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The Fine Art of Fencing: Nationalism, Hybridity, and the Search for a Native American Writing Pedagogy

Scott Richard Lyons

Ten years ago I published "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?," advancing a conception of Native rhetoric that I hoped might take Natives out of what I'll call the "perpetual past"—a discourse in which we are considered to be essentially oral and not literate, cultural and not political, and above all "traditional" and not modern—into a discourse on sovereignty. At that time Natives were considered by most to be a minority ethnic group as opposed to nations, a "race" rather than different peoples, and a reminder of something tragic that happened long ago instead of historical human groups living and acting in the world today. Rhetorical sovereignty was defined as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires . . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" (Lyons 449–50; emphasis in original). In addition to privileging literacy over orality, politics over cultural difference, and nationality over minority status, I wanted to articulate rhetorical sovereignty as the right of a group instead of individuals. On that score perhaps the essay was more prescient that I could have imagined, given that seven years later, on September 13, 2007, the United Nations enshrined its first recognition of "collective rights" in the form of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: a legally non-binding but still important comprehensive statement on rights to Native self-determination, including rights over tribal lands and resources, cultures and languages, educational and political institutions, and more. As the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues stated in 2006, "The

Declaration emphasizes the right of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs" (UNPFII). In other words, it was intended to be an instrument for the assertion and recognition of indigenous sovereignty, and if we add "rhetoric" to its list of rights, that's basically what I was hoping for back in 2000.

One important realization of rhetorical sovereignty is the revitalization of heritage languages, a topic I have addressed in another article, entitled, "There's No Translation for It: The Rhetorical Sovereignty of Indigenous Languages." In that essay I discuss both the steady decline of Native languages around the world and efforts to resist linguistic dormancy. When Columbus arrived, there were over 300 Native languages representing over 50 different language families spoken north of the Rio Grande, but today, as Norbert Francis and Jon Reyhner observe, "not a single exception exists to the overall tendency toward language displacement by either Spanish or English" in the U.S. (33). The same holds true for Native languages worldwide, as one (out of roughly seven thousand) goes dormant every two weeks. But tribal people actively resist the threat of language loss, in part by employing a kind of strategic essentialism construing the language as nationally, religiously, culturally, or even biologically hardwired into one's tribal identity, hence the common refrain, "there's no translation for it." One—a word, a meaning, even a body—does not necessarily translate into something else, not if we wish to keep our languages, cultures, and identities as distinct peoples intact. While linguistic determinism may reign supreme among language activists, one need not personally have a hardliner's view that "language determines thought" to appreciate the rhetorical sovereignty exercised in these locales. As with any strategic essentialism, you consider what's at stake and weigh that against the problematic aspects of the essentialism evoked. I might wince when teachers suggest *Ojibwemowin* is more easily learned by Ojibwe because "it's in our blood," but if it motivates people to learn all those verb conjugations, why not look the other way?

The text you are now reading extends the ideas raised in my previous essays to another issue pertinent to any discourse on indigenous literacy, rhetoric, or education: the question of settler languages and English in particular. If "Rhetorical Sovereignty" was an attempt to place Natives on the rhet/comp map in a way that prioritizes the concept of sovereignty, and "There's No Translation for It" was an investigation into one important site where rhetorical sovereignty is now asserted, this essay is about engaging the English language in a manner that's consistent with the ideas advanced in the first two. What this means, I'm afraid, is that I must now make an unsexy argument endorsing the value of teaching Standard English to Natives. In so doing, I must also take a stand against some ideas that have captured the imaginations of scholars who construe them as liberatory or egalitarian, among them hybridity and code meshing. Sovereignty, you see, even though thoroughly rhetorical and intersubjective, requires a sense of boundedness or separation that hybridity will always contest. It is not something that is easily meshed. If anything, sovereignty requires the making of a fence, not to keep things out, but to keep important things in. I would go so far as to suggest that, contra Robert Frost, sometimes fences can even make good neighbors. But first let me tell you about the place where I come from.

i.

The Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota was established by a treaty in 1855; that same, fateful treaty also provided thousands of acres of land cessions that now comprise a good portion of northern Minnesota. More land was lost in subsequent years, especially during and after the allotment era, which was between 1889 and 1934. Today people at Leech Lake control a tiny fraction of the original land base, and the reservation is "checkerboarded," which means that state land, federal land, tribal land, allotment land, and private property—as well as the various peoples who now occupy those lands—exist in extremely close proximity. Indians are not the majority population on the reservation proper, and among private business owners they constitute but a tiny minority. There are eleven communities on the Leech Lake Reservation—Ball Club, Bena, Cass Lake, Inger, Mission, Oak Point, Onigum, Pennington, Smokey Point, Squaw Lake, and Sugar Point—and the reservation straddles four counties and seven school districts. There are roughly 5000 members of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, approximately half living on or near the reservation, most others residing in cities as a result of relocation programs

during the 1950s and 60s. Leech Lake has a tribal government that is formally part of the six-band Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT), which was created in 1936. The other MCT bands are White Earth, Mille Lacs, Bois Forte, Grand Portage, and Fond du Lac. Unlike other Native political consortiums—for example, the Six Nations Confederacy of upstate New York, which predates white settlement by centuries—there is nothing particularly traditional about the MCT. Rather, the MCT was a by-product of John Collier's Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, which attempted to restore a semblance of self-government among Indian communities nationwide after nearly a century of federal attack. Of the many different Ojibwe groups that existed and dealt with Europeans and Americans prior to their incorporation as a "tribe," the two that ended up at Leech Lake were the Pillager and Mississippi bands, each having subset bands that lived in different communities and had different leaders and, really, different histories. What they shared was a language, *Ojibwemowin*, and what appeared to the whites to be a "race." They did not even share a religion, as a host of Christian churches—Episcopal, Catholic, Mission Alliance, to name only a few—had been operating for well over a generation and functioned alongside (and typically in opposition to) traditional ceremonial institutions like the *Midewiwin* and pan-Indian spiritual practices such as peyotism and the sweat lodge.

The last official war between Indians and the United States Army took place at Leech Lake in October 1898, when Bugonaygeshig and twenty-two others, including at least three women, defeated the Third Infantry at Bear Island (Sugar Point). One person who hails from Sugar Point, and lives there still, is Dennis Banks, who during the 1960s and 70s distinguished himself as a fiery leader of the American Indian Movement (AIM). There was a lot of struggle at Leech Lake during the "Red Power" years of my childhood, and Banks usually attended it. In May 1971, when I was six, Banks organized an AIM action at Leech Lake and hundreds of Indians from showed up to participate. I lived with my family in Cass Lake and remember driving through an armed checkpoint with my terrified white mother. As Gerald Vizenor, who covered AIM as a journalist, chronicled it, "the American Indian Movement carried weapons for the first time, in preparation for an armed confrontation with white people on the opening day of fishing on the Leech Lake Reservation in Minnesota. The militants were prepared and determined to battle for tribal control of hunting and fishing rights on the reservation, rights that had been won in federal court. Their threats were not needed" (*Chippewa* 131). Nine months later Banks and other AIM activists took their stand at Wounded Knee, which some consider the last *unofficial* war between Indians and the American military.

Since Red Power, Leech Lake has experienced a small explosion of new tribal businesses, social institutions, and powers of self-government. There are three gaming facilities on the reservation—all fairly modest in productivity, at least when compared to prominent others around Native America—making Leech Lake the largest employer in Cass County. The tribe owns a service station and convenience store, an office supply company, a motel-restaurant-marina complex, an archeological firm, and a gift shop. In addition to these businesses, the tribe operates a halfway house, an ambulance service, two daycare facilities, seven Head Start programs, the K-12 Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School, and Leech Lake Tribal College. There are other enterprises as well, and the sum effect of these institutions, most of them developed during my lifetime and since Red Power, is, as a former Vista worker once put it to me, "quite a drastic change from the sixties, when absolutely nothing was happening at Leech Lake." Accompanying these developments is a greater sense of power vested in the tribal government or, in other words, sovereignty, as Leech Lake now has a tribal police force and court. I credit these improved conditions of daily life to reforms that took place not because the federal government became more sensitive and morally responsible but because of the pressures created by activist groups like AIM. If nothing else, they made intolerable injustices visible to Americans, who in many cases had little idea that Indians were still around, and they in turn pressured the state to do something. Power concedes nothing without a demand; AIM demanded; now things happen at Leech Lake. There's a line that can be drawn here, although it would by no means be a direct or unbroken line in a causative sense.

One can, however, draw a fairly straight line from Leech Lake's problems to our historical experience with the United States and its history-makers. In 1881 federal dams were built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Leech Lake, Cass Lake, and Lake Winnibigoshish to control

seasonal flooding in the Twin Cities downriver. They raised water levels by seven feet or more, destroying homes, graveyards, and the wild rice beds that constituted our primary food source. In 1889 the Nelson Act, Minnesota's version of the Dawes General Allotment Act, created individual land allotments that were granted to male heads-of-household; "surplus lands" went to timber barons, railroad companies, and white settlers. By 1934 most of the allotments had been lost through tax forfeitures and fraud, and we now retain only five percent of the reservation's original 670,000 acres. In 1899 the Great Northern Railroad was granted a right-of-way through the reservation, and two other railroad companies followed. The town of Cass Lake was created and soon boasted one of the largest rail yards in the state, but the profits of the railroad—as with the timber and the dams—benefited whites, not Natives. In 1908 the federal government, concerned about all the excessive logging that had been done, created the 1.6 million acre Chippewa National Forest by seizing some 40 percent of the tribe's remaining land. The Ojibwe were promised $1.25 per acre plus the value of remaining timber, but the logging boom had already subsided. By the 1930s the timber barons were gone, the government land office had closed, and most Ojibwe were poor. A tourist economy was taking shape, but as with other industries it was controlled and owned by whites. The 1950s witnessed the arrival of an oil pipeline and the rerouting of a major highway around Cass Lake just when Indians were situating themselves into the local economy as business owners. By the 1960s, as we've already observed, absolutely nothing was happening at Leech Lake.

It goes without saying that the Red Power movement was in large part a response to this history. While there can be no question that some aspects of life have drastically improved since then—more economic opportunities, enhanced control over education and health care, greater degrees of political sovereignty—life can still be challenging at Leech Lake. Poverty is still widespread, and with poverty always comes crime, chemical abuse, and violence. Racism remains a major problem in border towns like Bemidji and Walker. Many of the forty-plus lakes on the reservation, including sizable Leech Lake, a tourist destination, were polluted by local industries that operated without accountability for decades. Poor health, including mental health, is always of concern. The reservation is one

generation away from having *Ojibwemowin* spoken by a scant handful of people. Finally, there is the issue of representation, as Leech Lake and other Ojibwe often find themselves depicted in schoolbooks and mainstream press accounts in problematic ways. In textbooks, for example, Indians are typically discussed in cursory fashion, usually in Chapter One where "our past" is discussed, with little attention paid to ongoing tribal life, aspirations, and struggles. It is fair to suggest that in the seven public school districts the reservation spans, there is virtually no civics education regarding Ojibwe history, modern life, and relationships between Indians and non-Indians in Minnesota.

If the perpetual past is the primary culprit in educational materials, a new twist on an old and tiresome mode of narrating all Indian experience as *tragedy* reigns in popular media accounts. In 2004 Leech Lake endured an ugly media assault from *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* reporter Larry Oakes in the form of a lurid three-part series on youth crime entitled, "The Lost Youth of Leech Lake," which portrayed Ojibwe teens as violent drug-addicted gangsters and pregnant welfare princesses. According to a follow-up editorial, Oakes' "articles and photographs focused on the violent, hopeless, drug-and-alcohol-drenched lives of too many young people on the Leech Lake Reservation" ("Leech"). They sure did, and protests predictably followed (thus the need for a follow-up editorial). But despite his editors' attempt to rehabilitate Oakes' reputation by shamelessly insisting that "the reaction [to the series] wasn't shock; it was familiar sadness" ("Leech"), there were no fewer than three demonstrations at Leech Lake to protest the coverage: a three-day "We Are Not All on Drugs" Walk organized by (who else?) Dennis Banks, a youth rally organized by Leech Lake teenagers, and a reservation-sponsored conference on the theme, "We Are Not Lost," in addition to many letters sent by Ojibwe to the *Star-Tribune* and other local newspapers. While precisely no one argued that Leech Lake Reservation wasn't a community with problems, the demonstrations they organized and letters they wrote were attempts to counter the tragic narrative imposed on them and claim rhetorical sovereignty over their beleaguered public image. Tragedy is a problem because it always ends in death, posits the existence of some damning flaw, and ultimately requires little if any action from its audience; as countless rhetoricians and critics have observed since the

time of Aristotle, the goal of tragedy is catharsis, not change. It was that tragic narrative and not the reasonable impulse to write about social problems in a tribal community that motivated the protests at Leech Lake.

That said, it's not as though Oakes imagined the crimes and personal histories he chronicled in his stories. Clearly, there are real problems at Leech Lake, and people talk about them endlessly. When I go home and visit with friends and family, invariably the talks we have begin with a review of the latest murders, arrests, and accidents before we get to more mundane and life-affirming topics of discussion; in fact, it was several years before I realized that this wasn't the way most families and friends talked during visits. The difference, however, between our discussions and spectacles like the "Lost Youth" series is that ours usually lead to political discourse of some sort—not sophisticated in an academic sense, perhaps, but always geared toward positive change. And there are other topics of discussion, too: humorous gossip about lively characters we know, hunting and trapping stories, updates on people's health (or lack of it), ceremonial goings-on, elections and other tribal governmental matters, political happenings at the federal level, ancestors and old family stories, young people and the lives they are growing into, plus topics that would be considered typical in lots of places: sports, movies, celebrities, public scandals, and everyone's growing sense that the world seems to be going to hell in a hand basket—in other words, regular stuff. That's the thing about reservations; people seem to forget that despite their differences (of culture, language, identity, history), in the final analysis they are simply places where people live. Home.

Even in this quick snapshot of Leech Lake you can catch a sense of what life is like on a typical Indian reservation. In a nutshell, it is already hybrid to the hilt, with a tremendous number of differences intersecting in every possible way: on maps and in the names of towns, in treaties and the makeup of tribal governments, in cultural spheres like Christian churches and traditional practices (some of which, traditionalists will be quick to tell you, really aren't that traditional at all but rather recent pan-Indian inventions), and especially in the concrete fact of Indians and non-Indians living in checkerboard fashion, even if that fact isn't always publicly acknowledged. Even among the Ojibwe population, hybridity is the most

accurate metaphor to characterize life in the community. With some possible exceptions (although I can't think of a single one), every Ojibwe family has their Christians, traditionalists, and those who choose to sit the religion game out; every family has people either speaking or learning to speak Ojibwemowin, as well as those who don't really care; every family has intermarriage or some other important connection to people from other peoples. I personally don't believe that cultural purity ever existed among the Ojibwe, or among any people in the world, but those who do would find it impossible to suggest that such purity exists today. No, Leech Lake, and the Ojibwe Nation itself, has long been hybrid, cosmopolitan, and for lack of a better word, *impure*, and that particular condition, I'd say, makes the Ojibwe classically indigenous.

Of course, I'm the kind of guy who doesn't mind a little contagion here and there. It would be a mistake to assume that people at Leech Lake (or anywhere for that matter) commonly describe themselves in that way. When Ojibwe writers flirted with the ideas of impurity and contagion in the 1970s and 80s—I'm thinking now of Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor, both of whom promoted the figure of the mixedblood as an apt metaphor for modern identity in Native America—academics exhibited far more excitement about the prospects of what was eventually hailed as a new *mestiza* consciousness than most Indians did. For reasons that are doubtless explained by our history, the operative terms used by most at Leech Lake to describe the hybridity of daily life are "assimilation" (in a negative sense) and "change" (in a positive sense). One's worry about the possibility that he or she is witnessing yet another example of assimilation—into whiteness and away from Ojibweness—is answered by another's reassurance that "all cultures change." Why? Because no one at Leech Lake wants to stop being Ojibwe.

On the other hand, there are the pressures of the world and daily life. Let me take leave of this section with a brief illustration of how identity and culture sometimes collide with the pressures of what I will hesitatingly call the "real world." Once when I was a young man who hated everything about himself that he considered to be white (this is not an uncommon phase), I asked my uncle to take me ricing, which seemed a very Ojibwe thing to do. Ricing was a primary means of my uncle's livelihood at the time. He sighed and said, "Fine. But if you can't keep up and go as fast

as your aunt can"—his wife and my aunt, I should mention, is white—"you are done. This isn't a 'cultural experience' for me. This is how I make money."

ii.

Leech Lake is hybrid and checkerboarded. The Ojibwe are pure, if changing, but worried about assimilation. And the pressures of the real world loom. What does any of this have to do with language and literacy? For one, Leech Lake can be read as a kind of text, albeit one with many different authors. For another, this homeland—its character, its people(s), its problems, and aspirations—forms an occasion for writing. Leech Lake is one big rhetorical exigency. Finally, I would add that developing a literacy pedagogy for Leech Lake requires paying close attention not so much to "cultural difference" as to *politics*. Let me explain.

To admit the fact of hybridity in actually existing Native communities is not to ignore the politics that shaped it, and to properly describe those power dynamics as they have operated for centuries, and still operate today, the best word to use is *colonization*. Colonization, more than anything else, has been the driving force behind the conditions, changes, and challenges of life at Leech Lake, from the languages we speak (or want to speak) to the troubles we have (or wish we didn't have) to the lands we share (or lost) to the spirits we pray to (or not). Colonization defines our history since the reservation was created; it is the reason why reservations exist. Indian reservations are federal enclaves "reserved" and held in trust by the United States government for the purpose of providing homelands for Indians to live on as nations in accordance with treaties that were signed not so very long ago. Those treaties and the legal relationships they engendered are still in effect now, no matter how "broken" they may have been over time. What this means, and I say it in the most literal sense possible, is that reservations are colonized territories. Natives who live on them have dual citizenship (since 1924 Indians have been legally American citizens as well as citizens of their tribal nations) thus possess a peculiar dual identity as both American and colonial subject. It really depends on the particular space one inhabits at a given time. As Eric Cheyfitz has written, an Indian person living on a reservation is "constrained to live under the colonial regime of federal Indian law without the constitutional guarantees of U.S. citizenship, excepting the right to vote in U.S. state and national elections," while that same person living elsewhere in the United States is an American (albeit of tribal descent) with American rights (Cheyfitz 44). Hence, it is not only who you are but where you stand that sets the parameters of your legal possibilities.

I want to suggest that colonization sets the parameters for literacy possibilities as well, and it is here in the realm of composition studies that the usefulness of hybridity as a model breaks down. To make this point I need to situate this discussion in the reigning paradigm for indigenous studies today: nationalism. Nationalism in Native studies is not unlike tribal nationalism per se. What they share is a decolonization agenda that can be pursued in different ways: by prioritizing traditionally indigenous modes of knowing and being, by "indigenizing" the institutions and discourses that people want to keep (or have to keep), by revitalizing the languages, religions, and cultures of the Native past, and by insisting on one's right to sovereignty in the realms of politics, law, taxation, land rights, and so forth. Indigenous nationalism is similar to "ethnonationalism," although they are not the same thing. Canada's Bloc Québécois, for example, promotes ethnonationalism for French-language separatists in Quebec, but their claims are considerably different, not only politically but historically, from those of Mohawk nationalists living in neighboring Kahnawake. The primary difference is that the Quebeckers have no claim to indigeneity or an experience of colonization. Indeed, while they do possess an ethnic minority status today, they were the Mohawks' colonizers yesterday. (See also: Oka Crisis of 1990.)

What unites ethnonationalism and indigenous nationalism is a certain claim that each makes to what Anthony D. Smith has called an *ethnie* or "preexisting traditions and heritages that have coalesced over the generations" (Smith, "Nations"). That claim to an ancient but surviving *ethnie*—or "peoplehood," as it gets called in Native studies—is not by itself nationalism, or at least not yet. As Smith elucidates their historical relationship,

> the nation is a sub-variety and development of the *ethnie*, though we are not dealing with some evolutionary law of progression, nor with some necessary or irreversible sequence. While the *ethnie* is

> an historical culture community, the nation is a community [with a] mass, public culture, historic territory and legal rights. In other terms, *the nation shifts the emphasis of community away from kinship and cultural dimensions to territorial, educational and legal aspects*, while retaining links with older cultural myths and memories of the *ethnie*. (Smith, *Ethnic* 130)

For both ethnonationalism and indigenous nationalism, appeals are made to the existence of an *ethnie* that by rights should be considered a nation. But, importantly, another aspect to consider is that key shift from culture to politics, or, put another way, from a discourse of cultural integrity versus assimilation to one of ethnicity versus nationality. This is a crucial shift to make, especially for Natives who have long been scrutinized for signifiers of assimilation (or to revive the old nineteenth century expression, "Civilization"), and it explains why multicultural inclusion is not quite the objective of nationalism, although that can be nice. The goal of nationalism is a nation, and that implies sovereignty.

Nationalism is thus not the same thing as resistance to assimilation, although such resistance is often part of the agenda. More precisely, nationalism is the politicization of culture and identity for achieving political goals, such as land rights or sovereignty. Now precisely which land rights, or how much sovereignty might be appropriate, are questions that I simply cannot address here; let me just refer you to the work of Ronald Neizen who finds that indigenous peoples, globally and generally speaking, "do not as a rule aspire toward independent statehood" ("Recognizing" 140). To what do they aspire?

> For most indigenous peoples, liberation means an honorable relationship with states in which their rights to land are affirmed and compensation for their losses determination, to develop culturally distinct forms of education, spirituality, economic development, justice, and governance. The most common goals of indigenous peoples are not so much individual-oriented racial equality and liberation within a national framework as the affirmation of their collective rights, recognition of their sovereignty, and emancipation through the exercise of power. (Neizen, *Ethnic* 18)

This aspiration is echoed not only in important legal and political texts like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples but

also in the work of a wide variety of scholars devoted to the promotion of tribal nationalism in Native studies.

It seems worthy of remark that while nationalism is the dominant discourse in all varieties of indigenous studies now—law, social sciences, and humanities—it started in the field of Native American literary criticism. Simon Ortiz's seminal essay "Toward a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism" (1981) set the agenda by arguing that Native literary texts, like the indigenized Catholic rituals at Acoma, were "Indian because of the creative development that the Native people applied to them" (8). That is, "because in every case where European culture was cast upon Indian people of this nation there was similar creative response and development, it can be observed that this was the primary element of a nationalistic impulse to make use of foreign ritual, ideas, and material in their own—Indian—terms" (Ortiz 8). It wasn't only appropriation; it was the modernization of an *ethnie* driven by a "nationalistic impulse." The Pueblo of Acoma have made Catholicism their own, not to assimilate but to remain Pueblo, and for Ortiz this was simultaneously a political attempt to remain separate from other Catholics (and presumably settlers). For Ortiz, who situated his essay in a context of colonization, "this response has been one of resistance; there is no clearer word for it than resistance" (10). Hence, even though written in the language of the colonizer and employing the aesthetics and rhetorical strategies of "the West," Native American literature was, for Ortiz, a powerful act of resistance and nationalism.

Ortiz identified an important source of any tribe's *ethnie*, its oral tradition, but with a certain caveat:

> it is not the oral tradition as transmitted from ages past alone which is the inspiration and source for contemporary Indian literature. It is also because of an acknowledgment by Indian writers to advocate for their people's self-government, sovereignty, and control of land and resources; and to look also at racism, political and economic oppression, sexism, supremacism, and the needless and wasteful exploitation of land and people, especially in the U.S., that Indian literature is developing a character of nationalism which indeed it should have. (Ortiz 12)

Native writers draw from their oral traditions, are inspired by them, or connect to them in some other way, but they are not trying to *translate* them in an anthropological pursuit of authenticity. Rather, "writing in the oral tradition" is, as Ortiz suggests, both a new way of being Indian and a chance to develop the philosophical foundations of larger political movements. Clinging too fast to the oral traditions envisioned by classical ethnology or religious fundamentalism—that is, demanding authenticity at every turn—would be tantamount to nestling oneself in an *ethnie*. Claiming a connection to oral tradition (as every writer associated with the Native American Renaissance of the 1970s and 80s did) while moving forward into literacy, art, and politics, is to do nationalism.

Since Ortiz's essay, and especially during the 1990s, scholars in Native American studies have developed a nationalist discourse that now appears in a range of disciplines. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Robert Warrior, Craig Womack, Daniel Justice, Jace Weaver, and Taiaiake Alfred are only a few of the key figures associated with nationalist discourse in Native studies. Sometimes, as in the case of Womack and Justice, this nationalism takes the form of a critical theory focusing on tribally specific canons and aesthetics (e.g., the study of Creek or Cherokee literatures). Alfred's work promotes a new traditionalism in Native studies as well as in communities; it reminds one of Ngûgî Wa Thiong'o. Warrior published influential work on the concept of "intellectual sovereignty," and he along with Weaver and Womack produced a landmark text in 2006, *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Cook-Lynn, whose frequent polemics turned out to be rather effective in getting the nationalist agenda on everyone's minds by the turn of the century, often set her sights on postcolonial theorists in America who seemed as ignorant of Native issues as everyone else. "In the past twenty or thirty years," she wrote in 1997, "postcolonial theories have been propounded by modern scholars as though Native populations in the United States were no longer trapped in the vise of twentieth-century colonialism but were free of government hegemony and ready to become whatever they wanted, which, of course, they were not" (13). On that note, Cheyfitz writes that "the ignorance within postcolonial studies, which amounts to an ignoring, of the Native American context may result from the domination of the field by African, Asian, and Caribbean agendas and paradigms" (4). We could also point

to a lack of numbers, wealth, and power in Native communities, perhaps combined with a lack of interest on the part of many Americans, to explain the "ignoring." In any case, there has been a disconnect between postcolonial and indigenous studies, and one result has been a Native disparagement of a concept near and dear to any postcolonialist's heart: hybridity. What's the problem with hybridity?

Although its origins are botanical and biological—with time spent doing work in nineteenth-century race theory—the concept of hybridity was connected by theorists like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha to linguistic hybrids (e.g., creoles) to posit a third space outside of a colonizer-colonized binary opposition. It was a subversion of linguistic or cultural power. Bhabha's hybridity was "a problematic of colonial representation . . . that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" ("Signs" 156). The idea is that colonial authority could be challenged by the hybridity that increasingly came to bear on the settler language and acts of speech: "The effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions" ("Signs" 154). Eventually the concept would stand for a deconstructive neither/nor position in a differentiated culture where "hybrid counter-energies," to use Edward Said's phrase, constantly challenge the center to create a continually "disjunctive, liminal space" (Said 335; Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 312). This deconstructive mode has something in common with the trickster discourse analyzed by Gerald Vizenor in a Native American studies tradition and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in an African American studies context. Hybridity was also used to describe a kind of cultural integrity that paradoxically inheres when cultures meet, fuse, and compound with others (as we find, perhaps, in Ortiz's discussion of nationalism). "While hybridity denotes a fusion," however, "it also describes a dialectical articulation," according to Robert J. C. Young. "At the same time, in its more radical guise of disarticulating authority, hybridity has increasingly come to stand for the interrogative languages of minority cultures" (23-24). In all of these variations hybridity seems to possess a countervailing ability against the dominance of the colonizing power's discourse; it can escape a disabling binary, it can contaminate the

dominant's language, it creates liminality, it testifies to what Vizenor has called "survivance," it speaks back to the center, and it does all of this from a marginal or minority position. It is easy to see the concept's attractiveness, at least when examining it from a left-liberal point of view, in a world and during a historical moment where "fixed" increasingly means "bad."

On the other hand, here is what the Creek nationalist critic Craig Womack has to say about hybridity in his provokingly entitled, "The Integrity of American Indian Claims (Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love My Hybridity)": "In all my years in Oklahoma I have yet to meet an Indian who introduced him or herself to me as a 'hybrid.' Maybe someone should wonder why a word that used to reference seed corn and cattle is now the term of choice for critics describing people of color" (136). Julie Gough goes a bit further, calling hybridity "a potentially dangerous notion, a scientific disclaimer of authenticity or originality" (93). I think Jace Weaver gets to the real heart of the matter when he confesses to feeling that Indians "are being pushed into a postmodern boarding school, where, instead of Christian conversion and vocational skills, assimilation requires that we all embrace our hybridity and mixed-blood identities, and high theory replaces English as the language that must be spoken . . . producing yet another lost generation, out of touch with, and unable to talk to, Native community" (Weaver 30). What these critiques share is a sense that hybridity is not the countervailing force against colonialism or racial oppression that we encountered above, but in fact something that emanates from precisely the "Western," white oppressor, whether through its questioning of any possible authenticity in Native (or anyone's) cultures and identities or its dense theoretical garb. I think another aspect to this is something that typically happens in nationalist discourses: namely, boundaries must be maintained at all costs when they are attacked or accused of illegitimacy, and, at least for some Native critics, hybridity feels like an attack. On this view, sovereignty would seem to be the opposite of hybridity, given the former's reliance on boundaries, borders, and a clear differentiation from the outside, as well as the latter's relentless dismantling of such things. The last thing any decent nationalist wants to do is acknowledge a mixture with the non-nation (or in tribal nationalism's case, the colonizer). Hence, as Gough writes, "By accepting the label 'hybrid' . . . Indigenous people relinquish the power to name themselves" (93).

Personally I have found the theoretical discourse on hybridity incredibly useful in thinking about postmodern cultural forms and performances in the public sphere and, as I have already stated, I don't believe there is any possible way of understanding Indian life in the modern world without acknowledging its hybridity. The real enemy in my world is not the discourse of hybridity but rather the discourse of assimilation, wherein things that don't appear to be traditionally authentic are viewed as evidence of the Vanishing Indian. Ortiz's essay on Native nationalism, which repeatedly states that cultural phenomena like indigenized Catholicism or English-language Native literature are still Indian, not despite their changes but precisely because of them, has always made a great deal of sense to me. My position is that Indians don't assimilate; they *modernize*, and anyone who takes issue with that difference thinks like either an old ethnologist or a new traditionalist. That is, they take an outside observer's view of tribal culture, not an inside participant's view. As Seyla Benhabib writes, "Any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purposes of understanding and control" (5).

That said, I have to tentatively side with the hybridity haters, not because I believe cultures are whole but because Native understanding and control is preferable to someone else's in a decolonizing age. Truthfully, I think Womack and Weaver are more indebted to hybridity than they will admit. For example, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Womack attacks a persistent binary opposition that he calls the "pure versus tainted framework" and squarely endorses the taint, while Weaver confesses in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* that "to acknowledge the truth of hybridity [aha! the *truth* of hybridity] does not mean that we are globally merging into a single McCulture in which we must all consume the same Happy Meal, using the same critical utensils, and then excrete the same McCriticism" (28). What these activists really want to do is maintain a separatism that hybridity appears to threaten. Insofar as their attacks constitute strategic essentialism, let's chalk it up to tribal nationalism and a desire for sovereignty. And those two things, I hope you agree, should be enthusiastically supported. Remember,

in the end it's ultimately the politics of these debates that matter, not their theoretical purity, and the politics we have been discussing here were first set into motion by colonization. Indians didn't start any debates about nationalism or hybridity; the fact that we speak to them now testifies to our desire for decolonization. And decolonization can happen, as I have said, in many different sites and discourses, even in places where that hybrid language known as English is routinely taught, learned, maybe even indigenized, on an Indian reservation.

iii.

After completing graduate school I returned to Leech Lake and taught at our tribal college for a couple of years. At the time Leech Lake Tribal College was renting space in the former Cass Lake High School building and teaching its classes there and across the street in a dilapidated old church building we renamed the Annex. My office was in the basement of the Annex, and it flooded every time it rained. The first time I went to teach, in that same Annex, there was no chalk to be found, but there was evidence that rodents had been running wild in the classroom overnight. Being Natives who respect nature, we immediately offered a gift of tobacco to the Mouse Spirit. No, I'm kidding. The point I am making is that Leech Lake Tribal College was an extremely grassroots affair, and we seriously lacked for resources. Nevertheless, I did some of my most exciting teaching there and will always remember the place fondly, mouse offerings notwithstanding.

Leech Lake Tribal College has new facilities today—much nicer and no mice—and the layout of the architecture is in the shape of a thunderbird, which would be part of the Ojibwe *ethnie*. The tribal college movement began in 1968 with the foundation of Navajo Community College (now Dine College), and within twenty years there were 24 two-year tribal community colleges across the country. Now there are 36. Leech Lake's was founded by tribal council resolution in 1990. It achieved congressional Land Grant Institution status in 1994 and received accreditation from the North Central Association in 2006. It is a member of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), which is the primary professional organization for tribal colleges in the United States, and has on average

between 200 and 250 students enrolled in a given year, 8 percent of whom are non-Indians. The college offers programs leading to either an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Applied Science degree, which means that graduates can either learn a trade or transfer to a four-year college or university after graduation.

The "Purpose" (the word is capitalized and put into quotes because I am about to reproduce part of its charter) of Leech Lake Tribal College is as follows:

> To provide all persons a quality education grounded in the spirituality, history, and culture of the Anishinabeg.
>
> To nurture a knowledge and respect for women as leaders of their clan families, and as traditional and contemporary leaders of the Anishinabeg.
>
> To develop Anishinabe cultural and language studies as an area of study, and to recognize that the Anishinabe language is the first language of the Anishinabeg.
>
> To provide courses leading to fully transferable Associate of Arts and Bachelor of Arts degrees.
>
> To provide opportunities for studies leading to two-year Associate of Applied Science technical degrees and one-year diploma programs.
>
> To assist tribal members to be active and creative members of their communities and of the Leech Lake Nation or their tribal nation.
>
> To provide Leech Lake tribal members with opportunities to improve skills and understanding in the arts and sciences, business, education, health, and human services. (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe 2)

This is effectively a mission statement, published in an official document available on the college's website (www.lltc.edu), and like any mission statement it presents the goals and values of the institution. So what are they? For starters there is a stated desire to produce graduates who will become "active and creative members" of their communities. There are

statements that place "Anishinabeg" (the word for "people" in the Ojibwe language; some prefer it to "Ojibwe" or "Chippewa" although these words all reference the same people) at the center of the educational project; this is expressed in terms of language, history, spirituality, and culture. There is a powerful (and as I remember, controversial) position taken regarding the importance of women to the community and to the college, and an overt linkage of that value to traditional culture. Finally, there is a strong call for a cultural revitalization that might actually be felt elsewhere as a contribution to human knowledge: "Anishinabe cultural and language studies as an area of study." In these value statements it is not difficult to note a post-Red Power nationalism at work, but we would be amiss to ignore other important forces bearing on the text—communitarianism, for instance, as well as feminism—and we must remember that these other values were as much a part of the civil rights agenda as nationalism. Finally, it is very important to note the charter's possibly mundane, but absolutely essential, mandate to equip the students for further education. The degrees they receive, we are told in no uncertain terms, should be "fully transferable."

Writing teachers working in Native contexts, or at very least at Leech Lake Tribal College, could do a lot worse than take Leech Lake's charter seriously as a framework for indigenous literacy. That is, Native literacy education could produce readers and writers who conform more or less to the kinds of values and goals that are stated in the charter's mission statement, which as I have remarked is not only nationalist but communitarian, feminist, and what I will call cosmopolitan in its mandate for fully transferable education. Certainly one implication of this idea is that the English language should be mastered to the point of both written and spoken fluency, there being little chance of becoming "fully transferable" without it. But how would that goal connect to a politics of decolonization? English is the settler's tongue, the language of the oppressor, and the most obvious sign of assimilation. Right?

It is if you ask a language activist, who will adamantly agree with the charter that *Ojibwemowin* is "the first language of the Anishinabe." Language activists always bank on the idea that our first language is our only "real" language for precisely those reasons having to do with decolonization. They will doubtless remind you of the boarding school experience, General Richard Henry Pratt's infamous directive to "kill the Indian, save the man," and Grandpa getting punished for speaking his language at Flandreau, Carlisle, or wherever he was educated. They will also likely make the suggestion that speaking like the white man equals being the white man, and if you happen to be a twenty-something Ojibwe, that statement will sting. Finally, this entire discourse will be delivered with a hefty dollop of guilt topping, for example: "We're not losing our language. Our language is losing us" (Treuer 5). And obviously this will all be impossible to refute. Language displacement was a consciously crafted aspect of colonization, and colonization really happened, and is happening still.

Yet in what has to be one of the great ironies of our time, the nationalists will not be with the language activists on this issue, probably thanks to Ortiz's defense of English as a language that is always open to indigenization. In two separate essays published in the same collection, Womack calls English "an Indian language," Weaver likewise states "English is Native language," and Weaver goes on to make the rather bold statement that "Claiming English as an Indian language is one of the most important, if not the most important step toward ensuring Indian survival for future generations (Womack 120; Weaver 34, 44). Taiaiake Alfred takes a more measured account of the situation in *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, in which he bemoans language shift and argues for the importance of language revitalization, not for "their sacredness, essential superiority, or divine or mystical quality" but rather for "their usefulness as philosophical systems and as a gauge of peoples' success at reasserting their authentic existence," while in the end deciding that they really aren't that crucial to keep around (247; 244-49). One might assume a contradiction lurks here, as most ethnonationalisms typically surf in on a national language that differs from that of the non-nation, but here we are confronted with the historical reality that most Indians speak only English today. It would be impossible to find a nationalist who simply disavows the heritage language of his or her people—it being, after all, an absolutely central component of the *ethnie*—but in that case it would seem that English is the "modernization" part of the ethnonationalist scheme. Perhaps language activists and nationalists are caught on opposite ends of the same historical contradiction: either you essentialize a language that most of your people don't speak, or you modernize what is actually

someone else's *ethnie*. That's history for you—always messing with your clear-cut theories.

My own view on the subject of heritage languages like *Ojibwemowin* vis-à-vis English is drawn from the lessons imparted to me by elders, one of whom was my own grandmother, Leona Lyons. It is simply this: tribal languages are precious heritages and the best indication of a national difference from other nations (as opposed to, say, race or culture), and they absolutely should be revived. So much traditional knowledge is kept secure in heritage languages, and when the latter goes, so does the former. I don't know any today, but I have memories of old people from my childhood who not only spoke our language but did not speak any English, and when I consider the prospect of dormancy, I think people like that will effectively become instant victims of a genocide. That said, I also follow my grandmother Leona, who spent her life as a schoolteacher at Leech Lake, and her view that English is the language of power and mobility, so it too must be taught and learned by Indians. On that view, English is indeed an Indian language. If you were taught by my grandmother, you would know that she took her English language lessons rather seriously—as the Ojibwe like to say, "with a stick in her hand"—correcting your grammar, calling foul on your slang, and praising what she had no problem calling proper English. (Her handwriting was perfect too.) Between her and the elders who taught me to love *Ojibwemowin*, I suppose I hold the value of bilingualism, which would put me in the unusual position of agreeing with both language activists and nationalists. I have no truck with calling *Ojibwemowin* the first language of our people—even if hardly anyone speaks it now—while simultaneously promoting the idea of English as an indigenizable global language. That may not endear me to either camp, but I think it makes me sound like the elders I've known, who I have always considered to be most reasonable in their desire to maintain a distinct Ojibwe identity while at the same time trying to function in the larger world. It's not only the larger world that demands English language fluency, however; Leech Lake Reservation requires it too, with all of its complex situations and writing exigencies, reviewed earlier in our little tour of that essentially hybrid homeland. What we need in relation to the language question at Leech Lake and elsewhere is not an either/or paradigm but rather a both/and solution.

What we do not need is a new writing pedagogy or rhetorical theory banking on hybridity as a model for literacy at Leech Lake, and I suggest this places me in the elders' camp as well. There is a way of doing things at Leech Lake that may be instructive; I'm talking about the traditional habit of keeping things apart if they demonstrate a propensity for producing conflict. This may come as a surprise, but it is not uncommon for families to have two different funerals for people who die, one for the traditionalist wing of the family and another for the Christians. The funerals happen at different times, of course, but in the same facility where the deceased is reposed, while the ceremonial officiates—the medicine man and the priest—work out the details in a congenial manner that makes everyone happy (well, as happy as they can be at a funeral). It's not a perfect system, but it has worked fairly well for a long time and testifies to the ability of people to deal with their differences when occasions demand it. What you do not see at Leech Lake, at least not that often, are hybrid funerals where a priest lights some sage and beats a drum before getting on with the business at hand; or if you do see that sort of thing, it's more about the aesthetics of the funeral than anything happening spiritually. Another example: "Indian names" are an important cultural practice at Leech Lake; these are Ojibwe names that are given more or less ceremonially for use in different cultural contexts. My Indian name is Mizhakwad, a verb that roughly translates to "be clear sky," and my daughters' names are Ogiimaabinesiik or "thunderbird woman" and Waabishkagaabowiik or "woman standing in white light." Please note: our Indian names are not Clear Sky, Thunderbird Woman, or Woman Standing in White Light, because people at Leech Lake mostly agree that Indian names should be Ojibwe language names. Whenever someone does make the mistake of giving out Hollywoodesque, English-language Indian names—it happens—they are often disabused of their error, not only by language activists and traditionalists but by English speaking Christians. The rule they broke was not keeping irreconcilable things apart.

The gods of hybridity, of course, would smile down on the befeathered priest or Two Dogs Frolicking, suggesting in the process that the priest reveals the weakening of Catholic hegemony, while our friend Two Dogs Frolicking has a name that decenters the authority of "proper" English language naming practices. Or something like that anyway, something

radical and subversive. Over here in the elders' camp, however, it just appears that the youngsters have broken a longstanding and useful rule again.

I want to suggest that when it comes to creating a literacy pedagogy or rhetorical theory for a place like Leech Lake, we should follow the elders and keep the languages of English and *Ojibwemowin* respectfully apart instead of looking to play with hybridity in, say, the reservation dialects that people speak. On that subject, while there are as many reservation dialects as there are reservations—each with its own expressions and codes—making it impossible to posit the existence of a singular Indigenous Vernacular English, the "rez talk" dialect spoken by some people at Leech Lake contains elements that can be traced to several different linguistic sources, including *Ojibwemowin*. "Youse," for example, seems a fairly direct translation of how speakers would address more than one person, just as my grandfather's occasional slippage between he/she and him/her reflected *Ojibwemowin*'s lack of differentiated gender pronouns. Increasingly, another source of this rez dialect's character, especially among the young, is hip-hop culture, as witnessed in the rise of Native rap music. For an example of how that looks and sounds, check out the music of Leech Lake rapper Wahwahtay Benais, whose "Indigenous Holocaust" was a major hit on the electronic moccasin telegraph of Facebook, You Tube, and email lists in 2009. Benais's lyrics address history, injustice, and dreams of a better future from a sometimes Ojibwe, sometimes pan-Indian perspective, and his music is nothing if not hybrid, with samplings and mash-ups of sources ranging from powwow drum music to classic R&B to the Dixie Chicks. It's very artful, and hybridity provides a useful way of analyzing how it functions as a cultural text. It also provides a noteworthy illustration of the vitality and creativity of reservation dialects when they are transformed into art. But now we are talking about *art*, and our elders' rule is geared not to art but to the kind of literacy education that happens in introductory English classes. The field of composition studies has never been comfortable making these kinds of distinctions—say, between dialect-as-art (which gets a pass) and dialect-as-"nonstandard" (which gets called out for gatekeeping and racism), or between exciting artful writing and stodgy old academic prose—but I think such distinctions are essential. If we are not consciously making art in a

writing class specifically devoted to that sort of project (a project that would be entirely worthwhile in my view), we should resist the temptations of bringing hybridity into more academically oriented writing courses and provide access to Standard English, which is, I remind you, now an Indian language.

Actually, it would be more accurate to say that Standard English is now an Indian *grapholect*, which isn't a regular spoken language that people use in their homes each day but, as Walter Ong defined it, "a transdialectical language formed by deep commitment to writing" (8). Grapholects are official written languages and the products of centuries of knowledge accumulation. Although they may have started out as some group's dialect, their lexicons are enormously larger than any dialect could possibly be. The grapholect called Standard English, for example, has some two million words accessible to it, while dialects typically (and necessarily) have a few thousand. As Ong writes, "linguists today commonly make the point that all dialects are equal in the sense that none has a grammar intrinsically more 'correct' than that of others . . . [b]ut it is bad pedagogy to insist that because there is nothing 'wrong' with other dialects, it makes no difference whether or not speakers of another dialect learn the grapholect, which has resources of a totally different order of magnitude" (108). To claim Standard English as an Indian grapholect is not to concede that Standard English is some sort of superior language of the gods by which savages are transformed into Thinking Beings. It's more a question of access.

Remember, we're trying to devise a writing pedagogy that would accord with the mission of Leech Lake Tribal College, a mission that deals not only in tribal nationalism, but communitarianism, feminism, and "fully transferable" cosmopolitanism. Access is a stated objective, and I'm not at all certain how a new hybrid pedagogy of "code meshing," which A. Suresh Canagarajah defines as "accommodat[ing] more than one code within the bounds of the same text," would meet it (1626). Canagarajah and other code meshers are arguing not only against Standard English but also a pedagogy of "code switching" in which dialects and grapholects are taught as such to students—as "home language" and "school language," for example, with the goal of validating the former while initiating the students into the latter—because they don't believe code switching

adequately challenges the hegemony of Standard English. I think code switching is a completely reasonable way to demystify these different languages while simultaneously helping students to gain access to the code used in school and elsewhere. Code switching is bilingualism. Code meshing is hybridity and violates the elders' rule of mutually assured separatism.

This discussion, which is now coming to a close, matters for three reasons I think deserve mention. First, let us never forget that languages like English have not only been around Ojibwe country for centuries but have provided a means for Indians to address the problems of colonization as well as chronicle other important aspects of indigenous life. There is an Ojibwe national literature, written in English and consisting mostly of non-fictional public writing, reaching back to the early nineteenth century, and this literature would not have been possible had it not been for English. This writing reveals the great diversity of Ojibwe experience, from its Christian influences to its anti-colonial resistance (sometimes those things are found in the same text), and it should be studied as a national literature in Ojibwe schools. We should hang portraits of key Ojibwe writers like George Copway, William Whipple Warren, Marie Baldwin, Louise Erdrich, and Gerald Vizenor, to name only a few, on the classroom walls of tribal schools.

The second reason why this matters is because English teachers need to believe in the work they are doing. When I worked at Leech Lake I often talked with non-Indian writing instructors who would confess—one time in tears—that they felt uncomfortable teaching English in a reservation classroom. They wondered if they weren't reproducing the colonizing work of General Pratt and other gung-ho imperialists, assimilating students into the language of the white man. The question is excellent, and the answer is no. If anything, such teachers are more akin to my grandmother who always wanted her Indian students to create a level playing field for themselves wherever life might happen to take them. As I've said, the discourse of assimilation is not a useful way to talk about changes to Indian life, and teachers need some relief from it just as Natives do.

Finally, another reason why this discussion matters is because of the elders' rule about keeping irreconcilable things apart. There's a respect in that rule which should not be missed in a dash for theories like hybridity.

Some things, and here I mean things like *Ojibwemowin*, tribal sovereignty, or the idea of the Leech Lake Ojibwe, are not open for negotiation. They will not be compromised, so they are protected by the rules of elders, the theories of activists, the tears of teachers, and the labors of love that characterize the work that goes on at places like Leech Lake Tribal College. This is especially true in communities as hybrid and historically abused as Indian reservations, where things are now being rebuilt. Not everything we do is for money. Sometimes we are guided by forces that compel us to protect what we still have, restore what we've lost, or assess what matters most. Sometimes we are compelled to build a fence, although fences will always need mending. Neither natural nor permanent, fences can create the conditions for good neighbors to meet. And neighborliness, I assure you, is on the indigenous agenda.

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