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Indigeneity and Early American Literature

Summary

Indigeneity is the abstract noun form of “indigenous,” defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “Born or produced naturally in a land or region”; in conventional usage, it refers primarily to “aboriginal inhabitants or natural products.” Indigeneity has a conceptually complex relationship to American literary history before 1830, insofar as, for most of the history of the field, “early American literature” has predominately referred to works written in European languages, scripts, and genres, produced by peoples of European origin and their descendants. Within this framework, until Native Americans began adopting and adapting these languages, scripts, and genres for their own use, there were no literary works that might be simultaneously characterized as “indigenous” and “early American.”

Four conceptualizations of the relationship between indigeneity and early American literature provide a basis for this history and its historiography. Three of these pertain to cultural works produced at least in part by Native Americans: these are (1) written representations of Native American spoken performances, or “oral literature”; (2) writings that register various degrees of participation in literacy practices by Native American converts to Christianity; and (3) cultural works that employ non-alphabetic indigenous sign-systems, or “indigenous literacies.” These formulations variously challenge conventional ideas about literature and related terms such as authorship and

writing; in the case of the Christian Indians, they can also challenge notions of indigeneity.

A fourth conceptualization of the relationship between indigeneity and early American literature is premised on narrow definitions of these seemingly antithetical terms: it pertains to the aesthetic project of some settler-colonial authors who hoped to connect their prose and verse works to the domestic landscape, to assert their cultural independence from England, and to enact the replacement of Native American cultural traditions with their own.

Keywords

indigeneity, early American literature, oral literature, literacy, media, settler colonialism

Oral Literature in the Canon

European and Anglo-American depictions of Indians appear throughout the letters, colonial relations, histories, poems, essays, prose-fiction, and miscellaneous works that compose standard anthologies of early American literature. Texts expressing Native American participation in their own representation, however, are relatively scarce, and these consist primarily of written representations of spoken-word performances, affirming the understanding, as expressed in the 1994 *Cambridge History of American Literature*, that the indigenous peoples encountered by European colonists in North America “had an old and richly developed oral literature; they did not write.”¹ These hybrid texts put a strain on the operative definition of literature, already much more of a

catch-all in early American studies than for contemporary periods in British literary history. They raise challenging questions about chronology, authorship, and interpretation.

For example, Volume A of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, covering “Beginnings to 1820,” slots in the Iroquois and Navajo “Stories of the Beginning of the World,” before Christopher Columbus’s 1493 “Letter to Santangel.” (Columbus’s letter, incidentally, introduced the misnomer whereby indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere became known as “Indians.”) But if these Native American oral traditions emanate from the so-called pre-Columbian era, surely their written performances, by the Tuscarora David Cusick (1827) and the Navajo Irvin Morris (1997), also reflect their contemporary contexts.² So why place them at (or before) “the beginnings” of American literary history? “The inclusion of Native American myths in the opening pages of American or Canadian literature anthologies,” according to Cherokee scholar Christopher Teuton, “serves to reinforce a teleological literary history from the premodern to the present, all the while encoding colonial narratives of ‘progress.’”³ In other words, despite the *Norton*’s attempt to avoid using non-Indian representations of these creation myths, it places them as precursors to an American literary history that is already determined in part by teleology, or the anticipation of the national literature of what William Spengemann refers to as “the future United States.”⁴

Similarly, the set of “Native American Trickster Tales,” drawn largely from 20th-century ethnographic collections, is sandwiched between John Smith and William Bradford, creating the sort of “historical disjunction” that Michael A. Elliott discusses in

his analysis of the inclusion of “Coyote–His Myth,” a tale translated by the anthropologist Franz Boaz and performed by his informant Charles Cultee (Chinook) in 1890, in an earlier edition of the *Norton*.⁵ For Elliott, such selections pose the “danger of meaningless tokenism,” but an approach that considers the interpretive complications they pose—including the problems of mediation and translation, the interaction between the ethnographer and the informant, the alienation of the text from the cultural context of the oral performance, and the relationship of a performance at a particular time and place to a longstanding oral tradition—is brimming with pedagogical possibility, presenting the potential to “disrupt the categories *American, literary, and history*.”⁶ In other words, with regard to culture, form, and chronology, the inclusion of a written representation of a performance of a Native American oral tradition challenges the logic underlying a national literary history of the United States.

As Peter Nabokov has argued, indigenous traditions can challenge Western notions of history more generally; accordingly, Native American narrative accounts “usually arrive in English under the cover terms ‘oral tradition’ or ‘legend.’”⁷ The *Norton*’s inclusion of the “Delaware Indian Legend of Hudson’s Arrival” is a case in point. The anthology pairs it with the 1609 journal of Robert Juet, Hudson’s first mate, noting, “Although its details do not completely match those of Juet’s journal, it provides a fascinating glimpse of the other side of the narrative divide.”⁸ Yet the effect of this juxtaposition is to place documentary evidence on one side of the divide and “legend” on the other. It is unclear why the “legend” is attributed to John Heckewelder, the Moravian missionary who recorded and translated it, rather than to his Delaware Indian informants,

but Heckewelder himself refers to it as an “account,” recognizing that it pertains to a genre of oral tradition that advances positive claims about past events.⁹ Moreover, although some of these claims, especially the Delaware account’s representation of the first colonial land transaction, may seem implausible, using this account as a historical source on Dutch colonization need not entail, as Arnold Krupat suggests, relinquishing the Western “fetish of the historical fact.”¹⁰ Instead, we should “be open to the capacity of native histories to shed new light on the colonial period.”¹¹

A final category of oral literature included in the *Norton*, in addition to creation myths, trickster tales, and historical “legends,” comprises representations of speeches attributed to the Indian leaders Pontiac, Logan, Red Jacket, and Tecumseh. These texts have an indeterminate relationship to actual utterances by historical individuals. For example, “Chief Logan’s Speech,” excerpted from Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), passed through a tenuous chain of communication: Jefferson had supposedly heard it from a British officer who had been present when it was delivered, by Logan’s “messenger,” to the Virginia colonial governor, Lord Dunmore. Thus, at best, the written text is a highly mediated representation of what the mysterious leader known as “Logan” may have said. But the authenticity of the speech was irrelevant to Jefferson’s rhetorical purpose in including it in his letter on “Productions mineral, vegetable and animal”; he offered it as evidence of the Indians’ “excellence in oratory,” thereby contesting the notion that America’s indigenous products, including cultural ones, were inferior to those of Europe.

According to Gordon Sayre’s *The Indian Chief as Tragic Hero*, such “praise for the

gravity and eloquence of oratory by native leaders was a commonplace” in early American writing.¹² For colonial and early national writers, native oratory, construed as eloquent protestations of a disappearing race, was explicitly opposed to Euro-American “letters;” for example, Jefferson pointed out, as an explanation for the Indians’ supposed lack of cultural attainments, that “that letters have not yet been introduced among them.”¹³ Similarly, settler-colonial discourse posits oppositions between the Indians’ creation myths and the colonists’ Bible, the Indians’ “tales” and the colonists’ literature. Thus while in a 21st-century anthology of “early American literature” representations of Native American speech count as “literature,” within the historical context of early American literature they stood for its opposite.

“Writing Indians”

All but one of the Native American selections in Volume A of the *Norton* embody this dichotomy between indigenous speech and European writing. The single exception is an excerpt from the Mohegan missionary Samson Occom’s “A Short Narrative of my Life” (1768). Occom’s narrative paradoxically reinforces the dissociation between indigeneity and literacy because it is a narrative of alphabetization, recounting Occom’s own education under the Reverend Eleazer Wheelock, as well as his efforts, as a missionary and educator himself, to teach Indian children to read. He helped the struggling students “by making an Alphabet on Small bits of paper, and glued them on Small Chips of Cedar after this manner A B & C.”¹⁴ Unlike the vast majority of the works in the anthology,

then, Occom's writing positions him at the remote margins of early American letters.

The juxtaposition of representations of indigenous oral traditions with Occom's narrative illustrates a paradox informing literary criticism of Native American literature, the notion, in Lisa Brooks's phrase, that "literacy is a mark of coercive colonialism and modernity inherently antithetical to Indigenous traditions."¹⁵ As Maureen Konkle argues in *Writing Indian Nations*, in critical assessments of Native American literature "evidence of 'oral tradition,'" is often "the standard of literary value."¹⁶ In this view, Indians can only contribute to the corpus of American literature, then, by cleaving to oral tradition; those who choose to communicate through a colonial medium and in colonial genres compromise or forsake their cultural identity. Thus, "Chief Logan's Speech" and Occom's narrative face different questions of authenticity. For one, we may doubt that the textual artifact reliably represents the utterance of an authentic Native American. For the other, some may question whether an English-language Christian conversion narrative can be an authentic Native American expression.

As Hilary Wyss points out in her groundbreaking *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity and Native Community in Early America*, "in our longing to find an 'authentic Native voice' speaking to us from the past, we have ignored those who wrote and thought from a Native perspective that included a sense of their colonial position."¹⁷ Whereas conventional American literary histories mark the advent of Native American literature in 1772 with Occom's "Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian" (considered the first published work by an Indian), or in 1829 with the Pequot William Apess's *A Son of the Forest* (recognized as the first Native American

autobiography), *Writing Indians* brings a more expansive archive of “bicultural” writings by Indians who were introduced to alphabetic literacy by Protestant missionaries into the purview of early Americanist scholarship.

This archive, further investigated and expanded by scholars such as Joanna Brooks, Kristina Bross, Phillip Round, and Drew Lopenzina, reaches back into mid-17th-century New England, where missionary enterprises led by the ministers John Eliot and Experience Mayhew exposed Algonquian peoples to European literacy as a programmatic part of Christian evangelization.¹⁸ Literary scholars have revised an earlier understanding of alphabetic literacy as a unilateral “weapon of conquest” in the evangelists’ arsenal of cultural imperialism.¹⁹ This earlier view is exemplified by the ethno-historian Neal Salisbury’s observation that the Puritan missionaries simply imposed their Calvinist pedagogical model, requiring “a basic education, particularly literacy,” on their Indian converts, who were segregated from both traditionalist Indians and colonists into “Praying Towns.” Radical Protestant theology dictated that Bible literacy was a necessary precondition for true conversion, but in the Praying Towns it “acquired a radically new purpose—the inculcation of Puritan cultural and religious values in adults and children for whom those values were utterly foreign and meaningless.”²⁰

Whereas recent literary scholarship largely concurs with this understanding of the missionaries’ intentions, it has instead emphasized Native Americans’ adoptions and uses of the European technologies of reading and writing. Thus, for example, the written records of the public confessions of the Massachusetts converts from the “Praying Town”

of Natick, who in 1659 successfully applied for permission to form the first Native American church in New England, demonstrate their efforts to master the content and forms of Calvinist theology. As with the written representations of oral traditions, such translated, transcribed records of oral performances are highly mediated; however, the Indians converts necessarily participated in European literacy practices, as expressed through numerous references to Scripture, and they conformed to Protestant discourse genres, in this case confession narratives. But they also express the perspective of a people whose world is undergoing catastrophic upheaval, as Kristina Bross observes in the anthology *Early Native Literacies in New England*, who “performed a Native Christianity potentially unrecognizable to their English proselytizers.”²¹

In this context, some instances of Native American “transculturation”—the process whereby “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture”—were directly confrontational.²² For example, several scholarly analyses have converged on a note that was left “stuck up in a cleft of one of the bridge posts” outside the town of Medfield, Massachusetts, after a devastating raid in the winter of 1676, during King Philip’s War. “Thou English man hath provoked us to anger & wrath,” the note read, according to a contemporary transcription, “& we care not though we have war with you this 21 years for there are many of us 300 of which hath fought with you at this town[.] we haue nothing but our lives to loose but thou hast many fair houses cattell & much good things.”²³ Possibly, it was written by James Printer, a Nipmuc convert who has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, largely because of the part that he played in Mary Rowlandson’s celebrated 1682

captivity narrative, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*; he was one of the scribes who composed correspondence, on her captors' behalf, negotiating her ransom and release. As he worked for the printer Samuel Green, both before and after the war, he also set the type for her narrative—"one of the most sublime ironies of King Philip's War."²⁴ The note challenged the English worldview not only through Christian literacy, but also through English Christian rhetoric, declaring that the settlers had become the objects of the Indians righteous "anger & wrath." Commenting on the note at Medfield, the literacy scholar E. Jennifer Monaghan observes that Christian Indians during King Philip's War put reading and writing to different uses: "The skill of reading . . . was still being used in the service of the new faith of the Indian converts, who were deriving consolation from the Bible in a time of hardship. The skill of writing, in contrast, was the vehicle for the native Americans to express their angry self-determination and trumpet their independence."²⁵ Yet if the note was written by Printer, he was not necessarily the author, in the sense of the person generating its message; he may have been acting as a scribe, as he did for the ransom notes. In this way, even when framed by a narrow conception of literacy, early Native American literature can complicate the idea of authorship.

In *English Letters and Indian Literacies*, Wyss uses the dichotomy between reading and writing to characterize the uses of literacy by Indians who were educated in 18th- and early-19th-century mission schools. She delineates a spectrum according to which the "Readerly Indian" represents the white educator's "particularly gendered fantasy of a passive, docile Native figure" who tractably subjects herself to cultural and spiritual reformation.²⁶ The "Writerly Indian," by contrast, finds in English literacy a means to

assert a Native identity. Thus, for example while Eleazar Wheelock, the founder of Moor's Charity School (which became Dartmouth College) "longed for the perfect Readerly Indian," his famous alumni emerged as Writerly ones. In a 1771 letter, Samson Occom, recently returned from a fund-raising trip to England, denounced Wheelock for betraying the school's mission by forsaking Indian students for white ones: "I am very Jealous that instead of Your Seminary Becoming alma Mater, She will be too alba mater to Suckle the Tawnees."²⁷ His Latin pun played on the conception of a school as a soul mother; *alba* means "white." Thus, albeit less drastically than the note on the Medfield post, Occom's letter turned his educator's own medium, including his rhetoric, against him.

Occom, along with his brother-in-law David Fowler (Montauk) and son-in-law Joseph Johnson (Mohegan), both fellow Moor's School alumni, were among the founders of Brotherton, a community of Northeastern Christian Indians that settled in Oneida territory in New York in the late 18th century. During the same period, another pan-Indian Christian community, the Stockbridge Indians, under the leadership of Occom's friend Hendrik Aupaumut (Mahican), also relocated to Oneida territory. These communities constitute some of the important nexuses in the archive of Native American writings from the early United States. In the early 19th century, this archive broadened to include native peoples from outside the Northeast, such as the Cherokee graduates of the Foreign Mission School in Connecticut, John Ridge and his cousin Elias Boudinot, founding editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*.²⁸

As Philip Round observes in *Removable Type*, the Cherokees constitute a special

case, because even as some obtained English-language literacy using the Roman alphabet, beginning in 1821 there was also widespread Cherokee literacy in the syllabary developed by the Cherokee Sequoyah, George Guest. While both languages and scripts appeared side by side in the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the two literacies and their communities of practitioners diverged. English-language literacy had an assimilationist connotation, while Cherokee literacy had a “semiotic value to everyday Cherokee as a sign of national identity.”²⁹ Thus the instance of Sequoyan (as the system is denominated by Ellen Cushman) illustrates that the supposed antithesis between literacy and indigeneity does not pertain to writing, per se, but only to particular scripts.³⁰

Indigenous Literacies

Rose Gubele and others have suggested that early accounts of Sequoyah’s development of the Cherokee syllabary emphasized his exceptionalism—“the American Cadmus”—and alleged a mixed-race parentage because of a reluctance to credit a Native American with the invention of a writing system.³¹ More broadly, in recent years, some scholars have increasingly argued that the conventional definitions of “literacy” and “writing” similarly express an exclusionary bias, and, in Elizabeth Hill Boone’s phrase, “summarily dismiss the indigenous Western hemisphere.”³²

Boone’s argument for a more inclusive definition of writing appears in her introduction to the essay collection *Writing without Words: Indigenous Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*. She points out that the often implicit understanding of

writing as the visual representation of spoken language fails to account for the full functions of writing even in Western societies (which include, for example, musical and mathematical notations) and is certainly insufficient to comprehend the complexity of the world's writing systems. She disputes the hierarchy suggested by grammatologists (scholars of writing systems) such as John DeFrancis and J. Marshall Unger, who distinguish between "partial" and "full" writing, and posit that the latter "includes *only* those systems of graphic symbols that can be used to convey *any and all thought*."³³

The ideological stakes of this hierarchical schema, wherein non-European media are either excluded from the category of writing or construed as lesser forms, are indicated by their anticipation in colonial discourse. In "A Discourse of the diversity of Letters used by the divers Nations in the World," the prolific early modern compiler of European imperial relations Samuel Purchas observed that "the varietie and differing forms" of writing "hath superabounded"; his list includes "Quippos in Stones or Threads, as in Peru" and "Pictures as in Mexico." He recognized that some writing is logographic, "with Characters, each expressing a word or thing, not a letter, as the Chinois, Japonites, and our Arithmeticians and Astronomers in the figures of their Arts." Yet he maintains that "letters," or alphabetic script, "are disposed to frame all words, and hath beene the most complete kind of writing which ever was." Thus, the Europeans' use of "letters" was an index of cultural superiority over peoples who used other forms of writing, let alone over those without writing altogether, who "are esteemed Brutish, Savage, Barbarous."³⁴

Boone's proposed definition of writing, "*the communication of relatively specific ideas in a conventional manner by means of permanent, visible marks*," is sufficiently

capacious to include Meso-American media such as Aztec and Mayan scripts (which include phonetic elements) and Incan khipu, or knotted cords.³⁵ Increasingly, scholars have adapted and extended her argument to include media used by indigenous peoples north of Mexico, proposing more inclusive conceptualizations of *writing* and related terms: *literacy*, *reading*, *book*.

For example, in an influential essay published in the journal *Book History*, Germaine Warkentin asks if “the European definition of the ‘written’ in fact may involve some sort of category mistake?” She points out that the clear distinction between writing and painting is really specific to Western culture; among “diverse non-Europeans peoples,” including indigenous American ones, the categories of “text and picture overlap.”³⁶ She similarly questions the boundary between text and oratory. Whereas the birchbark scrolls and belts of wampum (shell beads) used by Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples are often construed as mnemonic devices, rather than writing, insofar as they cannot be completely “read” by a person who has not memorized the utterance they are associated with, Warkentin suggests that the notion that true writing simply contains a message that is communicable to anyone who is familiar with the script is effectively an arbitrary, ethnocentric criterion, one that is no longer tenable in our poststructuralist age.

Another proponent of a redefinition of writing in the context of indigenous and early American studies is Birgit Brander Rasmussen, whose *Queequeg’s Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* builds on Boone and Warkentin in defining writing as “communication of relatively specific ideas transmitted across space and/or time by use of a conventionalized system of visual and tactile marks understood by a

given community of readers.”³⁷ Applying this definition, she furnishes “dialogic studies” of the interactions between indigenous and European writing systems, including a chapter on the reciprocal encounter between French ““Pen and Ink Work”” and Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Wampum in a 17th-century treaty meeting, and another on the Quechua writer Don Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s massive chronicle of the Conquest of Peru, which “emerges out of and is shaped by two distinct literary and textual traditions: the European book and the Andean quipu.”³⁸

The impulse to classify indigenous sign systems as writing paradoxically subscribes to the valuation of writing as a sort of cultural credential.³⁹ Is it necessarily derogatory not to classify a given sign system as writing? “Dialogic” studies such as those presented by Rasmussen are by no means dependent on such a classification. A number of recent studies examine the interactions between indigenous media and European literacy. For example, in *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*, Lisa Brooks examines the transformative encounters between indigenous and European media and discourse genres: “Birchbark messages became letters and petitions, wampum records became treaties, and journey pictographs became written ‘journals’ that contained similar geographic and relational marks, while histories recorded on birchbark and wampum became written communal narratives.”⁴⁰ In *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England*, Matt Cohen posits the cross-cultural, multimedia “publication event”—rather than the text—as a “basic unit of analysis,” calling for a methodological convergence of literary, media, and performance studies.⁴¹ As Cohen and Jeffrey Glover write in their introduction to the edited collection *Colonial Mediascapes*:

Sensory Worlds of the Early Americas—which includes contributions from several of the scholars mentioned here—these works, as well as those that advocate a redefinition of writing, all understand uses of alphabetic script “as happening, and as being received, in relation to multiple, sometimes simultaneous modes of communication.”⁴²

Constructing Indigeneity

In addition to the three conceptualizations of indigenous peoples’ participation in early American literature: as speakers whose performances are represented by texts, as writers employing alphabetic script, and as practitioners of “indigenous literacies” involving sign systems other than alphabetic script, a fourth conception of the relation between indigeneity and early American literacy elides the participation of Native Americans altogether. Instead, it focuses on how writers of European descent in the early United States attempted to root their work, produced in an exogenous medium and typically corresponding to European genres, in what they wished to construe as their own native land.

This “problem of establishing their ‘indigeneity’ and distinguishing it from their continuing sense of their European inheritance” was not unique to the United States but was common, as the Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin observe in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, to former settler colonies, especially Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, in which the majority of the population of the new nation comprised European settlers and their

descendants, rather than indigenous peoples. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin note the conflicting desires of “early American writers to compete on equal terms with their British counterparts” and “to repudiate borrowed models and follow an independent path.”⁴³ They give the examples of Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper, whose iconic characters Edgar Huntly and Natty Bumppo arguably represent attempts to construct the American indigeneity of white men. Moreover, Cooper’s famous *Leatherstocking Tales*, borrowing from Walter Scott’s *Waverley* novels, features a stylized representation of indigenous oratory in which noble indigenes elegiacally take leave of their ancestral territory: “In the morning I saw the sons of Unamis happy and strong,” pronounces the fictional version of the Delaware leader Tamenund at the close of *The Last of the Mohicans*, “and yet, before the night has come have I lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans!”⁴⁴

However imitative, Cooper’s ventriloquism of Native American oratory, staged in sublime American landscapes, may have been a rhetorical attempt to achieve “mental Independence” from British letters.⁴⁵ Yet the consideration of early national American literature as “postcolonial,” as proposed by Lawrence Buell and elaborated by Edward Watts, has been controversial.⁴⁶ Whereas Watts construes the early Republic as a “flowing plurality in which colonialism and anticolonialism are just two of many coexisting presences in an unfixed and unfixable postcolonial blend,” scholars such as Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, David Kazanjian, and John Carlos Rowe have instead emphasized “imperialism” as a keyword for the study of American literature, highlighting the new nation’s violence and subjugation of Native Americans and African Americans.⁴⁷

“We are not questioning the fact that the final effect of militaristic and juridical state apparatuses included the systematic expropriation of American Indians’ lands for colonization, annihilation of the natives, and the definition of African Americans as property,” write Malini Johar Schueller and Watts in *Messy Beginnings: Postcoloniality and Early American Studies*, in response to this critique. In this context, the term *postcolonial* does not characterize the early United States, but rather “refers to procedures and processes, representations and articulations.”⁴⁸

In recent years, the question of the applicability of the theory of “settler postcolonialism” has been largely overridden by the widespread adoption of the concept of “settler colonialism” within Native American and indigenous studies.⁴⁹ “As opposed to franchise-colonial relationships (such as the British Raj, the Netherlands East Indies),” writes the Australian Patrick Wolfe, “settler colonialism seeks to replace natives on their land rather than extract surplus value by mixing their labor with a colony’s natural resources.” Within this view, the parallel between the United States and Canada, Australia, and New Zealand consists neither in their ambivalent cultural relations with England, nor in the anticolonial strains in their early national literatures, but in their common efforts to “eliminate” indigenous peoples.⁵⁰

Read as settler colonial literature (as opposed to settler *postcolonial* literature), even seemingly benign instances of “constructing indigeneity” are redolent of the “logic of elimination”; they function not only to establish cultural independence from England but also to replace indigenous traditions with exogenous ones.⁵¹ For example, Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” famously transplants a German folktale, the story of “Peter

Klaus the Goatherd,” to New York’s Catskill Mountains. A “Postscript” to the story helps to establish the graft of the imported folktale to supposedly indigenous roots; it cites a “memorandum-book” of Diedrich Knickerbocker, the fictional Dutch antiquarian author of “Rip Van Winkle,” that claims that the “Kaatsberg, or Catskill Mountains, have always been a region full of fable.” This postscript briefly recounts tales about the “Catskill Witch,” “an old squaw spirit” who “dwelt on the highest peak of the Catskills,” and about “a kind of Manitou or Spirit” whose “favorite abode” was “a great rock or cliff on the loneliest part of the mountains.”⁵² The postscript associates these Native American spirits with landscape features and natural phenomena that also figure prominently in the story of Rip Van Winkle. Whether or not Irving is drawing upon authentic Native American folklore, he alludes to these tales only to supersede them with one he constructed from exogenous materials. “Rip Van Winkle” helped to spawn a tourist industry that resembled the one that flourished in the Highland settings for Walter Scott’s romances, and the “favorite abode” of the supposed Manitou became the site for a famous hotel.⁵³

Further Reading

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Links to Digital Materials

Indigenous Studies Portal (iPortal): Electronic resources database at University of Saskatchewan.

[Lakota Winter Counts](#) online exhibit: From the Smithsonian Institution.

The Oocom Circle: "a freely accessible, scholarly digital edition of handwritten documents by and about Samson Oocom (1727–1792) housed in Dartmouth College."

Notes

¹ Maya Jehlen, "The Literature of Colonization," in *The Cambridge History of American*

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- Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 37.
- ² Nina Baym et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. A: *Beginnings to 1820*, 7th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 21–34.
- ³ Christopher B. Teuton, “[Indigenous Orality and Oral Literatures](#),” in *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, ed. James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), 172; see also Christopher B. Teuton, *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).
- ⁴ William C. Spengemann, *A New World of Words: Redefining Early American Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), ix.
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