

Humour, Intersubjectivity, and Indigenous Female Intellectual Tradition in Anahareo's *Devil in Deerskins*

It is the spring of 1926 in Doucet, northern Quebec. The trappers are coming into town to present their furs to the local buyer at the general store. Among them, nineteen-year-old Gertrude Bernard makes her first appearance in town following her inaugural winter alone in the bush with her trapper boyfriend, who is eighteen years her senior. Gertie is anticipating “much fun and frolic” after the solitude of camp life (Anahareo, *Devil in Deerskins* 59). But her reputation as a woman living with her lover has preceded her, and she is “given the icy shoulder” at the town’s celebrations because of her unmarried living arrangements (60). To show her “contempt” for the judgmental townspeople, Gertie retreats to her hotel room and decides to get drunk for the first time (60). What ensues is a humorous account of Gertie’s first experience of becoming, as she says, “completely ‘swacked’” (60). The whisky, or “liquid fire,” “just refus[es] to pour down” her throat (60). “[W]ith the determination worthy of a better cause,” she manages to down the bottle only to find she cannot tell everyone “to go to hell” because her “equilibrium [has gone] haywire” (60). She sees her “bed rise ceilingward” and she is left hanging onto the blankets for dear life (60). Finally, Gertie comes up with a brilliant drunken plan to get her hands on her boyfriend’s gun and “sh-shoot the works” (61). Luckily her boyfriend is unco-operative and, joking about how difficult it would be to dispose of so many bodies when you live on bedrock, he kills time until Gertie passes out. The next morning, Gertie bemoans what she deems the “physical wretchedness” of a hangover and the “mental and spiritual suffering” of morning-after shame (61). If this weren’t enough, Gertie fights with her boyfriend, who annoyingly

insists she either marry him or return to her father's home. Fed up with her limited options, Gertie grabs a hunting knife and stabs him in the arm. Upon seeing blood, Gertie "be[comes] hysterical, running and screaming from tree to tree" (62). She spends the next days in dejection, fearing for her boyfriend's safety in her presence, and agreeing with a townsman who declares she "ought to be shot" (62).

How do we read this episode of comic drunkenness from Mohawk (Kanien'kehaka) writer and conservationist Anahareo's 1972 autobiography *Devil in Deerskins* about her life with legendary conservationist, writer, Englishman, and Indigenous impersonator Archibald Belaney, more commonly known as Grey Owl?¹ A reader familiar with the stories of Anahareo and Grey Owl cannot miss the darker side of what Sophie McCall calls Anahareo's characteristic "deadpan humour" and "impeccable" comedic timing (202). Both Anahareo and Grey Owl struggled with alcoholism, and Anahareo lost custody of her daughter because of public attitudes and law enforcement that discriminated against unmarried Indigenous mothers (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 161). More broadly, Indigenous communities continue to struggle with alcoholism and violence as part of a colonial legacy. Why, then, does a woman who "openly reject[ed] or quietly ignor[ed] [the] prevailing images" and negative stereotypes of Indigenous women include this episode of a drunk and violent younger self in her autobiography (Gleeson, "Blazing" 287-89)? And how might contemporary readers reconcile Anahareo's legacy as a trailblazer known for being fiercely independent and counter-cultural with her own descriptions of her younger self as extremely naive and, at times, conforming to the media's Romantic image of her relationship with Grey Owl?²

To take a closer look at these questions, this article considers *Devil in Deerskins* and its reception alongside recent theories about Grey Owl as persona, the history of literary and media depictions of Anahareo, autobiographical theory, the generic expectations of Romantic nationalist reading practices, and Deanna Reder's call to read Indigenous autobiography as nation-based intellectual production. I view Anahareo's text as both contesting and capitalizing on her Romantic public image popularized through the works of and about Grey Owl. I suggest that Anahareo deliberately uses humour to engage with and refute the dominant literary depictions of Indigenous women and, in the process, models an Indigenous female intellectual tradition of autobiographical self-representation. My reading is prompted by the 2014 reissue of the text. As the inaugural

publication in the University of Manitoba Press' First Voices, First Texts series, which "aims to reconnect contemporary readers with some of the most important Aboriginal literature of the past" (Cariou), the 2014 critical edition of the original *Devil in Deerskins* contains few changes. However, editor Sophie McCall's afterword frames Anahareo's text as an "underrecognized narrative of Indigenous history in Canada" (190), and the inclusion of forewords by Anahareo's daughters emphasizes a female family lineage.

Though Grey Owl's writings and filmography made Anahareo famous, the 2014 edition of *Devil in Deerskins* and Kristin Gleeson's biography *Anahareo: A Wilderness Spirit* (2012) provide more information about her life. Anahareo, née Gertrude Bernard, grew up in Mattawa, Ontario, with her non-status, off-reserve Mohawk/Algonquin family. Both the tutelage of her grandmother, who practiced Catholicism while carrying on traditional Mohawk and Algonquin ways of life (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 6), and the supervision of a domineering aunt influenced Anahareo's rebellious life choices. According to McCall, Anahareo's family situation meant that her understanding of her Indigenous identity was "based not so much on her connection with a single land-based community, but more on the stories, skills, and a sense of history passed down to her from her grandmother" (192). At that time, Mattawa was segregated by race, with most of the Indigenous families (though not her own) living in what was degradingly dubbed "Squaw Valley" (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 9). Gleeson depicts an adolescent Anahareo who defies the race and gender norms of her religious middle-class town (*Anahareo* 8-11). In 1925, at the age of eighteen, "Gertie," as she was called, met "Archie" at Camp Wabikon, where she was working for the summer. In February 1926, she accepted his invitation to visit his bush camp. Though she intended a short visit, she would not return to Mattawa for nearly thirty years (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 202). Anahareo's family, in particular her sister Johanna, disapproved (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 22); it was a choice that would affect Anahareo's relationship with her family for decades.

Anahareo's chosen partner, Grey Owl, remains a controversial figure. His world-renowned lectures, articles, and books about animal rights and wildlife preservation changed the face of conservationism in Canada. Arriving in Canada from England at the age of eighteen, Archie learned to survive in the bush from trapper Bill Guppy, but he acquired Anishinaabe language, skills, and cultural knowledge from his first wife, Angele Egwuna, and her Bear Island community. He continued to explore Indigenous worldviews through

trapper friends and the Espaniel family (Anishinaabe) who took him in when he returned from the First World War. With his newfound knowledge and a flair for satisfying the popular thirst for Romantic depictions of the Canadian wilderness, Grey Owl would use his adopted (but widely assumed to be “authentic”) Indigenous identity to passionately convey his conservationist message. Upon his death, the revelation of his English heritage threatened to overshadow his life’s work and cast suspicions of collusion on his supporters.³ Today, though his contribution to environmentalism is recognized, mixed feelings remain about Grey Owl’s adoption of transcultural Indigenous identity (Billinghurst; Braz; Chapin), about his relationship to the Romantic tradition of the “noble savage” (Gleeson; Ruffo; Smith), and about how to read his authenticity (Fee, “They Taught”; Loo; Polk).⁴ Anahareo’s role in the making of Grey Owl’s persona is also contested. According to Gleeson, Anahareo never questioned Archie’s proclaimed Scottish-Apache heritage, and learned how to survive in the bush from him. She also convinced Archie to give up trapping for furs; initiated his literary career; satisfied the media’s desire for a Romantic image of Grey Owl; played mother to their beaver companions in Grey Owl’s wildly popular films; gave birth to one child, Shirley Dawn, during their time together; and argued with him about pursuing her dream of becoming a prospector. Throughout their relationship, Anahareo fiercely opposed mainstream conventions of marriage and family, living independently for long periods, even after the birth of their daughter. However, Grey Owl’s biographer, Donald B. Smith, presents Anahareo in a different light, emphasizing the roles Archie’s English wife Ivy Holmes, his Aunt Ada, and his mother played in his career (62, 83), and detailing his long-held interest in conservationism and “playing Indian.” From this perspective, Anahareo is more of a muse and media figure than the motivational force behind Grey Owl.

Either way, Anahareo retained the media designation of Grey Owl’s wife for the remainder of her life. After her split with Grey Owl in 1936, Anahareo struggled as a single mother and through a second tumultuous marriage. But in her later years, she used her public persona to speak in support of the conservationist movement linked to Indigenous rights; she won the Order of Nature (1979) and the Order of Canada (1983). Over the course of her long life, Anahareo’s persona has been met with a range of reactions, from confusion and Romanticism in the 1930s, to enthusiasm in the context of 1970s activism. More recently, Anahareo has received belated attention as an important but overlooked Indigenous literary voice.

Anahareo as Persona

Current critical and creative explorations of Grey Owl have tended to approach Belaney's cultural transformation as a performance that transverses multiple identities. Armand Garnet Ruffo's *Grey Owl: The Mystery of Archie Belaney* (1996) has been celebrated for its exploration of Belaney's liminal identity and trans-ethnic transformation (Kádár), and it also considers how Anahareo's persona is produced through a negotiation of identity constructs. Ruffo presents Lovat Dickson, Belaney's publisher, reflecting:

[Anahareo] may be in reality
a product of Grey Owl's own imagination,
in other words, his own creation, which may not
have anything to do with the flesh and blood
of the woman. (114)

In Ruffo's poem "You Ask," Archie identifies Anahareo as intimately "part of [his] fiction," while recognizing that the fiction he has created is comprised of the very real embraces, words, and moments they shared (115). Ruffo shows Archie losing himself to the fiction of Grey Owl, while at the same time claiming that "[His] body, [his] spirit" are one with his work (115). In Ruffo's poetry, Anahareo, too, exists in this liminal space where body, spirit, fiction, and performance both merge and diverge as she and Archie perform for each other and the public.

Albert Braz's book *Apostate Englishman* (2015) describes the role Anahareo's persona played in supporting Grey Owl's public Indigeneity. Braz argues that "what troubled many people was not so much that Grey Owl had fooled them about his identity and embraced the North American Indigenous way of life but the fact that he had forsaken English culture. That is, he had committed cultural apostasy" (1). Braz examines Belaney's engagement with ethno-cultural passing and the ways Belaney's writings, performances, and, significantly, his choice of romantic partners formed his transcultural identity. Braz highlights Grey Owl's public emphasis on Anahareo as his wife (although he had four). Though Angele was Belaney's first intimate link to his Indigenous persona, Anahareo, who "believed" in his identity, proved most publicly beneficial to him; "Thus," suggests Braz, "for the overwhelming majority of his readers and the public at large, there is only one woman in the conservationist's life: Anahareo" (92). Braz considers "class, education, and aesthetics" as well as Grey Owl's role in fashioning Anahareo's persona as factors that made her the appropriate mate (93). Braz reviews both of Anahareo's autobiographies as growing out of the persona created for and by her as the partner Belaney

needed for the success of his message. My examination of Anahareo's texts follows the trend of examining both Grey Owl and Anahareo as carefully crafted, interdependent public personae; however, I suggest that *Devil in Deerskins* is also important as an independent autobiography that pays tribute to one Mohawk woman's fascinating life.

Two Autobiographies: 1940 and 1972

Following a lifetime of media attention, and after having her first autobiography, *My Life with Grey Owl* (1940), heavily edited by its publisher, Anahareo was motivated to publish *Devil in Deerskins* by her desire to control her public representation. By the 1960s Anahareo, no doubt, had a different perspective on her years spent with Grey Owl; she had re-established family ties in Mattawa, had the support of her adult daughter Shirley Dawn, and was living in a time when environmentalism provided a new audience for her story. With Dawn's help, Anahareo began reworking her autobiography to craft a narrative about her years spent with Grey Owl that focused on her own life story (McCall 205). The result is an older and wiser narrator who tells of her youthful adventures, her heritage, and her coming of age. Life writing scholar Julie Rak characterizes the act of speaking autobiographically as a metonymic substitution in which the subject substitutes for themselves the recognized identity of the "autobiographical self," which "guarantee[s] authenticity and legitimacy in Western discourse" (2). Both of Anahareo's autobiographies can be read as attempts to wield the cultural assumption of unmediated autobiographical truth in order to reassert control over a public persona that was most often associated with Romantic images of the "Indian." However, disentangling the narrative voice of a female Mohawk writer from the pre-existing expectations of publishers and readers proved to be difficult. The Romantic writing of authors such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Fenimore Cooper represented the aesthetics and values of the 1930s publishing industry (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 121), including the stereotypes of the *noble savage*, *Indian princess*, *easy squaw*, and a *vanishing Indian race*. Romantic stereotypes also pervaded the popular romances and films, predisposing readers to identify Anahareo as a Mohawk heroine within a generic love story rather than as the subject of a groundbreaking autobiography.

As Janice Acoose (Nehiowe-Métis-Anishnaabekwe) argues, Romantic stereotypes not only shaped literary values but also "dangerous cultural attitudes that affect human relations and inform institutional ideology" in Canada (40). The revelation of Archie's English origins in 1938 had prompted

a flood of media attention calling Anahareo's credibility into question and, as Gleeson indicates, her public "image began to deteriorate" (168). One infamous article insinuates that Anahareo, abandoned by Grey Owl, had fallen into prostitution. The truth of these suspicions, which Anahareo never addressed, still haunts discussions surrounding her (Braz 108); what is of interest here is not Anahareo's actual sexual choices but rather the consumability of a Romantic depiction of an Indigenous woman, abandoned by her now-known-to-be-English lover and fallen into immorality and poverty.

Simultaneously, Grey Owl's publisher, Lovat Dickson, a Canadian expatriate living in England, was attempting to salvage Grey Owl's image. This included publishing a biography of Grey Owl called *Half-breed: The Story of Grey Owl* (1939) in which Anahareo appears as an Indian princess from a vanishing race. Dickson introduces Anahareo as a "beautiful young Indian girl," in "rough clothes [that] fitted her slim figure perfectly, the well-cut breeches and the long boots emphasizing both the slenderness of her waist and the long perfectly shaped legs," who falls in love with Archie's noble savage demeanour (176). According to Dickson, Anahareo and her siblings are afflicted by a haunting melancholia: "[c]haracteristic of their race they felt themselves friendless and alone in an alien world. They sat then like lost little spirits, grief and an inarticulate and inexpressible longing filling their hearts and making their soft brown eyes large and moist" (178). While attempting to offer a positive counter to the negative images of Anahareo in the press, this depiction of Anahareo's family still relies on Romantic stereotypes rather than biographical research. The lively description of Anahareo's family in *Devil in Deerskins* (37), as well as the stories Gleeson collected in partnership with Anahareo's family (*Anahareo* 203-05), provide a startling contrast to Dickson's paternalistic assumptions.⁵

The publication of *My Life with Grey Owl*, soon after Dickson's *Half-breed*, provided minimal opportunity to correct Dickson's narrative due to his involvement in the editorial process. From the outset, Anahareo was subject to content restrictions; primarily, she was not allowed to discuss Archie's background. McCall's archival work suggests that the anonymous introduction to *My Life with Grey Owl*, which frames Anahareo as a Romantic heroine, as well as the first two chapters, were not approved by Anahareo (204). The introduction highlights Anahareo's vivacious temper, her "slim, iron-muscular figure," and her feminine "large and softly sentimental" heart (Davies viii-ix). As the narrator asks, "Why mention these things? Because what follows is a love story" (ix). Despite the actual content

of the text, this introduction firmly places Anahareo's story in the romance genre, laden with Romantic stereotypes. Deeply dissatisfied with the book's representation of herself and Grey Owl, Anahareo ripped out the first pages from any copy she could find (Gleeson, *Anahareo* 179).⁶

The cultural expectations of the Romantic tradition and the romance genre influenced the publication and reception of Anahareo's first biography and continue to influence the reception of her second. In her article on "The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers," Barbara Godard draws on Fredric Jameson's argument that "genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (qtd. in Godard 185, emphasis original). Writing in 1990, Godard contends that within the Canadian publishing industry, Indigenous authors seeking publication have no choice but to emulate or contest the limits of Western literary conventions; this includes navigating the slippery slope between autobiography and romance when the author is an Indigenous woman. Indigenous women authors have continually contested the drastically unequal power dynamics within the editorial process. Yet, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishinaabe), founder of the Indigenous press Kegedonce, writes that there remains "intense pressure to conform to imposed mainstream publishing values, aesthetics, and goals" (31). Though Anahareo wrote *Devil in Deerskins* on the brink of the "renaissance" of Indigenous writing in Canada, the cultural expectations of the romance genre and the Romantic tradition continued to influence the way she was (and is) read and, given her past experiences, how she would choose to make her story heard.

Romantic Nationalist Reading Practices and Genre in the 1970s

In once more taking up the cultural capital of autobiography in the 1970s, as Gleeson suggests, Anahareo successfully took advantage of the environmental movement's renewed interest in Grey Owl;⁷ *Devil in Deerskins* was a bestseller. However, the 1970s reception of *Devil in Deerskins* suggests that the environmental movement's nostalgia for idealized pre-contact worldviews, combined with the surge of cultural nationalism surrounding Canada's centennial, helped predetermine that *Devil in Deerskins* would be read through Romantic tropes.

In 1987, Margery Fee argued that "[n]ationalism . . . [was] the major ideological drive behind the use of the Indian in contemporary English-Canadian literature" ("Romantic" 17). In Romantic nationalist texts, the

protagonist moves from “immigrant to native” through a transformative relationship with an Indigenous person or stand-in “object, image, plant, animal or person” who passes on their legitimate connection to the land (16). This “literary land claim” circumvents the dilemma that “Old World” nationalism, dependent on a racial group’s connection to the land and possession of a native language and mythology, does not fit the “New World situation” (17). In 1989, Terry Goldie demonstrated that the Romantic preoccupation with an unattainable indigeneity is often satisfied through the sexual exploits and violence of the romance genre. The indigene functions as a signifier that becomes collapsed with the idea of nature, with the land itself, and is always only a representation of “suitable ground for the cultivation of [the settler’s] indigenization” (40). For Goldie, the female indigene signifier “represents the attractions of the land but in a form which seems to request domination” (65); romantic conquest of the indigene female is used to resolve Romantic nationalist anxiety. Similarly, alliance with the eroticized, “instinctual,” “animal” indigene appeases environmentally motivated nostalgia that desires a “bridge to the freedom of the non-man in nature” (25). At a period in Canadian history in which discourses of cultural nationalism and environmentalism were ascendent, the semiotic field into which Anahareo was writing presupposed the “loaded” signifier of the indigene (4).

Readers expected Anahareo’s narrative to provide them with the “wife’s-eye view” of what it meant to be Grey Owl (Mayse): i.e., the successfully indigenized settler (Goldie 215). Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Grant MacEwan’s 1972 introduction to *Devil in Deerskins* explicitly frames the text as a new perspective on Anahareo’s husband (x). When read as inside access to Grey Owl’s life, Anahareo’s text stands in for the figure of the “Native” in Canadian Romantic nationalism: “[I]mpelled by a strong desire to know more about the past” and beset with nostalgia for a time of environmental purity (Fee, “Romantic” 16-17), urbanite Canadians could consume *Devil in Deerskins* as a way of indigenizing themselves and reforging an idealized connection to land lost through immigration and industrialization. Anahareo’s text is particularly adept at facilitating a reader’s “transformation” from dispossessed immigrant to naturalized inheritor of ancestral knowledge, since her narrative details her own transformation from a town girl to a self-sufficient woman of the wilderness. Ironically, it is Gertie’s “inauthentic” Native identity, forged by her family’s history of forced displacement and dispossession, which allows readers to enact their transition from “immigrant to native.” Archie’s indigenization facilitates

Gertie's indigenization, which facilitates the white Canadian reader's indigenization. The only source of authenticity is the sign of the indigene Grey Owl evokes.

In search of indigenization, readers in the 1970s continually identified *Devil in Deerskins* as a love story and Anahareo as the corresponding idealized Indian heroine. In 1978, *The Globe and Mail* published a spoof called "The Great Canadian Romance Kit" by Heather Robertson; the article begins, "It was late in the summer and I was at Wabikon . . ." (A5). These opening lines are taken directly from the first page of *Devil in Deerskins*. Robertson identifies Anahareo and Grey Owl as *the* quintessentially Canadian romantic protagonists who "arouse the erotic fantasies and secret passions of the nation" (A5). While Robertson is satirizing the public's thirst for Canadian Romantic nationalism, she simultaneously identifies Anahareo's text as a romance, as did more than one reviewer.

Popular reviews that emphasize the romantic plotline of *Devil in Deerskins* highlight the parts of Gertie's character that reiterate Romantic depictions of Indigenous women. Reminiscent of portraits of the Indian princess, a review in *Outdoor Canada* describes Anahareo as "strong, patient, and brave," suffering for her love of Grey Owl (34). In stark contrast, *Windsor Star* reviewer Bruce Blackadar's version of events casts Anahareo as the beautiful Indian girl of questionable morals who leaves her father to join her white lover in the Romantic wilds of the North. Other reviewers align with Blackadar and feature Anahareo as beautiful, yet violent, promiscuous, and irrational. An extreme example is Kildare Dobbs's review entitled "A Wild Man and His Wild Woman." Citing the knifing in Doucet, Dobbs emphasizes that Anahareo's "violence and pestilence" is dangerously Romanticized under the guise of a "tempestuous" heroine. Dobbs simultaneously critiques Anahareo's text for emulating Romantic conventions and claims that it is an accurate picture of "the Canadian North." As a result, Dobbs's review illustrates a bind that characterizes the reception of Anahareo's autobiography: the conventions of Romance distort the authority of autobiography, while at the same time, readers only recognize Romantic depictions of Anahareo as authentic.⁸

Humour and Intersubjectivity

Gillian Whitlock argues that the female subject in colonial discourse takes up the subjectivities made available to her, and through an intimate process of "intersubjectivity and negotiation" produces an autobiographical narrative that the reader will accept as "truthful" and "authentic" (9). Approached from

this perspective, *Devil in Deerskins* uses the cultural capital of autobiography to mobilize the literary tropes of the Romantic tradition and the romance genre in order to draw attention to the contradictions inherent in the dominant literary depictions of Indigenous women and to control the way Anahareo herself is represented.

When Anahareo's autobiography is read as upholding the tenets of Canadian Romantic nationalism, the text is performing earnest work for the reader, and this earnestness denies the narrator her sense of humour. As Kate Vangen notes in her article on "defiance and humour" in Indigenous literature, "[o]ne of the first stereotypes that has to be debunked by any Native writer who wants to be taken seriously—yet does not want to be taken *too* seriously—is that Indians are stoics, totally lacking in humour" (188). As early as the anonymous introduction to *My Life with Grey Owl*, humour is identified as a key aspect of Anahareo's writing style. The introduction apologizes for the confusion that may ensue from Anahareo's unrefined tendency towards humour even as it acknowledges that the text is meant to be funny (viii; x).

Today, Anahareo's text finds a place in a larger literary tradition of Indigenous humour. Vangen identifies Maria Campbell's (Métis) use of humour to mediate tragedy and tell the truths of loss while "keeping a safe distance from both despair and cynicism" (203). Likewise, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) describes how in the poetry of Indigenous women in the US, "[h]umor is widely used by Indians to deal with life . . . the horrors of history . . . the continuing impact of colonization, and . . . the biting knowledge that living as an exile in one's own land necessitates" (157-58). Anahareo's use of a humorous tone to describe the antics of her younger self contradicts the stereotype of the serious and silent noble savage who acts as a vehicle for "literary land claim[s]" (Fee, "Romantic" 17). Simultaneously, the text's mocking of any of Gertie's actions that might validate the racist stereotypes of *noble savage*, *Indian princess*, or *easy squaw* refutes the legitimacy of these dangerous categories.

For example, Anahareo's depiction of her budding relationship with Archie, which received so much attention in the press, does portray young Gertie in search of romance. However, Anahareo engages the tropes of the romance genre with a tone of self-deprecating humour. The opening lines of Robertson's *Globe and Mail* article mention Gertie's awe for the "Godlike" Archie and describe him as the noble savage "in brown deerskins stepping with the speed and grace of a panther from a canoe" (A5). However, Robertson skips over the opening paragraph of *Devil in Deerskins* in which

Gertie, exhausted and steaming in “disgust,” watches Archie plod easily on ahead of her during her first trip into the bush (1). The humorous contrast between Gertie’s disgust and Anahareo’s description of her immediate infatuation with Archie pokes fun at her youthful ideas about romance. In a similar vein, Anahareo frames Archie’s offer to take Gertie away from school and into the bush as an offer to help her “escape from the convent” (11). Gertie is “thrilled” by the “prospect of being rescued” (11). The narrator remembers her fascination with Archie’s tales of violent heroism, her “mounting excitement,” her eagerness for “the prospect of more blood and thunder,” and her final disappointment when the only crime Archie commits is giving “the station agent a couple of swings” (8). The text draws attention to the ridiculousness of young Gertie’s enthusiasm for violence; Archie teases, “I’m sorry I didn’t kill the guy because I know how much you would have enjoyed that” (8). The narrator’s tongue-in-cheek response to her younger self allows the text to mobilize the literary conventions traditionally associated with depictions of the indigene while at the same time poking fun at the desire to sensationalize Gertie and Archie.

Yet, Anahareo’s text takes quite seriously the work of denying the stereotype of the promiscuous Indian woman. Though often characterized as a romance, the text is almost devoid of displays of physical affection. And, as Braz details, in comparison to her first autobiography, Anahareo is less outspoken about her opposition to traditional marriage (98-100). Still, Anahareo’s humorous tone is vital to understanding the way she guides the reader’s perception of her younger self. When, for instance, Archie comments on Gertie’s short skirt, she exposes the double standard inherent in his statement, joking: “Since you are so clothes-conscious, why are you wrapped in that awful oilskin? It isn’t raining, you know” (5). And while Gertie is drawn to Archie for his sense of adventure and danger, early in the narrative she reveals that the only crime Archie is wanted for was actually committed in protection of a young girl’s virtue (6). While mocking conventional romantic plots and idealized heroes, Anahareo also defends her own reputation by painting herself and Archie as honourable in character.

Moreover, Anahareo presents young Gertie as naive, while concurrently cataloguing her rather impressive feats of independence as a running self-deprecating joke. The description of Gertie’s naiveté works to counteract the suggestion of promiscuity. For instance, Gertie is oblivious to Archie’s attempts to profess his love for her and has not seemed to contemplate *why* he might have asked her to come stay at his camp (50). Even when the priest

is infuriated with Gertie's insistence that she has no sins to confess after living unwed with Archie, the narrator responds with a humorous display of sympathy, stating: "Since this painful scene I have discovered that the good Father had a perfect right to his fury because . . . 'It looks like hell from the road for a girl to be going with a man, even into God's own country, without a chaperone'" (56). Anahareo's depiction of Gertie's naiveté acts as an excuse for flouting social norms, while the narrator's self-deprecation mocks society's obsession with the sexual behaviour of Indigenous women.

My reading of *Devil in Deerskins* suggests that Anahareo's text models an Indigenous female narrator who deploys humour in order to engage and refute the stereotypes present in the dominant literary depictions of Indigenous women and who, as a result, manipulates the way her life story is read. If we return to my preliminary questions about how to approach *Devil in Deerskins* in a contemporary context, the scene in Doucet might be read as satire of the savage and promiscuous Indian woman. Presented with the limited options available to her as a young, penniless, unconnected, Indigenous woman in the North, Anahareo is so vehemently opposed to her prospects that she becomes violent and enacts a wild return to the woods. Importantly, she is no victim; rather, she is the one knifing Archie. Her extreme self-loathing after unsettling the townspeople and stabbing Archie becomes part of her self-deprecating and self-protecting running joke about her independence; after all, she does marry Archie, but at a Cree ceremony and long after the episode in Doucet. The scene in Doucet not only reveals the pressure on Anahareo's text to navigate prevalent stereotypes of Indigenous women, but also critiques the widespread settler acceptance of Romantic stereotypes. In implicating the structure of Doucet social life and the available options for young Indigenous women in Gertie's displays of self-loathing and anger, Anahareo subtly addresses the connection between settler-Indigenous relations, literary depictions of Indigenous women, and her lived reality.

Through her use of humour, Anahareo meets stereotypes on her own terms. She chooses to omit many tragic life events from her book, including her alcoholism, losing custody of her daughter, and her poverty, among other things. While there are personal reasons for these choices, the result is a predominantly *happy* book, a contrast to texts that use humour to tell a story of horrors and ultimate survival. In 1972, the self-deprecating and ironically humorous narrator who reflects back on their misspent youth was a convention commonly associated with a white male literary voice, not the Indigenous female writer. Anahareo's choice to depict a young woman

who lives through her mistakes and has a long, influential, adventurous life defies dominant literary depictions of Indigenous women and Romantic nationalist reading practices that cannot but perceive an Indigenous woman subject in relation to the genre of romance or of personal tragedy.

Autobiography as Intellectual Tradition

Contemporary interpretations of Anahareo are still at risk of falling into stereotypical traps. The most obvious example is Richard Attenborough's 1999 cinematic representation of Anahareo, which McCall characterizes as combining the tropes of the Indian princess and the 1950s damsel in distress (210). But even Braz's intervention into settler hang-ups over "authenticity" shows signs of preoccupation with Anahareo's sexual choices (107-08), her unconventional approach to motherhood (109), her Indigenous identity as an urban dweller (93, 110), and her dependence on Grey Owl (94). However, contemporary reviewers are also asking new questions of *Devil in Deerskins* as an *Indigenous* text: how do we read Anahareo as a role model who "counters negative hegemonic stereotypes" (Mitten 2), or how can we understand *Devil in Deerskins*' "literary historical value . . . within the larger corpus of Indigenous writing in Canada" (Cabajsky 117)? While reading *Devil in Deerskins* in relation to Romantic nationalism helps to tease out the ways in which Anahareo astutely managed her public persona, such a reading also threatens to reduce her text to an act of resistance.

The text does contain such resistance, but it is more important to locate *Devil in Deerskins* as part of an Indigenous intellectual tradition, according to Deanna Reder's use of the term. In response to the Canadian critical tendency to focus on Indigenous life-writing as a genre, rather than Indigenous autobiography as Indigenous intellectual tradition, Reder emphasizes that autobiography works to "preserve Indigenous knowledge and specific tribal understandings for their descendants and subsequent generations" (170). While writers of Indigenous autobiography have "absorbed, adopted, and appropriated" various literary practices "in order to tell Indigenous stories," Reder claims "there is more to the politics of self-determination than resistance to oppression" (172). If critics view Indigenous authors' engagement with Western literary traditions only as evidence of assimilation, they "fail to see what cultural work it continues to accomplish" (173). I suggest that while Anahareo's text manipulates dominant Western literary conventions to her advantage, the text itself depicts female autobiography as an inherited Indigenous intellectual tradition.

One of the significant portions of *Devil in Deerskins* that was not included in Anahareo's previous autobiography, but emerges as an important component of the 1972 and 2014 editions, is Anahareo's grandmother's narrative of her family history (McCall 205). Anahareo notes that these stories tracing her family history from first contact with Europeans to her birth in Mattawa were "told and retold" by her grandmother, and she specifies that in cross-culturally communicating her stories to Archie she risks "first unraveling the story as it came to [her]" (33). As a result, Anahareo's text locates the practice of speaking autobiographically as both a female Indigenous intellectual practice and one that is situated within Anahareo's grandmother's understanding of her Mohawk/Algonquin culture formed through tradition, resistance, and displacement.

In the face of racial and gendered violence against Indigenous women, female Indigenous writers have spoken about the importance of reclaiming and maintaining Indigenous traditions of representing femininity. Lee Maracle (Stò:lò) cites her grandmothers as her centring force when she began writing and "erased invisibility as a goal for the young Native women around [her]" (6-9). Similarly, in her poem "I Am an Indian Poem," Rosanna Deerchild (Cree) tells of the importance of finding a place among a lineage of Indigenous female authors who "stand behind [her] . . . Holding the story" while Indigenous language and cultural practices are systematically silenced; these women, as Deerchild comments in the essay "My Poem Is an Indian Woman," wrote her alive while Canadian literary tradition was "writing [her] dead" (242; 241). In light of national literary institutions tied to the erasure, silencing, disappearance, and murder of Indigenous women in Canada, texts and authors that reaffirm the continual strength of female Indigenous intellectual traditions of self-representation are a powerful statement. From this perspective, Anahareo's practice of writing her self is not merely an appropriation of Western literary practices; it is a vital continuation of her grandmother's inherited practice of female self-representation.

Reading *Devil in Deerskins* from this celebratory perspective is not without its own dangers. Daniel Francis argues that the popularity of "Celebrity Indians" reflects the desire of "non-Native Canadians to understand and admire what *they* considered to be the virtues of Indian-ness" (155, emphasis mine) and, admittedly, the platform from which Anahareo speaks is built on the settler desire to consume narratives of a particular form of Indigeneity. As Braz points out, Anahareo's voice is privileged over the voices of Angele and her Bear Island community (93). Anahareo's literary success is based on her ability to engage with and navigate the publishing industry, attained

through her choice to ally herself to Grey Owl over her home community. This does not devalue Anahareo's contribution, but it does demand recognition of the power dynamics that allow Anahareo's voice to be heard over other Indigenous voices. Nonetheless, the publication of the First Voices, First Texts 2014 edition of *Devil in Deerskins* offers a fresh chance for audiences to engage with Anahareo's witty and astute persona.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to Tanis MacDonald, Jenny Kerber, and Doug Cass (Glenbow Archives) for their help in developing this article.

NOTES

- 1 I refer to Anahareo as Mohawk, rather than Kanien'kehaka, because that is how Anahareo proudly referred to herself. See Sophie McCall's afterword for the history of displacement that resulted in Anahareo identifying as Mohawk.
- 2 I use *romance* to refer to love, emotions, sexual desire, and the romance genre; *Romance* refers to the Romantic tradition and the idealization of the Indian that is prevalent in Romantic nationalism.
- 3 For biographical information on Grey Owl see Billingham, Braz, Dickson, Gleeson, Smith, and "They Taught Me Much" by Fee.
- 4 Debates over "authenticity" surround both Anahareo and Grey Owl. As Fee argues, the obsession with Grey Owl's authenticity has often obscured his conservation legacy and his relationships with specific Indigenous communities ("They Taught" 190). Anahareo has at times been viewed as inauthentic for not living up to the Romantic image which Grey Owl so successfully performed.
- 5 Dickson's second biography of Grey Owl (1976) is *more* faithful to Anahareo's story as told in *Devil in Deerskins*. This suggests Anahareo's 1972 autobiographical intervention could not be ignored.
- 6 Other Indigenous autobiographies were also being published at the time, and, as was the case for Anahareo, their authors' lack of control in the editorial process was pronounced. See Karell and Ledwon.
- 7 See Braz for discussion of Anahareo's shifting relationship to conservation.
- 8 Both McCall and Gleeson also highlight the positive impact of the press in identifying Anahareo as an important historical figure (190; 96), and Elizabeth Samson's review of *Devil in Deerskins* on CBC's *Our Native Land* depicts the text as "more of an autobiography of Anahareo" who is cast as an early Indigenous "women's liberator."

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