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Culturalism and Its Discontents:
An Essay Review of David Treuer's *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*

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i.

We usually date the beginnings of Native American fiction from John Rollin Ridge's rather odd novel, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit* published in 1854; the first Native American novel by a woman is S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema, a Child of the Forest* (1891). Just after the turn of the twentieth century, the body of Native American fiction is added to with the appearance of short fiction by Zitkala Sa, Pauline Johnson, and John Milton Oskison, who would later publish full length novels in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1927, Mourning Dove, aided by or interfered with by Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, published *Cogewea, the Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range*, a novel she had largely completed by 1916. Also from the 1930s comes fictional work by Francis La Flesche, John Joseph Mathews, and D'Arcy McNickle. Although Ella Cara Deloria had completed her novel, *Waterlily* by 1944, it was not published until 1988.

But it is N. Scott Momaday's novel, *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction it won the following year that, as has again and again been written, initiated a "Native American Renaissance"[1] in literature, an important component of which has been fictional work by Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, and Gerald Vizenor in the first decade after Momaday's Pulitzer. These writers continued to publish fictional work, and were soon joined by many more Native novelists. To offer an overview of and an introduction to this by-then-already-substantial body of Native American fiction, Louis Owens, himself a Native American novelist, in 1992 published *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel.*

In his Introduction, Owens argued that for Native American writers, "the novel represents a process of reconstruction, of self-discovery, and cultural recovery" (5). And yet, "the Native American novelist works in a medium for which no close Indian prototype exists" (Owens 10); this poses difficulties for "the very questions of identity and authenticity the new literature attempts to resolve" (Owens 11). Considering the five-hundred-year-long historical trauma for American Indians marked by the publication date of Owens's book (1492-1992), the near-genocidal, extended colonial assault on indigenous peoples by the Europeans who would become Americans, it is easy to see why it seemed necessary for those who had not "vanished" but survived

[1] See Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance.*

to consider just exactly what it meant to be culturally and individually Indian in the second half of the twentieth century. The "restless young men" (19), as Robert Dale Parker called them in the fiction of Mathews and McNickle of an earlier period, are reinvented, as Parker further notes, in some of the fiction of Leslie Marmon Silko and Thomas King, and, as I might add, in the fiction of many other Native American writers. There are restless young women, too.

For many of the protagonists of these writers' work, to return to Owens, the attempt to achieve a positive identity very much had to do with cultural recovery. Thus, to offer only a few—and indeed somewhat-oversimplified—examples, critics have debated whether Abel, the protagonist of Momaday's novel, is or is not healed and more or less whole as he runs in a traditional manner at the novel's close. So, too, was it debated whether the unnamed protagonist of James Welch's first novel, *Winter in the Blood* (1974) has or has not achieved a measure of personal reconstruction after he discovers his traditional grandfather, and newly comes to value his grandmother's medicine pouch. Jim Loney, central to Welch's second novel, *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), cannot figure out what it means to him to be (part) Indian, and, as the book's title alerted us, Jim Loney will die. But in Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), thanks to a variant of the Navajo Red Antway Evilway ceremony performed by an unusual and innovative medicine person named Betonie, and by sexual connection to an avatar of Yellow Woman named Ts'eh, Tayo, its protagonist, is "healed" and can authentically reintegrate with his Pueblo people. Identity, culture, authenticity, and communal re-integration were the subjects emphasized by a great many critics both before and after Owens' seminal work.

But culture was attended to in a rather different manner by other critics of Native American fiction. In 1981, Simon Ortiz published "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism." As his title makes clear, Ortiz wished to foreground the political dimension of "cultural authenticity" in literature, as it was conveyed by the word *nationalism.* In 1985, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, with Roger Buffalohead, Beatrice Medicine, and William Willard, founded and herself for long edited the *Wicazo Sa Review*. Cook-Lynn relentlessly urged Native novelists and their critics to focus on the historical and presentday importance of Native sovereignty. Gerald Vizenor, in 1998, in his *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* made a strong case for Native sovereignty as vested in an ongoing tradition of Native storytelling both oral and written. He, along with others, argued that not only treaties, but Native cultural integrity based on the values Vizenor termed *continuance* and *survivance*, were the strongest underpinnings for American Indian claims to sovereignty.

In 1993, Kimberly Blaeser, in her "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center," took the search for literary sovereignty in the direction of an appeal for the implementation of indigenous critical modalities, and the following year saw

the appearance of Alan Velie's edited collection, *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History*. Consistent with this revision in the meaning and use of culture was Robert Warrior's call for "intellectual sovereignty" in his *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995). Jace Weaver coined the term "communitism" to suggest the ways in which critical practice needed to be responsible both to a Native community and to Native activism in his suggestively titled, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (1997), and Scott Lyons, in his essay, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" published in 2000, made a case for what he termed "rhetorical sovereignty." These critical moves were extended and elaborated by Craig Womack in his *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), which, among other things, urged that Native American literary theory derive more from a look at what he called the "home cultures" (13). Indeed, Womack himself offered some insightful readings of Creek oral and written literature. In this nationalist line as well is Daniel Heath Justice's recent *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (2006). All of this work saw itself as contributing to an ongoing resistance to the internal colonialism or domestic imperialism still experienced by Native people in the United States, and this work continues to develop in all sorts of interesting ways.

In 2002, in *Red Matters*, I attempted to group some of the critical work on Native literature that had appeared to that point according to the perspectives I called "Nationalism, Indigenism, and Cosmopolitanism." Defining my own position as that of the cosmopolitan critic, I nonetheless pointed to the great importance of nationalist criticism, quoting Neil Lazarus to the effect that "it is only on the terrain of the nation that an articulation between cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged" (19). Even in our globalized age, resistance to colonialism still must take place on the ground of the nation. In 2006, Michael Elliott and I, in our "American Indian Fiction and Anticolonial Resistance," part of The *Columbia Guide to Native American Literature Since 1945*, revisited many of the novels of this period, from Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* up until the present, considering the ways in which these books referenced Native culture not so much in the interest of identity issues, but, rather, in the interest of instantiating alternative lifeways with an integrity of their own. We read these novels as anti-colonial resistance literature and discussed them in relation to the overlapping perspectives of nationalism, indigenism, and/or cosmopolitanism. In the section on poetry in that volume, Kimberly Blaeser, in parallel fashion, observed that

> The colonization of literature cannot be extracted from the history of colonization of land or people, nor can the ongoing attempts at literary decolonization among the indigenous American writers be viewed in any amber-encased "pure"

> academic discipline. The poetry of indigenous America has both literary and supraliterary intentions. (184)

Also worth mentioning in these regards is Maureen Konkle's study, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (2004). Konkle did not discuss Native American fiction, but she explicitly foregrounded the political nature of Native American writing in the period of her concern. Konkle's very specific discontent with culturalism had to do with her sense that critical focus on culture in Native writing would serve to "incorporate Native peoples into the United States politically by making them representatives of one of the many ethnic cultures that constitute the multicultural United States" (32). Native use of culture in writing, as she saw it, had very different political purposes, purposes consistent with those we have traced in a body of nationalist criticism. The culminating text of nationalist resistance to colonialism, for the moment at least, is *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006) published by the aforementioned trio of Weaver, Womack, and Warrior.[2] There is much to be said about this movement in criticism, and I hope to address the pertinent issues more fully in another essay.

The year 2006 also marked the publication of David Treuer's *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual*. Treuer, a Native American novelist,[3] revisits two of the novels that appeared in the decade following Momaday's Pulitzer, and comments as well on two published in the 1990s, just after Owens' book. Arguing for an important revision in the way Native American fiction is read, Treuer strongly rejects readings for culture that relate it to questions of authenticity and identity, insisting upon an *aesthetic* orientation to the novel, attentive foremost to *language* and to style. He says nothing about the nationalist use of culture, nor does he show any interest in the possible socio-political functions of culture in minority literature (or, indeed, in any literature).

Treuer's book also includes chapters titled "Lonely Wolf," "How to Hate/ Love an Indian," and "The Spirit Lives On." These are made up of autobiographical recollections, an account of truly horrifying racism on the part of some South Dakotans toward Indians, and reflections on the mindless sentimentality of a catalogue copy for an exhibition of Native American art. Virginia Kennedy has pointed out that these chapters work to show the "separation between literature . . . and the lived experience of Indian peoples," drawing "conclusions in each of them . . . that relate to" some of Treuer's central theses (Personal communication). Treuer, as we shall see further, draws a restrictive line between culture in literature and in "the lived experience of Indian peoples."

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[2] The book references and reprints Ortiz's essay, "Towards a National Indian Literature," originally published in 1981. Its subtitle, "Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," can be seen as joining an earlier attention to "authenticity" with a later concern for political "nationalism."

[3] *The Education of Little Tree* (1995), *The Hiawatha* (1999), and *The Translation of Dr. Apelles* (2006), a book that should be read in conjunction with the *User's Manual.*

Native American Fiction: A User's Manual was the subject of a positive article in the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* (8/19/06), and its introductory chapter appeared in the *European Review of Native American Studies* (20:1 2006). It was the subject of a panel at the Native American Literature Symposium in March of 2007, and it was discussed at a major international conference at Oklahoma University in May of 2007. Its jacket carries blurbs from Alan Trachtenberg and Werner Sollors, two major, senior Americanists. Clearly, the book has attracted attention. The remainder of this essay-review considers some of Treuer's critical claims largely on their own terms—terms which radically and, I believe, unfortunately divorce themselves from issues of colonialism and resistance in Native literature.

ii.

Treuer calls for an aesthetic orientation to the novel, attentive foremost to language and to style. "Ultimately," he asserts in his introductory "Author's Note," "the study of Native American fiction should be the study of style" (4). As he sees it, Native American fiction "has not been studied as literature as much as it should be." But the full sentence in which he laments this apparent fact creates a problem, for that sentence in its entirety reads: "*So-called* Native American fiction *(if there is such a thing)* has not been studied as literature as much as it should be" (3 emphases added). Why this assertion of the conditional existence—"*(if there is such a thing)*"—of the book's object of study, of the body of material to which it ostensibly offers a "user's manual?" Indeed, Treuer goes much further than the conditional, for he concludes his book with a section titled, "Some Final Thoughts about the *Non-Existence* of Native American Fiction" (emphasis added). Here, he clearly states that

> This book has been written with the narrow conviction that if Native American literature is worth thinking about at all, it is worth thinking about as literature. And these essays also betray a much broader conviction: *Native American fiction does not exist.* (195 emphasis added)

Having begun this essay with a brief historical sketch of Native American fiction, I must admit to finding Treuer's unequivocal assertion that it "does not exist" rather strange—all the more strange in that Treuer himself is studying Native American fiction, and, moreover, making it quite clear that "Native American literature is worth thinking about as literature." Nonetheless, he will repeat the assertion that "Native American fiction does not exist."[4] But how can we read something that does not exist

[4] Although he seems quite unaware of this, Treuer is echoing Michael Dorris' claim, in 1979, that "there is no such thing as 'Native American literature'" (qtd. in Owens 20), a claim that was disputed by Owens. Treuer thus misses another opportunity to disagree with Owens who wrote, contra Dorris, "that there is indeed such a thing as Native American literature, and . . . it is found most clearly in novels written by Native Americans about the Native American experience" (Owens 20).

"as literature"—or, for that matter, "as" anything at all? Treuer is in the position of an atheist offering a "user's manual" to God! Why does this bright, young critic feel it necessary to adopt this strategy?

Native American fiction does not exist for Treuer because he believes it can only be constituted as a category on the basis of the author's identity, as this is determined by cultural authenticity; Native American fiction is bedeviled by attention to what he calls—negatively echoing Owens, whom he does not mention here—"the terrible twins of identity and authenticity" (4). (Treuer pays no attention whatever to the vexed but important issue of blood quantum in regard to identity.) He wants to reorient critics away from these aspects of the text's "origination" toward what he calls its "destination" (5). If we focus our attention on the origins of Native American fiction—as we must if the category is to exist—he fears we will not read it as "literature," for "style." It is only "by ignoring the identity of the author and all the ways the author constructs his or her authority outside the text,"[5] that "we will be better able to ascertain the true value [sic] of that text" (3). In order to move criticism in the direction of stylistic achievement or destination—toward "the true value of [the] text"—and away from "the identity of the author," Treuer finds it necessary to claim that Native American fiction, the subject of his book, does not exist. I think this is a strategy rather than a philosophical position, i.e., that this is something Treuer finds more nearly useful than true: but it is nonetheless a classic case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Treuer's strategic solution to what he sees as the problem of reading for identity and cultural authenticity is far worse than the problem itself.

Native American fiction most certainly exists, and it can loosely be defined as fiction by someone accepted as Indian, about some aspect of American Indian life.[6] This sort of definition, to be sure, has all sorts of problems ranging from issues of how you actually determine who is Indian to whether a novel by someone who is Indian but which has little or nothing to do with Native American life is also Native American fiction. Thus, whether the "first" Native American novel by John Rollin Ridge deserves its primacy in the canon of Native American fiction; whether all or just some of John Milton Oskison's work; all or just some of Martin Cruz Smith's work; or all or just some of Lynn Riggs' work, for example, is to be classed as

[5] This, too, is a bit odd: what Treuer has thus far been concerned with is the fact that the author's authority might be an issue inside the text, where any attention paid to cultural authenticity as relevant to an author's identity—and so her "authority" as a Native writer—could distract us from the style. It is only when he later discusses the author of *The Education of Little Tree* (see below) that there is any question of an author's authority being constituted outside the text.

[6] It is the first part of this loose definition that is inevitably problematic in that definitions of Indian identity are hotly contested. But I will dare the suggestion that anyone is an American Indian who can document some quantum of "Indian blood," or who has been accepted by a federally or state recognized tribe as a tribal member, or who is generally credited by other American Indians as one of them. There are all sorts of possible objections to these criteria of which I am aware; for all that I think they are pragmatically operative. Problems such as these are the legacy of colonialism.

Native American fiction I will leave for others to determine. But there really is no way around the fact that the identity of the author serves as the determinant of all categories of minority literature, nor does that fact constrain us to reading for "identity and authenticity." To offer some obvious examples, surely fiction by someone who is "white," even if it is about black people, cannot be part of African American literature: but African American literature exists. It is writing by people generally accepted as African Americans about some aspect of African American life. I think D.H. Lawrence wrote brilliantly about women in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. But even if you agree, you cannot include excerpts from those novels in an anthology or a course in women's literature. Meanwhile, women's literature also exists; it is writing by women about some aspect of the lives of women.

The example of Lawrence, I think, gets to the crux of Treuer's concern, for he wants us to see that just because an Indian writes something about Indians it is not necessarily good, and in the same way, he wants us to see that writing about Indians by someone who is not Indian is not necessarily bad.[7] This is true and useful; Treuer wants us to focus on the writing not the writer. But this truth hardly requires him to insist, as he does, that even after we have learned that the author of *The Education of Little Tree*, Forrest Carter, is not Indian, his book nonetheless remains Native American fiction. *Little Tree*, as Treuer notes, was "for a long time . . . thought of as an example of Native American literature and then, overnight, it was not" (159). This is because in 1991, fifteen years after the book's initial publication, it was discovered that its author's real name was Asa Earl Carter, that he was not a Cherokee but a Ku Klux Klan member and speech-writer for George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama. Treuer concludes that *Little Tree* is "as 'Indian' as [Sherman Alexie's] *Reservation Blues* (and as a piece of writing . . . as Indian as any other Indian novel)" (186). If we remove *Little Tree* from the category of Native American fiction, he claims, "we are committing the sin of not treating literature as literature" (186). But treating literature as literature—and, as we will see, what Treuer means by that derives from a rather narrow understanding of American New Criticism from roughly the late 1920s to the late 1950s—will not help us determine whether a novel by a non-Indian is "as Indian" as a novel by an Indian; you cannot determine that on the basis of style alone, nor do you have to. *Little Tree* may or may not be a good novel, but it is not Native American fiction—by definition. Nor is there anything to be gained by re-inserting *Little Tree* into the canon of Native American fiction—especially since there is no such thing as Native American fiction any way. I will come back to *Little Tree* later.

[7] I think he also does not want the category of Native American fiction to exclude the author of Native American fiction from the broader category of fiction in general. And like many African American or Jewish American writers, he does not want Native American writers to be read as spokespersons for their particular group. This, too, is reasonable. Meanwhile, the fact that Saul Bellow and Treuer's teacher, Toni Morrison are, respectively, Jewish American and African American writers did not prevent them from winning Nobel Prizes in literature.

Treuer is quite reasonably tired of the expense of energy over whether one writer or another is or is not “really” Indian; he wants Native American novels to be read as literature, and he properly remarks, as I have said, that literary readings must be attentive to questions of “style,” and “language.” But I think there are very few today—probably not even David Treuer—who would say that because something is to be apprehended as literature, its aesthetic function must be conceived so narrowly as to permit nothing other than the production of beauty.

iii.

As we have noted, it is not just identity that is troublesome in Native American fiction but cultural authenticity, or, indeed, culture itself. Treuer makes a distinction between “reading books as culture and seeing books *as* capable of *suggesting* culture” (5). That distinction is not made clear either here or in the readings he later offers. Meanwhile, he seems to think that we must choose between reading *either* for style *or* for culture, so that in order to privilege the former in literature, he must banish the latter. That is a mistake, for, as Stephen Greenblatt has written,

> a culture’s narratives, like its kinship arrangements, are crucial indices of the prevailing codes governing human mobility and constraint. Great writers are precisely masters of these codes, specialists in cultural exchange. The works they create are structures for the accumulation, transformation, representation, and communication of social energies and practices. (229-30)

Thus, as Greenblatt also notes, “Cultural analysis . . . is not . . . an extrinsic analysis, as opposed to an internal formal analysis of works of art” (227). Treuer cannot or will not see this; he believes that if we read Native American fiction for culture, we will not read it for style.

His problem is entirely with culture-in-literature, for he has no argument with culture as such. Treuer holds a Ph.D. in anthropology, and surely what anthropologists work on is culture. Moreover, in a recent review of Walter Benn Michaels’ *The Trouble with Diversity*, Treuer rightly noted that he “would have liked Michaels to analyze what counts as culture instead of jettisoning culture altogether,” adding that “the Indians who fight to hold on to tribal languages and traditions are . . . attempting to define themselves on their own terms with the ultimate goal of recapturing cultural and economic self-sufficiency . . .” (13). They are, that is to say, using culture in the interests of nationalism and sovereignty. But Treuer will not allow Native American fiction itself to be culture or to use culture to play a part in this fight, and he—willfully, I suspect—ignores entirely the nationalist criticism I remarked earlier, or, indeed, *any* criticism that takes into account the socio-political *function* of Native American fiction.

(He also pays no attention, as I will note, to the social agendas of many of the New Critics.)

Treuer concludes his introductory chapter with a reference to T.S. Eliot as critic. "I side with T.S. Eliot," Treuer writes, "in thinking that a great literature only survives when it is lofted on the shoulders of great readers"(6). This is certainly meant to catch the reader's attention; not many contemporary commentators on Native American literature invoke Eliot's criticism![8] The sentiment Treuer ascribes to Eliot is not referenced; of course it may well appear somewhere in his work, for all that. I don't recognize it. Eliot's early critical work, in particular, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919/1920) did certainly urge that we consider poetry not in relation to its origin in the poet, although it says nothing whatever about its readers, the poem's destination. Rather, Eliot calls attention to the necessary relation of each new poem to what he calls "the tradition," "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer" (4), a set of textual "monuments" that "form an ideal order among themselves" (5). The St. Louis-born and Harvard-educated Mr. Eliot, neither in this essay, nor in his major poem of this period, *The Waste Land* (1922), with its huge inventory of quoted material, references a single American or female author; it's the male monuments of Europe that are to the point.

But following his baptism into the Church of England in 1927, foreshadowed in his "Ash Wednesday" (1925) and more fully explored in *The Four Quartets* (1936-1942/1943), Eliot, in his later criticism, is at least as interested in culture[9] as he is in style, that is to say, in the *function* of poetry. In a book titled, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, (1939),[10] Eliot reads poetry not only for style but for its contribution to the "idea" of the book's title. It is the early Eliot that Treuer would seem to have in mind, but his allusion is somewhat arbitrary and I think it may not be accurate.

Before going further I need to acknowledge a certain embarrassed awareness on my part that I am performing here in the role of wise elder taking a young upstart to task. I do not view myself as particularly wise (you do not need to be smart to get old), and I am not very comfortable with such a role. But Treuer's book offers a wide range of Western literary and critical references in a manner I find less than convincing and, sometimes, as I have suggested in regards to his comment on Eliot, perhaps not entirely accurate. So I beg the reader's indulgence.

An Introduction follows the Author's Note, and, as the Author's Note's

[8] I will later note Shamoon Zamir's reference to Eliot's poem, *The Waste Land* as relevant to Silko's *Ceremony*.

[9] Eliot thinks of culture in the manner of Mathew Arnold where it is synonymous with civilization. For Eliot as for Arnold, both of those terms strongly imply a value judgment (one attains to culture and civilization) and neither of them can take a plural.

[10] This book contains Eliot's unfortunate observation that "any large number of free-thinking Jews is undesirable" (129) to the health of a Christian state. This sentiment was first expressed in a lecture of 1933, but reprinted in a book published in 1939, the year of Hitler's invasion of Poland.

concluding page mentions T.S. Eliot approvingly, the Introduction's opening page offers approvingly a quotation from R. P. Blackmur. Here, a reference is given. It is to a book published in 1980, and it is quite possible that some readers will not know that this text first appeared in 1952. Blackmur (1904-1965) was an important figure in what has been called the "New Criticism," a prominent critical movement in the U.S. from roughly the early 1930s into the 1950s.[11] Treuer's citation—there is another much later reference to an important New Critical text by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren of 1938 (original publication date given)—suggests that his own determination to read novels "as literature," for "style" derives in some measure from New Critical work.

The New Critics did indeed urge that we read for style (although they, like Eliot, worked almost exclusively with poems). They did not attend to culture because their focus was exclusively on canonical European and American texts and what they banished was for the most part history, along with other contextualizing materials, psychology and biography in particular.[12] Many of them, however—Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks and others—like Eliot, had a conservative, Christian agenda. Although this was not usually made explicit in most of their actual readings, it certainly gave those readings their ideological underpinning.

Here, I will note only in passing that not only does Treuer urge that we not read novels for culture, but he also largely avoids reading them historically. He mentions the Viet Nam War, and the curious fact that Silko's *Ceremony* appeared in the same year as the first of the *Star Wars* movies (1977), but he does very little either with the war or with that coincidence. His lack of interest in historical contextualization may be reflected in the fact that he does not arrange his book's discussions of particular novels in chronological order. Thus, his study of Silko's *Ceremony* of 1977 comes after consideration of Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* of 1993, and the Alexie chapter, focused on a novel published in 1995, follows the one on Silko. Consistent, perhaps, with his understanding of New Critical practice, he gives very little information that might valuably contextualize even our readings for style, asserting that "there is nothing beyond language in literature" (76).[13] But this is only true if we keep in mind the fact that the language in any piece of literary writing is itself imbricated in history and, to be sure, culture—not to mention ideology which resides far outside the borders of Treuer's conception of the literary. Every language has an order, a history, and a

[11] I can, however, personally testify to its persistence into the 1960s, for it was the dominant reading strategy taught in the graduate school of Columbia University during my years of attendance, 1963-7.

[12] The reader interested in these matters may wish to look at, among many other things, my chapter, "Criticism and the Canon," in *The Voice in the Margin* (1989). Notes on pp. 61-2 include my comment that "New Critical formalism was not in the least apolitical but committed to a determined, if sometimes vague, feudalist program . . ." (61).

[13] Treuer might also have invoked a stage of Derridaean and de Manian post-structuralism often summarized by the mantra "il n'y a pas de hors-texte," there is nothing outside the text. But he is not much interested in pursuing the theoretical underpinnings of his positions.

causal/consequential relation[14] to a specific moment in a specific culture/society that precedes any author's engagement with and inflection of it.

To give a simple example, consider a comment a student of mine made recently, "King Lear, he had, like, three daughters." (I am assuming that the same considerations would pertain if we found this sentence in a novel.) What do we need to know to understand her "style?" For one thing, we would need to know that the word "like" in American colloquial speech of the last twenty years does not always function as an indicator of comparison, and it might also help if one had some sense of the way in which California "Valley Girl" speech had spread from a West Coast teenage dialect to a hegemonic American lingua franca. But none of that information is conveyed by the words themselves. Or, consider the use in English of the word "gay" or the word "fairy." If we find those words in a text, we can only know what they mean—and, too, what they do not mean—by having some idea of when the text was written, and, to some extent, where it was written. The British new critic, I.A. Richards performed a number of experiments in which he gave undergraduates poems to read without telling them the author's name or the date of composition. He found that their readings for style or language alone were frequently wildly mistaken according to accepted critical standards.

iv.

But there is something more at issue in Treuer's approving mention of Eliot and his citation of Blackmur. By referring to them early on, he is, in what I think is again an intentionally provocative manner, going against the grain of what I noted earlier, the important movement in contemporary Native American literary criticism that seeks to call attention to and make use of indigenous critical thought. To be sure, this movement, in addition to the positive developments I have noted, has also had some less than positive developments. Thus, Devon Mihesuah, former editor of the *American Indian Quarterly*, a novelist, critic, and fine scholar in her own right, in an essay called "Indigenizing the Academy," a Keynote Address to the Sixth Annual American Indian Studies Consortium Conference in 2005, insists that "*We need to use more indigenous theories*," acknowledging that she is "guilty sometimes of using *too many* ideas of non-Natives when I should be using the ideas of indigenous intellectuals" (135 second emphasis added). She makes clear that she is "not saying that Foucault, Nietzsche, [Edward] Said, [James] Clifford and others have no place . . . ," and yet her insistence is that "we have to start showing by example and teaching in the classroom the ideas of indigenous thinkers" (135). But surely the most important thing is for Native and non-Native scholars to be as widely informed as possible—which does

[14] Like the unanswerable question of whether consciousness determines the material conditions of society or whether the material conditions of society determine consciousness (unanswerable because there is no way to examine either possible cause independently of possible effects), so, too, is it an unanswerable question whether language determines culture or culture determines language. To some extent like chickens and eggs, causes and consequences are not clearly distinguishable.

indeed mean paying attention to "the ideas of indigenous thinkers"—many more of whom, as I have said, are available in print at the present moment than perhaps at any moment in the past—but not necessarily privileging an idea because of its author's identity. To do so leads to such unfortunate exercises as the coyly-titled recent book, *Muting White Noise* (2006), in which James Cox, a non-Native scholar, makes the arbitrary determination—based, he claims, on "respect for Native voices" (4)—to use non-Native criticism, scholarship, and theory as little as possible, thus "muting" all "white noise" except his own. No wonder that Treuer can ask, with reasonable exasperation (if, as well, a slight measure of exaggeration), "Why is there such a strain and stain of anti-intellectualism in . . . Native literary criticism?" (56). [15]

But there is a good deal of quite rigorous intellectual work in "Native literary criticism" that has been done by both Native and non-Native scholars. Treuer's book notices little of this.[16] Does he ignore so many Native scholars because he believes that Native American fiction employs "a stunning array of literary techniques, *sourced mostly from Western fiction*" (67 emphasis added)? Certainly, he goes out of his way to find not Native but European and Euramerican literary and critical sources for his readings. This seems an instance of a talented young writer intentionally being outrageous, or trying to *epater la bourgeoisie*, and my choice of a French phrase, here, is also self-conscious and strategic. I mean it to mirror ironically Treuer's provocative manner.

His book has no Index (I draw no conclusions from that fact), but a quick perusal of his endnotes, as well as a scan of the various chapters, yields the following references. Among the European and American writers and critics mentioned, there are, as previously noted, Blackmur and Eliot early on. Then we have: Charles Baudelaire, Alexander Pope, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Gilmore Simms, John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Erich Auerbach (two citations), Stephane Mallarmé, Gustave Flaubert, Homer, Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, James Fenimore Cooper (two citations), Rene Chateaubriand, Ernest Hemingway, John Milton, Raymond Carver, Marcel Proust, Aristotle, Italo Calvino, the novelist Charles Baxter (the citations, however, is to a book of his essays), Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, and Dante Alighieri. The Silko chapter has passing reference to such works as *Remembrance of Things Past, The Magic Mountain, Confessions of Zeno* [Italo Svevo], and *Hunger* [Knut Hamsun], (116) along with what he calls the Greek "pastoral novels," *Daphnis and Chloe* and the *Ethiopica* (140). Ernest Hemingway is cited as providing the "*real* source of Tayo's sexual healing" in *Ceremony* (138 emphasis added). I will examine Treuer's chapter on *Ceremony* in some detail just below.

[15] It is some particularly unfortunate catalogue copy for a Native American art exhibit that prompts this question.

[16] All I have found are very brief references to Paula Gunn Allen, Louis Owens, William Warren, Silko and Alexie as critical writers, and to his brother, the linguist, Anton Treuer. Joseph Bruchac and Rennard Strickland are mentioned for their embarrassing early endorsement of *Little Tree.*

As I have noted, Treuer does not get to Silko's 1977 novel until after reflections on Erdrich's 1993 *Love Medicine,* and James Welch's 1986 *Fool's Crow*. I have no idea why he has structured the book this way. "Smartberries," the chapter on Erdrich is devastatingly persuasive. Treuer knows the Ojibwe language a good deal better than Erdrich knew it over a decade ago—his book is dedicated to his brother Anton Treuer for his "efforts to save and promote the Ojibwe language"—and perhaps better than she knows it still.[17] He can quite easily show that her uses of Ojibwe phrases is essentially off, and he translates a recently narrated Ojibwe oral tale to demonstrate that critical claims suggesting that Erdrich's fiction actually resembles oral narrative are quite mistaken. Making brief reference to Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife* of 1998, he shrewdly notes the way in which interpolated German phrases are not translated or treated in the same way as Ojibwe phrases are. Treuer concludes that "Ojibwe functions as an ornament, not as a working part of the novel's [*Love Medicine's*] machinery [?]" (61).

The central point of the chapter on Welch's *Fool's Crow* is that language trumps culture. Treuer examines Welch's ostensibly literal translations from the Blackfoot language—phrases such as "cold maker" for winter; "near-woman" as an insult to manliness, or "ears-far-apart" for owl—to show that there are many places where Welch does not consistently adhere to such literalness. He notes that Welch's novel has an important character named "Owl Child" not "Ears-Far-Apart Child" because that would be stylistically infelicitous (83). In the same way, "wood biter" may appear on one page while "beaver" appears on the next; "stick-that-speaks-from-afar" yields to rifle (84), and so on. This alternation, Treuer comments, shows "that the book is not a conversation occurring within a culture as much as it is a conversation between the material and the novel form" (84). His demonstration means to provide evidence for his earlier assertion that reading the novel for cultural "authenticity" and "accuracy" is mistaken, and it is offered in the generally iconoclastic manner that Treuer regularly adopts.

But could not one agree with most of Treuer's observations about *Fool's Crow* and differently conclude that the book is a conversation between *two cultural perspectives*, an ostensibly Blackfoot perspective and whatever cultural perspective inheres in the novel form? I am thinking of Shamoon Zamir's observation about *Ceremony*—I will briefly return to this later—that it is an example of "Silko's effort to create a *hybrid literary form*, a novel in which Pueblo oral traditions and western literary forms and narratives are juxtaposed and intercut as part of a *complex process*

[17] Erdrich's mother and grandfather were Mitchif speakers. The language, a creole mix of French nouns, Cree verbs and complex verb constructions, and some Ojibwe borrowings, is now classified as "moribund." Having begun her study of the Ojibwe language in the 1980s, Erdrich also used it in two novels for children, the first of which, *The Birchbark House* (1999), includes a four-page glossary, and the second of which, *The Game of Silence* (2005), has a five page glossary. In her non-fiction book, *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* (2003), Erdrich offered a note indicating her awareness of possible language errors but also testifying to her consultation with the Native speaker, Tonbasonakwut. I thank Professor Lavonne Brown Ruoff for this and other relevant information.

of mutual transformation" (397 emphases added).

Treuer insists that we must not read Native fiction in order to experience culture, and he is surely correct. But he is also fighting a straw man or one who passed away some time ago. Indeed, as he admits in his endnotes, several of his citations from those who claim to have found and appreciated authentic Indian culture in fiction come from jacket blurbs, popular reviews, and websites. But most serious readers surely know that blurbs are largely honorific, no matter who provides them.[18] Treuer shrewdly notes that similar foolish praise about the presence of Indian culture was offered to George Bird Grinnell; he cites the remark of one commentator that reading Grinnell's books on the Cheyenne, "one can smell the buffalo grass and the wood fires, feel the heavy morning dew on the prairie" (98). This silly stuff goes back at least to Natalie Curtis (1907), and especially to Mary Austin in the 1920s. Austin claimed she could, without knowing the language of a Native chant or song, intuit from its "rhythm" whether it came from the plains or the woodlands or the mountains[19] —and this sort of silly stuff does unfortunately still appear. But this bears very little on Welch's achievement in *Fool's Crow*.

For Welch has most certainly provided imaginative reconstructions of a different way of seeing and experiencing the world. His reconstructions are linguistic, to be sure; they are made of words; we can only see or experience as a function of his style. But if appreciating his style as literature is surely incumbent upon the reader, the reader's work need not end there. As Treuer would agree, style *creates*, literature creates possibilities for experience that did not exist prior to the words on the page—although those words do not create from nothing. This is to say that what the style creates is an experience that may indeed have something to do with traditional Blackfeet culture—which very few could experience even approximately were it not for the style. Native American novels, or any novel, need to be read as literature, and literary readings must be attentive to questions of "style," and "language"; so, too, must literary readings attend to form and structure, and not merely at the level of the sentence but at the level of the chapter, and of the novel as a whole. But this sort of attention need not stand in opposition to considerations of what the style, the language, the form of a novel *imply* and the way in which those implications relate to and work in the world.

This is where Treuer's deeply Western commitment to Aristotelean or structuralist binaries does him no good service. As I noted above, he tends to imply that we must read

[18] This is sadly true of Treuer's own book. As I have noted, its back jacket has blurbs from Alan Trachtenberg and Werner Sollors, senior Americanists whose work I hold in the very highest regard. But their jacket comments suggest only a casual read-through. Their blurbs have little substantive use for those who intend to read Treuer's book carefully, but they are no doubt useful as a selling point for those who do not pay a whole lot of attention to Native American literature.

[19] Mary Austin, *The American Rhythm: Studies and Reexpressions of Amerindian Songs*, originally published 1923. Curtis's book, just mentioned, is titled, *The Indians' Book: An Offering by the American Indians of Indian Lore, Musical and Narrative, to Form a Record of the Songs and Legends of Their Race.*

either for culture *or* for language; *either* we interest ourselves in a novel's origin or we look at where it is going, and how it is getting there (that is the most generous paraphrase of Treuer's instantiation of "destination" as the opposite of "origin" that I can provide). *Either* we consider perspective or worldview *or* we examine style. The examination of style is an important dimension of Treuer's chapter on Sherman Alexie's *Reservation Blues*, to which I will now turn.

v.

Reservation Blues was published in 1995, and Treuer examines it, as I have noted, after he has considered the earlier *Ceremony*. There are many fine things in this chapter; Treuer can be an astute close reader. One of the things he does superbly is to demonstrate the illogic of some of Alexie's sentences. My favorite example of his careful reading involves a sentence in which Alexie's narrator remarks that a character had hair so long that he "could have donated yards of the stuff and made a fortune" (qtd. in Treuer 171). Treuer wryly comments that "most of us have yet to make a fortune giving things away for free" (171). He has many other sharp observations along these lines.[20]

Treuer also compares Alexie's *Reservation Blues* to Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*, as we have already noted. He reads them both as novels of education, and both, he claims, are Indian literature. That *Little Tree*'s author turned out not to be a Cherokee was, indeed, something of an embarrassment for the Cherokee law professor, Rennard Strickland, and the Abenaki poet, fiction writer, and editor Joseph Bruchac, both of whom had praised the book. And, in Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1998), as Treuer notes, an important character in the novel lashes out at one of her college professors who dares to insist that *Little Tree* might still be considered Native American literature. [21]

Treuer neatly shows that both *Little Tree* and Alexie's *Reservation Blues* rely a good deal on the trope of *hyperbole* and that both novels—Carter's in an old-fashioned and sentimental manner, Alexie's in a cool and angry manner—tend to racial essentializing.[22] Treuer is completely unsentimental about this dimension of Alexie's work, noting that

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[20] I can not deny having enjoyed Treuer's skewering of Alexie's style. But as he must surely know, it is not logic or semantic coherence that determines the effectiveness of style in a work of fiction. If you try to grade Faulkner's sentences in, say, *Light in August*, for their communication value you will simply abandon the book as nonsense. Lots of sentences that "don't make sense," however, are highly effective expressively.

[21] Treuer quotes the view of this character, Marie, to the effect that novels are supposed to "present an authentic and traditional view of the Indian world," (164) and he ascribes her view to Alexie, the author, something he surely knows readers of fiction should be wary of doing.

[22] Having earlier mentioned how much good work on Native American fiction leaves unmentioned, perhaps I may note here that my own lengthy study of Alexie's *Indian Killer* in *Red Matters* (2002) might have been of interest to him. There, I consider what I variously refer to as Alexie's rougetude, "intrinsic racism," and "anti-racist racism" in order to arrive at conclusions not unlike Treuer's on this matter.

all too often in *Reservation Blues* (and, I would add, elsewhere in Alexie's work), "a white person does something stupid, which is racialized as 'white behavior'" (167). He unflinchingly points to the fact that "Making brown babies is the logical end point of the novel," and that this is "crude, reductive, uncharitable, ignorant . . . and essentialist. And it is completely understandable" (180). These powerful observations cannot possibly derive from consideration of Alexie's style alone.

Nor can style alone lead us to Treuer's conclusion about *Little Tree* that I mentioned earlier, that it is "as 'Indian' as *Reservation Blues* (and as a piece of writing . . . as Indian as any other Indian novel)" (186). Treuer says that if we ignore *Little Tree* "we are committing the sin of not treating literature as literature" (186). But surely we can treat it as literature without treating it as Indian literature. Attention to authorship in *Little Tree* might, of course, be no more than the sort of problematic identity politicking Treuer admirably deplores. But it need not be that at all. To know who the author was and, at least to some extent, what he believed can alert us to an important dimension of all literary writing that is not solipsistically stylistic. (We used to talk about this sort of thing as a matter of *positionality*, and we may usefully continue to do so.) Consider, for example, some of Shari Huhndorf's observations in her study of *Little Tree*. Huhndorf writes,

> Ironically, the idyllic portrait Carter paints . . . in many respects actually complements the author's earlier Klan politics. Reading this book together with Carter's earlier novel *Gone to Texas* reveals that his fiction articulates a white supremacist vision despite the Indian sympathies it claims. (152)

Huhndorf's detailed elaboration of these claims is entirely persuasive. Treuer is critical of the notion "that the role of literature is to represent" (164), but he construes representation very narrowly in order to accommodate his critique of "authenticity." (Meanwhile, the subtitle of Erich Auerbach's monumental volume, *Mimesis*, which Treuer quotes approvingly, is nothing less than *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.) In any case, when it comes to an account of actual historical events even in a work of fiction (and Carter's book, we might note, did not claim to be a novel but a memoir), surely it cannot entirely be an error to compare the novelistic account to what we know from other sources. We may enjoy the fictional account as literature regardless of its relation to factuality; but how is it an insult to literariness to note that relation?

vi.

Let me turn now to Treuer's chapter on Silko's *Ceremony*, which is called "The Myth of Myth." Treuer's aim is to show the "very incommensurability of the mythic forms used by Silko and the novel form in which they are couched [sic] . . ." (149).[23]

The chapter begins with a summary description of the novel, followed by three sections: "Sickness" (117-128), "Textual Healing" (128-131), and a lengthy final section also called "The Myth of Myth" (131-152). It is in this final section that Treuer discusses the differences between the styles of what he calls myth and novelistic prose. Treuer uses Erich Auerbach's distinction between paratactic and hypotactic styles (although he does not, here, reference Auerbach's *Mimesis* from which he takes this distinction). He quotes a passage of "myth" from *Ceremony* that Silko presents on the page in prose (Treuer 134) noting, that its style is paratactic (simple constructions in which major clauses stand alone or are connected by "and") rather than hypotactic (subordinate clauses and complex constructions), as the writing of the novel proper, to call it that, often is. "The prose in *Ceremony*," Treuer asserts, "is very different from the staged innocence of myth" (135). He will also reasonably question why myth in the novel is often made to "look like poetry" (145).

There are a great many problems with Treuer's discussion that once more have to do with his avoidance or unawareness of scholarship on at least two issues that he engages. First is work on *orality*, the style and modalities of oral performance. Second, is work on *mythography*, the translation and transformation of oral performances—acts in time—to writing, textual objects in space, words on the printed page. Treuer's discussion would have been greatly aided by Robert Dale Parker's work on "the invention of Native American literature" which discusses in detail the question that Treuer quite reasonably asks, Why it is that oral myths since the 1970s have predominantly been made to look like poetry on the printed page? (There are also volumes and volumes of criticism on Silko and *Ceremony* that Treuer has either not read or not found worthy of citation.)

To take this latter issue first, it is necessary for the reader to recall that the distinction between poetry and prose is a distinction entirely of the written page. Although anthologies like the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* contain sections labeled "Native American Poetry" and "Native American Prose," printing transcriptions of oral literature in broken lines on the one hand, and in block paragraphs on the other, the decision to write these performances in verse or in prose is the decision of the transcriber and translator; it does not inhere in the material itself.[24] In much the same

[23] I think "couched" is not the most accurate verb choice here. Whether I am right or not, I will briefly take this opportunity to note the oddity of a number of Treuer's word choices. Because this book is so intensely focused on language and style, this is not as petty a quibble as it might otherwise be; people who throw stones should be sure to build their own houses out of solid materials. In the Silko chapter, for example, Treuer uses the terms "uxoric" and "uxorious" on the same page (126). He says that sex in *Ceremony* "is desperate, never uxoric," and he speaks of Tayo's time with Ts'eh "as marked by the tender terror at the temporality of their uxorious paradise." My old, Random House College dictionary does not have "uxoric" in it, but I am sure some larger or newer one does. "Uxorious," however, means "doting upon, foolishly fond of, or affectionately over-submissive toward one's wife." Desperate sex does not sound like something to praise, but, then, neither does "uxoric" sex. And, for all the fine alliteration of the second phrase I've quoted, I'm not at all sure what it actually means. Their "uxorious paradise?" when the sex "is desperate, never uxoric?"

way it is important to recall that what we call myths were originally orally performed before they were written down—this is true for Greece, Rome, and ancient Israel, as well as for indigenous America. Orally transmitted material must always be paratactic in its style because the auditor who has only one chance to understand what is being said can more easily understand simple rather than complex constructions. It is not that oral material is conceptually simple or "innocent"; rather, because it is language that is audible only for a moment, it must take forms that can be grasped in a moment.[25]

Although Treuer cites myth in Silko in prose, he also, as we have noted, reasonably wonders why it is very often presented as poetry. He finds useful commentary on this matter by the poet John Hollander. But Treuer would have done well, as I've said, to consult Robert Dale Parker's "Text, Lines, and Videotape: Reinventing Oral Stories as Written Poems" which discusses the issue thoroughly and does so specifically in relation to Native American material. Treuer also briefly returns to Hollander to help him with the distinction between myth and poetry (147) with no mention of decades of major work on the subject by Claude Levi-Strauss. Is it because "Levi-Strauss" is a signifier of "culture" that the eminent French anthropologist's work could not be to the point? Treuer certainly goes to anthropological sources when it comes to Ojibwe language and culture. And, as we have noted, he has a Ph.D. in anthropology, so he must know Levi-Strauss' work.

The chapter proceeds to an assertion that seems to me arbitrary and, again, intentionally provocative and *epatant*, as Treuer makes the claim that Hemingway is more important to *Ceremony* than Pueblo myth. As I have quoted him earlier, Treuer writes, "The *real* source of Tayo's sexual healing with Ts'eh has a not-so-remote ancestor in Hemingway, not in Pueblo myth" (138 emphasis added). He quotes a passage from *Ceremony* that describes sex between Tayo and Ts'eh and compares it to a passage from one of Hemingway's "Nick Adams" stories, "Fathers and Sons," in which Nick has sex with an Ojibwe woman. There is a conceptual problem here that needs attention, but first let me comment on Treuer's reading of the passages he cites from Silko and from Hemingway for *style*. I think he is badly mistaken, but I can only show why I think that by reproducing in full the passages he has quoted. I ask the reader's indulgence. Here is the passage Treuer quotes from *Ceremony*:

[24] On this, see Parker's "Text, Lines, and Videotape: Reinventing Oral Stories as Written Poems."

[25] It also is concrete rather than abstract and tends to avoid forms of the verb to be. Here are just a few of Eric Havelock's remarks on the differences between the original Greek of the opening of Oedipus the King and a widely used translation. The David Grene translation opens with Oedipus saying, "The town is heavy with a mingled burden of sounds and smells." Havelock's literal translation of the Greek has: "The city altogether bulges with incense burnings" (95 emphases added). A bit later, the Grene translation has Oedipus begin a sentence with, "I would be very hard . . . ." The Greek, however, as Havelock translates is, "Unpainable I would exist" (96). We have known something about oral performance at least since the 1930s and the work of Milman Parry on Homer, followed in the 1950s by Albert Lord, Havelock himself, and Father Walter Ong. Subsequent work by Ruth Finnegan, Ong, and John Miles Foley is also of use for these purposes.

> He watched her face, and her eyes never shifted; they were with him while she moved out of her clothes and while she slipped his jeans down his legs, stroking his thighs. She unbuttoned his shirt, and all he was aware of was the heat of his own breathing and the warmth radiating from his belly, pulsing between his legs . . . He let the motion carry him, and he could feel the momentum within, at first almost imperceptible, gathering in his belly. When it came, it was the edge of a steep riverbank crumbling under the downpour until suddenly it all broke loose and collapsed into itself. (qtd. in Treuer 138)

And here is the passage from Hemingway:

> Could you say that she did first what no one has ever done better and mention plump brown legs, flat belly, hard little breasts, well holding arms, quick searching tongue, the flat eyes, the good taste of mouth, then uncomfortably, tightly sweetly, moistly, lovely, tightly, achingly, fully, finally, unendingly, never-endingly, never-to-endingly, suddenly ended, the great bird flown like an owl in the twilight . . . (qtd. in Treuer 138-9)

Treuer says of Trudy,[26] the "she" of this passage, that "She barely speaks, just like Ts'eh. She is blithely open to having sex, just like Ts'eh. There is no sense, in either case, that there is a sexual exchange, equal or otherwise. The erotic eye is only focused on the men" (138). Treuer's commentary continues but let us take only this much for the moment.

Trudy is not actively involved in the Hemingway passage at all; the only verbs of action associated with her—"Could you say *she did* first what no one has ever *done* better . . ." (emphases added)—are just a manner of speaking on the part of the narrator. There is no sense of her *doing* anything; she is the one *done* to. But the opening sentence of the paragraph quoted from Silko has first, Tayo watching Ts'eh's face while, next, Ts'eh *moves* out of her clothes, *slips* off Tayo's jeans, *strokes* his thighs, and *unbuttons* his shirt. The rest most certainly focuses on Tayo's climax, but this is quite different from Hemingway's un-Hemingway-like string of adverbs in a bathetic display of purple prose.[27] Silko describes Tayo's coming in terms of momentum and metaphors of downward movement; Hemingway reverts to upward movement and cliché. Tayo's climax plausibly

[26] A later story of Hemingway's called "Ten Little Indians" has Nick involved with an Indian woman named Prudie, although there is no explicit description of sex between them. "Fathers and Sons" first appeared as the last story of *Winner Take Nothing* (1933); "Ten Little Indians" appeared in *Men Without Women* (1937), and I'll chance the guess that Hemingway simply forgot that he had earlier called Nick's Indian girl friend Trudy and so here named her Prudie.

involves crumbling and collapsing; Nick's involves "the great bird flown like an owl in the night." What "great bird" could that be other than Nick's happy phallus?

Treuer finds "Both passages . . . beautiful . . . well constructed and heart quickening" (139). I find Hemingway's passage thoroughly embarrassing. Treuer then says that "clearly [!] Tayo's sexual healing does not parallel the myths in *Ceremony* as much as it parallels Nick Adam's sexual education. Or it does parallel a myth, just not the one presented to us by Silko" (139). For one thing, he simply does not see, as Virginia Kennedy has written, that

> Ts'eh and also Night Swan are empowered through sex with an ability to heal. Through them sex is associated with creative forces and the power of women to have possession of their own bodies and to share who they are and what they can do of their own free will. (Personal communication)

If Silko's treatment of Ts'eh and Tayo "does parallel a myth, just not the one presented to us by Silko," we may reasonably ask what exactly is the myth "presented to us by Silko" that is to no point? Treuer will not say; he refuses to specify the Keresan Yellow Woman myths "presented to us by Silko." Why is this? It cannot be because he does not know them or know of them, for he has cited a text of Silko's that has Yellow Woman in its title, and, too, I would guess he also probably knows the story called "Yellow Woman" in Silko's *Storyteller* (1981). But he will not write the name Yellow Woman—not even to specify her story as a failed mythic comparison.

Instead, the "myth" that Tayo's sex with Ts'eh "parallels" is "the myth of the educationally available Indian woman" (140), as in the Hemingway story, and he finds its antecedents in the ancient *Greek* "pastoral novels" (140), *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, and the *Ethiopica*, by Heliodorus.[28] Treuer's point is that Ts'eh, like women in these ancient tales, "is sexually available and more experienced," and thus "educates" Tayo, as, indeed, the Indian woman Trudy educated Nick Adams in Hemingway's "Fathers

[27] It is curious for such a teleologically oriented critic as Treuer to be genealogically presenting "the real source" of Silko's passage. Meanwhile, sources for Hemingway's passage, I would suggest, could well be some of the passages in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1930) describing sex between Connie Chatterley and Oliver Mellors, her lover, or passages in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), in particular from the "Nausicaa" chapter which involves Leopold Bloom masturbating on the beach as he watches young, flirty, Gerty McDowell.

[28] Longus, a Greek who lived on the island of Lesbos and was perhaps a freedman of a Roman family named Longus, wrote in the second century C.E. Daphnis and Chloe are innocents, he, nurtured as a child by goats, she, by sheep. It is someone named Lycaemion who is the experienced woman who does indeed educate Daphnis. The *Ethiopica*, more usually spelled *Aethiopica*—as I discovered from a good deal of googling—is an extremely long and convoluted story by Heliodorus, a Syrian Greek who is said to have written about the fourth century C.E. He is not named by Treuer—indeed, until I looked up these titles, I believed it was Longus who had written both of the Greek texts mentioned—although Treuer's phrase "the other writers of these romances" does indeed leave open the possibility of an author for the *Aethiopica* other than Longus. I have found internet summaries of the *Aethiopica* but there are so many characters in it and so many plot twists, that I must take Treuer's word that this text as well includes an available, sexually experienced woman to educate one of the protagonists.

and Sons." But there are a great many years and a great many literary texts separating the Greeks and Hemingway. If Treuer were really serious about this theme, or motif, or *topos* actually *operating* as a "myth" more powerful than any version of the Yellow woman myths in *Ceremony*, he might fill in some of the gaps. Regrettably, I think he is not serious; once more he is content merely to be epatant. He calls the theme or *topos* of the sexual instructress a myth so that he can assert its greater relevance than any Pueblo myth in the novel, and that is the end of it. If we must have a myth, says Treuer, how about this one. Any myth, it seems, will do so long as it is not a myth claiming to derive "authentically" from the "culture" depicted in the novel! This is, conceptually, as I have said, a problem; and it is yet one more of this book's deep contradictions: having denied that myth was functionally operative in *Ceremony*, Treuer now claims that, after all, myth does indeed operate—provided we have the right myth, one that cannot and must not derive from Native American culture. [29]

Committed to the view that instantiations of any Pueblo myths actually invoked in *Ceremony* are no more than fake poetry or what he calls "cultural nostalgia" (151), Treuer cannot allow Silko's invocation of Yellow Woman stories to be *part* of what the novel does. For him, to see what the novel actually *does* requires that we reject entirely the author's use of mythic reference (or that we substitute mythic reference that Treuer himself arbitrarily provides). This is just wrong for the simple reason that—as was the case with Welch—mythic or cultural reference in these novels is deeply involved with, is *part* of what the novels *do*.

Shamoon Zamir has usefully complicated readings of Silko's use of myth by pointing out that

> *Ceremony* traces a precarious trajectory between a genuinely inventive local resistance and a deeply nostalgic recodification that aligns Silko's narratives not so much with their traditional sources of Pueblo oral culture as with Western high modernism's reactionary appropriation of a global mythology of sacrificial rejuvenation . . . (400)

Zamir calls the final section of his essay on *Ceremony* "'What the Thunder Said': Pueblo Modernism." In it, he reads *Ceremony*'s climactic scene as "based not on Native American sources but on the final section of Eliot's *The Waste Land*" (407). His reading is too complex and nuanced for me to summarize here, so I will say only that this instantiation of an alternate mythology, for all its apparent *either/or* logic (based not on this but on that), can quite easily be adjusted to a *both/and* logic, and even within the terms of Zamir's essay. The point is not to obliterate myth or to instantiate a

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[29] It has also been pointed out to me that Treuer's third novel, *The Translation of Dr. Apelles*, published the same year as the *User's Manual*, contains a reworking of the Daphnis and Chloe story. I have read the novel only once, and this did not occur to me. Short of a second reading, I am entirely willing to admit that may be a failure on my part.

completely arbitrary and largely irrelevant *topos* as myth, but, again, to see the way in which cultural or mythic reference in no way commits us to reading for culture; rather, it commits us to reading *fully*.

Perhaps Treuer's conceptual confusions influence the writing in his concluding paragraph to this chapter. I am tentatively suggesting that if his analysis was more secure, so, too, might his prose *style* be at this crucial point. Treuer writes:

> If we can manage to tear our gaze away from the crib and cradle of "pure" or "authentic" culture and redirect it at the more interesting and active adolesence of the prose, we will be able to do better than Tayo. We will not just remember the story, we will also understand how it works. (152)

Is it that we are to tear our "gaze" from the cribs and cradles of an infancy committed to cultural authenticity in order to see better the "active adolescence" of Silko's prose? (An actively adolescent prose?!) If so, will this actually help us "do better" than Silko's fictional character? Will it help us not "just remember the story, [but] also understand how it works"? (152) I doubt it. Treuer has all too well, here, succeeded in one of the aspects of his provocative project. Confronted with *language* like this, with such a *style*, I am indeed, baffled, shocked, and astonished. There are many things in *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* to admire, but there is also a very great deal that is dubious in the extreme.

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