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Canadian Native Literature and the Sixties

A Historical and Bibliographical Survey

I. "Native Literature in the Sixties?"—Stating a Dilemma

> H.L.: I was asked to contribute to a book on Canadian literature in the 1960s, put together by somebody here at UBC. . . . And I looked at my sources, and I said, "I can't, because in the 1960s there was no, or hardly any, Native fiction or poetry or drama . . . "
> H.A.: No, there was no literature! Native people were not at all at that level of concern. We were still in the ghettos, and we were still concerned with issues of bread and butter on the table. You cannot talk about culture or literature when you are hungry. So, there was no way! I had tried it, and I would only get insulted from my own people. So, there was no way that we would talk about literature at all. We were just not there! (Adams, "Interview" 137)

The quotation above is from a conversation with the Métis scholar, writer and activist Howard Adams, recorded on October 10, 1990 at his home in Vancouver. It demonstrates not only Adams's dilemma in 1964 after his return from Berkeley as the first Métis to hold a doctorate, but also my dilemma in writing this essay. The more I looked at the task before me, the more I came to realize how nearly literally Howard Adams's words would have to be taken.

II. The Setting: A Legacy of Colonialism and Ethnocide

> But our greatest wound was not of the flesh but in spirit and in our souls. We were demoralized, confused and frightened. (Chief Dan George 19)

The 1960s were indeed "bread and butter" years for Canadian Native people, both in the physical and in the ideological sense. Confronted with stifling

conditions, Native people struggled hard to retain/reclaim their identity. While there were incidents of remarkable hope and "progress" in the relations between Native and non-Native, there were also failures, and the period is marked by contrasts and internal conflicts, as a few examples may serve to demonstrate.

As "late" as the winter of 1957/58 fourteen Inuit people died of starvation in the North of Canada, but, as "early" as 1958 John Diefenbaker appointed Jim Gladstone (Blood) as the first Indian senator (Dempsey 164), at a time when Indians and Inuit people did not have the right to vote. Two years later, franchise followed on the federal level (and for the Inuit in 1962), but Alberta and Quebec did not implement provincial franchise for Indians until 1965 and 1969 respectively. While the Canadian Bill of Rights was passed in 1960, Indian women continued to lose their Indian status on marrying a non-Native husband, while Native men upon marriage extended their Indian status to the whole family, including non-Native wives.[1] In 1962 Norval Morrisseau and other Native artists won national recognition in Toronto, while in Saskatchewan in 1963 Métis people were forcibly driven off their road allowance settlement near Yorkton, in the last of many Métis dispersals (Campbell, "Interview" 45), and in Glaslyn, Saskatchewan, white citizens beat to death a young Saultaux Indian for camping on "their" sportsfield. The sixties abound in such contrasts as do our own times, and many Native adults today recall with bitterness the ordeals they endured. So does Beth Cuthand in her narrative poem "Four Songs for the Fifth Generation" (39-45), where the voice of the third generation is that of a Native woman who grew up in the sixties.

> It was 1960
>   when dad and mom
>   got the vote.
> All us kids got copies of Canada's
>   'Declaration of Human Rights'
> and took them home
>   and put them up
>   all over the walls.
> Yeah, that was a great day
> for Canada
>   'Oh Canada
>   Our true north strong and free.'
> We moved south when I was ten
>   to a town with sidewalks

and running water
and a playground with a pool
not a lake
'Hey Injuns! Yer not allowed
in the pool.
You'll get it dirty,
dirty'. (42)

Through most of the sixties the brutal policy continued of removing Native children from their communities and educating them in residential schools. Amongst the results of this ethnocidal practice was the physical, linguistic, and spiritual alienation of three generations of Native people from their own homes and families. After three generations of not having had the privilege to grow up in a family situation, many individuals today are reduced to a status of confusion and shame, the effects of which are felt daily in Indian urban ghettoes and on skid row throughout North America. Colonialist "de-education" left the majority of schooled Natives literally speechless. Native writing reflects this process.

The current lack of Native scholars with graduate degrees in literature (or, indeed, in any subject) is the result of the residential school system, which was certainly not designed to prepare Native children for university. The de-education practice was based on an 1880 amendment to the Indian Act of 1876, still upheld by the Indian Act of 1951, by which "any Indian obtaining a university degree would be automatically enfranchised" (DIAND 61). "Enfranchisement," one of the key issues of all Indian Acts and amendments, is a euphemism for loss of Indian status. Very few individuals chose to pursue a higher education under these conditions, even if their residential schooling had enabled them to. For example, in 1958, Bill Asikinack, today a professor at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, was the only Native student in teachers college in Ontario from where he graduated in 1962. Howard Adams for years denied his Native background, passed as white, and in the sixties went to the United States to receive higher education from Berkeley. It was in California that Adams experienced his "political awakening," which later turned him into the most active and vocal Métis leader in Saskatchewan,

The more I became involved, the clearer colonialism became. I was very moved when I heard Malcolm X speak to the students about black nationalism. Afterwards, I wanted time to think of the beautiful things he had said. The ideas he expressed about black nationalism were so important that I could not put

> them out of my mind. I kept trying to put them into the Indian/Métis situation at home. Nationalism seemed to be the spirit that motivated the black people to a new sense of pride and confidence. Like the black people, I began to reject my feeling of inferiority and shame, and to become proud of my Indian heritage and Native nation. In Berkeley I read everything I could find on Métis and Indians of Canada. I spoke with pride of my Indian heritage. By the time I'd finished my doctorate I was anxious to return to Canada and particularly to Saskatchewan where I would be at home among Métis people. (Adams, Prison 153)

Like language and the oral tradition, Native religious lifeways are tied to the land. Traditionally, Native religious ceremonies are unalienable parts of everyday life practices, not restricted to certain edifices, days of the week, relics, artifacts and so on, but a whole way of conducting one's life. Such religions cannot be destroyed unless lifeways are changed and other beliefs are forcefully put in place. Amendments to the First Indian Act were designed to help missionary efforts at destroying Native religious identities, and an 1884 amendment forbade the celebration of the Potlatch and the Sun Dance. The 1951 Indian Act lifted these bans. While most ceremonies had continued underground in clandestine meetings, the many years of prohibition did impede their scope. In the 1960s Native people began gradually to overcome the effects of these bans. Early writings by Native authors are often attempts to reclaim what had been made to vanish (Johnson 1911; Robinson 1956; Clutesi 1967; 1969; Spradley/Sewid 1969).

III. The Sixties Between Reform and Revolution

> She also told me about a local group called Native Alliance for Red Power (NARP) . . . and when I read their first issue it sounded pretty good to me . . . sort of an anti-White culture thing along with a demand for Red Power. They also wrote about their first demonstration, which was against religious, mainly Catholic, schools. They called it "cultural genocide" and objected to schools not allowing Indians to speak and be taught in their own languages. (Maracle, *Bobbi* 132)

In the late fifties and early sixties Diefenbaker's populist politics appealed to large sections of Western and non-establishment Canadian voters. Jim Gladstone's appointment to the senate extended this appeal to many "progressive" Native people, and franchise for Status Indians and the Declaration of Human Rights in 1960 looked like further steps towards relying on the support of Native citizens. From the start, many Native leaders, especially conservative treaty Indians, were wary of the right to vote for Indians, fearing that it might constitute a decisive step towards assimilation

because it meant the relinquishment of treaty status and the unilateral imposition of civil rights (and duties) on Native peoples. Such fears were not ill-founded. In 1953, the American Congress had passed House Concurrent Resolution 108, better known as the "Termination Act," designed to assimilate all Native Americans into the melting pot, by using privatization of Indian reservations and termination of all special rights and privileges guaranteed to Indians by the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs). Native Americans soon came to call this devastating act to destroy tribal structures the "Extermination Act," and they fought a long struggle against it, until the Nixon administration halted the erosion in the seventies. Canadian Natives feared the beginning of a similar development in Canada. In 1968/69 the liberal federal government under Prime Minister Trudeau, with Jean Chrétien as the head of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIAND), conducted a series of consultations with Native leaders who voiced their concerns, especially with regard to land title, treaty rights and cultural self-determination. But policy had already been unilaterally determined before talks even began. When the federal government in 1969 published its White Paper, and Jean Chrétien publicly called for a dissolution of his own department, Native leaders were appalled and protested this initiative, which advocated almost an exact replica of the Termination Policy in the United States sixteen years earlier. It called for a repeal of the Indian Act and an end to "the federal responsibility for Indians and terminating their special status." In the DIAND's own words,

> ... the government hoped to abolish what it deemed the false separation between Indian people and the rest of Canadian society.
>
> What the government had not fully understood was the value Indian people placed on their special status within confederation and on their treaty rights. The Indian Act thus revealed itself to be a paradox for Indian people. While it could be viewed as a mechanism for social control and assimilation, it was also the vehicle that confirmed the special status of Indians in Canada.
>
> So vehement was the negative reaction of Indian people and the general public that the government withdrew the White Paper. Ironically, the new policy had served to fan sparks of Indian nationalism. (DIAND 87-8)

The government recalled Indian agents from the reserves and started funding Native organisations directly. This decisive latter move helped to divide Native groups into those who were funded and respected by the government, and those who rebelled and lost good standing with their colonial grantgivers. It is true, however, that the response to the White Paper helped

encourage already existing tendencies towards Native cultural nationalism. The "winds of change" fanned Canadian Indian politics.

Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* (1969) is a seminal book for Native cultural nationalism. It was written and published in direct response to Chrétien's White Paper, and the title ironically reflects Prime Minister Trudeau's vision of a "just society" for Canada (17, 28, passim). Cardinal states that "Indian people are now impatient with the verbal games that had been played" (11). He hopes in his book "to point a path to radical change that will admit the Indian with restored pride to his rightful place in the Canadian heritage . . . and find his place in Canadian society" (2). The latter statement is typical of Cardinal's approach. It is an angry, powerfully verbalized, and poignantly argued attack on dominant culture's treatment of Canadian Native peoples. The book contains an abundance of illuminating and pertinent passages on education, Indian identity, the relationship to the land, and on the cultural and political conflict between Christian priests and Native medicine people. His observation that missionaries and churchmen have supplanted medicine people and elders, thus utilizing the elders' power for the colonizer, has lost nothing of its actuality. Maria Campbell drew attention to this fact twenty years later (Campbell, "Interview" 47).

Cardinal amasses a great number of cases where the government and its colonizing administrators have wronged Native people, and his book was a consciousness-raiser for many Native and non-Native readers. But it remains a response to existing conditions rather than proposing fundamental changes or radical action. Like Howard Adams in the interview quoted, Cardinal states that even political action for the impoverished is a "bread and butter" issue: "If Indians have money they must buy food and clothing first" (114).

Cardinal argues for joint action and says that Indians must organize (97), but at the same time he says, seemingly without much regret, that

> [t]he deep division between registered and nonregistered Indians could not be bridged. The Métis or nonstatus Indians also were in the process of attempting to organize. However, their problems and consequently their aims were markedly different from those of the registered Indians. Provincial governments hold power over the Métis. The federal government ruled the status Indian. Treaty Indians feared association with the Métis would jeopardize their relationship with the federal government and, more importantly, endanger their treaty or aboriginal rights. (109-10)

Unlike Howard Adams in his analysis of internal colonialism in Canada, *Prison of Grass* (1975), Cardinal does not identify colonial imperialism, let

alone capitalism, as the main enemy, but rather the hypocrisy of white rulers who speak with forked tongues across what he calls the "buckskin curtain." While perceiving parallels with the struggle of Blacks in the United States, he is not calling for international solidarity with Third or Fourth World peoples around the globe, but rather limits his analysis to the relationship between registered Indians in Canada and administrators, priests, politicians, and educators who deny Natives access to the resources they were promised in the treaties. Even some of Cardinal's case studies, fictional or real, tend to uphold the colonial give-and-take relationship rather than advocating political radicalism. Cardinal quotes an anonymous "young chief" who rejects being on welfare, because he wants to be a free man. The young chief ends his statement by pointing out that Natives have enough natural resources, and then he asks the colonizer for a different type of handout,

> Why does the government not send us men who would come to teach us the skills we need to survive in the ways of the white man? . . . Instead of sending us welfare, why does the government not send us the money to develop the resources that we have here so that people can make their living from these reserves? (63)

This is a plea for administrative reforms to extend the niche provided, at least on paper, for registered Indians within Canadian society. Harold Cardinal's later book, *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians* (1977) remains similar in style and approach. When compared to later texts by Adams, Armstrong, LaRocque, Campbell or Maracle, the limits of the reformist approach in *The Unjust Society* become obvious.

Besides official government measures like the White Paper directly pertaining to Native peoples, there were external influences affecting Native/non-Native relations in the sixties. The impact of the Civil Rights Movement began to be felt. In 1964 Ontario finally repealed the law requiring the segregation of Black students in provincial schools, a practice that had long been discontinued. A year later, 2,000 Civil Rights marchers, including many politicians and officials, protested in front of the American Embassy in Ottawa. Lincoln Alexander, the first Black Member of Parliament, was elected in 1968. In the process, white liberals came to realize that race relations in Canada were not so much better than in the United States.[2] Instead of blatant discrimination there was a general neglect of Native people and their plight. Student activists attempted to implement in Canada the civil rights tactics developed in the Southern States, and in the

summer of 1965 ten students from Toronto and Saskatchewan moved onto Indian and Métis communities in Saskatchewan as part of the Student Neestow Partnership Project to learn more about conditions there and to support the Native struggle for self-determination (Dobbin 226).

However, there are also major differences between Natives in Canada and Blacks in the United States. Both suffer from colonialism, but they have different histories, a different relationship to the land, and most importantly, they differ in numbers, in cultural diversity, and in their degree of urbanization. Nevertheless, the more radical political leaders emphasized the parallels and called for the solidarity of all Third and Fourth World Nations, seeing reservations and urban ghettos as internal colonies involved in the international anti-imperialist struggle for decolonization. As the Civil Rights Movement was radicalized in the Black Panthers and the most active student organizations, so were some groups of Native people in Canada, especially the Métis of Northern Saskatchewan, who share a tradition of political activism closely connected to the names of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris (Dobbin). Many young Native people felt attracted by the activism and insights of radical students and political leaders, while others followed the drift towards depoliticization and escaped into the fringes of the hippie subculture. West Coast Métis author and activist Lee Maracle relates, in her autobiography *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975), how, for a time, she went through this process herself, and Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), describes the development in great detail in her novel *Slash* (1985).

In the late sixties George Ryga's play *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, first staged in Vancouver in 1967, played throughout Canada in the following years, became a general consciousness-raiser, not only for white audiences, but for many Native persons as well, who for the first time witnessed how a sympathetic non-Native author addressed their situation in public. The play demonstrated that Native actors could successfully play on mainstream stages, and that urban Indians could, indeed, be "news." For many young Native people seeing Ryga's play became an incentive in their struggle for their humanity. By the end of the sixties Native people in Canada were no longer invisible or inaudible. Gradually, like Harold Cardinal, they started to articulate their demands and to express their cultural identity in writing, using English as the *lingua franca* of pan-Indian and intertribal communication, and as the appropriate medium to reach the Canadian majority at large.

IV. Oral Traditions and Life Histories

> I'm not a lawyer, I'm not a politician. I'm a storyteller. I've always been a storyteller . . . This is probably the only contribution I can make to my society: to be a storyteller, and to defend the authentic Native voice, to speak up for the Trickster. To tell people: "Keep your hands off! If you want to hear stories then you come to me. And you go to my grandmother or my grandfather." (Keeshig-Tobias 83-4)

In his introduction to the 1961 republication of E. Pauline Johnson's *Legends of Vancouver* (originally 1911), Marcus Van Steen writes about the Mohawk poet and her West Coast mentor, Chief Joe Capilano: "they both came from the proud but warm-hearted race of our first Canadians" (vi). He addresses the collection in the same vein,

> None of these stories, as they appear here, can properly be classified as folklore. There is more in them of the sophisticated artistry of Pauline Johnson than of the simple imaginings of a primitive people. But the folklore is unmistakably there, lovingly embellished, almost transformed by the word skill of the Mohawk singer. (vii)

In their condescension, Van Steen's words are symptomatic of the early 1960s. More than thirty years later, it seems superfluous to criticize Van Steen in detail, because phrases like "*our* first Canadians [emphasis mine]," or "simple imaginings of a primitive people" reveal themselves for what they are: as not only racist, but also factually wrong. When Lee Maracle read the book recently, she lauded E.P. Johnson for *not* embellishing but *retaining* the voice of Joe Capilano without transforming it:

> She was true to his voice, the beautiful language that he used in English. . . . Our great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers, really did speak English very well in the beginning. The residential school robbed us of both languages. Those who didn't go to residential school had no problem learning English or speaking English. . . . (Maracle, "Interview" 171)

In the sixties, after half a century of paternalist domination and ethnocidal education, Native people in Canada had become literary mutes: "The decades between the First World War and the 1969 government White Paper on Indian policy was a barren period for native writing in Canada" (Petrone 95).[3] Instead of articulating themselves on the printed page, mainstream culture spoke in their place. While the oral tradition had been carried on in Indian, Métis and Inuit communities in the aboriginal languages as well as in English and French, its situation in the sixties presented a dialectic. While some saw (and continue to see) its function as being the residue and bearer of traditional cultures not accessible to the colonizer—thus, not to be published in

order to protect it for Native people—others would like to see it in print to preserve it from being lost, since it is always only "One Generation From Extinction" (Johnston, "One Generation" 10). In the sixties, however, Native authors/storytellers did not have enough access to publishing to even attempt the latter process. If Native stories saw print at all, it was either in collections of "Indian Tales" written and/or edited by non-Native ethnologists, hobbyists or literary scholars, or as "autobiographies," which were, more often than not, retold and extensively edited by non-Native ethnologists or friends. This pattern of literary domination did not begin to change until very late in the decade.[4]

George Clutesi's *Son of Raven, Son of Deer: Fables of the Tse-shaht People* marks 1967 as the beginning of contemporary writing by Native authors in Canada. It is a collection of tales, of translated poems from the Nootka oral tradition, and of illustrations by the author. In his introduction Clutesi himself, rather than a non-Native, explains the origin and objectives of his collection. He illuminates the didactic function of traditional Native storytelling by opposing it to the often nonsensical "message" of European nursery rhymes. His style is often self-consciously literary. The poems, mostly unrhymed, use repetitions, onomatopoeia and other rhetorical devices. Native names and terms, and a whole stanza in Nootka (Wakashan), manifest the linguistic identity of the author's people on the printed page and demonstrate his pride in Nootka cultural heritage. As a descendant of a Sheshaht lineage of chiefs, George Clutesi was an official storyteller, and the book is an extension of his traditional function.

Like so many Native authors[5], Clutesi was a multi-talented artist. At the Montreal Expo, he painted a mural and presented a poem in English which proudly depicts the cultural practices of his people, moving from the painting of petroglyphs to the carving of totem poles and culminating in the ideal of being a strong provider,

> In the beginning he merely marked
> Then he incised on rock.
> Later he carved on wood to paint and colour with rock and roe.
> He believed in a God; he aspired to a generous heart.
> Asked for strength of arm, a true aim for his bow,
> To provide and share with his fellow man. (125)

Alliterations and irregular rhymes follow conventional literary patterns to extol the art and values of his culture before colonization. As such, the

poem stands in line with similar ones, like "The Red-Man," written much earlier by the Canadian Iroquois exile in Britain, Frank Prewett, or like "I am the Redman," written a decade later by Duke Redbird. Clutesi's poem ends with an assertion of sovereignty and equity, and the tradition of sharing that reached its greatest manifestation in the Potlatch tradition of the West Coast nations,

> With all the powers at hand,
> A great potlatch he would now command.
> To bid you: "Come, enter and share with me."
> A rich cultural inheritance is his indeed. (126)

The importance of Clutesi's collection for the development of Native literature in Canada can be assessed better today than when it was published over two decades ago. Since then Native tales have been collected and published, from the West Coast (Schwarz), from the Cree (Ray/Stevens; Brass), the Inuit (Nanogak; Metayer), the Ojibway (Johnston), and from other Native nations. Clutesi was the first to collect stories and write them down as a Native storyteller, and to write an introduction explaining their function to non-Native readers. It was not until twenty years later that Alexander Wolf achieved a similar degree of self-determination with *Earth Elder Stories* (1988). With his conscious effort to preserve his heritage for future generations, and to share with a general public by publication, Clutesi was ahead of his time.

Next to tales and myths from the oral tradition, Native autobiographies are the most widely published type of early Native writing. Gretchen M. Bataille and Kathleen Mullen Sands in their study *American Indian Women Telling Their Lives* distinguish between oral and written autobiography, each with varying degrees of non-Native participation. According to Bataille and Sands, autobiographies based on an oral original may be separated into the "ethnographic" and the "as-told-to," depending on the scholarly interest or personal empathy of the collectors. It is characteristic of early Native autobiographies that they are not really *auto*biographies in the true sense of the word, but depend heavily on outside collaboration with non-Native recorders, translators, co-authors, writers and/or editors.

Nuligak's autobiography, *I, Nuligak*, the life story of an Inuit from the Mackenzie Delta area, is based on a manuscript in Nuligak's own hand, but it is not clear how "true" to the original the published version may be. Following an underlying traditional mythic structure (McGrath 102, 103),

the life-history was originally written down in Inuktitut some time before 1956. The manuscript was then handed over to missionary Maurice Metayer for translating and editing. The English translation (from the French) appeared in 1966. It stands as the first in a long tradition of Inuit autobiographies that were published throughout the seventies and eighties relying on non-Native collaborators like Dorothy Eber, Maurice Metayer or Gerald Deagle and Alan Mettrick, the lawyers of Anthony Apakark Thrasher. Later, in the eighties, Inuit editors and publishers assumed the function of collaborators and began publishing bilingual, tri-typographical oral autobiographies by Inuit elders, in English and Inuktitut, using syllabic and Roman orthography. Besides recording the adventures and exploits of the author, *I, Nuligak* also contains two poems, one of them in a bilingual Inuktitut-English version (171, 185). Appendices include Inuit sagas and a treatise on the igloo. The autobiography is a record of Nuligak's life and an ethnographic source of information about the Inuit hunting, fishing and gathering culture, as well as a historiography of their gradual colonization and dependence on sedentary life at mission stations and trade settlements.

By contrast, another well known autobiography of the late sixties, James Sewid's *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid, a Kwakiutl Indian*, is not based on a manuscript by Sewid, but was composed from taped conversations, structured interviews, a daughter's scrap book, psychological tests and the participant observation of James P. Spradley, who is listed as the author. Written in the first person singular, the text appears to convey James Sewid's own voice, but because of the context of its production, the book reflects a colonial discourse in which James Sewid remains the observed object, studied and interpreted by the ethnographer as subject. In his introduction, Spradley explains the objectives and methods pursued, and in his final evaluation he explores Sewid's adaptation to culture conflict. Sewid's own objective for the book was neither literary nor ethnological, but rather political and cultural: to set an example and to reach readers he would not have been able to approach personally (260). Similar to Clutesi's books, the text documents the pride in being able to share. Sewid is a chief raised in the tradition of the Potlatch and the importance of titles and lineage. As a personalized and regional historiography, the text follows West Coast Native cultures from the times when the "big do," the Potlatch, was still banned, to the time of rebuilding a culture almost destroyed by missionary impact. Throughout, Chief James Sewid

insists on the equality of both cultures and the necessity to be "progressive," that is to be successful in the mainstream. The older he grows, however, the more deliberately he returns to, and rejuvenates, Kwakiutl culture. His return culminates in the erection of a big house and the establishment of the Kwakwala Arts and Crafts Group. Gradually, as one reads the text, the initial object-subject relationship, of which one is almost painfully aware in the beginning, seems to be reversed and in the end James Sewid reveals himself as a strong personality, an ambitious entrepreneur, a leader of his people, and a social worker who dedicates his life to the improvement of Native/non-Native relations, based on a pride in Kwakiutl heritage that allows his people to face the dominant society without fear.

How to face the dominant society and how to survive in it are questions underlying most Native autobiographical writing of the seventies, the decade in which this genre became the most prolific one in Native literature. Some texts were true *auto*biographies (Tetso 1971; Boulanger 1971), while others were edited by non-Native specialist James R. Stevens, and contained oral history and "folk tales" (Kennedy 1972; Redsky 1972). Autobiographies relating the contemporary struggle for survival in urban and rural Canada appeared both as results of collaboration with non-Natives (Pelletier 1973; Maracle, *Bobbi Lee* 1975) or were written by the subjects themselves (Willis 1973; Campbell 1975). Many of these texts had their origins in the 1960s and earlier, but it needed the rebirth of nationalism and ethnic pride, inflamed by political anger, to arouse larger public interest and to set the first Native bestseller in motion: Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* still stands as a seminal work, setting a standard against which all later Native autobiographies are being measured, both in literary and political terms. The examples of Nuligak, Sewid, Campbell and others indicate that Native writing in Canada developed according to a pattern outlined in the United States some years earlier, with an ever increasing number of Native persons acting as authors, collectors, editors, and publishers.

V. Literature as Assertion of Ethnic Continuity

> . . . the language changes from place to place. But also, in the country you live in, the past is always there. The voices, even if they are 5,000 years old, a million years old, are there. But when you leave that place, and you come to another place, then it must be harder to be able to hear those voices. (Campbell "Interview" 63)

Towards the very end of the sixties, Native authors began producing texts that went beyond the more traditional forms of "myths and fables," political oratory, or life histories. With these texts they moved into the area most easily recognized as "literature" (*belles lettres*) in a conventional European/Eurocentric sense. Often, poetry and prose fiction are direct results of a growing pride in Nativeness, and contents and message reflect the process of growing socio-political and cultural emancipation of Native people in Canada (Lutz 1995b).

Kent Gooderham's *I Am An Indian* (1969) reflects the very beginning of this process, marking an initial step. It is the first anthology of Native literature published in Canada, and in most aspects it still follows the "colonial" pattern: the editor is non-Native, the majority of texts are historical, either from the oral tradition or sections from memoirs and biographies. Approximately fifteen authors are non-Native, seven are Indians from the United States, and of the remaining fifty or so texts by Native people from Canada, only about twenty are contemporary, including recorded speeches, (parts of) memoirs, newspaper articles, historical sketches, Buffy Sainte-Marie's song "Universal Soldier," and about ten poems.

Poetry was and still is the most predominant genre used by Native authors and other People of Colour in North America. In the case of Native authors, this may have to do with structural affinities between poetry and certain ritualized forms of oratory. More generally, however, the phenomenon is related to the "bread and butter" issue addressed earlier, that is, for a person preoccupied with economic survival, writing a short poem may be a more feasible undertaking than the sustained and costly effort of writing a full-length novel or drama. Some poems are spontaneous reactions to daily experiences, such as the sadness expressed in Amy Marie George's "Damian" over having to surrender a baby to hospital (A.M. George 20-21), or Saul Terry's comical "Coming of Age" of a bullfrog (Terry 39). Because of the collective trauma experienced by Native people, the majority of authors lament the loss of lives, land, language and religion in their poems. Some texts contain both nostalgia for a past seemingly forever lost, and hatred for the European settlers who caused that loss. Others go beyond "the lament" and derive strength for the future from pride in the past.

The rejection of dominant society is also the most striking feature of songs of protest sung in the sixties by Native performers Winston Wuttunee, Alanis Obomsawin, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and Willie Dunn. Throughout

their careers, singers Sainte-Marie, Obomsawin and Dunn have remained active supporters of the Native struggle for self-determination. Born at Piapot Reserve in Saskatchewan in the forties, Sainte-Marie was adopted and raised in the United States by a part-Micmac family. Her songs "Now that the Buffalo is Gone" and "My Country 'Tis of Thy People You're Dying" personally address the dominant culture as a collective "you," exposing the hypocrisy of white politicians, educators, and missionaries. By singing out the names of places, historical individuals and Indian nations involved, Buffy Sainte-Marie evokes memories of concrete political and military incidents, and of fraud and deceit in the relations between Native and non-Native. "My Country . . . " is a detailed and historically charged overview of Native American history, stating that the white man is now killing the land itself. "Now That the Buffalo Is Gone" attacks the hypocrisy of Uncle Sam who left nothing to the Indians after having conquered them and killed off the Buffalo, while, after having defeated Nazi Germany, he left Germans "their pride and . . . left them their land" (which by the way is not quite correct).

In Native poetry and songs of the sixties, the greed of the white man and his aggressiveness are addressed in pictures of bearded men (Williams 36), missionaries, exploiters and developers who strip the land (Dunn "O Canada"), cut down trees (Oppenheim 38-39) and dam rivers (Buffy Sainte-Marie; Redbird, "Beaver" 97-99). As in many texts and songs by people of colour and anti-establishment activists, a major attack is launched on the national symbols of the United States and of Canada. Willie Dunn sings "I pity the country," and he ends one of his songs to the tune of the Canadian anthem with "O Canada." Buffy Sainte-Marie, referring to the United States, sings of the "blue, white and scarlet hypocrisy" and "the eagles of war" that were never anything more "than carrion crows; / Pushed the wrens from their nests, stole their eggs, changed their story" (Sainte-Marie, "My Country" 166).

While some poems or songs nostalgically evoke the memory of a better past for Indians (Rowland 80), Willie Dunn follows the tradition of honouring historical heroes by writing songs about them—a tradition that is ongoing even in modern pow-wow music, where "honouring songs" are sung to remember and praise special individuals. In his song "The Carver" Willie Dunn honours the West Coast artist Mungo Martin. He remembers the many Native children who lost their lives trying to escape from boarding school, in his moving song about little "Charley Wenjack," who froze to death under the Northern lights, asking fearfully "Is that the great Wendigo,

come to look upon my face" (Dunn "Charley Wenjack"). In his song to honour Louis Riel, Dunn elevates the Métis leader to quasi-apotheosis, following a pattern established earlier in French Canadian drama and Métis folk traditions (Klooss 141ff; Mossmann 237-9). Other honouring songs are about Crazy Horse (Lakota), who defeated Custer, and Crowfoot (Blackfoot), signatory to Treaty No. 7. Such songs and poems derive strength and encouragement from their celebration of heroes of the past who dedicated their lives to sustain their people.

The greatest source of encouragement, however, are the earth and the natural creation. Native poetry often establishes a spiritual relationship between Native people and their surroundings, with "All My Relations" as the Lakota say at the end of their prayers. Authors present individuals as surrounded by the tangible and intangible aspects of a homeland which holds the spirits and the bodies of their ancestors, and of which Native people are and will remain physical and spiritual parts themselves. Shirley Daniels expresses this identity with and through the land in her short poem "Drums of My Father," which forms the "Epilogue" to Gooderham's anthology,

> A hundred thousand years have passed
> Yet, I hear the distant beat of my father's drums
> I hear his drums throughout the land
> His beat I feel within my heart.
>
> The drums shall beat, so my heart shall beat,
> And I shall live a hundred thousand years. (196)

Shirley Daniels belongs to the Ojibway (Anishinabeg), for whom the Midé drum is intricately tied in with religious practices. A traditional Anishinabeg poem, "The Sky Clears" (136), states that the sound of the Midé drum causes the sky to brighten up and the water to be calm for the one who carries the drum. Added to the mythical and geographical dimensions addressed in Daniels' poem, "The Sky Clears" also expresses the notion that the drumbeat attunes the heartbeat of all people to the pulse of the land.

Native writing addresses again and again an almost physical relationship to the Earth, and this relationship is older than the New Age or present ecological concerns about our Mother Earth. It has existed for ages, as a deep conviction and experience, and it permeates all Native epistemology and life practices. It finds expression in Phil George's "Old Man, the Sweat Lodge" (68-69), in V. Rowland's despairing "The Spirit Trail" (80), and even

in Mary Jane Sterling's "Thoughts on Silence" (37-38), where the isolated poetic voice receives an encouraging message from birds singing and flying overhead. When Willie Dunn sings "O Canada!/We sympathize with thee/O Canada!/We stand on guard for thee," his statement entails more than a parody of Canada's national anthem (Lutz 1993). It is an affirmation, in modern form, of an age-old Native traditional identification with the land which sees Native nations as trustees rather than owners of territories. As Native writers are aware (Cardinal, *Unjust* 24-25; Campbell, "Interview" 62-64), this identification with the land transcends national boundaries and has roots far deeper than any Euro-Canadian can claim.

Few texts of the late sixties are as consciously literary as Gordon Moore's poem "The Spell of the Windego" (Gooderham) or George Clutesi's multimedia novel *Potlatch*. Moore's poem treats a traditional topic, the luring play of the northern lights, in a form that is reminiscent of E. Pauline Johnson and Frank Prewett's poetry,

> With trailing green and red between
> And blinding yellow bars
> We heed the tune of mellow moon
> And dance beneath the stars. (Moore 108)

Clutesi's prose sometimes follows a similar romantic vein,

> . . . the myriad of live sparkling stars that floated upward on invisible surges of air currents to effuse through the smoke-hole at the ridge of the easy sloping plank roof. (11)

To me, *Potlatch* is the most remarkable Native text of the sixties. Of novel length, the text combines formal oratory and poetry of the Nootka, translated/recreated in English, with varying narrative points of view that integrate historiography, myth, ritual, drama and forms of short story. In his prose style Clutesi seems close to Victorian conventions, whereas his multimedia blending of various forms of presentation is in keeping with typical sixties experiments. However, in the case of *Potlatch*, such blending of genres and media seems rather an outgrowth of the multi-media tradition of the Potlatch itself than an effort to follow the contemporary literary development in mainstream, to which Clutesi seems to have had little access. In general, the transcending of Western linear definitions of time, place, reality and genre is characteristic of most Native Literature today. In its multidimensional format, this early book by a male author already foreshadows the development of a literary complexity reached in contemporary Minority

Literature by such women novelists as Alice Walker, Tony Morrison, Gloria Anzaldúa, Leslie Silko, Maxine Hong Kingston, or Joy Kogawa and Louise Erdrich (Karrer and Lutz, "Minority"). Often it remains unclear where the border lies between illusion (created by the skilful use of masks, music, lighting and dance in Potlatch rituals), and where the extra-textual "reality" constituted by the text transcends Western notions of realism into the supernatural or magic. This approach, in which the physical, the social, the psychological and the spiritual blend into a complex reality far larger than European notions of it, is characteristic of Native cosmology and traditional everyday life practices. Potlatch, in its multi-generic discourse, reflects this multi-dimensionality, and, quite in line with traditional Native practices, explanations are not given, and events are described "as seen," without ethnographic or literary omniscience.

The narrated time spans one full cycle of the moon, from crescent to crescent, and the narrative depicts the celebration of one full Potlatch ceremony in a Nootka village before contact. Significantly, it describes a circular motion, starting with The Short One's journey to visit the master canoe builder (13), and ending after the close of the "Tloo-qwah-nah," with The Short One watching "the last canoe move downstream and fade into the mist" (186). The circular pattern is underlined by the roundness of grandmother moon. Such a circular, holistic structure is characteristic of many Native novels today (Lutz "The Circle").

And so is the use of words and phrases taken from Native languages. Code-switching has become a conscious literary device in much Chicana/-o, Métis and Indian fiction and poetry today. The use of pocho, patois or Native phrases in English texts "constitute literary strategies which subtly express cultural conflicts through linguistic tensions" (Karrer and Lutz 25). Clutesi's use of Nootka terms encodes Tse-Shaht linguistic and cultural identity. Throughout the text, he uses the Nootka term for "potlatch," "Tloo-qwah-nah," but explains in the introduction,

> Tloo-qwah-nah later came to be known as Potlatch by the early Europeans perhaps because the Nootka verb Pa-chitle, to give, was often heard during these festivities so naturally the early settlers mistook that verb for the name of the feast. Pa-chitle is the verb. Pa-chuk is the noun and means article to be given. Both words were used only when the articles were given in public such as at a feast. (9-10)

The "Introduction" and the "Epilogue" tie *Potlatch* in with the present and

the past. In his very first paragraph, the author admits that he attended the last Tloo-qwah-nah as a young man, when it was still unlawful to hold Potlatches,

> Indeed his [Clutesi's] own kin was arrested for having staged such a Tloo-qwah-nah. It is then with trepidations that this "eye-witness" account is given and it is because of this lingering fear that actual names have been omitted. (9)

This matter of fact statement makes clearer than many "lament"-poems that Native people and their culture exist under a colonial situation. Thus, the "Introduction" marks the book as a defiant assertion of ethnic continuity, both in cultural and political terms, and the "Epilogue" continues this proud cultural nationalist assertion. "Chah-Mah-Dah, Heir Apparent of the Tse-Shaht People," is a hymn or honouring song in the form of a poem, extolling the virtues of a West Coast dignitary/noble, carefully raised for chieftainship,

> There was pride in the way he moved.
> Slow and lazy, like the stream that runs deep.
> There was no room for arrogance in his face.
> It smiled to all men and also to nature.
>
> When he turned, the color, the hue of his skin shone,
> Like the copper in the light of a growing moon.
> His sea-otter breech cloth glistened in the night.
> He stood naked before his God, Creator of all men
> He spoke with ease. There was no hurry. The night was long.
> He need not say that he was kind, that he was good.
> No need to tell that he was generous, truthful and honest too.
> No boasts of arms so strong, of will power secure.
> Long years of training, of bathing in the streams of a tarn;
> Rubbing, kneading and scouring his limbs with the herb of yew.
> From a child to manhood he was in commune with the Creator
>
> He was a man, rooted to the earth. To mother earth.
> He was Chah-ma-dah, heir apparent. . . .(187-188)

The strength of the heir-apparent comes from his careful training for the position he is designed to hold. But it also comes directly from creation around him, from bathing in the streams, and from using the sacred yew. Most importantly, the land gives the chief identity and strength to share and hold Potlatches: throughout the book there are passages of giving thanks to the chief's lands and the over-abundance of food they provide to share with all. Clutesi celebrates this identity in the seemingly conventional form of an

English poem, but in his poem he still uses methods of the oral tradition; thus pauses are indicated by spacing.

Almost two decades before the first Indian novels in Canada, and a year before Markoosie's Inuit novella *Harpoon of the Hunter*, Clutesi's innovative book is a textual monument commemorating the enormous communal spiritual and material efforts which went into conducting a Potlatch, and it celebrates the sophistication and the intricate relatedness of all participants in the event. Similar to James Sewid's autobiography, *Potlatch* is a bold assertion of West Coast culture and a gift to the readers. Thus, the novel is a "Pa-chuk," a public gift-giving in itself, and while it is a literary creation, *Potlatch* is also *about* literary creation and creativity—the Short One and others are song makers and composers. For Clutesi, like modern Native writers such as Jeannette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Tomson Highway, Daniel David Moses and many others, there seems no longer to be a contradiction between traditional identity and modern forms of expression on the written page or the stage. Writing is merely a technological tool that can be used, just as metal blades have superseded stone adzes in the creation of totem poles and Big Houses. Clutesi's novels shows that by the end of the sixties Native cultures began asserting themselves as alive and vibrant, and literature became just one additional medium to express and celebrate this vitality.

VI. Still Voicing the Land

It goes beyond that. The Earth is also a teacher. (Johnston, "Interview" 232)

In Canada, more so than in the United States, Native people often continue to live in the region originally called "home" by their ancestors. To this day their attachment to the land remains essential to their identity as Native persons. When asked about their sources of inspiration, contemporary Native authors in Canada like Anne Acco (131f.), Maria Campbell ("Interview" 49f.; Lutz 1995a), Tomson Highway (89f., 94f.), Basil Johnston ("Interview" 231f.,234f.), Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (84, 86), Emma LaRocque (181f.), and Ruby Slipperjack (203f., 206f.) named the oral tradition of their people as the greatest influence. And the oral tradition is tied directly to the region they come from. The land, in its tangible and intangible aspects, remains the basis of Native identity—it carries the "voice of the Mother," as Maria Campbell explained ("Interview" 49f.).

Beth Cuthand's narrative poem "Four Songs for the Fifth Generation"

(39-45) follows the development of Native/non-Native relations through five generations. Retrospectively, it also reflects developments in the sixties—quite bitterly, as we have seen at the beginning of this paper. The first stanza starts with the voice of a great-grandmother who remembers the buffalo, "but now they are gone"(39). There is a recurrent chorus listening to the echo of pounding hooves, drums, and heartbeats in the land itself,

> Drums, chants, and rattles
> pounded earth and
>   heartbeats
>   heartbeats

Chants are sung and drums sound for dancers who pound the earth with their feet just as the thundering hooves of the buffalo who "flowed like a river/over the hills into the valleys" (39). Together they create a song on the skin of the earth that resounds with the rhythm of drums and rattles, and the song of the chanting voices of people surrounding the drum's circle. They are all related through the earth.

The fourth generation in Beth Cuthand's poem are the young people of today. One of them, the son of the "I" who grew up in the sixties, fearfully asks his mother about the next generation of Natives in Canada, and the chorus ties his question in with the unending cyclical time measured in "pounded earth and heartbeats,"

> When I grow up
> will my kids
> have to fight
> for a place in the neighbourhood
> too?"
>
> Drums, chants and rattles
> pounded earth and
>   heartbeats
>   heartbeats. (45)

NOTES

1 This practice was upheld by a Supreme Court decision in the famous Lavell case in 1973 until finally defeated by Bill C 31 in 1985.

2 For an exploration of racism in Canada as directed against Natives see the contributions by Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Emma LaRocque, Ron Bourgeault, Boyce Richardson and others in *Racism in Canada*, ed. Ormond McKague (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991).

3 To my knowledge, Penny Petrone seems to be the only critic until now to have seriously looked at the sixties in terms of First Nations literary productions. In her *Native Literature in Canada* (pp. 108-11) she mentions a substantial number of writers and activists, and concludes her discussion of their works by stating that "the 1960's can now be seen as the threshold of a new wave of assertive action and creative energy" (111). Moreover, in her two anthologies, *First People, First Voices* (1983) and *Northern Voices* (1988) Petrone has published 'Indian', Métis and Inuit texts from the sixties.

4 Gordon Robinson's *Tales of Kitamaat* is an isolated attempt even before the sixties to bypass the paternalist interference of non-Native collectors, translators, editors and publishers. It is a collection of Kwakiutl legends, children's stories, hero-tales, folklore and ethno-historical information, published in the city of Kitimat, B.C., just "across the bay" from the Haisla village of Kitamaat, where Robinson was born in 1918 (v). It is a 60-page booklet, illustrated by crests and symbols from Haisla heraldry. The stories told in the little book are from the oral tradition, and the author does not explain for whom he decided to write them down. Written in the style of European fairy tales, they are an assertion of pride in his culture, and although the brief historical comment, "Kitamaat Life Prior to 1876" contains no direct criticism of colonization, its nostalgia for a life that was "entirely satisfying" (39) conveys the author's attitude, which also prevails in his account of Charles Amos' campaign to christianize his people in 1876 which concludes, "Christianity did change the social order so drastically that the old, almost carefree days were no more" (41). One must remember that the book was published only five years after the ban on the potlatch was lifted!

5 Serain Stump's *There is My People Sleeping* (1970) inverts the process of illustrating a text. His drawings tell stories of which the few printed words—haiku like—reveal only a skeleton. Incidentally, in his first letter to his publisher, which forms the introduction to the book, Serain Stump expressed his desire to meet George Clutesi: "He's the first of the Indians far away I feel like going to see" (N. pag.).

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