

## Collaborative Authorship and Indigenous Literatures

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**Albert Braz,**  
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**Abstract:** In his article "Collaborative Authorship and Indigenous Literatures" Albert Braz discusses the duality of the writer. At least since the advent of poststructuralism, the distinction between writer and author — the first being the historical person behind the text and the second a figure in the text — has been a paradigm of contemporary critical analysis. Braz argues that this new emphasis is not germane when it comes to Indigenous literatures, a field in which one often cannot determine who are the material producers of texts and/or their writers. Braz postulates that one of the defining characteristics of Indigenous literatures is their high incidence of writer indeterminacy. From the *Popol Vuh* through *Cogewea* to *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, canonical Indigenous texts are the result of collaboration, usually (but not always) involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals. Since by definition Indigenous texts are supposed to be the work of Indigenous people, writer indeterminacy forces us to reconsider what really constitutes Indigenous literature.

**Albert BRAZ****Collaborative Authorship and Indigenous Literatures**

One of the most fruitful (but almost certainly inadvertent) consequences of the ever-proliferating discourse on the "Death of the Author" has been the focus on the duality of the writer. Although many writers and scholars have not been persuaded that the author is either "dead" (Barthes 55) or merely "a discursive function" (Foucault 148), they openly concede that the producer of a text is not a unitary being. For Margaret Atwood, for example, writers are necessarily "double" (37) and two distinct individuals: "one that does the living and consequently the dying, the other that does the writing and becomes a name, divorced from the body but attached to the body of work" (62). Alexander Nehamas would seem to agree, suggesting that we should distinguish between the writer and the author: the "writer is a historical person, firmly situated within a specific context, the efficient cause of a text's production," exists "outside" that text, and is "not in a position of interpretive authority" over it (272). The author, in contrast, is a character in the text but one that is "manifested or exemplified in a text and not depicted or described in it" (273). Thus, "texts can be taken away from writers and still leave them who they are. Authors, by contrast, own their texts as one owns one's actions. Their works are authentically their own (*eigentlich*). They cannot be taken away (that is, reinterpreted) without changing their authors, without making the characters manifested in them different or even unrecognizable" (288-89). Not the least significant aspect of Nehamas's differentiation between writer and author is that it provides a possible way out of the impasse regarding the death (or life) of the author. I contend that this postulate is not as useful when it comes to Indigenous literatures, a field in which frequently one cannot even determine who the material producers of texts or their writers are.

Among the defining characteristics of Indigenous literatures in the Americas is their high incidence of writer indeterminacy. From the *Popol Vuh* through *Cogewea* to *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, canonical Indigenous texts are often the result of collaboration, usually (but not always) involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals. It is commonly accepted that, in order for a text to be Indigenous, it must be written by an Indigenous person or persons. As Craig Womack states, for him what marks a "Creek work," in addition to its "depiction of a geographically specific Creek landscape and the language and stories that are born out of that landscape," is "its authorship by a Creek person" (20). Similarly, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn maintains that Indigenous literature must be created by writers with a strong "connection to tribal national life" (68), since presumably only such people are able to establish "a new set of principles that recognizes the tribally specific literary traditions by which we have always judged the imagination" (76). Or, as Jace Weaver encapsulates this position, "Native American literature, it must be said finally (and we would have thought it was obvious), is literature of, from, by Native Americans, not *about* them — or, worse yet, *set among* them" (16). The linking of cultural authenticity and the writer's citizenship in Indigenous literature is underscored by the increasingly common practice of following the names of writers with their "specific tribal affiliations" (Hoy 20). Consequently, if a text turns out not to be fully produced by an Indigenous individual or individuals, its indigeneity is called into question.

The most celebrated recent case of writer indeterminacy in Indigenous literature is *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. The account of the life of the Guatemalan political activist Rigoberta Menchú, which was instrumental in winning her the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, tends to be presented as a memoir. Yet it has long been known that Menchú was not the work's sole producer but merely one of several people who contributed to it (Taracena 82-88; Stoll 181-88). The person most often credited with the authorship of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* — and, significantly, the holder of its copyright — is Menchú's main interviewer and editor, the Euro-Venezuelan anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos (her first name is sometimes spelled Elisabeth and her surname Burgos-Debray). In fact, the title page of the book's Spanish-language edition still claims that it was written "por" Elizabeth Burgos (Burgos, *Me llamo* n.pag.). The matter of the authorship of a text is obviously important for both legal and monetary reasons. Burgos not only contends that she is "the author of Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio" but also that she is entitled to receive the book's "royalties" ("Story" 58, 59). Menchú's own responses are contradictory. At times she maintains that the memoir "does not belong to me, morally, politically or economically" (Menchú qtd. in

Stoll 178). Since Menchú supposedly "never had the right to say if the text pleased me or not," she feels that "it is opportune to say that it is not my book" (Menchú qtd. in Stoll 178). Yet, in other instances, she declares that "the authorship of the book really should be more precise, shared" and describes Burgos as "the editor" (Menchú qtd. in Stoll 187). As she elaborates, "when I wrote that book, I simply did not know how the commercial rules" and now her "dream is to recover the rights to *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and to expand it" (*Crossing Borders* 114). In short, even when it comes to the two main collaborators, there are doubts regarding who is the real writer of the memoir.

Another major consequence of the text's multi-writership is the uncertainty about the status of the central voice in the text. Or, to phrase it differently, who exactly is the I that speaks throughout *I, Rigoberta Menchú*? The memoir opens with a fascinating paragraph worth quoting in full: "My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people. It's hard for me to remember everything that's happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people" (1). The most striking aspect of the passage is that it simultaneously asserts it is and it is not a personal account of a specific life. While it relates the story of one Rigoberta Menchú, it also purports to tell "the story of all poor Guatemalans," the story of "a whole people." In her introduction, Burgos states that Menchú is "a privileged witness" to the ancient but tragic history of Guatemala, by virtue of her K'iche' Maya ancestry (xi). Yet, judging by her (unacknowledged) additions to the text, it seems that Burgos did not consider Menchú culturally authentic enough. For example, several of the chapters are framed with quotations from the *Popol Vuh* but, as David Damrosch notes, this is "a text that Menchú herself never mentions and seems never to have seen" prior to the writing of her memoir (244; see also Stoll 186). Similarly, Burgos affirms that, for Menchú, "the Bible is a sort of ersatz which she uses precisely because there is nothing like it in her culture" (xviii). Again, this is a curious claim considering that the "sacred text" to which Menchú often refers is "the Bible — naturally enough, as she was raised as a devout Christian, and like her father she became a catechist, instructing children in Roman Catholic doctrine and leading Bible study groups in her village" (Damrosch 244). Indeed, it could be argued that one of the paradoxical ways in which Burgos does "author" the life of Rigoberta Menchú is by investing her with a pre-contact Indigenous cultural authenticity that Menchú, as a self-declared Catholic activist, clearly lacks.

Philippe Lejeune posits that the reason the writership of "the taped autobiography of the common people" usually cannot be attributed to its titular subject is that the genre is perceived as being part of "the autobiographical discourse of *those who do not write*" (196). This would appear to be the case with *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, whose then obscure protagonist came to accept that her memoir probably would be more effective politically if readers did not think it originated with her and did not deem it "a sort of family pamphlet" (Menchú, *Crossing Borders* 113). Lejeune, however, argues that the reverse dynamic occurs with collaborative autobiographies of celebrities, who as heroes must be ascribed the "autobiographical signature," even when it is public knowledge that they did not write the texts themselves (196). Interestingly, the writership of Menchú's second memoir is treated differently from that of her first. Perhaps because of her winning the Nobel Peace Prize and becoming an international personality, by the time Menchú published *Crossing Borders*, she was presented as the sole author — at least in English. The Spanish-language edition of the book, *Rigoberta: La nieta de los mayas*, states that the text was written by Menchú, in "colaboración" with Dante Liano and Gianni Minà (n.pag.; see also Damrosch 251). However, the English version, which reverses the order in which the chapters appear, presents her as the sole writer. That is, with her two books, both of which are collaborations, Menchú goes from being an unknown political activist who cannot have her writership acknowledged to a luminary who must be perceived as the single creator of her narrative.

Beyond the celebrity of the subject, of course there is another reason why collaborative works by Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers are often attributed exclusively to the Indigenous party, and that is the matter of cultural authenticity. If one realizes that society considers that only a cultural insider is capable of conveying the reality of a given group, then it becomes imperative to conceal the fact that some outsider has also contributed to the production of a text. Such hidden non-Indigenous

writership is evident in numerous "Indigenous" works. Here I cite only one, *Cogewea, the Halfblood*. The 1920s novel is often ascribed to the Okanogan writer Mourning Dove, with Lucullus Virgil McWhorter being listed as the editor, responsible for "notes and [a] biographical sketch" (Mourning Dove n.pag.). Yet the text reveals that it possesses at least two distinct authorial voices. *Cogewea* is basically a romance about the advent of ranching in Montana's Flathead region and the people who try to adjust to the new economy, particularly those of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry like the title character. Part of the text does read like a western, as we can see in the very opening: "It was sunset on the river Pend d'Oreille. The last rays of the day-God, glinting through the tangled vines screening the great porch of the homestead of the Horseshoe Brand Ranch" (15). Other parts, in contrast, appear more like political tracts or ethnographic studies. Thus, when *Cogewea* pontificates on "the mysteries" of tobacco, she hardly sounds like someone who lives on the range. As she describes the "oldest pipes," they are "straight, tapering, trumpet-like tubes, made of clay or stone," and are "closely contemporaneous with the non-angular variety, showing the funnel-like orifice for both the stem and tobacco" (120). Likewise, for her, those "'coffin-nails'" called cigarettes are "of the white man's inception, along with his multitudinous diseased adjuncts of civilization: whiskey, beer, wine and opium with attending crimes and ills" (121). Given the discrepancy between the voices in the text, it is difficult not to conclude that it could not have been written by a single individual. The apparent collaborative writership of *Cogewea* raises questions not only about its ethnonational identity but also its gender. Mourning Dove was long considered as "perhaps the first Indian woman to write a novel" (Fisher v), but current scholarship suggests that McWhorter "overstep[ed] appropriate editorial bounds" and "intervened" in the writing of "Mourning Dove's novel" (Brown 278-79). The contemporary Okanogan/Spokane writer Sherman Alexie, in fact, characterizes the text as "an example of a book written by a White person which is disguised as an autobiography of an Indian person" (29). If Alexie is correct, it becomes problematic to classify *Cogewea* either as an Indigenous or as a woman's novel.

Needless to say, not all literary collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are problematic. In her compilations of stories by the Okanogan storyteller Harry Robinson, the Euro-Canadian ethnographer Wendy Wickwire highlights Robinson's writership by striving to reproduce "the stories exactly as told" (15; while Okanogan and Okanagan are the same people, they spell their name differently depending on whether they are based in the United States or in Canada). Robinson was not a native English speaker, something that is evident in such idiosyncrasies as his using "pronouns indiscriminately" (Wickwire 15). Yet, since English was fast becoming the dominant language among the Okanagan, Robinson felt that he had to tell "his stories in English to keep them alive" (Wickwire 15). Wickwire respected his decision and, as a result, readers are now able to read Robinson's Okanagan stories the way the master storyteller related them, rather than through someone else's translation. Perhaps even more ambitious, although not necessarily as successful, is the partnership between the Tohono O'odham or Papago farmer Theodore Rios and the white literary scholar Kathleen Mullen Sands in *Telling a Good One: The Process of a Native American Biography*, a text that both underscores the problematics of collaborative writership and illustrates its frequent necessity. The project — written over a span of twenty-five years — started in the mid-1970s, when Sands was a graduate student in English at the University of Arizona. Sands had a special interest in ethnography and, after she was introduced to Rios, the two agreed "to produce a conventional 'as told to' narrative of his life as a Tohono O'odham man born in the first quarter of the twentieth century and coming to maturity in a culture and time intensely influenced by assimilation policies and the pervasiveness of American culture" (Rios and Sands xiii). Their pact was confirmed by a "letter of intent," specifying that the endeavor entailed "the biography of Theodore Rios as told to Kathleen M. Sands," that both parties would "share equally in publication credits and royalties from the book," and that Sands could submit the manuscript toward her "doctoral degree" (10, 11). However, once Sands conducted her first interview with Rios, she began to suspect that she might not be able to complete the manuscript she and he had intended and decided to change her plans. Sands's reservations about the project are precipitated by her feeling that her dialogue with Rios lacks "real narration" (15), a suspicion that seems amply justified when one compares different versions of the narrative. According to Sands, Rios expected his life story to follow a traditional outline, such as: "I was born October first, 1915. Jose

Rios was my grandfather, and I think he was from San Xavier. No idea where he was born. 'Course, I was just a little tot when he died, as far as I can remember — little. Oh, he farms, and then he represents San Xavier. He went to Washington" (1). But that was not quite what the narrative sounded like before Sands edited and condensed it:

KS: Okay, the first thing that I want to know is when your [sic] were born.

TR: October first, 1915.

KS: Okay, some of the other things that I need to know are things about your family — your grandfather's name — your father's father.

TR: Jose Rios.

KS: Okay. And where was he from?

TR: I think he was from San Xavier.

KS: He was from San Xavier?

TR: Mm hmm. He stayed there.

KS: Do you know where he was born? Any idea?

TR: No. No idea. 'Course I was just a little tot when he died.

KS: Oh, you were? Do you remember what year that was?

TR: No, I never did.

KS: About how old were you? Six, seven? You were a full-timer? You were just a child?

TR: Mm hmm. Well, yeah. As far as I can remember, little.

KS: I see. What did he do for a living?

TR: Oh, he done farming, and then he was — represents San Xavier. He went to Washington. (12)

Sands acknowledges her early ineptitude as an interviewer, reflected in her failure "to ask open-ended questions," which "would have encouraged spontaneity" and "exposed what Ted himself thought was important — or at least what he thought was important to tell me" (16). Yet her contention that the failure of her interviews with Rios is not related to his inability to give "the history of his family in narrative form" (15) is not too convincing. Whatever else they may prove, the exchanges between Sands and Rios clearly indicate that narrative does not come naturally to everyone and thus that the only way some people will be able to have the stories of their lives told is if someone else does it for them.

Not surprisingly, Sands gradually abandons the idea of writing the biography of Rios she had contracted to do, an action that raises serious questions about collaborative works. In terms of the ownership of the text, Sands seems to be beyond reproach. Rios's name appears before hers on the title page and she often underlines that *Telling a Good One* is the labor of two people. As Sands writes, "While the making of this book in its present form is my work, there would be no book, would never have been a narrative text, had Theodore Rios not recorded his life in his own words" (xi). Also, while they had agreed to "share equally" (10) in any money from the book, she states that, after Rios died, she donated "all royalties" (10) to "a tribal scholarship" in his name (253). Still, there remains an apparent imbalance between the writer/editor and the subject in the final construction of the text. Sands's decision to abandon the project appears to be motivated less by her difficulty in capturing Rios's "voice" than by her increasing discomfort about "the ethics of producing a conventional Native American autobiography" (18, xiv). Sands comes to believe that "Native American collaborative personal narrative is neither written nor autonomously produced" (3). So instead of writing a biography, she determines to explore "the process of collaborative work that goes into the recording and publication of Native American life story" (4). Yet she admits that a conventional life is precisely what Rios "expected to go into print — a continuous narrative that I would order and edit from the interviews I did with him" (3). In other words, Sands rejects her (and Rios's) initial conception of the project in the name of cultural authenticity. The paradox is that, by doing so, she shifts the text's focus from the subject to the writer/editor. Thus, in the end, *Telling a Good One: The Process of a Native American Collaborative Biography* is less about the life of its Indigenous subject, Ted Rios, than about the travails faced by his collaborator, the white academic Kathleen Mullen Sands.

As works like *Telling a Good One* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú* illustrate, textual collaborations involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are problematic, since they inevitably introduce doubts about the indigeneity of the texts. That being said, there can be textual indeterminacy even when both (or all) parties responsible for the creation of a work are Indigenous. The *Popol Vuh* is a case in point. The Maya classic is one of the most ancient texts in the Americas. However, it was transcribed

only after the Spanish conquest, a most traumatic event that has left numerous traces in the text. The authorial voices in the *Popol Vuh* assert that the book documents "the beginning of the Ancient Word, here in this placed called Quiché," and that the early Maya "accounted for everything — and did it, too — as enlightened beings, in enlightened words" (Tedlock 71). Yet they immediately acknowledge that the continuity between them and their national past has been ruptured, at least partly, for they are copying the manuscript "amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now. We shall bring it out because there is no longer a place to see it, a Council Book" (Tedlock 71). The magnitude of the changes undergone by the Maya between the time the text was conceived and the time it was transcribed and codified becomes evident when we are told that "the citadel of Quiché" (Tedlock 71) is "now named Santa Cruz" (Tedlock 227). Even if the transcribers of the *Popol Vuh* happen to be Maya, they cannot help but transform the text in fundamental ways. Regardless of their admiration for their culture and its gods, they are fully aware that those deities did not preclude the Maya from being vanquished by the Spaniards and thus must entertain some suspicions that their people somehow have been failed by their own gods.

Another example of voice indeterminacy in Indigenous literature is the work of the Métis writer Maria Campbell. One of the most influential contemporary Indigenous writers in Canada, Campbell remains best known for her first book, the 1973 memoir *Halfbreed*. Written when she was still in her early thirties, *Halfbreed* is a searing exploration of "what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman" in a predominantly white country like Canada (2). In particular, Campbell is determined to demonstrate that although the Métis may have been defeated militarily by the Canadian government at Batoche in 1885, they have not lost their sense of nationhood. As she quotes her paternal great-grandmother, because Canadians "'killed'" the nineteenth-century Métis leader Louis Riel, "'they think they have killed us too, but some day, my girl, it will be different'" (11). Not the least significant consequences of *Halfbreed* is that it led to a collaboration between Campbell and the Euro-Canadian actor and playwright Linda Griffiths, which culminated in the production of a play entitled *Jessica* (Griffiths and Campbell 113-75). The play is not so much an adaptation of the memoir as an exploration of what happened to Campbell after "its publication" (Griffiths and Campbell 19). However, *Jessica* has been overshadowed by the volatile relationship between the two writers (see Murray 92-93). Tellingly, when the play was finally published in a volume called *The Book of Jessica*, it was prefaced by two dialogic exchanges between Campbell and Griffiths that are nearly twice as long. The conflict between Campbell and Griffiths is usually seen as a case of cultural appropriation, the implication being that Griffiths committed some kind of transgression by attempting to dramatize a Métis narrative. As Campbell herself quips, "The bear doesn't try to tell the deer's story" ("Maria Campbell" 58). Without minimizing the issue of cultural appropriation, it is apparent that the relationship between the two women also concerns the question of writership or voice, not only who speaks in the text but who owns it. *Jessica* is described as being "Written by: Linda Griffiths, in collaboration with Maria Campbell" (Griffiths and Campbell 115) and Campbell seems to have accepted that she would share the play's royalties both with Griffiths and with their theatrical go-between, the director and producer Paul Thompson. But when she was informed that the theater that first staged the play also had a claim to the profits, she refused to do any more "sharing" (Griffiths and Campbell 105). In the process of explaining her reasoning, she contends that her decision is informed by her own culture: "Why do I hurt when we talk about the play especially, never mind the rest of the stuff. Where does that come from? It's so hard ... the world is all ownership, people owning land, houses, things, always accumulating. I don't believe that comes from my culture, from my community ... the influence, the essence comes from outside, we struggle with that influence constantly, our culture isn't one of ownership. Our elders teach us that we don't own, can never own the land, the stories, the songs, not in the way that the outside world views ownership" (Griffiths and Campbell 90-91; authors' ellipses). Campbell adds that "we have traditional copyrights on songs, stories composed by the people," whose "very sharing" constitutes "a contract" (Griffiths and Campbell 91). In addition, she confides that the reason discussions of *Jessica* become so painful to her is that she realizes "I can never own it either, and everything else in my life I've always owned" (Griffiths and Campbell 90). Again, the conflict between the two collaborators does not merely reflect different cultural views of voice appropriation but also Campbell's own discomfort about having to share the writership of what started out as her sole text.

The collaboration between Campbell and Griffiths has inspired a plethora of essays, most of them extremely critical of Griffiths's ostensible sense of white entitlement to what is truly "Maria Campbell's book" (Hoy 60). Campbell, however, has been involved in another textual collaboration, a compilation of traditional Métis tales entitled *Stories of the Road Allowance People*. Curiously, the second work has received little critical attention, particularly concerning its writership. Published in 1995, the illustrated volume comprises eight "old men's stories." Campbell notes that she strived to "get old women teachers" but, while the old women were very kind to her, they refused to tell her any stories and "sent me off to the old men who became my teachers" (2). All the stories deal with some aspect of the lives of ordinary Métis people. One of the more compelling ones is "Joseph's Justice," whose protagonist is an "Ordinary Halfbreed like us./ Not dah kine of mans anyone he tell stories about" (109). While Joseph lives in the Batoche area in 1885, he elects not to "take part in dat war," for he does not believe in "dat Anglais government" (105). Despite his non-involvement in the military conflict, he has his gun and furs confiscated by the Canadian troops and the story is about his attempt to get restitution. Joseph does not succeed, yet the text tells us that "he win" because "he believe on hissself/ an he don give up" (125). In short, he is the sort of ancestor of whom contemporary Métis should be proud.

In her introduction to the collection, Campbell states that, "although I speak my language I have had to relearn it, to decolonize it or at least begin the process of decolonization" (2). It certainly is difficult not to see the volume as a self-consciously postcolonial text, a text designed to provide a Métis counter-narrative to the dominant discourses. However, from such an angle, the question that one also must ask is: whose voice or voices dominate in *Stories of the Road Allowance People*? Campbell names a series of teachers early in the text (3), but she does not identify who is the source of each particular tale. Also, contrary to what she tells Griffiths about her people not believing that stories can be owned, she declares that "I have paid for the stories by re-learning and re-thinking my language and by being a helper or servant to the readers. I have also paid for the stories with gifts of blankets, tobacco and even a prize Arab stallion" (2). That is, it seems that Métis culture does allow for the buying and selling of stories, and the proof is that Campbell owns the collection. Her claim to ownership of the tales, which has been deemed "appropriate" (van Toorn 40), becomes conspicuously evident in the book's paratextual framework. Although the cover and title page list her as the translator, she is identified as the sole copyright holder — an uncommon right for a translator. Many of the problems in *Stories of the Road Allowance People* arise from the fact that the tales are copies without originals. The reality is that we cannot verify the changes the editor/translator has effected to the narratives, and thus the extent to which she makes the stories her own. Still, there are indications that she has transformed them in crucial ways, not the least by engaging in that most paradoxical of postcolonial gestures—the deliberate Anglicization of non-English worlds. Campbell often asserts that she has an adversarial relationship with the English language because of her ethno-linguistic background (Griffiths and Campbell 72). Yet, at times, her practice suggests otherwise. Most Métis now speak English, but historically they were a French-speaking people and French traces are still evident in the speech of older people. Campbell, however, tries overtly to erase those linguistic markers by replacing them with English ones. As she tells an interviewer, when she revises her writing, "if there is too much French, I take it out and I reword it in broken English" ("Maria Campbell" 50). Notwithstanding her awareness of her collective history, she creates the ineluctable impression that her people have always been English-speaking. Interestingly, few scholars have explored the parallels between Griffiths's treatment of Campbell and her own conduct toward the Métis storytellers. Helen Hoy, for one, is so incensed by Griffiths's placing her "name first in the attribution of authorship" of *The Book of Jessica* that she reverses unilaterally the procedure and presents Campbell as the first writer (48, 234). However, not only does Hoy fail to analyze the relationship between Campbell and the Métis elders who provided her with the tales that comprise *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, she also lists Campbell not as the volume's translator but as its writer (234). Needless to say, for some Campbell scholars, it is wrong to steal from other cultures but it is perfectly permissible to do so from one's kin.

The issues I raise in this article are not exclusive to Indigenous literatures. As scholars like Lejeune have pointed out, the question of the textual "signature" resonates in many societies (195-96). Still, textual indeterminacy seems particularly endemic to Indigenous literatures. Part of the reason for the phenomenon has to do with the ubiquity of linguistic and cultural translation in the field. Since In-



Indigenous texts often strive to convey either an oral reality or a temporally prior reality to which the writer has no direct access, they tend to involve more than one person. Perhaps even more significant, Indigenous cultures are believed to possess an extremely writer-centered concept of writership. As the poet and playwright Daniel David Moses asserts, Indigenous cultures are probably "more autobiographical than the mainstream" (Moses and Goldie xxii). Whereas "mainstream ... editors want to know what one alienated individual thinks," Indigenous peoples are "suspicious" of such individualism and "want to know where the opinion is coming from. Who are his or her people?" (Moses and Goldie xxii). That is, Indigenous cultures appear to reject the seemingly necessary division between writer and author. The complication, though, is that while textual transparency may be easy to accept when Indigenous writers work in, say, K'iche' Maya or Cree, it is much more problematic when they write in tongues like Spanish or English. Indeed, the dilemma facing scholars of Indigenous literatures is how one is to ascertain the indigeneity of a purportedly Indigenous text without going outside the text. This is a question that is bound to become only more urgent as more Indigenous writers continue to work in traditionally non-Indigenous languages such as English. The enormity of the task ahead is illustrated by *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, the recent manifesto by Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior. The three authors maintain that they are not advocating a return to essentialism. As Weaver explains, they do not exclude non-Indigenous critics but simply insist that "in reading literature one should privilege internal cultural readings" (10), since they consider "an understanding of community as being important to a nuanced reading of the text" (11). However, it is not always apparent how one is able to determine where a writer is "coming from," to echo Moses, without accepting his or her self-identification at face value, a strategy that is fraught with problems from a literary perspective. Weaver, for instance, showers much praise on John Moss for his perceptive introduction to Tomson Highway's *Comparing Mythologies*. He is especially impressed with Moss's awareness of Highway's "dual identities" (49), which Weaver links to the critic's ostensible ethno-national background, identifying Moss twice as "Mohawk" (32, 49). Weaver's deduction that Moss is Mohawk seems to derive more from the latter's claim that "I wear my Mohawk ancestry on my lapel" ("Opposite of Prayer" 11) than from any culturally specific stylistic marker. So what is one to make of an analysis such as Weaver's once one discovers that the supposedly Indigenous critic is not Indigenous? This is the case with Moss. While he may have some Mohawk ancestry, he is not only white but actually hails from a rather influential family. As Moss writes of his roots in what is now Cambridge, Ontario, "separate families whose blood is merged in mine employed well over a thousand people in a town of five thousand. I've grown up embarrassed to talk about this. And proud of it. Schizophrenic Tory" (*Bellrock* 83). His exposure to Indigenous life also appears to have been limited. Moss states that his family owned a cabin in the Temagami region of northern Ontario. This cabin had been built by his paternal grandfather and "Ernie Smith, an Indian who later founded the Temagami Canoe Company, in which my grandfather had an interest. Ernie was part Indian. His wife was Indian. My knowledge of Indians has been filtered through my early experiences with Ernie and Mrs. Smith" (*Bellrock* 301). In other words, whatever may account for Moss's insights into Highway's writings, it is not likely to be his Mohawk heritage.

I have no desire to make an example of Jace Weaver. After all, he is hardly atypical among contemporary scholars who privilege civic insiderism (as opposed to scholarly competence) in the study of Indigenous literatures. The point I wish to make is to draw attention to the danger inherent in favoring the writer over the author (and thus the text) in the study of any literature. The identity of the producers of texts, including Indigenous texts, is simply not as transparent as some critics would have us believe. This reality has been underscored dramatically by the rash of hoaxes in Indigenous literatures, notably in Australia, where too many people have been deceived in their interpretations because of "fantasies of originary wholeness and certainty" (Nolan and Dawson xi). Moreover, insider criticism is irredeemably anti-intellectual. As Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has noted, when ethno-cultural "authenticity" is the yardstick for judging texts, any Indigenous person becomes an expert in his or her culture, thus eliminating the need for Indigenous "scholarship" (59-60). Perhaps even more significant, the approach is undermined by its own contradictions. For instance, if Moss's analysis of Highway's work was deemed insightful when he was believed to be a Mohawk, it cannot have lost its cogency simply because he turned out to be something else; his text has not changed, only his ethno-

racial identity. Thus Moss proves that outsiders are able to produce "internal cultural readings." Or, at least, he illustrates the fallacy of basing one's reading of a text on the (ostensible) identity of the writer.

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