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LIFE IN TWO WORLDS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY TRADITION IN NATIVE AMERICAN
WOMEN WRITERS' LITERATURE

by

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A THESIS

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LIFE IN TWO WORLDS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY TRADITION IN NATIVE AMERICAN
WOMEN WRITERS' LITERATURE

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University of Nebraska, 2017

Advisor: Frances W. Kaye

My thesis project is a four-section paper exploring the topic of belonging and assimilation in the works of four indigenous women writers. Each section focuses on the autobiographical elements in the pieces of fiction or non-fiction of each author.

The first two sections are dedicated to the writers of the first half of the twentieth century—Zitkala-Ša (born Getrude Simmons; Dakota) and Pauline Johnson (Canadian Mohawk). Both were among the first female Native writers to appear visibly on the literary scene and to voice the problematic issues of living in “two worlds”—white and traditional Native American. The analyzed texts for the first two sections are Zitkala-Ša’s *American Indian Stories*, published in 1921, and Pauline Johnson’s story collection *The Moccasin Maker*, published posthumously in 1914. There will be elements of a comparative study since both authors bring up the subject of conflict between two worldview systems that have to go side by side, but do not quite sync. The elements of comparative study between the creativity of these two writers are in part implemented in the section dedicated to Emily Pauline Johnson.

The last two sections concentrate on autobiographical works of Leslie Marmon Silko and Janet Campbell Hale. In contrast with the first two authors, these two writers’ texts are strictly nonfictional and have a stronger emphasis on individual experiences. Both writers belong to the second half of the twentieth century and in their creativity more directly deals

with the intricacies of success and balance in the white world. Janet Campbell Hale's *Bloodlines* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of Spirit* are the primary texts I work with.

In general terms, I will be looking at how the rhetoric and means of expression changed for Native women writers throughout the century. The early writings aimed at attracting the Western reader to gain more understanding of Native cultures; in contrast, writers of the following decades employed a more straightforward approach in order to alter the colonialist vision of indigenous people, their outlook and traditions.

SECTION I: Zitkala-Ša and Pauline Johnson

A. Zitkala-Ša: A Struggle Towards Wholeness

Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them [sad memories] now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent to hear it.

—Zitkala-Ša

Indigenous women's voices were subdued for a long time. Before the arrival of the colonizers the native world was predominantly woman-centered. Women had power in making decisions, they stood for wisdom, they held the key to regeneration, they were well respected. The Western civilization's notions and perceptions of gender that were imposed on native people across the continents (North and South America) completely disrupted the gender balance in indigenous communities. Europeans felt threatened by the idea of gender equity, so their natural reaction was to suppress women to make them fit into the European patriarchal systems. As Paula Gunn Allen observes, one of the genocidal practices employed by the U.S. government was "the degradation of the status of women as central to the spiritual and ritual life of the tribes" (195). I turned to indigenous women writers to celebrate their creativity and to see how they worked to overcome the issues of cultural suppression, loss of tribal power and self-identification on the border of two worlds. I render the autobiographical works of the selected authors as a way to reclaim their voice through an individual work and to attempt to answer the question "How does one survive in the face of collective death?" (Allen 156).

Early Native American literature is often perceived as transformed by translation and interpretation of English speakers who published the texts using the formula "as told to."

However, the biggest transformation and break from tradition was an autobiographical genre employed by Native authors themselves. Although the oral tradition reigning in the Americas from time immemorial kept guard despite rapid settler colonialism processes and was cherished by most tribes throughout the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the twentieth, it was no longer effective in the struggle against cultural suppression by Euro-Americans. The majority of the tribal nations were confined to reservations and suffered major economic and cultural changes. The demoralizing reservation atmosphere, the prohibition against performing the traditional rites and rituals, along with aggressive politics of taking Native American children away from their families and putting them into Indian boarding schools, took their toll. People had to face the fact that the oral literature and Native languages were increasingly threatened by the Western cultures. The cultural crisis led to the search of ways to preserve what still remained, and one of the obvious solutions for cultural retention was to turn to written narratives in English.

The transition from oral storytelling to written texts was a process that involved those who, either unwillingly or by personal choice, received an education outside of the traditional society by attending an Indian boarding school, being introduced to Christianity, and experiencing the influences of Western acculturation. Those individuals could then take an advantage of an opportunity to apply their knowledge to the cause by telling a story and sharing their perspective through fiction and non-fiction available to a wider white audience. The early Native American authors primarily relied on the autobiography genre, because they saw it as the most fitting for the purpose of sharing concerns and anxiety about losing ties with Native culture and finding oneself in a world where a non-white person is more severely judged and minutely scrutinized. Among those writers were George Copway (Ojibwe, 1818-

1869), Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (Paiute, 1844-1891), and S. Alice Callahan (Creek, 1868-1894). The autobiographical element continued to be foundational in the later literary works produced by Native American writers and poets. It is worth noting that an autobiography as an account of individual experiences from an egocentric angle would not thrive in traditional Native communities, because it would be seen as rather immodest and improper to put individual experiences above communal ones. How could your life be more important, more interesting or more outstanding than continual experiences of your people and connections with the all of creation? However, in the context of cultural hybridity, the autobiography genre allowed Native writers to reveal personal views and perspectives on history, culture and traditions of one's tribe and thus offer, at least, a small oasis of cultural representation of Indian writers in an ocean of Anglo-Saxon literary dominance. Western civilization's views and assumptions pervade the discourse about the history of relations between American Indians and colonizers. By incorporating autobiographical elements into their work, Native authors could alter that discourse to present a fairer picture as well as help preserve the beliefs, dreams, songs and rituals for future generations that, perhaps, would be capable of revitalizing the culture by learning from these stories.

The focus of the first section of the thesis is on Zitkala-Ša and Pauline E. Johnson, female writers of the beginning of the twentieth century who dedicated their life to creative representations of their cultures. They managed to have their work published and draw the attention of a mainstream America that was basking in the glory of winning the Indian wars. Eager to affirm their superiority, the American public now expressed a zealous interest in everything that pertained to a worldview of a "vanishing Indian." Both Zitkala-Ša and Pauline Johnson explored how their roots and their life in the world of the white culture presented

a challenge of finding harmony within themselves. Despite being relatively known and successful in their own time, their legacy was largely overlooked. The success of the Native American Renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s signaled the surge of genuine interest in American Indian literatures with such authors as N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Louise Erdrich at the forefront. However, the importance of the earlier writers should not be overlooked. It would be fair to claim that authors like Zitkala-Ša and Pauline Johnson paved the way for contemporary authors.

Zitkala-Ša (1876-1938) is one of the first Native female authors who introduced the problematic topics of cultural hybridity and the complexity of Native culture preservation to the Euro-American audience of the first half of the twentieth century. During that period East Coast readers were exposed to the vision of Native American world almost exclusively through the lens of Euro-American writers, historians, archaeologists and ethnologists. Zitkala-Ša's white audience was accustomed to the sensationalized stories about the "Wild West" and portrayals of Native people as either evil lurking Indians disturbing the peace of white settlers or noble savages who once had been close with the land and now were gradually becoming relics of the past. This dichotomy of envisioning Indians as only vicious and treacherous or as exotic and eco-friendly created a space in which it was extremely difficult to place a rhetoric that would outweigh and ultimately replace these stereotypical perceptions. As a rule, the volumes readily available in the bookstores lacked historical accuracy and were, of course, written and published by white authors. Although readers were curious to discover a new voice, let it be a Native voice for a change, they still expected to find romanticized characters, plots and ideas sprinkled with a good amount of mysticism and

“simple poetic admonitions and aphorisms that pass as knowledge in the American intellectual cafeteria” (Deloria 250). More likely than not, Zitkala-Ša was aware of those expectations and kept them in mind while writing. They were taken into account to a degree, but she wouldn’t compromise her own artistic expression and truth to merely giving the readers what they could digest. Gary Totten points out that Zitkala-Ša clearly saw “the connection between a positive future for American Indians and their ability to take control of how they are represented in popular culture” (158).

Zitkala-Ša, born Gertrude Simmons, was raised on the Yankton Sioux reservation in South Dakota. Her mother, Ellin Tate Iyohiwin Simmons, was Dakota, and her father, whose identity remained unknown, was white. She grew up with her mother as a single parent (McClinton and Velie 413). As a youngster she was taken to the Indian boarding school in Wabash, Indiana, leaving her native land and family behind. She eventually never went back to reside in her homeland and found her niche in the “white” world, developing a career as a writer and social activist. The boarding school education became a major point of division between her tribal background and her vague position in the Western lands. In “School Days” she describes how profoundly her life was affected by her boarding school experience: “The melancholy of the black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by” (67). After an incomplete course of studies at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, she began working as a teacher at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, hoping to introduce positive changes into the system that she considered harmful. Zitkala-Ša married Raymond T. Bonnin in 1902, and they moved to a reservation in Utah. Her activism resulted in work as a correspondent for the Society of the American Indians. She later served as a liaison between the society and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington D.C.

Throughout her life she advocated for the observance of rights of Native peoples as well as cultural recognition of tribal heritage (Fisher 234).

The fact that Zitkala-Ša published her first stories in some of the most popular literary journals of the period, *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*, indicates how powerfully she made her voice heard as a female Native writer in the literary Olympus of a white patriarchal world. According to the *Encyclopedia of American Indian Literature, American Indian Stories* (1921), an autobiographical set of stories and fiction, “offer a plain, unsentimental view not only of the author’s unspoiled childhood on the plains, but also of the heart-wrenching torment of being taken, even voluntarily, as was the case with her, from that life and being schooled in the assimilationist methods of the U.S. government” (33). Although it is true that initially little Gertrude made a conscious choice to go with the missionaries to the boarding school and later regretted it, one might argue that there is a certain degree of sentimentality in Zitkala-Ša’s nostalgic manner of presenting the reservation past that might not necessarily reflect the reality as it was. Rather it created an overflow of emotions for the things that were essential for any child’s happiness, on or off reservation. For example, when she describes herself and her friends in “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” she draws an almost idyllic picture: “We shouted and whooped in the chase; laughing and calling to one another, we were like little sportive nymphs on that Dakota sea of rolling green” (23). I believe that emotionally loaded descriptions like that are employed to a greater degree to imbue her judging East-coast readers with a sense of empathy and an idea of simple universal joys that unite people of all races. The word “nymphs” appears alien in the text, because it originates in ancient Greek mythology and is absent from the traditional Dakota culture. However, this inclusion of Western culture’s discourse is understandable, considering

Zitkala-Ša's college background and her love of literature. As Ruth Spack observes, Zitkala-Sa's

translingualism reflects the way cultures and languages actually interact and engage with one another and shows how a writer can create culture and language anew. Having mastered English, she rhetorically reconstructs Native life and makes Dakota language and culture an enduring presence in American history and tradition. Having mastered Dakota, she takes ownership of its literacy, using the language not to promote Euro-American values, as the missionaries had done, but rather to reflect a Native worldview, transforming it in the process—and thus keeping it alive. (58)

This idea is closely connected with Joy Harjo's and Gloria Bird's concept of "reinventing the enemy's language." It is understood that English has become the language of expression for most Native people and led to the annihilation or oblivion of many Native languages; however, the process of survival (or "survivance" as Gerald Vizenor would put it) channels the energy into employing the colonizer's language to serve its aims: "But to speak, at whatever the cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction. In our tribal cultures the power of language to heal, to regenerate, and to create is understood. These colonizers' languages, which often usurped our own tribal languages or diminished them, now hand back emblems of our cultures, our own designs: beadwork, quills if you will. We've transformed these enemy languages" (Harjo and Bird 22).

Zitkala-Ša includes many of her early experiences in *American Indian Stories*, including the time when she had to leave the classrooms at Carlisle School to travel as a recruiter.

That meant she had to be sent out to the West to recruit new students and, therefore, was isolated from her literary surroundings, which signaled that the school authorities might have disagreed with her ways of teaching. Whatever the case, Zitkala-Ša resigned after one year in service. In “Indian Teacher Among Indians,” she points out the judgmental tone with which the young teacher is treated by a school official at the very beginning of her career: “‘Ah ha! So you are the little Indian girl who created the excitement among the college orators!’ he said, more to himself than to me. I thought I heard a subtle note of disappointment in his voice” (83). This coldness in communication with whites is recurrent in all her experiences outside of home. In spite of gaining trust and support from white educators and intellectual elite, it was quite clear for Zitkala-Ša that she was not taken seriously; in fact, she was treated like a primarily children’s books writer. Suffice it to read the “letter of appreciation” put together for her published book by Helen Keller: “I thank you for your book on Indian legends. I have read them with exquisite pleasure. Like all folk tales they mirror the child life of the world. [. . .] Your tales of birds, beasts, trees and spirits can not but hold captive the hearts of all children” (196). The condescending tone and assumption that Native life can only be perceived as the child stage of humanity certainly reflect the common ideas of the time. Native authors were supposed to write about old ways and peaceful contemplation of nature rather than analyze the damage or talk about the consequences of genocide. Assimilation helps Zitkala-Ša establish a literary career and to some extent educate American readers about Native culture, but it doesn’t make her feel as if she belongs to the white world where her artistic integrity is subtly questioned.

The three-part autobiography tells a tale of cultural split and crisis of identity. Although Zitkala-Ša voluntarily agrees to go to the boarding school and leave the “rolling sea of

green” (23) for the land of “big red apples” (47), soon she experiences all the bitterness and harshness of Eastern life. The fact that she wishes to ride “an iron horse” (47) and live among white Americans, which naturally reflects a child’s curiosity, makes her mother very sad and unsupportive of such endeavor. Despite feeling a regret that “settled heavily” (45) just after leaving home, there is no way back or a way to change what had been done. Cut off from her family, she finds her new home a spirit-clenching, oppressive place characterized by an “iron routine” (65). She misses her mother and sincerely wants to go back: “Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone west, to be nourished by my mother’s love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice” (76). But learning the English language and becoming educated in the frame of Western culture ultimately defines her destiny.

When Zitkala-Ša returns home for summer vacations, she recalls this time as “four strange summers” (69). The reason why they are strange for her is that she finds herself estranged both from her mother and her peers. Her mother “had never gone inside of a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting her daughter who could read and write” (69). Her Indian peers are civilized in a manner that makes them speak English even on the reservation as well as switch to Western clothing. Zitkala-Ša is excluded from the group for merely external features: “I could speak English almost as well as my brother, but I was not properly dressed to be taken along. I had no hat, no ribbons and no close-fitting gown. Since my return from school I had thrown away my shoes, and wore again the soft moccasins” (73). The way young people begin to discriminate against “blanket Indians” is another example of detrimental workings of assimilationist policy. We can observe how Native people

split in groups within their own community. Suddenly, an education in a Euro-American institution is considered to be superior to traditional teachings and is considered a point of division among young Native people.

When she returns home as an adult, there is still an apparent distance between Zitkala-Ša and her mother. The daughter is mostly silent, unable to establish connection with her mother, because the latter has no knowledge of how life in the East is; therefore, there is a cultural gap emerging as an obstacle in communication. At one point, the mother condemns the “palefaces” and relies on the Great Spirit’s revenge, which only irritates her daughter: “My shattered energy was unable to hold longer any faith, and I cried out desperately: ‘The Great Spirit does not care if we live or die! Let us not look for good or justice: then we shall not be disappointed!’” (92). At this point Zitkala-Ša questions Native religious beliefs since she observes how Native religious rites and ceremonies get prohibited all over the country and Christianity asserts its dominance. The disillusionment with the Ghost Dance craze and Wounded Knee massacre aftermath must have had its impact on Zitkala-Ša. Her attitude towards Christianity is complex. She doesn’t revere the Bible, and several episodes in the book indicate that Zitkala-Ša’s does not lean towards embracing Christian religion in any way. The first encounter with the Bible leaves a deep impression; at the boarding school the incompetent nuns scare children with the descriptions of devil: “Then I heard the paleface woman say that this terrible creature roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him” (63). Later, little Gertrude has nightmares and is filled with hatred towards the book that has this “evil divinity” (63) in it. The subversive act of scratching out the image of Satan in a children’s Bible reveals Zitkala-Ša’s spirit of resistance. Upon arrival home for summer vacations, Zitkala-Ša’s mother offers her daughter

an Indian Bible as a source of consolation: “I took it from her hand, for her sake; but my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother” (73). Could these difficulties in understanding each other have been overcome? Perhaps, they could once there had been peace found within herself. However, constantly walking on the wire and balancing between two cultures made it a daunting task.

Zitkala-Ša’s eloquence and literary gift allowed her to proceed with her college education. She describes her time spent at Earlham College in “School Days,” and again this decision to prolong her stay in the East goes against her mother’s wishes: “Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man’s ways, and to be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience” (76). Her interactions with peers are few and she is still somewhat of an outsider, yet she succeeds greatly in her academic endeavors. She wins an oratorical contest, to great applause. Her classmates congratulate her and are willing to make a connection; however, Zitkala-Ša prefers to be alone: “Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room” (78). Nevertheless, this enormous success marks her as an outstanding student and a progressive woman of her time. In her introductory article for *American Indian Stories*, Susan Rose Dominguez points out that, “in representing Earlham, Miss Simmons was not only the sole Native person in the state contest, she was also the only woman to speak” (Zitkala-Ša xii).

In “An Indian Teacher Among Indians,” Zitkala-Ša describes her work in the Indian boarding school, which turns out to be an upsetting experience. An atmosphere of distrust permeates the school. The isolation and lack of motivation leads to depression, and in the end she does not feel that she is able to find the balance between reasoning with school officials

and being a good teacher for the Native community. Early on she already gets a feeling that her work will be fruitless: “For a short moment my spirit laughed at my ill fortune, and I entertained the idea of exerting myself to make an improvement. But as I tossed my hat off a leaden weakness came over me, and I felt as if years of weariness lay like water-soaked logs upon me. I threw myself upon the bed, and, closing my eyes, forgot my good intention” (84). As Garry Totten observes, “through her individualized experience of loneliness, she invokes the ongoing devastation of first contact, registered by threats to land, language, and culture” (150). Though she successfully masters the English language and shows willingness to make the transition, she quickly realizes that it doesn’t pave the road to acceptance in the white world. She is still judged at the same level of prejudice. She also does not think that children in this school are in the right place, considering the sacrifice they have made leaving their land, family, and traditions behind, just to make Euro-Americans satisfied and proud of fulfilling the task of “killing the Indian, saving the man.” The weapon Zitkala-Ša uses in order to fight the injustice is the same subversive spirit she employs as a child in the boarding school. When she is ordered to mash turnips, she does it with so much ardor that the jar breaks; as a result, the turnips are not served that day: “I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me” (61). As Barbara Chiarello puts it, “by breaking the borders, shattering the container itself, she deprived her captors of both sustenance and the moral grounds for punishing her. This act of defiance can be seen as the template for reading Native American literary resistance” (22).

Zitkala-Ša actively rebels against any instance of injustice and bias when she encounters them in Western civilization, yet she grows more and more detached from her own culture and traditions. She underlines that coming back home for vacations during school years

was a good way to reconnect with the land and family but it wasn't a fulfilling experience and so she couldn't wait to leave: "a few more moons of such turmoil drove me away to the eastern school. I rode on the white man's iron steed, thinking it would bring me back to my mother in a few winters, when I should be grown tall, and there would be congenial friends awaiting me" (74). As we learn in the third part of the autobiography, this does not happen. She doesn't obtain friends, either among her tribal peers, in college in the East, or among her colleagues in the Carlisle Boarding school. The room she resides in at school is a "white-walled prison" (96) and Zitkala-Ša is just "the petrified Indian woman" (96). She is isolated both from people and nature: "For the white man's papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. [. . .] Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God" (97). She distances herself from her family and culture beyond retrieval. Her Native consciousness and spirit of resistance makes her an alien among white society. As the years go by, she turns into an alien on the reservation as well. Once immersed in Western culture, it becomes a torture to attempt making the two parts of her identity harmonize. She is caught in between two worlds that both seem to reject her. Zitkala-Ša does not offer a solution to her readers as to how this clash of cultures can be resolved, but the book reveals the important motifs (of temptation to leave for the big white world, of alienation, of cultural split, etc.) that will later appear in other Native authors' works. In her critical paper, Roumiana Velikova underlines that Zitkala-Ša sticks to the strict binary where "West and the East in her narratives also acquire the metaphorical value of relatively pure centers of Indianness and whiteness. Because Zitkala-Ša continuously represents the East and the West as distinct psychological entities,

the instances of interpenetration of the two worlds, included at strategic points in the narratives, generate acute feelings of estrangement and alienation” (54).

In a short story “The Soft-Hearted Sioux,” Zitkala-Ša questions the value of Western education within Native communities. We first encounter the main character of the story, a sixteen-year old boy, encircled by his family members in a tepee. The boy seems to be embarrassed by his grandmother asking him whether he is going to woo a pretty woman any time soon. His father instructs him to be active and brave, just like any good hunter and warrior should be, which makes him feel uneasy: “Refusing to smoke my grandmother’s pipe because my heart was too much stirred by their words, and sorely troubled with a fear lest I should disappoint them, I arose to go” (111). In the next chapter readers learn that the boy has gone to a mission school and “hunted for the soft heart of Christ” (112) for nine years. Upon his return to his tribe, he finds his father very sick and his mother burdened and altered by the years. He experiences deep regret for the differences between him and his family that now seem so vast and painfully visible: “I sat down between my father and my mother as I used to, but I did not feel at home. The place where my old grandmother used to sit was now unoccupied. With my mother I bowed my head. Alike our throats were choked and tears were streaming from our eyes; but far apart in spirit our ideas and faiths separated us” (114). He confronts the local medicine man by publicly arguing with him after his sermon, thus losing respect of tribal people, which leads to even more isolation and the feeling of being misplaced. While writing about the life of Plenty Horses, one of the first students at the Carlisle Indian Boarding School in Pennsylvania, N. Scott Momaday described the phenomenon of the trauma of not belonging to either world as a state of being “thrown away”: “To be ‘thrown away’ is to be negated, excluded, eliminated. After five years Plenty Horses had not

only failed to master the English language, he had lost some critical possession of his native tongue as well. He was therefore crippled in his speech, wounded in his intelligence. [. . .] In terms of his culture and all it held most sacred, Plenty Horses himself was thrown away” (103). Zitkala-Ša’s hero is condemned for wearing “a foreigner’s dress” (117) and not being able to provide food for his sick father. Despite refusing to hunt at first, due to his firm beliefs in non-violence, he finally goes out to search for an animal to kill, seeing that his father is in critical condition. He kills a cow from a nearest farm and cuts a lump of meat to bring to his father. When he is chased, he kills the farmer as well, trying to protect his take. However, this desperate act leads to no result: his father is already dead and the main character is sentenced to death for murder. Before the execution he ponders what awaits him; being torn between two cultures and two different religions, he does not know how to answer question that spring in his mind: “Will the loving Jesus grant me pardon and give my soul a soothing sleep? Or will my warrior father greet me and receive me as his son? Will my spirit fly upward to a happy heaven? Or shall I sink into the bottomless pit, an outcast from a God of infinite love?” (125). The education the young man received outside of his community is useless for his people and only serves as a catalyst of a spiritual crisis. The tragic fate of the main character illustrates the mishaps of many Native people who found themselves culturally and socially isolated after getting “civilized” in the white world. What is it good for to have the knowledge that your people cannot use for their needs, and most importantly, for their survival?

Dexter Fisher points out that, “controversial to the end, Gertrude Bonnin remained an enigma – a curious blend of civilized romanticism and aggressive individualism” (236); “she struggled toward a vision of wholeness in which the conflicting parts of her existence could be

reconciled” (237). One might surmise that this search for wholeness documented through her published stories marked an important vector in Native American literature: Zitkala-Ša was first to openly discuss the problem of cultural hybridity and the detrimental powers of imposed assimilation policies, as well as to explore the topics of alienation of young Native Americans unable to fit in and adjust to two contradicting cultures. Her autobiography ends with a reflection that is rather gloomy: “But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization” (99). Based on Zitkala-Ša’s own experience and impressions, it seems that the answer is obvious; however, would we ever have heard her voice if not for the Western schooling and books written in English? This spirit of contradiction and ambivalence is ingrained in Zitkala-Ša’s creativity and life.

B. Emily Pauline Johnson: Resisting the Stereotypes and Defying the System

There are those who think that they pay me a compliment in saying that I am just like a white woman. My aim, my joy, my pride is to sing the glories of my own people.

—E. Pauline Johnson

Emily Pauline Johnson (1861-1913) was a Canadian writer and performer born into a family of a Mohawk chief and an English mother. She was raised on a Six Nations Reserve in Ontario province, Canada. Her father was one quarter white so she looked more white than Indian; however, by Canadian law she belonged to Indian Nations and in her own mind she considered herself Mohawk. In terms of cultural impact, Pauline was strongly influenced by both her mother, who used to read Byron and Keats to her and her sisters, and by her father, who told stories about Hiawatha and other prominent chiefs of the Iroquois confederacy. The Iroquois confederacy was established by Hiawatha around 1600 and originally included Five Nations--the Mohawks, Senecas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Oneidas. Later, in 1722, the Tuscaroras joined and it became known as a Six Nations confederacy. After the Revolutionary War, in which the majority of warriors in these tribes supported the British, the Confederacy broke down and split. Despite the fact that some tribes supported the U.S. in the war, they were nevertheless forced to leave their native land and move to reservations. Meanwhile, the tribes that fought against the U.S., including the majority of Mohawks, decided to leave their settlements in upper New York State and move to Canada where the British government offered them to resettle as a gesture of gratitude.

Although, as a child, Pauline Johnson lived in relative luxury, she would grow to be financially dependent on her creative work later in life. Due to her father's powerful position in society and her mother's English background, she obtained an excellent education. Her father was given the name of Onwanonsyshon, or "He Who Had a Great Mansion," and it was rumored that guests in Johnson's family were served with silver and china. Pauline Johnson began writing and publishing poetry at a young age. As a grown woman, she travelled between England, Canada, and United States, giving performances and gaining connections with literary figures. She successfully performed on stage reciting her poetry while wearing traditional Mohawk attire. Gerson dwells on explaining how Johnson's stage attire choices reflected her cultural hybridity and appeal to contradictory imagery:

The resulting image dovetailed with the tremendous popularity of such attractions of the 1880s and 1890s as Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show and ethnological Aboriginal exhibits at large-scale expositions; hence it offered a dramatic contrast to the image of the upper-class lady created by her other costume, her elegant evening gown. The doubleness exemplified in Johnson's costumes effectively mirrored the multiplicity of her voices: for example, in the political realm, she both advocated the ideals associated with the British Empire and deplored the effects of colonialism. (48-49)

All her creative activity indicated that she embraced her mixed-blood heritage and was proud of her origins. She once declared that, despite her "civilized" white appearance, she was very much Native at heart: "There are those who think that they pay me a compliment in saying that I am just like a white woman. My aim, my joy, my pride is to sing the glories of my own people" (Qtd. In Keller 5). However, her romantic life was marked by

devastating relationships with men who were her managers and had a say in her career. Those relationships left her emotionally depleted and made her believe that white men were unconsciously prejudiced against women of mixed origins. At one point in her life she took a Mohawk name for herself—Tekahionwake—that belonged to her ancestor and meant “double wampum” (wampum—a string of white shell beads) or “double life.” Her own struggle towards harmony in both worlds and that of her female characters in her work advocate for such a name choice. As Margo Lukens observes, “Pauline Johnson lived with the dilemma that her own sense of values derived from an upbringing shaped largely by her mother's English culture and image and her father's choice to live mostly within that culture. Even though she was a ‘status Indian’, because of her father's acculturation she grew up amid the trap-pings of Anglo-Canadian culture” (52).

Pauline Johnson's collection of eleven short stories and one essay under the name *The Moccasin Maker* was published in 1913 after Johnson's death at the age of forty-two. The nature of the collection is autobiographical. Even when Johnson does not render events of her life, she discusses topics and themes important and familiar to her in terms of Mohawk culture and Canadian realities. Her short stories contain the portrayals of many female characters who embrace the difficulties of balancing between two worlds. Women in her short stories are always characterized by honesty and are driven by desire to be in peace with their internal instincts and beliefs. Their fortitude and resilience reflect Johnson's feminist rhetoric that she saw as a tool in challenging and defying the Canadian oppressive patriarchal system.

“My Mother” is the longest piece in the collection and consists of four chapters. At its focus is a life story of Pauline's mother, who serves as a prototype for Lydia Bestman. Through

sharing her mother's background, Johnson strives to establish the bridge between Euro-Canadian and Mohawk cultures as they inevitably have to co-exist within Canadian borders. Lydia's father, Mr. Bestman, abandons England and finds a new home in Ohio. Children in his house are treated with Victorian coldness. Lydia chooses to leave her father and stepmother and join her older sister, Elizabeth, in Canada. There she meets a young Mohawk leader, George Mansion, whose character is based on personality of Pauline Johnson's father, George Johnson. Johnson's father was a prominent chief who frequently spoke in the Parliament and advocated for Native people's rights. His attempts to stop the liquor sale and timber theft on the reservation territory made him a desirable target for criminal gangs. He believed that it was his duty to fight the forces that worked towards "the depletion of the Indian forests and the degradation of the Indian souls" (Johnson 65). As described in "My Mother," George is beaten and shot in the streets multiple times in his life, which results in serious injuries, long recoveries, and illnesses that add up and eventually lead to his death. The numerous attacks are extremely violent and are politicized. George is pursued for being the one who passionately seeks to ensure the welfare of his people: "They broke his hand and three ribs, knocked out his teeth, injured his side and head; then, seizing his pistol, shot at him, the ball fortunately not reaching a vital spot. As his senses swam he felt them drag his poor maimed body into the middle of the road, so it would appear as if horses had trampled him, then he heard them say, 'This time the devil is dead'" (81). George Mansion survives each time and manages to maintain his good humor. According to Lukens, "such an extremely idealized version of her father may have been a necessary antidote to Johnson's fear that mixed blood truly was a liability; writing 'My Mother' was her constructive response to the rage she felt against society's judgment that mixed blood was a mark of shame" (53).

Although Lydia Bestman is portrayed as a loyal wife and, generally, a quiet person, she is shown passionately defending her marriage in a conversation with her older sister. The sister is the one who never lived with Lydia, but chose to cultivate hatred and prejudices towards Indian people. Her attempt at shaming Lydia for marrying an Indian man and convincing her to cancel the wedding is unsuccessful, because Lydia knows how much she gains: “‘Yes,’ defied Lydia, “an Indian, who can give me not only a better home than this threadbare parsonage of yours”—here she swept scornful eyes about the meagre little, shabby room ‘yes, a home that any Bestman would be proud to own; but better than that,” she continued ragingly, “he has given me love—love, that you in your chilly, inhuman home sneer at, but that I have cried for” (49). Quite disappointed and painfully hurt by the fact that someone would disrespect George “because of his warm, red skin and Indian blood” (48), Lydia is now ready to confront anyone who expresses any degree of scorn or lack of respect for her future husband.

Similarly, George is stern in his decision to marry Lydia, even though it goes against his parents’ will: “His mother’s face took on the shadow of age. ‘You would marry a *white* girl?’ She exclaimed, incredulously. ‘Yes,’ came the reply, briefly, decidedly. ‘But your children, your sons and hers—they could never hold the title, never be chief’, she said, rising to her feet” (40). Lydia and George both follow the path of rebellion against prejudices and stereotypes as well as demonstrate courage and commitment to overcome difficulties in order to be together. The birth of their first baby is both a happy and sad occasion. George feels guilty for letting his parents down. The newborn baby will never inherit chieftaincy because the Mohawk descent system is strictly matrilineal: “His unfulfilled duty to his parents assailed him like a monstrous enemy, then happiness conquered, came forth a triumphant victor [. . .] Titles did not count in that moment; only Love in its tyrannical majesty reigned in that sacred room”

(61). Pauline Johnson describes the firstborn son as “a being of a new world, new nation” (62). This optimistic view of a mixed marriage and family life clearly stems from Johnson’s observation of her parents’ union. It also reflects her hope for Canada to build harmonious relationships between indigenous peoples and Euro-Americans. These relationships would be based on equality, mutual respect, and openness for a dialogue that includes multiple narratives.

Lydia becomes friends with her husband’s mother only when she comes over to visit her son who got sick after hiding in the marshes while waiting to fight timber thieves and liquor vendors. The concern for the man creates a bond between the two women, and now George’s mother is a frequent guest in their house. All the children in the family are culturally enriched by their parents and their Native grandparents: “They were taught the legends, the traditions, the culture and the etiquette of both races to which they belonged; but above all, their mother instilled into them from the very cradle that they were of their father’s people, not of hers” (69). After the second violent attack, George Mansion cannot recover this time and dies due to numerous injuries. Lydia is devastated, yet tempted to follow her husband to be reunited with him. However, she chooses to live for the sake of her youngest children and to see her “youngest daughter” grow “to be a woman” (85). Although the description of Mansion’s life is highly romanticized and because of that considerably lacking in credibility, it is aimed to show that love is able to bring together people coming from different backgrounds and that it is possible to surmount obstacles put forward by society if you truly love another person. As noted above, it also works as a metaphor of societal relationships that are free from chains of racism and prejudice. Additionally, it should be noted that Pauline Johnson, who financially depended on her performances and publications and was in

need of attracting a bigger audience, consciously relied on emotion and idealized representation of characters.

In a short story titled “A Red Girl’s Reasoning,” readers can observe a strong-willed, mixed-blood Indian woman, Christie, who marries a white man, Charlie McDonald, but leaves him when he expresses disrespect towards her people’s beliefs and traditions. Johnson shows the tension that existed between the racist white community and Native people proud of their origins. This story reveals the motif of “betrayal of a passionate woman by a fickle lover” (Gerson 55) frequent in Johnson’s fiction and poetry. Christie is a mouthpiece of Pauline Johnson’s views on what love and marriage should stand for. When asked to tell the story of her parents’ marriage, an Indian woman and a white Hudson Bay trader, Christie happily shares with the audience knowledge of her people’s customs: “There is no ceremony at all, save a feast. The two people just agree to live only with and for each other, and the man takes his wife to his home, as you do. There is no ritual to bind them; they need none; an Indian’s word was his law in those days, you know” (111). This speech shocks some of the “noble” guests at the fancy party she and her husband are invited to. People are quick to throw judgments at her. One of the guests bluntly declares that, if Charlie McDonald married her in the same manner her father did, he would “have blown his brains out to-morrow” (111). Not embarrassed by reactions of strangers, Christie feels truly betrayed when her husband appears to be ashamed by her speech and hurriedly sends her home where he scolds her for the fact that she publicly “disgraced” him (114). Christie decides to leave and justifies the separation by turning the tables and reminding Charlie of how her people were forced to suffer too much already at the hands of colonizers; they did not need to be stripped off of their marriage rituals:

Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine? According to your own words, my parents should have gone through your church ceremony as well as through an Indian contract; according to *my* words, *we* should go through an Indian contract as well as through a church marriage. If their union is illegal, so is ours. If you think my father is living in dishonor with my mother, my people will think I am living in dishonor with you. How do I know when another nation will come and conquer you as you white men conquered us? And they will have another marriage rite to perform, and they will tell us another truth.... (117)

The separation follows shortly after and the desperate husband cannot find his runaway wife for a long time. However, even when he finally finds her alone in a small house making a living by sewing and embroidery, Christie refuses to come back to Charlie, remaining irresistible to his begging and persuasion: “‘You cannot *make* me come,’ said the icy voice, ‘neither church, nor law, nor even’—and the voice softened—‘nor even love can make a slave of a red girl’” (124). The way Christie carries herself with so much dignity, self-possession and determination to stand her ground is a reflection of how Pauline Johnson might have had to act after many broken partnerships and an engagement with a white man. Romantic failures were a factor in questioning the ephemeral moments of acquired balance between Native identity and success in the white world. Despite physically appearing more white than Indian, Pauline Johnson strongly associated herself with Native women, and “the incongruity between her official Indian status and her English upbringing placed Johnson in a situation where her identity was always a question, despite its apparently being a settled issue” (Lukens 52). In a larger context the disagreement between Christie and Charlie can be seen as a clash of civilizations.

The indigenous nations' fight for keeping sovereignty and retaining culture is opposed to Canadian laws developed so that the Native people are deprived of their land, have less legal rights and voice in matters pertaining to lifestyle and religious freedom.

Early in her career Johnson demonstrated her awareness of social and political events shaping Canada. After the North-west Rebellion, she wrote a poem "Cry from an Indian Wife," which expressed solidarity with all aboriginal peoples of Canada. Among other things, the poem contained a bold message that, "by right, by birth we Indians own these lands." Rick Monture points out that this poem "is noteworthy not only for its display of anger at the violence inflicted on the Native peoples of Canada, but also because it is one of the first such pieces written from a Native perspective to a white audience" (128). Pauline Johnson is one of the first Native writers who almost fully focuses on telling stories on behalf of two minorities—women and Indians. Her portrayals of women are powerful because they show female characters undefeated, loyal to their ideologies and beliefs envisioning Johnson's feminist stand and respect for female perseverance.

Although Pauline Johnson never went to an Indian boarding school or a mission school, she was sensitive to the effect it produced on Native people. The main character of her short story "As It Was in the Beginning" is an Indian woman, Esther, who is taken away from her family and native land as a child and put in a mission school. For the fourteen years that she spends at school, she is denied the possibility of coming back and visiting her parents. There are similarities with the events described in Zitkala-Sa's autobiography. For example, the girl's mother is strongly opposed to her child's departure and is quite hostile towards the intruder who comes to preach in their tepee: "If the white man made this Blackcoat's hell, let him go to it. It is for the man who found it first. No hell for Indians, just Happy Hunting Grounds.

Blackcoat can't scare me" (145). In "Indian Childhood" Zitkala-Sa's mother attempts to persuade her daughter to stay and warn against the missionaries' "white man's lies": "Don't believe a word they say! Their words are sweet, but, my child, their deeds are bitter. You will cry for me, but they will not even soothe you" (41). The vicious effects of the boarding schools echoed in the indigenous communities for many decades and the tragedy of observing the young generations suffer was one of the biggest traumas inflicted on the indigenous nations:

For tribal elders who had witnessed the catastrophic developments of the nineteenth century—the bloody warfare, the near-extinction of the bison, the scourge of disease and starvation, the shrinking of the tribal land base, the indignities of reservation life, the invasion of missionaries and white settlers—there seemed to be no end to the cruelties perpetrated by whites. After all this, the schools. After all this, the white man had concluded that the only way to save Indians was to destroy them, that the last great Indian war should be waged against children.

(Adams 337)

In "As It Was in the Beginning," another member of the family (in Zitkala-Ša's story, it is the girl's aunt), the father, falls under the charm of Blackcoat, the white missionary, and sends his daughter to go with him: "Take the child, Blackcoat, and save her from hell" (146). The school regulations make the girl very sad and angry; not only she is forced to be far away from her environment, but she is obligated to leave behind all her habits and her people's customs. She cannot speak her native language (Cree), and she cannot wear traditional clothing: "Oh how I hated that stiff calico dress and those leather shoes!" (146). She makes friends with

Blackcoat's (or as he is called by whites—Father Paul's) nephew and grows to love him as a young woman. They confess their feelings to each other and enjoy every moment of their existence because they are happily in love. Esther overhears the conversation between her beloved and Father Paul, and to her disgust, she finds out that Father Paul disapproves of their love on account that Esther "comes of uncertain blood": "I have tried to separate her from evil pagan influences; she is the daughter of the Church; I want her to have no other parent; but you never can tell what lurks in *a caged animal that has once been wild*" (152). Interestingly, Zitkala-Ša uses an animal metaphor while describing her school impressions from how children were treated in that institution: "Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder" (56). As racist as it is, for white patrons, the Indian children are similar to savage animals, and religion is considered to be one of the ways to tame them. Esther is filled with rage: "My white father, my life-long friend who pretended to love me, to care for my happiness, was urging the man I worshipped to forget me, to marry with the factor's daughter – because of what? Of my red skin; my good, old, honest pagan mother; my confiding French-Indian father" (153).

However, even more discouraging is the truth she learns about her beloved Laurence, who entirely submits himself to his uncle's authority and agrees that having a future with Esther will be a mistake and that he must forget her. At the end of his speech, Father Paul finds yet another word to describe Esther—a snake. Esther is overwhelmed with indignation: "I hated that old mission priest as I hated his white man's hell" (153). She is also overwhelmed with jealousy: "Then there arose the image of the factor's daughter. I hated her. I hated her baby face, her yellow hair, her whitish skin" (155). Esther's rage is as vehement as her love. She takes the snake venom and kills Laurence while he is asleep (perhaps, Louise Eldrich was

inspired by this story to reproduce a similar episode in *The Plague of Doves*). Later, despite hating “the white man’s hell,” she is fearful of what might be her punishment for her deed. Although she is not taken to prison, because there is no evidence and no one can prove that she is guilty for killing Laurence, Esther thinks about the dreaded place: “I dream nightly of the horrors of the white man’s hell. Why did they teach me of it, only to fling me into it?” (156). Why would Esther be afraid of hell if her people didn’t believe in it? As Reid puts it, “her relationships with whites had brought about an alteration such that she was no longer the person she had been at the beginning. Missionary, romantic, and murderous relationships with whites were, in this instance, the constituents from which a person was recreated” (11).

Analyzing “Red Girl’s Reasoning” and “As It Was in the Beginning,” Ruoff specifies Johnson’s shift to the first-person narrative and the main character’s focus on internal thoughts rather than attempts to engage in dialogues as a more effective tool in defying the male dominance:

Esther does not engage in verbal combat with her victimizers. By the time she wrote ‘As It Was in the Beginning,’ Johnson may well have felt that debate and separation were inadequate responses to betrayal. Throughout the story Esther is essentially silent in the presence of whites. Speech becomes a white weapon to betray Esther: Lawrence’s pleas that Esther stay, and Father Paul’s persuasive arguments about why the young girl should be sent to school and why she is an unsuitable marriage partner for his nephew. Instead of having Esther state her feelings and beliefs in dialogues, Johnson has the heroine reveal these to the reader through first-person narration. (Ruoff 254)

This rhetorical move indicates Johnson's growing concern for the representation of her female characters in a manner that allows for cultivation of a strong personhood and commitment to vision of gender equality and taking pride in one's ethnic background.

Beth Piatote, in her essay discussing the topic of national belonging, points out the emblematic aspect of portraying interracial marriages in Native American literature. In her stories Pauline Johnson dwells extensively on love affairs between Native women and white men and, metaphorically, these relationships stand for the conflict between Euro-American and Native worldviews. The passionate, sacrificial love of indigenous women symbolizes the striving of Native people to embrace the white men's ways and make peace instead of cultivating animosity and aggression. Yet the economic and legal dependency along with underlying racism made the relationships unequal: "But in the laws that regulated Indian political subjectivity, these metaphors gained materiality: white men as patriarchal heads of households became the stable center through which Indian political rights could be defined and assigned. And that had very real consequences for indigenous people, whose legal personhood was imperiled through choices in love" (96). Canada established a legal way for diminishing indigenous women's rights through the Indian Acts that underlined only patriarchal and patrilineal relationships within the indigenous communities as valid: "women were recognized only through patrilineal descent or marriage in a patriarchal society - a complete abrogation of matrilineal principles of Johnson's Mohawk society and many other North American indigenous peoples" (Piatote 103). Deloria comes to the conclusion that Indian nations were doomed to have their laws ignored and sent into oblivion by the Euro-Americans due to, in most cases, their lack of formality and Western-type structures and organization: "Finding a qualitative difference between Indians and themselves, the Europeans promptly characterized the North

American people as a lawless breed devoid of the attributes of civilized society. A great many wrongs were done to Indians because non-Indians believed them to be without laws and therefore unable to make intelligent or just decisions regarding their lives” (140). The more valuable is Johnson’s choice to portray Native women who defend their right to be bound by their indigenous nation’s laws and traditions.

Speaking on behalf of women and Native Americans, Zitkala-Ša and Pauline Johnson make a tremendous step forward towards advancing Native American literature and female voices. I would argue that Zitkala-Ša’s exquisite metaphors and similes and overall mastery of the language mark her as a more skillful writer; however, Pauline Johnson’s emotional intensity, candidness in presenting her characters and determination to touch upon intercultural topics as a way to bridge two cultures distinguish her as an important writer of the period. Johnson’s vision of gender, women’s resilience and power is admirable, even more so because she discusses the topics and issues that are consciously avoided in male literature of the period. Zitkala-Ša’s acute sense of justice and shrewdness in distinguishing the fake and the genuine is something that makes it worthwhile to reread and teach her work today. These authors’ bravery to hold on to their own voice in a hostile environment of the time as female writers and ethnic minorities is truly remarkable. Gerald Vizenor in *Native Liberty* stated that the indigenous writers of that period, including Zitkala-Ša, “were by visions, words, and actions, the new warriors of survivance between the Civil War and the First World War. Their narratives of survivance have inspired many generations of natives” (83).

SECTION II: Janet Campbell Hale and Leslie Marmon Silko

A. Anguished Questions and Restless Spirit in Janet Campbell Hale's *Bloodlines*

Our ancestral land, where they [family members] were born,
but I was not, is their home; it can never be mine. I will remain,
as I have long been, estranged from the land I belong to.

–Janet Campbell Hale

The second half of the twentieth century is marked by a number of resonant events affecting Indian country. Among them are The Indian Relocation Act of 1956, the occupation of Alcatraz in 1967, the 1968 Indian Civil Rights Act which became commonly known as a “self-determination” act, the creation of American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1968, the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. The resurgence of Native American literature is accompanied by the rise of civil rights movement in the 1960s and a growing economic and political resistance from tribes. The gush of publications and literary awards for Native American authors serves as a powerful reminder that indigenous people are still here, they still inhabit the land, survive, resist, and continue the tradition of storytelling. This literary success became a part of the so-called “Native American Renaissance,” a bigger phenomenon encompassing different areas of resistance: “The term ‘renaissance’ is indeed appropriate, for like the European Renaissance of the fourteenth through the seventeenth century or the American Renaissance of the nineteenth century, the Native American Renaissance has involved changes in all aspects of life, political and material as well as cultural” (Velie and Lee 2013).

Although Native American writers and poets were widely recognized and critically acclaimed, women writers faced the same problems Zitkala-Ša and

Pauline Johnson did at the beginning of the century—the subject matter of a given fictional work by a Native American author and the nuances of the main heroes/heroines’ position/pose/opinion/lifestyle were scrutinized and judged on the matter of enough “Indian-ness” present. Surely, as a Native writer you could not write just about anything; you had to represent the image of the Indian that Western culture sought to digest. Paula Gunn Allen in her interview of 1983 shares her frustration with those who refused to publish her work, but provided a handful of commentaries that hinted on what kind of literature and what characters were expected and welcomed to be featured in a work by a Native American author:

The point is, that if I write a book that's about a media Indian—not a human being, but a media Indian—I can get it published. If my heroine walks around and says ‘Ugh’ a lot and beats the drums and is terribly romantic and wise and noble, I'll get it published. Or if she talks funny and she's very poor and browbeaten and persecuted and oppressed, I'll get *that* published. But if she's a person with a mixed bag of experiences, some good, some bad, some brutal, some ennobling, sometimes she's smart and sometimes she's really dumb—if she is that kind of person, I'm not going to get it published in any major kind of press. (qtd. In Ballinger 12)

This discouraging truth about the kind of topics that most interested the general public reflects the same narrow-minded vision of race and the unnerving demand of stereotypical identity types and situations. This demonstrated that there was little change in seeing Native Americans as solidified figures of either noble savagism or mistreated, forgotten, disgraced remnants of the “vanishing race.”

Janet Campbell Hale (1946-) is a Native American writer who was born in California and grew up in Idaho on the Coeur d’Alene reservation. Her father was a full-blood Coeur d’Alene and her mother was of mixed heritage—Kootenai, Cree, and Irish. In her creative writing Hale expresses her feelings about how her family situation and the conditions she grew up in defined her destiny. She dwells on the relationships with her abusive mother in much detail. Her mother’s own identity crisis and inability to assimilate into either an Indian environment or the white world resulted in constant relocations and troubled relationships with her husband and children. Hale’s drinking father and older siblings who shunned her as a kid did not help her much in pursuing personal growth and positive outlook. Throughout her childhood years she frequently travelled with her family from one place to another, which resulted in a fragmented education. Hale did not finish school, dropping out after eighth grade. In 1964, she got married at the age of fifteen and gave birth to a son. However, the marriage was unhappy and characterized by physical abuse inflicted on her by her white husband. The marriage ended in divorce the following year. At age eighteen she returned to formal education by attending San Francisco City College and then transferring to the University of California, Berkeley, where she received a bachelor’s degree in 1972. She received a

master's degree from the University of California, Davis, in 1984 (McClinton and Velie 155).

Hale's work is strongly influenced by her life experiences and her personal understanding of what it means to come from an impoverished community and a broken home, and experiencing various struggles caused by gender, race, and class inequalities on the way to adulthood. Her fiction and non-fiction work often explores the issues of self-identification as a Native American woman of mixed ancestry; it discusses poverty, abuse, and the condition of women in society. Hale's first published work appeared in 1972 in an anthology of poems by young Native American writers. She then published her first novel, *The Owl's Song* (1974); the book of poems *Custer Lives in Humboldt County & Other Poems* (1978); and *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* (1985), her master's thesis, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Hale published *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter* in 1993 as a collection of autobiographical essays. As Carolyn Ross Johnston outlines in her review, *Bloodlines* "is a gripping, haunting story of the personal consequences of being an Indian woman who is trying to define her identity in a white society" (212).

As an epigraph to *Bloodlines*, Hale chose a Wallace Stegner's quote from *The Law of Nature and the Dream of Man*: "The guts of any significant fiction—or autobiography—is an anguished question." In *Bloodlines* Hale poses several anguished questions that branch out into many more. The majority of pieces have her mother as the central figure. Hale attempts to explore her past and her stormy relationships with her mother, who never seemed to make an effort at being a supportive and loving parent, in order to find the roots of her alienation and an emotional pain that had been gnawing at her throughout the years. The seeds of her uprootedness lie in her family history and, largely, the history of the Coeur d'Alene people,

spiritually drained and wounded by colonial forces. In “Autobiography in Fiction,” a chapter in *Bloodlines*, Hale shares her creative vision of inspiration and close ties between fiction and autobiography that “is used as a basis for fiction” (12). She specifies that autobiography calls for rearrangement and transformation and provides a structure for thoughts, and later finds its way into fiction that “imposes order where there was none” (12): “Stories aren’t written as a series of intellectual decisions. It is an intuitive sort of thing” (11).

Patricia Penn Hilden, a mixed-blood writer, in her autobiographical work *When Nickels Were Indians*, describes the problematic paradox of an autobiography genre being an exciting exploration of self, a journey that promises to magically connect things and events in your life, and, at the same time, a cultural betrayal of unwritten Native rule not to center the stories around your persona and expose them to the outside world:

Like other native American “autobiographies” then, this work is written not only by my two selves—European-American, Native American—but also by a dozen other individuals, some related by blood, some by race, others by a friendship born from the shared experience of ‘cultural displacement’. In this sense, it is a small fragment of evidence suggesting that efforts to ‘Americanize’ tribal people have failed. In keeping with centuries of tradition, and however easily they move in the mainstreams of American life, few Native Americans make either a life, or the story of that life, alone. (3)

Hilden calls it a true “dilemma” (2), but resolves it by admitting that her own autobiographical work is, essentially, a collective effort of her family members, friends, tribesmen, the interested strangers. In this sense, Hale makes an attempt at diminishing this dilemma by plunging into her family’s history and incorporating the memories of other family members, like her daughter who seems to be less negative about the tribal community.

In “Circling Raven: An Introduction,” Hale briefly describes her family situation and presents a timeline of her life by marking the most defining events. At the very beginning Hale also gives a historical context by introducing a tribal prophecy made by Chief Circling Raven that foretold Euro-American colonization, land theft, upcoming hardships, and conversion to Catholicism. In that prediction the U.S. colonial practices and its practitioners are described as “the terrible enemy” (xv). The Catholic church, which was once welcomed among the Coeur d’Alene people, is rendered by Hale as “a cruel and efficient tool of assimilation” (xvi). Hale is mainly outraged by government-established boarding schools associated with aggressive assimilationist policies. She laments the fact that her father and his generation were forced to abandon their traditions and turn to speaking English and wearing Western clothes. The boarding school enterprise can be summarized in the words of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, who emphasized the long-lasting effects of that traumatizing experience on the communities:

The experience of generations of Native Americans in on- and off-reservation boarding schools, run by the federal government or Christian missions, contributed significantly to the family and social dysfunction still found in Native communities. Generations of child abuse, including sexual

abuse—from the founding of the first schools by missionaries in the 1830s and the federal government in 1875 until most were closed and the remaining ones reformed in the 1970s—traumatized survivors and their progeny. (212)

Hale describes her visit to the Couer d'Alene tribal school thirty-six years after she left reservation at the age of ten. During that visit she talks to students and has an opportunity to give them hope and words of encouragement. She addresses the children with words of support meant to alleviate the pressure related to cultural retention: “North America is our old country. And you, kids, you are the future of our people” (xx). She continues to stress the importance of tribal identity, family ties, and sustenance of culture and traditions within the community. However, she writes that the confession she did not venture to share with those children on that day contained a message of no lesser importance, according to Hale. She does not tell them these words in person, but she includes them in her book where she advises to count on oneself in a situation where home becomes an unsafe place:

But some of you, kids, like me and like many other people from all kinds of racial and ethnic backgrounds, don't come from families that can and will encourage and support you. Some families will, if they can, tear you down, reject you, tell you [that] you are a defective person. You could end up brokenhearted and broken-spirited.

If you come from such a family and you have no one else to turn to, then you must, for the sake of your own sanity and self-respect, break free,

venture out on your own and go far away. Then you will have to rely on yourself and what you've managed to internalize regarding strength, stamina, identity and belonging. (xxi)

Hale approaches the problem of social disorder and various challenges abounding in the Native communities that impede an individual from developing and leading a healthy lifestyle. It is known that Native communities suffer from the plague of alcoholism, physical abuse and suicide rates, accompanied by unemployment and lack of resources. The concept of historical trauma is essential to understating the contemporary reservations' state and the impact of oppression on Native American communities, resulting in an inability to maintain healthy relationships in the family and community. A heavy psychological stress and disruption due to colonization, subjugation, loss of land and resources, removal from ancestral territories, and the limitation of religious and cultural freedoms made a deep imprint upon communal memory and transformed into a historical trauma affecting all generations and all areas of psyche. According to Sotero, "secondary and subsequent generations are affected by the original trauma through various means. Extreme trauma may lead to subsequent impairments in the capacity for parenting. Physical and emotional trauma can impair genetic function and expression, which may in turn affect offspring genetically, through in utero biological adaptations, or environmentally. Evidence suggests that disorders such as mental illness, depression and PTSD can be genetically transmitted to secondary and subsequent generations" (99). Taking into account the complex effects of historical trauma on Native communities, it is logical that what fascinates and occupies Hale's mind the most is the issue of how excruciatingly difficult it is to establish healthy relationships between all family members and build life in harmony with oneself, the tribe and its location in a larger context of the

U.S. state: “The book is in part an effort to understand the pathology of the dysfunction, what made my family the way it was” (xxii).

Much of the bitterness expressed in the book comes from Hale’s unresolved conflicts with her mother and, although Hale acknowledges her mother’s occasional kind gestures towards her, like supporting her desire to adopt truthfulness and honesty in her writing, she mostly emphasizes her mother’s cruelty and lack of empathy. Hale’s mother is of a mixed-blood heritage and her life path has been fraught with poverty and need, abuse from husbands, hard physical work, declining health, and complex relationships with family members. Her first marriage to a white man turned out to be a nightmare with beatings and hate-mongering: “it was a bleak, desolate existence with that man who hated music, who it turned out, hated Indians, too, though he knew when he married Mom that her mother was an Indian” (xxiii). After getting married for the second time, now to a full-blood Indian, Hale’s mother yet again encounters physical abuse and violence. Later, Hale’s father learns to control his drinking and is a much more sympathetic figure in Hale’s eyes. Margaret, Hale’s mother, feels detached from her second husband’s tribe and does not quite assimilate into Coeur d’Alene reservation since, for most of her life, she “spoke only English and was light-skinned and lived in white society all of her life until she married my father” (xvi). The hardships and psychological traumas accumulate to affect all aspects of life and preclude from building trust and love with her youngest daughter, who is especially susceptible to the family’s dysfunction. Despite Hale’s continual, and mostly futile, attempts to reconcile with her mother, they apparently remain strangers till her mother’s last day.

The dream about a turtle that Hale relates in the concluding part of her introduction contains a message of hope and serves as a powerful metaphor for an ultimate faith in family

ties and tribal resilience and strength. In the dream Hale accidentally steps on a sea turtle while walking along the shore and mistakenly assumes that she killed it. But later she finds the turtle alive and empowered: “I come back to that place on the shore later and see that the turtle is not only alive but is no longer the size of a small rock. It has grown to a hundred times its previous size. It’s like a giant sea turtle and is very strong. I am filled with joy now. I watch as the great turtle walks into the water and swims away” (xxxix). Despite including pieces where her positive thoughts on her tribe and her family give the reader a reassuring feeling, Hale finishes with a darker vision in the last paragraph, which leaves an impression of an overwhelming alienation and loneliness: “I once longed to belong to the family I came from. Not anymore. I’m one of its broken-off pieces now” (xxxiii).

Much of what Hale shares in her introduction is discussed in the chapter “Daughter of Winter” in more detail. Her and her mother’s incessant travels as a way to escape Hale’s dad and his drinking are intermingled with unstable, low-paying jobs and stays in inadequate housing conditions. For Hale the financial hardships and lack of material possessions are of less concern than the emotional turmoil, verbal abuse, and lack of empathy she has to experience in communication with her mother. The episodes from her childhood capture the moments of solitude and isolation. At the age of seven she confronts her mother about her swearing and gets expelled from the house, left alone in the street and shattered by her mother’s unjust behavior and worrying about survival. She ends up asking for forgiveness: “I have to go home and humiliate myself as I never have before. I have to go beg my mother to take me back” (34). Another episode captures her as a ten-year-old girl who is not permitted to be inside her sister’s house while her mother is busy not paying any attention to her, so she is outside on her own. Her first menstruation occurs right at that moment and she has no one to

talk to and finds the whole situation terrifying: “Then I wish I had somewhere to go, a place of my own. A shelter of some kind. I really feel trapped . . . by my own body as well as by circumstance. There is a big woods beyond the grassy fields that stretch out behind my sister’s house. I daydream about running away and living out my life in those woods . . . as a wildwoman of the woods” (37). The motive of loneliness is recurrent in all chapters of the book. Hale attempts to inspect her mother’s life to find a solid excuse for her coldness and brusque ways of speaking and treating her youngest child. She looks into her troubled youth, her first failed marriage followed by an abandonment of her two children, her second marriage to the man who became her father and who began drinking and turned into “a vicious, brutal drunkard” (44). But she admits that it is an unattainable task to justify her mother’s anger directed at her throughout her life, because her wounds are still fresh and she is still affected by the harm that was done: “But to look with compassion requires distance and a feeling of safety . . . that you’ve gone beyond the reach of all that had harmed you way back then” (42).

One of the most peculiar episodes in the “Daughter of Winter” chapter is Hale’s attempt to relocate to Canada. Her grandmother belonged to the Kootenay, a tribe inhabiting the territories along the border of Canada and United States. With an intention to live in Vancouver, British Columbia, she prepares herself for moving in hopes to become a part of local Indian community and finally find the place she can call home. The Jay Treaty (1795) that is supposed to grant border tribes the right to have a dual citizenship is not legally recognized by Canada. Thus, in order to stay legally in Canada Hale would have to apply for a Canadian citizenship and renounce her U.S. citizenship, which she finds unacceptable. She recalls a

game between her and her father that involved her father's singing of the U.S. national anthem while little Hale was picking his pockets. The father would stand still and let his daughter rob him, because he was "so patriotic" (54), he couldn't move during the anthem. Although Hale does blame the U.S. for imposed religion and boarding schools, among other things, she remains faithful to her ideas of belonging to the United States as her native land: "Could the daughter of a man that patriotic renounce her country? I don't think so. Dual citizenship is one thing. Renouncing one's country is quite another" (54). This truly odd admiration of her father for the national anthem is transmitted to his daughter, who turns out to deem her citizenship more important than her tribal affiliation and desire to reunite with the people and the ancestral land of the Kootenay.

The motive of fragmentation and loss of wholeness is recurrent throughout the book and indicates Hale's unoptimistic vision of whether these delicate issues can be resolved. As Finnegan points out, Hale's identity is defined through her distance from her family, and this distinguishes her from other Native writers who have published their autobiographies marked by deep connection with the tribal histories and stories of revival:

This approach remains foreign to Native American personal narratives such as Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* and Simon J. Ortiz's *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land*, since autobiography "is not an indigenous form of literature for American Indian peoples" (Sands, "Indian Women's Personal Narrative" 270). Hale writes in the tradition of autobiographical individualism in order to emphasize the loneliness of her childhood and its alienating effects on her adult life. At the same time, the text chal-

lenges conventional autobiographical notions of unique and autonomous selfhood by locating Hale's individual identity within a collective context. (69-70)

Finnegan continues to note that Hale's work not only sheds light on the evils of colonialism, but strives to reimagine and enlighten the relationships between women in the family by revisiting sites of generational connection: "Hale's memoir thereby attempts to shift the center of Euroamerican, patriarchal narratives by focusing on the interconnected life stories of multiple generations of Native women (71). In contrast, Frederick Hale makes a point about Hale's deep concern with her private feelings and impressions that outweigh any attempt at analysis of socio-cultural and historical context:

Like most of her female predecessors, Hale focuses on her private life while casting only occasional glances at historical events as associative mileposts for her memory without attempting to discern the impact the latter made on her. Furthermore, like many earlier Native American autobiographers on whom Euroamerican cultural influences have been determinative, she emphasizes the centrality of personal relationships and the impact of turning points in her life on her psychological development, if in a generally haphazard way, rather than episodically relating individual achievements. (69-70)

Although I would agree with Frederick Hale that throughout the book her individual experiences are highlighted, I would argue that, in "The Only Good Indian," Hale positions her family into a bigger picture of the U.S. history with a political edge to it. She discusses racism and social injustice, as well as takes a feminist stand by refusing to admire people

who have power, but fail to see beyond appearances. Hale takes interest in her family's genealogy and makes a journey to Chicago's Newberry Library in an attempt to learn more about her mother's Irish roots and the figure of Dr. John McLoughlin, once called "The father of Oregon," an influential figure in the West. In this story she tries to make connections between generations and find her place in that intricate web of intermarriages, choices and racial tensions. As a child Hale goes to the McLoughlin house (turned into a museum) in Oregon City, accompanied by her mother. Her memories of that place and that day are vivid since that was the first time she began thinking about "bloodlines" and her relatedness to the kin. Casting a glance at the photographic portrait of Margaret McLoughlin, Dr. John McLoughlin's Indian Chippewa wife, she sees beauty and poise. In contrast, her mother primarily sees class and color by nonchalantly making a remark that Dr. McLoughlin was not ashamed of his wife:

I studied her portrait. Solemn. Sad eyes. An Indian woman. What was there about her to be ashamed of? (My mother said things like that sometimes. I didn't like it.) I resented my great-great-grandfather then, the eminent Dr. John McLoughlin, disliked him even. How dare he have such a condescending attitude toward his own wife? I resented Dr. McLoughlin as if my mother's attitudes were his. (112-113)

Hale's mother's attitudes are complex, for her judgments and discourse essentially reflect an internalized racism. Favoring her Irish blood and demeaning her Indian heritage, she lives her life suppressing the unresolved inner conflict and refusing to come to terms with her identity as a mixed-blood woman. This inability to cast away her prejudice and subtle hostility towards everything Indian greatly disturbs Hale, even as a child:

She would often instruct me on being a good Indian, the kind white people approve of (and sometimes, when I was a little older, on being the kind of woman men respect). I would feel the resentment rise in my blood. Why should I care? Why don't they worry about being the sort of person I respect? Why should I have to be the one to live up to someone else's expectations?

(113)

The concept of a "good Indian" springs from the rise of racial slurs and insulting proverbs gaining popularity in the era of Indian wars. The frontier cliché that survived well into the twentieth century, "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," is attributed to General Philip Sheridan, an ardent Indian hater. However, it was voiced not in the military circles first, but in Congress. Wolfgang Mieder mentions James Michael Cavanaugh, congressman from Montana, who in 1868 publicly expressed his contempt towards indigenous nations by describing their savagery and ridiculing those U.S. citizens who admire the "noble Indian": "I have never in my life seen a good Indian (I have seen thousands) except when I have seen a dead Indian" (42). When the expansion of the West accelerated and Americans saw a military resistance on the part of Indians who defended what was rightfully theirs, it seemed necessary to create a demonized image of an evil savage who scalps innocent settlers. Later, Colonel Richard Henry Pratt, another Civil War veteran and an Indian Wars "hero," established the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, where the main motto was "Kill the Indian, save the man." Although here the killing of the Indian is metaphorical and is meant to show how education can civilize Native people by luring them into the world of white dogmas and turning them into hard-working, law-abiding citizens, it is charged with a severe racist incentive.

Mieder succinctly summarizes the intent of such proverbs in the historical context of genocide: “Be it physical or spiritual death, Native Americans were doomed victims of perpetrators who acted in the name of manifest destiny while so-called innocent bystanders did nothing to prevent the holocaust of Native Americans” (42). These cultural formulas layered in American conscience contributed to the ongoing growth of outward and inward racism permeating the American society.

Continuing her quest for a holistic family picture, Hale expresses curiosity about Gram Sullivan, who was one-quarter white, but had a look of a “dark Indian woman,” and hated her daughter’s children from the second marriage because they looked Native. When she asks her mother why Grandmother Sullivan is mean to her, she says that she reminds her of “someone she does hate” (115). Hale’s aunts from that family line are equally repulsed by the “Indianness” of their sister’s offspring. Hale’s father instructs little Janet to carefully observe these uneducated women who make “snide remarks about Indians” (116), to learn that this is “just exactly how women should not be” (116). Gram Sullivan’s youth was spent in Spokane, “a sort of a wild-West kind of town,” where racial tension between whites and Indians was tangible. Hale notes that “even today, in Spokane, Indians pretty much keep to themselves and whites to themselves, though there are people on both sides striving for racial harmony” (119). Racial slurs were an ordinary thing in this town and all generations of women in Hale’s family undoubtedly experienced the verbal attacks. These instances of racism and sexism rouse Hale’s indignation and contribute to her alienation and desire to live elsewhere. Julia Watson justifies Hale’s overwhelming stream of depicted abuse and alienation by claiming that this is an inevitable tool the writer appeals to in order to escape the narrow or romanticized vision of self and, largely, her indigenous community in its present state:

Hale, then, practices a kind of ‘strategic essentialism’ from her position as a mixed-blood American Indian writer, educator, and mother. At the same time that she celebrates her indigenous bloodline, she acknowledges its devastating cost to American Indians in a heritage of dispossession, from colonialism to the present, that has induced internalized anger and pain. By identifying with her heritage while critiquing its deterioration and abuses in her own ‘blood’ or family history, Hale comes up against a narrative crisis: the dilemma of ‘telling’ as ‘telling on’. To celebrate her Indian identification she must also castigate it, refusing to be simply either victim or hero. (113)

Hale suspects that Gram Sullivan had felt inferior throughout her life and had tried to be as invisible as possible because she was self-conscious about her race: “Mom said she thought Gram felt inferior because she wasn’t Irish. I wonder if this was true. Did the woman who washed so much dirty Irish laundry that year her husband was disabled feel inferior because she wasn’t Irish?” (121). Hale’s grandmother refused to be accompanied on her visits to the Kootenay Valley, her home, again on the premise that she was ashamed to be seen being with her relatives and speaking Kootenay. In the course of her investigation at the Newberry Library of Chicago, Hale finds out that her great-grandfather, Gram Sullivan’s father, David McLoughlin, who “went native” and married an Indian woman, was invited to a ceremony in Portland honoring his father. They singled out David as the most white-looking sur-

viving member of the family, but they treated him with much scorn and pity because choosing an Indian lifestyle over many privileges of Western civilization was considered an act of a tremendous retrogression: “They believed David had ‘thrown himself away’ because he’d chosen to live as an Indian. ‘Don’t go, Great-grandpa,’ I would have said had I been there. ‘Don’t do it. They’re going to bring you all that way and dress you up in some stupid white man’s suit and make a big deal out of the few cents they paid for it’” (135). Another revelation comes when Hale discovers an account about two young women who came to Portland in search of work years earlier to the McLoughlin honoring. She recognizes Gram Sullivan and her sister in them. The account ungracefully concludes that the women left soon after arriving since, because of their “unpresentable appearance,” they would only be able to count on menial jobs. Hale imagines that her grandmother was well aware of Dr. McLoughlin’s kindness, as he was very generous with helping newcomers settle in Oregon by loaning livestock and lending money, but the kindness she expected to persist in his successors was denied to her and her sister.

The essay ends with a powerful episode from Hale’s childhood that she recalls in connection with Gram Sullivan’s self-hatred. When little Hale attends a catholic elementary school in Omak, she finds herself estranged from her peers during playtime: “Nobody would hold my hand. They refused to touch my brown Indian hands. Even when the nuns tried to make them. I went home after school and filled a white enamel basin with water, then poured a cup of Purex bleach into it and soaked my hands. For a long time. As long as I could. My hateful brown hands. I hoped and prayed I could make them white. That I could make myself acceptable enough” (140). This heart-breaking confession is the most vivid example of the scale of her trauma’s emotional intensity that Hale linked with Gram Sullivan’s internalized

racism. Hale muses whether the rejection experienced in Portland made Gram Sullivan enter upon the path of hating her Indian-ness: “What did Gram think of, way back then, when she looked at me? At my Indian face, which was rather like her own? Did she remember the trip she and her sister made to Portland in 1895 ‘seeking employment’ (as the Historical Society woman put it) ‘and escape from their unenviable surroundings,’ which they did not succeed in getting because they were too dark? Their Indian blood. Their Indian looks. No escape. Not then. Not yet. Who did I remind Gram of if not herself?” (140).

The essay “Dust to Dust” adds the finishing touch to the collection. Hale shares her memories of revisiting the Coeur d’Alene reservation with her daughter and her desire to ensure that her children embrace their tribal identity. She fishes out the happy moments of her childhood, such as playing with frogs who would not be afraid of her or bedtime coyote stories told by her father and her uncle, or her infatuation with Elvis Presley. But, as Hale admits, she designed her stories to show the few truly joyful episodes and “stitched together a happy childhood” by creating “an expurgated version” and smoothing off “the rough edges” (169). Nevertheless, she admits that this trip as an act of passing down the stories marked an important moment of reconnection: “I have so little to pass down to my daughter, it seems. Just the stories, the history, who we came from: we are of the Salish People, the Coeur d’Alene tribe, and this is our country. The first ancestor whose name we know was a man born in about 1820, and his name was Colemannée, which translates as Dust” (186). Thus, the meaning of the essay’s title acquires an additional meaning. Hale comes to the land where her family clan originated, where her ancestors lay buried, and where, eventually, she, actively refusing to live there all her life, or her children might come to join them for the journey into another world: Dust (Colemannée/Campbell) to dust.

Critics differ in opinions on the artistic value of Hale's autobiographical work. Some point out that the lack of organization and structure took away from the generally positive impressions from the book, while admitting that *Bloodlines* "vividly reflects the bicultural matrix in which it was conceived" (Hale 79). Others praise Hale's resilience reflected in her work and call her "an outstanding novelist who has fulfilled her childhood drive to write with intensity, clarity and honesty" (Johnston 212). Despite Hale's confession that in some ways she can never make peace with her past and that she would always remain "estranged from the land" (185), the ancestral land that her family belongs to, her stories "reframe the past within a narrative of continuity and hope" (Finnegan 83). Moreover, her creativity "calls for new, hybrid stories linking the collective past to personal histories that reinterpret its seeming defeats" (Watson 131).

A. Leslie Marmon Silko: Cultural Hybridity

We are sisters and brothers, clanspeople of all the living beings around us. The plants, the birds, fish, clouds, water, even the clay—they all are related to us.

—Leslie Marmon Silko

Leslie Marmon Silko (1948-) is one of the leading Native American writers of the second half of the twentieth century. Silko is of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican and European ancestry. She grew up on the Laguna reservation in New Mexico, nourished by Laguna Pueblo stories told by the elders and female members of the family—grandmothers and aunts. Silko attended Catholic school in Albuquerque and then earned a B.A. from the University of New Mexico. In 1969 she published her first short story, “The Man to Send Rain Clouds,” in the *New Mexico Quarterly*. Silko has two sons from two marriages that ended in divorce. Silko’s early published stories; her poems are collected in her first book, *Laguna Woman*, in 1974. Her first novel, *Ceremony* (1977), is among the most critically acclaimed of all Native American novels. Her second novel, *Almanac of the Dead* appeared in 1991 and her most recent one, *Garden in the Dunes*, in 1999.

Silko’s creativity is very much concerned with and inspired by the life of her Laguna Pueblo people. In an interview with Per Seyersted, Silko talks about her childhood and a different vision of gender that was never a cornerstone in her community where men and women were equally involved in all kinds of activities and experiences. This benevolent community atmosphere of no stigma imposed on genders seems to be an important point to consider while assessing Silko’s creativity:

[W]hen I was growing up I never thought of myself as having any sort of gender one way or the other. I mean, certainly I was aware that I was a girl, but if you've noticed my grandmother, she is in and out and she is seventy-four—when she was growing up she was a Model A mechanic, and even now, my uncle has a coin-operated laundry here and she fixes those machines and she carries heavy things. So she was there when I was growing up, and my father had three daughters, I was the oldest, and my father made no connections between the fact that we were daughters and not sons. He took me deer-hunting when I was seven years old, and then when I was a little girl I can remember when the crews would come to plaster the house, that they were women. The people who plaster the houses here traditionally have always been women, men do not plaster houses. [. . .] I realized I was a girl, but I never saw that one's experiences or one's activities had to—either in my own family or just around me—I never made the connection that because of one's sex one would be limited to certain kinds of experiences. (19)

Leslie Marmon Silko's autobiographical collection of essays *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* was published in 1996. It reveals an author's deep connection with Laguna Pueblo culture and an active involvement in the dialogue about the state of Indian Country today in the context of postcolonial reality. Silko's writing seems to be informed by inspired confidence and genuine respect for the resilience of Laguna culture, which positively impacts her vision of belonging and self-awareness. Silko's family supported her cultural and spiritual awareness through storytelling, freedom of expression, and living the life

of harmonious interrelationships with the land and animal world. Yet Silko's political poignancy stems from her acute sense of social injustice and active disagreement with the U.S. government's continual policies directed against indigenous people and their rights. She skillfully balances the discontent and anger caused by the instances of racism on the personal and state level with the conscious realization of the strength of tribal communities that have been able to survive the calamities of colonial and postcolonial drives to deceive and destroy.

Although Silko identifies herself as a mixed-blood and emphasizes her borderline position, which appears to be obvious to the people outside of the Laguna Pueblo environment and for Indians with a colonized consciousness, she seems to find her "Indian-ness" not to be a liability in the white world she is a part of by blood and by her active role as a writer, educator, speaker and traveler. In an autobiographical note Silko confesses that her half-breed identity is an important factor in her perception of the world. It augments her concern with the issue of belonging since the Western and Traditional Indian systems seem to resist effective communication: "I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed, or mixed-blooded person; what it is to grow up neither white or fully traditional Indian. It is for this reason that I hesitate to say that I am representative of Indian poets or Indian people. I am only one human being, one Laguna woman" (197). As a representative of neither cultures, she sees the conflict between white and Indian cultures as extremely dangerous for its tendency to traumatize individuals by distorting reality and violating inner peace, followed by bitterness, misunderstandings, instances of racism, bigotry, misogyny, etc. Disturbed by the question of balance between the Western idea of individuality and Native notions of community engagement, cooperation, and survival, she nevertheless clearly

defines herself as a “Laguna woman” without definitely rejecting her European ancestral heritage or Western influences. Her profound understanding of Laguna culture and her Western education, along with an appeal to the white English-speaking audience, are not contradictory. As Lynn Domina notes, Silko writes in a trickster way that gives her an ability to move freely along the borders and sides of her personality and, thus, to write across the “Laguna-white hyphen”: “Such a hyphen asserts that a person is neither absolutely Laguna nor absolutely white, yet it also functions as a fulcrum, permitting a shift from one to the other, especially when identity is perceived through cultural performance rather than physical appearance” (46).

Silko diligently takes note of racial tensions and the kind of transformations that take place in her Pueblo community, which is being infiltrated with ideas of the divisions between white and Indian, women and men, beautiful and ugly, dignity and shame, etc.: “Younger people, people my parents’ age, seemed to look at the world in a more modern way. The modern way included racism. My physical appearance seemed not to matter to the old-time people. They looked at the world very differently; a person’s appearance and possessions did not matter nearly as much as a person’s behavior” (“Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit” 61). In several different autobiographical essays in the book, Silko recalls the same painful memory from her childhood in which a man from a tourist group motions to her to stay out of the photograph, wishing to depict only Indian children: “I felt so embarrassed that I wanted to disappear. My classmates were puzzled by the tourists’ behavior, but I knew the tourists didn’t want me in their snapshot because I looked different, because I was part white” (63). This episode illustrates the immaturity of an American public still seeking to look at other ethnicities within the U.S. as alien and exotic, unable to see people and living

creatures as indigenous to the Americas, and therefore rightfully in their place. Silko also gives an example of racism directed at her Euro-American ancestors, who, by becoming associated with an Indian world, are turned into renegades and transferred to the “subhuman” group by whites:

My great-grandfather endured the epithet Squaw Man. Once when he and two of his young sons (my Grandpa Hank and his brother Frank) walked through the lobby of Albuquerque’s only hotel to reach the café inside, the hotel manager stopped my great-grandfather. He told my great-grandfather that he was welcome to walk through the lobby, but when he had Indians with him, he should use the back door. My great-grandfather informed him that the “Indians” were his sons, and then he left and never went into the hotel again. (104-105)

However, the reader can notice that these harmful instances of racism are always performed by outsiders, while Laguna culture provides a “safe space” for co-existence of Indians, whites and mixed-bloods. The Laguna culture, at least as Silko portrays it, is based on seeking an existence that is inclusive and appreciative of all the links that there are between the land, animal and plant life, and humans. This quality allowed them to embrace the change brought with the Spaniards and later Americans, and to endure all subsequent perturbations with dignity and grace: “The old-time people were very secure in themselves and their identity; and thus they were able to appreciate differences and to even marvel at personal idiosyncrasies so long as no one and nothing was being harmed” (103). Any strange person with a different color was welcomed in Pueblo culture without prejudice and was looked at and

judged in accordance with their actions and attitude. Any white people could join the community as long as they were respectful, friendly, and willing to bring in useful and positive cultural exchange.

This inclusiveness and open-mindedness of Laguna culture instilled the kind of values Silko draws strength and knowledge from. The many stories that are at the heart of any Laguna family unit are an eternal source of moral support, consolation, and encouragement. Silko explains how storytelling constitutes an act of sharing stories that have been a part of individual or group experiences for centuries and affected them, thus illustrating the connection between all human beings and the commonality of either positive or negative events: “Keeping track of all the stories within the community gives us all a certain distance, a useful perspective that brings incidents to a level we can deal with. If others have done it before, it cannot be so terrible. If others have endured, so can we” (52). The ability to see that others rejoice and suffer in the same ways you do is an active component in healing the historical trauma and giving direction in one’s path to recovery and mental health. Recent studies affirm that “storytelling, reminiscing, remembering, and memorializing are traditional, mind-oriented interventions that can engender wellness by selectively emphasizing certain experiences, values, and feelings. For instance, reminiscing about past events in which problems were successfully overcome can help bring harmony to the mind by instilling hope that present difficulties can be overcome” (Hodge, Limb, and Cross 216).

One of the most influential figures of cultural and religious importance of Laguna Pueblo featured in the book (and as reflected in the title) is Yellow Woman or Kochininako. The stories about Kochininako are solid layers in the cultural foundation of the Laguna Pueblo. These stories contain lessons about the advantages of a non-aggressive approach to

life, as well as of the cultivation of empathy and employing wit and humor. Kochininako helps her people by being smart, caring and full of passion: “her triumph is achieved by her sensuality, not through violence and destruction” (72). The female power of Kochininako is deeply respected among the Laguna Pueblo and these myths create narratives that are inherently pacifist, feminist, and accepting of complex identities and differences between individuals: “The stories about Kochininako made me aware that sometimes an individual must act despite disapproval, or concern for appearances or what others may say. From *Yellow Woman’s* adventures, I learned to be comfortable with my differences” (71).

It is interesting to note how Silko sees the interactions of Euro-Americans and Native people throughout the colonization period and the consequences of their mutual influences. In an interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko articulates the idea of the propensity of the American soil to synthesize all incoming cultures and religions to create an ultimate American experience in which the transformation is inevitable:

That's what happens in the Americas, because it's all inclusive, it excludes nothing. You come here, you'll never be the same again. You'll be taken in and churned around, and what comes out is American. I don't care if it came in European, or it came in Chinese, it comes out American. It's changed by being on this very soil, on this continent.

In Peru and in Mexico, right away the folks started doing that. That's what the *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* is about too. It just freaks out the Europeans, because the Europeans, and a lot of cultures, are so exclusive and want to keep things pure. [. . .] They [Europeans] weren't here long, and they had to see

their Jesus, their Mary, their Joseph, their saints, go native, just like that. And they couldn't stop it. (25)

Unlike Deloria, a renowned Lakota Sioux historian and theologian, Silko does not establish a strict binary by distinguishing between American/Western/Anglo-Saxon and Native American/Indigenous worlds. The very fact that colonizers, invaders and immigrants live on Native lands accounts for their gradual conversion to an American cultural code, which, first and foremost, dwells on Native traditions and origin stories. "American" here is definitely indigenous American. Silko's view can be characterized as hopeful; meanwhile Deloria has a much grimmer idea of the religious experiences in the Americas. He places in question the whole future of tribal religions as he underlines the dimensions of the irreversible damage the colonial policies have produced over the centuries. However, he is careful to leave some hope:

When the old circles or hoops of life were broken, thousands of years ago for most non-Indians and a century ago for most Indians, the possibility of recapturing that original sense of awe and respect was lost and could not be recovered. [. . .] The remaining ceremonies and traditional practitioners may well serve as focal points around which people can someday rally and renew themselves. (267)

For Silko, it seems, those traditions are very much alive and are not separate from the contemporary American reality. She believes that the resilience of traditional beliefs has a power that goes beyond the ways we think about it. For example, when she drives past the Pasqua Yaqui village near Tuscon, she admires the Yaqui people's retained sense of community, despite the relocation from their original tribal lands and many losses along the way.

For them there was no delay in renewal, there was no suffocation of their culture or its temporary abandonment, because the culture never ceased to be nurtured by traditional beliefs and rituals, despite the genocidal attacks from without. People found home in the new land and the land received the spiritual heritage of the Yaquis as natural and fitting: “The presence of the Yaqui people and their Yaqui universe with all the spirit beings have consecrated this place; amid all the clamor and pollution of Tuscon, this is home” (89).

Deloria argues that Indian nations and non-Native invaders “have failed to communicate with each other. Both systems of thought and behavior are exclusive of the other. [. . .] When either system of thought is confronted with the other, it must begin to adopt the characteristics of the other or reject it out of hand” (133). Although this is true for many tribes, we must observe that Silko’s family example is more positive in the sense that her white and Laguna ancestors lived in relative harmony and were able to avoid abuse and violence. Silko admits that what could be crucial to that prevailing healthy environment among the Laguna is the fact that the Pueblos were lucky to inhabit the same land for centuries and were not forced to leave their ancestral lands for the completely different regions, often barren and with harsh climates, like many other tribes were. For instance, the Lakota, who were among the most active warriors in the era of Indian wars, were confined to reservations, as well as deprived of hunting and free travel opportunities. The Mohawks were shunned from their settlements in the East; they split into groups and got scattered over the territories of Canada and the U.S.

Where Silko and Deloria find themselves in complete agreement is their attitude towards Christianity as one of the most oppressive forces in Native America. Deloria goes as far as to assert that “Christianity is the chief evil ever to have been loosed on the planet”

(146). Silko is also very sensitive to this topic, because the missionaries and boarding schools with Christian teachers deprived her community of its native language proficiency and were responsible for denigrating indigenous cultures: “Because our family was such a mixture of Indian, Mexican, and white, I was acutely aware of the inherent conflicts between Indian and white, old-time beliefs and Christianity. But from the start, I had no use for Christianity because the Christians made up so many terrible lies about Indian people that it was clear to me they would lie about other matters also” (17).

In another autobiographical work *The Turquoise Ledge*, Silko underlines the importance of Native languages in keeping the Earth in balance. Even though she heard most Pueblo stories in English, she conveys the idea of the colonizer’s language being influenced by Native sounds, names and meanings. Moreover, she believes that, on a global level and in the face of universal threats, indigenous languages of the Americas will revive and thrive when it comes of survival after drastic changes that might require people to unite: “Linguistic diversity is integral to the cultural diversity that ensures some humans will survive in the event of one of the periodic global catastrophes. Local indigenous languages hold the keys to survival because they contain the nouns, the names of the plants, insects, birds and mammals important locally to human survival” (46). This faith in Native languages is inspiring, considering the widespread fear that in several decades most indigenous languages will disappear without trace. Moreover, in *Yellow Woman*, Silko claims that storytelling, with its innate quality for creating an infinite cycle, “represents an important contribution to the English language” (50).

Silko’s anger is expressed each and every time she discusses major U.S. institutions and structures, such as the legal system, for example, which she believes “was designed by

and for feudal lords” (20). After enrolling in law school and observing the inner workings of the system, she comes to a realization that justice is delivered selectively and is mostly accessible to the wealthy and above attainment for those in real need of it. As a stark example of this, her tribe was left with a debt to lawyers after years of fighting in court for the land that was stolen by the U.S. government. Silko is rather straightforward in her evaluation of the damage that has been done to indigenous peoples and she is not afraid to be vehement in calling it like it is: “For American Indians, injustice has been institutional and is administered by federal and state governments. In this regard, the United States is not so different from the racist governments of South Africa and the former Rhodesia” (78). The dominant discourse often evades an honest conversation about the systematic oppression and continual genocide of indigenous peoples; the more valuable is Silko’s conscious choice to challenge such historical narratives. Susan Miller, a Native historian, outlines the situation by pointing out the popular cop-outs:

The United States has always stood in a colonial relation to the tribes. American historians tend to discuss this fact euphemistically, if at all. They no longer claim that the abuse of tribal peoples was necessary because the tribes ‘got in the way of Progress,’ and many have moved on from the simplistic and not so subtly racist explanation that the tribes lost a ‘conflict of cultures’. Conventionally American historians characterize U.S. violations of the nation-to-nation relationship with tribes as ‘tragic’ or (contrary to dictionary definitions)

‘ironic’ and often take shelter in the passive voice, which permits one to say that ‘a wrong was done’ without naming the culprit. (14)

By allowing an informed anger into the narrative, Silko demonstrates her readiness to battle prevailing assumptions and attitudes. And she feels strong and confident enough to do so. Audre Lorde, an African American poet and writer, feminist and civil rights activist, makes a valid point, justifying and encouraging this kind of anger directed against racial inequality and injustice: “Any discussion among women about racism must include the recognition and the use of anger. This discussion must be direct and creative because it is crucial. We cannot allow our fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty” (128).

However, it should be noted that Silko understands that the history of injustice is made possible through acts of hatred, cruelty and betrayal performed by both sides—white and Indian. In an interview with Per Seyersted, Silko warns that passionately blaming only one side is erroneous and leads to delusion and isolation: “Radical Indian politicians like to say, ‘Well, it’s all white people’s fault, you know, we didn’t do any of this.’ That’s such a simplistic view, because from the very beginning, the betrayals of our people occurred through deeply complicated convergences of intentions and world views” (33). This understanding of the dangers of taking one side only reveals Silko’s awareness and insight into the complexity of transcultural narratives that imbue the literary space.

Is Silko comfortable with her identity? Does she find strength in balancing two worlds, in balancing her white and Indian sides? Irrespective of the answer to these questions, it is undeniable that Silko's cultural hybridity plays a significant role in her literary contributions that by their nature create a dialogue between whites and Indians as well as raise awareness in the whitestream society about indigenous people's survival. Her autobiographical work exposes the wounds that need to be healed as well as reveals narratives inspired by the stories that have already proven to be medicines, solution providers, and important reminders of lessons of humility, mutual respect, and spiritual power.

Janet Campbell Hale and Leslie Marmon Silko's autobiographical works present almost opposite stories of belonging. Hale puts at the center of her work her deeply personal issues (family dysfunction and fragmentation, for example) and explores the family dramas that in many ways defined her destiny, while casting only occasional glances at the problems of racism, misogyny, interrelationships between Native communities and the bigger U.S. system, history of genocide on the North American continent, etc. Meanwhile, Silko, although not strictly defining herself as Native or white, appears to be comfortable with her family and tribe history and the goals that she chose to pursue in life, which permitted her to be more active and involved in discussing political events, statements, movements and their meaning, ecological issues, historical nuances, artistic and spiritual value of the living world, such as stones and snakes. Silko definitely comes across as a more distinguished writer and more consistent in her writing, despite her tendency to repeat certain stories in a number of her autobiographical essays. Hale's *Bloodlines* at times lack the harmonic flow and contain several incomplete sentences and timeline inconsistencies, which precludes the reader from following the storyline smoothly. Silko's Laguna Pueblo heritage appears to be an enormous source

of psychological and emotional support through the tradition of storytelling and the strength of community ties. Hale's Coeur d'Alene origins are the catalyst of the intricate web of broken destinies and family tragedies. The weight of the twentieth century's rapid transgressions and transformations further distorting the relationships between Native people and the outside U.S. world, the growing issues of isolation, loneliness, and the growing value of individualism in the Western society greatly influence the creativity of these authors and leave their imprint on their exploration of self and the ways they write their autobiographical pieces.

All four women writers discussed in this paper are mixedblood authors who have been compelled to delve into the issues of transculturalism. Even though not all readily identify themselves as only Native American writers, they appear so to the Euroamerican public and their voices are bound to tell the stories of "internalized transculturation" (Owens 46) and constant border crossing. Gloria Anzaldúa, in her groundbreaking *Borderlands /La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), introduced the concept of borderlands—a geographical, emotional and metaphorical space in which two or more cultures collide and the minority group is forced to balance existence by incorporating both cultures and overcoming a tremendous pressure of living up to the expectations imposed by the colonizer. Victoria Bomberry notes that often Anzaldúa's concept of crossing the borders is simplified to the understanding of borderlands as merely a state of "being caught between two cultures": "This fails to capture the dynamic interplay between cultures, subjectivity, and the agency required to successfully negotiate a complex set of circumstances located in ethnicity, race, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality. Caught between two cultures implies a kind of paralysis and an inability to act in any meaningful way in either culture" (21). In this line of reasoning, it is important to study the creativity of these Native women writers who, despite touching upon problems of

periodical “paralysis,” are prominent voices, active trespassers of borders and challengers of the dominant cultures. In “Shadow Survivance,” Gerald Vizenor celebrates the state of contemporary American Indian autobiographical literature and its crossblood representatives, who, essentially, move it forward and away from oppressive stereotypes: “Native American Indian authors have secured the rich memories of tribal generations on this continent; the diverse narratives of these crossblood authors would uncover the creative humor of survivance and tribal counterpoise to the literature of dominance. These autobiographical essays would overcome the racialism of discoveries and the romanticism of tribal cultures” (95). In her book *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna Pueblo poet and literary critic, effectively explains what makes Native authors maintain resilience and develop the literary tradition that has always been bolstered up by Indian philosophies and spiritual knowledge and inspired the generations of indigenous writers and poets:

Indians are remarkably resilient, and their ways are remarkably durable. And while the white government and churches have made it their business for centuries to assimilate Indians into American life, Indian values, perceptions, and understandings have clung tenaciously to life, informing the work of writers and artists as they inform the lives of all Indian people in the United States today. Certainly, our ancient bond to the land and to the spirit world is in large part responsible for this tenacity, and the strength of spirit presence speaks powerfully in all the works of contemporary American Indian writers.

(183)

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