

VOICE IN TEXT: TRANSLATING ORALITY IN ROBERT BRINGHURST'S *A STORY AS SHARP AS A KNIFE*, HARRY ROBINSON'S *WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART*, AND WAR PARTY'S *THE REIGN*

by

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Abstract

Voice in Text investigates the process of translation that occurs when transmitting oral stories into a written framework with the intention to bridge the gaps that exist between oral traditions and technological scholarship. This thesis explores the potential motives behind Robert Bringhurst's retranslation of John Swanton's Haida texts, Wendy Wickwire's transcription of Harry Robinson's stories onto the page, and War Party's use of Hip Hop as an expression of Native identity. Translating (one culture into another and the spoken into the written) can be used as a tactic to reinscribe cultural priorities and also to enact resistance. A storyteller's allowance of the transcription and translation of their stories can be read as a plea for a listening that functions cross-culturally, a listening in which we can gradually learn to hear the storyteller's voice in a written context. I apply theories of hybridity and intersubjective approaches to listening in my investigation to uncover how the translator and storyteller engage in a cross-cultural mode of transformation. Because of the highly sensitive nature of translating First Nations literature into a European poetic context, as both Bringhurst and Wickwire do, I explore some of the debates surrounding cultural appropriation, as well as show how potential divergences between written and oral practices interact to question what constitutes a respectful rendering of another culture. In many cases, writing and orality can function within a unified synthesis that reflects the priorities of both mediums simultaneously. Ultimately, this project is intended to provide an ethical approach to listening, an approach that places responsibility on a reader's own approach to a text, in order to show that a sensitive reading is itself a process that involves a highly dialogic and integral role in the process of uncovering a human voice in text.

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Yahguadangang (to pay respect)

I have learnt far more from First Nations literature than I could ever hope to repay by placing it within a sphere of critical scholarship. In many ways for me this project has been a labour of love; it is a way for me to express my gratitude for and to pay respect (*yahguadangang*, as they say in Haida) to the knowledge imparted upon me from the various storytellers explored in *Voice in Text*. I am writing my admirations from a beautiful cabin seven miles outside the town of Masset (“White Hillside,” Ghadaghaaxhiwaas) on Haida Gwaii—far removed from university life, the 2010 Vancouver Olympics (which are currently taking place on Native land), the city, corporations, and even basic amenities, such as electricity. This cabin is my Walden, and in many ways its dislocation from city life serves as a direct reminder of the ecological richness from which the literature of this project emerges. Like the ecologically diverse landscape, culture, and people of Haida Gwaii, I hope my project (*Voice in Text*) reflects a little of this unique environment. With the Vancouver 2010 Olympics wrapping up this week, research on cultural translation, cultural appropriation, and hybridity are now perhaps more crucial than ever. The Hudson’s Bay Company’s unsanctioned appropriation of the Cowichan¹ Sweater as official Olympic wear and the many hybridized images presented on billboards and televised screens, are some of many examples of cultural appropriation of First Nations culture that have recently taken place. Like the complex weave work of a Cowichan sweater, the rich hybridity of Hip Hop music within a First Nations context, or the multilayered imagery found upon a Pacific Northwest totem pole, this project is an attempt at academic polyphony. The quotes which introduce each section of this project provide voices from a variety of literary spheres and margins that, for me, engage with the works in dialogic ways, often illuminating the interconnectedness of diverse cultures, while highlighting their inherent and unique distinctiveness. Like the storytellers found in this project, these opening quotations are reminders of voices that refuse to be silenced; further, they create dialogic counterpoints and shed light on my own intertextualized observations. Lastly, after having spent a week on Haida Gwaii, visiting some of the same spots where Skaay and Ghandl recounted their masterworks to an attentive John Swanton—amid a world they loved, a world which they saw being decimated at the hands of their oppressors—this project is an attempt at attentive listening. *Voice in Text*, first and foremost, is an homage to all the writers of this project (First Nations and academic scholars who maintain the importance of First Nations literatures) and their endurance and ability to infuse the oral within the textual. These (Skaay, Ghandl, Robinson, War Party) are all voices that refuse to be silenced and are all works that engage in repatriation (a return back to an origin). I have learned a great deal in listening to these poets (skilled crafters of words) and hope that others will too seek them out. I dedicate this project to their vast wisdom and to an ongoing hope for cultural understanding across human constructed boundaries.

Haaw7a.

Haida Gwaii (Masset)

Feb 25, 2010.

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I would also like to extend the warmest thanks to my wife. Meg, in many ways this thesis is partly yours. I am eternally grateful for your constant encouragement and the many hours you have spent listening to my work, draft after draft.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this project to the First Nations of Canada, particularly the Musqueam and Salish bands, whose traditional territory occupy UBC land.

Oh, God! Like the Thunderbird of old
I shall rise again out of the sea;
I shall grab the instruments of the white man's success—
his education, his skills, and with these new tools
I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society.
Before I follow the great Chiefs who have gone before us,
Oh Canada, I shall see these things come to pass.

-Words spoken by Chief Dan George
at the 1967 centennial celebration in Vancouver

Chapter 1: Building Bridges Between Academia and Indigenous Literatures

1.1 Outlining the Project's Parameters

Speaking to newcomers in their language is dangerous
for when I speak
history is a dreamer
empowering thought
from which I awaken the imaginings of the past.
(Jeannette Armstrong, "Threads of Old Memory," *Breath Tracks*)

In the above passage, Jeannette Armstrong alludes to the dangers of using culturally specific language because it connects to a past full of pluralities of meaning and connotations that differ across cultural lines. The challenge of writing about First Nations literatures in a manner that is both sensitive and critical, within the parameters of academic praxis, reminds us as scholars that any academic analysis of literature requires careful application of methodologies that focus on the cultural specifics of the text. This project, *Voice in Text*, began for me in a second year course on Canadian Literature at the University of British Columbia. In the course I expected to study the giant Canadian literary figures, such as Margaret Atwood, Northrop Frye, and Robertson Davies; the course was instead entirely structured around First Nations literatures,² which is fitting given that the University itself occupies Salish and Musqueam territory. The professor (Erika Patterson) incorporated various methodologies of First Nations pedagogy: we were not allowed to write notes, the class was dialogue based, and we sat in a circle and applied Indigenous theories such as the Medicine Wheel³ and storytelling to our discussions. The class directly challenged my own Eurocentric epistemological biases, notably my suppositions that the written word was a more complex form of literary communication than the oral and my notion that everything worth learning originated in Britain, beginning with Chaucer and ending with T.S. Eliot. Indirectly, the course was my first encounter with the process of reinscribing Indigenous narrative against the hegemony of traditional academic practice, a process many academics refer to as postcolonialism, described by Judith Leggatt as "an ongoing attempt to find means of cross-cultural communication that escape the repressive hierarchies of colonial encounters" (Judith Leggatt, "Academic Theory" 111). Ever since

this course, I have been interested in literatures that do just that: literatures that deconstruct pervasive colonial narratives, enact resistance, and challenge my own listening approaches.

Voice in Text explores the processes of listening for the poetic moments of orality found in collaborative and cross-cultural texts that engage in translation. When translation is most productive, the dialogic interaction between the original composer (or text), the translator, and the reader has the potential to bridge cultural gaps through hybridized (or multi-perspective) formulations of cross-cultural understandings. One of the primary cross-cultural perceptions this project attempts to show is that First Nations stories told in English, and written down, are not necessarily any less of First Nations origin than an ethnographically transcribed oral story, or an oral story that has not been recorded or translated in text. While oral stories inevitably change when translated into text, as will be uncovered in the following sections, their textual embodiment does not necessarily deprive them of their cultural priorities; in fact, at times they are expanded.

This thesis explores the divergences between written and oral storytelling in Robert Bringhurst's *A Story as Sharp as a Knife*, Harry Robinson's *Write it on Your Heart*, and War Party's *The Reign*. I am concerned with the transformation that occurs when an oral performance is made textual or recorded, and how productive forms of hybrid expression create bridges between academic and First Nations cultural approaches to knowledge. Wendy Wickwire assembles, titles and edits Robinson's stories in *Write it on your Heart*. With a different approach, Robert Bringhurst retranslates and provides detailed methodologies to reading Haida stories. By further contrast, the First Nations group War Party employs Hip Hop as a didactic medium to tell traditional and modern stories. Because of the cultural distinctiveness and unique approaches to collaborative understanding manifested by each text, these three works open up a dialogic conversation that challenges any single hermeneutic approach to reading and translating oral forms of storytelling into written or recorded mediums.

Voice in Text investigates the potential motives behind Bringhurst's retranslation of Swanton's texts, Wickwire's choice to transcribe Robinson's stories onto the page, and War Party's

use of Hip Hop as an expression of Native identity. Despite Bringhurst's good intentions to provide a space for classical Haida storytellers, many debates surrounding cultural appropriation (specifically Bringhurst's decision to put First Nations oral stories into a European poetic context), as well as potential divergences between written and oral practices interact to question what constitutes a respectful rendering of another culture. Wickwire's choice to carefully edit Robinson's stories, which includes extensive pronoun editing to make them consistent with their antecedents, as well as her choice of poetic typography underscore her concern about the accessibility of Robinson's text, and raises similar questions about the appropriateness of editing Native stories for predominately non-Native, often academic audiences. However, Wendy Wickwire's writing of Harry Robinson's stories in *Write it on Your Heart* differs from Bringhurst's translation because hers is a more plain transcription of Robinson's autochthonic stories because she listened to them directly without much mediation; Robinson even provided the translation into English himself. The final section of this undertaking will connect Hip Hop to the experience of resistance among the members of the First Nations musical group War Party, showing that stories ultimately cross perceived borders of race and culture, and can be used as a resistant practice to reinscribe cultural power for people that have been silenced or marginalized by the ongoing effects of colonization in Canada.

1.2 Finding the Appropriate Words

So while the white people had much to teach us, we had much to teach them, and what a school could have been established upon that idea!

(Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* 236)

The hope of *Voice in Text* is to create greater perceptions of how we approach literary criticism and to engage in cross-cultural approaches to reading literature. Because the focus is on listening to stories, the theory needs to emulate the act of careful listening and respectful criticism. A story analogues theory (and vice-versa) because it tells the truth inasmuch as it communicates a specific perspective; whether or not we agree is a separate ethical category. As Uchendu claims in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, "There is no story that is not true" (141). Thomas King affirms

Uchendu's claim when he says, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (*Truth* 2). It is the subjective truth created by the act of translation between cultures that this project is interested in exploring. Translation, and scholarship in general, involves a level of negotiating between literalness and creative distinctiveness; finding the appropriate and correct words when analyzing First Nations literature requires a balance between academic praxis and cultural protocol.

Recently I travelled to Haida Gwaii in an attempt to better understand the place from which Bringhurst's translated Haida stories emerged. To understand Haida stories, and myth in general, Bringhurst urges us to "visit them at home, in the living trees, the rivers, the earth" (*Tree of Meaning* 169). Whether or not a physical personification is essential to careful analysis, and whether Bringhurst practices what he preaches⁴ is not as important as the ethical implication that we have a moral responsibility to pay respect to the subjects in which we invest our criticism. As listening critics (academics who translate stories into theory) we are challenged to be witnesses to any polyvocal poetic text, echoing Houston A. Baker's assertion of Hip Hop critics to "be at least as exacting of their knowledge of rap as the rappers they pretend to discuss, defend, categorize, or witness" (*Rap* 81). Essentially, under Baker's assessment, and as this project claims, the act of reading becomes the act of listening: good listening creates good critics or, vis-à-vis Bringhurst's own listening, good dialogic poets.

One of the dilemmas of this project is the possibility that literary criticism is an inappropriate medium to apply to First Nations literature. This concern is self-reflexively manifested by various critics of First Nations literature, such as Blanca Schorcht who argues that "literary criticism study reflects the perspectives of Western literary theory even when it discusses 'other' literatures, and literary critics seem keen to separate literary aspects of their study from 'anthropological' aspects even when the writing itself resists this kind of compartmentalization" (*Storied Voices* 12). Schorcht's concern over the appropriateness of methodology is self-reflexively negotiated by many postcolonial writers who study indigenous literature, such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin who contemplate whether the concept of meaning as it is institutionally taught could itself be Eurocentric

(*Empire* 182). However, there are many First Nations thinkers (Jeanette Armstrong, Thomas King, and Leslie-Marmon Silko, among others) who make compelling arguments that First Nations stories are deeply embedded with meaning, and understanding them demands a complex set of cultural codes and methodologies. A passive, uncritical response to First Nations literature denies the influence of English (or any language in general) on Native literature and further marginalizes literary categories (such as oral and written or Native and non-Native) by highlighting their differences rather than focusing on inherent similarities and potential cross-cultural theories in an ever expanding globalized world. The concept of a globalized literary world is important because it does not polarize scholarship or indigenous theories, but rather has the potential to allow these theories to function together in a process of constructing meaning across cultural lines that emphasizes decolonization.

The term postcolonial (a term which is often hyphenated),⁵ which can be used to provide ethical readings of the ongoing effects of colonization, is a term fraught with debate about its appropriateness when applied to First Nations literature. Judith Leggatt argues that “[i]f one approaches Native literature from an academic perspective, which is also a Western perspective, then the *best* one can do is to approach it from a post-colonial perspective” (“Academic Theory” 120). While academia as an institution is historically Western, I am a little uneasy with her analysis that “an academic perspective” is “a Western perspective,” since the academy is currently influenced by academics from a variety of cultures. In addition, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that postcolonial “theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing” (*Empire* 11). Their definition highlights the sensitivity of writing about First Nations literature in an academic setting, and is useful because it underlines that postcolonial theory has the power to create dialogic spaces that interrogate various systems of oppression. Postcolonial theorist and Canadianist Laura Moss states that to “teach literature through the application of postcolonial theories in the classroom is to teach with an eye on the historical inequalities of colonialism and an eye on contemporary injustices brought about by

cultural imperialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization” (“Postcolonial?” 7). Any theory applied to First Nations literatures needs to consider the ongoing psychological effects of colonization and attempt to break from the repressive hierarchies of colonial encounters. Although Canadian society has progressed a great deal since the “Indian Act,” the ongoing effects of colonization can still be seen.⁶

If applied without careful consideration, postcolonialism, or any theory, can reinscribe hegemonic principles. In “Godzilla vs. Postcolonialism,” Thomas King worries over the usage of postcolonial theory as a lens to interpret Native literature and voices the concern that such theory begins the discussion of Native literature with the advent of Europeans in North America (11-12). King’s concerns are echoed by Schorcht who argues that postcolonialism takes a historical approach to colonization and thus re-enacts assimilation (5), as well as by Linda Tuhiwai Smith who characterizes postcolonialism as a “convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world” (*Decolonizing Methodologies* 14). While King, Schorcht, and Smith raise some valuable concerns about the appropriateness of applying postcolonial theory, they seem to misread the generative capacities of the theory itself and further marginalize academic and First Nations collaborative efforts for mutual understanding. Their misreading of a theory that is ultimately designed to bridge cultural gaps and provide ethical readings of texts influenced by the effects of colonialism is at the heart of several of the questions this project asks, for example: does Bringhurst appropriate Haida literature in his avoidance Haida protocol?; does Wickwire provide an accurate translation of Robinson’s orally composed stories?; and does War Party find an appropriate medium in Hip Hop to transcribe modern Native identity? It is these types of questions that join with postcolonial theory, and it is through these types of questions that we can undo stereotypical conceptions of Native literature.

Perhaps one of the most influential fields of cultural research, which has often led to stereotypical views of Native people, originates with anthropology and its early ethnographic offshoots. Franz Boas, one of the primary founders of modern anthropology and one of Bringhurst’s

largest influences, admits with a level of humility that making historical or scientific claims about other cultures is a reconstructive act, particularly of groups he considered primitive: “As a matter of fact, all the history of primitive peoples that any ethnologist has ever developed is reconstruction and cannot be anything else” (“Science in Anthropology” 139). The danger of cultural reconstruction and mistranslation is particularly evident during mid-nineteenth century analyses of First Nations people, when quantified analyses in relation to European culture were made, as if the oral literatures of Native communities awaited systematic assessment by Westerners.

In 1874, a student of Boas’ named James G. Swan described the “Haida Indians” as awaiting the glorious effects and benefits of English colonization, arguing that they are “well adapted to colonization” and they “lie waste and fallow, yet marvelously productive, and awaiting nothing but capital, enterprise, and skill to return manifold profit to those who will develop their resources” (*The Haida Indians* 1). While this statement was made over a hundred and thirty years ago, its strong juxtaposition between settler and Native reminds us of the racism that many First Nations poets, storytellers, and writers still face to this day. Often, historical records and museums show that approaches to Native culture were formed not within a well-developed understanding that acknowledged the priorities of Native communities, but rather through culturally subjective analysis’s that seek to justify European artistic superiority, or to identify distinctive differences to those who were perceived as “Other.” While the appropriative implications of Bringham’s and Wickwire’s translations might not be as obvious or damaging as the cited examples, they do remind us that comparative or imaginative revision might be hard to separate from methodology. Ute Lischke and David McNab in *Walking a Tightrope* pose the question: “Can Aboriginal voices appear in a European context?” (2) — or more importantly, can a productive dialogue take place between Native and Non-native imaginations? *Voice in Text* explores this possibility for Native and non-Native dialogue via collaborative translation. However, we need to consider that even a collaborative work in translation can be as dangerous as one that is identifiably xenophobic.

Kevin McNeilly, in negotiating his own response to Bringham’s work on Haida literature,

urges for a respectful encounter between cultures, arguing that what is valuable in any cultural work is “the respectful encounter with what you are not, the pull of the other” (“Cutting Both Ways” 169). Bringhurst’s seminal *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* is a complex work that propels scholarship to question whether or not his translations are respectful renderings or insensitive appropriations of Haida resources. Perhaps the only way to avoid scholarly or literary appropriation is to apply theories that most closely reflect a cultural group’s specific priorities, and to apply such theories without hierarchical principals — a definite challenge for any student of literature. Houston A. Baker, Jr.’s analysis of the blues as a matrix is a good model for intersecting web-like theories, which he describes as a “point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit” (*Blues Ideology* 3). While Baker’s analysis is applied to African American vernacular theory, the section on War Party’s use of Hip Hop will show that such a theory can in fact be applied across cultures as a mode of cultural translation with productive and transformative effects. In applying a productive theory as Baker describes it, we need to apply multiple cross-points that intersect to avoid appropriating or misrepresenting another culture, especially since cultures are more than capable of representing themselves. Most effectively, a theory in transit across cultural borders can form a bridge between cultures, and therefore it aids in understanding and embracing differences.

1.3 Appropriation and Abrogation

Speaking real Indian
Is a true-red talent
No white writer talk that good Cree
(Gregory Scofield, “Speaking Real Indian”)

One of the major concerns of this project is whether or not the various writers explored are guilty of some level of cultural appropriation, particularly Bringhurst and Wickwire, who translated orally composed stories. The introductory quotation from Gregory Scofield suggests—perhaps with a level of ironic inversion—that only First Nations speakers can actually speak in a Native tongue, therefore making any translation of Native stories a potential act of appropriation. M. NourbeSe

Philip provides a useful definition of appropriation: “the abuse of power by one group in exploiting indiscriminately, for their *own economic advantage*, the cultural resources of other groups,” echoing Lenore Kesshig-Tobias’ urging of non-Native authors to “stop stealing Native Stories” (qtd. in *Canadian Literature* 531). Margaret Atwood offers a counter argument in support of an artist’s right to respectful renderings of other cultures, saying that “It’s only a short step from saying we can’t write from the point of view of an ‘other’ to saying we can’t read that way either, and from there to the position that no one can really understand anyone else, so we might as well stop trying” (*Moving Targets* 87). While appropriation need not be defined under such cloistered prefixes as Phillip’s definition, it need not either be argued against as polemically as Atwood’s claim for complete artistic freedom: an artist should be able to make money from their trade if they are respectfully writing beyond their cultural context, but an artist should follow cultural protocols and be aware of appropriation of voice. As listeners we can ask: what constitutes appropriation, and by extent, who can participate in First Nations literary practices and storytelling? Are First Nations storytelling spaces reserved for people of First Nations heritage? In addition, given that the oral performances were never intended to be written down, we should ask what putting the stories on paper does to the way we experience them. Walter Ong argues that “words are grounded in oral speech, [and that] writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever” (11). Ong’s reading of typography is perhaps a little too literal, as it denies the subjectivity and living prosody of each reader, or teller. While writing certainly solidifies a particular oral performance, it does not mean that the story cannot be re-told, re-shaped, or re-written into new contexts (Watkins, “Ecolinguistics”).

Given the very alacritous nature of storytelling itself, it might be suitable to conclude that textual translation and the act of cultural translation are not as divergent as one might assume; in fact, translation and cultural syncretism could even be viewed as a single strategy, one that is put to good use in the hybrid texts of Robinson and War Party. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue in *The Empire Writes Back* that code-switching between vernaculars within English is a strategy of the postcolonial writer: “Writers in this continuum employ highly developed strategies of code-switching

and vernacular transcription, which achieve the dual result of abrogating the Standard English and appropriating an English as a culturally significant discourse” (45). Whether the First Nations writers studied in this project would like to be considered postcolonial is not as important as the fact they make use of tactics such as code-switching and a reappropriation of poetic language; Robinson and the group War Party subvert the idealized form of standardized English practice (what we might term textbook English) and write back to a canon of white writers that have attempted to define, on their behalf, what it means to be Native, often meshing a polyphony of different stories (European, African American, and Native) to reach a broader listening audience. This is seen in Robinson’s retelling of the popular European fable “Puss in Boots,” and reflects Wickwire’s decision to place “Puss in Boots” at the end of the *Write it on your Heart* collection: it is a direct choice to emphasize Robinson’s ability to amalgamate stories across cultural lines. Furthermore, the reimagining of “Puss in Boots” in an Okanagan context highlights that Robinson’s stories refuse to adhere to any single telling, nor to simple compartmentalization.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define abrogation as “a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or ‘correct’ usage, and the assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning ‘inscribed’ in words” (*Empire* 37). Through abrogation, Robinson and War Party are able to challenge typical portrayals of authentic Native Literature in a post-imperial world, rejecting “the process by which ‘authenticity’ is granted to the categories of experience authorized by the centre at the expense of those relegated to the margins of Empire” (*Empire* 90). In many ways, modern First Nations authors employ syncretism in their texts (fusing the oral and written, using the tools of the colonizer and a variety of cultural traditions and tactics) to reinscribe identity for a modern audience, placing traditional stories in new contexts. While Robinson and War Party certainly incorporate a variety of what we might be tempted to term postmodern techniques in their storytelling, Bringhurst is more concerned about presenting a classical Haida text in its purest and most accurate form through his translations. As attentive readers we can ask if Bringhurst’s translations, and his described technique in *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* can be considered authentic

Native literature, something Bringhurst does not seem concerned about, preferring to present an accurate ethnopoetic translation (a subfield of anthropology and ethnology that places the poetics of the spoken word into a typographical setting) that rather suggests an ontological authenticity (a concern for rootedness), further challenging concepts of racial authenticity, and the literary process of cross-cultural translation.

1.4 Make it New: Translation and Hybrid Textuality

A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translations; or follows it. (Ezra Pound, *Make it New*, 101)

As the above Ezra Pound quotation implies, the translation of a great literary work can result in a great transformation, and potentially even an expanding of the original. It seems to be a requirement of the translator that he or she must have a vast knowledge of both the culture and language they are translating. However, as seen in variations between different translations (and the bible is just one instance where historians differ in opinion between distinctive editions), it is apparent that translation always involves a level of interpretation. Pound is an ideal analogue to the translation techniques used by Bringhurst, Wickwire, and War Party because all of their works tend to move away from an original work or mode, while trying to adhere to its thematic intentions, perhaps most strongly emphasized in War Party's translation of Hip Hop into a Native context. While Pound's poetry enacts transformation, he is also worth mentioning because his works are often not necessarily pluralistic, but rather may be read as Eurocentric renderings of other cultures, most notably Chinese poetry.⁷ Pound, who Bringhurst often uses as a model in *Sharp as a Knife* (see 365, 487f, 487), tends to move away from strict line-by-line translations into what he believes to be a form of paraphrase where the translator uses the original simply as the inspiration for his own poem. Pound's translated *Cathay* is described by Wai-Lim Yip as a "group of excellent English poems based upon some Chinese text rather than translation" (*Chinese Poetry* 4). T.S. Eliot went so far as to call Pound the "the inventor of Chinese poetry," further arguing that through Pound's translation "we really at last get the original" ("Introduction" 14). Essentially, Eliot is claiming that Pound's

imaginative reworking of these Chinese poems expands the cultural ownership of the original by putting it into new contexts. We can either read Eliot's claim as a potential ignorance towards the original Chinese text, or interpret it as a striving for sensitive cross-cultural translations that equally acknowledge the original and the new. Yip admits that no two cultures are identical, and therefore there is an impossibility of total cultural translation (79).⁸ If we agree with Yip, it is fair to assess that no translator can ever really claim to have actually fully translated the poetry, but rather only approximated a given culture into a new context, a new language, and probably for a new audience. In fact, Bringhurst is aware of the liberties often taken in any translation and confesses early on in *Sharp as a Knife* that all translation is at best an approximation, somewhat deflecting his responsibility towards accuracy, while also indicating that translation is but another version of the original, and never the same.

Walter Benjamin argues that "the basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" (*Illuminations* 81). Both Wickwire and Bringhurst allow a foreign tongue to affect their translation, and both struggle at times to find the appropriate words in English. Sometimes in translation the original word and meaning can only be rendered or left in its original form. Bringhurst is careful to leave many nouns in their original Haida, particularly the place names of villages and the names of storytellers, such as Ghandl and Skaay, arguing that he feels "less disrespectful using Ghandl's Haida name, even knowing that its owner might find fault with [his] pronunciation" (*Nine Visits* 17). By refusing to use Ghandl's "English" name Walter McGregor, Bringhurst further highlights his belief that typography can represent a prosody that when sounded out participates in a type of humanistic ontology. With similar concerns around cultural protocol, Wickwire constantly tries to translate the word *ha-HA* into terms that exist in her understanding, but even after repeated listenings to Robinson's stories she is still unsure how to explain the concept in terms that make sense to non-Native English speakers, saying that there "is no equivalent in English," but that it "connotes magic power inherent in the object of nature which is more potent

than the natural powers of men” (*Write* 31). These examples demonstrate the sensitivity and uneasiness that Wickwire and Bringhurst both have towards translation. Indeed, the most vehement criticism to which Bringhurst’s *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* has been subjected is that he attempts to conflate Haida culture and European culture in such a way that makes them appear homogeneously united, rather than diversely independent with potential dialogical intersections.

The danger of placing indigenous expression into a European or scholarly context is itself a type of translation from an Indigenous mode of expression to a Western one. This does not mean that a typically Western critical analysis of a classically Indigenous text is any less cogent or appropriate in its translated form, especially if the approach to that text creates new dialogues that would have otherwise never formulated. For this reason I find Bringhurst’s *Sharp as a Knife* both alluring and dangerous: the translation is alluring because it is highly poetic and because it expands upon the current field of classical Haida literature, whereas the translation is potentially dangerous because Bringhurst does not follow Haida cultural protocol (as I will be exploring in the next section), preferring to interpret the literature beyond the politics of cultural production.

In retelling these transfixed Haida oral stories (already transcribed by Swanton) to a group of predominately scholarly listeners, Bringhurst supplements his translations with many anthropological and historical notes. Bringhurst connects his project to *Decolonizing the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, claiming Ngũgĩ asserts that one cannot study African literatures without studying the particular cultures and oral traditions from which Africans draw their plots, styles and metaphors (*Sharp as a Knife* 19). Bringhurst is similarly concerned with providing notes on natural and social history and language, because without these notes he feels that most listeners would be lost, even though at time the stories were told such knowledge would be general information to Haida audiences (“Ecolinguistics”). While the quasi-empirical science of Bringhurst’s claim that cultural loss must be overcome reads as a little out of sync with his concepts of listening and translation, these cultural gaps can be read along an axis of two possible interpretations: on one hand, they are an opportunity to bridge understanding between cultures; more critically, they can be read as an instance

where a white scholar, such as Bringhurst appropriates a mother tongue (Haida), and then tells us how to read his translation.

Leggatt argues that cultural gaps can be read “between the cultures of the First Nations and Academia... [as] an opportunity for both academics and Indigenous writers” to engage in communication (122). Using Leggatt’s reading, the acts of textual and cultural translation become dialogical moments between an original storyteller and a translator that allow for a mutual negotiation between Academics and First Nations writers. Providing an ideal analogue to Bringhurst’s own cross-cultural understanding of Haida mythology and culture, Homi K. Bhabha argues that “the possibility of inciting cultural translations across minority discourses arises because of the disjunctive present of modernity. It ensures that what seems the same within cultures is negotiated in the time-lag of the sign which constitutes the intersubjective, social realm” (*Culture* 354). Under Bhabha’s assessment, translation becomes a performance, enacting or enunciating cultural communication, and promoting multiple levels of shifting perspective via dialogue. Conceptually, Bhabha’s description of cultural translation is productive because it prescribes an ethical responsibility to reading and theorizing literature within the framework of modernity.

As Pound demonstrated with his translations and poetic dictum (to “make it new”), translation as an approximation of another’s writing or culture creates dialogism across boundaries that exist in both the past and the present. Bringhurst, Robinson and War Party transform traditional stories by placing them into a textual setting that invites a modern reading audience. Given that all of the texts by the above writers engage in a two-way process of cultural translation themselves (Bringhurst’s translation of Haida, Robinson’s translation of European fable (“Puss in Boots”) into Okanagan storytelling, and War Party’s translation of Hip Hop into Native culture), it could be argued that some form of translation is mandatory for any work to participate in cross-cultural dialogue. Under this assessment, *newness* is defined by the boundaries of culture in a continual process of recuperation that acknowledges a historical past in an unfolding present. Perhaps the connection between traditional and modern expression is enacted most poignantly in the instance of

War Party's usage of Hip Hop: through this medium, the past is brought into the present to challenge various aspects of colonialism—still ongoing in prevailing injustices—particularly life on the reserve which has similarities to life in an American ghetto. By applying Hip Hop, War Party is able to connect the African American struggle to the First Nations struggle to create a hybrid identity that challenges colonialism and its unequivocal hold on meaning.

It is the cross-fertilization of communicative techniques—between orality and textuality, between origin and translation, and across cultural lines—that this project ventures towards in asserting a theory that challenges systems of power. Theories of hybridity can in fact become (or have already been) totalizing in their botanical roots, as investigated in Robert J. Young's book *Colonial Desire*, which explores the genealogy of 'hybridity' through nineteenth-century racial theory and its development into what has now become an innovative cultural-political concept. Hybridity as a concept is often used to assert liminality, living processes, cultural production, and intermixture as a challenge to dominant discourses, as seen in the work of postcolonial and cultural theorists such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and Homi K. Bhabha. Even the mentioned writers, who use hybridity often, grapple with its historic problematics and have done so with a revealing degree of anxiety. In his highly influential text *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy explores terms such as diaspora and hybridity as productive modes of cultural interaction, but he later moves away from an allegiance to hybridity, declaring: "I think there isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity ... that's why I try not to use the word hybrid ... Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails" ("Cultural Politics" 55). While Cultural production certainly cannot be as easy as whipping up a Cosmopolitan, I do believe that hybridity as an acknowledgement of the merging of two or more cultures into something new is an important term to apply to cultural translation, as well as a term that can be applied to challenge dominant discourses through subversive practice (via code-switching, abrogation, and through other tactics of linguistic hybridization). The type of hybridity that this project is concerned with, most crucially demonstrated in War Party's mixing of subversive techniques, relates to Bhabha's notion of hybridity: "Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to

sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative” (*Culture* 162). By challenging what many would consider authoritative voices (religion, government, colonial narrative, and approaches to storytelling), stereotypical approaches to other cultures are most strongly challenged and displayed. It is in these moments of cultural translation, from the oral to the written, that we go beyond the page into the realm of social consciousness, creating bridges between cultures and challenging ignorant perceptions of other cultures. It is the type of cultural translation, for better or for worse, that takes place in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and then again in Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*—we might be tempted to say that Robinson is like Conrad, and say Wickwire or Bringham are like Coppola in their reimagining of an original—highlighting that translation is an ongoing process that adapts along cultural lines and, as I will argue, it is this type of cultural translation which takes place between the First Nations writers and the scholars who interact with them and translate their works.

Chapter 2: Cross-Culturally Rendering Oral Myth in Robert Bringhurst's *A Story as Sharp as a Knife*

2.1 Anthropology and Ethnopoetics

Over a hundred years ago, and a hundred miles into the Pacific, a young student of Franz Boas named John Swanton listened attentively while recording the people of Haida Gwaii. He listened and recorded the voices of Skaay and Ghandl, among others—poets of incredible merit. Their words were part of an ecosystem signified by rain drops, mist, rays of sunlight piercing through cracks in trees, an unpolluted ocean, and forests as ancient as the people who inhabited them. However, what is perhaps more amazing is that Swanton found these two incredible oral poets (some of the last of their kind) amid fractured, decimated Haida villages. The Haida population, language and art were greatly devastated after European contact: they were irreparably damaged by disease, war, Christianity and new customs that forbade many of the old ways—including the potlatch and the pow wow.⁹

A dialogic work of scholarship, like a multilayered story, begins with listening. Each listener adds another layer to the thriving ecosystem of any living story, with root-like complexities that intersect with a number of fields of human understanding. For Bringhurst, John R. Swanton¹⁰ becomes an ideal listener upon whom to model his project, and it is through Swanton's listening and transcription of Skaay and Ghandl that Bringhurst builds upon for his own translations. The stories reach us, as readers, in their final form after many mediations: from Ghandl and Skaay to Swanton, with the aid of his Haida translator John Moody, to the final prose edition printed by the Bureau of Ethnography in 1905. Then, nearly one hundred years later, and after others such as John Enrico have retranslated Swanton's Haida manuscripts, Bringhurst's retranslates them again in the hopes of providing a more humanist translation (that attempts to recover the meaning of the myths, rather than being an exacting translation), along with methodologies and notes on how to reread and listen to the stories.

This section explores whether what Bringhurst attempts in *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* can be classified as intercultural trade, as a dialogical space between artists across boundaries, or as cultural appropriation. Bringhurst argues that Swanton was not guilty of cultural appropriation because he followed the proper protocols, "by buying his first story from Sghiidagits [headman of the village]" (*Knife* 73). The Haida council tends to agree with Bringhurst's assessment, as the stories told by the

Haida storytellers were not the individual property of any one family, but rather communal stories; however, this does not excuse Bringhurst's usage of these stories in his own work, a point emphasized by the Haida Council when they pronounced Bringhurst's translation to be an unsanctioned work of cultural appropriation.

Through an examination of the debates surrounding orality, typography and mythology, as well as the methodologies of anthropology and ethnopoetics, we can decide whether or not Bringhurst is guilty (if guilt is even the right word) of culturally appropriating Haida stories. It is Bringhurst's supposition that languages are interconnected; this notion reflects Ferdinand de Saussure's view that languages should be analyzed as systems in which each part is related to another, just like that of a complex ecosystem. Bringhurst often describes language as an ecosystem, going so far as to say that language is alive with ontological diversity: "A language is an organism. A weightless, discontinuous organism that lives in the minds and bodies of those who speak it—or from the language's point of view, in the bodies and minds of those *through whom it is able to speak*" (*Tree* 163). In viewing language as an ontologically defined ecosystem, Bringhurst's translation of classical Haida literature (and language), for him becomes one of conservation, and one that reflects the common anthropological belief that language embodies culture.

Bringhurst's project takes on ecological importance because, for him, the Haida language is in fact an endangered species. According to Bringhurst there are few fluent Haida speakers alive today who speak the vernacular (*Knife* 420). With such knowledge, and given the fact that the number of literate speakers is likely smaller, Bringhurst's texts (which contain various inclusions of Haida, including a pronunciation appendix) becomes a project of historical recovery. Whether Bringhurst is the right person for such a project remains debatable. *Sharp as a Knife* participates in the type of recovery undertaken by anthropologists, such as Franz Boas and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who wanted to show that people and society can be studied and viewed in terms of universals— from kinship, mythology, art, language, and social organization.

Franz Boas not only believed that culture embodies language (thus sociolinguistics is an important subfield of anthropology), but furthermore believed that the structure of a language remains unknown to the speaker until a grammatical framework is introduced (Lévi-Strauss, *Structural* 19). For Lévi-Strauss, Boas reads as a proto-structuralist whose own methodologies were some of the first to apply a “scientific aim and universal scope to anthropological research” (8). Lévi-Strauss argues that the traditional difference between anthropology and history is that anthropology lacks written documents, so anthropologists must apply their analyses primarily to the unconscious elements of social life (23-24). To view the past as divided between that which is written down (and seen as more “accurate”) and that which is not (oral elements of “primitive” societies) is extremely Eurocentric. In fact, there is much overlap between what is preserved in the written word and what is preserved orally. The Swanton texts that Bringham chooses to translate are essentially cultural artifacts because they are situated somewhat outside of the living present, in that the primary poets he translates, Skaay and Ghandl, are dead and unable to reenact their performances without Swanton’s written mediation.

In using ethnography and ethnopoetics¹¹ as methodologies to study the poetry and thus the mythology of Haida culture, Bringham’s approach mimics James Clifford’s notion of a modern “ethnography” of conjunctures, which is “constantly moving *between* cultures, [and] does not, like its Western ego ‘anthropology,’ aspire to survey the full range of human diversity or development” (*Predicament* 9). Ethnography for Bringham appears as a hybrid activity, what Clifford might call a “subversive practice” (13) because it places Haida mythology beside the poetics of history. Through a retranslation of Swanton’s texts, Bringham is able to place particular performances of Haida stories into an ongoing present where they are textualized, thus losing an element of their initial performance but taking on new meaning in the context of a readership. In this sense they operate along both metanarratives that Clifford describes in *The Predicament of Culture*: one of homogeneity, and the other of emergences; one of loss, and the other of invention (17). In any translation, something is lost; however, for Bringham translation is a mode of recuperating an

original, hence his desire to work directly with Swanton's manuscripts, rather than current translations of them. In retranslating the oral stories of Ghandl and Skaay, Bringhurst most closely participates in an ethnography of emergence, applying the methods of ethnopoetics to bring the original performances to a modern audience.

Ethnopoetics¹² only began to emerge as a field in the 1970's, somewhat after sociolinguistics (Hymes, *Ethnography* 165). Dell Hymes argues that ethnopoetics is associated primarily with the verbal art of other societies, notably societies traditionally studied by anthropologists (166).¹³ Bringhurst uses ethnopoetics in his translations to highlight the musical individuality of each Haida poet, describing myth as a prosody of meaning that involves us, as readers, or translators, "learning how to hear the myth itself and how to hear the one who tells it" (*Knife* 368). Under Bringhurst's analysis, listening to Haida stories resembles listening to music: the listener is an integral part in the manifestation of the performance.

For Bringhurst "[m]yth is that form of language in which poetry and music have not as yet diverged" (*Knife* 364). In the context of mythopoeia, Bringhurst finds no distinction between voice and music, stressing that the classical Haida language and its orally composed stories deserve the same attentive listening that classical music does. Thinking of Haida literature under the prefixes of European classical music is a strange choice when a comparison to Haida music would be a more apt and culturally specific analysis; albeit, his musical formula is consistent with the ethnopoetic method. Accordingly, Hymes argues that "[o]ral-formulaic theory and ethnopoetics are both concerned with composition in the course of performance and with constraints that must be met in doing so" (Hymes, *Now I Know* 303). Given that Hymes' definition of composing or transcribing oral texts is highly alacritous, jazz or another form of improvisatory music would be more suitable to describe Bringhurst's practice than perhaps classical music; however, Hymes' definition of oral-formulaic theory reminds us that Bringhurst is principally concerned with recovering an element of live performance which, like classical music, is rooted in a certain time and place. Part of Bringhurst's objective in retranslating Swanton's Haida manuscripts is to recover some the shapes and patterns of

poetic speech that Swanton and Boas initially glossed over. Bringhurst believes that the forms present in Classical Haida literature are a poetry where “*what there is to count* is almost always what there is to think about, not *what there is to hear*” (*Knife* 365). This theory is expounded in *The Tree of Meaning* (thirteen lectures delivered by Bringhurst), where Bringhurst connects listening and poetry to the Haida notion that when you think in (or about) something, you say *hl gudang*, which means, “I hear it” (Watkins, “Poetics”).

For Bringhurst, attentive listening (a term which is abstracted and mystified by Bringhurst as a process that is more organic and ontological than explained in his texts) is an aid to uncover a universal form in Haida poetry that connects to poetry in general, and he uses John Swanton as his model for an ideal listener. Hymes posits that the universal element of all poetry, in any culture, is its organization according to some pattern (*Ethnography* 124; 219). While this definition is rather broad, it does help to highlight that under ethnopoetics, all language (not just poetry) is universally adaptable. Perhaps the most useful and universally adaptable poetic term Bringhurst applies to Haida stories is Pound’s term *phanopeia*, which denotes the casting of images upon the visual imagination (*Knife* 487). In thinking of voice as a type of projector for the images of stories, we can begin to highlight how writing and orality function in similar capacities.

2.2 Learning to Hear the Voice in Text

Our story has always been the spoken word, animated with subtleties and emotions that don’t translate into print. (Guujaaw, “This Box of Treasures,” qtd. in Enrico vii)

One of the key concerns of this project is the potential divergence between orality and textuality, especially since the texts this project explores all attach a special importance to the oral medium, yet depend on a written form to reach a broader, often non-Native audience. Bringhurst translates the Haida stories into a type of poetry that is arguably fixed by the page, although Bringhurst would likely attest that his typography adheres to the conventions of written orality. Undoubtedly, the printed word fails to replace the attributes of an oral performance: intonations, vocal inflections, timbre, physical gestures, and other living attributes of oral storytelling cannot be

fully conveyed through text. However, this does not mean that oral performances should never be written down: imagine a literary world without an *Odyssey*, or an *Iliad*.

One possibility is to look at the contact between written and oral worlds as creating metaphorical space for cultural exchange. In fact, Bringhurst argues that First Nations language and culture, in relation to European language and culture, are not as divergent as we might assume. Thinking about metaphor, he often compares what he terms as “First Nations poetry” to a European painting, believing that the images in European paintings, and the painters who are commissioned to retell a story afresh resemble the Haida storytellers and their stories: “it is often more informative to compare Native American oral poetry to European painting than to European literature” (*Knife* 45). While Bringhurst attempts to provide a methodology for reading (or listening to) Haida literature by thinking about how images are called into the mind through the oral, he risks overshadowing the uniqueness of Native culture by making strong cultural comparisons between European art traditions and Haida oral traditions. Although Bringhurst endeavors to show that Native stories are worthy of the same attention as the European paintings that are hung in art galleries around the world, and therefore worthy of an effort to understand them, his comparative analysis overshadows the cultural specificity of Haida oral literature, which deserves to be examined under its own terms. In spite of the many arguments for and against Bringhurst’s comparative analysis, he at least makes an effort to engage in a dialogue that places two diverse traditions in conversation with one another and equally grants brilliance to both; however, it is possible to read this conversation as a monologic assessment that perpetuates a new stereotype of oral literature being synonymous to European art.

In *The Singer of Tales*, Albert Lord highlights the somewhat arbitrary nature of a term such as oral literature: “The expression ‘oral literature’ is obviously a contradiction in terms. Yet we live at a time when literacy itself has become so diluted that it can scarcely be invoked as an esthetic criterion” (xxxix). I disagree with Lord’s definition, because the term oral literature acknowledges that oral stories operate under similar conditions as written ones; however, a level of translation is necessary as the spoken and written are not interchangeable. Tom Flanagan makes the unfounded

claim that “[w]riting has a tremendous advantage precisely because it transcended the limitations of individual memory” (163). This statement is proved erroneous after one reading of Robinson’s stories (which fill three volumes of written transcription) or Bringhurst’s Haida translations (Skaay and Ghandl each fill a volume simply with the stories they chose to tell Swanton, or that Swanton chose to record). One of the wonderful things about reading oral texts that are highly complex and dialogic, such as Bringhurst’s and Wickwire’s translations, is that they innately refute common assumptions about orality as being inferior to the written; furthermore, they inextricably involve the reader in highly participatory dialogism.

Often in Haida literature, and in Bringhurst’s translations, the phrase “they say” is placed at the end of a sentence to remind us that the text was initially in spoken form and involves voices outside the narrator’s own telling, highlighting that the story is part of the fabric of a continual mythopoeia that connects the past to an ongoing present. Nicholas Bradley argues that the device “they say” functions to remind readers that the “narrator is not *inventing* the events in the myth but retelling the elements of a story, which exists independently from any individual performer or poet” (“We Who Have Traded” 150). The notion of an engaged reading audience is supported by Roland Barthes, who argues that the text has no meaning until someone reads it and makes sense of it by interpretation (qtd. in Ong 159). Because of the need for interpretation, something of the original performance is inevitably lost when an oral story is transferred into a written context.

Bringhurst’s stories are far removed from their original telling (and are therefore more phantasmic than Wickwire’s autochthonic transcription of Robinson’s stories), as Bringhurst’s work is actually the retranslation of stories originally written down and translated by Swanton with the help of a bilingual Haida translator named Henry Moody. It is Bringhurst’s intention that readers recreate an element of the original performance, whether that involves reading the text aloud or mentally transporting ourselves into the type of space in which the stories were originally listened to. In re-listening to Bringhurst’s, or any, oral text in translation, we must realize that there is a mosaic of voices speaking, and that no single author (or translator) can claim complete ownership.

The many voices that participate in creating a myth such as “Raven Travelling” are perhaps why Bringhurst insists on the importance of polyphony: a myth in which multiple versions exist in Haida and throughout Coast Salish mythology. Bringhurst’s task as a translator involves a tripartite interpretive weaving: his own craft is placed alongside that of the First Nations storytellers in translation, to implicate us as readers in the text. Bringhurst’s intertextual approach reminds us of the etymological Latin root of text: *textus*, which means “weave,” highlighting the fact that textual and oral analysis might be more symbiotic than irresolute (Ong 13). Socrates, in Plato’s *Ion*, describes the occupation of the rhapsode as an interpreter, or translator of the poet: “And no man can be a rhapsode who does not understand the meaning of the poet. For the rhapsode ought to interpret the mind of the poet to his hearers.” To rhapsodize means “to stitch songs together,” something storytellers and DJs do literally when they incorporate a multitude of samples into a single production, creating what can be described as modern orality: fusing the oral within the textual.¹⁴

While Bringhurst mentions the importance of protecting an oral literature in its textual space, he also argues that in thriving oral traditions the oral voice is itself polyvocal and involved in dialogue with a world that listens. He describes the voice of Skaay as “one who knows that the living world as a whole—one particularly thoughtless and distracted species partially expected—hears and weighs his every word” (*Knife* 283). Skaay’s careful attention to words, as described by Bringhurst, suggests a symmetry between the organic and the origin of spoken words, a nostalgia that Western Philosophers have often been interested in recovering. Plato, who venerates Socrates (who never wrote anything down) above any other philosopher, condemns writing at the end of *Phaedrus* on the grounds that writing destroys memory and that a written text cannot defend itself in dialogue (Kennedy 13). In a rare moment of clarity, Phaedrus describes the written as a mere image of the original living word: “You mean no dead discourse, but the living speech, the original of which the written discourse may fairly be called a kind of image” (276a). It is precisely this living speech that Bringhurst hopes to uncover in placing the oral into a typographic space.

Ong makes a compelling argument that writing moves words from the sound-world to a world of visual space, describing that the finality of print locks words into position in this space (119). By fixating the Haida myths in a textual setting, with poetic stanzas, it becomes apparent to the average reader/listener that the “typographic aesthetics of the page are at least as important to Bringhurst as producing audible sounds” (Watkins, “Poetics”). Nevertheless, Bringhurst’s poetic practice is more concerned with the quasi-orality of silence than with actual speech. Bringhurst maintains that narrative patterning in an oral performance is no less universal (aligning with his belief in the universality of poetry) than any other linguistic phenomenon (*Nine Visits* 29). His choice to retranslate the Haida texts into poetic stanzas is supported by Mary Jane McGary and Joan Tenenbaum’s similar decision to edit Antone Evan and other Tanaina storytellers into the imbricated form associated with verse:

The line and stanza format merely makes it possible to include more information about the way the stories were told than a plain prose presentation would. It also seems to make reading the stories more like hearing them, perhaps because we read verse lines more slowly and with more concentration than we read blocks of prose. (“Dena’ina Sukdu’a 6)

While McGary and Tenenbaum’s choice to use poetic stanzas is compelling, it is problematic to assume that First Nations stories should only be textualized in poetic form, which does not allow for other equally suitable literary mediums, such as prose, or visual and/or audio representations.

The possibility of an amalgamated mode of storytelling (that combines orality and textuality) is often articulated by partition rather than cohesion. Walter Ong’s oversimplification of the division between the written and the oral as two modes of communication that are irresolute at their roots is both a reductive and prescriptive view of language that does not consider the possibility for interaction between the two. Schorcht argues that “[w]hen set alongside the written voices of Ortiz, Silko and Armstrong and read through the lens of contemporary Native literature, such dichotomization of oral and written must be implicated in the domestication of Native narrative traditions” (23). The perpetuation of stereotypical divisions between written and oral cultures is for

Schorcht a type of domestication that promotes cultural essentialism, thus turning Native people into a subjugated culture. Rather than focus on division, a more productive strategy involves dialogic participation from an audience: a performance made textual, such as Bringhurst's translation, is greatly aided by a high level of active participation from a readership to recreate the original performance.

The connection between the written and the oral is not something wholly original to First Nations studies either; it is a reality of all literature, something that V.N. Vološinov¹⁵ investigates in his exploration of dialogism, which can exist in print as part of a "*continual process of verbal communication*" ("Marxism and the Philosophy of Language" 95). Vološinov's connection between the written and the oral elucidates what most First Nations writers already know: that writing and orality are not necessarily divergent forms of communication. Furthermore, Vološinov's argument provides another voice in support of Bringhurst's belief that "the poems of Skaay and Ghandl can be described as associative prose" (*Knife* 366), which are essentially unmetered rhythmical phrases which can be written down after careful listening. Bringhurst argues that poetry "is a quintessential part of aboriginal American tradition" (367), and sites Ghandl, the blind poet, as a great listener and communicator with the world. The beginning of Ghandl's "Those Who Stay a Long Way out to Sea" highlights the storyteller's ability to capture birdsong through words:

*Then they were off, they say
After they travelled a ways,
a wren sang to one side of them.
They could see that it punctured
a blue hole through the heart
of the one who had passed closest to it, they say. (Knife 343)*

This passage from Ghandl highlights that listening functions between human and non-human entities, reflecting Bringhurst's argument that myth exists "independently of any human culture" (368). While this statement from Bringhurst is an ecological argument for the universality of poetry, it ignores that many myths belong exclusively to certain Haida families and are considered their property.

By refuting communal authorship, Bringhurst attempts respectfully to recognize the craft of individual Haida storytellers, particularly Ghandl and Skaay, who choose to have their stories made public by allowing them to be written down. Ironically, he risks a recasting of Eurocentricism by placing First Nations storytellers under the rubric of the Western author. The positive side of his analysis is that an oral myth can be theorized in a similar way as a novel (allowing for easier cross-cultural analyses); the negative side is that it denies the fact that myths do not necessarily adhere to the Western defined principles of authorship and textual analysis.

2.3 The Sound of Myth

Myths are good to think, it seems, and those who have absorbed them may carry certain of them with them all their lives. Artistry is inseparable, one may think, first, from eliciting absorbed attention that makes the heard myth part of one's imagination, then from offering patterns and details that can give expression to new understanding. (Dell Hymes, *Now I Know Only So Far* 402)

Claude Lévi-Strauss maintains that “myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is part of human speech” (209). This statement about myth by Lévi-Strauss reflects the above epigraph by Hymes, who states that myth is ultimately a type of patterned language. This connects nicely to Bringhurst's humanist vision to conserve mythology via a retelling of the Haida myths. Furthermore, Bringhurst's ethnographic concern for preserving classical Haida mythology echoes the apprehensions of anthropologists who thought that certain myths would be lost forever if they were not written down. Within this framework, Bringhurst is more than a translator: he is a cultural curator who negotiates the duality between the ethnographer and the missionary. An ethnographer wants to understand another culture, while the missionary only wants to change it, to eradicate their so-called myths through the introduction of Christianity. While Bringhurst is certainly not imposing Judeo-Christian beliefs upon First Nations literature, he does risk imposing his own Western judgments on Haida literature, particularly his concern with preserving the stories in his own writing.¹⁶ For Bringhurst, at its core his project is one of recovery; it is an attempt to recover the prosody of myth that other translators have failed to hear, as well as to preserve classical Haida language.

In “Raven Travelling,” Skaay describes how Raven killed off half a village in one stroke, reminding listeners of the loss of myths and culture at the hands of Europeans: “Then he sliced his father’s hat in two./ Half the villagers were killed” (*Being* 329). In actuality, half a village being decimated is an understatement of the destruction that took place during and following European contact with the Haida people. In the *Tree of Meaning*, Bringhurst describes how “four hundred years ago there were three hundred indigenous languages spoken in North America and now there is only around one hundred and seventy” (66). Bringhurst’s frequent inclusion of Haida passages, interspersed within his translations, challenges us as audiences to listen to the original language and make space for its survival. Any ethical reading of a translated text involves a type of ecological linguistics that not only recognizes the value of the language and culture, but also its relation to space in both the literary and physical sense (“Ecolinguistics”).

In Ghandl’s myth-story “A Blue Hole in the Heart,” he foretells that myths will die out, like a language, if they are no longer spoken: “Myth Woman, it will be through you/ that the last people listen to the myths” (*Knife* 358). Later, in the same story, a Shaman tells the people how they came to know their names, emphasizing the importance of oral memorization as a listening tactic that preserves culture:

*After he had spoken,
this was a story they couldn’t forget.
They repeated it night after night to each other.
For that reason, moreover, they never forgot it. (Knife 359)*

This passage reveals a communal responsibility to memorize culturally specific stories. In this communal setting, memorization functions as a type of translation between the original and a more polyphonic version, which incorporates multiple tellers. By repeating a myth, over and over, to a larger audience, the myth develops and expands beyond the original performance, and enters into the memories of all who listen, perhaps the reason that Skaay and Ghandl decided to have their stories transcribed and written down by Swanton. Gary Snyder argues that since “oral literature is carried in memory alone, it is impossible to expect any single version” (79). Bringhurst emphasizes that the

shift from the oral to the written affects the meaning of the stories, and the language: “A shift from oral to written culture affects the functioning of memory, the understanding of the truth, and the place of voice and language in the workings of the world” (*Knife* 193). Bringhurst is more concerned with an ontological return to classical Haida orality in his translations than a renewal of the oral culture under North American urban poetics.

For Bringhurst, the structure and patterns of Haida oral poetry are a type of polyphonic music that highlights a complex poetic structure.¹⁷ Such a complex analysis of Haida literature underscores Bringhurst’s favouring of multilayered expression, which is likely why he compares Haida literature to European paintings and classical forms of music and poetry. The problem with Bringhurst’s privileging of structural music (a concept that is somewhat fraught given that music and structure are not necessarily synonymous) is that he essentializes classical Haida literature, while hardly broaching modern Haida literature in English. While Bringhurst’s ethnopoetic approach to First Nations literature is concerned with an attentive listening of structure and pattern, in attempting to reveal a universality to Haida oral poetics he risks marginalizing current Haida poets and storytellers who are the very representations of what he might be looking for in the past. However, in taking an ethnopoetic approach to represent classical Haida orality, Bringhurst challenges us to listen to the words on the page carefully to see the oral in myth, and thus to hear the oral in the written.

Bringhurst urges us to “*think* the myths,” making the “creatures that inhabit them” real “and not fictitious” (143). Snyder argues that the narrative complexities of mythology show that Native song and poetry take a much more connotative, metaphorical approach to storytelling than European culture, which tends to have more analytical approaches to literary structure (89). I disagree with Snyder’s assessment, as there are numerous examples in Western literary culture that prioritize a metaphorical approach, yet I believe he is valid in asserting that metaphor is central in an oral story. Like Bringhurst, Snyder is attempting to deconstruct past theories of mythology that viewed myths as if they “were irrational diseases from which savage minds suffered” (89). Mythology takes on many layers of what Bringhurst terms *narrative music*, which is “played by calling images into the mind

with spoken words” (*Knife* 53). These images are called to the mind by a process of cross-cultural translation, consequently reflecting Bringhurst’s concern for the accessibility of his text. While there is an inability to fully translate myth, as Lévi-Strauss (229), Boas (*Race* 452), and Synder (88) all examine in their own works, it does highlight that myth functions as a space of transition, and translation is an attempt to capture that moment of modification.

The Raven¹⁸ figure is an ideal metaphor to draw attention to translation as a process that enacts transformation, such as the process of making the oral textual. In “Raven Travelling” and other Haida stories that involve Raven, Raven often represents the story, and tells lies in order to make the truth more apparent. Raven’s actions are typically gluttonous, greedy, incestuous, and, as Bringhurst says, they represent both “shit-disturbing and irrepressible logos” (*Knife* 292). The Raven has the power to create, as well as to destroy, often reinventing himself and his surroundings to meet changing situations. Raven can bring humans into being with his thoughts, and often the effortless act of thinking gets him into trouble in Skaay’s “Raven Travelling”: “Suppose he swallowed me,” he [Raven] thought. / The whale did that very thing, they say / and this one gobbled up his guts from the inside” (*Being and Being* 279). The act of thinking relates to listening, and thus to poetry as a creative force. The poem is set in motion by the act of thinking, as an old man (the symbolic storyteller) speaks these words to Raven: “You are me./ You are that too” (287). Raven himself is a shapeshifter who often crawls into different skins and whose unique powers extend to his ability to be a polyvocal listener: “He listened throughout the house” (284); “He listened to them talking” (285). Furthermore, Raven’s power of speech is addressed throughout “Raven Travelling,” as his words bring his thoughts into fruition:

<<Ghaaaaaw!>>
It was solid, that rock,
And yet he splintered it by speaking. (*Being and Being* 319)

<<His [Raven’s] talk brought it to be.
It is just as he described it.
Well, we have plenty of people and food!>> (322)

These passages elucidate Raven's ability to transform the world by speaking, explicating the notion that myth, like translation, is itself transformative, portraying the storyteller as one who possesses an ability to shape an audience's perceptions of the world.

In the more than fifty renditions of "Raven Travelling" that Boas studied, Skaay's is the only one in which the mythteller plays with the use of a narrative mirror, self-reflexively identifying the immediate situation of the story being recorded by Swanton. Such deviation from the common formula of the tale helps Bringham's case for individual authorship, and challenges Boas' belief that oral literature is essentially independent of individual thought. Bringham describes Skaay's version of "Raven Travelling" as the only classical Haida mythtext in which we find the phrase "mythteller" or *qqaygaanga llaghaaygaai*, and the only text in which a mythcreature turns to another and asks, "Don't you know any myths?" (*Knife* 269). Bringham's choice of the word 'myth' — when in Swanton's version, the word 'story' is used: "Don't you know a story" (*Haida Texts* 124)— highlights that translation not only involves a level of subjective interpretation, but that it may in fact distort and transform the original into something new. Bringham's selection of 'myth' over 'story' exemplifies that in translation, an element of the original is always reinvisioned; this is also true in Swanton's text because he too made a conscious decision to use the word 'story,' rather than myth, tale or another alternative. The following passage can be read as a resistant act to writing an oral performance down; it is also a highly self-reflexive moment where Skaay reveals the monologic nature of transferring myth into a written context:

Voicehandler turned to the people beside him.
<<Do you know any stories from mythtime?>>
<<No,>> they replied.
He turned to the other side.
<<Doesn't one of you know any stories from mythtime?>>
<<No, we don't.>>

Then he said to his father,
<<They don't seem to know any stories from mythtime.>>
Then Qinggi, his father, said,
<<Really? Not even the story called Raven Travelling?
Couldn't one of your crewmembers tell me that story?>> (*Being* 329-30)

While there is no literary portrait of John Swanton, this is a moment in the text where we as readers feel as Swanton might have felt while listening to such rich stories and being unable to offer any in return (“Ecolinguistics”). The trickster was often a viable and devastatingly dangerous character in Skaay’s time and, like the Raven, the colonizers had taken all they could from the Haida people and offered little in return. After all this destruction, and after almost ninety percent of the population was destroyed by disease, a small unarmed man named John Swanton appeared, wanting all the stories he could record—especially the biggest of them all: “Raven Travelling.” Like the ravenous Raven, as audiences it is hard not to feel that we too have invaded the world of oral myth.

It is as if Skaay tells us, however subversively, that when the story is textualized, it is compromised in that it is no longer dialogic. Just as Swanton is unable to respond to stories told in Haida (a language he did not initially understand), we are unable to respond to a text fixed by the page. In solidifying an oral performance through writing across cultures, we must ask whether this is an act of cultural appropriation, or whether it is something new (in the Poundian sense) that deserves the same antiphonic call for a return to stories; this is the challenge that underpins Skaay’s warning, and it is the biggest challenge facing any translator.

2.4 Rendering the “Other” in the Self

The collective unconscious is not dependent on cerebral heredity; it is the result of what I shall call the unreflected imposition of a culture. (Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 191)

Although Frantz Fanon is both “Other” and analyzer, and as such his position is markedly more complicated than Bringhurst’s, this epigraph (an anti-colonialist approach to psychology) connects nicely with Bringhurst’s own polyphonic and humanist approach to consciousness, reminding us of the psychological imperative of trying to understand that (or whom) which has been labeled as “Other.” However, Bringhurst overlooks a crucial step in trying to understand Haida literature, particularly in his avoidance of current Haida policy and cultural repatriation. Unlike Swanton’s attentiveness towards Haida protocol (he paid for the stories he used), Bringhurst did not even ask permission of the Haida Council to re-use the stories, since Swanton’s use of the stories had

already met with the initial approval of the Haida villages. This logic seems a little odd to me, considering Brighurst's translations are far removed from the original performances and the initial agreement between the anthropologist and Haida community. These questions surrounding Brighurst's text are ones that we, as readers, should be asking; they are of particular relevance since Haida commentators such as Vince Collison (the deputy chief councilor for the Old Masset village council) have argued that Brighurst's work is in fact an act of cultural appropriation. Other scholars such as John Enrico argue that Brighurst does not even have a well-grounded understanding of the Haida language. Aside from concerns of cultural appropriation, Enrico's translation of Swanton's manuscripts met with less disapproval because he prepared his texts along with the assistance of two Haida consultants, leaving the text copyrighted to the Haida Nation (Bradley, "Traded" 141). Enrico's collaborative translations differ greatly from Brighurst's because they are written in prose and contain the full Haida text on the left page, with a line-by-line English translation on the right page. While Enrico's methodology reads as more sound than Brighurst's, his translations are observably less poetic, as exemplified when comparing their translations of the opening lines to "Raven Travelling":

This island was nothing but saltwater, they say. Raven flew around. He looked for a place to land in the water. By and by, he flew to a reef [k'il or Flatrock Island] lying at the south end of the island, to sit on it. (Enrico 15)

HEREABOUTS WAS ALL SALT WATER THEY SAY.

He was flying all around, the Raven was,

Looking for land that he could stand on.

After a time, at the toe of the islands, there was one rock awash.

He flew there to sit. (Brighurst, *Being in Being* 283)

It is this attention to abstracted detail that separates Brighurst's translation from the prose editions of Swanton and Enrico. Swanton argues that he created his own translations in such a way "as to assist the philologist without too far obscuring the meaning" (*Haida Texts* 5). By contrast, Brighurst's translations are consistent with the methods of ethnopoetics, preferring to not use standard sentences, as shown in the comparison to Enrico's text, but rather lines of verse, probably with the intention of breaking up thoughts, and more effectively propelling a modern listening

audience to sound the stories aloud to recreate the physical aspect of oral performance. While Enrico's translation hinges closer to textual accuracy, Bringhurst's is a better portrayal of how the stories may have originally sounded when spoken; however, while both texts differ in their typography, it must be remembered that both are interpretations of the same Swanton manuscript. Once again, Bringhurst is more concerned with ontological accuracy when shaping his translations than the politics surrounding his methodology.

Bringhurst continually declares that poetry exists beyond the limits of any one culture, believing that "stories, whether mythical or historical, timeless or temporal, never exist in isolation" (*Knife* 47): the ultimate goal of his translations is one of "cross-cultural respect and understanding" (391). While it is difficult to understand how cross-cultural respect can be achieved by ignoring the ongoing effects of colonial appropriation (such as the usage of Haida stories by non-Haida writers for profit), it is easier to understand Bringhurst's indebtedness to an ethnopoetic approach towards common humanity, as well as his concern with recovering the voices of both Skaay and Ghandl. In trying to provide Haida storytellers such as Skaay and Ghandl a textual space to express their voice—Bringhurst prefers to see the Haida storytellers that he translates as individual artists, rather than simply as communal storytellers—Bringhurst opposes common anthropological assessments, such as Boas' belief that oral literature is fundamentally independent of individual composition. Bringhurst argues that Haida storytellers were using pan-cultural formulas to tell their stories, but with individual skill unique to each performer and their mastery of a given story.

Bringhurst argues that this mastery allows for a poetic distinctiveness to each Haida storyteller, but it also reflects a history that belongs to a communal audience. Such attentive listening is described by Bringhurst as the prosody of meaning, and it is reflected by First Nations storyteller Shlàwtxan, who equates myths as belonging to all people:

*Not just here in this place
but in every place there is:
all the different kinds of people,
differing languages,
differing foods*

[...]

*They were listening to the myths back then,
and they are thinking of them still.
The land and the myths have grown together this way
from then until now. (Knife 371)*

Bringhurst takes up the call of the above passage and uses *Sharp as a Knife* to make a plea for polyphony: he does so with an ear towards the witnessing of the past, arguing that First Nations poetics and poets exist in similar capacities to the poetic canon already in place, yet with their own sense of identity and complex history, thus prompting polyphonies of cultural listening from his readership. While Bringhurst makes a strong humanistic claim for the universality of poetry, it is also a claim that tends to homogenize Haida stories, rather than focus on the specific uniqueness of Haida poesies. It is in these moments that Bringhurst loses me, yet it is with his well crafted translation that he pulls me back in. Bringhurst deflects some his responsibility by claiming that the first step to cross-cultural understanding begins with his kind of listening, an act of careful translation that involves the author and the readers, as listeners: “the maturity and character of oral literature depended on the listener as much as the teller” (*Nine Visits* 17). Bringhurst admits that his translation “is not a perfectly consistent text but one securely rooted in a single authorial voice and historical time” (*Knife* 421). For him, his text is an attempt to be faithful to the storytellers’ original voices, and to maintain those voices in text as much as possible.

Bringhurst’s good friend, Haida carver and storyteller Bill Reid (of Haida and European decent) was often criticized for being a mimic of Haida culture with manufactured ties, moving away from the community while serving it, but is now viewed as inspiring a Haida Renaissance in art. While Bringhurst has no direct ties to Haida heritage, his project is ultimately a celebration of the heritage of Haida storytelling, cross-cultural communication, and the importance of a poetic Renaissance. Whether or not we agree with all of his described methodologies (or need to sanction his approach: his choice not to ask permission from the Haida council is a hard one to overcome), his translations challenge us anew as scholars, and more importantly as attentive listeners who not only

think about poetry, but who attempt to think *through* poetry to bridge gaps between cultures, worldviews, and our connection to the world around us.

Chapter 3: Creating Dialogic Spaces in Harry Robinson's *Write it on Your Heart*

3.1 Storytelling as a Cultural Pedagogy

give me the voice
To tell the shifting story of the world
From its beginning to the present hour. (Ovid, *The Metamorphoses* 35)

Like Ovid, who calls upon the power of the gods to aid him in covering the entire spectrum of past to present, Harry Robinson's stories also span the range of history. Robinson's stories often directly interact with narratives of colonization, confronting and challenging history through the act of listening. Walter Benjamin argues that in the twentieth century (particularly in Europe), the "art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out" ("The Storyteller" *Illuminations* 87). Many First Nations writers would argue against Benjamin's non-autochthonous perspective, viewing the act of weaving stories as a continual process which is always adapting to new demands (from the oral to the written); yet, as Robinson, Skaay, and other storytellers decry, on the horizon there is the possibility of losing many of the old stories. Robinson's stories are rooted in his people, but they are also rooted, like the stories of Skaay and Ghandl, in a world that listens, which includes gods, animals, nature, and mythological approaches to human understanding. Wickwire describes "Harry's life [as being] filled not with material things, but with the pervasive presence of a still-living mythological world. Every hill, valley, canyon, creek, and river has its story" (*Heart* 14). Wickwire's assessment that Robinson's life is not filled with material things is a little out of tune with the fact that when Wickwire would visit him he would come to meet her in his pickup truck (14). If anything, Robinson stands at the edge of two worlds: an oral past, and a highly technological future that includes writing as a natural development for his stories. By engaging with humans and non-humans, Natives with non-Natives, Okanagans with non-Okanagans, the written and the oral, Robinson transforms the entire world into an ever-shifting story that does not assume authority for any single voice.

Robinson's stories refute Ong's argument that in oral cultures the cosmos is an ongoing event where humanity is at the centre (72). Robinson's oral stories challenge Ong's assessment of oral culture by showing that Okanagan oral ethos does not place humans at the centre of the universe, but rather that human beings are part of an ongoing process of transformation. In oral literature, Coyote often outsmarts God, and at other times animals help humans overcome obstacles, showing a world that cooperates—an inversion of the story of Genesis, which maintains human dominance over nature: "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). However, in the fourth and final part of *Write it on Your Heart*, "World Unsettled: The Age of the White Man" (the text does not make it explicit whether this is Wickwire's or Robinson's title, or a joint effort of nomenclature), Robinson depicts a much different world, where the connection to the past is broken, and magic does not exist in similar capacities because the settler has taken it away. The title of this final section, "World Unsettled," is a pun that highlights the fact that Robinson is worried about what will happen to his stories once they have been placed alongside the mythology of European history, although his stories in this section embrace these possibilities. The final section of *Write* is the reason why Robinson's stories are so important to the current debates surrounding cultural appropriation, dialogic interaction between a Native (Robinson) and a non-Native (Wickwire), and hybridity: Robinson himself is unafraid to appropriate European storytelling ("Puss in Boots," for example) into an Okanagan context. The danger of losing the power to tell his stories is Robinson's greatest motivation to have them solidified in writing and to engage in dialogue with Wickwire, who is more than simply a transcriber and editor of his stories, but a friend who is often incorporated into the very fabric of the tales. Wickwire elucidates that "[m]ore than anything, Harry laments the erosion of his native language, and the replacement of storytelling by television and radio" (15). Robinson warns that "I'm going to disappear [...] and there'll be no more telling stories" (15). Thus, writing for Robinson and Wickwire becomes an essential act of preservation, and translation becomes a didactic plea for cross-cultural respect and understanding.

In listening to Robinson's stories we (as listeners, scholars, and translators from one cultural context into another) are challenged to become storytellers ourselves via reading. Ong argues that the "sense of individual words as significantly discrete items is fostered by writing" (60), but Robinson's text, which contains many Okanagan words, such as *Chap-TEEK-whl* (stories of how the world came to be), *shmee-MA-ee* (stories which followed the mythical age), *shoo-Mish* (Nature helper), *SHA-ma* (white man) and *Shin-KLEEP* (Coyote), prompts readers to think about the performance of words, more so than their typographic or orthographic setting. Wickwire insists that "Harry's stories are really performed events, rather than fixed objects on a page" (16). Under Wickwire's assessment, the stories that Robinson tells are active and living narratives (in that listeners recreate them) that rework a variety of ancient stories "to incorporate events of his lifetime—which makes the collection vital" (22). Listening to Robinson's stories provides us with an Okanagan understanding of how the world operates through storytelling, bestowing us with an anachronistic challenging of both time and space. However, after Wickwire's extended edits and careful arrangement of the stories in their sequence, the stories become governed by a chronotopal relation to narrative: they are grouped by time, and follow a typical narrative in their textual placement. While Wickwire's transcription of Robinson's *Write it on Your Heart* differs from Bringham's Haida translations because hers is a more plain autochthonic transcription (Robinson provided the translation into English himself), Wickwire still enacts the role of cultural translator in her choice to group the stories according to a typical narrative sequence that commences with "Beginnings: The Age of the Animal People" and concludes with stories that display a disconnection with an Okanagan past.

Even with Wickwire's careful compiling, Robinson's stories still confront traditional written history by highlighting that stories do not fit smoothly along linear time, and that truth is a matter of perspective, beyond textual compartmentalization. In his story "Coyote Plays a Dirty Trick," it turns out that it is not Neil Armstrong who is the first man on the moon:

Coyote's son was the first man on the moon!
And Mr. Armstrong was the second man on the moon.
So the Indians know that,

but the white people do not know what the Indian know (92).

By challenging history through storytelling, and by setting up a polarity between white and Native perspectives, Robinson reminds his listeners that many stereotypes about Native people have been perpetuated through cultural difference, the media, and written history. Robinson's weaving of multiple viewpoints into the fabric of his storytelling sets everything up for re-telling: truth itself becomes a process of transformation that involves translation across cultural lines. Schorcht argues that when Robinson gives us his version of Neil Armstrong's trip to the moon, he gives it to us in the framework of an Okanagan worldview that "suggests the continuity of an Okanagan past and history into the present. It shows how Robinson uses traditional Okanagan narrative to frame or interpret his modern-day life experiences" (54). Schorcht highlights that Robinson uses the traditional framework of Okanagan storytelling to counteract those forces which threaten his people's space to tell their own stories. By reinscribing a factual event, such as Neil Armstrong's moon landing, Robinson highlights the subjective truth of stories, as well as his desire to claim his own cultural space alongside written history. While having Wickwire transcribe, edit, and compile his stories into a book would seem like a way to crystallize Robinson's stories, and deprive them of their cultural specificity, it is a desire that reflects Robinson's hope to leave his legacy, as well as that of his ancestors, behind.

In having Wickwire transcribe his stories onto the page, Robinson opens his storytelling to a much wider audience. Inviting a larger reading audience far removes the stories from a primarily oral Okanagan context into a cooperative sphere that emphasizes and acknowledges the power of the written and spoken word in conjunction. In moments of alacritous reflection throughout *Write it on Your Heart*, Robinson reveals the vital need for his stories to be preserved, believing that he is the last survivor of a long oral tradition: "And that's how did we hear the stories from there, here./ But now nobody know that but only me" ("Helped by a Wolverine" 150). The challenge for us, as readers and scholars alike, is to learn how to hear Robinson's stories through their written medium and to participate in the dialogism that this project enacts—to hear the voice in the text.

3.2 “Interfusalional” Writing

What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” *Dialogic* 358).

Schorcht, in *Stories Voices in Native American Texts*, describes Robinson’s oral texts as the “first comprehensive body of traditional Native stories where the storyteller has provided his own translation,” as well as instructions on “how he wants us to think about Okanagan linguistic categories and cultural experience” (34). While Schorcht’s definition is helpful, it denies the participatory role that Wickwire plays in shaping our opinions about Okanagan linguistic categories and cultural experiences. As a compiler, transcriber and editor, Wickwire participates in Bakhtin’s concept of hybridization by combining her own linguistic consciousness with that of Robinson’s, particularly shown in her choice to “[edit] the pronouns” in order “minimize confusion for readers new to these stories” (15). Furthermore, Wickwire’s introduction to *Write* never mentions whether Robinson is complacent with her choice of editorial decisions; she simply states she carefully searched for a style that captures the dramatic pauses and rhythms of Robinson’s speech as accurately as possible (16). Thomas King describes this process of interaction between the written and oral in Robinson’s stories as “interfusalional” writing, a style in which “the patterns, metaphors, structures as well as the themes and characters come primarily from oral literature” (“Godzilla” 13). Wickwire is aware of the irony of writing Robinson’s stories down, as an element of their living orality will inevitably be lost: “ironically, to crystallize Harry’s stories, either on tape or in book form, also fixes these living stories in time. They will no longer evolve as they have for hundreds of generations” (*Heart* 23). Thinking of Robinson’s stories as “interfusalional” helps to challenge hermeneutic approaches to text because when readers sound out *Write* the oral is displayed in the written, and the written in the oral, thus blurring the lines of compartmentalization between the two.

As readers, the original living oral performances are unattainable; recovering much of the oral voice is a matter of readers moving beyond thetic approaches to orally composed texts. King

argues that Robinson, “within the confines of written language, is successful in creating an oral voice” that works against the fixity of the written text by encouraging readers to read aloud, thus “recreating at once the storyteller and the performance” (“Godzilla” 13). Wickwire retains the oral element of Robinson’s stories by recording, in her textual version, the alacritous moments of Robinson’s spoken thought-process—which many editors seeking a clear text would eliminate—for example: “ah gosh, I know the name, but I forgot” (165). By maintaining the oral in the written form, Robinson and Wickwire incorporate an oral past into a written present that participates in the evolution of a story. Robinson, throughout his storytelling, comments self-reflexively on how magical powers in Okanagan stories are still meaningful in our present lives, even if this makes the narratives difficult to believe:

So, that’s the end of that story
It’s kinda hard to believe
but that’s the way I heard ‘em
and a lot of Indians talked about it (“Saved by a Grizzly Bear” 125)

By grouping himself within the oral past, maintained by other Okanagan storytellers, Robinson shows that his stories are not reserved solely for Okanagan audiences; his sensitivity to the differences between Native and non-Native knowledge shows an awareness of the cultural translation that is taking place as he tells his stories to Wickwire.

As mentioned in the introduction, Wickwire’s inability to translate both the word and the concept of *ha-HA* into terms that exist in her understanding is an example of one of the central problems in translating any literature, particularly between cultures. Philip Kevin Paul, who is a member of the Sencoten (Saanich) First Nations, often leaves words untranslated in his poetry, finding no parallel meaning or word in English. In his poem “Water Drinker,” Paul describes that when a language is put into a different context it might mean the same thing, however it is always alien: “when/ I say the word now, *ÍO, ÍO, ÍĆ*,/ it is the same word, but said in an alien light” (“Water Drinker” 23). It is the words that Robinson chooses to leave in their original Okanagan context for which Wickwire cannot find a suitable translation that display the cultural distinctiveness and foreign

aspect (to Non-Natives) of Robinson's stories. While Robinson does not want his stories to be foreign to his English audience—hence his decision to tell his stories in English and have them transcribed by Wickwire—his choice to leave certain words untranslated reflects a concern with the preservation of an aspect from the original cultural context (and language). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin contend that the “technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text is a more widely used device for conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness” (62); furthermore, they argue that an understanding of the untranslated word(s) “will require the reader's own expansion of the cultural situation beyond the text” (64). Robinson creates these opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue in his stories, using multiple names to refer to objects or characters, and outlining the acquisition of Coyote's name as a type of translation.

The fact that Coyote was not always Coyote by name highlights that Robinson's text engages in a process of ongoing transformation: “At that time he's not Coyote yet./ He's not Shin-KLEEP./ His name was Shim-ee-OW” (55). In Robinson's story, “Coyote Gets a Name and Power,” Coyote quibbles over which name he should receive, wanting to be a wolf, then a cougar, and then a fox, until God responds that there are only two names left: SWEELSH-tin (sweathouse) or Shin-KLEEP (Coyote). Robin Ridington argues that “Robinson's Coyote challenges the listener to think about signs and signification. His conversation is about semiotics. Coyote thinks about all the names. He thinks about being Wolf, about being Cougar, about being Fox” (347). If we accept the challenge Ridington outlines, then the next logical step as readers is to enter into the translation itself through a dialogue that considers both Okanagan and English signs, thus blurring or hybridizing categorization. It is accurate to say that Robinson stories are “interfusional” because the collection enacts transformation; it blends both Native traditions of the oral and written, standard English and Okanagan words (that resist translation), as well as Native and European stories to form a final hybridized text that is highly polyphonic. *Write* interacts with Bakhtin's concept of hybridization, as the “mixture of two social languages with a single utterance” (358), to create a text that engages in translation across modes of expression and cross-cultural exchange, exemplified in the real life

dialogue between Wickwire and Robinson. Wickwire's concern over the typographic placement of words, as well as her sensitivity to cross-cultural exchange, is reflected in her efforts to achieve an accurate ethnopoetic translation, as was similarly seen in Bringhurst's translations.

Wickwire's choice of typography and orthography reflects many of the notions of ethnopoetics, particularly her use of line breaks and her choice to move away from standard prose and sentence spacing. In my own reading of the text, the spacing serves to highlight a breath, while stanzas indicate a break between thoughts; however, reading *Write it on Your Heart* differs from *Sharp as a Knife* because unlike Bringhurst who provides a reading methodology to his translation, Wickwire chooses to leave hers more open to interpretation. The following quote from the text underscores her transcription technique, as well as the colloquial and informal tone found in most of Robinson's stories:

In another way he's a power man.
In another way he's an Indian doctor.
That's how it is.
So that's the end of that. ("Rescue of a Sister" 160)

The above passage displays a concern over grammatical accuracy, as seen in the periods, commas, and contractions, as well as a concern for capturing each breath as a sentence. Deciding how to read the text involves the reader's own performance, and whether he or she chooses to read the text aloud; however, the line breaks and the grammatical decisions that Wickwire makes create an incredibly suggestive reading of the text. In "Signifying the Nation," Christine Kim elucidates that the "reader becomes at once an immediate audience for the storyteller and a reader of text, a combination that uses the verbal, a practice of the local and the everyday, to displace institutionalized history" (99). Kim's interpretation of Robinson's text is highly ethical and places the reader into the performative space that the text invites, but her hermeneutic approach is an attentive postcolonial interpretation that likely differs from another reader's (particularly if they are not an academic) own intersubjective reading of the text. In becoming part of the process of the story, whether that involves a silent reading or an oral sounding of the text, we are challenged to enter into a spatial experience beyond

typeface. Hermeneutics will vary from reader to reader, but by recognizing that the typography in *Write* attempts insofar as it is possible, to represent the oral, we can move beyond a diametric view that juxtaposes writing and orality as antonymous to one another. From there, we can move into an understanding that considers them under the rubric of synesthesia: learning to hear the voice in text is like learning to listen to the words on the page— both sight and sound function within conjoining spaces that rely on one another.

3.3 The Whirlwind of History

You should understand
the way it was
back then.
because it is the same
even now. (Leslie Marmon Silko, “Storyteller”)

According to Okanagan and First Nations interpretations, history is a “fluid motion, bound by neither time nor space” (Karl Hele, “The Whirlwind of History” 149); under this assessment, it makes perfect sense that the telling of history should not be confined to a single story etched in stone, nor to a single mode of storytelling (written or oral). This Aboriginal concept of understanding the past, present or future involves a direct engagement of all three, even though they come “before and after one another as the whirlwind spins history” (Hele 149). Traditionally, Western philosophy is quick to define history as something that is catalogued and written, with little emphasis on the changeability of facts or the interaction and influence of the present on the past. To express the interchangeability of time, stories often exist both in the time they were composed and in the present time in which they are told; furthermore, they provide a fictional setting that often suggests an ethical imperative to the unfolding of the future. An ethical responsibility is suggested by Robinson as each of his stories teach a lesson. This message is compounded by Wickwire, who places “World Unsettled” as the final section of *Write*, which emphasizes the victimization of First Nations people at the hands of the settlers. Robinson’s first story in this section, “Fur Traders,” describes how “the Indian” was duped into trading fur for guns:

“All right, you take the gun. I take the hides.”

And the gun, it was only worth about \$30.
And then the hide, it was about \$900.

See?
They traded that way.
That way wrong. (243)

Robinson’s rhetorical “See?” is a moment where we as readers are brought into the ethical implications of his text, and thus invited to participate in the creation of a better future that acknowledges the injustices of the past.

Wickwire explains that for Robinson, creation is an ongoing process: “creation is not some moment in the past, but remains present as the wellspring of every act and every experience in the world” (23). The dialogism found in Robinson’s text incorporates a simultaneity of times—past, present and/or future—to show that there is constant interplay between the story’s meanings, the storyteller, and the audience. This anachronistic approach to history explains why there is an undeniable influence of European narratives in Robinson’s stories, from the reworking of the European fable “Puss in Boots” to the inclusion of the white man in his creation stories; however, despite these inclusions, the stories reinforce and emphasize an Okanagan worldview that is alive and vital, and which prioritizes the Native way of life, while entering into dialogue with the European and North American. It is in dialogue that stories become alive, and it is through speech that Robinson’s God creates. While the Judeo-Christian God of Genesis stands apart from his creation, Robinson’s God creates through his thoughts, and remains an integral part of his craftsmanship: “God made the sun [...] Just on his thought” (“The First People” 31). By challenging the fixity of stories in the bible, Robinson displays how stories are open to interpretation; this is exemplified through the frequent incorporation of Coyote into traditionally biblical stories, highlighting that there is never simply one dominating voice in any story:

And Noah and his family
and the animal, whatever they get ‘em in that ark.
But in this island, nothing but Coyote. (“The Flood” 118)

Robinson's version of the "The Flood" does not so much as contest the hegemony of European (or Western) dogma, as it provides an alternate Okanagan frame of reference that prioritizes spoken history, which interacts with the written histories of European cultures.

By prioritizing spoken history in oral stories, Robinson presents a challenge to Eurocentric readings of written history, which are historically viewed in Western society as being more accurate than oral ones. In oral stories, dates are not facts set in stone as they are in written texts. The narrative time in "Captive in an English Circus," one of the stories from *Write It On Your Heart*, quibbles with itself over the artificiality of linear narratives that demarcate experience into the fixity of months and years. The story opens:

This is about George Jim.
He belongs to Ashnola Band, George Jim.
Those days, I had it written down—1886.
No, I mean 1887.
That's one year I'm out there.
That's supposed to be in the 1886
 Instead of 1887.
That time, 1886. (244)

The narrator's uncertainty of a particular date highlights its unimportance to the prevailing thematics of the story, which is essentially a challenging of alterity. Robinson is looking at historicized moments from the past, and reworking them into a commentary that interrogates a xenophobic present. Kim provides a powerful reading of this particular story, in which she argues that the story manages to disrupt colonial logic by putting imperialism on display in such a way that it "interrogate[s] colonialism and capitalism as logics used to construct a nation through the containment of alterity" (98). Kim's interpretation is further supported, though likely somewhat subversively and unconsciously, by Robinson's abrogation of the English language: his choice to tell stories in the language that subjugated his own is a politicized act of resistance; by changing the intonations and meanings of the English language through grammatical reformation among other linguistic techniques, Robinson participates in a semiotic form of resistance ("Ecolinguistics"). In highlighting the alterity of bodies in "Captive," Robinson exemplifies the racial intolerance of white

police officers, as well as how the semiotics of the English nation function to represent the image of “Indian” as “Other.”

Robinson describes how there were no “Indians” in Europe at the time that “Captive” takes place, and so viewing the “Indian” as a specter mirrors the mortification and excitement of viewing the Elephant man in the context of the carnivalesque:

And these people, they pay.
Pay money to see that Indian.
There is no Indian in Europe at that time.
Only him. (“Captive” 259)

By making the captive “Indian,” an exhibit that is paid for to be seen, a psychological colonization takes place that divides spectator from “Other,” creating a division between British and “Indian.”

Thomas King describes the concept of “Indian-ness” as a “nebulous term that implies a set of expectations that are used to mark out that which is Indian and that which is not” (*Relations* xv).

With humour and semiotic play, substituting Black and Chinese bodies for the man’s Native body in the story, Harry Robinson explores the concept of the “Other” and the racial exploitation of an Okanagan Indian as a captive showpiece in England. The showcasing of an Indian in Robinson’s story recalls the captivity of Saartjie Baartman (1789-1815), who was the most famous of at least two Khoikhoi women who were exhibited as sideshow attractions in 19th century Europe under the name “Hottentot Venus.” Using blunt language to interrogate the pervasive racism of colonial exhibitionism, Robinson applies the same stereotypes and labels that Europeans used in their description of an “Other.” He examines racial labeling, using terms like “Indian,” “Chinaman” and “Negro boy,” as he illuminates the underprivileged amid European conquest: “ ‘That’s not Jim. That was a Chinaman.’/ Kinda stout Chinaman./ He must have been in jail.” (265). The story immediately following “Captive,” “To Hell and Back,” which is set during the gold rush, takes an antithetical approach to “Captive” by having a killer indiscriminately murder two White people, one Chinese person, and one Indian during the gold rush. The placement of “To Hell and Back” is a fitting choice by Wickwire because it expands “Captive” beyond an Okanagan context into the

larger framework of human morality: essentially, the killing of any race is an equal sin, one that forces the antagonist to tell his story of greed to the living as a form of repentance, similarly as Coleridge's ship captain must perpetually tell his story to pay atonement for killing an albatross, in his poem, "The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner."

It is Robinson's moralization that projects an ethos into the story, constructing a break between the mystical elements of his stories and the horrific realities of racial intolerance and colonialism. Wickwire argues that in the age of the white man, Harry's stories are devoid of the mythical powers they once possessed, as the old ways, land, language, and culture are being stolen: "Here there no magic; the white man has taken it away. The connection with creation is broken; there is no hope" (27). I disagree with Wickwire on this point, as the final section to *Write* tends to expand upon *Write*'s mythical framework by placing Native and non-Native epistemologies in conversation, still often with magical elements: this is portrayed in Robinson's reworking of the European fable "Puss in Boots," where a half-man, half-cat interrupts the life of rancher and his family, and in "To Hell and Back" where the murderer of four people is sent directly to the devil (Shteen), and back to earth to pay atonement. By including both white and Native perspectives in *Write it On Your Heart*, Robinson shows a concern with white and Native interactions, and uses repetition and hyperbole to mock the voices of the white oppressors, calling attention to white hypocrisy:

if the white man tell a lie,
it don't seem to be bad.
But if the Indian tells a lie,
that's really bad (*Heart*, "Twins: White and Indian" 46)

"They going to live here with you./ But this is your place" [...] "And he don't tell 'em./
'Later on you going to have a permit to get that deer.'"
("Prophecy at Lytton" 187)

"And later on, the white people,
getting thicker and thicker and thicker." (192)

In displaying paradoxical instances of white insincerity towards First Nations people, whether through lying and stealing or through the overpowering of cultural space, Robinson's stories use

parody to challenge dominant discourses that have often subjected Native people to marginalized spaces.

Robinson's "Puss in Boots" is an excellent example of a First Nations storyteller appropriating a European story into the framework of an Okanagan one, and can be read as a form of resistance against the dominance of other voices trying to claim authority in the stories ardent promotion of cross-cultural dialogue. In the opening to "Puss in Boots," Robinson explains that "It's not Indian stories./ This is white people stories,/ because I learned this from the white people" (282). After acknowledging the ontological roots of "Puss in Boots," Robinson proceeds to tell the story in the exact same manner as his previous narratives; this act of cultural translation emphasizes the adaptability of placing one cultural context into another. Robinson's translation is not a word-for-word translation of the original, but is rather an a loose and imaginative reworking of a written/European medium into an oral/Native mode that takes the original's theme of trickery and places it within an Okanagan framework.¹⁹ Further, Robinson's choice to have his stories written down can potentially be read as a reclaiming of space, and a reinscription of the past into an ongoing present of competing ideologies and worldviews. Henry Louis Gates Jr., engaging with M.M. Bakhtin's essay "Discourse Typology in Prose" shows how parody functions by appropriating another's speech into an antagonistic space:

The second voice, having lodged in the other speech, clashes antagonistically with the original, host voice and forces it to serve directly opposite aims. Speech becomes a battlefield for opposing intentions... Parody allows considerable variety: one can parody another's style as style, or parody another's socially typical or individually characteristic manner of observing, thinking, and speaking. Furthermore, the depth of parody may vary: one can limit parody to the forms that make up the verbal software, but one can also parody even the deepest principles of the other speech act. (*Signifying Monkey* 110)

While the cultural specificity of Gates' *The Signifying Monkey*, which compares African American literature to African oral traditions, might read as racially different from the cultural specificity of

Robinson's text, it is actually quite adaptable, given that Robinson's text applies its own oral traditions in conjuncture with European myths and texts as a type of parody. Further, Robinson's "Puss in Boots," in his collaborative effort with Wickwire, shows a sensitivity to cross-cultural translation and a concern for the transformative effects of parody. It could be asked whether or not *Write* as a text is itself a parody of writing, or a parody of orality. In actuality it is a parody of neither, as it easily moves between both spaces, enacting what Susan Gingell describes as "textualizing orality," presenting oral stories in written form. Robinson's text is an example of how seemingly divergent forms of dialogism—voice and text, white and Native—can function together. While Robinson uses parody to criticize colonial imperatives, he also uses it to provide another voice in an ongoing discussion of storytelling that evolves and changes within a continual past, present, and future. King describes his amazement in discovering how well Robinson "understood the power of the oral voice in a written piece" ("Interview"). If we too hear the oral voice in Robinson's text then we too play an integral role in shaping the story, and thus participate in a similar capacity to Wickwire, as both an interpreter and a translator.

3.4 Performing Audience

Now reader, do not leave the table yet
 reflect upon what you have only tasted,
 if you would dine on joy before you tire. (Dante, *Paradise*. X. 22-24)

As listeners of stories, we help to shape their meanings; therefore, we are involved in the act of creating literary spaces. We are called to engage with the text in order to achieve greater understanding, as suggested in Dante's insistence that we reflect upon that which we "have only tasted." Native storytellers such as Harry Robinson, who attempt to reproduce an element of the oral in their text, engage listeners in a dialogical conversation that is open to critical responses surrounding the act of listening. All of Robinson's stories are textually structured in ways that encourage oral performance and require active listening from their readership. While every author wants to elicit some response from their readers, Robinson's orally structured texts are particularly

vocal in how they engage with readers, often through the direct invocations Robinson makes to Wickwire. In this way, Wickwire is both an audience and a scholar, responsible for combining the oral and written mediums of communication into a holistic amalgamation. As Ong and Bakhtin argue, human consciousness is never uni-directional, but is shaped in its very form and content by anticipated response. Our words, and especially the words of storytellers such as Skaay and Robinson, written in different spaces, times, and experiences, are aware of a world that listens in the most ecological sense: the polyvocality of their stories also reflects a world that responds.

In thinking about Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, which assumes that languages interact and intersect with, rather than exclude, one another, Wickwire can be seen as the sensitive listener, as well as an interlocutor for not only language interaction, but also cultural dialogism. The ideal listener and storyteller interact with one another in a dialogic unity that suggests interplay between the two. Traditionally, audience members share a matrix of cultural signifiers with the teller; however, even if the audience comes from a completely different cultural background than the teller, there still exists the potential to form a cultural bridge that mutually heightens both perspectives. Robinson's texts are enmeshed in a matrix of cross-cultural communicators; it engages in the type of reading experience described by Bakhtin as mutually enriching: "dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched" ("Speech" 7). Bakhtin valorizes the experience of cross-cultural communication, because the linguistic poly-cultural implications of hybrid texts suggest a high level of dialogism: they are texts formed vis-à-vis dialogue in their very composition. As readers that engage in cross-cultural understanding, we can form bridges between diverse and differing cultures and begin to recuperate past misunderstandings between cultures.

Historically, communication between First Nations and whites was often one-sided, monologic, and without the opportunity for cross-cultural collaboration. Frequently in *Write*, Robinson incorporates Wickwire directly into his stories, asking her rhetorical questions, and using her as a synecdoche for his ideal audience:

Did you ever hear that stories?
Nobody did, but only one tell me that and I know.
That's the way I heard that. ("The Flood" 118)

No car those days,
no motorcycle,
no bicycle,
no nothing.
Only saddle horse.
You know that. ("Captive" 251).

The above passages are akin to Skaay's recognition of Swanton's role as both a transcriber and an integral part in the telling of the stories; the passages also prioritize Robinson's desire for companionship. The stories are clearly tailored for Wickwire's own listening, and she is aware that Robinson's choice of which stories to tell her have been influenced by having her as his listener: "Harry no doubt told stories which he thought I, as a white, middle-class female, would like to (and should!) hear... [s]tories which he tells to a young native make might be quite different" (16). Nevertheless, this does not exclude us (whoever that encompasses) as listeners, as Wickwire mentions that "the reader is invited to listen in" (28); albeit, it reminds us that we are overhearing a particular performance tailored for Wickwire, through Wickwire's own translation.

Benjamin argues that a "man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship" ("The Storyteller" 100). While Benjamin goes on to distinguish between stories and novels, his statement accentuates that both the storyteller and listener operate within a process of translation to generate mutual understanding. Jeannette Armstrong provides useful commentary on the process of translating between Okanagan and English: "I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns" (181). While Armstrong's written materialism (she is very much a part of the academic scholarship surrounding First Nations culture and literature) differs from Robinson's, they both remind us that our job, as listeners or readers, is to construct meaning in both non-verbal and the verbal manifestations, creating the story's reality through our own intersubjective reflections of performance. King observes that, "[b]y forcing the reader to read aloud, Robinson's written texts

recreate a sense of both storyteller and performance” (“Godzilla” 13). While Robinson might not want to *force* his readers to read aloud as King suggests, Robinson does encourage his readers to read his work aloud by telling his stories in a highly dialogic manner: at times he achieves this through *phanopoeia*, casting visual images into the mind of the reader, thus challenging us to visualize his gestures: “Turn around./ Then he was a big lion./ Stand about this high” (307). At other times, he perfects his storytelling craft by being very direct, often by improvising certain elements of his story: “That squirrel is small./ That is what your dog is after all day today./ [Harry refers to my dog, Rufus]” (308). Robinson uses much more than the few techniques mentioned here to display his craft (*technē*) as a storyteller, but what is most crucial about Robinson’s stories is that they illuminate a mind with a connection to a deep mythological past that has the ability to translate the old stories into the context of modernity. Robinson, in collaboration with Wickwire’s careful transcription, textual editing, and compiling, is successful in translating an oral voice into a written context. The very process of their cross-collaborative translation is significant in its ability to draw readers into a dialogue with the text that promotes mutual understanding and respect across cultural lines.

Chapter 4: Resistance as Cultural Translation in War Party's *The Reign*

4.1 Hip Hop as a Multicultural Pedagogy

If Hip Hop is going to help fight against oppression, and be part of the turn-around for Natives, then the Natives are going to have to believe more in Hip Hop. We still get questions from our own people asking us why we're emulating Black culture. But, I've known Hip Hop to save people's lives in my culture. It definitely saved mine. (Hellnback of Urban Buffalos and RezOfficial, and formerly Kool-Ayd of War Party).

Hip Hop music is a secondary oral culture²⁰ that is made up of four elements: Hip Hop dance (notably break dancing), urban inspired art (markedly graffiti), deejaying (turntablism) and emceeing (rapping). Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, describes the genesis of Hip Hop culture as coming “out of cross-fertilization of African-American vernaculars cultures with their Caribbean equivalents rather than springing fully formed from the entrails of the blues” (103).²¹ Originally, Hip Hop music was a multifarious subculture born out of resistance by young African American youths as a way to make their voices heard. Within the politically charged songs of War Party, Hip Hop resists and challenges the authenticity of European language and culture as the dominant symbolic system of expression in North America. As Kool-Ayd argues in the epigraph, Hip Hop has the potential to help fight against oppression, which is precisely how War Party uses the medium. The opening song, “This Land Was Ourz” (perhaps a semantic inversion and militant borrowing of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land”) from War Party’s album *The Reign* establishes the tone of the record via polemical lyricism that reignites land claims and treaty debates, articulating a vocalized call to arms:

Fight back! Just let the Mohawk barricade
When we had no fear, scuffling him on our blade
The cracks in our story, are cause of his-story
Our pride, our feelings inside, before we'd never succumb²²

This militant approach to politics remains consistent throughout the album, and so translates the resistive aspects of African American Hip Hop into a space of First Nations cultural protest.

War Party’s first album, *The Reign*, put First Nations rappers on the Canadian Hip Hop radar: their song “Feelin’ Reserved,” was the first major First Nations Hip Hop music video to get rotation on Much Music. Additionally, War Party won the Aboriginal Music Award for best rap album in

2000. My analysis focuses on War Party's most politically charged songs from *The Reign*, predominantly "This Land Was Ourz" and "Feelin' Reserved." The group (initially formed in 1995) resides in the Hobbema reserve in Alberta, and at the time of the release of their album *The Reign*, the group consisted of producer, rapper, and founder Rex Smallboy (Mic Nobel), Cynthia Smallboy (Girlie Emcee) and Karmen Omeosoo (Kool-Ayd). The group has released a total of four albums, with some of the members moving on to other Native Hip Hop projects, such as Team RezOfficial. It seems appropriate that Hip Hop was adopted and reappropriated by poor Native communities because there are many Native youths who can relate to the music's movement and lexis against hopelessness, depression, segregation, assimilation, and blatant racial intolerance.

War Party's reappropriation of the English language within the heteroglossia of First Nations and African American vernaculars can be read as an act of resistance which challenges the colonialism of the English language (rooted in tradition and solidified in grammar)—the imperialistic viewpoint that words can be owned. In a conversation with Tara Henley of Vancouver's *Georgia Straight*, Rex Smallboy states that it was natural for First Nations youth to adopt Hip Hop as a mode of expression: "When I heard a lot of the African-American artists talking about what they saw in their communities, the social conditions, that made me take a look at what was going on in my own neighborhood [...] This is the reserve—this is not Compton; this is not the Bronx" ("Beyond the Reserve"). Cultural translation, in this instance ghetto oppression into the oppressive context of Native reservations, functions similarly to textual (language) translation in that it approximates a specific set of cultural codes from one context and applies them to another. Using Hip Hop as a dialogic mode of adaptation between cultures (via cultural translation), and by reappropriating English, War Party generates a voice that parallels the historic mistreatment of African Americans, but is refocused on the subversive subculture of First Nations Hip Hop that takes place within the confines of the reserve.

Resistance subcultures,²³ Hip Hop in this instance, often challenge the patriarchal conquest of language through grammatical reforms, as seen in War Party's recontextualization of standardized

English from Black Talk into First Nations Hip Hop. Mos Def rhymes that subversive language can negotiate a reclaiming of language by challenging standardized English:

Embrace the bass with my dark ink fingertips
Used to speak the king's English
But caught a rash on my lips
So now my chat just like dis ("Hip Hop")²⁴

The above passage displays how hybrid African American vernacular was spawned from the speech fragments of the "Other": the "Other" being British English, the use of which was associated with a distinct sense of cultural superiority that suppressed Black culture and Black identity. bell hooks describes the appropriation of English by slaves as an act of resistance: "I imagine them hearing spoken English as the oppressor's language, yet I imagine them realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance... English was transformed, and became a different speech" (*Teaching to Transgress* 168). hooks' avowal well parallels War Party's Cree roots: there are over two hundred thousand Cree people in Canada (*Canadian Geographic*), yet Cree is not an official Canadian language and thousands of Cree children were forced to learn English in Residential schools. In reappropriating the English language perpetuated under colonialism, War Party is able to spatially re-impose upon the linguistic terrain defined for them; even if their language might reinscribe similar terminology, the very act of transforming it under specific cultural priorities reflects the group's concern with both expanding and reclaiming their threatened cultural spaces.

In War Party's "This land was Ourz," both cultural and geographical spaces are contested; the song is a polemical call for Natives to reclaim the land that was stolen from them:

We got to look to the future
We can't dwell on the past
Cause in 2000 it's time to take a stand
We take back the land from the pale skin man

The track opens with a sample from a Native elder who says, "Long before our grandfathers were born, this used to be our land." The sample is repeated multiple times, as the rhythm kicks in with dense, hard-hitting drums, and on the track the emcees rap life on a reservation, genocide, suicide,

drug and alcohol addiction, and education, all while asserting Native pride. Cynthia Smallboy (Girlie Emcee) ends the song with an addressing of silence through a didactic articulation of Native pride:

We got nothing to hide
My wise old elders I'm your number one fan
But I got spit this truth, cause this Indian can
All my Native Kings, I got made respect
Fight like them warriors, and expand on intellect

Girlie Emcee's insistence that she must "spit this truth" does not necessarily limit the heteroglot approach of her message; in fact, it expands its range through an assertion of self-reliance that is intended to propel others into war-like action. By calling upon not only the youth, but the elders as well, Girlie Emcee is able to address the silencing of Natives by whites, while also opening up a dialogue among her own community.

In addressing the state of being silenced, War Party takes up one of the principle functions that Hip Hop enacted at its origins, which was to provide a voice for the historically marginalized and underprivileged. Awad Ibrahim argues that in "its historical origin, Rap was formed as a voice for the voicelessness and performed as a prophetic language that addresses silence, the silenced, and the state of being silenced" ("Black English" 182). War Party utilizes Hip Hop as a dialogical pedagogy (it engages in translation from Black culture to Native culture in order to engage directly with troubled youths) that emphasizes First Nations' voices from the margins of segregated space, while emulating the resistive and non-normalizing structure of the music. In using Hip Hop didactically, "This Land Was Ourz" functions as an alternative history lesson, which reminds its listeners that North America is a place that has always included Native communities. Kool-Ayd raps in a discursive space that prioritizes Native voices, emulating the form of a classroom setting to teach a lesson to his audience: "It's the chubby Native commin' to educate the masses." Kool-Ayd describes that he will use the microphone as a tool to educate the Native majority, while simultaneously blaming the colonizers for stealing land and introducing drugs, alcohol, and residential schools into Native communities:

Sure we had culture, [undecipherable] that was cool

But then you brought guns, brew, and residential schools
Sure you gave us reservations, little bits of lands
While you make the government and take what we used to have
So with the mic in hand I'm a educate the masses
Put down your glasses peeps, end of classes

In creating a classroom scenario, which parodies colonial education, Kool-Ayd portrays how Canadian colonialism damaged First Nations culture. In translating the colonial narrative of systematic education, War Party opens up a political interchange between the colonized and the colonizer while advocating for positive activism among Native communities. This counterdominant narrative is stylized vis-à-vis War Party's translation of African American culture into First Nations culture; it directly challenges colonialism, and creates a style to be emulated and contested.

Tricia Rose argues that in Hip Hop culture, "a style cannot be understood or erased, a style that has the reflexivity to create counterdominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy [...] to fortify a community of resistance" (61). In creating a resistance style in opposition to colonial hegemonies, War Party participates in the movement that Dick Hebdige terms "subculture," a counterculture that breaks away from the natural order of society. Hebdige argues that "[s]ubcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media" (90). While Hebdige focuses mainly on the punk movement, his analysis translates well into Hip Hop because Hip Hop's own enactment of disturbance challenged hegemonic social structures much in the same way the earlier punk movement did, as evidenced by War Party's use of Hip Hop to disrupt colonial ideologies. However, as listeners we need to be particularly careful to not merely read War Party, or First Nations literatures in general, simply as a simulacrum of resistance to imperialist hegemony and/or European culture. As Edward Said reminds us in *Culture and Imperialism*, such a reading simplifies and moderates cultural experience along a colonial axis. Rather, Said suggests that any analysis of cross-cultural experience must be read among the multilayered complexities of both cultures: "to consider imperial domination and resistance to it as a dual process evolving toward decolonization, then independence, is largely to align oneself with the process, and to interpret both sides of the contest

not only hermeneutically but also politically” (259). Said’s statement reinforces the necessity of an ethical reading across cultural lines, essentially an acute and critical listening that considers not only the hermeneutics of a text, but the political circumstances with which the text engages.

4.2 Contesting Space: Abrogation and Reinscription

my touch is a history book
full of lies and half-forgotten truths
written by others
who hold the pens
and power (kateri akiwenzie-damm, “stray bullets”)

War Party’s challenge to dominant discourse often involves a syncretism of forms, such as traditional storytelling within the polystylism of Hip Hop. By using the tools of the oppressors, particularly recording technology (a technology that has historically been controlled by executives at recording labels to sell a product via an industry that has typically not promoted Native musicians until the recent advent of the independent label) the members of War Party reinscribe their voices within an empire that attempted to historically silence First Nations people. War Party reappropriates the technology in the same way that the early do-it-yourself Hip Hop deejays appropriated the turntable to create music from the archives of the past that reflects the cultural landscape of the present. This is not to dodge the reality that Hip Hop music has become commodified by large corporations and marketed to mostly suburban white audiences, but it is merely to suggest that War Party is interested in a Hip Hop that abrogates against oppression in a similar vein enacted in Hip Hop’s street-level inception. In the opening verse to “Feelin’ Reserved” (album version), Kool-Ayd uses abrogation to challenge the hegemonic principles of colonial racism, depicting white men as vultures that prey upon the youth: “I mean like a total loss of culture/ Without that we’re mice and the white men are vultures waiting/ To prey upon us, from the higher level.” War Party reinscribes traditional First Nations values, including storytelling and self-governance, by confronting a system of oppression supported by white hegemony. By challenging the initial core agenda of the Indian Affairs Bureau, whose original objective via the Indian Act was to assimilate Native people into

mainstream Canadian society, War Party enacts a culturally specific vernacular against a colonial narrative that attempted to suppress their culture's voices.

Vernacular is an act of resistance to the standard (Porter 2), and rap as a type of signifying vernacular allows rappers to assert a sense of identity through language: a rapper's use of doubletalk creates multiple planes of meaning and interpretation.²⁵ The members of War Party often use heteroglot language (multi-leveled language composed of Native, African American and Cree signifiers) to assert shifting identities by code-switching between Black vernacular and First Nations (anglicized Cree) vernacular. Additionally, War Party employs literary devices such as metaphor and simile, which are typical verbal techniques in African American Hip Hop, and translates them into a First Nations context: "I'm the greatest Native, you've never heard better/ Forever tough, like that Moose skin Moccasin leather" (*Resistance* "The Battle Continues"). The effect of such double identity, from a linguist's perspective, is the creation of what Geneva Smitherman terms the linguistic push-pull of language (*Mother* 5-6): in this instance, it is First Nations rappers embracing Black Talk, while simultaneously rejecting it to assert their own identity. By tactically using the formula of Hip Hop, War Party is able to tell stories about life on the reserve with a poignancy and cultural immediacy that far surpasses typical written expression. Michel de Certeau defines tactics as belonging to the "Other," which can indicate that rappers who use English, changing its intonations and meanings through grammatical reformation, are actually participating in a semiotic form of resistance: "A space of a tactic is the space of the other... play on and with a terrain imposed on it... tactic is an art of the weak" (37). Certeau goes on to define Speech Acts as acts in which a "speaker actualizes and appropriates his mother tongue in a particular situation or exchange or contract" (19).²⁶ In using English, rather than their Native Cree (although there are instances where Cree makes its way into some of the recordings), War Party reaches a much larger audience and thus abrogates and stylizes English within a Cree context. The value of using a tactic, in particular by framing their narrative in the context of Hip Hop and the music's relation to protest, War Party are able to

retranslate what it means to be Native in Canada in a postcolonial, postmodern, and adaptable context.

War Party make use of stylized language as a mode of resistance to challenge the English language that was forced upon them: tonal semantics, semantic inversion, and mimicry are three figures of speech regularly employed to defy standard uses of the English language. In the video version of the song “Feelin’ Reserved,” Grrlie Emcee uses semantic inversion to flip the effects of life on the reserve into a positive reclaiming of an imposed space: “Amidst a play galore there ain’t no way I’d rather be / One love for my people / u-n-i-t-e instead of feelin’ reserved my reserve feel me.” Grrlie Emcee applies the rhetorical device of chiasmus by inverting the term “feelin’ reserved,” and in doing so War Party reclaims a space that has been imposed upon them. By recording the video themselves within the local community of a Hobbema reserve, they create a scenario with which First Nations youths throughout Canada are able to identify. Further, depending on how far we are willing to view the local in the global (the video has nearly a hundred thousand plays on *youtube* with many comments of support from various First Nations and non-First Nations people), the video speaks to multitudes of marginalized people around the world.

By staging the video on the reserve the song participates in a semiotic resistance that extends the reserve into the context of popular protest, relating back to the early days of Hip Hop, where graffiti was used as a sign of resistance and empowerment—as a way of writing back. The semiotics of resistance reach their pinnacle in videos of groups such as Public Enemy (a group from which War Party draws inspiration, having frontman Chuck D speak on the introduction of their album *The Resistance*) who use the medium as a social critique of both power and oppression. Public Enemy’s choice to situate Chuck D in front of the Audubon Ballroom in their video “Night of the Living Baseheads,” can be read as a protest within the contexts of white hypocrisy. By weaving a Malcolm X vocal clip into the introduction of the song, the video is layered with meaning outside the immediate, rupturing a present by recalling a past of injustices that translates into current inequalities

between Black and white America: “Have you forgotten, that once we were brought here, we were robbed of our name, robbed of our language, we lost our religion, our culture, our God. And many of us, by the way we act, we even lost our mind.” In using translation, by emulating the techniques used by groups such as Public Enemy, War Party efficiently adopts Hip Hop as a cross-cultural medium that recalls a long tradition of communal protest. Public Enemy’s “Baseheads” not only condemns drug use by hypocritical White America, but also critically censures Black America’s propagation of the drug problem. The video provides an excellent analogue to War Party’s “Feelin’ Reserved” which views the problems of reserve life under a similar rubric, displaying that communal resistance can function in similar capacities across cultural lines.

In the video version of the song,²⁷ Rex Smallboy raps about addiction on the reserve as a serious obstacle that keeps Natives trapped within the reservation mentality:

Yeah right, it’s just a never ending sequel like Indian people
Who always have a cheekful of fire water cause they like to be buzzin’
It might not be you, but I’m sure you got a cousin or a dozen in the family
Who like to get pissed, stuck on the reservation, something like this

The simile “a never ending sequel like Indian people” is a poignant representation of how the cyclical perpetuation of alcohol abuse relates to the larger problem of what life on the reserve does to a diverse culture marginalized from a traditional setting. The message that Smallboy delivers in “Feelin’ Reserved” compounds that of his opening track “This Land Was Ourz,” in which he relates the problems of substance dependence to the destruction of Native culture, placing explicit blame upon the colonial program of assimilation, and describing the colonial narrative as a type of cultural genocide:

Half of my people drunk, you got the other half in jail
Aware, I guess it was part of the plan
Genocide, the white conquered the red man
You think that it happened in the way that they said
That was his-story, cause my story’s red
From the blood of my people who died when they came
To change my name, and make me look the same
Cause I’m thinking about the devastation, civilization’s
Assimilation had on my reservation

These two examples from Smallboy highlight a concern for the historical mistreatment of First Nations people, and they do so with images that depict harsh stereotypes as realities of a system of perpetuated injustice. By showing the harsh realities of reservation life, the group is able to gradually reinscribe cultural priorities through a retranslation of the past into a productive future. By creating an inclusive future, recalling and reenvisioning the group action of the American civil rights movement under a First Nations rubric, War Party retranslates homogenized cultural stereotypes into signs of group solidarity. In the videos for “Feelin’ Reserved” and “All for One,” the crew is represented through group affiliation: the local connotes communal identity, the mass movement signifies unification in numbers. Most noticeably, this unification in numbers is depicted through a peaceful Native youth street rally in “All for One” (*The Resistance*), with sequences of elders in traditional dress walking through a reserve as people join in the march. The protesters’ signs read “no violence” and “no alcohol,” while their shirts have slogans such as “peace,” and “pride.” Identity is formed through communal struggle; acts of rallying and protesting function as ways to denote meaning and make public the psychological facets of First Nations marginality.

In War Party’s *The Reign*, there is no romanticizing life on the reserve: it is depicted as a place of loss, degradation, and ultimately as an endless reminder of the effects of colonization. By transforming the reserve into a place of power that yields activism and opportunity, War Party spotlights reserve life to raise awareness for an area that has been marginalized from mainstream society. War Party hopes that by displaying the reality of the reserve, rather than an idealized version, they can create change—and it is for that reason Smallboy depicts the reserve with blunt hopelessness in “Feelin’ Reserved”:

Stuck on the reservation my realization
Of my situation has got me wondering
Why do these things got to be like this
Little Indian girls having F.A.S.²⁸ kids
Everybody’s getting high man,
We can’t forget that they used to smoke dope, now they smoking crack

War Party's attempt to create change by exposing the harsh realities of reserve life echoes Curtis Mayfield's defense of the honest depiction of poverty and social violence in blaxploitation films; he believes that "the way you clean up the films is by cleaning up the street. The music and movies of today are the conditions that exist. You change music and movies by changing the conditions" (qtd. in "Gangster Boogie" 88). War Party exploits the reserve under a similar type of *creeploitation*: by depicting the negative aspects of a Reservation system supported by government, they attempt to create a greater public ethos that demands change. Daniel Francis argues that "Not only are Indian images used to represent what non-Natives think about Indians, they are appropriated by non-Natives as meaningful symbols of their own culture" (*Imaginary Indian* 172). For War Party, the loaded Aboriginal images that Francis describes become sources of cultural power in a retranslating process that popularizes street life vis-à-vis a realistic depiction. What was once considered a private sphere of struggle among the economically and socially marginalized becomes part of the realm of popular space: a space constantly invaded by radio and television.

In *Rap and the Academy*, Baker argues the contesting of public space (exemplified by the blaring boom box in Central Park) led many middleclass citizens to panic because of what they "perceived as the ethnic pollution of public spaces by the sonic 'other'" (43). In painting themselves as "Other," War Party extends the public space (by placing the reserve into mainstream radio and television, and performing publically) into a historic *other* that recalls stolen space: Native space becomes one of ecological and psychological damage, and War Party uses this to empower the experiences and voices of misplaced peoples. By embracing their minority perspective, manifested via their choice to identify with the reserve and to tell stories that focus upon the effects of colonial programs, War Party reasserts traditional values using Hip Hop to speak to and for marginalized youth, who by virtue of being Native are labeled as "Other." In the video version of "Feelin' Reserved," Kool-Ayd paints a vivid description of the colonizers, setting up a narrative that reveals Native people to be the victims of racial segregation and an explicit program of genocide:

We never brought residential schools to this place
We never brought alcoholic fluid to our tastes
We would never go and try to change you
But what you did to my descendants, changed the elders' lives too
And all the time you knew
Now we're feelin' reserved
Living disturbed, living a life we never deserved
The Native way of thinking ain't the way of the old
It's time to look towards the future, let our story unfold

This perspective of “living disturbed” acknowledges a disconnect from traditional Native narrative while articulating a renewal of the transformative function of storytelling within the realities of current oppression, and from the viewpoints of the minority. Bhabha argues that the “social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (3). While hybridity is a natural development or synthesis of cultural amalgamations, they are not always instances that reflect cultural priorities; quite often they represent a disjunction to a past hinged by cultural clashes. However, War Party's hybridized Native and non-Native forms of protest are a recognition of selective cultural fusions that can empower Native culture in a highly technological environment. By empowering the marginal space through Hip Hop, which connects War Party to a larger North American dialogue that engages with the act of being silenced, a new hybrid identity is created that can be affirmed, copied, and solidified by other oppressed groups.

4.3 Hybrid Orality and Hypertext Poetics

One of the main catalysts for hip hop's growth in a specific place surely has to be the existence of alienated youth. However, for hip hop to thrive beyond mere imitation, young people also require self-consciousness and this is often derived from a specific set of circumstances. (On Hip Hop in Tokyo: Patrick Neate, *Where You're At* 66)

Music journalist Patrick Neate claims the only condition required for Hip Hop to emerge in a given culture (he travels from New York to Tokyo to Johannesburg and Rio Janeiro): an alienated youth looking for representation, or a creative outlet to express themselves. Under these conditions it is hardly surprising that First Nations youth have adopted Hip Hop (initially a mode of Black oral expression) as a mode of creative expression. Moreover, the fact that numerous First Nations Hip

Hop groups (including War Party, Rezofficial, Urban Buffalos, and Red Nation) have made use of oral practices employed by African American Hip Hop artists alongside their own culturally developed oral practices to tell poignant stories further highlights the compatibility between the two oral cultures. The fusing of two or more cultural modes of expression creates new styles, reflecting the transnational nature (across cartographic borders) of postmodern expression. Rapper Red Cloud,²⁹ whose heritage is Mexican and Native American, is the perfect example of a cross-cultural artist who uses Hip Hop as an edifying mediator to express cultural conflict, marginality and identity. The adaptability of rap, across cultures, as well as its absorption of various genres, underlines that the oral component of Hip Hop expression (its emphasis on the power of speech) is not formed in cultural isolation.

Rose argues that “to interpret rap as a direct or natural outgrowth of oral African-American forms is to romanticize and decontextualize rap as a cultural form” (95). While Hip Hop music certainly incorporates forms of oral storytelling, it is also thematized and informed by modern technology: “rap simultaneously makes technology oral and technologizes orality” (Rose 86). Although the oral might be a preferred medium for verbal communication, it is true that in a literate and culturally communicative world, most literature is informed by a mosaic of voices (composed of written and spoken elements). In using the medium of rap, the members of War Party highlight their engagement with both the popular (technology, writing) and the traditional (orality, storytelling). In the song “Assimilate” (*The Resistance*), textual metaphors that signify the turning of pages along with culturally specific references are used to enact both the traditional and the shifting modern: “Right now the current state of this often hated race/ Natives in the paper chase, face it kids we’ll never change/ Unless we turn the page.” By emphasizing a tactility to their oral performances, War Party displays a high self-awareness of the metaphors they use: Natives changing money becomes Native turning pages, equating to Natives reworking a system that was imposed upon them—displaying a mastery of commerce and literacy, and using an approach that mimics many African American artists contestation of the dominant symbols of power that have been imposed upon them.

Under these modes of signification it is possible to examine War Party's music under the rubric of *Black Studies*, which Baker argues "as a sign became not only a *real* ground of contestation, but also a *coded and generative space of values* that encompassed both past and proximate, inside and outside, confrontations" (*Academy* 12). In thinking of *Black Studies* as a type of simulacrum that the members of War Party emulate in their own assertion of First Nations marginality, War Party engages in the generative space that *Black Studies* (as described by Baker's instance that Hip Hop is a postmodern practice with the power to change the popular landscape) promotes through its synthesized incorporation of the oral in the recorded, reaching audiences through multiple planes of communication.

In the video for War Party's "All for One," Native drums are synthesized using standard Hip Hop production (and illustrated by the image of a Native elder banging a drum while young urban Hip Hop youths move in sync with the rhythm), creating a semiotic continuity between the past and the present. War Party extends this signification to literally mean the continuity of time and storytelling, often textualizing an oral metaphor: "It's why I turn the tables like time turning the pages" ("Feelin' Reserved," video version). By comparing turntables to the wheel of time, War Party mimics the textual in the oral and the oral in the textual to emphasize a fusion between the two mediums. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that mimicry has a powerful effect on colonial discourse, changing it to meet cultural demands: "Mimicry is thus a sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" (122). It is through mimicry that a style of musical expression such as Hip Hop can mock or deconstruct a power model by repeating its form: as Bhabha argues, "Mimicry repeats rather than represents" (125). In the song "Nothing you can do about it," Smallboy's style emulates African American rappers within a First Nations context, constructing a style to contend with: "I bet that you never thought that you would see a red emcee/ Rocking rhymes like a nigga when I'm freakin' the beat." While such a statement might be read as an instance of reverse racism, it functions as an

intertextual reminder of how abrogation can be used to connote solidarity against oppressive forces, as well as a cultural reclaiming of racist language from the colonizer.

It is common in African American Rap and Hip Hop to reappropriate the word “nigger” as a term of endearment for one’s friends (Ibrahim 178). However, in the song “Mr. Nigga” by Mos Def, semantic inversion is employed to flip the word back into the context of its original derogatory meaning: he uses racial stereotyping vis-à-vis the word nigger as the catalyst for his lyrical analysis. Often blurring his own voice within racialized judgments the song brings the voice of racism into the immediate:

White folks got it muffled across beneath they breath
“I didn't say it...”
But they'll say it out loud again
When they get with they close associates and friends

Through the use of sarcastic prosody, Mos Def inflects his vocal tone, cueing the listener for the Direct Speech of a racist flight attendant: “She approach officially talking about, “Excuse me”/ Her lips curl up into a tight space / Cause she don't believe that I'm in the right place” (“Mr. Nigga”). By changing his vocal pitch to mimic the voice of the racist flight attendant, Mos Def reminds his listeners that the term “nigger” is a highly racist term that can only be reinscribed under a specific cultural context. Similarly, Smallboy reinscribes the term Redman, like a palimpsest, in order to disrupt colonial authority and make its systems of power ambivalent. In appropriating the imposed terms Redman and Indian, War Party simultaneously reclaims the terms as sources of power while reminding the listener of historicized racism. Appropriating derogatory or racist terms by the groups that were once victimized by them is a productive form of hybridization because it illuminates that identity and culture are always in dynamic transit. At best, hybrid forms of expression, such as Hip Hop, come to a consensus through cultural fertilization; otherwise, they come to a still often productive dialogic dissensus (an unresolved argument), highlighting the inevitable meshing of the colonizer with the subject, disrupting power and allowing for transformation between cultural gaps.

Hybridization, as defined by Bakhtin, is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance (358). For many ethnically diverse Hip Hop groups performing in English, the complex mixture of languages involves a culmination of standardized English (which only really exists in principle) interfused with the common features of culturally specific vernacular: for War Party the stylization of language is highly polyphonic in its balance between English, African American, and anglicized Cree. It is through stylization that language can artistically function and represent itself (Bakhtin 363), and it is also through stylization that urban vernacular can represent itself as hybridity: not as a single, solitarily unified language system, but as a system of resistance that takes place on a cultural plane, and where the terms in which it exists depend on that plane (Perry 14). While the cultural planes differ between cultures, hybridity is a reality of all literature: we find it in Shakespeare's stealing (let's say intertextualizing) of the Italian short story "Un Capitano Moro" by Cinthio for his famous play *Othello*, and in A Tribe Called Quest's stealing (or creative interpretation) of "Spinning Wheel" (Lonnie Smith) and "Walk on the Wild Side" (Lou Reed) for their famed song, "Can I Kick It." This is not to claim that all hybrid expressions are homogenous; it's actually quite the opposite: the point that I am emphasizing is that while all literature, music, or film, participates in some level of hybridity, they do so with differing principles. War Party's choice to amalgamate Hip Hop as a tool that allows them to translate their cultural specificity into a cross-cultural realm of protest and resistance against hegemony creates a hyperpoetic subtext that draws listeners in via the signifiers of the Hip Hop genre they apply.

Given the medium that War Party applies, many listeners are automatically withdrawn from the conversation, in the same way that an academic work will generally not draw in the general public. To capture an audience while enacting dialogic conversation, whether through a scholarly work or through an artistic medium of expression, a level of disruption must occur: something must be challenged, disrupted, contested, or grappled with. Poetry, like rap, as Baker argues, is intended to be a "disruptive performance [...] as an audible or sounding space of opposition" (*Rap* 96). In disrupting the colonial narrative through the Hip Hop medium, War Party creates a hybridized poetry

that moves outside of the context in which First Nations oral stories have typically appeared. While hybridity in its botanical roots essentially represents a separation from origin, it can in fact create a productive and unified space for resistance, as shown in War Party's usage of Hip Hop. In this sense, the members of War Party become decentred subjects who form their identities in the in-between, not yet defined spaces of cultural globality. Bhabha describes the decentred subject as one figured in the in-between spaces of double frames: "its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred subject signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionally of the present"(309). In speaking to the present, and using the contemporaneously antiphonic and polyphonic subcultures of Hip Hop, War Party is able to speak directly to youths in a manner that traditional storytelling often cannot. While many might read this decentering, and hybrid form of storytelling as a loss of Native culture, it is, as Kool-Ayd mentions in the opening epigraph to this chapter, a moment to reinvigorate storytelling for Native youths. In being engaged with the popular present, War Party is able to speak directly, just as Skaay and Ghandl did to Swanton, and as Robinson did to Wickwire, to an audience in the living present: after the moment has passed, some level of cultural translation inevitably occurs. Once passed, all that remains is a moment that we can only moderately call back to, reminding us that something is always lost in translation, although something else is potentially gained.

4.4 Antiphony: Calling Together, or Calling Away

You see this here is more than just music, we're trying to make a difference. It's about the change, just like it was back in the day when Hip Hop first came out [...] It's about the influence; the influence that the music industry has in our communities; the influence that our music and music videos have on our youth; the influence that females have on little girls in music videos [...] the influence that gangster rappers have on young men; it's because those young men are future leaders [...] The Resistance is the movement towards the positive light [...] there is a saying: those who do not stand for something, will fall for anything. (Chuck D of Public Enemy, introduction to *The Resistance*)

Like listening to a story, a live Hip Hop performance requires active participation from its audience; the audience becomes integral to the meaning of the words. A Hip Hop deejay or emcee is not a passive spectator, but rather one who manipulates and invigorates the crowd to throw their

hands up, or at times to even take action beyond the show by spreading the vibe. Hip Hop requires active listening on a level surpassed by few—if any—popular mediums. It is self-referential, dialogic, and highly polyphonic (some songs have upwards of one hundred different samples and multiple voices overlapping), and woven together by a matrix of cultural signifiers. The act of listening, for Hip Hop artists, is often the act of reading: “You can play us and repeat us and then take us home and read us” (Black Star, “Definition”). Essentially, Black Star connects critical reading practices to critical listening practices; in order to make the textual oral, as listeners we must recreate a performance. Like any music, Hip Hop generally draws in a specific audience whose own critical engagement is invested in the message of that music: whether it be to party, or to liberate.

Because of its pervasive power to liberate marginalized voices from the depths of silence, Hip Hop functions as a form of expression that works in conjuncture with what academics like to call the postmodern. Baker’s definition of how the postmodern functions in Hip Hop, as a “nonauthoritative collaging or archiving of sound and styles that bespeaks a deconstructive hybridity” (89), is useful because it highlights that Hip Hop, for those who still maintain its initial cultural values and powers of voice and sound, functions to offset constructed realities for marginalized people. His definition also notes that Hip Hop is a collage of representative voices, which allows it to function as a universal art, much like poetry, instead of being a solely Black form of expression.

Thinking of Hip Hop as a universal form of expression is helpful in engaging with the music of War Party; while their music might be directed towards a First Nations audience (most poignantly towards a listening Cree audience) its poetic form and simulacrum of the Hip Hop medium allow its interpretation and retranslation to occur across diverse cultural lines. As readers and as listeners (which, if we agree with Black Star, can be synonymous terms), we determine the value of the popular by incorporating it into the hybridity of our own cultural manifestations. Certeau argues that “the text has meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them... it becomes a text only in its relation to the exteriority of the reader” (170). By listening to a performance, whether live or on

an album, we participate in creating the reality of that text, and by doing so we recreate a communal experience of resistance.

It should be noted, however, that many of the references in politically militant groups, such as War Party and Public Enemy, include or exclude the audience depending on his or her race. On the track “Feelin’ Reserved” most of the direct and antiphonic references (those references that refer specifically to an audience through pronouns) are aimed most topically at a Cree audience:

Don’t let no one tell you that you ain’t a Cree
See what we see, but don’t be who we be
Being yourself starts with originality
But I want to tell you to stay away from all the brew
And the drugs, and the bitches, and the dirty money too
And work hard to get a good education
Cause that’s what we lack on almost every reservation (Kool-Ayd)

This passage reveals that the lyrics are both monologic and dialogic: they promote dialogism by drawing a Cree audience in through self-reliance and an adaptable Cree identity; they disrupt dialogue and take a monologic approach by telling the listener precisely which vices to stay away from, and by telling them to be proud of, and identify with, their Cree heritage. This telling, or warning, does not necessarily mean that the audience is being coerced into acting a certain way, as much as they are being rhetorically drawn into a community that reinscribes traditional values, such as one’s spiritual wellbeing. Martin Luther King, Jr. refers to the power of the collective as abundantly more influential than individuality; he says: “Never stop and forget that collectively—that means all of us together—collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world” (“I’ve been to the Mountaintop”). King’s message ascribes a highly ethical responsibility to listening practices, moving listening beyond a single interpreter or translator. King’s call for change highlights that active participation in War Party’s rhetoric leads to larger and more productive communal audiences working together.

Hip Hop creates dialogism that participates in an ongoing deconstructive and reconstructive process, vis-à-vis sampling and intertextual references that function as types of antiphonic signification that incorporate a listener. Bakhtin describes the role of the listener as quintessential to

the functionality of all human speech: “every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word it anticipates” (280). The chorus in Hip Hop, as it is with most popular genres of music, is a moment that brings the audience together in collective solidarity, encouraging them to sing along. The chorus to “Just Ain’t Right” (*The Reign*) prompts the audience to respond with “And it just ain’t right” after Rex Smallboy describes a condition of life on the reserve:

There’s people dying on my reservation
And it just ain’t right
There’s mommas crying on my reservation
And it just ain’t right
Nobody’s trying on my reservation
And it just ain’t right
Still things just don’t got to be like this

The prosodic change in the chorus, when the phrase “And it just ain’t right” is repeated, is a moment that acknowledges the importance of antiphony: in describing each injustice on the reservation, the group responds in unison with the hook “And it just ain’t right,” underscoring a solidarity that recognizes the problem as being unified. The chorus is crafted to ensure that the same response will come after every line, aligning with Ong’s assessment that human communication “not only calls for response but is shaped in its very form and content by anticipated response” (173). Smallboy takes into consideration his audience’s anticipated response in “Just Ain’t Right” (a song about suicide in Native communities) when he describes the events that lead his cousin to take his own life, a crisis many First Nations communities can relate to. The song builds up to the emotive chorus, and throughout the verses Rex connects his personal experiences with depression and familial suicide with other families who are going through similar pain: “Suicide is something everyone’s tried/ To feel the pain, and the sorrow deep inside/ For my tribe and the problems that they hide/ These kinda things they go through my mind.” By making the private public, War Party performs a polyphony that extends beyond the initial group and draws in other First Nations listeners who have lost someone through addiction, depression, or suicide.

The antiphonic nature of call and response in Hip Hop is perhaps one of the most communal representations of rapping, while ironically also potentially being one of its most monologic. In its most basic portrayal, the emcee will say something like “Hip” prompting the audience with alacrity to respond with “Hop.” Yet in other instances groups such as N.W.A (Niggaz With Attitude) construct choruses that can be read problematically, such as their anti-police brutality anthem, “Fuck tha Police,”³⁰ which repeats the phrase “fuck tha police” multiple times in their chorus. While War Party’s strong anti-assimilation, anti-reserve, anti-colonization, and often anti-white (settler) messages might be read as moments that fissure the diegetic across cultural lines, they can be read as moments that acknowledge the brutal manifestation of a still visible colonial agenda. The cultural specificity of their constructed audience is a statement of to and for whom War Party chooses to speak: their audience is made up of predominately Cree and First Nations people, and by directing their message at this audience, War Party hopes to engage in dialogue with those who have been silenced and marginalized.

By using inclusive pronouns, much in the same that this project often makes direct reference to a reading “we,” War Party projects a Native audience into the performance, while instilling them with the power to be curators of change: “500 years ago we lost the freedom to be who we are/ Today some of us still imprison ourselves/ Mentally we’re holding ourselves down”³¹ (“Assimilate,” *The Resistance*). We see invocation throughout African American music and the method is well applied by War Party and other Native Hip Hop acts alike. An invocation to an audience is delicately intertwined into a song in order to gradually merge them into the performance, as in: “The young, gifted and Black are sprung addicted to crack/ All my people where y'all at cause, y'all ain't here/ And your hero's using your mind as a canvas to paint fear” (Black Starr “K.O.S,” emphasis added). Other times, the technique of call and response (popular in spiritual and political settings), which is the idiomatic form of antiphonal speech, is used to draw listeners into the performance as we report the lyrics in unison with the emcee (Richardson 11): “You say one for the treble, two for the time /

Come on y'all let's rock this! (Mos Def, “Hip Hop”). By making Hip Hop an inclusive medium, the audience becomes integral in the music’s physical mobility for change.

Since Hip Hop was ultimately formed as a voice to bespeak oppression and the suppression of voice, and to challenge access to public space, it is crucial that Hip Hop moves beyond the page (or recording) into the living fabric of the spoken word. Like Wickwire’s writing of Robinson’s stories in book form, recording War Party’s songs onto an album deprives them of some of their living orality, but it also fuses them with a sense of careful production, and reaches a much larger audience. In the song, “Thank you God” (*Resistance*), Thane Saddleback raps about the need for Nations to band together: this is most likely a reference to the six Iroquois Nations, but it is also a call to all First Nations people to maintain traditions, even in a polyform such as Hip Hop:

Yo, I’m thanking our forefathers
For their decisions my people listen
[..]
We all could change our positions
Keep our traditions flowing strong
The nations will listen

By asking “people [to] listen,” which leads “the nations [to] listen,” War Party stresses a listening built around polyphony, which connotes that the translation of an oral tradition into a textual or recorded tradition can still reflect the priorities of a collective. The antiphonal nature of Hip Hop, rooted in performance, is embedded in functionality, community and the heterogeneity of individuals in its composition—it is the music of the collective (Perry 73).

While War Party prioritizes Cree and *reserve* voices, Robinson prioritizes an Okanagan worldview, and Bringhurst (via Ghandl and Skaay) advocates for the mastery of Haida voices, their textual placement into the realm of a popular orality places all three texts in dialogue with one another. All three of the discussed texts promote a call for listening—a voice within the text—and insist upon the importance of listening to cultures (and artists) that have been historically neglected in the past, and therefore have been segregated, and at times nearly entirely forgotten by the majority of Canadians (and sadly, scholars). In “All for One,” Girlie Emcee sums up the crucial task of good

listening (attentive and ethical), which is a shared solidarity between all people: “It’s all for one, and one for all/ Together we rise, alone we all fall.” With a Black president in office in the United States, who admits to listening to Hip Hop (particularly those artists with a positive message), and with Native youths empowering themselves and speaking against a horrific past of injustice, there is no telling where the future of Hip Hop will lead. If criticism and Cultural Studies, within the act of cultural and critical translation, can capture that energy, even for a moment, then they too can have the generative capacity to create new epistemologies beyond the page into the living zeitgeist.

Chapter 5 (Outro): Listening Scholars

5.1 First Nations Critical Practice in the 21st Century

Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning. (Maya Angelou, *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings* 98)

Master orator Frederick Douglass, echoed in the above Maya Angelou epigraph, connects spoken and written speech to justice and liberty with a profound appreciation of their inherent powers, saying:

Great is the power of human speech—by it nations are enlightened and reformed; by it the cause of justice and liberty is defended, by it evils are exposed, ignorance dispelled, the path of duty made plain, and by it those that live today, are put into possession of wisdom of ages gone by. (“Human Speech” 476-77)

If Bringhurst’s *Sharp as a Knife*, Robinson’s *Write it on Your Heart*, and War Party’s *The Reign* validate anything, they prove Douglass’s statement that the power of human speech can enlighten and change our perceptions. Through voice in the form of textualized orality, these three works aim to create a more unified world: an ecolinguistic space that is channeled through storytelling. The telling of stories is ecolinguistic in that it parallels the phenomenon of an ecosystem in nature: if stories are not respected and told, they die, and the cultures that depend on them lose some of their richness; similarly when ecosystems such as those that rely on British Columbia’s Gary Oaks are disrespected, logged and decimated for selfish purposes, the system collapses and species that depend on its resources become extinct. In order to thrive, an oral story must exist in harmony with its environment, its audience, and the culture in which it was created (“Ecolinguistics”). While the translation of a story from an oral culture into a written one will drastically change the original, it will potentially create a dialogue that functions across cultures and communicative mediums. Translation in its most productive state enacts a dialogic pedagogy that promotes understanding between different approaches to telling a story, because the transformed story has relevance in another cultural construct.

Scholarship could emulate this unity, rather than totalize or subjugate First Nations stories and culture. The process of embracing First Nations pedagogy, as Bernie Harder puts it, is in many ways a method to “challenge the colonization that affects all of us, whether we are aware of it or not” (“A Way of Seeing the World” 336). Learning to hear the voice in text allows us to stop viewing either the written or the oral as a superior or more ontologically pure mode of storytelling. Listening at its roots promotes community, and the community is an aspect of learning that is integral to First Nations pedagogy, of which we, as readers (and listeners) are brought into through Skaay’s, Ghandl’s, Robinson’s, and War Party’s willingness to allow us to listen to their stories. Essentially their invitation, in allowing their stories to be written down and translated, is a plea for a listening that functions cross-culturally, and one in which we can gradually learn to hear the voices of the storytellers in a written context.

In looking at these few examples from First Nations literature, from the Pacific West Coast to British Columbia’s Western valley and East towards Alberta’s Native Reserves, we have only begun to uncover one thread that explores some of the inherent differences in expressing place and culture through an oral text as it relates to translation as both a highly attentive act of listening, and more dangerously as a culturally appropriating act. The various modes of First Nations expression, from the translated oral to the transcribed oral, and to the recorded oral, all help us reflect on the boundaries among which First Nations studies often move (between orality and textuality, between human and non-human) and the leaps that are required to understand our relation between different worlds of understanding. As dialogic scholars, whose own critical responses create a type of storytelling in themselves, we cannot frame our responses to the diversity of First Nations Literature within cultural isolation.

Nicholas Bradley states that “to recognize the multiplicity of Canadian literature—is to conceive of a Canadian Literature most accurately and most ethically” (*Offence* 900), and goes on to say that Canadian literature is “an unsettled field that is multilingual and multicultural, that includes oral texts as well as written ones” (909). War Party’s use of Hip Hop, Bringhurst’s translations, and

Robinson's stories challenge us to recognize that Canadian literature is just that: multicultural, hybrid, and diverse, including oral texts as well as written ones. Like a Garry Oak, our stories and responses to them become endangered when we strip them of their natural habitat, of their *habitus* ("Ecolinguistics"). The habitat of the texts with which *Voice in Text* engages are incredibly diverse, spoken and written in distinctive times, and for a wide range of audiences; thus, a single hermeneutical or homogeneous approach cannot be applied. Rather, theories that acknowledge that cross-fertilization and cultural translation take place when engaging with First Nations literatures in translation facilitate dialogues that promote mutual understanding. The epigraphs to each section of this project are a recognition of the mosaic of voices that entered into my own reading of each text, and they are an attempt to expand a solitary textual analysis through my own cross-cultural translation. Similarly, Bringham uses European painting and classical music as a highly evocative method of understanding Haida oral myth; Robinson finds it natural for white people to take part in his creation stories, or for the European fable "Puss in Boots" to be placed within an Okanagan framework; and War Party finds Hip Hop to be a suitable, and perfectly adaptable medium to express Native resistance.

It is impossible for any scholar to completely detach themselves from that which they study to provide a fully objective reading. Bringham's prescribed reading methodologies in *Sharp as a Knife* are compelling precisely because he describes how our readings of Haida literature should function across cultures; ironically, they are also potentially alienating because his reading is so strongly asserted that it leaves little room for Haida literature to be interpreted under its own terms. This is where we come in as listeners: it is because these three First Nations texts function cross-culturally (through a process of collaborative translation from one medium into another) that we have an ethical responsibility to not only unpack them, but to understand them because they all raise the question of whether cultural translation is even possible. Clearly, I believe that it is, as it seems perfectly natural to me that First Nations storytellers (particularly youths) express themselves through Hip Hop because that is where the current audience lies. Essentially, all storytellers want to

connect with an audience, and there is no larger listening youth audience in the world today than in Hip Hop.

As listeners we are part of the unfolding of meaning, to which we apply our own cultural backdrops of understanding. Listening as a sense is described by Jean-Luc Nancy as “always to be on the edge of meaning” (7), which connects nicely to the idea of translation as a listening technique that can only approximate an original; hence, listening becomes an attentive mode of recovery—we listen for the oral in the text. In applying good listening (which is always in productive transit between the speaker and the listener) we can create scholarship that forms new cross-cultural understandings, thus bridging common misapprehensions between cultures. Lee Maracle argues that cross-cultural encounters promise an interchange of ideas, rather than a conflict between cultures, creating bridges or arcs of mutual understanding: a “mutual construction in a language we both understand” (15). Hopefully this project shows that I have learnt a tremendous amount from various First Nations storytellers and artists, and have bridged many gaps in my own critical approaches to theory, reading, and listening. I have said all that I can, go out and listen for yourselves, and gather some of your own stories. Afterwards, I’d love to hear your translations.

Endnotes

¹ The Cowichan Sweater is a famous hand-knit sweater made by the Cowichan First Nations people on Vancouver Island. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) made the controversial decision to have their official Olympic (Cowichan-style) sweaters constructed and imported from an outside source (after failed negotiations with the Cowichan Nation regarding their potential production of the sweaters for HBC) and insisted that they are different from the traditional Cowichan sweaters. Cowichan First Nations officials accused HBC of stealing, via the appropriation of their iconic sweaters design, after HBC rejected the Cowichan Nation's proposal to produce Cowichan sweaters for HBC's line of 2010 Olympic clothing. In an interview, the Cowichan First Nations released the statement that they "believe they [the sweaters] are not very good knock-offs of the genuine Cowichan sweater." Cowichan Tribes general manager Ernest Elliott said in an interview that "Anything that tries to resemble a genuine Cowichan sweater is a fake" ("Cowichan Sweater").

² I use the term First Nations throughout my text because it is the current and most politically correct term to use to refer to people of Aboriginal decent in Canada. It also acknowledges First Nations presence in Canada before colonial encounters. Nevertheless, there is a variety of different terms used to refer to Canada's indigenous populations under differing connotations by scholars and First Nations writers, often depending on the context. The most common include: Native, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Indian, Redman (although a derogatory term it is sometimes used to reinscribe resistance); in the United States they include Native American, and American Indian (also somewhat artificial distinctions because the borders Europeans drew on maps almost never correspond to the borders of actual First Nations groups). When I do not use the term First Nations it is generally because of a context based discussion.

³ The Medicine Wheel is a common motif to many First Nations groups. The Wheel typically consists of four categories: *The West* (arrival, spirit, water); *The North* (searching, body, plants, and animals); *The East* (dreams, mind, air, the act of learning); *The South* (healing, emotion, heart, fire). These categories differentiate in their application and understanding by various Native groups in North America.

⁴ It is worth noting that Robert Bringhurst, while he has been to Haida Gwaii, did not return there in a professional capacity.

⁵ There are numerous debates around the term postcolonial as a hyphenated term, or an unhyphenated term. Laura Moss argues that the term itself "changes definitions, or at least emphasis, if one is looking at the text itself [...] the author and her place of origin, or the community from which she is writing" ("Postcolonial?" 3). I prefer to not use the hyphenated version of the term because it moves the term outside of a spatially defined and historically grounded debate around the larger issues of human oppression, psychological effects of colonialism, and resistance against regimes. Ashcroft et al. prefer to use the hyphenated term, arguing that the "hyphen is a statement about the particularity, the historically grounded nature of the experience it represents" (198). However, at the end of the day it seems to be a personal choice about what one feels more comfortable writing.

⁶ Xenophobic fears of First Nations people are scattered throughout the *Indian Act* which attempted to essentially wipe out what was considered "Indian": particularly, sun dances, potlatches, and pow-wows, with heavy fines for those that practiced them, or for "any person who induces or employs any Indian" (*Canadian Literature* "Indian Act" 325) in such ceremonies— further creating borders and cultural separatism. The *Indian Act* drew strong lines of division between what it considered "Indian" and not "Indian." In *The Truth About Stories*, King comments on the deceptive nature of the *Indian Act*: "It is a magical piece of legislation that twists and slides through time, transforming itself and the lives of Native people at every turn. And sprinkled throughout the act, which, among other things, paternalistically defines who is an Indian and who is not, are amendments that can make Indians disappear in a twinkle" (132).

⁷ It is worth mentioning that Pound's *Pisan Cantos* openly express anti-Semitic and often fascist views, which further complicates Bringhurst's choice to use Pound's poetic terminology to describe Haida oral stories.

⁸ In “Some Reflections on the Difficulty of Translations” Achilles Fang sums up what he considers the three problems of translation: firstly, adequate comprehension of a translated text; secondly, adequate manipulation of the language being translated into an other; and lastly, what takes place in the in-between (111).

⁹ This is my personal emulation of the type of manner that Bringhurst’s often writes in *A Story as Sharp as a Knife*. It is not so much meant to parody the text, as it is to illuminate my own ethical reading of the text. This epigraphic piece originally appeared in a conference presentation that I gave at *The University of Victoria*, as well as in Laura’s Moss’s graduate seminar on Canadian Literature.

¹⁰ John Swanton (1873–1958) collected Haida texts and ethnographic and linguistic information from Haida Gwaii from September 1900 to August 1901, as part of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition.

¹¹ As briefly outlined in Chapter One, ethnopoetics is a subfield of anthropology and ethnology that places the poetics of the spoken word into a typographical setting

¹² This essay does not have the space to delve into a complex outlying of ethnopoetics, however, it is worth mentioning the principles of ethnopoetics that Hymes outlines in *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality* (166–67):

(1.) Performed oral narratives are organized in terms of lines, not sentences.

(2.) Poetic organization is called equivalence, and deals with aspects of tense and aspect, among others.

(3.) Sequences of equivalent units commonly constitute sets and do so in terms of a few pattern numbers, such as two and four.

(4.) Texts are not ordinarily constituted according to a fixed length, rather each performance of a narrative may differ.

(5.) Variations and transformations in narratives appear to involve a small number of dimensions, which may prove universal

¹³ Later in life, Hymes would take a less clear stance on ethnopoetics saying that “[w]hatever ethnopoetics may be taken to be, it is first of all a matter of taking seriously the ways in which narrators select and group words. It is through attention to such choices that individuality of attitude and style can be recognized” (*Now I Know* 333).

¹⁴ Ong argues that “writing [is] a ‘secondary modeling system,’ dependent on a prior primary system, spoken language. Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality” (8). Essentially, Ong is claiming that writing is merely an aid, or even an enhancement to orality, organizing the patterns of speech onto the page or book. Ong goes so far as to call written words a “residue” while the “oral tradition has no such residue or deposit,” believing that when an “often-told oral story is not actually being told, all that exists of it is the potential in certain human beings to tell it” (11).

¹⁵ Some scholars argue over whether Vološinov, who was a close friend of Bakhtin’s, actually wrote *The Philosophy of Language*, or whether it was written by Bakhtin himself; nevertheless, Bakhtin’s influence is clear in the text.

¹⁶ In *Person and Myth*, James Clifford provides an analytical biography of Maurice Leenhardt (1878–1954)—missionary, anthropologist, and founder of French Oceanic studies—arguing that the “great difficulty of the missionary is to avoid imposing his Western judgments, and to come to understand these nonexistence personalities, potential and becoming” (67).

¹⁷ Bringhurst describes that in Haida, five and ten—*tliithl* and *tlaahl*—are perfect consonant numbers, while two, four and eight—*sting*, *stansing*, and *stansingxha*—are perfect numbers too, in different keys, while nine—*tlaahl sghwaansingguu*, ten minus one, is a dissonance waiting to be completed (*Knife* 51).

¹⁸ Sean Kane argues that Raven is not a person but a process (115). Raven and Coyote, who are both carrion-eating animals, bring life from out the depths of nothingness, and function as mediators between this world and the unknown (Lévi-Strauss 226). In Haida mythology, Raven, *Xhuuya* in Haida, is also one of the primary Haida clans, along with the Eagle, as both humans and gods are divided into either the Eagle or Raven side.

¹⁹ Charles Perrault (1628–1703), a member of the *Académie française*, is the French author who initially wrote “Puss in Boots.” In the original the cat uses trickery and deceit to gain power, wealth, and the hand

of a princess in marriage for his poor master. The fable has been adapted many times, including a version by the Grimm brothers, and an appearance by the cat in the third act of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*. Robinson's version is particularly different from the others in its many transformations of humans into animals, and in its strong moralistic ending which calls for the respect of animals and our pets.

²⁰ As Walter Ong states in his pioneering book *Orality and Literacy*: "we can style writing a 'secondary modeling system,' dependent on a prior primary system, spoken language" (8). Hip Hop in North America is secondary because it exists in a society that knows and utilizes writing; in a society without writing it would be a primary system (if such exists).

²¹ African American vernacular speakers largely provide Hip Hop's lexicon, with some words donated from Spanish, Caribbean Englishes, and from graffiti vocabulary (argot) (Richardson 11). As far as origins are concerned the argument states that the music is equal parts Black and Latino (Latino rappers could trace their cultural roots back to ancient Aztec warrior poets of Mexico) (Brinkman 11).

²² I transcribed the lyrics for War Party's albums *The Reign*, and *The Resistance*. In transcribing the lyrics I applied many of the methods of ethnopoetics, particularly the use of line breaks between breaths. Any errors that appear in the transcription are solely my own. Undergoing this transcription process reminded me of the role that Wickwire played in transcribing Robinson's stories. I had to make decisions about where to insert grammatical markers, and when to apply standardized spelling, or a spelling that reflected the abrogated form of words as they were sounded out in the recording.

²³ See Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*

²⁴ The off-rhyme between "English" and "dis" can be read as an engagement with otherness because standardized "English" is transformed into African American vernacular, as emphasized in "dis," negating the colonial power while using it as a tactic, as a hybridized form of speech.

²⁵ It is through stylization that African American vernacular (and rapping) can represent itself as hybridity: not as a single, solitarily unified language system, but as a system of resistance that takes place on a cultural plane, and where the terms on which it exists depend on that plane (Perry 14).

²⁶ It would be worth examining if Certeau's language is unproblematically appropriated to a racially marked discourse. The term "mother tongue" is explored in poet M. NourbeSe Philip's poem "Discourse on the Logic of Language."

²⁷ For clarity it is worth noting that there are two versions with different lyrics to the song "Feelin' Reserved." The longer version appears on the album, and the condensed version of the song appears on the music video with different lyrics (except for the chorus) and similar thematic.

²⁸ F.A.S. stands for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

²⁹ Red Cloud (1822-1909) was a war leader of the Oglala Lakota (Sioux). He was one of the greatest opponents that the United States ever had to face, who led a successful conflict which was known as the Red Cloud's War (1866-1868) over control of the Powder River Country in Northwestern Wyoming and Southern Montana ("Wikipedia").

³⁰ "Fuck tha Police" appears on the group's 1988 album, *Straight Outta Compton*: the song portrays a mock court scene, in which the Police Department is put on trial. The song itself has been translated into other mediums and genres, and was covered by the alternative rock group Rage Against the Machine.

³¹ Rex describes the harmful effects of cultural degradation on the interlude: "The loss of our language, the loss of our culture, the loss of our way of life, as a people we never grieved over these things..."

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