

## “A Life Has Only One Author”: Twice-Told Aboriginal Life Narratives

There are two voices in the pages of this book, mine and Donald Barnett's. As-told-tos between whites and natives rarely work, when they do, it's wonderful, when they don't it's a disaster for the Native. Don never intended it to be a disaster for me. The first *Bobbi Lee* was a reduction of some two hundred pages of manuscript to a little book. What began as a class to learn how to do other people's life history, turned into a project to do my own. We had disagreements over what to include and what to exclude, disagreements over wording, voice. In the end, the voice that reached the paper was Don's, the information alone was mine.

—Lee Maracle, Prologue, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*

In the Prologue to the 1990 edition of *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*, Lee Maracle contests the editorial control that the recorder, Don Barnett, had maintained in the first edition. Maracle's anger at Barnett's editing is palpable. By obscuring his own role, Barnett reproduced the historically asymmetric relations of address in “as-told-tos between whites and natives.” He also failed to account for the process of collaboration in compiling the recorded testimonial life story. Significantly, Maracle, in 1990, does not re-write but rather re-frames the first version with a new preface, Foreword, Prologue and Epilogue. Although Maracle does not change the content of the narrative, re-framing the narrative fundamentally transforms the life story. In this paper, I examine how collaboratively produced “told-to” life narratives radically mutate when they are re-told and re-framed.

While critical studies of recorded life narrative have focused on the agenda of either the writer or narrator in the making of the life narrative, such a focus often elides the social contexts in which tellings, re-tellings or re-readings take place.<sup>1</sup> For M. M. Bakhtin, it is impossible to consider speakers and listeners, or writers and readers, in isolation from one another, or dissociated from the world in which they interact: “Still current in linguistics are such fictions as the ‘listener’ and ‘understander’ (partners of the speaker). . . . These fictions produce a completely distorted idea of the complex and multifaceted process of active speech communication” (68). These

insights are especially pertinent to the process of “entextualizing”<sup>2</sup> First Nations’ oral texts, a process historically steeped in culturally determined notions of orality and literacy, of ethnicity and difference.<sup>3</sup> In retelling their life story, narrators re-negotiate the relations of authority that govern the life narrative.

Changes in these relations can lead to shifts in the form of the life narrative—from ethnographic life history to autobiography; from biography to testimonial; from the dually produced narrative to the collective life story. In Margaret Blackman’s *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman*, feminist ethnographic life history “move[s] towards autobiography” (Godard 7). However, though Blackman insists upon the collaborative nature of the recorded (auto)biographical project, she holds unilateral authority in shaping the arc of the life. More dramatic are the changes when the narrator re-publishes the life story in new forms. Lee Maracle’s additional frames in the edition of *Bobbi Lee* fundamentally change the reader’s comprehension of the unchanged text. Similarly, in *Night Spirits*, co-authors Ila Bussidor and Üstün Bilgen-Reinart retell the story of the relocation of the Sayisi Dene, contesting the formal report initially prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). In contrast to Virginia Petch’s report, *Night Spirits* highlights the collective nature of the testimonial project. However, the collaborative relationship between Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart is complicated by the historical legacy of mistranslation between Sayisi Dene and Euro-Canadian groups. Finally, Beverly Hungry Wolf, in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, re-writes the stories she initially collected for her husband, Adolph Hungry Wolf. Adolph first published the stories under his own name in ethnographic monographs of Blackfoot culture. In contrast, Beverly explicitly acknowledges and highlights all of the narrators and writers who contributed to the collective life story. In so doing, *The Ways of My Grandmothers* calls into question the standard relations of address in the ethnographic life story and autobiography. My aim in examining these “twice-told” or “thrice-told” life stories is to bring into focus the multiple forms of mediation that constitute the recorded life narrative and to show how the life story is transformed through various tellings, re-tellings and re-readings.

An important genre mode of the recorded Aboriginal life narrative is the feminist ethnographic life history, especially popular in the 1970s, that aimed to bring to light lives of women through detailed description of their daily lives.<sup>4</sup> These narratives emphasize personal connection and collabora-

tion between women in cross-cultural contexts. However, while friendship may even out some power imbalances, it may also serve to disguise the workings of ethnographic authority. In *During My Time*, anthropologist Margaret Blackman describes how she worked closely with Florence Edenshaw Davidson of the Haida nation over several years. Blackman identifies friendship and mutual trust with Davidson as the reason the project came into being. She limits her interaction with Davidson to small, intimate spaces, as if to emphasize the close connection she feels with Davidson. Much is made of the “kitchen table” where Blackman and Davidson discuss life in a frank and open manner.<sup>5</sup>

Blackman downplays her own role in writing Davidson’s life story, claiming that it was Davidson who initiated the project. In 1977, Blackman returned to Haida Gwaii “to fulfill a promise made to Florence Edenshaw Davidson of Masset in 1973: we would, one of these days, sit together and record her life history” (xx). Blackman explains that “Justification for me lay in my personal relationship to Florence Davidson. She had served as my main female teacher in my previous Haida studies and we had developed a close working relationship; she had taken me into her home and I lived with her during most of my field research; but, most importantly, she accepted me, as she has others, as a grandchild” (xx). Blackman calls Davidson “Nani” (Grandmother) to increase the effect of intimacy in the text.

Yet the reader begins to suspect that the intimacy flows only one way when Blackman, determined to secure personal revelations from her informant, presses Davidson to speak candidly about her experiences “as a Haida woman”: “Nani was somewhat embarrassed to discuss her puberty seclusion knowing that the account might be published. I, on the other hand, felt the subject significant enough to pursue until she had exhausted her memory” (16). Blackman impels Davidson to reveal her private recollections to ensure the narrative’s ethnographic “significance.”

The close relationship between Blackman and Davidson is supposed to convince the reader that Blackman has shared authorial control with Davidson. However, the alleged sharing in fact increases Blackman’s ethnographic authority. Though Blackman argues that the recording of a life history is necessarily a collaborative activity, collaboration merely provides “an affective or experiential dimension” that “complements” the “standard ethnography” (4). “Nani” might command centre stage in the text, but she does so as exemplary evidence within Blackman’s interpretive framework. By claiming a special, even familial bond with Davidson, Blackman endeav-

ours to dissolve the outsider/insider dichotomy of anthropologist and informant. She personalizes the differences between herself and Davidson, thus attempting to isolate their differences from larger political and colonial contexts. By suggesting shared and transparent communicative relations, Blackman confers greater legitimacy upon her dispassionate anthropological interpretations.

In her study of recorded life story, Carol Boyce Davies discusses the function of precisely this kind of friendship in bonding “the oral narrative contract in life story telling.” The oral narrative contract “turns on the concept of ‘trust.’” Indeed, “[a]ll of the collectors identified building ‘trust’ as the critical ingredient in having the stories told at all” (13). However, while trust, reciprocity and collaboration are often proclaimed in the prefaces and introductions of recorded life stories, that trust frequently dissolves at the time of writing. Boyce Davies argues that “[i]n the written version . . . this oral life narrating contract is often violated”:

At the point of writing . . . the dominant-subordinate relationships are enforced and the editor becomes a detached, sometimes clinical, orderer or even exploiter of the life stories for anthropological ends, research data, raw material, or the like. Writing another person’s life can become an act of power and control. (13)

The loss of trust, I would argue, is not due to the function of writing so much as to the function of authorship. The breakdown in trust occurs as the author signs the title page and the publisher circulates the text in larger economies. Philippe Lejeune argues that authorship, with its emphasis on individual creative genius, precludes the very existence of collaborative literary production. He tells the story of a publisher who had declared that “a life has only one author” when a ghost-writer asked to include her name on the title-page of the “autobiography” she had transcribed (185). Publishers continue to privilege the singly authored work, despite recent critical work (such as Boyce Davies’s) that emphasizes relationality, dialogue and collaboration in the making of subjectivity. This is because the singly authored work enables the publisher to use the “brand name” to maintain control over profit, labour and property in print-capitalist markets. As a result, challenges to the supremacy of the author spark explosive and heated controversies.<sup>6</sup>

In some cases, the breakdown in trust can galvanize “the narrator” of the recorded life story to become a “writer.” When Lee Maracle re-issued her recorded testimonial life narrative, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*, under her own

name, the new edition reconceptualized Maracle's collaboration with Don Barnett, who had first transcribed, edited and published *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel: Struggles of a Native Canadian Woman* in 1975. As quoted in the epigraph above, Maracle contends that a recorder's good intentions to collaborate fairly with a teller are not enough to overcome the historically asymmetric relations of address in recorded life stories. This is particularly ironic with respect to the genre mode of the testimonial narrative. *Bobbi Lee*, part of the series of "Life Histories from the Revolution," was supposed to document Canada's "interior colonies," not engender its own form of textual colonization.

According to John Beverley, *testimonio* is meant to correct the unequal relations in ethnographic life histories, by emphasizing the narrator's control over the life story: "In oral history, it is the intentionality of the recorder—usually a social scientist—that is dominant.... In *testimonio*, by contrast, it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount" (96). *Testimonio* enacts a "powerful textual affirmation of the speaking subject" (96) while simultaneously accomplishing "a sort of erasure of the function and textual presence of the 'author,' which by contrast is so central to all major forms of bourgeois writing since the Renaissance" (97). However, Beverley's attempt to privilege the narrator over the recorder merely displaces and renders invisible the role of the author. Though he downplays the role of the author-writer as mere "compiler" or "activator" (97), he nevertheless suggests that the compiler is crucial to give voice to a "previously voiceless, anonymous" subject (98). Moreover, by simply switching the critical emphasis from the recorder to the narrator, Beverley reasserts a sharp divide between the two interlocutors, thereby nullifying any potential forms of intersubjectivity.

Don Barnett's 1975 Introduction to *Bobbi Lee* exhibits the same contradictions that complicate Beverley's theory of *testimonio*. Deleted from the 1990 publication, the Introduction creates and sustains subalternity:

The vast majority of peasants and workers in the super-exploited hinterland of the imperialist system are illiterate.... Their 'backwardness' condemns them to literary silence, as well as poverty, disease and a short life. Our objective is to provide a medium through which these classes can *spea*k... [and] *be heard* by those of us who comprise imperialism's privileged and literate metropolitan minority. Their recounted lives throw our own into sharp relief, while at the same time they offer us fresh perspectives on the processes of repression and revolution from a unique vantage point: *from below*. (xi; italics in original)

Though Barnett and Maracle might have thought at one time that they were speaking a common language of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist resistance, Maracle makes clear that that moment of commonality has since splintered and fallen apart. Despite the best of intentions, *Bobbi Lee* has failed to become the shared resistance story that the two interlocutors had first envisioned. Barnett's "blatantly elitist agenda places emphasis on what colonized people can do for the dominant culture. In addition, Maracle most certainly was not illiterate. The narrative reveals that she was widely read in the literature of social revolution and was an articulate and forceful speaker for the rights of Native people" (Donovan 39-40). Indeed, Barnett's elitism is palpable as he plays the "god-trick" of "seeing without being seen," of giving voice to the voiceless while dismissing the formative role of his editorial intervention. By suggesting that he has conferred literacy upon an "illiterate" subject, Barnett renders his own intervention indispensable. At the same time, by suggesting that the life story was a collaborative project between equals, he asserts the authenticity of (his recording of) Maracle's words. By italicizing the words *speaks* and *is heard*, Barnett produces the effect of immediacy while obscuring the power relations that obtain in creating the text.

In the 1990 version, Maracle calls into question the "I" of the *testimonio* that is allegedly the powerful coming-to-voice of the subaltern subject. Thus, "[t]he new edition permits Maracle more textual control over her life narrative. Indeed the new edition inscribes a different 'I'" (Warley 66). The new edition provides Maracle with the means to take part in, but also take apart, the mediating structures that constitute her textualized voice. However, Maracle does not suggest an intimate, balanced, and truly collaborative "we" as an alternative. Instead, she redraws the lines of collaboration between herself and the editors, not by rewriting her story in her own words, but by resituating her voice within different historical and political contexts.

In the new edition, Maracle maintains an antagonistic, interventionist relation to all framing voices, including her own. She speaks doubly, beginning again and again in different registers of voice. She thus reconfigures what Beverley assumes to be the immediacy of the testimonial voice. Indeed, her testimonial voice is highly mediated: it is multiple, changeable, historically situated and collectively defined. As a result, her text becomes double-voiced in Bakhtin's sense. Bakhtin's discussion of how "heteroglossia" emerges from rigidly hierarchical social relations is particularly relevant

to *Bobbi Lee*. In her text, Maracle makes no claim that the staging of conflicting voices results in plurality, suggesting instead that the experience of living as a Native woman in painfully divided Canadian social spaces requires her to have a double voice.

In the opening preface to the 1990 version of *Bobbi Lee*, “Oka Peace Camp—September 9, 1990,” Maracle aligns herself with the Mohawk warriors at Oka. Oka, for many a symbol of First Nations sovereignty over land and community, has profoundly changed the relations between First Nations and Canada. The barricades harshly highlight the fact that First Nations do not live in a postcolonial world but under military siege: “after centuries of the colonial state pressing on our villages, taking life after life, we are finally fed up” (6). Maracle draws stark contrasts between Euro-Canadian and First Nations worldviews and values. She repeatedly returns to the persistence of these groups’ dichotomous relations that preclude reciprocity or understanding. Maracle’s discussion of Oka allows her to re-conceptualize the genre of the testimonial life narrative in a way that highlights tensions between voices, rather than implying perfect understanding between speaking “partners” (see Bakhtin).

Following the Foreword by Jeannette Armstrong, Maracle reproduces the Dedication to Don Barnett that opens the first edition of *Bobbi Lee*. Here she honours Barnett’s life and death: “We all loved him deeply. Our love must not be wasted in sorrow but rather must manifest itself in our willingness to take up the struggle for proletarian socialism with the same determination and unwavering tenacity that so characterized Don” (17-18). However, in the Prologue that follows the Dedication, Maracle distances herself from the “we” above: “I respected Don, at the time almost liked him, but not quite. I didn’t, couldn’t tell him everything. There were too many obstacles in my path” (18). Her feelings of respect have changed into a burdensome sense of indebtedness: “He did inspire me to get command of my voice. He believed I had great potential, but was quite raw” (19). The colonial and gendered implications of being “raw” material for Barnett’s “Life Histories from the Revolution” series are not lost on Maracle: “I remember Don once said his wife was ‘almost an intellectual’. It scared me into silence. Now I see it as so much white male narcissism that kept him arrogantly rooted in autocratic behaviour” (19).

Maracle acknowledges the ambivalence of having learned both from Barnett and against his authoritative interpretations of anti-capitalist struggle: “his idea of political struggle was riddled with arrogance, something I

loathed, but knew I too was full of” (18). Maracle stages a series of self-revisions over time: “I was a very distorted child *at the time* of the first book” (19, emphasis added). In the Epilogue, she distances herself from her previous writing selves: “I am sitting in my room mulling over the ancient manuscript from which *Bobbi Lee* was born. My misspent youth, the craziness of internalized racism, my own confusion and the holes rent in my memory had come back at me like cruel bill collectors wanting their pound of flesh” (199). The Epilogue is an appeal to the future, of what she is writing towards: “This epilogue is intended to fill in the missing pieces that came alive in my memory through the long process of unravelling that began in 1975. . . . The rest [of those memories] are inserted here on the final pages I will ever write about Bobbi” (201). The life of Bobbi nevertheless re-appears in *Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories*, also published in 1990, as well as *Sundogs* (1992), *Ravensong* (1993) and the revised edition of *I am Woman* (1996). As Maracle moves from one version of the life story to another, the reader senses that the author has left open gaps in the life narrative. The story of Bobbi’s life is not a smooth chronology; rather it appears and disappears as Maracle retells the story in fiction, poetry, sociology, polemic and even told-to narrative.<sup>8</sup>

The additions to the 1990 *Bobbi Lee* fundamentally change the reader’s reception of the parts of *Bobbi Lee* that have not been revised. The framing texts do not permit the reader to forget that this confessional narrative emerges from Maracle’s volatile and emotionally charged relationship with Barnett. Clearly, Barnett’s role as listener and interviewer played a formative role in shaping the narrative, and the question of what Barnett removed from the text and what editorial decisions led to his selections becomes pressing. Maracle implies that Barnett’s role as editor was heavy-handed and unilateral. However, Maracle’s contradictory self-positionings indicate that her own understanding of her life story is partial, changing over time in response to changes in historical and political contexts. The reader thus becomes aware that various versions of the life story spring from the struggle for narrative control within the “collaborative” relationship.

The republication of Maracle’s autobiography marks a shift in both publication and reception of First Nations recorded life narratives between 1977 and 1990. The 1997 collective testimonial life story *Night Spirits*, co-authored by Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart and narrated by thirteen other Sayisi Dene spokespeople, initiates the kinds of life narratives published in the 1990s. It is an example of the “collective life history,” which “moves beyond the sense of a *dually authored* text to a *multiply articulated* text”



(Boyce Davies 4, italics in original): “These narratives can be read as individual stories . . . or they can be read collectively as one story refracted through multiple lives, lives that share a common experience” (4). A collective life story defies linear arrangement and chronology, interweaving women’s stories as recurring and spiralling fragments. Whereas the dually authored life story was popular in the 1970s and early 1980s,<sup>9</sup> recent publications showcase collectively produced First Nations life stories.<sup>10</sup> In these latter texts, multiple recorders and narrators exchange places, thereby limiting the recorder’s role and calling into question the paternalism of giving voice to “illiterate” speakers. Moreover, the multiplicity of narrating roles limits the importance of the recorder’s role.<sup>11</sup>

As a collective life story, *Night Spirits* rejects the “affirmation of the speaking subject” that Beverley argues is crucial to the genre of the *testimonio*. According to Beverley’s strict categorization, the “true” *testimonio* can only be a full-length life story by one remarkable individual who speaks in the first person (Beverley 101-02). *Night Spirits* maintains an explicitly politicized agenda. “Every story is a tool we can use if we want to. That is what our elders say,” Ila Bussidor writes (“My Story” 8). A sense of political urgency permeates *Night Spirits*. The bibliography shows that it is closely tied to the Sayisi Dene’s political struggles for social change. *Night Spirits* has provided ammunition to the Sayisi Dene in their ongoing battles with the federal government. These include compensation for the relocation;<sup>12</sup> territorial disputes with the borders of Nunavut;<sup>13</sup> a self-government agreement;<sup>14</sup> and land claim negotiations.<sup>15</sup>

Though the Sayisi Dene have told and retold the story of the relocation many times to government officials, settlement managers, researchers, social workers and journalists, their presentations have not resulted in a clear acknowledgement of governmental responsibility for the loss of an entire generation of the Sayisi Dene Nation between 1956 and 1977. In this period, over three-quarters of the 117 deaths in the community were classified as “violent,” resulting from the living conditions in the Churchill camps (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 146-47). Reams of letters, interviews, transcripts from public hearings and sociological studies have passed between the Sayisi Dene and the federal government over the past forty years of protest against the 1956 relocation.<sup>16</sup> *Night Spirits* attempts to retell the relocation in a way that will finally assert the urgent need for recognition and compensation.

The study most immediately preceding *Night Spirits* began in 1990, when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) hired Virginia Petch

to prepare a “background report” on the Sayisi Dene relocation. Petch bases her report primarily upon historical records, such as documents from the Hudson’s Bay Company, memos and letters from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Though Petch conducted personal interviews of Sayisi Dene community members from 1990-1994, she does not reproduce those conversations. Instead, she summarizes the information they provide. Petch paraphrases what could be Bussidor’s life story,<sup>17</sup> reporting that this band member “believes that in order to begin the healing process she must tell her story and many others must follow suit” (Section 5.0).

Bussidor, fearing that Sayisi Dene voices would again become subsumed within yet another report, appeared before the RCAP public hearings in Thompson, Manitoba in 1993, demanding a special community hearing at Tadoule Lake. Bussidor emphasizes that it is important for the commissioners to hear the story of the relocation from the Sayisi Dene themselves:

The Sayisi Dene are requesting the Royal Commission to hold a public hearing in Tadoule Lake. You are the people who will be reporting to the government. It is crucial that you hear first hand from the people who hold that story, a story not documented, but a living memory. There are no words to describe that urgency of this request. (Bussidor, “Presentation”)

Bussidor’s insistence reflects the crucial importance she places on the collective nature of the project. A few months after Petch concluded her “participant-observation” research, between October 1994 and February 1996, Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart conducted their own interviews of the Sayisi Dene. As a community-based project of remembering the past, *Night Spirits* challenges the culturally determined binary of a non-Aboriginal writer transcribing the words of an Aboriginal teller. Much of the text is made up of the narrators’ recollections of the past. Their voices create a polyphonic narrative that contrasts with the formality of Petch’s report.

Though the flexibility and inclusive nature of the collective testimonial enables Bussidor to honour the memory of the Sayisi Dene survivors of the Churchill camps, Bussidor is only too aware that the genre can transcribe the words of her community only imperfectly. For Bussidor, the work of the testimonial can never be completed, since her parents, Suzanna and Artie Cheekie, died in a house-fire in 1972. Despite her careful work of memorialization, Suzanna and Artie remain a ghostly absence that haunts *Night Spirits*. They can only be heard through their creased photographs or through their voices as “night spirits.” On the title page, Bussidor inscribes

an epigraph, connecting her mother with the night spirits that hear the smallest whisper but whose utterances cannot be understood: “When I was a little girl, every night at bedtime, my mom . . . would tuck us in and tell us we had to be quiet or *e’thzil* would hear us. The word *e’thzil* means ‘night spirits’. Night spirits are the spirits of dead people.”

The “night spirits” are symbols of what Bussidor fails to collect, or what the narrators cannot or will not recollect in the testimonial life story project. *E’thzil* highlight the difficulties of translation, mistranslation and non-translation in imperial-colonial contexts. The unintelligibility of these spirits is symbolic of the cultural and linguistic misunderstandings that caused the forced relocation of the Sayisi Dene in the first place. According to the narrators of *Night Spirits*, failure of cultural groups to communicate led directly to the dissolution of the Sayisi Dene community. With a symptomatic lack of cultural sensitivity to Sayisi Dene beliefs, the Department of Indian Affairs relocated the Sayisi Dene to Camp-10, a site adjacent to the Churchill cemetery. Ila’s grandmother Eva Anderson, one of the principal narrators of *Night Spirits*, says: “Everything about our ways as a people was overlooked right from the beginning. That is why they placed us right in the middle of a burial ground to live for the next decade” (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 61).

*Night Spirits* reconstructs the misguided governmental decisions based on mistranslation that led to the relocation. In July 1956, a couple of months before the relocation, the supervisor of Indian Affairs for the region, R. D. Ragan, visited the “Duck Lake Band” to discuss the intended move. “After a very full discussion it was unanimously and amicably agreed by the Duck Lake Band still at this Post that they would move to the mouth of the North River,” Ragan writes in a departmental memo (qtd. in Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 45). However, as Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart point out, the Dene spoke no English, and Ragan and his officials spoke no Dene: “In view of the immense communication problems faced by both sides, what Ragan meant by a ‘full discussion’ is anyone’s guess” (45).

Given the historical background of the “immense communication problems” between the Sayisi Dene and Euro-Canadian groups, Bilgen-Reinart is understandably uneasy and at first unwilling to become involved in Bussidor’s testimonial project. Bilgen-Reinart compensates for her reservations by insisting that Bussidor was the primary initiator and executor of the project. In the Introduction, Bilgen-Reinart suggests that she had virtually no choice but to collaborate with Bussidor in the making of the book:

In 1990 . . . [Ila] told me she wanted to tell her story, and the story of her people, in a book. She wanted me to do it with her . . . I encouraged Ila to write the book alone, to start by talking into a tape recorder. In the spring of 1994, she came right out and asked me to begin working with her, and I realized she meant business. My first impulse was to pull back. I knew some of the heart-breaking injuries my friend and her people had suffered. But to enter their experience, to re-live those nightmares with Ila, and to navigate a joint project with her, seemed perilous. (Bilgen-Reinart xiv)

According to Bilgen-Reinart, Bussidor strongly urged her to participate in the task of compiling the testimonial life. She reports that Bussidor told her “simply that we were meant to write this book together” (xiv), but insists that her co-author drove every step of the production of *Night Spirits*: “[s]he interviewed the elders, she taped her older sister and brothers, and she transcribed and translated those interviews” (xvi). However, Bilgen-Reinart neglects to describe her own role in the making of *Night Spirits*, thus reproducing the historically asymmetric relations between recorder and teller in First Nations “told-to” narrative.<sup>18</sup>

However, because the making and circulation of *Night Spirits* is defiantly collective, and closely tied to the Sayisi Dene’s political demands, the ambiguity of Bilgen-Reinart’s role is of less importance than, for example, Don Barnett’s role in the 1975 edition of *Bobbi Lee*. The active participation of multiple narrators diffuses the recorder’s strict control over the narrative. *Night Spirits* has played a vital role in establishing or reviving community networks among the Sayisi Dene. Participation in the RCAP public hearings at Tadoule Lake has brought Sayisi Dene groups together, and has encouraged them to take stock of misdirected governmental policy leading up to, and dating from, the relocation. Re-opening communication channels in Aboriginal communities is one of the main achievements of RCAP, while the validity of the commissioners’ interpretations, conclusions or recommendations remains open to question.<sup>19</sup>

If Don Barnett’s vigorous editing pushed Lee Maracle to write her own version of *Bobbi Lee*, and if Petch’s report inspired Ila Bussidor to collect, transcribe and translate fuller accounts of her community’s relocation, perhaps Adolph Hungry Wolf’s ethnographic studies of Blackfoot customs motivated his wife, Beverly Hungry Wolf, to trade in her role as Native Informant for the role of Native Anthropologist in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. Beverly, only too aware of how recordings can paraphrase Native North American verbal art as quaint Indian customs, is more careful than Adolph to describe the processes by which the life stories are put together.

First Nations women interlocutors have long played active roles as tellers, recorders and translators. However, published collections of recorded oral narrative have not always acknowledged these mediators. Moreover, because recorders such as Blackman have encouraged their tellers to get personal and stick to their own life story, the collective nature of the stories has been suppressed or ignored. In *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Beverly sets out to recognize the chain of women storytellers, including herself, whom Adolph had concealed in his book, *The Blood People*. In so doing she reconceptualizes some important genre modes of the recorded life story.

*The Ways of My Grandmothers* brings into sharp relief the difficult and uneasy relationship between ethnography, autobiography and Blackfoot/Blood traditions of the collective life story. In an early study of Native American recorded life narrative (1984), Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands argue that in writing autobiography, Native American women move from object of discourse to speaking subject. Helen Hoy questions the narrow forms of subjectivity that Bataille and Sands assume. For Bataille and Sands, “‘ethnographic autobiography’ approaches ‘genuine’ autobiography only when ‘the personality of the narrator breaks through’” (Hoy 109). In Hoy’s reading, *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is autobiographical, though Beverly Hungry Wolf routinely “bypasses opportunities for self-disclosure” (115): “Hungry Wolf is located even in resolutely impersonal passages and in these other women’s stories—embedded in them, that is, not simply ‘breaking through’ occasionally. . . . There is more than just a genealogical and tribal positioning here, however self-defining this cumulative layering of relational mappings may be. Because the text documents the practices of *her* grandmothers, Hungry Wolf’s selection and arrangement provide self-representation” (111-12).

As a collective life story, the text constantly changes speakers and writers, abruptly shifting from first- to third-person narration and taking advantage of the fluidity of personal pronouns. Hungry Wolf connects the stories to one another through the genealogies of the storytellers. “I am related to you, Beverly, because my mother and your grandmother, Hilda Strangling Wolf, were cousins. That makes your mother and me cousins, which, in Indian, makes me your aunt,” explains Mary One Spot (52). Genealogical description as a way to introduce the stories is prevalent in *The Ways of My Grandmothers*. Much of *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is made up of a layering of names of people and detailed descriptions of their relations. For example, Hungry Wolf maps out the different names given to one of her grandmothers, whom she calls AnadaAki:

AnadaAki means Pretty Woman in our language. It is the name she has carried the longest. When she entered school she became known as Hilda Heavy Head, and when she married my grandfather she became Hilda Beebe. After my grandfather died, she remarried and became known as Hilda Strangling Wolf. To top off this name-changing, her real father's name was Joseph Trollinger, a German name which she never carried. (19)

The multiplication of names and relations conveys the impression that more than one storyteller is speaking. Hungry Wolf meticulously draws attention to the range of mediators who pass on the stories. In so doing, Hungry Wolf reconceptualizes authorship in the collective mode. Hungry Wolf defies the voice of the single author, emphasizing instead the grandmothers as authors. In *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Mary One Spot, Paula Weasel Head, Annie Red Crow, Ruth Little Bear and Mrs. Rides-at-the-Door all submit their own contributions, both written and oral. Hungry Wolf does not enclose their passages in quotation marks, suggesting that they themselves authored their life narratives.

While autobiographical discourse affirms Hungry Wolf's legitimacy as speaker and writer, and the collective life story enables Hungry Wolf to displace the autonomous "I," "auto-ethnography" allows Hungry Wolf to explore Blackfoot traditions of self-representation. In auto-ethnographic strategies, "anthropological field research becomes a way to rediscover and study lost siblings, to learn about the transformations, transculturations, and cultural *métissages* at work in various areas of the New World" (Lionnet 26). Auto-ethnography offers Hungry Wolf the possibility of recovering Blackfoot practices (such as the Sun Dance) that Canadian and American governments have actively suppressed. However, auto-ethnography in *The Ways of My Grandmothers* is far from Blackman's earnest project of ethnographic description. Hungry Wolf uses auto-ethnography as a ruse to parody colonial ethnographic discourse. Parallel to her oblique appropriation of autobiography, Hungry Wolf writes a counter-ethnography in the ironic mode. "A TRADITIONAL BLOOD MARRIAGE: A Grandmother Who Married at Seven," is the title of Hungry Wolf's introduction (26-28) to Brown Woman's first-person account (28-31). The title mocks what could be a sensationalist headline in a colonial newspaper of "curious" customs of "primitive" peoples. Thus, auto-ethnography potentially unsettles ethnographic discourse.

Significantly, Hungry Wolf's career as ethnographer begins with her work as Native Informant for her husband, Adolph. Beverly's double role as both "Native Informant" and "Native Anthropologist" turns upside down the professional norms of address in collecting life histories "from the field." In

the Preface, Beverly describes her experience as unacknowledged gatherer of stories, to the great benefit of her husband's professional life: "I first recorded some of the stories in this book while helping my husband compile his book *The Blood People*" (B. Hungry Wolf 9). However, in his Introduction to *The Blood People*, Adolph does not refer to Beverly's participation. Instead, he explains how he came to Blackfoot territory, how he became interested in studying Blackfoot life and how he came to call the Blackfoot people "our People." He writes:

As a child I lived far from the lands of the Blackfoot People. Yet my dreams often took me among these People. As I grew older I went to schools, studied American history, and became a schoolteacher. I wanted to relate to this land and its People, both past and present. So I finally traveled to the lands of the Blackfoot People to see if there was any truth to my childhood dreams. I met an old Blackfoot man who told me there was. . . .

From this first old man I was guided north into Canada to the land of the Bloods—a tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy. These People became the relatives that I saw in my childhood dreams. They are the People of my children's mother. (A. Hungry Wolf xi)

Adolph's childhood "dream" ideologically reinscribes the Romantic nationalist impulse of appropriating indigenous peoples' lands and stories.<sup>20</sup> In referring to his adopted community as "the People of my children's mother," Adolph elides Beverly as subject. She functions solely as mother to his children, as the passage through which Adolph passes without comment. At the same time, Adolph asserts his place at the head of the Hungry Wolf family by describing the children as "my children."

In much the same spirit as Lee Maracle, Beverly appropriates passages from Adolph's texts and re-contextualizes them in *The Ways of My Grandmothers* to different political effect. Passages from at least seven earlier Hungry Wolf books (either authored by Adolph alone, or co-authored by both Adolph and Beverly) resurface in *The Ways of My Grandmothers* (see Hoy 121; 221n). Many of the previously published passages "are . . . repeated verbatim. The few changes that have been made are of a personal nature: the addition of Hungry Wolf's own experiences with a craft, the incorporation of a comment by her mother, the alteration of the general to the specific ("Blackfoot traditions" becoming "my grandmothers' traditions"), and the insertion of a first-person voice into passive constructions. . . . Pictures from other Hungry Wolf books are also cropped . . . to highlight the female experience of tribal life" (221-22n. 16). Beverly re-frames the stories to highlight women tellers (including herself) whom Adolph had failed to acknowledge.

In *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, Beverly reads her husband's accounts, listens to the stories circulating in her community, and retells the narrative to highlight gender relations that had become erased in Adolph's writing. For example, both Adolph's *The Blood People* and Beverly's *The Ways of My Grandmothers* include stories of the famous war raider, Weasel Tail. However, the texts differ significantly in the representation of "his wife," Hate Woman. Adolph's publication acknowledges that "his wife accompanied him" on the war raids, though Weasel Tail remains the active participant in the "fantastic adventure[s]." Adolph recounts that in Weasel Tail's final and most glorious war raid, "while his wife waited in the nearby timber, he and the other man managed to steal fourteen good horses and they all returned home safely" (A. Hungry Wolf 269).

Beverly does not appear to appreciate the metaphorical implications of Hate Woman "wait[ing] in the nearby timber" while the men steal the horses. In Beverly's re-telling, Hate Woman is directly involved in the war raid: "Weasel Tail, Hate Woman, and one other man. . . . managed to steal fourteen good horses, with which they returned to their own camps safely" (B. Hungry Wolf 62). In Adolph's version, Hate Woman is an indirect, shadowy figure, obscured by a screen of trees. In Beverly's book, Hate Woman carries "her six-shooter, which she aimed along with the rest" (62). Hate Woman, no longer an appendage to her husband, becomes a war raider in her own right in Beverly's narration.

Beverly's version directly contests the bias of the anthropological record that has constructed Weasel Tail as the sole author of his exploits. "An anthropologist spent time with [Weasel Tail] in his last years and recorded the details of his life. Unfortunately, no one asked his wife to leave her stories about the war trails that she went on" (B. Hungry Wolf 60). In Adolph's telling, Weasel Tail enjoys the high status of storyteller in his community: "In later years, Weasel Tail was a frequent participant at Sun Dance Encampments, pow-wows and other gatherings of the Old People. He was often called upon to relate his exploits so that the ceremonies could proceed" (A. Hungry Wolf 269). However, in Beverly's re-writing, Hate Woman becomes the storyteller: "Hate Woman was asked to recount this adventure [of stealing 14 horses] during the tribal Sun Dance, which was a great and unusual honour for a woman" (B. Hungry Wolf 62).

Because of the historically asymmetric relations between non-Aboriginal editors and Aboriginal tellers, the process of translating recorded life story onto the page has often re-inscribed textual colonization and dominance.



Avowals of friendship, trust, mutual responsibility, shared agenda and the relinquishing of authorial control often cloak the workings of ethnographic authority. In *During My Time*, Blackman asserts an intimate relationship with Davidson as a means of boosting her own credentials as ethnographer. Don Barnett claims to be Maracle's equal in anti-imperialist struggle while dismissing the formative role of his editorial intervention. Üstün Bilgen-Reinart also effaces her own role in the making of *Night Spirits*, as if to intensify the authenticity of Ila Bussidor's testimonial project. In contrast, Virginia Petch and Adolph Hungry Wolf conceal the many voices that contribute to their authoritative ethnographic interpretations. However, by retelling their life stories, Maracle, Bussidor and Hungry Wolf transform the genre modes of the testimonial, report and ethnographic life history to suit their own goals. Recent examples of recorded life stories, in which First Nations interlocutors play a larger role, make good use of the flexible nature of the collective life story. The collective life story offers the possibility of imagining a diverse range of objectives, audience and forms of authorship. In the collective life story, recorders are more likely to acknowledge oral forms of copyright, in which those who pass on the stories become co-authors of the stories.

## NOTES

My thanks to Barbara Godard, David Chariandy, Joanne Saul and Livia Monnet for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Canadian Literature* for their helpful suggestions and careful readings of the paper.

- 1 Speculations on whose intentionality is supreme—the recorder's or the teller's—dominate critical debates on recorded life narrative. While poststructuralist arguments posit that the Aboriginal narrator is but a cypher at the mercy of the author's textual manipulations, readings of recorded life stories as forms of *testimonio* tend to reverse the unilateral relation and insist that the narrator is the ultimate authority. For examples of critical studies that unduly emphasize the formative role of the recorder, see Murray and Lejeune. For examples of critical studies that excessively emphasize the free agency of the teller, see Donovan and Beverley.
- 2 Entextualization is the process of transforming oral discourse into written discourse. As William Clements argues, the term entextualization is helpful to show that "oral expression and textualization are not dichotomies but rather interactive" (10). For Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, the process of entextualization is in effect a process of decontextualization: "entextualization is the process of rendering discourse extractable, making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit, a text, that can be lifted out of interactional setting" (qtd. in Clements 10). See also Murray.
- 3 For more on the historically asymmetric relations between Aboriginal tellers and non-Aboriginal recorders in oral literary production, see Krupat, Murray, Clements,

- and Blaeser. In Blaeser's words, "translation in the Native American context has come to represent a process of domination" (58).
- 4 For examples from the 1970s and early 1980s of ethnographic life histories of Native women tellers by non-Native women writers, see Vanderburgh, Andrews, and Pitseolak.
  - 5 The kitchen table is a standard trope in feminist research that suggests collaboration between women interlocutors. See also Silman.
  - 6 For example, if we study the spiraling loss of trust in Linda Griffiths's and Maria Campbell's *The Book of Jessica*, the enforcement of "dominant-subordinate relationships" occurs most conclusively at the moment of the drafting of the copyright contract between Griffiths, Campbell and Theatre Passe-Muraille that legally entrenches the ownership of the play, *Jessica*, in the hands of the theatre. Also, see Feltes for more on how authorship helps to consolidate the publisher's control over the means of production.
  - 7 I borrow the phrase "god-trick" from Donna Haraway, who expands upon the notion of "seeing without being seen" as a strategy of dominance (189).
  - 8 In the re-telling of the life story in *I am Woman*, Maracle again emphasizes self-transformation over time, organizing the narrative not chronologically but around Maracle's/Bobbi's intellectual growth and development. Significantly, *I am Woman* contains its own told-to narrative, "Rusty" (43-61). Here, however, Maracle is the recorder of Rusty's story. She includes her own questions, as well as commentary on her changing views about Rusty's life, thereby creating a more explicitly dialogic testimonial life narrative.
  - 9 In addition to Blackman's *During My Time*, examples of the dually produced life narrative from the 1970s and 1980s include Vanderburgh, Pelletier and Poole, Spradley, and Speare.
  - 10 Examples of recent collective life stories include: Silman; Hanna and Henry; Hitakonanu'laxk; and Kulchyski, McCaskill and Newhouse.
  - 11 Michèle Kaltemback argues that in the collective life story, "la multiplicité des narrateurs contribue à repousser le rapporteur à l'arrière-plan" (163). Kaltemback supports Boyce Davies's analysis of the more democratic relations in the collective life story (4).
  - 12 According to Petch, "after 40 years, no answers to the relocation issue have been given by government and no compensation or apology has been received" (Section 7.0).
  - 13 In the final report of RCAP, the commissioners acknowledge that the Sayisi Dene's "traditional lands have been included within the boundaries of Nunavut," an act of land appropriation that "adds to the Sayisi Dene's sense of grievance" (Canada 438).
  - 14 In 1995, the Sayisi Dene at Tadoule Lake negotiated a self-government package that includes control over health, education and community programs (Bilgen-Reinart xii).
  - 15 In May 1996, the Sayisi Dene Nation joined nineteen other Manitoba First Nations in signing a tentative agreement with the federal government that granted 23 000 acres (9000 hectares) of land and \$580 000 for economic development to the Sayisi Dene (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 138).
  - 16 *Night Spirits* carefully documents the forty years of Sayisi Dene protest against the relocation. From 1956 onwards, leaders of the Sayisi Dene repeatedly wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs, demanding more suitable spaces for living than the shores of Hudson Bay, Camp-10 or Dene Village (the three sites where the commu-

nity had been relocated in 1956, 1959 and 1967, respectively) (Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 72). Northern magazines and newspapers such as *The Musk-Ox*, *The Beaver*, *Winnipeg Free Press* and *The Taiga Press* published reports on the “plight” of the Sayisi Dene throughout the 1960s and 1970s (151-52). In 1971 Phil Dickman, a community worker who spent several years in Dene Village, published “Thoughts on Relocation,” based on interviews he conducted during his stay with the Sayisi Dene (90; 102). In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Sayisi Dene Nation commissioned studies to help construct their cases for self-government, compensation for the relocation and land title (138).

- 17 In an effort to protect the privacy of those she interviewed, Petch kept her informants anonymous. However, there are strong parallels between Bussidor’s life story as narrated in *Night Spirits* and Petch’s version in Section 5.0 of her report.
- 18 Bilgen-Reinart’s self-effacement is reflective of an old problem in Native American and First Nations “told-to” narrative. As David Brumble argues, editors of recorded Aboriginal life stories have historically attempted “to create the fiction that the narrative is all the Indian’s own” (75).
- 19 RCAP has been criticized by Aboriginal and governmental spokespeople alike for being ineffectual in bringing about the changes the commissioners recommended. The Minister of Indian Affairs has publicly disassociated the government from the report’s recommendations (470 in all), claiming that they had already been implemented by the time the report was released (Frideres 232). Patricia Monture-Angus, Mohawk legal scholar, is equally critical of RCAP. According to Monture-Angus, the commissioners spent “day after day travelling to communities to listen to the people,” only to “return . . . to Ottawa to craft solutions in isolation behind closed doors.” She maintains that RCAP remained “merely in consultation with Aboriginal Peoples” (12).
- 20 For more on Romantic nationalist appropriations of indigenous traditions, see Lutz and Fee.

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