

Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Texts in Native American Literature and Culture

Submitted to CSIU by Dr. Diane Krumrey

May 29, 2009

I. Fiction and Poetry

Alexie, Sherman. *Indian Killer*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.

Indian Killer is a darkly nuanced and complex genre novel—a psychological thriller about a confused young Indian man who has been “adopted out” of the reservation and is now living in Seattle, trying to cope with increasing mental derangement. This happens against the background of growing racial tension between natives and whites as a series of what seem to be racially motivated murders unfolds. The usual anger and literary irony that are associated with Alexie here are entirely subsumed into the artifice of the novel, rather than reaching out histrionically to the reader, making this a more realized piece. Alexie famously called the book a “feel-good novel about interracial murder.”

-----. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. New York: Grove Press, 2005.

This volume is an interlocking collection of short stories that incorporate memoir, magical realism, coming-of-age themes, and free-form prose poetry. It chronicles everyday contemporary life on a Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington state through the eyes of Victor, a young man growing up there and then moving into an increasingly challenging life in nearby Spokane. This novel/short story cycle was instantly hailed as a witty, ironic, and lyrical depiction of contemporary Native American life (which it is) but, interestingly, it was roundly criticized by his own fellow Spokanes.

-----. *One Stick Song*. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 2000.

Like *The Business of Fancy Dancing* and *First Indian on the Moon*, *One Stick Song* is a slim and very accessible collection of poetry by one of the most prolific and well-known contemporary Native American writers today. Alexie embodies the anger, frustration, irony, and understated spirituality that is felt by his generation of Native Americans and is appreciated even more by the generation of white readers that have grown up with him. His poetry weaves in and out of brilliance and clarity, occasionally breaking into prose. It is always honest and self-searching as well as political.

Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. New York: Harper Collins, 1988.

Louise Erdrich is a brilliant and prolific novelist, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe who writes both from her German-American and her Ojibwe heritage. *Tracks*, written in 1988, returns to the fictional reservation in North Dakota

where *Love Medicine* was set, but *Tracks* occurs in an earlier time period, from 1912 to 1924. The chapters are narrated alternately by two characters, Nanapush, an all-too-human elder of the tribe who is trying to preserve the tribe as a community in the face of white incursion and the logging business, and Pauline Puyyat, an Ojibwe young woman who is the personification of cultural insecurity and the psychological unmooring that accompanies cultural subordination. By turns the two narrators tell the story of a true culture hero who recurs throughout many of Erdrich's books, Fleur Pillager. Fleur embodies the female power in tribal societies, as well as shamanism, nativism, and aboriginal resistance.

Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.

Critics argue over whether this first published work by Erdrich is a collection of stories or a novel, but to do so is to lose sight of the tribal sensibility that Erdrich captures in these interlocking tales of her fictional Ojibwe reservation. Her characters' competency with the fragmentation that occurs in a postapocalyptic world (which 20th century America is for all native peoples) precedes what we would call postmodern narrative fragmentation. They reveal a comic vision through very very dark moments of displacement, alcohol and drug addiction, poverty, and violence. For Erdrich's characters, love is the medicine that causes problems but offers the solution, too.

Glancy, Diane. *Flutie*. Rhode Island: Moyer Bell, 1998.

Flutie is an achingly beautiful coming-of-age novel about a young Cherokee girl growing up in the poverty and limitations of a working class family in Western Oklahoma. Deeply religious, Flutie seeks for spiritual truth as a teenage girl. Where does religious love come from? Can it be entwined with and expressed in secular love? Family love? These questions are explored in Flutie's bleak life through Glancy's astoundingly poetic narrative. Diane Glancy has also written very notable poetry and essays.

Harjo, Joy. *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*. New York: Norton, 1994.

Joy Harjo is a prolific and highly respected Native American (Muskegee) poet. Though she has written many wonderful volumes of poetry (e.g., *She Had Some Horses* and *In Mad Love and War* this is a particular favorite because of its thematic unity, employing the myths of her tribe to expand on the meaning and depth of human spirituality, responsibility to the earth, and to each other. Beginning with "Reconciliation, a Prayer," the entire volume works to draw together all peoples, sewn together with personal reminiscences of childhood and people she reveres. Her collection of selected poems, *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2001* (NY: Norton, 2002), is also a wonderful collection, covering the majority of Harjo's poetry career.

King, Thomas. *Green Grass, Running Water*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Green Grass, Running Water is perhaps the funniest book ever. In it, King brings together an impossible combination of people, historical events, and contemporary and family issues mostly on a reservation in Canada. This novel not only satirizes the contemporary treatment of First Nations people in Canada and the way they use hybridity, resistance, and accommodation to survive in the twentieth century, but it also follows the emotional growth of two young people as they try to find themselves in this very satirizable contemporary world. Using techniques that mainstream readers would identify as postmodern but that King himself considers only native storytelling methods, King incorporates an amazing wealth of pan-Indian knowledge and belief systems in a way that educates the reader in the cultures and myths of Indians as well as the cultural appropriations of the white world. This is a classic of contemporary Native American literature set on a Blackfoot reservation, by Cherokee author King

Momaday, N. Scott. *House Made of Dawn*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

House Made of Dawn not only won the Pulitzer Prize, but also initiated the great renaissance of Native American literature. Momaday broke the path for later Native American novelists like Silko, and James Welch. In turn, there was a critical reassessment of earlier Native American writers based on the excellence and popularity of Native American literature following the publishing of *House Made of Dawn*. Abel, the main character, is a Pueblo Indian man, returning from World War II, is unable to become a part of his community—despite the love of his grandfather and the support of his community, he drinks excessively and eventually kills a man. Years of prison and incomplete rehabilitation in urban LA ensue, graphically described. When he finally returns to his home to care for and then bury his dying grandfather, there is a poetic return to himself culturally and personally, encoded in the healing rituals and ceremonies of the Pueblo nation.

-----. *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Albuquerque, NM: U of NM Press, 1976.

This short book is a gem of poetry, personal reminiscence, and tribal history and consciousness. In it, Momaday reinscribes the path of the Kiowa Nation from their mythic beginnings to the last Sun Dance celebration in the 20th century, from the Northwest to a reservation in Oklahoma, from a woodland people to horse-riding plains Indians. Within this poetic history he also inscribes the life of his grandmother, who experienced both the pinnacle and the nadir of the Kiowa culture. Though it is often called a spiritual quest, Momaday himself describes the theme of *Way to Rainy Mountain* as “a narrative wheel that is as sacred as language itself.” The stories in it are told in three “voices”: the ancestral voice, the voice of historical commentary, and the voice of personal reminiscence.

Noriega, Julio, Ed. *Pichka Harawikuna: Five Quechua Poets*. Trans. Maureen Ahern. Tempe, AZ: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1998.

While Quechua is one of the major indigenous languages of South America, the language and its culture are relatively unknown, since those who speak it are

primarily members of oppressed and illiterate communities in Peru and Bolivia. This tri-lingual collection gives insight into the literary and cultural heritage, as well as the daily life and political struggles of five Peruvian poets.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin, 1977.

According to a survey of English professors in the 1990s, *Ceremony* was the most frequently taught novel in U.S. English classes, and for good reason. It is not only beautifully written, but in fact extremely “teachable,” an exemplum of the intersection of postmodern and indigenous styles that is frequently noted in late twentieth century Native American fiction. Silko, who is part Euro-American and part Laguna Pueblo, writes about the experience of a mixed blood Pueblo Indian man returning from service in the Pacific during World War II. The novel records the ceremony that he must go through to heal from his post-traumatic stress disorder (as we would now term it) from WWII, especially traumatic for the pacifistic Pueblos. His and his family’s search for healing must go beyond known western methods and Native ceremonies, to a new hybrid ceremony that embraces the mixed origin and lifestyle of the main character. Further, Tayo’s story is embedded in a mythic meta-story of resolved cultural conflict between whites and natives.

II. Personal Narrative

Hopkins, Sarah Winnemucca. *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883) in various collections and online:

http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/life_among_the_piutes/

Life among the Paiutes, published in 1883, is an amazing accomplishment—Winnemucca was the first Native American woman to write in English and publish her work under her own name. This is her very engrossing narrative of her life, especially her experiences in the Bannock War.

Lame Deer, John Fire and Richard Erdoes. *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*.

This is perhaps the greatest example of the as-told-to autobiographies of Native Americans, many of which are raw, often painful, vivid, but perhaps exaggerated at times. Anyone who chooses to read books like this or *Black Elk Speaks* as told to Neihardt, should approach it as an oral history that has been translated. These books are full of valuable information that only the informants could render, but the tone and some of the narrative should be interrogated for a certain amount of manipulation of tone and dramatic touches by the amanuensis. Lame Deer lived through a fascinating time in American history, and as an Oglala Lakota from the Rosebud reservation, is able to tell white American exactly what has been done to his people, and he does. Ultimately he is philosophical, funny, gracious, and an absolute trickster.

Zitkala Sa . *American Indian Stories* [aka Gertrude Simmons Bonnin] (1876-1938). Washington: Hayworth Publishing House, 1921.

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/zitkala-sa/stories/stories.html>

At the turn of the century, Zitkala Sa introduced herself to the American reading public in the pages of Harper's and the Atlantic. Borrowing somewhat from the romantic tradition of women's writing, she movingly relates the experience of growing up native, being forced to go to Indian Boarding School, and generally trying to acclimate and understand cultural difference from the outside in. *American Indian Stories* expresses early twentieth-century forms of nativism and eco-criticism.

III. Literary and Textual Criticism

Allen, Paula Gunn, Ed. *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs*. New York: Modern Language Association, 1983.

This volume of critical essays and course outlines was produced in 1983 in response to the rising interest in the teaching of American Indian literatures, as well as the acknowledgment of the complexity of the subject area. It could be called a "classic" of Native American criticism and pedagogy; it divides American Indian literature into what are still some of the best ways to organize discrete college courses: oral literature; personal narrative and autobiography; American Indian Women's Literature; modern and contemporary American Indian Literature; and the Indian in American Literature. The "Resources" section, as well as some of the teaching methodology is dated, but it has seminal articles by Paula Gunn Allen on the sacred in Indian literature and by LaVonne Brown Ruoff on the links between old traditions and new literary forms.

Lundquist, Suzanne Everts. *Native American Literatures: An Introduction*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004.

This volume has everything that a person seriously interested in studying Native American literature needs to get started, including cultural, theoretical, and historical background. Everts emphasizes the multiplicity of the literary traditions of native literatures of North America. The cultures, languages, belief systems, and uses of the literary traditions of North American tribes cannot be under represented, and Lundquist has organized her book to not only remind the reader of this truth but to illustrate it as well. For this reason, the two most helpful chapters are "How To Read Native American Literatures" and "Themes in Native American Literatures." Newcomers to Native American literature most frequently underestimate the seriousness of these two topics. In "How To Read Native American Literatures" Sundquist provides the necessary cultural grounding for various tribal literacies; in and "Themes in Native American Literatures" she outlines the recurrent themes in contemporary Indian literature that help readers follow deeper meanings in the literature as they are connected to other works and as they are read by Indian communities.

Murray, David. *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Forked Tongues is a very theoretical reconsideration of texts by and about native Americans that had mostly been ignored or considered corrupted until he resuscitated them. He is one of the first serious critics to address Samson Occom and William Apes, and brought many previously unknown contact narratives to the more general academic readership. His thesis, that self-representing Indian texts as well as texts about Indians penned by whites, should be scrutinized as literary texts through postmodern literary approaches, allow us to appreciate the ideological work that is going on in these works.

Porter, Joy, and Kenneth Roemer, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

This excellent recent anthology of criticism on Native American literature includes articles by the most original and respected of contemporary Native American literature specialists, including Roemer himself, who is a central figure in the practice and philosophy of teaching Native American literature; Bernd Peyer, who specializes in non-fictional works of the nineteenth and early twentieth century; and David Murray, who writes about the representation of the Native American voice through translations and European-American depictions of Native life. Divided into categories that reflect the historical and cultural issues, different genres, and well-known individual authors, this is a great way to begin to understand the wealth of Native literatures, as well as the most productive and respectful critical approaches to the literature and the cultures that engendered it.

Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP: 1973.

This tome of literary history is not essentially about Native Americans, but about the twists and turns that American literary self-consciousness has experienced over the centuries through whites' interactions with the land and the peoples of this continent, brining their own preconceptions and their belief in their right of ownership. The mythology and the narratives that prop it up—the myths of the cannibal, the chosen people in Canaan, the romance of the “Natural Man,” and the Frontier—are reconstructed through the literature written in each era. Slotkin's theoretical structures have generated an entire generation of criticism on American literature. His Works Cited list provides a wealth of primary sources.

Treuer, David. *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2006.

Part Ojibwe and part Jewish, Treuer is a Native American novelist who studied under Toni Morrison at Princeton. In this book of literary essays, he takes on the great names of the preceding generation of Native American authors, applying an original reading of culture and cultural appropriation to works by Erdrich, Silko, and Welch. The strength of this book is Treuer's constant insistence on close readings that study

language, rhetoric, situation, and intention without following the assumptions usually made about native writers. The deficit in the book is its insistence on seeing every invention and effect in the writing of contemporary Native American writers as overdetermined by the cultural assumptions about Indians that preceded the authors. This book adds much to our detailed understanding of Erdrich's use of Ojibwe, for example, but only to criticize it.

IV. History and Cultural Anthropology

Churchill, Ward, *Indians Are Us?: Culture and Genocide in Native North America*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994.

To say that Ward Churchill is controversial is not just an understatement—it misses the symbolic role that Churchill plays in the tension between Native American history, literature, and politics on the one hand, and respected academic inquiry on the other. This volume, though it appeared before Churchill made unnecessarily vitriolic comments about those who were killed in the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001, is classic Churchill “history” and political commentary. In this loose collection of loosely written essays, he has a good point when he attacks the dominant culture's blithe tendencies to appropriate various aspects of Native American history and spirituality in “Indians Are Us?,” “Declaration of War Against Exploiters of Lakota Spirituality,” “Alert Concerning the Abuse and Exploitation of American Indian Sacred Traditions,” and “Do It Yourself ‘Indianism,’” but the problem is that it is the same point made over and over again, stridently, and often with insufficient critical background. It is arguably important to read something by Churchill to see how he has simultaneously brought attention to cultural insensitivity and caused mistrust of Native American scholars who are activists.

Juárez, Ana M. and John McGee. “A Mayan Version of the Adam and Eve Story.” *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 19:1 (2003) 1-18.

Based on field research by the authors, this article offers first-hand insight into acculturation among the Yucatec-Mayan Indians of Tulum, Mexico through a bilingual translation of an oral telling of the story of Adam and Eve, conflated with Mayan myth narratives. In one short article the reader is able to experience orality, hybridity, and code-shifting in action.

Lepore, Jill. *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

In this history of the bloodiest, most influential, and perhaps least understood war in American history, Lepore finds a key to the way Americans think of themselves and their enemies. She deeply researches the causes and eventualities of the conflict that lasted from 1675 to 1676 and displaced and killed more whites and Indians proportionally than any other war in America. Lepore sees this as the beginning of racialized thinking as well as the place where American thinking about war began.

McNickle, D'Arcy. *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973, 1993.

This book is dated to a certain extent, but there is still no better, clearer, or more judiciously eloquent history of the contact between whites and the natives of North America—all in 170 pages.. A noted anthropologist and member of the Flathead Nation of Montana, McNickle writes without the bombast of popularizers about the historic and legal experiences of native peoples beginning with colonial times. He concludes (in 1973) that “Indians may no longer be expected to vanish before a competition ‘they had not the means of sustaining,’ but their moral right to remain a separate and identifiable people is far from assured” (166). This is still true.

Smith, Paul Chaat, and Robert Allen Warrior. *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. New York: New Press, 1996.

Like a Hurricane is an inspiring and very readable history of AIM (the American Indian Movement) from its inception in the 1960s to its quick demise in the 70s, including the occupation of Alcatraz Island and the Wounded Knee uprising. This books sets itself above other histories in that it does not romanticize the cause or the people who lived it. Its extensive and responsible se of the archival material reveals a much greater interest in truth telling than in myth making.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective." *English Literature: Opening Up the Canon*. Ed. Leslie Fiedler. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981. 54-72.

This brief “talk” given before academics in 1980 is a beautiful exemplum of native storytelling as well as a metanarrative of the different perspective of native awareness and specifically the way in which the Pueblo perspective informs their use of narrative. It is filled with personal stories and analogies.

Tedlock, Dennis, Ed. *Popol Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

The title says it all: this is the definitive pre-Columbian text, text written in the Mayan language and created over generations to reflect the mythology and history of the Mayan culture. The translation is the work of a lifetime of scholarship and primary research, and beautifully renders this extremely difficult and dense work. Tedlock’s introduction is also the best explanation of the Popol Vuh and guide through its thorny pages. As Fuentes says, the Popol Vuh is the Mayan Bible.

