

First Person Plural

Aboriginal Storytelling and the
Ethics of Collaborative Authorship

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First Person Plural

Introduction

Collaboration and Authorship in Told-to Narratives

Our European concepts of 'voice' are hedged with assumptions and undermined with problems. Voice equals speech. Voice has the floor. Voice is authority. To have voice is to have power. To be dumb or voiceless is synonymous with being ignorant.

– RON MARKEN, FOREWORD TO MARIA CAMPBELL'S
STORIES OF THE ROAD ALLOWANCE PEOPLE

The time has passed when privileged authorities could routinely 'give voice' (or history) without fear of contradiction.

– JAMES CLIFFORD, *PREDICAMENT OF CULTURE: TWENTIETH
CENTURY ETHNOGRAPHY, LITERATURE AND ART*

Nowhere is our cultural disorientation better captured, or the ambiguous transitional moment in which we find ourselves more clearly underlined, than in the complex issue of voice appropriation. The issue of who can speak for whom, and who can write for whom, is a major contemporary issue in the social sciences and humanities.

– ALAN CAIRNS, *CITIZENS PLUS: ABORIGINAL PEOPLES
AND THE CANADIAN STATE*

So many of us are a mixed-up lot, a chorus of intermingling voices and histories, and I write to tell you of that mixing, of the sounds of that chorus.

– GREG SARRIS, *KEEPING SLUG WOMAN ALIVE*

‘Voice’ remains a central point of struggle in Aboriginal studies, standing for a range of concepts: from empowerment to appropriation, from individual style to collective identity. *First Person Plural* confronts the complexity of the issue of ‘voice’ by examining ‘told-to narratives,’ in which, typically, non-Aboriginal recorders collect, edit, and structure stories by Aboriginal narrators.¹ Historically, collector-editors have submitted the oral performance to numerous changes, omissions, and manipulations, while claiming sole authorship on the title page. At the same time, these editors have effaced their intervention, stating in the preface that the story is in the narrator’s ‘own voice.’ My approach emphasizes the interpenetration of authorship and collaboration. I attend to the degrees of authorship and degrees of collaboration between storytellers, recorders, translators, editors, and authors, and I track the subtle shifts in the balance of power between mediators who are working within a broad range of as-told-to forms, techniques, and arenas.

First Person Plural looks at some genre variations of told-to narratives – including ethnography, recorded (auto)biography, testimonial life narrative, documentary, myth, legend, and song – and examines the implications of the choices that editors, translators, narrators, and documentarians make in their textualizations. Collaboratively produced texts, such as Lee Maracle’s *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* (1990), Julie Cruikshank, Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned’s *Life Lived Like a Story* (1990), and Harry Robinson and Wendy Wickwire’s *Write It on Your Heart* (1989), are some of the key texts that I analyse in this work; however, I further expand the category of the told-to narrative in order to examine how contemporary Aboriginal voices have been represented in public forums, land claims court cases, commissioners’ reports, media representations, and film (both documentary and dramatic). In carrying out this work I have discovered that many of the same issues pertaining to voice and agency that animate discussions of told-to narratives are also at stake in reading the transcripts of public hearings, legal trials, and government reports. My intention is not to demonstrate the limits of the genre of told-to narrative but, rather, its scope. Approaching this hybrid genre in the widest sense of the definition, I explore a variety of contact zones of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal

interactions as overshadowed by colonial legacies in Canada but also as potentially decolonizing. Thus, for example, I read Justice Thomas Berger's report of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry and his approach to the politics of voice in tandem with the ethnographies and films of Hugh Brody, who worked as a writer and consultant for Berger (Chapter 2); I pair an analysis of the media representations of the Oka crisis, which simplified the issues at stake in the standoff and divorced them from their historical context, with readings of the complex chorus of voices in Maracle's recorded (auto)biography and in Alanis Obomsawin's quartet of films relating to Kanehsatake (Chapter 3); and I demonstrate the extent to which Zacharias Kunuk's film *Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner*, which began shooting in the same month and year as the formation of Nunavut in 1999, is shaped by the filmmaker's (at times ambivalent) cultural nationalism (Chapter 6).

The double focus of this study stems from the recognition that literature and criticism are continuously responding to larger public discourses. This double focus also enables me to address more than one audience – an appropriate goal for a book on the politics of voice. While the book is aimed primarily at readers of Aboriginal literary studies in the Canadian context, it also will attract readers interested in Native North American Studies, Canadian literary studies, and postcolonial and cultural theory. In particular, the audience will include scholars investigating the problem of textualizing Aboriginal oral narrative. A primary concern in writing this book has been the search for innovative ways to produce textual readings that meaningfully engage with historical, social, and political contexts. I ask how and why we read texts and histories in conjunction with one another – and why we don't. The wager of this book is that an approach that emphasizes the theoretical elasticity of told-to narratives provides a unique opportunity to bring together texts, histories, and critical approaches whose connections, for disciplinary reasons, have remained understated.

Most of the texts, histories, and case studies addressed in this book are dated from 1990 to 1999. I focus primarily on the 1990s because these years were pivotal in reconceptualizing how we think about voice and representation in Aboriginal cultural politics. In 1990, the 'Oka crisis' (also known as the standoff at Kanehsatake) coincided with an explosion of debates over the 'appropriation of voice' in universities and dominant media outlets. The disputes go to the heart of struggles around the politics of cultural representation: who has the authority to speak, for whom,

and under what circumstances? Aboriginal writers have used the issue of the appropriation of voice to highlight struggles over the material conditions of publication and circulation of texts, as well as conflicts over the control of resources, land, and cultural property. The demands for the 'return of voice' have dovetailed into efforts to repatriate cultural treasures held in museums in metropolitan centres in North America and in Europe (Kew 91), as well as legal battles over land and resources. Told-to narratives, historically 'authored' solely by collector-editors, are implicated in these debates over cultural property. The fierce discussions over the appropriation of voice helped to create a shift in the production of told-to narratives: First Nations editors, translators, recorders, and collectors began to take more active roles in recording, translating, editing, and publishing the texts. As a result, new forms of the genre have emerged that emphasize process, debate, and exchange.

Until recently, Canadian literary criticism – which, along with Aboriginal studies, is the core disciplinary space from which this analysis proceeds – has ignored the told-to narrative, labelling this diverse body of texts as anthropological case studies.² In the preface to *Contemporary Challenges* (1991), Hartmut Lutz comments that, prior to the 1970s, 'texts stemming from the oral tradition were usually collected, translated, and often heavily edited by non-Native missionaries, anthropologists, and hobbyists.' These editors, Lutz argues, 'tended to represent Native "tales" from the igloo, the smokehouse, or the campfire as "quaint" or "exotic," fit for ethnological inquiry perhaps, but not for serious literary studying' (2). Lutz implicitly concludes that critics should thus dispense with cross-cultural told-to narratives altogether, and turn their attention to First Nations writing produced in the past thirty years. Increasingly, Canadian literary critics have questioned this tendency to leave aside the work of interpreting recorded oral narrative, and have sought new ways to approach these layered texts. In the words of Susan Gingell (2005), 'Canadian literature is ... a rich archive of textualized orature and orality, one whose wealth has only just begun to be recognized by critics' (9). Gingell has played an important role in coordinating scholars working on textualized orality in Canadian contexts.³

Despite a recent upsurge in interest, there are several reasons these blurred genres have remained understudied in Canadian literary criticism. Told-to narratives do not fit the criteria that govern European concepts of genre; the collaborative process challenges the author-function and notions of the literary by foregrounding process over product, context

over text, and audience over author; and literary critics have assigned the study of oral literature to the departments of anthropology and folklore, contributing to the view that transcribed oral narratives are the domain of linguists or other cultural specialists. Meanwhile, Aboriginal literature in Canada has increasingly come to mean singly authored texts, as if told-to narratives were synonymous with literary colonization. My study, in contrast, argues that told-to narratives play a formative role in both Aboriginal and Canadian literatures. As a meeting ground for multiple voices, told-to narratives offer productive sites for analysing the shifting dynamic of cross-cultural interaction. Exploring the complexity, richness, and depth of the collaborative process provides a way for me to articulate a different kind of cultural politics that avoids reinscribing a sharply oppositional characterization of the relationship between Aboriginal storytellers and non-Aboriginal collectors, writers, and editors in contemporary told-to narratives. By focusing on the processes of mediation and collaboration, I hope to challenge notions of ‘voice’ that are singular, unmediated, and pure, thereby questioning the discourses of authenticity that continue to perpetuate static notions of Aboriginal identity.

In American (as opposed to Canadian) literary studies, the study of Native North American oral literatures has claimed greater institutional legitimacy. Dell Hymes (1981), Dennis Tedlock (1983), Arnold Krupat (1983, 1992), Brian Swann (1983, 1992, 1996), David Murray (1991), William Clements (1996), and Eric Cheyfitz (1997) are just a few of the critics who have produced extensive critical studies on Aboriginal verbal art. For the most part, these critics focus on translations or re-translations of oral literatures from the nineteenth century or from the first half of the twentieth century. While there are a number of important exceptions,⁴ there has developed an historically entrenched split between critics who study historical Native American orature and those who study contemporary Native American writing. Commenting on this phenomenon, Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig Womack (2006) argues that until recently ‘all Indian writing was claimed as being based on oral tradition and ceremony, yet there was little actual tribally specific analysis or consideration of how oral tradition itself has a literary history and has changed over time’ (154). Similarly, Jace Weaver (1997), also a Cherokee scholar, reacting against the assumptions embedded in these critical studies, persuasively argues that an over-emphasis on ‘orature’ in Native American literary studies ‘is a way of continuing colonialism. It once again keeps American Indians from entering the twentieth century’ (23). However, Weaver’s conclusion – that

'Native American literature ... is most clearly found in novels written by Native Americans about the Native American experience' (26) – is also problematic. He suggests that only those Native American writers who write novels about the 'Native American experience' are writing Native American literature. He also suggests that an attempt to critically engage with orature will necessarily lead to 'continuing colonialism' (23). In considering the implications of Weaver's statement, the question arises: Are Native American writers who write novels participating more directly in a process of literary decolonization than those who engage in the textualization of oral narratives? In recent decades, as Aboriginal writers, editors, translators, scholars, and community members have become more involved in developing innovative approaches to the task of recording and preserving oral traditions, it has become clear that told-to narratives remain a vibrant form of cultural expression.

Thus, in this book, I do not approach told-to narratives as inherently examples of textual colonization by White recorders of Aboriginal oral narrators. Following the lead of Coast Miwok/Pomo/Jewish writer Greg Sarris, whose book *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* (1993) is a key influence in this study, I argue that there is always a gap between recorder and storyteller, even when the interlocutors belong to the same community or family, and even when they follow a careful collaborative process. I approach the claims made by those collector-editors who state that they have recorded the stories 'exactly as told' with a degree of skepticism. David Brumble in *American Indian Autobiography* (1988) argues that a dominant trend in recorded life narrative is the myth of the 'absent editor,' who 'create[s] the fiction that the narrative is all the Indian's own' (75). The recorder denies his or her role as listener in shaping the story, stressing his or her neutrality or objectivity. There are numerous examples of the absent editor phenomenon. In the preface to the collective testimonial life story *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene* (1997), a searing account of enforced settlement that I discuss in Chapter 4, recorder-editor Üstün Bilgen-Reinart writes that the story 'is told largely by Ila [Bussidor] and the other Sayisi Dene, in their own voices' (xi). Janet Silman, a Métis writer who recorded and edited the stories in *Enough Is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* (1987), likewise states that the testimonies by the women from the Tobique Reserve in New Brunswick are transcriptions: '[t]he story is not about them but rather *by* them in that it is in their own words' (9, emphasis in original). Rosamond Vanderburgh

is one of a minority of recorder-editors who acknowledge that their work – in Vanderburgh’s case the biography of Anishinaabe narrator Verna Patronella Johnston, *I am Nokomis, Too* (1977) – is not a direct transcription: ‘Much of this story reflects her [Johnston’s] manner of speaking and her own phrasing, but inevitably it reflects, as well, the cultural framework and expressions of the interviewer’ (15). However, given that Vanderburgh has changed Johnston’s first-person account into a third-person biography, and has provided descriptive titles to each ‘chapter’ of Johnston’s life, this admission of editorial intervention seems understated at best.

Avowals of friendship, trust, mutual responsibility, shared agendas, and the relinquishing of authorial control are common in editors’ prefaces and introductions to recorded oral narratives. The recorded (auto)biography *During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson* (1992), by anthropologist Margaret Blackman, provides a good example of how the claim to collaboration provides ‘an affective or experiential dimension’ that ‘complements’ the norms of the ‘standard ethnography’ without substantially disrupting the genre (4). Haida elder Florence Edenshaw Davidson might command centre stage in the text, but she does so as exemplary evidence within Blackman’s interpretive framework. Blackman downplays her own role in writing the life story, claiming that it was Davidson who initiated the project. Yet Blackman, writing an ‘ethnographic life history’, presses Davidson to speak candidly about her experiences ‘as a Haida woman’: ‘Nani was somewhat embarrassed to discuss her puberty seclusion knowing that the account might be published. I, on the other hand, felt the subject significant enough to pursue until she had exhausted her memory’ (16). Blackman impels her ‘Native informant’ to reveal her knowledge about Haida customs to the point of exhaustion, in both senses of the word. The close relationship between the women suggests that Blackman has shared authorial control with her subject, but it should be noted that the claim to sharing increases the text’s ethnographic authority.

Nevertheless, storytellers have their own strategies for overturning the authority of the collector-editors. Just as the collector-editor selects, interprets, shapes, and determines the form of the narrative, so too does the narrator choose, arrange, and order her memories. ‘I don’t tell everything – what’s no good,’ Davidson insists (19), advising Blackman to ‘shut that thing off,’ referring to the tape recorder, at certain points in the narrative (xiii). Davidson makes clear that she is addressing more than one audience: one listener may be Blackman, but Davidson often has family and

community members present at the recording sessions as well. In addition, she is aware of the interest of outsiders in Haida culture, as numerous anthropologists, including John R. Swanton (1873-1958) and Wilson Duff (1925-76), had worked closely with her family members since the early twentieth century (14). In response to Blackman's detailed questions about Haida cultural practices, Davidson exclaims: 'It wasn't important to me then – how was I supposed to know that white people might be interested years later?' (18). Narrators use a range of strategies, from direct confrontation, to parody, to silence, to avoidance, in order to claim narrative authority in these composite texts. Blackman and Davidson struggle over not only the content, but also the form, genre, and language of the life narrative, and it is a mistake to assume that Davidson relinquishes control in this struggle. Power relationships are volatile and shifting, influencing cross-cultural negotiation in unpredictable ways. The relations of authority in the told-to narrative are open to alteration, recombination, and transformation.

Despite the complexity of the interaction between interlocutors in told-to narratives, critical studies have focused narrowly on the agenda of either the recorder or the narrator. In this book, I depart from those who posit the Aboriginal narrator as a cipher that is vulnerable to the collector-editor's textual manipulations. Poststructuralist literary critic Philippe Lejeune, in his well-known essay 'Autobiography for Those Who Do Not Write' (1989), argues that the recorder overrides the authority of the narrator.⁵ The recorder 'is the author in every sense of the term'; 'He [sic] ha[s] the initiative; the collected narrative accomplishes his plan, and not that of the model; he is in control of the work; and he is ultimately its signer and its guarantor' (208). For Lejeune, the collector-editor's frame determines both the form and content of the life narrative. At the same time, my readings also differ from those that merely reverse the unilateral relation and insist that the narrator is the ultimate author-ity. John Beverley (1992), writing about Latin American *testimonios* – collaboratively produced first-person narratives, inspired by Marxism and closely associated with social justice struggles – attributes all agency to the narrator⁶: 'In oral history, it is the intentionality of the recorder – usually a social scientist – that is dominant ... In *testimonio*, by contrast, it is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount' (96). As a result, '*testimonio* involves a sort of erasure of the function and textual presence of the author' (97). Beverley downplays or even camouflages the role of the collector-editor.

Both Lejeune and Beverley install a sharp opposition between recorder and teller, overlooking the forms of intersubjectivity that the told-to narrative produces. Focusing on the recorder or the narrator in an exclusive way elides the formative impact of other mediating figures, such as translators, editors, and readers. Such an approach also ignores the social contexts in which tellings, re-tellings, or re-readings take place. Social context plays a vital role in shaping told-to narratives, which are based on situated, embodied events of communication. According to Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), it is impossible to consider speakers and listeners in isolation from one another, or disassociated from the world in which they interact. He calls into question the tendency of listeners to deny their own role in shaping the story; indeed, for Bakhtin, ‘the listener becomes the speaker’ (*Speech* 68). Both listener and speaker participate in the acts of making meaning, while larger political and social contexts impinge upon the intimate setting of a conversation. Interlocutors operate in a contested zone; they cannot overcome or wish away the determinacies of their disparate social locations. He reminds us that these relations of authority exert their force in every act of communication. However, they are especially pertinent to the process of textualizing First Nations’ oral texts, a process historically steeped in culturally determined notions of orality and literacy, of ethnicity and difference.⁷

The asymmetric relations between the Native speaker and the (usually) non-Aboriginal recorder bear dramatic consequences in the mediated spaces of public forums, community hearings, media representations, and land claims trials. For example, I track the permutations that transcribed community hearings undergo when they are re-presented in official reports. Reports, which exert a degree of social power that hearings cannot, are important sites of analysis. Their rhetorical features – often downplaying the ‘personal’ viewpoint of the author(s), who may or may not be named – may tempt a reader to rely upon them as straight, factual accounts, but I emphasize the degree to which they are themselves discursive performances. Similarly, transcribed court documents in land claims trials involve a series of liminal figures (plaintiffs, defendants, cultural translators, expert witnesses, lawyers) who are testifying, performing, recording, translating, debating, editing, and arranging oral utterances. Court transcriptions starkly highlight how the act of recording oral statements is subject to the law’s powerful ‘ordering imperative’ (Boyce Davies 3). This ‘ordering imperative’ sometimes results in mistranslation

or nontranslation of those utterances that do not fit the existing analytical categories. Even when transcriptions demonstrate word-for-word accuracy, the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization potentially transform the range of possible meanings that utterances produce.

The public forums I have selected – the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (1973-77), the Oka crisis (1990), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1991-96), the land claims trial *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (1991, 1997), and community debates surrounding the creation of Nunavut (1999) – provide a rich (if contradictory) narrative of the struggle for Aboriginal rights in Canada in the last decades of the twentieth century. Historically, non-Aboriginal governmental representatives have crafted ‘Indian policy’ in Ottawa behind closed doors. Today, Aboriginal researchers and community activists are actively participating in negotiating self-government agreements, brokering modern-day treaties, and filing land claims. However, there are no guarantees that what is traced here is a narrative of progress towards more equitable relations between the Canadian nation-state and the First Nations. The development of Aboriginal rights in Canada has always been, as Aboriginal studies scholar Peter Kulchyski points out, ‘a history of sustained, often vicious struggle, a history of losses and gains, of shifting terrain’ (*Unjust* 9-10). If the Oka crisis ignited intense debates over the politics of representation, the formation of Nunavut in 1999 held out the promise that Aboriginal self-government may resolve or at least mitigate the intertwined crises over land, voice, and representation. Yet genuine change in Aboriginal-Canadian relations is still an elusive goal, as ongoing disputes over land, property, and resources make clear. The differential relations of communication in told-to narratives and in public hearings reflect the ongoing colonial nature of the Indigenous-settler relationship in Canada. Profound social, economic, and political inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups persist today.

Doreen Jensen, Gitksan artist and cultural worker, has said that ‘Canada is an image which hasn’t emerged yet. Because this country hasn’t recognized its First Nations, its whole foundation is shaky’ (20). There are yawning gaps and silences between official and alter-Native histories in Canada. Growing up in Montreal, Quebec, in the 1970s and 1980s and living on my parents’ farm not far from Oka during the summer of 1990, I learned something about these yawning gaps. My father was involved in the ‘No’ campaign leading up to the Quebec referendum in 1980 (and, to a lesser extent, again in 1995), and I vividly remember his defence of

bilingualism, minority language rights, and multiculturalism. Not surprisingly, as a fourth-generation Anglophone Montrealer, my father opposed René Lévesque's separatist, nationalist vision for Quebec. My father's liberal politics were imbued with a strong sense of fairness and equality, as well as a respect for cultural difference. I have always admired his political engagement, though we have disagreed about the implications of Canadian Liberal politics. In writing this book, I have learned the extent to which well-intentioned liberal ideology has contributed to the deferral of Aboriginal rights. For example, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's White Paper (1969) proposed to shred the *Indian Act* and eliminate the special status of Aboriginal peoples from the Canadian constitution. The assimilationist White Paper is classically liberal in its assumption that everyone should be treated 'equally' in a liberal democracy, regardless of race, class, or gender. While liberalism's defense of individual rights can be enabling in certain cases, its de-emphasis of collective rights poses a problem in the struggle for Aboriginal rights. Liberalism may recognize the rights of certain minority groups, but it sometimes ignores how privileges are conferred upon others. Liberal ideology, compounded by the settler mentality – which in this context involves the effacement of differences between Aboriginal and minority groups – often leads to a reluctance to acknowledge the degree to which mainstream society's benefits come at the expense of Indigenous people's rights. Yet Aboriginal communities should not be considered another minority group; they are the First Nations of this continent.⁸

It may come as no surprise to my readers that, as a non-Aboriginal, Canadian critic, I have chosen to write about these genre-bending, hybridized, collaborative texts that model Aboriginal / non-Aboriginal dialogues. To some extent, told-to narratives provide an entry point for me to engage with discussions about Aboriginal literature and criticism. Many Aboriginal critics today (though certainly not all) have adopted sovereigntist perspectives and have articulated tribally specific modes of interpretation. Sovereignty is a key issue not only in political movements but also in literary criticism, as the title of the text *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006), by co-authors Weaver, Womack, and Robert Warrior, makes clear. In Cree writer Janice Acoose's words, 'Exercising sovereignty, we must name/define our own literatures and take control of the Indigenous-literary territory' (46-47). She connects her work as a literary critic to current political struggles over land and sovereignty. In this book I both advance sovereigntist arguments and explore cross-cultural, pan-Native,

collaborative forms of expression. By working on double-voiced, cross-cultural, composite productions, I am attempting to fashion or at least to imagine new models of shared authority and collaboration that can contribute at the same time to ongoing discussions about land rights and governance. Envisioning models of sovereignty in cross-cultural contexts has implications for my work as a teacher and researcher of Canadian and First Nations literatures at a Canadian, post-secondary institution. I bear a responsibility to do what I can to make more space for Indigenous studies and to help make the university a more welcoming place for Indigenous students. I am inspired by my colleagues in Indigenous studies who have analysed with sharp clarity the imbrications of inequities both at the university and in broader social contexts and have dedicated time, energy, and thought to practising ‘an ethics of scholarship’ that bridges persistent gaps between academic and community dialogues (Fagan, ‘Delicate’ 78).⁹

The chapters in this book examine told-to narratives – including ethnography, documentary, life narrative, myth, legend, and song – in conjunction with discussions of political proceedings that dramatize Aboriginal/Canadian (non)exchange – public hearings, media representations of Aboriginal/Canadian conflict, royal commissions, land claims trials, self-government agreements – as a way to talk about how and why social actors engage in collaborative, cross-cultural production. In Chapter 1, I explore some historical roots of told-to narratives: Romantic-nationalist, anti-colonial, and collaborative. In the first half of the twentieth century, Romantic-nationalist collectors sought to salvage what they assumed were the last performances of Aboriginal verbal art as a way to provide the ‘ground’ for new settler literatures. By deploying an ‘art museum’ style of exhibition (Clements 186), literary anthologists of Aboriginal verbal art, such as Natalie Curtis (1907), George W. Cronyn (1918), and John Robert Colombo (1981, 1983), presented fragments of song in isolation from larger contexts. Following the rise of Aboriginal political movements in the 1960s, writers such as Lee Maracle (1990) and Craig Womack (1999), who argue for varying forms of literary sovereignty, have disassociated themselves from ethnographic traditions and have drawn attention to multiple forms of appropriation. The emergence of the ‘Native voice’ as one of anti-colonial resistance has created the necessary conditions for establishing more reciprocal relations of collaboration. In the collaborative approach, critics, writers, and ethnographers such as co-authors Cruikshank, Sidney,

Smith, and Ned (1990), Greg Sarris (1993), and Sharon Venne (2002), attend more carefully to the degrees of collaboration and of authorship that shape these composite texts while at the same time offering new ways to think about Aboriginal sovereignty in relation to ongoing disputes over land, voice, and representation in Canada. Told-to narratives cannot be romanticized as unmediated oral tradition, nor can they be dismissed as corrupted texts. Rather, a collaborative approach acknowledges the volatility of relations of authority between recorders, tellers, interpreters, and editors, and emphasizes the process of making told-to narratives as much as the product itself.

Chapter 2 focuses on the period just following the presentation of the White Paper, introduced by the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau in 1969, as Native groups struggled to transform Canadian Indian policy from one of assimilation to one of self-government. I examine the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, headed by Justice Thomas Berger, and Hugh Brody's ethnographies and documentary films of the 1970s and 1980s as important precursors in debates over voice and representation that emerged so forcefully in the 1990s in universities and in dominant media coverage. The Berger Inquiry endeavoured to break with the colonial past by actively seeking the opinion of Dene, Inuit, and Métis groups in thirty-five community hearings throughout the Mackenzie Valley regarding a proposed oil and gas pipeline. The hearings, which were televised nationally, introduced a new politics of voice in Canada, in which Native groups sought to speak directly to the Canadian public without mediators such as Indian agents, academics, or legal representatives. While Justice Berger celebrates Northerners speaking 'in their own voices' at the commission, his report reinforces the importance of governmental decision-making. In Hugh Brody's work, in contrast, there is a palpable sense of unease about the problem of speaking for a community, an issue that he explores through a variety of narrative and cinematic strategies. I argue that while both Berger and Brody are motivated by the best of intentions to expose injustice and 'give voice' to marginalized Aboriginal groups, they sometimes overlook their own role as mediators in cross-cultural dialogues and exchanges.

Chapter 3 focuses on the standoff at Kanehsatake as a turning point in First Nations politics and cultural production. This event became the crucible in which debates over the appropriation of voice began to boil over. In this chapter, I examine how two Indigenous artists – Abenaki

filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin and Coast Salish writer Lee Maracle – use strategies of the told-to narrative to engage with the Oka crisis, challenging the dominant, starkly oppositional representations of the event. While clearly highlighting asymmetric relations of power so palpable in the televised images of the barricades, Obomsawin and Maracle construct double-voiced, composite productions that are troubling to reified notions of identity, difference, and representation. Both artists, working within the limits of their chosen media, manipulate forms of the told-to narrative – interview, quotation, and collage – to retell and re-frame the events at Oka. Their ‘told-to narratives’ are ‘twice-told narratives,’ in which they re-write or re-present the conflict in ways that avoid stereotypical media oppositions.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was struck in 1991 in response to the Oka crisis, and the commissioners released their five-volume report in 1996. In Chapter 4, I discuss the implications of the commission’s stated goal to initiate a politics of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups in Canada, and what the turn to reconciliation might signify in light of debates over the appropriation of voice. I argue that the RCAP missed a crucial opportunity for creating the conditions for reconciliation. This is not because, as many critics have argued, its report’s vision of self-government was wrong-headed or divisive, its recommendations impractical, or its call for governmental change ineffectual. Rather, I focus on how, in moving from the community hearings to the writing of the report, the RCAP incrementally distanced itself from the testimony, containing and managing it within the language of recommendations. As a result, the commission did not elicit the active participation of Canadians as witnesses in the remaking of a shared history. In contrast, Ila Bussidor and Üstün Bilgen-Reinart, who initially worked with the RCAP and who later became the co-authors of the collective life narrative *Night Spirits* (1997), sought a broader audience to tell the story of the relocation of the Sayisi Dene First Nation in a way that would persuasively convey the urgent need for compensation. The tendency of the RCAP’s report to cut out the ‘you,’ directed for the most part to the non-Aboriginal addressee, is reversed in this publication, thus encouraging the listener to remain accountable to history in a newly crafted politics of reconciliation.

Chapter 5 explores the renewed connection between oral traditions, land, and Aboriginal title in the current era of land claims negotiations, and proposes that the principle of collaborative authorship may provide

a model for engaging with land disputes in the courtroom. Though oral traditions have gained legitimacy in the courtroom, problems of translation (cultural and linguistic) remain. In *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en land claims case that took place in the provincial court of British Columbia in 1991, Chief Justice Allan McEachern officially recognized that oral traditions were admissible as evidence of land title, but nevertheless continually questioned their reliability. Because the judge expected the oral traditions to provide stable sets of data, he failed to take into account the dialogic interaction at the heart of the oral traditions. In contrast, Harry Robinson and Wendy Wickwire, in *Write It on Your Heart*, as well as the co-authors of *Life Lived Like a Story*, make clear that storytelling does not occur in a vacuum; storytellers require continuous responses from participating audience members. I suggest that these texts practise oral traditions in ways that rethink the concepts of evidence, ownership, and Aboriginal title to land, and envision the negotiation of a land dispute as an ethical process of 'response and response-ability' (Blaeser, 'Writing' 54).

The film *Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner*, which the filmmakers say is 'part of the continuous stream of oral history' in Inuit traditions, opens with the character Kumaglak declaring: 'I can only sing this song to someone who understands it.' Kumaglak's statement is a kind of manifesto that shapes the politics and poetics of the film: to respond to, contest, and re-imagine the ethnographic traditions of recording, translating, and collecting oral stories in Nunavut (historically referred to as 'the North'). I argue that the subtitled film, as a form of textualized oral narrative, enables the filmmakers to create two parallel texts that interact and speak to each other in imperfect ways. The gap between what is spoken and what appears on the bottom of the screen can be manipulated strategically, for a variety of effects, enabling the filmmakers to address different audiences. *Atanarjuat* is part of a larger body of work by Isuma films that follows an 'Inuit culture of production' ('Filmmaking' par. 2), emerging from the same political movement for Inuit sovereignty as the new territory of Nunavut. The filmmakers take seriously their role of instigating debate and providing social critique of both colonial Canada and Nunavut. Through their work, they continuously remind the country's and the territory's leaders of the vital role that art and culture play in northern communities.

In the conclusion, I discuss the implications for this book, focusing as it does on told-to narratives and other collaborative cultural productions, of the current trend in Aboriginal literary criticism and in Aboriginal

studies more generally to draw upon discourses of sovereignty. In recent years, a significant number of Aboriginal literary critics both in the US and in Canada have turned to 'Indigenous literary nationalism' as a way to locate Indigenous writing within specific historical, political, cultural, and aesthetic contexts and traditions, rather than continually responding to, and calibrating ideas to fit, Euro-American critical paradigms. This turn often is accompanied by a turn away from collaborative texts and towards singly authored texts. Following the lead of Temagami scholar Dale Turner, who suggests that 'Aboriginal sovereignty is best understood by listening to the diverse voices of Aboriginal peoples themselves' (Turner, 'Introduction' 4), I argue that attentive listening to Aboriginal voices-in-dialogue, in a wide range of texts and contexts, may generate a productive range of models of sovereignty. I further suggest that reading and writing collaborative, cross-cultural, composite texts such as told-to narratives provides a way to imagine a new politics of voice and of sovereignty, as well as to shift the kinds of questions critics pose in addressing Native cultural production in Canada.

'Where Is the Voice Coming From?' Appropriations and Subversions of the 'Native Voice'

And there is a voice. It is an incredible voice that rises from among the young poplars ripped of their spring bark, from among the dead somewhere lying there ... a voice so high and clear, so unbelievably high and strong in its unending wordless cry.

The voice of 'Gitchie-Manitou Wayo' – interpreted as 'voice of the Great Spirit' – that is, The Almighty Voice. His death chant no less incredible in its beauty than in its incomprehensible happiness.

I say 'wordless cry' because that is the way it sounds to me. I could be more accurate if I had a reliable interpreter who would make a reliable interpretation. For I do not, of course, understand the Cree myself.

– RUDY WIEBE, 'WHERE IS THE VOICE COMING FROM?'

The concluding passage of Rudy Wiebe's short story 'Where Is the Voice Coming From?' evokes with great intensity the power of the 'Native voice.' The voice has the force of immediacy; it is 'high,' 'clear,' and 'strong.' It is at once the dying utterance of Almighty Voice, the Cree fugitive shot by the RCMP in 1895, and the voice of the Great Spirit, Gitchie-Manitou, emanating from the land. Yet despite its eruptive energy, the voice is a 'wordless cry,' a pre-discursive unit of sound. The mediating structures of translation are absent, and the Euro-Canadian narrator does not understand the

Cree language. At the same time that he disavows expertise in translation, he conveys the urgent necessity for ‘a reliable interpreter’ to salvage the elusive voice that would otherwise disappear unheard.

Wiebe’s story highlights the central paradox in the transcription and translation of told-to narratives: to simultaneously control and erase the processes of mediation in the making of the ‘Native voice.’ The voice that speaks for itself, yet cannot be heard without the intervention of a translator, is a recurring construction in the history of recording Aboriginal oral narratives in North America. In this chapter, I explore three competing constructions of the ‘Native voice’ in told-to narratives in the twentieth century: Romantic-nationalist, anti-colonial, and collaborative. Generally, Romantic-nationalist discourses from the first half of the twentieth century have constructed the ‘Native voice’ as an isolated fragment or ethnographic object. The ‘art museum’ style of exhibition in literary anthologies of Native North American verbal art has decontextualized the ‘Native voice’ and has contributed to myths about the ‘vanishing savage’ in works dating from the 1910s to more recent decades (Clements 186). In the second construction, critiques of appropriation in salvage anthropology, which began emerging in the 1960s, have produced anti-colonial readings of the ‘Native voice,’ in which writers have located and problematized the interventions of collector-editors. In this interpretation, told-to narratives are seen to exemplify incommensurable ‘parallel voices’ (Valaskakis, ‘Parallel’) vying for authority in conflicts over representation, conflicts that mirror larger political and social struggles. In the third interpretation, told-to narratives are neither simply authentic records of oral performance nor examples of textual colonization. At least two partners, both of whom are involved in complex cross-cultural negotiations that are shaped by relations of power, produce the composite texts. The result of their collaboration is an inter-subjective form that emphasizes process over product, exchange over static image. In the process of making told-to narratives, relations of authority are contested, negotiated, and recreated.

The ‘Native Voice’ as Ethnographic Fragment: Literary Salvage Projects and Romantic Nationalist Discourses

Viewing a Pomo basket in a museum is like viewing a movie frame depicting a close-up of water; it could be water anywhere, or nowhere.

– GREG SARRIS, *KEEPING SLUG WOMAN ALIVE*

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the discourse of the 'vanishing Indian' sparked many projects to record, collect, and anthologize Aboriginal oral traditions. While American and Canadian governments were drafting and implementing aggressive policies of assimilation,¹ a number of collector-editors set out to the field to salvage what they assumed were the final dirges of the departing 'child races' (Curtis xxix). Generally, these projects as examples of salvage anthropology – a term used beginning in the 1960s as part of a critique of nineteenth-century ethnography and of early modern anthropology – produced Romantic images of the Native, elegiac in mood. The 'vanishing Indian' became a particularly resonant image for Canadian and American writers who were seeking to define their newly 'indigenous' (read Euro-American invention of 'indigenous') literary traditions. Writers, poets, and critics from the first half of the twentieth century, such as Natalie Curtis, Mary Austin, George W. Cronyn, Lindsay Skinner, and Alice Corbin Henderson, argued that the fresh vitality of spoken Aboriginal art would enrich the new literatures of North America, as if poetic originality would spring from 'Aboriginality'. The confluence of the old and the new, of oral tradition and literary invention, of Aboriginal belonging and American discovery, would provide the ingredients for establishing a genuine American literature. Mary Austin, the American novelist, poet, and critic whose best-known work, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), was inspired by myths from the Indigenous peoples of the Mojave Desert, expresses the ideology most succinctly when she writes, 'The first free movement of poetic originality in America finds us just about where the last Medicine Man left off; treating the disappearance of this 'last Medicine Man' as a given (qtd. in Cronyn xvi). This section of the chapter explores how textualized Aboriginal oral narrative, particularly as presented in literary-minded anthologies, has contributed to the production of literary value in American and Canadian nationalist discourses.

The literary anthology of Aboriginal verbal art, whose popularity as a book form has continued to the present day,² played a key role in developing and justifying the new settler literatures of the Americas by using and transforming translations of Indigenous oral narrative. William Brandon states that the production of anthologies of Aboriginal verbal art 'became epidemic' during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'nearly always with either scientific or Cub Scout overtones, seldom presented as serious literature' (145). Brandon here is critiquing

the historical trends in presenting Aboriginal oral narrative either as data for anthropological studies or as simplified tales for children; instead, he argues, presenting examples from the oral tradition as free-standing poems, without encumbering them with further historical or cultural information, confers upon them their proper literary value. Margery Fee has convincingly argued that the development of settler nationhood in North America relied upon the appropriation of Aboriginal oral traditions, collected and displayed in national anthologies, as the 'ground' for the new settler literatures. Since the settlers had 'taken over the soil, they could also take over the myths of Aboriginal peoples, who were believed to be on the verge of extinction' (Fee, 'Writing Orality' 23). In Romantic-nationalist discourses, oral traditions are closely tied to the land and express the spirit of the nation.³ This one-to-one relation between land, literature, and nation suggests that a people's sense of belonging to a place is dependent upon that people's knowledge of and familiarity with a store of ancient oral traditions. Fee quotes from nineteenth-century German literary critic, Friedrich von Schlegel, who states: 'A nation unendowed with poetic stores that date from some time prior to the period of regular artistic culture ... will never attain to any nationality of character, or vitality of genius' (qtd. in Fee, 'Writing Orality' 23). For the nationalist settler critic, this poses a serious dilemma. How can the new literature attain 'vitality of genius' without drawing upon an oral tradition as its creative source? The answer is to record the myths, epics, and folktales of Indigenous groups, freely translate them, and present them in anthologies that de-emphasize or even efface tribal and language differences. Literary critic Glenn Willmott comments on how 'such backward looking to another's aboriginal past' is at the same time 'so peculiarly pregnant with the contrary, future-premised birth of a nation' (75).

The first anthology of Native American verbal art, Natalie Curtis's *The Indians' Book* (1907), exemplifies the Romantic-nationalist agenda that both Fee and Willmott describe. Curtis was trained as a concert pianist, but soon after hearing Native American music for the first time in Arizona in 1900, she focused exclusively on transcribing Native American songs and stories from many regions and cultural groups.⁴ For Curtis, 'We echo Europe, whereas we might develop a decorative art truly American' (qtd. in Clements 171). Truly 'indigenous' American art, she suggests, would rise from the ashes of Aboriginal music and poetry. Curtis was a strong critic of American governmental policies that sought to suppress Native American cultural practices. Yet in a manner commensurate with the

racialized discourses of cultural evolution of her time, Curtis wrote of 'the sunset hour of ... native life' whose 'night was soon to come' (Curtis xxii). While in *The Indians' Book* she states that 'the Indians are the authors of this volume' and that the editor's work was secondary – 'the work of the recorder has been but the collecting, editing and arranging of the Indians' contributions' (Epigraph) – she simultaneously asserts the importance of her role. Without writing, Aboriginal oral traditions were doomed to disappear forever. In speaking to one of her informants, Curtis expresses her regret that Aboriginal oral traditions cannot survive without writing:

As yet your people have no books nor do they read or write. That is why your songs will be forgotten, why even your language may some day pass away. When you sing, your song is heard, then dies like the wind that sweeps the cornfields and is gone, none knows whither. But if you could write you could put your song in a book, and your people, even to the children of their children, could know your song as if you yourself were singing. (475)

For Curtis, writing is purely functional, providing a convenient storage house for Aboriginal songs; she does not acknowledge whether and to what extent writing shaped the narratives that she secured. Struggling with the limited recording technologies of the early twentieth century, Curtis first used a phonograph and wax cylinders to record songs and stories, and later switched to pen and paper. Each method had its disadvantages: on the one hand, the phonograph was bulky and unwieldy, and wax cylinders typically only stored about two minutes of live performance. On the other hand, the accuracy of a written transcript depended upon the storyteller's willingness to pause while an interpreter translated and Curtis wrote. As a result of these technical factors, Curtis collected mostly short performances that were detached from conversation and stripped of their narrative frames. Curtis also showed a strong aesthetic preference for the ethnographic fragment. Though she expressed regret about what she saw as evidence that Native communities were passing out of existence, she also was moved by the elusive quality of cultural remnants: 'A bit of broken pottery, a bone-awl, an arrow-head, a grave-mound, mute testimonies these of the art, the industry, the life, the death of man in the long ago' (xxix). For Curtis, it appears, the more fragmentary the artifacts (including songs), the more powerful their affective influence.

Curtis's presentation of Aboriginal songs as decontextualized poems reminds us that writing, in its role as a technology of recording, is not a neutral conduit. Curtis's work influenced a number of literary anthologies of 'Indian verse' that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1917, the prestigious journal *Poetry* published a special 'Aboriginal Issue' of recorded oral 'poetry,' including translations by Curtis. Soon after, literary critic and anthologist George W. Cronyn published *The Path on the Rainbow* (1918), which became, in the words of Mary Austin, who wrote the Introduction, 'the first authoritative volume of aboriginal American verse' (in Cronyn xv). Cronyn showcased a vast range of Aboriginal verbal art without even, as William Clements comments, 'the equivalent of a museum exhibit card' (187) – that is, with little or no information on the narratives' cultural contexts, or explanations of the recording process.⁵ The fragments reflected the popular literary trend of the day, imagism, which favoured the poetic form of the short, personal lyric. Austin saw affinities between Aboriginal verbal art and new directions in American verse: 'Vers libre and Imagism are in truth primitive forms, and both of them generically American forms, forms instinctively selected by people living in America and freed from outside influence ... The Indian verse form *is* Imagism' (qtd. in Colombo, *Songs I* 104). Thus Aboriginal verbal art becomes a stepping stone in the making of American literature: through the dedicated work of writers and editors who would transform the oral material into written literature, American literature would evolve its way out of these 'primitive forms.' Cronyn included works by Euro-American poets whose contributions reworked Native American songs to fit the pared-down aesthetics of the personal lyric. Because these poets did not know the Aboriginal languages in which the songs were initially recorded, their aim was to create 'versions,' not translations.

Anthropologists and literary critics have long disputed the best way to 'entextualize' oral narrative, which Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs describe as the 'process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting' (73). Disciplinary divisions between anthropology and literature have created two poles in entextualizing styles of told-to narratives: while the former discipline invokes context as a form of authority, the latter seeks to reduce reliance on context in order to emphasize the timeless, artistic value of the fragment.⁶ In early literary anthologies of Aboriginal verbal art, the displayed ethnographic fragments are meant

to speak for themselves as art by appealing to a universal aesthetic that transcends cultural difference.

The first anthologies of Aboriginal verbal art from what is now Canada drew on material collected over several hundreds of years of Aboriginal-settler contact. *Poems of the Inuit* (1981) and *Songs of the Indians, Volumes I and II* (1983), edited by poet and compiler Robert Colombo, follow the traditions of anthologizing Aboriginal verbal art in the 'minimalist installation style' associated with art museums (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 391), an approach to entextualization that was popular in the first decades of the twentieth century. Colombo's skills as an anthologist have been well recognized in Canadian letters (he has been called 'the Master Gatherer' for his compilations of diverse forms of Canadiana), but they exert a particular politics in textualizing Aboriginal oral narrative. Colombo drew upon material in the American literary anthologies described above but re-oriented the content to reflect what he claimed was distinctively 'Canadian' Native verbal art, a categorization that ignores how many Native North American cultural groups cut across the forty-ninth parallel. Even though Colombo's anthologies of Aboriginal verbal art are not well known today, their influence persists. One of the most highly respected anthologies of Native literature in Canada – Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie's *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (2005) – uses Colombo's material in the opening sections of the anthology as examples of 'First Nations Orature.' As Moses and Goldie explain, the entries in the orature section provide 'the cultural roots' (1) from which contemporary Native writing springs – but ultimately departs.

As in the American anthologies, Colombo's collections demonstrate how literary value is constructed through the appropriation of Aboriginal oral expression as the basis for new literary innovations. Colombo's two-volume *Songs of the Indians*, a collection of song lyrics that were gathered over a period of four hundred years by a wide range of individuals of diverse backgrounds and trained in different professions (including Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Frances Densmore, Franz Boas, John R. Swanton, Natalie Curtis, Mary Austin, Marius Barbeau, and others), creates a dehistoricized, transpersonal, and decontextualized 'Native voice.' Colombo makes little or no distinction between the various collecting and translating projects of the original recorders. He rarely names the Native singers or storytellers of the lyrics, usually providing only the name of the cultural group to which the anonymous song or poem belongs. Although the lyrics are

expected to ‘speak for themselves,’ the reader is left with few clues as to the cultural background or meaning of the songs. Furthermore, Colombo re-translates, re-works, and compresses the songs in a number of cases. Each edited fragment is noted as being a ‘very free adaptation,’ ‘an interpretation’ (*Songs I* 105), ‘reconstructed,’ ‘reconstituted’ (107), or ‘reworked because the original is fragmentary’ (117). He also runs together disparate songs and rewrites earlier versions of the songs without knowing the languages in which they were performed or the cultural contexts from which they emerged. His anthologies are closely comparable to William Brandon’s *The Magic World: American Indian Songs and Poems* (1971), an anthology of eighty ‘poems’ that Brandon insists ‘can speak for themselves’ (Brandon n.p.); yet Brandon has radically adapted, fragmented, and conflated different songs to produce his versions (Clements 189-94).

In suggesting that changes to language are mere technical adjustments, Colombo (along with Brandon and other literary anthologists of Aboriginal verbal art) contributes to a further erasure of the original Aboriginal languages. This erasure shows that translation in the Native North American context has come to represent a ‘process of domination’ (Blaeser, ‘Writing’ 54). As David Murray writes: ‘In a situation of mutual agreement and equality of power, adaptation and translation can be a two-way process. In a situation of dominance, the cultural translation is all one-way. Knowledge of the processes of this translation, though, must be repressed by the dominant side, in favour of a reassuring image of mutual intelligibility which does not register as significant who has had to translate’ (6). Effacing language differences has ominous implications, given the policies of assimilation that have severely threatened the survival of some Aboriginal languages. Colombo’s one-way process of translation reasserts English as the dominant language over Aboriginal languages.

In a similar vein to Curtis’s *The Indians’ Book*, Colombo’s *Songs of the Indians I* associates ‘Indian eloquence’ with the elusiveness of its passing. The anthology opens with a three-line song in the Beothuk language, recorded phonetically in 1822. The three lines, printed upon a great expanse of the white paper without translation, paradoxically convey regret at the extinction of the Beothuk people and pleasure in the aesthetic impact of the fragment. In the notes at the back of the anthology, Colombo explains the provenance of the song. According to its recorder, William Cormack, the singer, Nancy Shanawdithit, who died in 1829 at the age of twenty-nine, was at the time ‘the sole survivor of her race’ (*Songs I* 105). Colombo emphasizes the untranslatability of the song: ‘Whatever the

nature of the language, the meaning may never be known, the melody may never again be heard. Something special has been lost' (105). He concludes his section on Beothuk song with a final comment that reinforces a rhetoric of disappearance: 'So much for the lyrical legacy of the Beothuk people' (105). In anthologies such as Curtis's, Cronyn's, Brandon's, and Colombo's, the *modus operandi* is not so much *finding* fragments as *making* them. These anthologies decontextualize the oral texts as museumized fragments frozen in the past, downplaying or erasing the mediation of the transcribers and translators. The editors then re-translate the translations. The project of salvage is represented as necessary to preserve Aboriginal 'oral cultures': 'All the cultures lacked letters ... The Indian spoke a highly structured language, the words of which he had no way of preserving' (Colombo, *Songs I* 11-12). In the name of preserving what orality cannot, the editors justify their interventions on the page.

The collapsing of Aboriginality with orality ignores Aboriginal writing and sign systems such as wampum belts, carvings, pictographs, and paintings,⁷ as well as the reams of letters, petitions, sermons, reports, essays, diary entries, and autobiographies that First Nations people wrote throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁸ At the turn of the twentieth century, enthusiasm for 'Aboriginal American verse' rarely included an appreciation for Aboriginal writing. In 1918, author and critic Louis Untermeyer, in his review of Walter Cronyn's anthology *The Path on the Rainbow*, made special objection to the inclusion of poems by Mohawk writer Pauline Johnson (1861-1913): 'It is an added disappointment to come across jingles like Pauline Johnson's "The Song My Paddle Sings," which is neither original nor aboriginal.' Johnson's poems, according to Untermeyer, are 'time-dusty,' 'rhymed sweet-meats' (qtd. in Colombo, *Songs I* 104). Untermeyer's disparaging comments reflect his interest in fashioning a 'modern' literary aesthetic, a goal shared by Canadian poet and literary critic A.J.M. Smith. While Smith was equally disapproving of Johnson's verse, he nevertheless valued Aboriginality as the ground and source of Canadian modern verse. For example, he admired the poem 'Story, with Song No. 1,' attributed to collector Charles G. Leland, a well-respected scholar in his day and editor-collector of the highly influential anthology of verbal art, *Algonkian Legends* (1884), as a 'simple and direct rendering of aboriginal poetry' (A.J.M. Smith 44). While the poem's style appealed to Smith, its content is also of interest here: the speaker is a 'Noble Savage' who declares 'Now I am left on this lonely island to die' six times in a poem of twenty-four lines (44). This poem, which is likely

more of a fabrication than a transcription, indicates the extent to which told-to narratives historically have reinscribed the trope of the ‘vanishing Indian,’ as well as the significance of this image for nascent American and Canadian literatures.⁹

The representation of Aboriginal oral narratives as anonymous, such as the one ‘attributed to’ the collector-editor Leland (above), implies they are unauthored. However, many First Nations view their songs as cultural property that can be exchanged and traded as a form of wealth. For example, Nora Marks and Richard Dauenhauer, collector-editors of oral narrative from the Tlingit First Nation in Alaska, of which Nora Marks Dauenhauer is a member, have produced four anthologies of Tlingit oral performance, including oratory, life histories, songs, and stories. They say that Tlingit tellers invariably begin stories by outlining where and from whom they initially heard the story, and why they have the right to re-tell it (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, ‘The Paradox’ 9). Many of the Tlingit songs are informed by the concept of *at.óow*, which, according to the Dauenhauers, means ‘an owned or purchased thing’ (*Haa Shuká* 25): ‘If a particular story is the *at.óow* of a given clan, it is important to note this somewhere in the telling’ (28). In their anthology of Tlingit oral narrative, *Haa Shuká/Our Ancestors* (1987), the songs are integrated into stories; in turn, the stories are embedded in the frame of the storytelling interaction. The stories all begin with the storyteller’s notation of the *at.óow* of the narrative, the storyteller’s *shagóon* or *shuká* (Tlingit clan or family genealogy), and the story’s or song’s place of origin. Clan members perform certain songs to begin feasting at a potlatch; no other clan is permitted to use the songs. In some cases, the storytellers may refer to songs without recording them. For example, A.P. Johnson, who tells the story of ‘Kaax’achgóok,’¹⁰ asked the Dauenhauers to delete his performance of the accompanying song (*Haa Shuká* 323n). The song, according to the Tlingit system of oral copyright, is owned by the Kiks.adi clan and cannot be retold without explicit permission (333n). Johnson offered the following lines to replace the song:

[Kaax’achgóok] started singing his song ...
 But this is the only thing
 you won’t hear.
 What they did is now ended.
 This is why
 you won’t hear it. (107)

For Johnson, each performance of the song acts as a kind of publication, and retellings that do not respect the song's lineage are breaches of oral copyright.

The problem of oral copyright becomes acute with the inclusion of sacred material, procured and then transformed without the permission of the teller. Representing sacred songs or stories without permission has sparked heated controversies over the politics of representation. Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Silko does not mince words when she writes: 'the racist assumption still abound[s] that the prayers, chants and stories weaseled out by the early white ethnographers, which are now collected in ethnological journals, are public property' (qtd. in Swann, Introduction xxix). Anishinaabe author Lenore Keeshig-Tobias similarly insists that debates over voice are symptomatic of 'the case of cultural theft, the theft of voice ... as surely as the missionaries stole our religion, the politicians stole our land, and residential schools stole our language' (72). Here, Keeshig-Tobias makes a clear connection between the appropriation of stories, the expropriation of land, and the loss of language. The history of told-to narratives is tightly bound up in this history of dispossession.

In recent decades, Indigenous writers have disassociated themselves from ethnographic told-to traditions, drawing attention to the fact that the vast majority of told-to narratives recorded over the past five hundred years are closer to appropriations than translations. They have highlighted the incommensurability of agendas between recorders and tellers in order to challenge totalized conceptions of the 'Native voice.' The emergence of the politics of representation that began in earnest in the 1970s with feminist, anti-racist, and civil activist movements has paralleled the efforts of Indigenous writers to highlight concerns about publication and circulation, as well as struggles over land, resources, and repatriation of material property.

Parallel Voices: A Question of Representation

There is a time bomb in Canada – a bomb that has developed, in part, because of a lack of voice.

The lack of aboriginal voice in basic communications, in history, and in politics has created in the dominant society a series of misconceptions that mutate into indifference and racism.

– JORDAN WHEELER, 'VOICE'

The emergence of the ‘Aboriginal voice,’ especially notable in the 1990s in Canada in political, scholarly, and literary debates, cannot be disentangled from the powerful mediating structures that have threatened to contain and manage that voice. For groups that have been historically silenced, cultural critic bell hooks (1989) has argued that ‘coming to voice’ becomes a ‘revolutionary gesture’: ‘speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak. As objects, we remain voiceless – our beings defined and interpreted by others’ (12). However, Cree-Ojibway writer Jordan Wheeler has complicated this notion of ‘coming to voice’ by drawing attention to the mediating structures that produce the effect of oppositional Aboriginal voices. Systemic discrimination in Canada’s ‘basic communications’ – media, history, politics, education, and publishing – have commodified and homogenized the ‘Native voice.’ In other words, the ‘Native voice’ can be heard, but how it is framed or mediated determines the extent of its impact. Wheeler’s point is that the movement from silence to speaking is a complex process that does not guarantee a ‘hearing.’ Pointing to the example of the media representation of the Oka crisis, Wheeler insists that ‘there was an aboriginal presence, but it was not voice. The depiction of the Oka crisis relied on the political slant of the various journalists and media outlets that recorded, interpreted, and relayed the events’ (37). By drawing attention to the relations of mediation that create an ‘aboriginal voice,’ Wheeler is defying the historical norm of the invisible, silent recorder who produces the effect of ‘Indian eloquence’ for a (largely) non-Native audience.

Julie Cruikshank, an anthropologist and collector-editor of oral narratives, makes a similar point, observing that since the early 1970s, there has been ‘a dramatic shift in popular discourse, and the idea that indigenous peoples should represent themselves rather than be represented by others (such as anthropologists) now meets widespread, commonsense approval.’ Cruikshank, however, has questioned the significance of the change, asking whether the incorporation of Indigenous viewpoints amounted to more than strategic acts of accommodation: ‘In Arctic and subarctic Canada, one consequence of this shift has been that references to local knowledge or indigenous knowledge are increasingly incorporated in public discussion, suggesting that additional voices are being included in public debates. But are they? And if so, how? And if more voices are included, whose are still left out?’ (*Social* 47). She is implying that the

'incorporation' of Indigenous voices in public discussions does not necessarily change the nature of the discussion. This is precisely what Wheeler is suggesting when he says that during the Oka crisis, the apparent inclusion in dominant media representations of the 'aboriginal voice' 'shouting threats of violence' merely provided 'info-tainment' (37).

Cruikshank's questions are crucial to my discussions in the following chapters, in which non-Indigenous collector-editors insist, usually in the preface or introduction of the told-to narrative, that they have recorded exactly what the teller has said. In told-to narratives, collector-editors have adopted textual techniques to create the effect of Indigenous narrators 'speaking for themselves,' but such strategies have not necessarily transformed the asymmetric relations between recorders and tellers. For example, in the introduction to *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984), anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray evokes the immediacy of the raw transcription of Menchú's story: 'We have to listen to Rigoberta Menchú's appeal and allow ourselves to be guided by a voice whose inner cadences are so pregnant with meaning that we actually seem to hear her speaking and can almost hear her breathing' (xii). Burgos-Debray downplays her own role in editing, but also presents her mediation as indispensable in retrieving what would otherwise be lost: 'I allowed her to speak and then became her instrument, her double by allowing her to make the transition from the spoken to the written word' (xx). Overcoming the difficulties of collaboration, Burgos-Debray suggests, requires sympathy, patience, and careful listening: 'For the whole of that week, I lived in Rigoberta's world. We practically cut ourselves off from the outside world. We established an excellent rapport immediately' (xv). In creating this immediate, intimate setting, Burgos-Debray attempts to isolate her interaction with Menchú from larger political contexts.

Burgos-Debray and Menchú's 'excellent rapport,' however, later dissolved. Following the allegations of inaccuracy in the *testimonio*,¹¹ Menchú accused Burgos-Debray of having stolen and misrepresented her story. She claimed that Burgos-Debray denied her authorship (and royalties) of the (auto)biography: 'authorship of the book, in fact, should have been more correctly indicated, shared, no?' (qtd. in Beverley, 'The Real Thing' 268). This breakdown in trust shares some similarities with the eventual rupture between Salish narrator Lee Maracle and Euro-Canadian writer Don Barnett, who collaborated in 1975 to produce a 'history-from-below' testimonial of Maracle's / Bobbi Lee's life story (discussed in Chapter 3).

It is also comparable to the dissolution of the relationship between co-authors Linda Griffiths (a White actress playing the part of Jessica) and Maria Campbell (whose own life provided the basis of Métis character Jessica's story) in *The Book of Jessica* (1989). A common thread between these controversies is the disjuncture between the time of narration, when the collaborators are speaking together in dialogue, and the time of writing and publication, when one of the interlocutors becomes an 'author.' Carole Boyce Davies comments on this moment of transition in her study of recorded oral life narratives:

The oral narrative contract in life story telling turns on the concept of 'trust.' All of the collectors identified building 'trust' as the critical ingredient in having the stories told at all ... In the written version, however, it seems, this oral life narrating contract is often violated. Rarely is the collector's story a part of the narrative. At the point of writing, then, the dominant-subordinate relationships are enforced and the editor becomes a detached, sometimes clinical, orderer or even exploiter of the life stories for anthropological ends, research data, raw material, or the like. Writing another person's life can become an act of power and control. (12, 13)

The transition from trusted confidant to editor to author often drives a wedge between collaborators. As the author signs the title page and the publisher circulates the text in larger economies, the initial trust between interlocutors dissolves. This is largely due to the function of authorship in print-capitalist economies. As literary critic Philippe Lejeune argues in 'Autobiography for Those Who Do Not Write,' authorship involves not only writing but also disseminating, publishing, and circulating texts (192). Authorship, with its emphasis on individual creative genius, precludes the very existence of collaborative literary production. This is because the singly authored work enables the publisher to use the 'brand name' of the author to maintain control over profit, labour, and property in print-capitalist markets. As a result, challenges to the supremacy of the author are liable to spark explosive and heated controversies. For example, if we study the movement of the spiralling loss of trust in *The Book of Jessica*, the enforcement of 'dominant-subordinate relationships' occurs most conclusively at the moment of the drafting of the copyright contract between Griffiths, Campbell, and Theatre Passe-Muraille. The contract is the cumulative effect of all the authorship activities that engaged Griffiths, Campbell, and Paul Thompson (director) in making *Jessica*, including the

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