



Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Alliance in the Writing Classroom

Using American Indian Texts

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Using American Indian texts in the classroom often seems like a daunting task, and truth be told, it is. Why teach American Indian texts in the first place? How does one incorporate American Indian texts into an already crowded contact zone curriculum? How does a teacher engage non-Native students in these texts? How can an instructor keep from inadvertently reducing American Indian texts to “sample” or “representative minority” texts? Such questions point to a gap in the disciplinary narratives of rhetoric, composition, and English studies, a gap that reveals how much we still need to talk about multiculturalism in the classroom, about how Native texts might not fit but might still be taught. What I offer here is a way to continue reframing the discussion around using Native texts. Specifically, I want to show how to further the goal of honoring sovereign rhetorical practices while building alliances between Native rhetoricians and non-Native instructors and students. Drawing specifically on the work of Scott Lyons and Malea Powell, and on their concepts “rhetorical sovereignty” and “rhetorical alliance,” respectively, I address how these terms can suggest an approach for using Native texts, that we may speak of both sovereignty and alliance in the classroom and seek a way for instructors and students to locate themselves responsibly in the ongoing stories and the processes of telling.

Specifically, I first briefly review the exigency for a discussion con-

cerning pedagogy, multiculturalism, and Native texts, and then I provide a general background regarding many Native peoples' relationship to the English language that will illuminate the relationships among these concerns. I next work through the oft-cited "contact zone" classroom model and its limitations for discussion of Native texts; and finally, I suggest an alternative method of composing the classroom using rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance, including a short case study as an example.

Exigency: Multiculturalism, Race, and Pedagogy

The need for Native texts in the classroom connects in part to a larger ongoing discussion regarding multiculturalism and the recognition of multiple voices in the composition classroom. While multiculturalism in pedagogy has made some progress via bringing those voices habitually marginalized to the attention of students, the rhetorical "hows" and "whys" of these voices and the texts through which they speak are not frequently addressed. This is not to say that instructors remain indifferent to providing some kind of narrative that includes and encompasses these voices and explains how they came to be on the edges; many instructors attempt this work and do so as responsibly as they can. Yet those rhetorics that do the encompassing—those rhetorics that build the prime narrative in rhetoric and composition and set up a need for inclusion in the first place—often remain uninterrogated.

Scholars in composition and rhetoric have already called for changes that challenge both overarching disciplinary narratives and the specifics of writing classroom practice. Concerning the emerging histories of composition studies, many scholars recognize that the tendency to rely on one narrative to unite the discipline, even one designed to be democratic, is dangerous. Paradigms, multicultural included, that validate the work of only a few will not resist the tendency toward prime narratives, and so we must avoid prime disciplinary narratives and seek better frameworks for what we do and how we teach (Royster and Williams 1999: 583). If the "inscription" of history as history "has social, political, and cultural *consequences*" (563, italics in the original), we should be seeking the limits of, the gaps in, and the ideological purviews of any given narrative of what we do as scholars and teachers even as we invoke it (564). Furthermore, race remains a persistent "absent presence" when there is little recognition of racism as "institutionalized, normal, and pervasive" in classroom practice (Prendergast 1998: 36). Therefore, the discourses surrounding specific classroom practice (and the echoes of colonial sensibilities still audible in them) must be scrutinized if the absence is to be recognized—even in multicultural or contact zone discourses (37, 46).

There is no neutral story, but instead many stories weighted with the implications of their time and place, the influences of the individual speaker-writer and listener-reader, and the way that race and culture are constructed and inscribed by all. The narratives we keep and tell shape our discursive practice, with material consequences.

The implications for classroom practice involve questioning not only the historical narratives that shape our practices but also how we all (white included) construct ourselves and are constructed by others as instructors and people who are “raced” and “cultured,” and then involve our students in doing the same. As Keith Gilyard (1999: 48) suggests, “whiteness” must be interrogated just as much as any other category of race when we talk about the discipline and classroom practice. Not to investigate how whiteness is constructed within the field and within our classrooms is to reinscribe the prime narrative of neutral (white) and others (all other people) (49). Even—or sometimes especially—a classroom cast as multicultural may in fact undo what it purports to do. If it fails to read white as part of the multicultural lineup, then the distance between “white” and “others,” dominating narrative and marginal narratives, is reaffirmed rather than shortened even as the study of “others” claims to promote tolerance and better understanding that can reach across (or erase) difference. To read race or culture requires that everyone does the self-reflexive work to show how we inscribe and circumscribe ourselves in the discipline and in the classroom.

Specific to Native rhetorical and literacy practices, multiculturalism and critical pedagogy itself may be counterproductive in their frequent overreliance on the ideals of democracy and democratic teaching as a panacea. Sandy Marie Angl s Grande (2008), for example, believes that critical pedagogy may have some relevance to Indigenous peoples, yet “the deep structures of the ‘pedagogy of oppression’ fail to consider American Indians as a categorically different population, virtually incomparable to other minority groups. [This is] to call attention to the fundamental difference of what it means to be a sovereign and tribal people within the geopolitical confines of the United States” (183). The assumption that a critical, democratic classroom practice can address the problems confronted by all minorities by giving everyone a voice is thus highly problematic for any minority group, and particularly for Native communities who are not necessarily seeking equality so much as working to maintain literal and rhetorical sovereignty. On one hand, the notion of a fluid, “hybrid” postcolonial identity tends to erode Native communities, as this kind of fluidity often moves all identities toward a democratic melting pot rather than allowing space for American Indian

nations to sustain traditional cultural and political boundaries (184–85). On the other hand, the resulting desire to fortify or control cultural, political, and identity borders for the sake of protection — essentialization of a kind — does not always appreciate the rich and dynamic cultures that are Native communities. As Greg Sarris (1993) describes the Kashaya community he knows, culture “is heterogeneous and pluralistic and always present in a dynamic manner. . . . Tradition is not fixed, but an ongoing process” (179–80). Therefore, a multicultural or democratic classroom cannot fully address the complex rhetorical substance of Native texts arising from sovereign Native spaces and communities by making them “equal.”

In sum, disciplinary and classroom practice must continue to change if justice is to be done, literally and figuratively, within rhetoric, composition, and English studies. Other voices need to be heard, not only as “other” but as voices in their own right, voices that may participate in the conversation of the discipline and in their own communities by their own rhetorical rules. The voices we consider normative need to be interrogated for the sake of placing them within their own contexts, rather than as prime narrators that might make token space for voices not like theirs. Multiculturalism has not quite done this work, and as a discipline, we have not yet, in the words of Victor Villanueva, “broken precedent” in order to turn the colonial mindset that still frames much of institutional practice (1999: 659). However, Villanueva does offer a suggestion to help rethink the narrative that still often masters us: we can look to the rhetorics of these “others” (659), and among these others he lists are the “interior colonies”¹ within the borders of the United States, including Native nations. Drawing on Villanueva’s proposal, I argue that the practices of contemporary Native rhetoricians offer key concepts that can guide us in making respectful alliances in our classrooms and discipline. Such alliances can broaden our understanding of what rhetoric and composition or even English studies might be and, just as important, recognize the sovereignty at play in Indigenous rhetorics. But first I wish to clarify the context for the endeavor in order to acknowledge the sovereignty of Native communities and rhetorics and the circumstances for alliance.

Claiming and Using the Language of the Interloper

The particulars of the relationship between the academy and Native peoples’ histories with writing and the English language in general (as well as other colonial languages) are well documented. The US government and allied organizations systematically used English as a language and its attendant literacy practices as a replacement for Native languages, rhetorics, and lit-

eracy practices. The expectation was that the primacy of English among Native peoples would hasten the process of assimilation into Euro-American society, and to an extent, English literacy is still a mark of “civilization.” An English-speaking Indian was/is a more civilized Indian, and one who could/can write with the flair of Euro-American counterparts was/is more civilized still. Furthermore, the language itself provided and still provides a particular way to conceptualize what it means to be an Indigenous person. “*Indian*” is a term of European-American origin beginning with the “Indio” coinage of Columbus, a construction and a category under which more than 500 diverse Native communities (in the United States alone) have been and still often are consigned. English and its *Indian* have provided a long-standing, still-standing role for Native peoples to play, the very presence of which signals the absence of Native peoples’ realities, their survival, and their survivance² (Vizenor 1999: vii–viii). It is the legal language that erodes, which turns Native peoples into “domestic dependent nations” or, as Lyons (2000) has observed, “from ‘sovereign’ to ‘ward,’ from ‘nation’ to ‘tribe,’ and from ‘treaty’ to ‘agreement,’ [this] erosion of Indian national sovereignty can be credited in part to a rhetorically imperialist use of writing by white powers” (453). In many ways, expressing oneself now in English, through writing English, is a literacy practice that underscores loss. As Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird write, many Native individuals and communities now use “the ‘enemy’s language’ . . . to tell our truths, to sing, to remember ourselves” (1997: 21), and while some communities have been able to maintain their languages, many have not. English literacy has been a tool of assimilation, a way to destroy cultures, a way to erase the past, a way to promote imperialism, a way to speak as though sovereignty never existed. English has become the default, and “shame outlines the losses” (21).

However, this is not only a story of victimhood — Native peoples have repeatedly put English literacy to their own uses. Harjo and Bird emphasize that using English can be a form of empowerment in the face of destruction when used for Native purposes: “In our tribal cultures the power of language to heal, to regenerate, and to create is understood. These colonizers’ languages, which often usurped our own tribal languages, or diminished them, now hand back emblems of our cultures, our own designs: beadwork, quills if you will. We’ve transformed these enemy languages” (21). For Native communities and individuals, English language and literacies have also provided many means of expression, tools to call for redress, a meeting place, a site to refigure what it means to be “Native” or “Indigenous” in a pan-Indigenous sense — a common language, if you will — and English composition maintains

itself still as a site for potential change and alliance. As Malea Powell and others have documented with figures such as Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Susan LaFlesche Picotte, Charles Eastman, and William Apess, the education of Native peoples in the rhetorical dimensions of written and spoken English has presented them new ways to reformulate identity and foreground survival even while enacting resistance and forming alliances. This is not to say that the devastation of the past can or should be expunged from general cultural memory in celebration of what Native peoples can do now. That history and that destruction provide the foil for what Native rhetoricians past and present do accomplish. But the rhetorical accomplishments and the acts of textual survivance carried out by Native peoples can perhaps serve to demonstrate another way to think about the narratives told in our disciplines and in our classrooms.

As discussed above, without an interrogation of cultural context on the part of the instructor, students, and text, it is all too easy to assign Native texts a symbolic place as a representative minority that does little more than make a token acknowledgment. To use Native texts well, we must take into consideration the unique contexts from which Native writers compose themselves and their texts. It is to this kind of work—less an interrogation and more a meeting together and a labor together—that the rest of this article speaks. But first, a word from the contact zone.

Agonistics and Indigenous Speaking in the Contact Zone

One of the more ubiquitous ways of conceptualizing this self-reflexive work in a multicultural setting has been through envisioning the classroom as a “contact zone,” and, interestingly enough, this conceptualization occurs via the text of an Indigenous writer. By now Mary Louise Pratt’s term *contact zone* has become well known in rhetoric and composition circles; first introduced in “Arts of the Contact Zone” in 1991, revised in subsequent writings, and circulating today in anthologies and reading lists, the idea and what it implies for the composition classroom are still debated.³ Pratt originally described a contact zone as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (1999: 76), and she used the 1,200-page text of Indigenous Andean Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala as an example of the “autoethnographic” writing that surfaces in such places. This writing from the “conquered others,” Pratt contends, is “a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms

to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding” (77). Contact-zone courses, Pratt argues, are places in which students encounter the ideologically prime writings from the conquerors and the “autoethnographic” writings from the conquered, illustrating the literate clashing and grappling that occurs in such spaces. As a result, all students (hypothetically) will find themselves, their narratives, and their communities represented and critiqued (86).

Exciting as the potential for such a classroom may be, framing a classroom as a contact-zone space has opened up questions about whether or not this formation creates more division than productive discussion, whether violence—rhetorical or otherwise—takes too much of center stage, or whether it in other permutations may overlook the conflict that tends to be part of the contact zone in favor of negotiation (Hall and Rosner 2004: 103–8). While a contact-zone classroom seems to suggest a way to begin working with the diversity and complexity of our classrooms, universities, and home communities, the “clashing” and “grappling” of a classroom in which “no one is excluded, and no one is safe” (Pratt 1999: 86) makes the possibility of dialogue appear to recede. Contact-zone classrooms want to make space where everyone is heard, but even Pratt acknowledges that when everyone gets to speak, the rough edges of racism, sexism, and imperialism writ large will surface. Even the “safe houses” Pratt proposes as a kind of shelter for participants who feel threatened by the discourses they meet in the contact zone seem little more than sticks and straw when the discussion becomes heated. In exploring the ambiguity of student reaction to a contact-zone classroom, Richard E. Miller (1994: 391) applauds the idea of the contact zone, but he expresses concern that it produces considerable tension but does little to suggest how that tension might be dealt with productively. Furthermore, students often tend to reproduce or “reconstitute” their own positions with respect to perceived teacher “agendas” or voices that challenge their own, resulting in a purposeful reinscription of the hegemonic discourse that borrows from the language of the disenfranchised of the contact zone (Murray 1999: 95). In sum, while the contact zone shows promise, it cannot quite do what we would like it to.

And then what of Guaman Poma, whose letter Pratt uses to illustrate the contact zone in the first place? He exists in many ways as the hinge pin for Pratt’s argument, for she makes her case about contact-zone literacies through him and his rhetorical practices. It is no accident that he is Indigenous, yet the kinds of questions Pratt asks, the very frame of the contact zone, circumscribe and restrict his presence. What she misses is an under-

standing of Guaman Poma's work not only as a voice in a contact zone but also as an Indigenous speaker making use of the enemy's language, indigenizing discourse for his own ends, on behalf of his community. Interesting and valuable though it may be, the point of view Pratt provides first leaves Guaman Poma in the past, disconnected from his descendants and from us, and then does not consider how his writing is less "hybrid" and more Indigenous Andean.⁴ What happens if we stop thinking of him as writing a hybrid text and incorporating the language and narrative of the interloper to produce something new in the linear sense of literacy development? What happens if we instead consider him still very much Indigenous Andean, using the means available to accomplish his purposes as part of a dynamic culture that is not "hybrid" so much as in flux (as all cultures are) because of contact? That he moves not so much between the binaries of a "metropolitan" center and "rural" margin, or between "colonizer" and "colonized," but rather negotiates via what American Indian scholars today might call rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance? If we read Guaman Poma as Indigenous, if we shift the perspective to that of an Indigenous Andean person claiming, even indigenizing, the enemy's language, we get a radical refiguring of Guaman Poma's rhetorical efforts. There is not space here to do full justice to Guaman Poma's story, to do the kind of work that Powell (2002), for example, has done with such figures as Charles Eastman and Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, but Guaman Poma's presence — what is and is not said about him, this absent presence — suggests that the contact zone and autoethnography as concepts may allow for some recognition of multiple speaking voices while simultaneously reinscribing colonial lines. In the contact zone he speaks, but only through the lens of the colonial. The contact zone cannot quite describe the ways in which Native peoples and communities enact rhetorical sovereignty as fully present in themselves, even as they enact rhetorical and literacy-based alliances with other communities.

What Guaman Poma shows us — what I argue we need — is a way to refigure the classroom as meeting place, but one not cast in the vocabulary of domination and subordination or colonizer and colonized, of only clashing and grappling. Power differentials or histories of imperialism should certainly not be glossed over, but we can choose different terms by which to address each other now, to begin seeking ways to speak to the common project we share and respect the projects in our respective communities.

Looking for an Alternative Classroom Model

Lisa Eck (2008) provides a useful way to begin thinking about cross-cultural engagement with non-European American texts. She argues for the teaching of postcolonial texts by means of invoking what she calls a “tripartite pedagogy” that creates a “nervous dissonance” (579). First, she asks students to identify with the texts they read in order to “make hybrid postcolonial identities seem familiar, even analogous” to the identities of the average American college students, and then she asserts, “This text is about you!” (578–79). Next, “stressing historicized difference,” Eck uses “the Otherness of the cultures reproduced in foreign texts to estrange the American familiar. . . . (“This text was never about you!”) (578–79). Finally, through these two dissonant notes, she seeks a third note located in the specifics of the classroom and the students themselves, a kind of in-between that asks students to sort out the details of the text within its context and theirs (“Because, this is *also* somehow about you!”) (579, italics in the original). Such an approach is striking in its multiple possibilities for discussion and is intriguing because of its wish to maintain a productive tension between understanding texts via direct identification and being unable to (or not allowed to) identify at all. The reality of meaning making is brought sharply home, at least in theory: meaning making is a process of negotiation; power is a part of that negotiation; students do not have the right to do with texts as they please; meaning making must be made transparent, especially in postcolonial locations. Yet still, we all have a stake together in the “legacy of colonialism” and the individual selfhood we all attempt to shape for ourselves (597).

However, regarding American Indian texts, we are working with texts and rhetorics that are not postcolonial per se. The colonizers aren’t leaving, and the situation is therefore, as Gerald Vizenor (1999: 77) might say, paracolonial. What this means for teachers of Native texts is twofold: first, American Indian writing cannot necessarily be subsumed into the general definition of postcolonial writing and the approaches to teaching texts classified as postcolonial, and second, the details of American Indian history and experience must—even more than Eck suggests—be forwarded to ground Native writings within their specific contexts in history and in location. I do not argue that Eck’s method is in error but simply that it does not go far enough for Native texts. Such a pedagogical approach must be cast in terms that translate it appropriately and respectfully into the context of American Indian survivance, that is, the act of American Indian survival (which often makes use of what the interloper brings) and resistance (which strives to avert the interloper’s influence) together.

It is at this point where contemporary Native concepts of rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance can reframe the discussion and accomplish more than multiculturalism, or the contact zone, or even Eck's postcolonial model have done. More than just providing history, background, or a sliding linear scale of relative proximity with polar opposites as bookends (this is about you, this is not about you), rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance are dualities that honor and support Native survivance. They are principles that call attention to one of the most profound concepts shaping Native communities past and present — sovereignty — while acknowledging the alliances those same communities have forged to bring themselves into the present. Rhetorical sovereignty demands that in this paracolonial situation we all inhabit, each Native community and its right to determine its communicative course must be respected lest the rhetorics it employs lose their significance in the general call for multiculturalism. At the same time, rhetorical alliance insists that across these lines, we can assist one another, that we can teach one another something.

Sovereignty is a pivotal concept for Native communities, and for most, if not all, American Indian writers, it is a concept that must be addressed, implicitly or explicitly, from within the specific context of that writer and his or her community. *Sovereignty* as a concept has its origins in feudal Europe and became pertinent to Native nations as they made treaties with European colonists who invoked it. As the United States expanded its colonial boundaries, the idea of Native sovereignty was routinely retranslated in U.S. courts to justify expansion, resulting in policy that eroded Native peoples' status as sovereign nations — a status accepted in international treaty practice — and denied self-government and denied or altered land claims, and still does (Barker 2005: 2–17; Lyons 2000: 450–53).⁵ However, *sovereignty* has become a term through which Native peoples define agendas for social change, although it is not a term that readily translates well into traditional tribal or community structures, and although it carries the burden of colonialism with it (see Alfred 1999), sovereignty has nonetheless proven useful. Describing this deployment of the term, Joanne Barker (2005) writes, “Fiercely claiming an identity as sovereign, and including multiple social issues under its rubric, has been a strategy of not merely deflecting globalization's reinvention of colonial processes but of reasserting a politically empowered self-identity within, beside, and against colonialism” (20). Sovereignty extends through treaty rights, land rights, identity, Native intellectual traditions, cultural revitalization, language, education, and more. Yet while Native communities use *sovereignty* as a term that encompasses many issues, its meaning depends

on the context of a given Native community for its direction and definition, “determined by the ‘located’ political agendas and cultural perspectives of those who rearticulate into public debate or political document to do a specific work of opposition, invitation, or accommodation” (21).

Located in the discipline of English or rhetoric and composition, American Indian sovereignty is therefore not “equality” as critical theory or pedagogy would have it, nor does it simply mean having a voice or the kind of agency that democracy supports. Grande (2008: 189) reminds us that “Indigenous peoples have not, like other marginalized groups, been fighting for inclusion in the democratic imaginary but, rather, for the right to remain distinct, sovereign, and tribal peoples.” As a refiguring of that sovereign struggle, especially given the long and difficult history Native peoples have with the written word and assimilation-oriented education, Lyons (2000: 449–50) offers his conceptualization of rhetorical self-determination, or what he calls rhetorical sovereignty. He defines rhetorical sovereignty as the “inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” as they grow from within the exigencies of Native communities, as opposed to having exigencies and the means to addressing them entirely imposed from without. Such an assertion claims the power of writing and meaning making for Native peoples, on their terms, as they need it, as they reach to reverse the colonial imposition of the English language and literacies as well as the connected goals of acculturation and rhetorical assimilation. For composition and English studies, Lyons issues a call to foreground Native peoples’ identities as nation-peoples and the way they use writing in order to refigure the discipline and to root out the lingering vestiges of rhetorical imperialism there.

American Indian texts, therefore, need to be read and understood as grounded in the communities and exigencies from which they come, not as isolated, and certainly not as a representative example of a “minority” text. As a principle that informs pedagogical practices, rhetorical sovereignty stipulates that Native texts be understood as a part of the ongoing stories from which they come. This is not to say, however, that non-Native peoples are excluded from textual interpretation, or that they cannot participate in the meaning-making process of anything related to Indians. As Robert Allen Warrior (1995: 124) states concerning intellectual sovereignty, “the struggle for sovereignty is not a struggle to be free from the influence of anything outside ourselves, but a process of asserting the power we possess as communities and individuals to make decisions that affect our lives.” Or as Lyons

(2000: 457) writes regarding Indigenous rhetorics, “Rather than representing an enclave, sovereignty here is the ability to assert oneself renewed—in the presence of others.” We need others, too. We need alliance.

In her article “Down by the River, or How Susan La Flesche Picotte Can Teach Us about Alliance as a Practice of Survivance,” Malea Powell (2004) calls for just such a reframing of our thinking about texts and rhetorics, one that asks for us to think not in terms of “us” and “them” so much as “we together”—not in the sense of making all the same or glossing over difference, but rather in the sense of acknowledging how communities in the United States and their rhetorics make meaning together. She argues, “We need a new language, one that doesn’t convince us of our unutterable and ongoing differences, one that doesn’t force us to see one another as competitors . . . [one] that allows us to imagine respectful and reciprocal relationships that acknowledge the degree to which we need one another (have needed one another) in order to survive and flourish” (41). Rhetorical alliance might then be defined as a mutual understanding across cultures and communities that “honor[s] a complex notion of texts that encompasses both beadwork and books as artifacts produced by users who have ‘the ability to act quickly, effectively, and prudently within ever-changing contexts’ (Johnson 53), but that doesn’t ignore the particular circumstances of their production and meaning within specific cultural discourses” (44). Rhetorical alliance means that everyone acknowledges the rhetorical contributions that every community makes and what the stakes are for the speakers and listeners involved.

Centered in her own context of the Miami creation story and history, and extended through her reading of Susan La Flesche Picotte’s work for her Omaha community and the white Women’s National Indian Association of the nineteenth century, Powell demonstrates how the principle of rhetorical alliance has been and is an integral part of American Indian writing and survivance. Just as we can investigate and understand how Susan La Flesche Picotte adapts the language and circumstance of her day to communicate to a specific white community for the survival of her Omaha community, we can work to comprehend how American Indian writers and rhetors in general strategically use writing in multiple ways for multiple audiences according to location and historical circumstance. Understanding this as a disciplinary community, she claims, might open up a new space for all of us to acknowledge the “meaner events” of our shared history and begin work on “a new story about ourselves, not a ‘prime’ narrative held together by the sameness of our beliefs, but a gathering of narratives designed to help us adapt and change as is necessary for our survival” (2004: 57–58). Teaching those rhetorical

alliances is one way for us to find a way out of the prime narratives that reinscribe colonialism in our classrooms.

Taken together, rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance suggest a balance through which we can continue thinking about responsibly using American Indian texts in the classroom. Native texts can make a significant contribution to the composition classroom not as “sample minority texts” but as examples and allies from distinct communities who can speak to what “rhetorics” and “writing” can mean.

Rhetorical Sovereignty and Rhetorical Alliance in the Classroom

Generally speaking, if we consider American Indian texts to be located both in their specific contexts but also in conversation with a wider audience, we can find ways to incorporate discussions of Native texts in our classrooms without having to resort to the “inclusion” model that tacks on minority texts as grafts onto the imagined Euro-American rhetorical tree.⁶ Framing American Indian texts as follows acknowledges their contributions and the communicative efforts of their writers all through the course of the making of history and not simply in selective places. For example, in terms of broader topics, when we talk about rhetorical traditions, we can remember Native rhetorical traditions as part of the communicative course of American history; when we talk about location, Lyons (2000: 465) points out that we can recognize “every university and school exists in a place, on a land, with a history and a community of struggle: every place has its peoples”; when we talk about audience, we can remember, as Powell points out, the work of Native rhetors across history to reach multiple audiences for a variety of purposes; when we talk about something like genre theory, we can remember how Native peoples did use and are still using Euro-American genres and putting them to Native communities’ communicative purposes; when we talk about digital rhetorics, we can talk about Native peoples’ development and use of digital texts (see, e.g., Haas 2007); and finally, in something as common as a literature analysis assignment, we can investigate the how and why of Native representations in literature by or about Native peoples. Simply put, the possibilities for recognizing the role of Native texts in the classroom conversations we have are myriad.

Rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance also have a place within a variety of class structures. This approach has emerged out of my own teaching experiences with Native texts across a range of courses, including first-year composition, advanced composition, introductory literature courses, and American Indian literature courses. Within a first-year composition

course, using Native texts alongside other essays—or, in some of my classes, alongside Pratt’s “Arts of the Contact Zone”—is a way to help complicate student understanding of rhetorical practice past the Aristotelian model of *logos*–*ethos*–*pathos*, prompt critical thinking about the way global communities engage one another in public and historic discourse, and reveal Native writers as contemporary and present. For a more advanced composition class, using Native texts provides a different entry point into more detailed investigations of how and why writers construct and deploy texts as they do, and Native texts provide a particularly profound illustration of how text production is grounded in specific cultural and historical circumstances and discourses. As included in a literature survey course, rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance contribute an alternate theoretical model that demands recognition of Native sovereignty, alliance, and survivance and calls attention to the specific ways that American Indian literatures may participate in global conversations while still maintaining connection to home communities. Finally, in a literature course that is centered in American Indian literatures, this approach can help move discussions about Native texts into the present as texts that speak to readers now; while favorite topics such as the oral tradition and traditional tricksters are important to consider, rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance draw attention to the local and global historical and contemporary circumstances of Native writers, texts, and communities.

Overall, and perhaps most important, rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance as principles can help guide us in asking questions of the texts within a Native framework. Learning to recognize rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance can provide insights to help instructors work through the connections between rhetoric and composition or literature as we understand it and the American Indian texts that are in dialogue with those understandings. Though it is beyond the scope of this article to address specific lesson plans for each potential classroom scenario, the approach outlined below is intended to be flexible enough to work within different classroom contexts, but it does require some tailoring depending on individual classroom needs and goals.

In terms of working with specific texts, asking students to identify first what they already know or recognize in a given text is a beginning point; such a start is an act of recognition that helps students see how a text is “about” them. What do we already know about this text? What does it appear to accomplish? Who is the speaker-writer, and who is the audience? Yet just as Eck (2008) asserts regarding teaching postcolonial literature, students should not stop with what they believe they know or with the features with

which they identify. Carol Zitzer-Comfort (2008: 162) reminds us that many students come with little background knowledge of Native peoples and tend to rely on the stereotypes they have learned. Recognizing rhetorical sovereignty asks that students dig deeper and try to understand what they do not know and what is not “about” them. A recognition of rhetorical sovereignty prompts instructors and students to consider questions like these:

What community/communities/people does the speaker-writer come from or claim? (Individual biographical and Indigenous community historical frameworks are important here.)

What are or might be the communicative goals of that community/those communities as enacted by the speaker-writer? How are those goals tied to the particular contexts/locations and exigency of each community?

What communit(ies) does the speaker address? (Often American Indian texts are addressing Native and non-Native audiences at the same time — how is this managed here?) How are these audiences identified?

What rhetorical strategies are present? How are they tied to the particular contexts, locations, and exigency of each community?

How are these strategies used to forward the communicative goals of the communities represented here?

How is this act of writing/composition in itself an act of rhetorical sovereignty?

As a balance, a recognition of rhetorical alliance reminds instructors and students that this text, its history, and its legacy are “about” them, too. Rhetorical alliance prompts us to consider questions like these:

What is at stake for each community involved in this communicative act, both for the speaker-writer and for the listener-reader? For the Native peoples involved, and for the non-Native people involved?

How do the communicative and interpretive goals of each community (both speaker-writer and listener-reader) meet in this writing? How do they influence one another?

Given there are multiple audiences, how does the speaker-writer negotiate his or her arguments? How does the speaker-writer appeal to multiple audiences in order to reach the communicative goals?

How are the listener-readers expected to participate in the rhetorical process? How do you as a listener-reader find yourself participating?

In what ways might this text be a call for rhetorical alliance between speaker-writer and listener-reader? Between the multiple audiences invoked?

In what ways might this text be an act of rhetorical alliance?

In the end, the principles of rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance come together toward the same goal, survivance, and produce a final question: Ultimately, how are American Indian texts acts of survivance? With survivance as the goal, learning to recognize rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance can lay the groundwork for a better understanding of Native texts and the work that Indigenous rhetors do, as well as how those texts and that work are both distinctly Native and still very much a part of the rhetorical world of non-Native instructors and students.

“Report to the Nation”: A Quick Case Study

At this point, I’d like to use an essay by Carter Revard to illustrate how Eck’s approach and then an informed teaching of rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance might function.⁷ This is only a sketch that would likely change shape depending on the classroom in which it is read, but I hope it will provide ideas for using an essay that students would find accessible for rhetorical and/or literary analysis. Revard is a mixed-blood Osage scholar and writer whose fields include medieval English literature, the history of the English language, and American Indian literature, and he has also published several collections of poetry and essays. In *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* (1998), the book from which the essay used here is taken, Revard uses his writing to both “speak first of where I come from in Oklahoma, then of some later travels, and finally of where I live now” and “[look] from a more academic distance at what being Osage, or Apache [etc.] . . . might once have been like, and at some of the ways in which American Indians now, with words, make places to live” (xi).

In “Report to the Nation: Repossessing Europe,” the essay of interest for my purposes here, Revard begins with a satirical take on the process of historical European practices of land claims, writing from the point of view of an Osage “special agent” who travels throughout Europe and reports on the Old World the way it once reported on the New World. A brief excerpt suggests the direction he goes:

When I claimed England for the Osage Nation, last month, some of the English chiefs objected . . . even though I’d taken a Thames Excursion boat and on the way formally proclaimed from the deck, with several Germans and some Japanese

tourists for witnesses, that all the land this river drained was ours, these Oxford chiefs maintained that our title was not good, except below their Folly Bridge at most. At least that leaves us Windsor Palace and some other useful properties, and we can deal with the legal hitches later. (76)

Yet after a time, Revard changes direction: “Our elders, I realize, don’t want to do things the way my report has been suggesting — they think that’s too much like the Europeans did our people, and they think we should be more civilized. . . . Maybe instead of sending people to take the land . . . we’d do better just to transport Europe over to us, and not try to counterpunch Columbus. . . . We can turn everything of theirs into electrons dancing around at our fingertips, words or corporations or whatever” (80–81).

And it is via words, prose and interspersed poetry, that Revard begins the task of interpreting his European travelogue through Oklahoma Osage eyes. Story becomes more valuable than European artifact and words more important than European land as Revard, in subtle and overt ways, claims Euro-American rhetoric and genre for the Osage in the very act of composing.

If we apply Eck’s approach, the first part — the “this is about you” — invites students to recognize the familiar rhetorical features: the satire, the irony, the parody and humor, the essay and poetry as genres, the shared historical narrative of Columbus “discovering” America, and the sly sideways glancing at the Euro-American audience that has perhaps celebrated Columbus Day as a universal holiday. The second step, which declares “this is not about you,” points out part of how the irony and satire works — that this is Indian mock-reclamation of Europe; that this is discovery read from a non-European point of view (specifically Osage); that the contemporary Osage home is Oklahoma, but perhaps not Oklahoma as they might know it, but instead Indian Country; that perhaps Columbus’s “discovery” might be cause for mourning and not occasion for celebration; and that maybe there is another audience who is laughing or crying more than the students are, the Osage Nation to whom the report is ostensibly addressed. The final part, the suggestion that “this is also about you,” I hope marks the turn where students recognize that history is written from more than one perspective and that the same rhetorical devices can function for different purposes, depending on who is wielding them.

All of these are good insights. Yet they cannot quite touch the full significance of Revard’s rhetorical act, and it is through the recognition of rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance that we can come to an enriched and respectful comprehension of what he does as a Native writer, an Osage

writer. More to the point, if we recognize rhetorical sovereignty, we must question why and how such an essay would be written. How does the state of the Osage people create historical and rhetorical exigency? How and why are the three audiences (Native generally, Osage specifically, and then widely non-Native) at play? Why is the act of claiming language and story important in the first place? How is it an act of sovereignty in and of itself? How are Revard's sovereignty as an Osage writer, the Osage people's sovereignty, and Native rhetorical sovereignty in general reflected in the choice of *how* to make claims, literal and rhetorical?

Specific to the Osage people, there is a long history of resisting cultural and territorial encroachment, as well as making strategic adaptations for the sake of supporting and protecting the Osage Nation. As the dominant tribal nation through the Ozarks and into Kansas and Oklahoma up to the last half of the nineteenth century, the Osages had been able to stave off initial Spanish, French, and English advancement. Yet with the continued press of white squatters/settlers and the relocation of removed eastern tribes onto Osage lands, the Osage were forced by the US government to relocate first to Kansas in 1854 and then Indian Territory in 1871 (Warrior 2005: 59–71). Throughout this turmoil, however, the Osages had been working to maintain themselves as a sovereign people, and in 1881 their leaders ratified a constitution to create a new form of tribal governance that would be a “vehicle for asserting not just political independence, but for retaining their sense of peoplehood and its distinctive features in the midst of a changing world” (53). The fledgling democracy was a success, but disagreement in the Osage community between pro-allotment and anti-allotment factions, as well as a desire on the part of the US government to break the communal hold on Osage land, led to the 1906 Osage Allotment Act, which unilaterally overturned the Osage Constitution and established the Osage Tribal Council, a government run exclusively by those Osages who had mineral rights to the oil reserves on Osage land (81). All others were disenfranchised. Not until 1992 were the efforts of Osage nationalists finally heard and recognized by a US court. In 1993, all Osages were allowed to vote in a referendum to draft a new constitution, two-thirds agreed, and in 1994 it was adopted. Nonetheless, the Osage Tribal Council appealed the court decision that allowed for the referendum, and in 1997 the Tenth Circuit court reversed the 1992 decision and overturned the new Osage Constitution and government (82–84). The US government did not recognize Osage sovereignty, and even among the Osage people, how to best achieve sovereignty was and is a divisive subject.

These are the history and circumstances from which Revard writes as an Osage in the mid-1990s. Revard's goal with the essay, as he suggests, is not to "counterpunch Columbus" as much as to make some sovereign claims on Europeans and what they have to offer the Osage people; this is a distinctly comedic and ironic pose, given the history of colonization by Europeans and Euro-Americans with both the Osage Nation in particular and Native nations in general. This is not about the literal claiming of land, but about the claiming of language and story, a space wherein the Osage get to choose what of European "civilization" is of value to them instead of being told how to be civilized. As such, Revard is working with several different audiences: the Osage Nation, which he directly addresses; Native readers at large, who will identify with the narrative of colonization and its general effects; and non-Native readers, in whose language he speaks, whose genres he uses, and whose prime narrative he gently satirizes. The rhetorical strategies that he employs — humor, satire, the frames of a letter, and poetry — work to deconstruct that prime narrative and assert the power of the entire Osage people to choose what they will have. As he traces his route through his European tour, he describes it from the so-called savage's perspective, except that the alleged barbaric Osage agent is the more civilized one, appalled at much of the behavior he finds in the Old World. Furthermore, he uses Euro-American-style poetry as another means to his counterstory: for every major place of note in the European landscape, he can tell a story-poem about places of equal value to him on the Osage homeland, reaffirming his personal connection to Osage place.

In short, if the context is the Osage homeland (as it stands and as it is imagined) as well as the page, and the speaker is an Osage abroad, and the goal is, in a sense, to demonstrate sovereignty and "civilization," then he uses his satirical prose and narrative poetry to read back and write back to the ways the Osage have been inscribed, their land claimed, culture discarded, and government overturned. Yet Revard isn't just mocking here — that would be an act of violence he is not ready to commit, and one that the elders he respects would not approve of. He also wishes to avoid becoming the oppressor, a new Columbus. Put another way, his goal is to be civilized in an Osage, twentieth-into-twenty-first-century style. This essay is therefore an act of rhetorical sovereignty in how it speaks to and from the Osage people, in how it makes its choices. If the thread of humor in the essay is also a way to teach, then it is also an admonishment to the Osage people not to give themselves up easily to Euro-American civilizing and instead shore up community and

tribal solidarity; additionally, it is a working lesson for non-Natives who perhaps thought they already knew what Indians were like.

Complementing that rhetorically sovereign work, the principle of rhetorical alliance helps to reveal this text as an act of survivance in how Revard — Oxford and Yale educated as he is — can employ the kinds of rhetorical devices and techniques that Euro-American students recognize and put them to a distinctly Osage purpose. He makes this story of counterclaim accessible because this is a conversation he wishes to have with everyone. This is a story that involves everyone.

There is something at stake here for each audience Revard invokes in this essay, though what is at stake differs considerably. For the Osage readers, it is a matter of affirming Osage presence, of establishing a perspective other than the Euro-American one and finding a way to use the enemy's language and culture to reclaim their own in a unified way, at least in some respects and perhaps in spite of a tense history of disagreement. For a pan-Native audience, the stakes are generally the same, but cast as a cross-cultural, pan-Indigenous presence. However, for non-Native readers, the stakes are considerably different: the investment for non-Native readers is in facing a perspective and a narrative other than the prime Euro-American narrative. Non-Native readers will have to learn to regain their balance when confronted, however carefully, by a narrative that challenges what they believe they already know about Indians, about history, and about what "civilization" means.

Revard's essay, therefore, becomes a meeting point, a place of contact. If his goal is to assert a kind of sovereignty, to demonstrate survivance to readers that include non-Natives who might sympathize but not want to be threatened, there is potential for conflict. This is, however, perhaps part of why Revard shifts gears away from counterpunching. His goal is not to slug his non-Native readers with the grisly and difficult realities of colonization as much as to gain their confidence via a kind of identification that can link Native presence and sensibilities with theirs, at least to an extent (Stromberg 2006: 5). In a sense, his goal is alliance: though he wants an affirmation of Osage presence and place among the Osage and in the larger world, and to do so he has to upset his non-Native readers' potentially ill-informed notions of history and privilege, he stresses that this isn't about countercolonization or finger pointing. It is about renewed Osage and Native presence in the world, speaking civilization to civilization.

Given his multiple audiences, Revard appeals to his Osage and pan-Native listener-readers via identification with colonial history. He is retelling a story very familiar to all Native peoples, and using a kind of humor to take

a little of the sting out of the wounds that story has inflicted (for more on humor, see Deloria [1969] 1988). At the same time, he appeals to his non-Native listener-readers through his use of familiar written English that takes shape in essay, letters, poetry, and story. He begins the task of identification with this familiarity and the awareness of a historical narrative of exploration and land claims that they know, turning it in such a way as to draw his readers closer. Here is an Osage person, a Native person, speaking just as they can, using the means of communication they know, and in that identification the gap between Revard and his non-Native readers may close some. Yet even as he draws his non-Native listener-readers closer, he asks the difficult rhetorical question: if we are all civilized, if you recognize me, why did colonization happen, and why is it still happening? What does acting civilized mean? He simultaneously draws identification and demands some self-reflexivity. Likewise, with his Osage and Native readers, he seems to ask, if we are just as civilized, how do we continue to assert and renew our presence? Do we have to be like the colonizers?

He is asking all of his readers for some self-reflexivity. For Osage and for Native communities, he is asking them not to give themselves away so easily now: “So don’t let any of us offer language, traditions, beadwork, religion, or even half the Cowboy and Indian myth, let alone ourselves, this time” in exchange for Europe, he writes (89). For his non-Native readers, he asks for an awareness that will keep history’s mistakes from repetition, from the folly of, for example, a president who “bought from a French dictator the land on which, as *he knew and did not know*, our Osage people happened to exist” (89, italics added). While this essay isn’t exactly a call for everyone to work together and does not ask for an erasure of cultural difference, what it does do is set its Native and non-Native readers on parallel paths toward affirming the presence of and respect for the Native civilizations that do exist. In a context of paracolonialism, this essay underscores for both Native and non-Native listener-readers the need for continued storytelling from all quarters, to be critical of what we call civilization and history.

Conclusion

In much stronger lines than multiculturalism, contact zones, or even Eck’s approach can do, teaching rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance together helps to reveal how Native survival and resistance can work through texts. To be sure, using Native texts and teaching in this way is not an easy piece of footwork, because it asks us to attend to rhetorical practices we may not have previously recognized. Furthermore, readers will find that not all

Native texts will be as accessible as Revard's, and not all Native writers will wish to couch critique in such gentle terms. Depending upon the locations and circumstances from which they write, some Native rhetors can be read as combative and/or exclusionary. Yet those voices, those contexts, and those rhetorical moves must also be acknowledged in order to create a fuller understanding of rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance—excluding those texts for the sake of a false harmony only resets the tidy, erasing narrative of multiculturalism.

At the core, teaching with rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance asks us to do the difficult and challenging work of calling institutionalized racism as we see it, even in our own work, and undoing the erasure that multiculturalism tends to wreak on Native writers and Native texts. It requires us to listen. It requires that we all extend our understanding of how Native peoples have come to use the languages and literacies imposed upon them for their own purposes. It reminds us that the very frames we set for “contact” in our classrooms will set the terms of the discussion and that we must be careful that those terms do not inadvertently cancel out Indigenous voices *as* Indigenous voices when they speak from Indigenous contexts to a wider audience. Yet this hard work does not have to be set up as contact zone clashing. Rhetorical sovereignty and rhetorical alliance also set the frame of the discussion in terms of a mutual recognition and meeting, of respect between Native writer/rhetor and the audiences who interact with his or her text. They set the frame in terms of alliance, an acknowledgment of how keeping a prime narrative for our classrooms and our discipline—even one with good intentions—will compromise everyone. Alliance recognizes that we need each one's contributions, to keep the balance.

Such an approach still asks students to examine others' arguments and to try to construct arguments of their own. It asks for close analysis. It asks for students to understand meaning making as a communal process and to respect that differing communities will have unique goals and rhetorical strategies, even as students do. These are familiar goals. Though incorporating American Indian texts and working with Native rhetorics might make some challenging waves in classroom practice, this work is an important step we take together to honor Native sovereignty as rhetoric practice and to build alliances in our classrooms and in our disciplines. A respectful acknowledgment of sovereign rhetorical practice and an alliance among American Indian writers, their texts, and the English classroom has the potential to strengthen the work that all our communities do.

Notes

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1. Villanueva, as I understand him, calls Native nations “interior colonies” for the sake of pointing out their often-overlooked presence within and across the geographic and political boundaries of the United States. However, the label is perhaps misleading: Native nations are sovereign tribal nations, countries within or overlapping the United States, and their citizens are dual citizens within their tribal communities and the United States. They are not colonies in the imperial sense.
2. *Survivance*, a term attributed to Gerald Vizenor, invokes the simultaneous act of survival and resistance that Native peoples carry out on a daily basis. In terms of the English language, the Euro-American label *Indian* has a long history of overwriting the diversity, history, and contemporary realities of Native peoples in favor of an oversimplified concept and image of “Indian.” For more on the documentation of this phenomenon, see Robert F. Berkhofer Jr.’s *The White Man’s Indian* (1979) and Roy Harvey Pearce’s *Savagism and Civilization* ([1953] 1988).
3. As Pratt’s work is interdisciplinary, it has had much of its influence outside of rhetoric and composition or English as disciplines. However, for the sake of clarity, the focus here will remain on how her idea of “contact zone” has affected discussion within rhetoric and composition.
4. Pratt does acknowledge the Indigenous Andean influence within the texts—the language used, the symbolism of the illustrations. However, she does it with the notion of “hybrid” in mind, a new creation born of the contact zone. I would argue that Guaman Poma’s text can instead be read as an extension of the Indigenous Andean rhetorical practices within a new context; it’s a horse of a different color, but a horse nonetheless.
5. On this point, see also Vine Deloria Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle’s *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (1998).
6. To an extent, I am echoing Craig Womack here when, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), he argues that “tribal literatures are not some branch waiting to be grafted onto the main trunk. Tribal literatures are the *tree*, the oldest literatures in the Americas. . . . We should not allow ourselves, through the definitions we choose and the language we use, to ever assume we are outside the canon” (6–7, italics in the original). While I do not go so far as to argue for the separatism of canons that he ultimately does, I do agree that individual Native nations’ rhetorical traditions must be recognized, and that the means to that recognition is not “inclusion” in a Euro-American canon.
7. It should be noted here that when looking up a Native author and his or her home community, the Internet has made things significantly easier. Often authors have home pages or pages with their publishers that help provide immediate background information, and many Native nations either have or are building websites that include community-told historical and cultural background information (or, at the very least, contact information for the folks who do educational outreach).

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