. The sense of sacredness is timeless, and there are therefore many ways that we can work it into our modern lives. (194)

In this sense, the personal affirmation of the speaker as a “sacred trust” represents more than the relationship she has in relation to others as it also represents self-recognition of the intense connection she has to all living things. At the same time, emphasis upon this spiritual and “sacred” connection further constructs yet another division between the first and second halves of the poem. For example, while the first half emphasizes patriarchal, sexual control over the speaker’s body, the second half emphasizes the strong, “sacred” connection she has to her culture, community, and environment.

In the final line of the poem, the speaker affirms the connection she has, as an individual, to all Aboriginal women. While it seems as though the individual is lost with the exclusion of “an” in the reappearance of the statement “I am Indian Woman,” it is more so a reminder of the connection she has to all Native women due to the fact that she is a “sacred trust.” While, on the surface, excluding the “an” in the final line of the poem may appear as a pan-Indian generalization, it also allows for a sense of power and connection to appear through numerous traditions, cultures, customs, and individuals. In this sense, “Indian Woman” and “sacred trust” are synonymous statements of knowledge, power and responsibility. Together, they represent a clear affirmation of what the reconstruction in the second half of the poem is about. It is also a clear reversal of what was stated in the first half. Armstrong herself calls this juxtaposition a statement directed at Native women telling them, “this is how other people see you, but over here is how you really are” (qtd by Williamson 9). While Armstrong’s assertion does again allude to a pan-Indian generalization of identity for Native women, “how one really is” is still a choice determined by one’s own cultural traditions and perspectives. In other words, while the sense of connection emphasized in Armstrong’s poem is one that may in fact be North American, it is still a connection that places emphasis on the recovery of personal cultural identity.

Chapter Four: 'Isn't That Special': Rethinking Identity in Beth Cuthand's "Post-Oka Kinda Woman"

Maybe this is a gross generalization, but I think women begin writing as a means of therapy. They write to stay sane. We write to stay sane! We write to let go of the 'boogies'.

~ Beth Cuthand

As there is such an emphasis on the recovery and revitalization of Aboriginal traditions and perspectives within Jeannette Armstrong's "Indian Woman," it is difficult to see how one might accommodate aspects of dual heritage in the reconstruction of her identity. Although Armstrong's emphasis on Aboriginal traditions is echoed by many Indigenous writers who are also addressing the issue of identity, matters concerning dual perspectives, dual heritage, and dual identity are also now being widely debated. In "Post-Oka Kinda Woman," for example, Beth Cuthand addresses the seemingly contradictory position in which, like Pauline Johnson, many Aboriginal women find themselves. That is, mixed heritage Aboriginal women who, like Johnson, are also being investigated as to whether or not they are authentically 'Indian.' Cuthand focuses on the blending of traditional/non-traditional influences and identities as a means of providing an alternative means through which Aboriginal women can reconstruct self-image. In this sense, the 'Post-Oka Woman' attempts to 'mesh' multiple customs and traditions as a means of becoming an individual who defies classification. In doing so, Cuthand addresses and challenges political as well as cultural ideologies regarding both authenticity and identity.

According to Devon Abbot Mihesuah, finding ways to accommodate a dual heritage or perspective is an important issue for many Aboriginal women as they begin to re-examine their Native female identities. Mihesuah explains that, "even if she is racially 'full-blood,' a Native woman still may face cultural confusion and have several identities

(individual, occupational, religious, social, etc.) that correspond to her allegiances (family, tribe, community, state, country), and her identity constantly develops in response to her social, political, and economic environments” (81). In this sense, biological lineage is not the only factor determining who has a mixed-heritage. As they search for answers to this dilemma, Mihesuah explains, “some mixed-heritage Native women believe that meshing Native and non-Native social and cultural values is key to tribal and personal survival and happiness” (81). However, for those who are “mixed-blood,” the search for identity becomes much more complicated when legislative impositions place limits on who has the right to be regarded as an Indigenous person. As Thomas King points out, amendments to the Indian Act, such as Bill C-31, have created a “‘two generation cut-off clause.’ Marry out of status for two generations, and the children from the last union are non-status” (143). The eventual impact of this legislation becomes more apparent when it is considered that “right now about 50 percent of status Indians are marrying non-status folk” (King 143-44). According to King, Native scholars such as John Burrows and Leroy Little Bear estimate that, if this trend continues, in fifty to seventy-five years, there will be no legally Indigenous people in Canada (144).

In fact, numerous government interventions regarding hunting rights, regional location, and cultural practices and languages have caused the dialogue over resistance and reconstruction to move beyond the ideological realm and into the realm of active, physical protest and confrontations. One such example is in the 1990 standoff between Mohawk warriors and Quebec provincial police and Canadian Armed Forces at Oka, Quebec. The area, which is traditionally affiliated in terms of land and people with the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, is more specifically known as Kanesatake and is now

an officially recognized Mohawk territory. In 1990, however, disputes between the Canadian and provincial governments and Mohawk leaders had not yet resulted in such an official designation. The resistance put forth by Mohawks was in opposition to a plan approved by the Oka town council to expand a nine-hole golf course to eighteen holes. More specifically, the Kanesatake Mohawks objected to the proposal that the additions to the golf course be built over traditional lands, including burial grounds for the Mohawk people. In spite of ongoing negotiations between various levels of the government and Mohawk representatives, the municipality decided to move forward with the extension. The Mohawks at Kanesatake responded with barricades and road blocks on March 11th 1990 and, according to Kim Anderson, the resistance quickly “turned into a national event, drawing Native people from across the country in support” (Recognition of Being 125). The standoff, which saw the lives of over 70,000 people disrupted by road blocks, ended with the Mohawk warriors surrendering unexpectedly to police on September 26th.³² Although the plans to extend the golf course never materialized, according to John Ciaccia, Quebec Minister of Indian Affairs at the time of the ‘Oka crisis,’ the issues were much more complicated and complex than the details suggest. Ciaccia explains that “the Mohawks at Oka were not talking about white people desecrating the environment [...] they were talking about the land where they had been born, where they lived, which they guarded, and where they died, a land revered, which represented who they were. Sacred ground” (31). In other words, above and beyond the disagreement over land claims were the Mohawks’ objections to the continued subversion of their spirituality, tradition, history and culture by those who “wanted to play a game called golf over the graves of their dead ancestors” (31).

Because the events at Oka drew national attention from both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, the situation is credited for, at least momentarily, forcing Aboriginal issues and concerns into a national spotlight and, in some ways, the widespread attention and support represents one of the most remarkable aspects of the volatile situation at Kanesatake. According to Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, “to the amazement of the federal government, Oka sparked the greatest display of Indian unity in recent Canadian history” (273). Furthermore, York and Pindera suggest that the support from Aboriginals across Canada was largely influenced by the fact that most “had experienced the same kinds of frustrations, the same bureaucratic obstacles and political neglect that had motivated the warriors to take up arms” (273). A former band chief³³ at Oka also speaks about the resistance as representing more than a local issue. He states that, in spite of the dialogue First Nations people were having with governments at home and around the world, “nothing had changed, [the colonizers were] still taking land and imposing culture” (Alfred Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors 114). In addition, he explains that the resistance had less to do with the proposed plan than it had to do with centuries of frustration over colonial impositions: “I said to myself that they were going to find out now, that this was the last straw. That’s what it was for me. I think something can be built on that” (114). This feeling that Oka represented a massive revitalized resistance is echoed by Anderson who calls the crisis “a rallying point and an overt example that colonial warfare was still happening in 1990” (A Recognition of Being 125). Anderson explains that “it was a call to consciousness for many Native people about identity” (125) which, in turn, caused many Indigenous people in Canada to “refer to the Oka crisis as a turning point in their lives” (125). In this sense, Oka is representative of an instance in

which the ideological battles of colonization moved into the realm of mobilized resistance to colonial oppression. At the same time, the fact that Oka represents a turning point in the lives of Aboriginal peoples demonstrates how a mobilized resistance can, in turn, manifest itself in a revitalized ideological movement regarding identity, resistance, and reconstruction.

As a “last straw,” a “rallying point,” and a “turning point” in the lives of Native Canadians, Oka has become a symbolic reference for many people who began to search for ways to engage in their own effort towards resisting colonial interventions and ideology. Given the symbolic importance of the 1990 events at Oka to Indigenous peoples all over Canada and the United States, it is clear why Cuthand may have chosen Oka as the referent for a momentous change in which a reconstruction of identity occurred. As the ‘Post’ in the title of the poem suggests, a shift in identity has already occurred, and, as a result, Cuthand’s poem features a character whose positive self-image has already been developed. It is also apparent that the Post-Oka woman’s focus is not upon confronting negative definitions regarding Aboriginal female identity; it is upon portraying an assertive, positive self-image and, consequently, Oka is the referent for both a recognition and rejection of Euro-imposed notions of identity. At the same time, while it is clear that the Post-Oka woman has an abrasive and confrontational approach to misrepresentations of her identity, the absence of what the Pre-Oka woman might have looked like creates a sense of ambiguity regarding what effect negative images might have had on her self-image. She may have never been subjected to an internalization of the colonially constructed identity and, on the contrary, may have always viewed herself in terms of a positive self-image. In this sense, the only difference between the Pre- and

Post-Oka woman may be in how she reacts to those who understand her only in terms of colonially controlled misconceptions about Aboriginal women and, since the speaker in the poem clearly addresses a non-Aboriginal audience, the question remains if some aspects of reconstruction in the poem have less to do with how the primary character sees herself and are more relevant in terms of how the audience perceives Aboriginal women.

Although it is unclear if the primary character is “racially full blood,” Cuthand constructs the Post-Oka woman as an individual that sees no problem with ‘meshing’ multiple cultural traditions and customs. In fact, there is a certain sense of cultural ‘meshing’ in the fact that Cuthand, who is Cree and from Saskatchewan, has chosen an act of resistance by Mohawks in Quebec as a reference for the reconstruction of her protagonist’s identity. While this choice is in some ways a symbol of the connection expressed by Indigenous peoples, it also alludes to an implicit sense of hybridity within the poem. The first two lines, however, provide a playful, yet confrontational, portrait of the Post-Oka woman as she is described by the speaker³⁴ defiantly “strutting down your street./This Post-Oka Kinda Woman don’t take no shit” (1-2). Although later references are clearly directed at a Euro-North American reader, the “you” in this statement may be a more generic subject. In this sense, this statement is the first instance in which the speaker alludes to the unwillingness of the Post-Oka woman to be fixed literally or figuratively. While this determination on behalf of the Post-Oka woman emphasizes the fact that resistance and autonomy are essential aspects of her identity, the diction is also representative of a writing strategy sometimes used by Aboriginal authors. Armstrong, for example, “encourages a deliberate and thoughtful application of this kind of writing, so that the subversion of English may be understood as a device rather than a mistake”

(Anderson "Reclaiming Native Space in Literature" 62). According to Armstrong, this subversion is connected to a willful embracing of, what she calls, "Red English" or "Reservation English." She states that this type of English is a dialect and not bad grammar:

The first speaker of English developed a process which was sort of in-between their own First Nation language and the English language. It's a transition English. The transition English had a number of features that sets it apart from standard English, or pigeon English, or just poor English. That's why it is called Red English, in that the Indianized forms of grammatical usage appear frequently. (Anderson "Reclaiming Native Space in Literature" 62)

Anderson refers to this dialect as "a hybrid of Indigenous/Western expression and world view" (61). According to this description, it seems as though this hybridized version of English allows concepts and terms not recognized by standard English to be expressed through an alternative discourse. The language, in other words, may appear to be the same, but the ideology which determines what is being said is different. Thus, as Alfred explains, "it does not immediately follow that if an Indian expresses himself in European terms, that his perspective is European" (Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors 73).

As she is described "struttin down your street" and determined to "take no shit," the Post-Oka woman appears to be assertive and empowered. In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker makes it clear that the Post-Oka woman has rejected modern stereotypes which characterize Natives as victims, so degraded by centuries of oppression that their lives become ones of constant struggle just to subsist. The speaker states:

She's done with victimization, reparation,
degradation, assimilation,
devolution, coddled collusion,
the 'plight of the Native peoples.' (4-7)

The Post-Oka woman rejects an image of Aboriginals as dejected and demoralized which is too often the image with which Euro-Canadians associate Indigenous people. According to Alfred, for example, "the stereotype of the Native, in Canada, has gone from that of the noble savage to the victim" ("First Voice: The New Warriorism" 03/12/03). Furthermore, Alfred explains that, while images of Indigenous people continue to be stereotyped in a variety of ways, the most common images reproduced in the modern context are ones in which "Native people are seen as victims of residential schools, victims of colonialism, victims of dispossession..." ("First Voice"). However, as Alfred points out, this image of Native people as "victims" often does not take into account the fact that young Aboriginals in Canada "have not been affected by these things to the same degree. They have been affected in terms of the legacy of those things, but not directly" ("First Voice"). Alfred states that, while many social programs are constructed to deal with those who are attempting to cope with the painful memories of those experiences, the attitude of young Indigenous people in Canada is often one of "anger and frustration" ("First Voice") about the current conditions created by colonial intervention. While the "anger and frustration" spoken of by Alfred represent the voices of young Indigenous Canadians, Ann Marie Sewell comments on how the image of the victim has affected her as an Aboriginal writer. She explains that this image of Native peoples as demoralized individuals can result in a pressure upon Aboriginal writers to

constantly write about “our oppression, our experiences as drunks and druggies and prostitutes, how we miraculously found our culture and got healed, and Eagles and/ or Bears and/or Wolves” (20). The Post-Oka woman seems to share in this frustration as she too is frustrated with the pressure constantly to look inwards and backwards and, conversely, is now determined to confront colonialism in a manner that concentrates on the future, as opposed to the past. In this sense, she is constructed as an individual who responds to the misappropriation of images with “anger and frustration” by refusing to view herself as a victim and assuming a more proactive identity.

This allusion is further emphasized in the next stanza as she is described as “o.k” and ready to “shashay into your suburbia” (8-9). As the Post-Oka woman walks provocatively into the classic domain of white North America – the suburbs –the speaker directly addresses that domain’s stereotypical inhabitants with the addition of “your.” At the same time, as the Post-Oka woman also becomes a resident of suburbia the speaker informs her non-Aboriginal audience that the domain of Indigenous women is not limited by the geographic boundaries of a reservation nor by the negative associations of that location. For instance, according to Wotherspoon and Satzewich, “with certain expectations, social scientists who attempt to locate aboriginal peoples within the class structure [in Canada] suggest that they form an underclass” (50). Wotherspoon and Satzewich also explain that this perception of “aboriginal peoples as a class of permanently unemployed and decrepit people reinforces the common sense impression that all aboriginal peoples live either off welfare on reserves or on ‘skid row’ in cities” (51). What the attempts of social scientists and the “common sense impressions” of Aboriginals do not reveal, according to Wotherspoon and Satzewich, is that Aboriginal

people in Canada are “nevertheless distributed across the range of class sites within Canada” (51). As a result, Wotherspoon and Satzewich conclude that the “underclass thesis” “ignores the fact that many aboriginal peoples are economically active” (51-52). Similarly, the Post-Oka woman assertively and confidently “shashays” into suburbia, she defies stereotypes which attempt to locate her economically and geographically; this defiance allows her to emerge clearly as an individual who is unwilling to be fixed literally or figuratively. At the same time, she maintains her Indigenous identity as she moves from one geopolitical position to another.

As implied by her unrestrained movement with regard to class and location, colonially constructed relationships of power and hierarchy are neither recognized nor acknowledged by the Post-Oka woman. Thus, the speaker also alludes to the production and incorporation of colonial images in the declaration that “Mackenzie Way, Riel Crescent belong to her” (10). With this reference to “Riel Crescent,” the “Post-Oka woman” recognizes attempts on behalf of Euro-North Americans to “incorporate the Other, superficially, through beaded moccasins and names like Mohawk motors” (Goldie 12) or, in this instance, by naming a suburban street after an important Metis historical figure. However, as she assumes ownership over “Riel Crescent,” she reclaims power over his image and, in the process, denies colonial control. At the same time, she assumes ownership and control over Euro-colonial figures and their images, as represented by “Mackenzie Way,” and, in doing so, she asserts herself a sense of power and control over Euro-Canadian history and culture. In this sense, she recognizes her ability to move into suburbia and out of socially constructed geopolitical images of Aboriginal peoples. At the same time, she is acknowledging a change in her relationship with history by assuming

control over the images of historical figures associated with the colonization of Canada. For example, while "Mackenzie" is a name that resonates throughout Canadian colonial history,³⁵ Riel is a figure of resistance against colonial impositions. It is also significant that William Lyon Mackenzie lead an uprising against British authority in the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion. Although Riel and Mackenzie share common ground as figures of resistance, they differ in the sense that Riel was fighting for the rights of Metis Aboriginals and against colonial impositions, while the Scottish born Mackenzie was fighting to further solidify a colonial presence in North America.³⁶ In both instances, assuming control over the names of historical figures and their legacies allows the Post-Oka woman to assume control over how she will view history in general. As a result, the Post-Oka woman revokes the authority of the "white signmaker" and assumes the ability and authority to construct a different story.

As she assumes power over history, she also grants herself power over Euro-North American culture. She acknowledges that, along with "Riel Crescent" and "Mackenzie Way" come "software, microwave ovens,/ plastic Christmas trees and lawn chairs" (11-12). In doing so, the Post-Oka woman challenges stereotypes that sometimes force Aboriginals to question their authenticity. According to Marilyn Dumont, questions of authenticity often originate within a presumption of culture as static and unchanging. As a consequence of this perception of Indigenous culture as either being pure and continuous or changing and erased, Aboriginal peoples are often forced to question the manner in which they balance traditionalist and non-traditionalist customs and perspectives. Dumont suggests that this questioning eventually results in the wavering

self-perception of one's identity as "either *too Indian or not Indian enough*" (47).

Dumont explains:

You're too Indian if you are not articulate in the language (if a native language is your first language) and you're not native enough if by way of growing up in an urban centre you became articulate in english instead of your own native language. Because if you are articulate in english, then you may be seen as coming from a privileged class and are scrutinized to determine how native you really are, scrutinized for your authenticity (by both Indian and white sides). (47)

According to numerous Aboriginal writers,³⁷ images of Native identity often take precedence over actual Aboriginal perspectives and concerns, and, as a result, Native individuals with little understanding of Indigenous cultures and perspectives sometimes allow themselves to be governed by insecurities about their identity by fulfilling the colonizer's image of what he or she is *supposed* to be. According to Gerald Vizenor, those who attempt to accommodate this pressure to be perceived as Indian perpetuate a simulation of Indian identity as opposed to maintaining any real connection to Indigenous culture. Furthermore, Vizenor calls those who embrace images of "Indianness" as "posers" who "are worried more by the real than other enemies of reference. Simulations are substitutes for the real and those who pose must fear the rush of the real in their stories" (23). As she acknowledges multiple aspects of her identity, the Post-Oka woman rejects the pressure to be a "cultural ritualist."³⁸ Thus, by claiming "plastic christmas trees," "software," "microwave ovens," and "lawn chairs" as belonging to her, she incorporates such Euro-North American customs as commercialism and Christianity into

her modern Indigenous female identity and, at the same time, rejects the pressure to be perceived as an “authentic” Indian. Consequently, she dismisses a “prevalent 19th century notion of culture as static which is founded on the belief that there exists in the evolution of cultures, a pristine culture which if it responds to change is no longer pure, and therefore, eroding and vanishing affects [Aboriginal peoples’] collective ‘self-images’ as either: pure – too Indian or diluted – not Indian enough” (Dumont 47-48). It is also clear that the Post-Oka woman’s assumption of ownership over Euro-North American traditions demonstrates that she is not so much interested in representing a “mixed-heritage” individual than she is in redefining what is and what is not included within a modern understanding of Indigenous heritage and cultural identity. Thus, she is not so much representing a hybrid identity as she is redefining what it is to be Indigenous.

As she denies Euro-North Americans with an opportunity to impress upon her a colonially controlled image of Indigenous identity, the Post-Oka woman represents a “multiplicity of experiences that go on being ignored because they do not fit a popular understanding of culture” (Dumont 49). For example, according to Dumont, that which is most often ignored or dismissed is the experience of “the urban native who participates in all the trappings of a wage economy as best he/she is able to” (48). She asks, “Why do popular images of us lag behind our reality? Images that portray us as rural, living a subsistence economy, traditional, when more and more natives are living the experience of an urban wage economy?” (48). As the Post-Oka woman rejects pressure to conform to negative Euro-imposed images of identity or self-imposed images of “Indianness” that demand she be a “cultural ritualist,” she embraces multiple traditions without the imposing power of the popular image nor the implicit hierarchies of Westernized

binaries. This “meshing” of traditional/non-traditional customs, practices and activities is made explicitly clear through a description of the Post-Oka woman’s family:

Her daughter wears Reeboks and works out.

Her sons cook and wash up.

Her grandkids don’t sass their Kohkom! (13-15).

Her daughter’s commitment to working out and wearing “Reeboks” in addition to her sons’ taking on of domestic responsibilities could represent an Aboriginal perspective in which roles/responsibilities are relatively unfixed by gender. At the same time, the grandkids’ unwavering respect for their grandmother alludes to the fact that Aboriginal perspectives and social/family structures are often matrilineal. The most apparent characteristic of the Post-Oka woman’s family is the absence of patriarchal structure as responsibility, freedom, power, and authority are constructed as being open and unfixed by a pre-inscribed masculine order.

As a result of these familial characteristics, the Post-Oka woman is constructed as one who recognizes and embraces an overlapping, changing perception of culture and identity while, at the same time, acknowledging that this overlapping of traditions usually limited to Euro-North Americans does not necessarily result in the sacrifice of Indigenous perspectives. These implications continue into the next section as the speaker describes the Post-Oka woman’s average daily and weekly activities. While the speaker alludes to the traditional aspects of the Post-Oka woman’s hobbies and commitments with the fact that she “sweats on weekends, [...] / sings old songs, gathers herbs” (17-19), and “Round Dances Wednesdays” (21), the speaker also acknowledges that driving foreign cars, reading popular fiction, dying her hair, and “two stepping” are aspects of the Post-Oka

woman's modern Indigenous identity. Although the line is ambiguous in the sense that it could be referring to a ceremonial dance, the fact that she readily embraces "Twelve steps when she needs it" (22), could signal that she is willing to confront the continued legacy of colonialism in terms of the substance abuse problems that affect many Aboriginal peoples and communities. However, rather than this acknowledgement being a perpetuation of a negative stereotype of Native women as alcoholics, it is more an acknowledgement that there continue to be a number of effects from a prolonged "lack of a positive or even a concrete identity" (Mihesuah 82).³⁹ Because the "twelve steps" refer to a process of internal/external recognition and recovery popularized by the program Alcoholics Anonymous, a "voluntary, worldwide fellowship of men and women from all walks of life who meet together to attain and maintain sobriety" (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org), the reference is also an acknowledgement of a willingness to actively confront issues which, if left unaddressed, could potentially control and destroy one's life. At the same time, the global nature of the Alcoholics Anonymous program seems to be a reminder that alcoholism is not primarily a Native problem⁴⁰ and, since the "twelve steps" has been incorporated into many different programs devoted to confronting and dealing with painful issues, it is now a popular culture reference to a process of healing with no specific link to one particular issue. In any case, the openness of the line is representative of the playfulness of the Post-Oka woman in the sense that she refuses to be contained or controlled by expectations about who she is or should be.

In another possible reference to the colonial legacy, the speaker returns to Oka as a referent for a changing perspective about gender, identity, and domestic violence. She explains, "Post-Oka woman she's struttin' her stuff/ not walking behind her man" (23-

American politics and ideology. While previous sections emphasize the overlaps of culture, custom and ideology, these sections emphasize difference. For instance, the speaker states, "Talk to her of post-modern deconstructivism/She'll say: 'What took you so long?'" (29-30). Although the statement is a reference to the difference between Aboriginal and Western views of language and narrative, it is also a reminder that many critics attempt to impose Western critical standards upon texts that are produced according to a different set of criteria and influences. Gunn Allen refers to this "western bias" as having "had many unfortunate side effects, only one of which is deep misunderstanding of tribal literatures that has for so long marked the learned and popular periodicals that deal with tribal culture" (68). At the same time, the response of the Post-Oka woman is a subtle suggestion that what appears to be novel, new, and revolutionary with regard to Western criticism and philosophy may in fact be found within the traditional perspectives of Indigenous peoples. The response on behalf of the Post Oka woman, "what took you so long?", alludes not only to the critical bias of Westerners but also to the fact that Indigenous literatures/philosophies/world views may have already been aware of those philosophies and theories. In this sense, the rhetorical question is a subtle subversion of the academic assumption that Indigenous philosophy and story telling are simple and literal in comparison to that which is typically included within academic canons. The question also alludes to the notion that, as Gerald Vizenor points out in Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance, Indigenous peoples have been using postmodern/poststructuralist strategies in a resistance against colonial simulations. Vizenor explains, "The Indian was an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation; the word has no referent in tribal languages or cultures. The

postindian is the absence of the invention, and the end of representation in literature; the closure of that evasive melancholy of dominance. Manifest manners are the simulations of bourgeois decadence and melancholy” (11). Furthermore, Vizenor writes, “the postindian warriors bear their own simulations to contend with manifest manners, the ‘authentic’ summaries of ethnology, and the curse of racialism and modernism in the ruins of representation. The wild incursions of the warriors of survivance undermine the simulations of the unreal in the literature of dominance” (14). He also explains that these “incursions” are not new and that they have been occurring as a powerful strategy of resistance against colonial misrepresentations: “the warriors, then and now, observe postmodern situations, theories of simulation, deconstruction, postindian encounters, silence, remembrance, and other themes of survivance that would trace the inventions of tribal cultures by missionaries and ethnologists to the trauancies and cruelties of a melancholy civilization” (13).

As the final sections continue, the opinions, desires and concerns of the Post-Oka woman reflect the image of Oka as a symbolic reminder that colonialism is not over. For instance, regarding political battles between the Canadian government and Canada’s First Nations leaders, the speaker states:

You wanna discuss Land Claims?
 She’ll tell ya she’d rather leave
 her kids with a struggle than a bad settlement.

Indian Government?

Show her cold hard cash. (31-35)

In some ways, the statements are a determined reversal of the exclusion of Native women from the front-lines of political dialogue and debate. According to Anderson, for instance, the continued minority of Aboriginal women in roles of political authority and responsibility in negotiations with the government is “largely due to the imposed Euro-Canadian political system that only validates the voices of men by handing them exclusive authority over the governance of our nations” (218). In this sense, the Post-Oka woman’s vocal opinion about issues concerning self-government and land claims represents the fact that “women are able to create places for themselves within the current political system and can reclaim their traditional political authority” (Anderson 218) in spite of the exclusionary Euro-imposed systems. At the same time, the speaker emphasizes that, in her reconstructed identity, the Post-Oka woman is not willing to sacrifice that which she feels Aboriginal people deserve: power and control over traditional lands, the authority to govern Aboriginal communities and peoples according to their own standards, and a strong connection to Indigenous philosophies and traditions. In other words, while there is an aspect of recovery of her role as a political, traditional leader, there is also emphasis on the continued resistance in relation to inherent rights and ownership of land.

The Post-Oka woman’s unwillingness to compromise is emphasized in the repetition of the fact that “she don’t take no shit!” (2, 25, 40, 41). As made clear in the previous sections, much of her unwillingness to compromise is due to unfair offers and settlements from the government. However, also made clear when she is described as dancing the ‘two step’ on Tuesdays and participating in traditional ceremonies such as ‘round dances’ on Wednesdays, her unwillingness to compromise extends into issues of

identity. In some ways, the primary feature of the reconstructed self-image for the Post-Oka woman is autonomy. Much in the same manner that the Mohawks at Oka expressed autonomy in their unwillingness to sacrifice traditional lands for an additional nine holes, the Post-Oka woman refuses to allow external images of Nativeness determine her Aboriginal identity. Her determined effort to be unaffected by external images is emphasized with her sarcastic response to a hypothetical encounter with an individual who informs her that he or she has “never talked to a real live ‘Indian’” (36). According to the speaker, the Post-Oka woman would respond confidently with “‘Isn’t that special’” (37). At the same time, while the speaker describes her as “cheeky,” “bold” and “cold” in her ability to be unaffected by external constructions of Native female identity, this description does not suggest an attitude that is necessarily apathetic and uncaring as a consequence of colonization. On the contrary, her assertiveness is a sign that confidence in her self-image prevents her from being affected by those who view her through a Euro-constructed lens. Moreover, the implied subject of “You” in line 36 once again suggests that the speaker is directly addressing a non-Aboriginal audience.

The duality and determination of the Post-Oka woman emphasizes the fact that it is possible to accommodate multiple perspectives in the construction of a modern Indigenous female identity. As she incorporates traditions and customs of Euro-North America into her own specifically Aboriginal racial and cultural identity she suggests that it is possible to redefine Aboriginal culture and identity without sacrifice. With her strong rejection of stereotypes which attempt to fix her geopolitical position, she emphasizes that movement is synonymous with autonomy. At the same time, the Post-Oka woman’s rejection of images which portray Indigenous identity as either pure or diluted suggests

that “the very concept of homogenous national cultures, the consensual transmission of historical traditions, or ‘organic’ ethnic communities – as the grounds of cultural comparativisms – are in a profound process of redefinition” (Bhabba 5). As a result, the poem suggests that, for many individuals, there are different means and ends when it comes to resisting and reconstructing identity. A reconstruction of identity within the poem may be more relevant to the audience than the author, speaker, and Post-Oka woman. At no point does the speaker suggest that the Post-Oka woman has either lost or recovered her identity. The speaker does, however, emphasize the Post-Oka woman’s determination to resist images which misrepresent her. It is also clear that statements such as “she shashay into your suburbia” (9), “Talk to her of post-modern deconstructivism” (29), “You wanna discuss Land Claims” (31), and “Tell her you’ve never talked to a real live ‘Indian’” (36) are directed at a non-Aboriginal audience. In each of these statements, “you” directs the poem towards a colonial reader. As a result, the only difference between the Pre-Oka and Post-Oka woman may have to do with how she addresses negative images of her identity and not with how she sees herself. In this sense, while the poem does represent a paradigm shift in image, it may be the audience who is being asked to reconstruct their perception of Aboriginal female identity and not the author, speaker, or even the Post-Oka woman herself.

Conclusion

From an Indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different language, and structures of power. ~ Linda Tuhiwai Smith

As I begin this conclusion, I would like to emphasize that I have been drawn to each of these poems with an aesthetic appreciation for both their technical and artistic elements. Although the significant power of these works as representatives of an important struggle over the control of identity has been an important part of this project, I also admire each author's ability to take control of language, transcend racial/cultural/gendered divisions and, in turn, invoke a variety of emotional responses from an individual in such a different personal and critical location. At the same time, each author constructs a powerful message of resistance regarding power, language, and identity. In doing so, they challenge the production and interpretation of history, images, and identity and suggest that changing the paradigms which govern both the present and future is possible.

In "The Cattle Thief," for example, Johnson exploits a variety of colonial narratives as a means of disrupting the colonially constructed reality. Through poetry, she explicitly challenges colonialist dogmas which influence the policies of assimilation by exposing the slippery signifiers and hypocrisy of the "white-signmakers." Armstrong's "Indian Woman," on the other hand, acts as a reminder that colonialist ideology has had an impact that extends beyond the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Armstrong challenges the misrepresentation of Indigenous women and exposes the implicit violence and destruction that such images can have both through the behaviour of those who act upon them and the incorporation of a negative self-image for Indigenous women. In

addition, Armstrong alludes to the irony of Euro-constructed images in comparison to traditional perspectives about the roles of Aboriginal women. Cuthand's "Post-Oka Kinda Woman" also includes strong elements of resistance. Cuthand's poem expands the criticism of negative images that contribute to an oppressive reality by addressing common images of Aboriginal peoples in Canada as degraded and demoralized. Similar to Johnson's exploitation of her dual identity as a means of "projecting a sturdier, hybridized image" (Aignor-Varoz 37), Cuthand's protagonist rejects constricting images of ethnicity as being either pure and static or erased and forgotten. In doing so, the Post-Oka woman emerges as an individual who resists any attempt to fix her geographically or culturally while, at the same time, maintaining a strong sense of her Indigenous female identity. Moreover, references to the 1990 Oka crisis are a reminder both of the contemporary relevance of the discussion and that resistance has the potential to take place through physical as well as ideological means.

While resistance is a powerful element within each of the poems I have studied, Johnson, Armstrong and Cuthand also use language as a means of reclaiming power over their identities. As each author rejects the power of Euro-constructed images to govern the lives of Indigenous women, they reposition that power into their own hands. Johnson, for instance, introduces the Eagle Chief's daughter into her narrative as the character responsible for constructing a new narrative of history and colonial relationships. In doing so, she interrupts her audience's expectations and introduces a different image of Indigenous women. Armstrong, on the other hand, appeals directly to the ways in which traditional perspectives about Indigenous women differ from Euro-constructed notions. Consequently, the speaker of "Indian Woman" constructs a positive and empowered self-

image by re-establishing a connection to Aboriginal perspectives. Cuthand's Post-Oka woman, on the other hand, focuses upon relating a hybridized view of her self-image through an emphasis upon her incorporation of Euro-North American traditions. Although this incorporation of customs and traditions does suggest a dual identity, the Post-Oka woman sees herself only as an Indigenous woman and not as a mixed heritage individual. As a result, she redefines her cultural identity by extending the boundary to include customs which are stereotypically associated with Euro-North Americans. As there is no indication that the Pre-Oka woman was ever suffering from a negative self-image, the speaker in "Post-Oka Kinda Woman" appears to be more focused upon reconstructing the audience's perception as opposed to reconstructing how the speaker/Post-Oka woman sees herself. Consequently, Cuthand's words remind her audience that the lives of Aboriginal women are not necessarily governed by a struggle to regain a positive self-image. Although each author addresses similar issues, they each construct Indigenous female identity as unique and empowered. In doing so, they suggest that resisting and reclaiming power over images of identity has potentially positive effects on the future.

In "The Cattle Thief," for instance, the Eagle Chief's daughter commands the settlers to reconsider colonial relationships. As a result, Johnson suggests that a successful future is possible through a reevaluation of Euro-North American ideology. At the same time, she suggests that Indigenous peoples in Canada are neither doomed to extinction nor destined for assimilation. Cuthand portrays a similar vision for the future and the relationship between Aboriginals and Euro-North Americans. While she does not explicitly ask the colonizers to re-evaluate colonialism, she does suggest that Euro-North

Americans need to understand that Indigenous peoples are not prepared to accept a life as victims of degradation and dispossession. In addition, she argues that colonialism has also created a determination among empowered Aboriginal individuals who are committed to continue fighting legal and ideological battles. Consequently, the future for Aboriginal women in Cuthand's narrative emphasizes defiance and autonomy.

The future presented in "Indian Woman," on the other hand, emphasizes a revitalization of tradition. It is also a future in there is a continued push for an ideological resistance to Euro-constructed images and world views. "Indian Woman" emphasizes the important traditional role of Aboriginal women as leaders responsible for the guidance and nurturance of younger generations also in search of an Indigenous community, culture, and practices. At the same time, Armstrong's vision for the future refers to the important role of Aboriginal women within the North American, if not global, Indigenous community.

Although I make many references to Indigenous writers in my discussion of how voice, identity, and empowerment are connected in the ideological power struggle of Indigenous women, many of these authors recognize that the concepts, concerns, and conclusions they have articulated are representative of a culturally relative response. Since the three primary authors I have been discussing come from different communities with unique cultural perspectives, they are not to be mistakenly grouped together in a generalized sense of Aboriginal issues, literature, and identity. Furthermore, as I mentioned in the introduction to my thesis, I am clearly not to be mistaken as an authority on Aboriginal traditions and cultures. In fact, due to my personal/cultural/racial/gendered position, I am limited in my ability to understand and interpret these works.

Consequently, I am reminded of my initial apprehension when I began researching and writing for this project. While I would like to say that I have successfully confronted my apprehension and am now confident in my decision to write about poetry by Indigenous women, I must admit that, after reading many accounts about the power of both academic and artistic misrepresentations of Aboriginals, I am now even more unsettled in my decision. In some ways, my apprehensiveness is now primarily concerned with the possibility that, by presenting an inaccurate representation of Indigenous peoples, I may be inadvertently contributing to the evolving nature of Euro-constructed images of Indigenous peoples.

Thus, as a means of finding a way in which I could complete my work after investing so much personal, emotional, and professional energy into this project, I sometimes find myself theorizing more about ways in which I can justify what I am doing as opposed to actually working on the task at hand. While my partner, among others, has referred to this practice as more procrastination than philosophical soul searching, I choose to view this self-interrogation as a healthy post-colonial endeavor. As a professor of mine once assured me, continuous self-doubt comes with the territory. If I was not questioning the ethics of my decision, in other words, I would truly have something to worry about. As a result, I have in some ways accepted that my apprehensiveness is necessary and appropriate.

This is not to say, however, that I have not been eager to research and write about this topic or that my point of view has no potential benefits. As I have already suggested, there is a large focus among post-colonial critics who read and write about First Nations literature to: (1) primarily discuss fiction and autobiography as opposed to other genres or

hybrid mediums of expression; and (2) focus upon discussing and theorizing the potential of these literatures, as opposed to taking part in close readings of the literature itself. Thus, my emphasis on poetry as an important medium for Aboriginal women engaging in an ideological battle over control of their identities and my focus upon offering close readings of three poems by three distinct authors does fill-in some part of a gap within contemporary theory and criticism of First Nations literatures. While I have done my best to avoid “researching through imperial eyes,”⁴¹ I remain apprehensive about the fact that I will be inevitably filling in a gap that could be and, in some ways, should be filled in by Aboriginal authors themselves.⁴² In response, however, I believe that my commitment to writing a personal perspective by making my own subjectivities explicit and reminding my readers that I am not to be mistaken as an authority on Aboriginal literature or culture allows for my work to be read as the response of one specific member of a very broad audience. In doing so, I leave the door open for other members of that audience to write their own stories. In this sense, I am not so much trying to fill a gap in contemporary criticism as I am attempting to open another door for future discussions.

Notes

¹ This reversal of power structures is not meant to imply that all poetry by First Nations writers is directed at a white audience. While poems such as "The Cattle Thief" by Pauline Johnson and "Post-Oka Kinda Woman" by Beth Cuthand are largely directed toward a white audience and thus represent a reversal in the self-granted authority of the colonizer with regard to information about history, culture and identity, poems like Jeannette Armstrong's "Indian Woman" may be written with a distinctly Indigenous audience in mind.

² Brundage attributes much of his love for Aboriginal literature to the fact that his mother exposed him to Native authors and stories as a child. Brundage states, "Probably a main reason I remain interested in Aboriginal literature is I associate it, like canoeing, with my mother" (35).

³ I would like to clarify here with regard to my father's inquisitive questions. Approximately two weeks prior to my encounter, a male youth who attended my high school had, in fact, created a local controversy by claiming that he had been beaten by a gang of Native youth. He later admitted that he had arranged to fight another boy and had made up the story when his father noticed bruises and cuts on his face and hands. As the story had been reported by the local newspaper, he was obliged by his father to issue a formal apology.

⁴ I am in no way making an excuse for the ways in which identity has been constructed through colonialism. Rather, I am attempting to explain how this identity construction became possible and the powerful effects that it creates. In this sense, the lack of 'choice' on behalf of the European points more toward the implicit problems within the European world view rather than an absolving of responsibility.

⁵ Goldie explains that, "For many writers, the only chance for indigenization seemed to be through writing about the humans who are truly indigenous[...]" (13).

⁶ I use the universalized term 'Native woman' only to emphasize that the plurality of Native women is absent in the construction of images with respect to Native women by whites.

⁷ It is well documented that Scott was responsible for such government interventions as residential schools and the imposition of Western modes of governance in place of Aboriginal traditions. According to Rick Monture, "As both a Confederation Poet and the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1931, he had a literary reputation that put him in the forefront of Canadian national consciousness, as well as the power to directly affect the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada through policies that he supervised and enforced" (119 – 20).

⁸ JanMohamed refers to this as the "dominant phase" of colonialism (61). In the "hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism)," "the natives accept a version of the colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production" (62).

⁹ One example of the forceful removal of traditional political/ideological structures and the imposition of Euro-constructed ideology can be seen in the actions of, once again, Duncan Campbell Scott. For instance, when members of the Six Nations council spoke publicly against the treatment of their community by the Canadian government and the Department of Indian Affairs, "'justice' and 'fairness' were extended to the Confederacy council in October 1924 when Colonel C.E. Morgan (a former colonial administrator in South Africa) and a number of armed RCMP officers 'officially' removed the traditional government from the council house at Six Nations, under Scott's orders, to be replaced by the elected band council system as set forth in the Indian Act" (Monture 135).

¹⁰ According to Patricia Doyle Bedwell, "The Shubenacadie Residential School operated from 1930-1967 in Nova Scotia. Following the framework used by the Canadian Government in setting up the Western Boarding Schools for Indian Children, the Government and the Roman Catholic Church, which operated

the School, tried to impose a system of assimilation and genocide upon the Mi'kmaq Children in Nova Scotia" (1).

¹¹ While Derrida is credited for exposing the system of difference that codifies language and meaning, "Lacanian theory holds that a girl's introduction into language (the symbolic order is represented by the father and built on phallic/non-phallic oppositions) is complex, because she cannot identify directly with the positive poles of that order"(Jones 229).

¹² For instance, Barbara Godard argues that, in one way or another, Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray all fail to "develop the materialist insights of [their] work into an expanded social theory"("Feminism and Semiotics" 3). In other words, while they frequently discuss the imposing forces of semiotic constructions of gender, they do not move their discussion beyond the realm of the theoretical and remain distant from real life by failing to "take into account the cross-cultural dimensions of the analysis carried out in a number of countries and languages"(Godard 3). Adrienne Rich argues in "The Politics of Location", "if we have learned anything in these years of late twentieth century feminism, it's that that 'always' blots out what we really need to know: when, where, and under what conditions have the statements been true?"(16). Although Rich's comments are not specifically directed at French Feminism, I find her critique of the universalizing the term 'woman' to be applicable.

¹³ Adopting the colonizer's language is also a political strategy since it provides the oppressed with a medium through which they can address the colonizer directly.

¹⁴ Armstrong does not exclude prose from her discussion regarding oratory. She explains, "[We are] looking for the way to have integrity around a narrated story, to have a narrator present in the story – and significant in the story as a way to develop prose, and a way to comprehend how the oral structure might work within the written text" (qtd. in Anderson "Reclaiming Native Space in Literature" 56).

¹⁵ The theatre Gerson is referring to is The Vancouver Playhouse.

¹⁶ In, "Pauline Johnson: A Reconsideration," George Lyon questions the authenticity of Johnson's claim to be an "acculturated Mohawk Indian." In The Imaginary Indian, Daniel Francis argues that Johnson was more concerned with pleasing her audience than with portraying Indigenous peoples with accuracy.

¹⁷ Numerous critics have pointed out that Johnson's buckskin dress was by no means an accurate representation of traditional Iroquois attire.

¹⁸ It is the intention of some critics to divide Johnson's poetry into categories of European and Native. For instance, in Penny Petrone's Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present, Petrone describes Johnson's "Indian poems" as being "distinguished by dramatic energy and passionate intensity"(qtd. in Goldie "Fresh Canons" 380). Petrone also asserts that Johnson's "literary forms, her world view, and her attitudes to nature were European"(qtd. in Goldie in "Fresh Canons" 381). Definitions such as this move beyond pairing her poems with the outfit she wore while reading them and into the realm of an essentialist view about the connection between ethnicity and writing in general.

¹⁹ I am in no way arguing that inclusion of Johnson's poetry within a white academically constructed canon is solely an attempt at achieving 'indigenization'. To do so would be to subsequently suggest that her work has no aesthetic/critical value outside of its connection to her Native heritage. Conversely, I am arguing that the misrepresentation of Johnson's identity has resulted in the image of Johnson taking precedence over her work, and that the questioning of that image has resulted in the de-valuing of her writing.

²⁰ The metaphor referred to by Bhabba is originally constructed by Renee Green. Bhabba states that "Green's 'architectural' site-specific work, Sites of Genealogy (Out of Site, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York), displays and displaces the binary logic through which identities and differences are often constructed – Black/White, Self/Other. Green makes a metaphor of the museum building itself, rather than simply using the gallery space"(3).

²¹ In "A Journey from Prince of Whale's Fort", Hearne describes his Native guides as "immediately engaged in planning the best method of attack, and how they might steal on the poor Esquimaux in the ensuing night and kill them all while asleep" (23).

²² Scott's use of this term is a reference to inter-racial relationships and mixed-blood offspring as well as the belief that this would ultimately result in the end of the "Indian race." Although the manner I am using it does not reflect the same means, the ends are definitely similar. In this sense, the demise of Indigenous peoples is guaranteed through contact with whites.

²³ As Thomas King points out in The Truth About Stories, "Edgar Allen Poe believed that the most poetic topic in the world was the death of a beautiful woman. From the literature produced during the nineteenth century, second place would have to go to the death of the Indian" (33).

²⁴ I would just like to note here that the idea that the Indigenous population in North America was declining to the point of extinction is indeed a colonially constructed image and is not an accurate portrait of the Indigenous population. However, Johnson's use of this image does not necessarily mean that she is endorsing it. Rather, I am arguing that she is exploiting her audiences devotion to this idea as a means of emphasizing the urgency of re-evaluating the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

²⁵ Terry Goldie argues that "the indigene is a semiotic pawn on a chess board under the control of the white signmaker" (Fear and Temptation 10).

²⁶ "And the words outleapt from her shrunken lips in the language of the/Cree," (Johnson 37)

²⁷ Francis argues that while "Johnson, of course, was not the 'voice' of the Indian [... she] happened to possess the only voice that White society *could* hear" (119).

²⁸ By "history and the present" I mean both the 19th century present and the present of the here and now. The broad ability of Johnson's verse to apply to both historical audiences as well as modern readers attests to her rhetorical ability. At the same time, it attests to the fact that many of the 19th century issues and problems present with regard to Euro-Canadian – Native-Canadian relations are still present today.

²⁹ Some critics/biographers also suggest that economic necessity played a major role in Johnson's professional and artistic decisions.

³⁰ In my discussion of Armstrong's poem I will be referring to "I" as "the speaker" of the poem. While I do this under the generally accepted assumption that the speaker in a poem is not necessarily the first person voice of the author, in this case, I do so with some hesitation. I am hesitant as many First Nations writers have criticized academic readers for constructing a division between the words of the individual and the individual herself. Many writers have argued that this division allows the academic reader to ignore the fact that the issues within the text also represent the real concerns and experiences of First Nations peoples. It is also important to recognize that Armstrong herself regards this poem as an articulation of a healing process that has allowed her to create a more positive self-image. Thus, in my discussion of the poem, I will periodically refer to the ideas in the poem as being put forth by Armstrong and when I discuss statements from the poem itself, I will refer to the speaker.

³¹ Aboriginal critics such as Devon Mihesuah are quick to point out, however, that "Numerous other Natives took offence [to Bruchac's defense of the word] and responded with comments such as: 'My tribe is in the West and we did not call a woman squaw [...]' (174 n. 6). These objections are commented upon by Bruchac when, in response to the massive criticism she received following her defense of the term, she stated that she has "never supported continued use of the word as a pejorative insult directed at Native women" (4). Bruchac also stated in her defense that she was simply trying to provide clarification of the word's historical origins and was only suggesting that the term should not be dismissed entirely as its

origins within Algonkian languages do not reflect the negative connotation attributed to it by the incorporation of Indigenous concepts through colonization.

³² A raid by the Surete du Quebec (SQ) on July 11th 1990 also resulted in the death of Corporal Marcel Lemay.

³³ In Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors, Alfred does not include the name of the former band chief although he does refer to him as 'A.D.'

³⁴ In a similar manner to my reading of Armstrong's "Indian Woman," I am somewhat hesitant about referring to the poem's 'speaker.' I understand that, since there are no first-person references in the poem, I am creating a complicated scenario in which a speaker talks about the Post-Oka woman and that this scenario inevitably drives the poem further and further away from its author. I am also aware that, as much of Cuthand's poetry relies upon personal philosophies and moments, it is likely that the Post-Oka woman is representative of Cuthand herself.

³⁵ For example, there are two Alexander Mackenzies that have prominent roles in Canadian history. The first Alexander (1763-1820) was an explorer. Another Alexander Mackenzie (1822-1892) was Canada's second Prime Minister. William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861) is credited with leading the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion.

³⁶ Mackenzie led a rebellion in search of a reformation of the British system of governance in Upper Canada. Riel (1844-1885), on the other hand, led a resistance against the Canadian government's forceful imposition of policies regarding the settlement of western provinces and territories. Many of the policies being imposed were in violation of treaties previously negotiated between the government and the Aboriginal peoples living within those areas.

³⁷ Examples of Aboriginal writers who discuss this scenario include, King in The Truth About Stories, Alfred in Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors, and Vizenor in Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance.

³⁸ In The Truth About Stories, King describes a personal experience with regard to the pressure to be Indian:

When I was going to university, there was an almost irresistible pull to become what Gerald Vizenor calls a 'cultural ritualist', a kind of 'pretend' Indian, an Indian who has to dress up like an Indian and act like an Indian in order to be recognized as an Indian. (45)

³⁹ According to Mihesuah, a "Lack of a positive or even a concrete identity can result in a variety of emotional and psychological problems for Natives, such as spousal and child abuse, turning to drugs and alcohol for anxiety relief, and ultimately, a lack of respect for tribal traditions that destroys cultures"(82).

⁴⁰ This reminder is further emphasized by the official web-site for Alcoholics Anonymous which estimates that "there are more than 100,000 groups and over 2,000,000 members in 150 countries" (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org).

⁴¹ In Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, Linda Tuhiwai Smith defines "research through imperial eyes." She explains,

Research 'through imperial eyes' is an approach which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings. It is an approach to Indigenous peoples which still conveys a sense of innate superiority and an overabundance of desire to bring progress into the lives of Indigenous peoples – spiritually, intellectually, socially, and economically. (56)

⁴² In "The Disempowerment," Jeannette Armstrong strongly encourages white, non-Aboriginal authors to stop telling stories that should be told by First Nations authors themselves. She argues that non-Aboriginal authors dominate the field of Indigenous studies and that, consequently, Aboriginal authors are continuously being silenced.

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