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The Meaning of Written English: A Place to Dream as One Pleases

Reid Gómez

Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell's book *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy* has been published by two different presses (University of Oklahoma, 1967 and University of Arizona, 2004), with the 1967 version attributing authorship to both Blackhorse Mitchell and T. D. Allen and the 2004 version naming Blackhorse Mitchell as sole author.¹ The 2004 edition is a simple facsimile of the original 1967 text; even the spelling of the word "Navaho" has not been updated. Yet depending on which version they read, readers are likely to have divergent experiences: the 1967 version begins with an introduction by T. D. Allen that advises the reader not to approach Blackhorse Mitchell's text as the work of a young man writing literature, but rather as an ethnographic subject. My work analyzes the practice of reading certain writers as producers of so-called "deficient prose" or "aborted English," as in the example of Allen's 1967 introduction to *Miracle Hill*.

Factors that affect how such writers are read include not only the dual process of language learning and production, but also racial formation and the idea of the literary itself. Writers' choices can be easily mistaken when their writing is read with an eye for "confused grammar" that is assumed to indicate "a sign of 'confused' thinking."² Blackhorse Mitchell's book provokes expectations of indigenous writing in English, of the Navajo artist, and of boarding-school literature.³ After arriving at the Institute of American Indian Arts, Blackhorse Mitchell's protagonist, Broneco, moves from medium to medium (weaving, sculpture, painting), when he finally arrives at creative writing. The following summarizes his excitement: "It's been a long time I have waited for this kind of work. At last, I have found the choice of my own to dream as I please."⁴

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Blackhorse Mitchell's characterization of writing as a place to "dream as one pleases" differs dramatically from the standard process of learning to write. Many of the questions I address in this article were raised in a 2011 special issue of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (AICRJ 35.2) devoted to American Indians and language. This special issue, titled "American Indian Languages in Unexpected Places," highlights the ways that language expectations are linked to power and circumscribe how texts can be read.⁵ Notably, guest editors Anthony Webster and Leighton C. Peterson appeal for a literary, rather than an ethnographic, treatment of Blackhorse Mitchell's book.⁶

TWO WHOLE TEXTS: *MIRACLE HILL: THE STORY OF A NAVAJO BOY*

The ashy-blue dust jacket of the 1967 University of Oklahoma Press edition displays a three-color woodblock illustration of the Shiprock formation, surrounded by clouds that look eerily like an atomic explosion. The front flap offers a brief description, "A Navajo boy relates the story of his early life, from his birth in a hogan until he became of age, of his introduction to, curiosity about, and attempts to enter the white man's world." The back flap describes the named coauthor T. D. Allen as the "corporate name of a husband and wife team . . . retained by Mrs. Allen." We learn that Mrs. Allen is "eminently qualified to guide a talented young writer like Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell." The book is advertised as offering the reader "a rare experience in communication." There is no description of Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell, and the book is dedicated "to the memory of Don Allen, who said, 'make them smell, taste, feel, and hear the story.'" The 1967 edition thus surrounds Blackhorse Mitchell and his writing with the Allens and their theory of writing.

The 1967 edition begins with a section titled "Please Read Loose." What follows is Mrs. Allen's introduction and an extended appeal for the reader to "abandon your tight girdle of grammar for a time and read loose."⁷ She explains that readers should allow the flow of language to take them into the text and away from any estrangement caused by the author's use of English. Blackhorse Mitchell's English is characterized as "an experiment in language stretching" and likened to primitive art with value that is "more documentary than aesthetic or literary."⁸ We are shown a sample of Blackhorse Mitchell's penmanship that "fascinated" Allen so powerfully that she "forgot to make corrections in spelling, sentence structure, English usage."⁹ This introduction frames the text's language as deficient.

The 2004 University of Arizona Press version of *Miracle Hill* lists Blackhorse Mitchell as the sole author and provides his biography on the copyright page. There is no introduction by Allen; readers can now enter the text directly, without an awareness of Allen or her framing. Blackhorse Mitchell's biography indicates that the text was "born" while he was a student of "literary writing" at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, moving the characterization of the text's genre from a boarding-school memoir to a portrait of the artist as a young man.¹⁰ Yet even in this later edition it is only possible for the reader to enter the second edition of Blackhorse Mitchell's book and remain unaware of Allen if the reader skips a foreword (what I call a second introduction) by Paul G. Zolbrod, a translator, playwright, scholar, and former adjunct

faculty at Diné College.¹¹ If readers do skip Zolbrod's introduction, they enter the book first through the title page crediting Blackhorse Mitchell as sole author, followed by the copyright page and its long paragraph "About the Author." A photograph "In memory of" the author's mother and aunt appears next, and then, following one blank page, the reader encounters a poem, "The Drifting Lonely Seed," credited to Blackhorse Mitchell and dated 1963. This presentation differs from the 1967 edition, in which Blackhorse Mitchell's poem is surrounded by Allen's text.

Appearing after the poem and the table of contents, Zolbrod's foreword nonetheless serves the typical function of framing the text for the non-Native reader in the same manner as white publishers often framed African American slave narratives. Most importantly, Zolbrod's foreword insidiously reintroduces Allen, undermining Blackhorse Mitchell's dedicated and painstaking work to remove her presence. Like Allen, Zolbrod recounts his personal knowledge of and friendship with Blackhorse Mitchell. Apparently, Zolbrod's three central goals are to represent Allen in a good light, and to attest to Blackhorse Mitchell's "Navajo-ness" and his "beautifully idiosyncratic idiom." Zolbrod writes, "It is to T. D. Allen's great credit, of course, that *Miracle Hill* found its way into print."¹² Her main fault seems to be not "recogniz[ing] the depth of his Navajo identity."¹³ In sum, this introduction encourages reading for non-mastery in two ways: by emphasizing and framing the racial or ethnographic value of the text and by prioritizing error analysis. Allen's characterization of his writing as "primitive" and her comments to white readers such as "the thing you . . . and Blackhorse Mitchell don't have in common is grammar" transforms the work into a showcase for errors and failures in grammar, style, and argumentation.¹⁴ As Rey Chow and William L. Leap demonstrate, neither approach allows us to read Blackhorse Mitchell or appreciate his style.

Another Set of Rules: Agreeing to Work with the Text

William L. Leap's work with elementary school children, primarily sixth graders, on the Northern Ute Reservation and on the Navajo reservation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, provides a way to read language arts instruction from a sociolinguistic perspective that provides significant insight for further literary analysis of the same texts. Following an in-depth sociolinguistic analysis, he concludes that these Navajo writers construct meaning in English using nonstandard language rules or conventions as literary devices. Consequently, the reader must use linguistic skills in order to interpret the writer's meaning (and meaning-making). Leap clearly points out that the linguistic reasons for nonstandard usage in verbal and written English for American Indian speakers are most likely due to "questions of power, politics and inequality,"¹⁵ yet many pieces of writing are "read strictly from the point of view of standard English composition, [and consequently assessed as] ineffective writing."¹⁶ In his 1993 essay on "Written Navajo English," Leap makes several summary points relevant to the reading of Blackhorse Mitchell's *Miracle Hill*. Young writers writing Navajo English write in a very personalized way; Leap calls this writer-centered writing.¹⁷ Leap calls for readers to reevaluate the assumptions they have about written English and the appropriate use

of language in a written context, to “become an active participant in the creation of text-meaning, not just an at-a-distance evaluator,”¹⁸ and to ask, “What does writing do?”

Leap asserts that reading written English with that question in mind is a method for hearing and reading language choices as forms of resistance; such linguistic reasons reveal that factors shaping assessments of proficiency and literacy are political rather than grammatical. In Leap’s view, writing assessment begins with the central concepts of “choice” and “knowledge”; thus, he recommends moving away from error analysis instead to look at writing in terms of the choices a writer makes, or as “a by-product of choice-making.” This method will “keep the speaker (writer, signer, etc.) agency at the forefront of the analysis.”¹⁹ In support of this focus on the choices of writers and speakers, he argues that scholars must frame their study of grammar to “reveal what people *can* do with the knowledge of the language they have acquired.”²⁰ Finally, Leap asks scholars to consider texts as “bounded segments of discourse,” noting that texts “begin and end at particular points in space and time. Those boundaries define the linguistic context within which particular features of message and meaning relevant to that segment of the discourse then become displayed.”²¹

When readers face a piece of written Navajo English in which everything the writer has written is rich and dense with intended meaning, using Leap’s method they approach the text the way listeners work to interpret a speaker’s meaning.²² It is not only the writers’ chosen lexical references, metaphors, and imagery that create these dense meanings, but creative “misspellings,” “errors” in punctuation and tense/aspect agreement, “refocused” idioms, and intentional repetition of words and phrases as well.²³ As Leap clarifies, “their significance within the text-setting needs to be fully explored”;²⁴ if we keep the writers’ choices in mind and read for meaning when we encounter such effects, we do not encounter writing that needs to be fixed, or errors that need to be corrected. Instead, interpretation becomes a shared text-making experience between writer and reader.

Leap’s focus on the reader in the text-making process, and on the complex package of concerns every writer brings to composing written Navajo English, draws attention to the importance of process, especially for high-context cultures.²⁵ According to Leap, every composition is created by a “complex package of concerns,” particularly text organization;²⁶ he identifies written Navajo English conventions that better characterize Blackhorse Mitchell’s writing choices and also offer another way to read actors in Blackhorse Mitchell’s narrative, who show up unannounced in ways that trouble Allen profoundly. Allen refuses to read Blackhorse Mitchell’s text organization as legitimate: as she requests that the reader read “loose,” she remarks in apology that the storytelling conventions she expects—those belonging to the “doctrine of corrections—are “unnatural for him.” Blackhorse Mitchell’s conventions, however, are a matter of choice, not nature.

Leap argues just the opposite: that “standard-English-based organizational strategies . . . would require that he [the writer] establish boundaries between each of those segments . . . fragmenting, rather than unifying text message.”²⁷ The text itself refuses to make a single point: like the lonely seed of Blackhorse Mitchell’s poem, it drifts. For example, Leap notes the absence of topic sentences because the Native youth prefer

the complex package where “each of the . . . sentences presents a portion of the text-meaning. None of them, if read individually and out of context, acts as a controlling idea, effectively expressing on its own the point of view which the text as a whole seeks to display.”²⁸ The key to reading Leap’s young writers, then, is that “the reader will agree to work with the text as a whole.”²⁹

Leap notes the rich details that characterize these young writers’ compositions. These details give the reader a place to return and linger, and point the reader toward the importance of text, not grammar. They also keep the reader coming back, as the reader should never move away from the text, but only go further into it. In this way reading becomes a process of returning to the dream, and to Blackhorse Mitchell’s understanding of writing as a place where one can dream freely. Leap’s final two observations about written Navajo English among young composers provide readers with the most useful guide to reading Blackhorse Mitchell’s work. “Navajo student English compositions do not concentrate ‘the point’ of the story in any singular location,” and “Information in Navajo student English compositions are inter-related and inter-dependent.”³⁰ It follows, then, that readers must know the text as a whole and expand their focus beyond discrete sentences, paragraphs, and chapters in order to interpret the text and engage in text-making.

Moreover, reading in this manner makes any and all knowledge of the speaker’s background essential for interpretation and, crucially, requires intimate knowledge of the speaker and not merely ethnographic knowledge of the speaker’s community. In my own reading of Blackhorse Mitchell’s “The Drifting Lonely Seed,” for example, the “complex package of concerns” that Leap has identified surfaces in three moments that, returning to each other, shape the poem’s structure: the writing of the poem, the discovery of writing itself, and the scene at his grandmother’s graveside.

LEARNING STANDARD WRITTEN ENGLISH IN “LABORATORIES OF DOMESTICATION”

Blackhorse Mitchell attended Ignacio Consolidated Agency Indian School for eleven years. Upon graduation, he attended the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, where he began the manuscript that became *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy* in 1962.³¹ He earned bachelor and master of arts degrees in elementary education and secondary education, with a minor in modern classical language (*Diné Bizaad*). To briefly summarize Blackhorse Mitchell’s school environment, Native American education and Indian boarding schools generally functioned as “civilizing” institutions moving Indian youth away from their home communities and languages into American life and culture as laborers or folk artists. At the time Blackhorse Mitchell wrote his book *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy*, there was a national movement toward bilingual education and community-controlled schools, particularly on Navajo.

Where and how we learn is of central importance in every discussion of Native American education. It is important to read Blackhorse Mitchell’s work in the context of Native boarding school education. Teresa L. McCarty’s *A Place to Be Navajo: Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Indigenous Schooling*, focuses on

two key concepts: place and choice. In this text she provides a “critical life history” of the school at Rough Rock on the Navajo Nation.³² McCarty notes that a place for being includes a place for speaking. She also points out that this place can and indeed must be everywhere, expanded beyond inside and out of the school; every being should be able to locate and inhabit that place.³³ Concepts of place as practice include each individual plant, animal, human, and textbook within that place concept. In addition, the hallmark of Native American education is the power, practice, and importance of individuals making their own decisions and coming to their own conclusions. Leanne Simpson’s essay “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation” is devoted to the idea that land is a place, and our place, of learning, where learning is consensual.³⁴ Simpson’s essay speaks to this, yet K. Tsianina Lomawaima and McCarty’s description of the “learner’s responsibility” in all matters is eloquently perfect: “it is up to you” (*t’áá bí bee bóholníih*), an idea to which I will return later.³⁵

To understand place in both concrete and esoteric terms requires thinking about responsibility away from one location (the school, the teacher, or the student) to a spiritual, linguistic, ethical, and intellectual embodiment shared by the entire community. A holistic idea of education, where the world is your teacher and you learn by observation and trial and error, is evident in Navajo educators’ curricular materials, such as those created at Rough Rock Community School and Tse Nitsaa Deezáhi Diné Bi’olta’ (Rock Point Community School).³⁶ A book that exemplifies this holistic idea of education, *Between Sacred Mountains: Navajo Stories and Lessons from the Land*, identifies community members as partners and coauthors, listing storytellers, seekers, artists, listeners, learners, and scribes.³⁷ These community-shaped paradigms stand in dramatic difference to Richard Henry Pratt’s late nineteenth-century model of indigenous education, which famously formed the curriculum of the United States Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and is commonly characterized as “kill the Indian and save the man.”³⁸

A century later, *To Remain An Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* takes as its theme the importance of Native students’ right to choose: “He who wants to remain an Indian and live according to his old culture should be aided in doing so.”³⁹ As it describes the nuanced complexity of educational frameworks for Native American communities, Lomawaima and McCarty’s rigorous volume emphasizes the equally nuanced and complex responses made by indigenous communities that were subject to such planning and policy. Turning to the words of Luther Standing Bear, one of Carlisle School’s most famous students, who asserted that Indian educational practices are “a native school of thought,” the authors of *To Remain an Indian* ask, “what can we learn when we look at the ways American Indians experienced the process of being educated in the United States?”⁴⁰

The first point they make about learning is to look at choice.⁴¹ According to Leap, choice is a foundational component of the text-making relationship between writer and reader, particularly for American Indian writers, and especially for young American Indian (Navajo and Ute) writers learning to write in English. Choice, then, is important both for understanding Blackhorse Mitchell’s text and the way we choose

to read his choices; should we read *Miracle Hill* “loose,” as T. D. Allen suggests, or should we read it “seriously,” as Webster requests? Choice is, in part, what resides in the powerful moment when Blackhorse Mitchell chooses his art form: writing. Choice is at the center of a place to dream as one pleases.

Blackhorse Mitchell’s narrative shows the full world and range of Native responses to Pratt’s approach that *To Remain an Indian* describes. He begins with an argument over going to school—his grandmother wants to keep him home (and away from English) and equally strongly, he wants to go (particularly in order to learn English). Blackhorse Mitchell’s book thus opens directly onto the intergenerational sentiments and understandings of boarding schools for Native Americans, particularly for Navajo. In another revealing response, Blackhorse Mitchell’s protagonist locates himself in the schoolhouse of the world by titling one chapter “I Do Have a Name” and declaring, “Hello, World.” Similarly, *A Place to Be Navajo* outlines and explains these historical experiences and distills them in chapter titles taken from McCarty’s interviews with community members: “How it Was,” “We Were Going to School Being Taught Only by Anglos,” and “A Portrait of Change.” The participants in McCarty’s study share a belief that what students learned at that school, in that moment, was of no use when students were removed from the home, taken away from family and clan and land—the only meaningful frameworks for existence—taken from what I have been calling the schoolhouse of the world to the stark, deeply divided, separate world of the Anglo (boarding school, English, American, Bilagáanaa). All these separations left them feeling, “we grew up confused.”⁴²

Blackhorse Mitchell’s text presents the complexity of this moment in time, and an experience of boarding school education on Navajo, beautifully. His discussion of *Miracle Hill* as, in part, a comment on boarding school reflects his personal journey, characterized by his ability to see several aspects of the boarding schooling program simultaneously.⁴³ Blackhorse Mitchell makes his own way in relationship to Allen and his grandmother and he learns English. He also does what he wants to do with his schooling and English language skills. McCarty finds that the community members at Rough Rock see many sides of an event (particularly boarding school); those she interviewed presented neither an unqualified positive or negative view of the schools or the curriculum they were taught.⁴⁴ Blackhorse Mitchell can recognize his teacher Allen’s desire that he learn to write correctly using standard English language rules such as tense while simultaneously recognizing students’ desires and ability to learn something else: to dream as he pleases.

Indeed, indigenous children and communities navigate US federal policies in their own way. *T’áá bí bee bóholníih* (“it’s up to him/her to decide”) indicates the significance of autonomy in Navajo culture, as Anthony K. Webster elaborates in his study of the implications of punning devices in Navajo poetry. Webster’s *Intimate Grammars* offers an in-depth discussion of his work with Blackhorse Mitchell, as well as his insights into the relationship between Diné Bizaad, Navlish, and English language for Navajo writers. According to Webster, *t’áá bí bee bóholníih* means that

Individuals have the right to make their own decisions. Puns, like the “indirect” forms of requests Lamphere describes. . . . reinforce an individual’s autonomy by relying on “ambiguity.” In form, then, rather than forcing a singular interpretation, they act as an invitation into imaginative processes. As some Navajos have indicated to me, overtly explaining something implies the listener does not have the proper mental capacity to discern something on their own. It is an infringement of the autonomy of the listener, with the added assumption that the listener is not capable of imagining autonomously. Puns are displays of verbal dexterity, but also invitations issued to the imaginative capacities of the listener/reader.⁴⁵

Webster’s analysis clarifies why and how Blackhorse Mitchell’s and Allen’s desires come into conversation in the first edition of *Miracle Hill*. It also calls into question a scene of education in which one teacher is teaching one subject to one student who is thereby baptized into a language and culture,⁴⁶ instead positing a place where two individuals are working and writing can dream freely.

The writer-centered aspect of written Navajo English makes Anthony Webster’s collaborative work with Blackhorse Mitchell indispensable for those doing any work on Navajo poetics, Navajo English (Navlish), and writing by Navajos in any language. In the way a writer’s love sometimes does, Blackhorse Mitchell’s love for language, reading, and writing fills the latter half of the novel and sets him apart from the other students. Webster offers love as a way of reading Blackhorse Mitchell’s book: “One way to read *Miracle Hill* is as a love story. It is a love story between Blackhorse Mitchell and his intimate grammar, his English.”⁴⁷ Webster’s reading of *Miracle Hill* as a love story is convincingly supported by discussion of Navajo feelings for English and Navlish and the intimacies allowed and created when, knowing *t’áá bí bee bóholníh*, one speaks as one chooses.

LIKE A NATIVE SPEAKER AND THE GRAMMAR OF COLONIALISM

In examining Leap’s proposed interpretive approach—that readers attempt to read for what writers believe they can do with language, as well as what they can do with writing—my argument has stressed a link between language and domination. The process of a colonial education is marked by an altercation between languages with uneven power relationships. The enforcement of those relationships is even more uneven. Some languages are considered official, and others are considered obsolete. Many think of this language struggle in terms of replacement, with the colonial language replacing the native language. Rey Chow’s *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Linguaging as a Postcolonial Experience* reminds us that colonized peoples are affected as linguistic and languaged subjects: language is neither transparent, innocent, nor history-free, and style is a linguistic project. Chow writes, “at the core of the colonial enterprise [is] an active production of *subjection* through the discipline of language.”⁴⁸ In the second chapter, she analyzes a comment that one of her graduate professors wrote on her paper: “You have one of those things offered by a colonial education—a clear writing style.” What her instructor identifies as clarity, Chow recognizes differently: “If linguistic clarity may be deemed a positive quality under other circumstances, in this

case it was the manifest symptom of successful political and ideological subjugation.”⁴⁹ Chow cautions against ideas of a “pure” linguistic practice, noting that “the use of one language is habitually interfered with by the vying availability of others,” but only for those willing to hear them.⁵⁰ Style is only available to certain authors.

Vicente L. Rafael characterizes the processes of standardizing spelling and punctuation and codifying grammar as the “systemized doctrine of correctness.” The codification project is extensive and takes place in disciplinary fields, educational settings, writing guides and reading practices. This project is supported by claims of cogency, clarity and style, and the related notions of native proficiency and education. According to Rafael, this doctrine works to equip English with a unified form and function capable of governing all spheres of existence. The doctrine of correctness “establish[es], this ‘common tongue,’ promised to subsume linguistic differences . . . American English would [then have the] capacity to bring distances up close, would conjure a perfect union. But it would be one where polylingual realities would have to give way to a monolingual hegemony.”⁵¹

Like Rafael, an essay by bell hooks, “this is the oppressor’s language/yet I need it to talk to you/”: Language, a place of struggle” examines the ways standard English is a “language of conquest and domination”; indeed, for hooks, “It is difficult not to hear in standard English always the sound of slaughter and conquest.” Among colonized African and Native Americans, the status of English as a shared, common language is a “mask which hides the loss of so many tongues.”⁵² Yet to eschew or renounce this language is not the only, or the most useful, solution. hooks points to the need for those learning this language to use it in order to become a subject: “This is the oppressor’s language/yet I need it.”⁵³ Blackhorse Mitchell too describes the process of creating oneself as a subject, in writing and through English, thinking at his grandmother’s graveside that “Someday people shall remember and read about you as I’m your author as well as my own.”⁵⁴

hooks’s essay focuses on the necessary and powerful work not of claiming a language, but of claiming the right to do as you choose with that language. This is a crucial distinction. For hooks, claims on a language through speaking/hearing and reading/writing are founded in a “relationship with learning to speak” and “remak[ing] that language so that it would speak beyond the boundaries of conquest and domination.”⁵⁵ hooks theorizes the awareness of slaves that the strange language they heard being spoken around them “would need to be possessed. Taken, claimed as a space of resistance.”⁵⁶ Webster’s work on intimate grammars, speaking disparaged language as a means of intimacy between speakers, is just the type of restoration of intimacy that hooks demands the speaker (the slave) make of the language (of the oppressor). The idea that it is not the language itself, but what “the oppressor does with it” is also at the heart of Leap’s work and Webster’s emphasis on the power readers have in text-making with the writer. Resistance resides in intimately pulling at and playing with language, and must include a willingness to speak, hear, and recognize language fluidity by writers and readers.

In reading the end of *Miracle Hill*, I want to linger on hooks’s idea of possession and move it away from the idea of ownership and reach toward the language of claims.

In the final chapter of Blackhorse Mitchell's book, the young writer Broneco returns to the land, and the small hill, that speaks to him and beckons him, "Come, Little One, for you may find your happiness here upon me, the miracle hill. For I am the mother earth who rules nature. Come."⁵⁷ It is on this hill, from which the book receives its title, that Blackhorse Mitchell writes, "Ever I shall use their tongue to understand and communicate, exchange gifts, for their tongue is the barrier of destruction to my people. Now, I have learn their signs and ways of living, I can see another mountain."⁵⁸ hooks describes this use of language in terms of the "counterlanguage" of the slave; as hooks explains, "they put together their words in such a way that the colonizer had to rethink the meaning of English language."⁵⁹ Reading written English, and rethinking the meaning of English reflects Leap's insights into the work of young writers, and Chow's reasons for refusing to write or speak like a native (using an idea of native proficiency as the model). The final sentence of Blackhorse Mitchell's book boldly declares, "This is the Miracle Hill, and Broneco walks on, learning about the world beyond hands' reach."⁶⁰ Writing, when conceived as what can be done, beyond the reach of English, beyond what Blackhorse Mitchell figures as "hands' reach," is the miracle on Miracle Hill.

Standard English refuses the intimacy required to know the speaker and hear what the speaker is saying. Standard English writing imposes what Rafael calls the "systemized doctrine of correctness" in the discursive space Christi Merrill characterizes as the "unexamined grammar of colonialism." Writing not like a native speaker, and reading for style and not errors, makes English, as hooks has seen, "more than the oppressor's language."⁶¹ Approaching English and writing through these angles is a way for individuals "colonized as linguistic and languaged subjects" to "create an intimate speech that could say far more than was permissible within the boundaries of standard English."⁶² Blackhorse Mitchell defines writing as a place to dream as he pleases. The power he wields in this definition "is not simply that it enables resistance to white supremacy but that it also forges a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies—that were crucial to creating a counterhegemonic world view."⁶³ He writes with the same language approach hooks identifies as the counterlanguage of the slave, Leap identifies as Navajo Written English, and Webster identifies as intimate grammars. Blackhorse Mitchell chooses not to write like a native speaker, and "there, in that location, [h]e make[s] English do what [h]e want[s] it to do."⁶⁴

LEARNING TO WRITE: NOT LIKE A NATIVE SPEAKER

The phrase "leave English behind" is common in many indigenous language revitalization programs that encourage language immersion. Language choice is figured or positioned as a choice between a monolithic colonial language, English, and a monolithic, endangered indigenous language. In looking closely at this question of choice and language, my intention here is not to elide the translative violence that moves speakers into English via assimilation and colonial schooling programs. Rather, moving away from paradigms of lost and found languages, I argue that the proposed choices between colonial and indigenous are problematic because they reflect the singular,

subjugated position of the colonized subject/object, whose only choices are to “lose language” or create an immersion situation and “leave English behind.” This framework limits the indigenous speaker and writer, and allows for an easy dismissal of language (revitalization) work and English as a language of expression. This framing positions two choices—assimilation or nativism—yet as we have seen, Webster and Blackhorse Mitchell’s work highlights the intimacies, dreams, and choices involved in English (not as a singular fixed language belonging to the colonizer) and writing (what can be done in and with written English).

The question of learning to write and what it means to be a native speaker (of colonial and/or Native languages) has often been asked from a monolingual context.⁶⁵ Much of the discourse is filtered through what is often referred to as the Achebe/Ngũgĩ debate.⁶⁶ For Achebe and Ngũgĩ, to pose the question “should the (African) writer write in English?” insists on choosing between the language of the colonizer and the colonized. Achebe refuses that choice with an immediate “of course” the African writer should write in English, but unlike hooks’s claims on English, which arise from need, Achebe reframes the very question itself: what kind of English should the African writer use? Achebe recast the terms of the debate: “So my answer to the question *Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?* is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: *Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?* I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so.”⁶⁷ Achebe not only claims English, but he claims the right to do with English as one pleases. This second claim fundamentally resists the place provided for the colonized, in the social order and in the literary imaginary.

I am framing the question of language and literature through four key language issues: reading multilingual authors as if they are monolingual (in monologic ways), the writer/speaker and reader’s relationship to “the colonizer’s language,” the fixed or flexible nature of language (American Indian English, intimate grammar, and Blackhorse Mitchell’s English), and writing (Leap, Blackhorse Mitchell). The decision to write in English, I argue, should not be seen solely in terms of making an aggressive claim on that language, the colonizer’s language, but as a refusal to bow down in deference to it. Blackhorse Mitchell’s emphasis on listening and dreaming as one pleases is so important because it allows for the autonomy of the writer and reader in the language of *t’áá bí bee bóholníh*.

I bring the Achebe/Ngũgĩ debate to an American Indian context to address a list of language issues which this paper brings together as a way of examining the links between language and colonization. This list of issues includes: the blend of multilingualism and the (sub/historical) consciousness of multilingualism of readers, interlocutors, and Englishes (Navlish, American Indian English, Black/African American Vernacular English, Chinglish, to name just a very few); and the refocusing of our questions about language from distinctions between the so-called oral and written to the question of the fixed or flexible nature of language and writing.⁶⁸ In Webster’s work with Blackhorse Mitchell, he constantly picks up his own writing and reads it to Webster. Webster notes this process, and Blackhorse Mitchell’s idea that there is something in the text, in the reading of the text, and in the repeated reading

of the text together that addresses any question in, and of, the moment. Blackhorse Mitchell himself returns to his own text as a text that changes while it remains the same, and constantly insists that Allen did not listen to what he was saying in his writing—she did not hear his writing.⁶⁹ Blackhorse Mitchell's choice of words here in reference to Allen's reading failures reveal his idea (in alignment with Leap's work and my argument) that writing is also reading and listening for meaning (actually hearing text being read aloud). This is what Leap has termed text-making between reading and writer.

My discussion of the Achebe/Ngũgĩ debate is not meant to dismiss or decenter the rich body of work in and on Native American languages, writing, and rhetoric,⁷⁰ but rather to focus on the student writer's choice not to write like a native speaker (echoing Achebe) and to center the work of the classroom, various pedagogical moments, editorial power relations, and publication outcomes that are involved in language planning and policy-making for writer, teacher, editor, and publisher. These negotiations and relationships shape the reader by shaping the rules of composition as well as the project of reading, as Leap argues, and both Allen's reading instructions and Zolbrod's foreword to Blackhorse Mitchell's work illustrate. Leap's study takes the responses of Native youth to composition assignments as its object of study; I read Blackhorse Mitchell through the work of Leap in the hopes of putting the practice of writing at the center.

My attention to the Achebe/Ngũgĩ debate is also an attempt to further refigure the idea of "the native speaker" in terms of a standard of learning and instruction in language, writing, and for the restoration of linguistic plurality to this enunciative field. Chow notes, "It is, I believe, to such liminality and discontinuity that Achebe alludes when he writes the answer 'I hope not' to his own question. In that affirmative, forward-looking gesture of negation—that an African will, *he hopes, not* learn to use English like a native speaker—we hear a creative domain of languaging emerging."⁷¹ The creative domain of languaging in and on Navajo is evident in the lush and ongoing work of Webster and Peterson on Navajo and in Navajo (Diné Bizaad), English, and Navlish, as well as in the way their work looks at languaging as a complex dynamic of oral and written, seeing and hearing, reading and listening, that happens on the page, as well as in public and private readings of pages, and through radio waves and programs.

Although the relationship writers and speakers have with colonial languages is often framed in polarized terms of renunciation or embrace,⁷² Christi A. Merrill offers another view, where such relationships are "passed along through the generations, repeated in such a way that it has given us a dynamic and mutable language for posing afresh some of the larger—and largely unanswerable—riddles of colonial and postcolonial exchange."⁷³ Her book *Riddles of Belonging: India in Translation and Other Tales of Possession* challenges readers to develop the critical vocabulary necessary to scrutinize the "unexamined grammar of colonialism," a call that has been a central influence on this article. I contend that we should rethink our concept of an initial or singular choice between colonial and indigenous languages in favor of a constant process of choosing what language and technology (writing, oral, pictorial, or alphabetic) can be. Thinking of language and writing in this way takes writers and readers away from

questions of mastery (of form or grammar) and the violation of norms (for good, clear, or correct writing) and brings them to the questions of power and play.

The refusal to defer to the grammar of colonialism and choose between fixed notions of language and writing is precisely what Achebe remarks and proposes in his response “I hope not” to the expectation that African writers conform their writing in English to the practices of native speakers. This refusal to defer describes the political, spiritual, and epistemic context of the colonial present where all speakers are still required, or demanded, to bow in deference to the colonial language and culture. Achebe openly declares, “The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use.”⁷⁴ Speaking/writing not like a native speaker is another viable solution. Speaking/writing not like a native speaker is a response attentive to the power within each subject, as well as within our languages—for some, understood as story—regardless of changing technologies, our relationship to, and understanding of, what language can and should do, whether in writing, in alphabetic script, or when written in one or several languages. The subject’s power of refusal can be used to contend with the relationships between languages as well as the relationships between their speakers.

When we place these relationships at the center, we can also center the practice of writing and read the responses of Native youth to composition assignments they are given. Toward the end of Blackhorse Mitchell’s text there is a humorous moment when he reveals his relationship to writing and to the grammar of colonialism by explicitly calling attention to Allen’s position as a writer—and a writer about Navajos. There are several such moments in the text where Blackhorse Mitchell and Allen discuss writing in general and his writing in particular, but in this chapter he brings up a third, and unfamiliar subject—Allen’s own writing, the book *Navahos Have Five Fingers*, coauthored with her husband (to whom the first edition of Blackhorse Mitchell’s book is dedicated). Offering a glimpse into their teacher/student relationship, and a day in the boarding-school life of a young creative writing student, the chapter begins with his return from Navajo and ends with his preparations to return. I read their two-page conversation as a confrontation between student and teacher because there is something hard (as in tangled, bunched, or matted) about the exchange. Blackhorse Mitchell works in the publication department, stays up late working on his manuscript, and after a long night of composing in his dormitory, sometimes falls asleep at his desk. Allen asks Blackhorse Mitchell why he’s falling asleep with his fingers still on the typewriter, while she rattles away on her typewriter across the room. Her questions are short: “Broneco, didn’t you have enough sleep last night?” He replies, “I sleep only for a few hours.” She asks, “Why?” He replies, “I was working on my script of writing.” She wants to know, “Why so late?” He tells her that the night hours provide the quiet where “Broneco’s mind is at ease and full of imaginations.”⁷⁵

Their exchange of words is triggered by a supposed conversational exchange about coffee. Broneco reveals his knowledge of Allen’s work outside the classroom. I hear and see this interchange as a conversation between two writers, sharing their process as writers do, and so much more—this conversation tells Blackhorse Mitchell’s readers that he sees and has a very nuanced understanding of Allen’s position at the school

and in the field of publishing, not only her own work, but her position in facilitating the publication of his. The complex point of view this chapter reveals far exceeds the description of their relationship on the preceding page: "Mrs. Allen understanding this light-brown complexed student. She taught this young, intelligent Indian boy with the best effort that she can give. By the end of the year, Mrs. Allen much surprise how much she has gotten into Broneco's unread mind."⁷⁶

Miracle Hill is filled with descriptions of Broneco's reading rituals, tastes and habits, but none are as forceful as when he tells Allen he has read her work, particularly *Navajos Have Five Fingers*. This moment is a metacognitive, metatextual dreamscape where Blackhorse Mitchell conveys to Allen his own desire to be a writer capable of writing "a book like that."⁷⁷ Replying with a declaration, value judgment, or challenge that seems to undercut the significance of the narrative of Broneco's exhaustion—the ostensible reason for their conversation about making and drinking a good cup of coffee—Allen first looks "straight at Broneco in stare. "Thank you. You will, only if you try."⁷⁸ This is the turning point of the entire moment: within the context of a conversation about coffee that allows Broneco to make his intertextual reference to Allen's work, he indicates that not only is he writing at night, but is also reading widely and deeply, even going so far as to read the work of his teacher. This is what a young writer does.

This moment introduces questions about editing, writing, and power in publishing, as well as the relationship between Allen and Blackhorse Mitchell. Although Webster comments on Allen and Blackhorse Mitchell's relationship and points to difficulties in the years between the book's two publications, this moment regarding *Navajos Have Five Fingers* indicates the power and play already present in their relationship.⁷⁹ I emphasize how Blackhorse Mitchell narrates himself as a writer alongside Allen and what can be done in writing. If his final goal as a student is to remain alive, or Indian, and in the end to have five fingers, as a Navajo/Navaho is purported to have, he does this by writing, in English, through the night and working in the publishing department by day. The ending of Blackhorse Mitchell's book echoes Achebe: "I have been given this language and I intend to use it."⁸⁰ Achebe's comments point to speakers in general, and to writers specifically. To make his point Achebe quotes Baldwin: "Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test."⁸¹

Following Achebe's argument, what makes English Blackhorse Mitchell's own is his use of it: writing is a medium. The Blackhorse Mitchell who writes *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy* and the Blackhorse Mitchell who reads *Navajos Have Five Fingers* are serious writers. To borrow one of Achebe's characterizations of writing not like a native speaker, Blackhorse Mitchell is a serious writer in search of "an animal whose blood can match the power of his offering."⁸² Blackhorse Mitchell positions himself beside his fellow writers to achieve a proper use of the English language, according to Achebe's guides: instinct, judgment, "still in full communion with the ancestral home," and "altered to suit the new African [Native, Navajo, Navaho, Diné] surroundings."⁸³ Blackhorse Mitchell's English must answer to Navajo (language and people).

The Drifting Lonely Seed

From the casein dark-blue sky
 Through the emptiness of space,
 A sailing wisp of cotton.
 Never have I been so trilled!
 The drifting lonely seed,
 Came past my barred window,
 Whirling orbit, it landed before me,
 As though it were a woolly lamb—
 Untouched, untamed, and alone—
 Walked atop my desk, stepping daintily,
 Reading forth my hands, I found you,
 Gentle, weightless, tantalizing.
 I blew you out through barricaded window;
 You pranced, circled round me,
 Sharing with me your airy freedom.

A PLACE TO DREAM IN A “LABORATORY OF DOMESTICATION”⁸⁴

In the first edition of *Miracle Hill* this poem is presented to the reader as Allen frames it: a response to her insistence that “Barney” tell his writers how he came to writing. Eight pages into her request that we read Blackhorse Mitchell’s work “loose,” and an explanation of what this means, she introduces this dialogue:

One day I said, “I think readers would like to know how you first decided you’d like to write. It was during orientation, wasn’t it?”

“Yes.” Barney answered.

“Well, try to remember all about it,” I suggested. “Your readers will want to know how you got started, and you have skipped over that part.”

He sat at the long table in our writing studio with a pad of paper before him and his chin in his palm. Finally he asked, “What was that you gave us that day? A kind of seed or something. I think.”

“I don’t know for sure, but I believe it was a milkweed,” I said. “Don’t worry about its name, though. Don’t you remember, I’ve told you not to label things? Remember your five senses. Give your reader your sense impressions and let him have the fun of imagining it as it was to you.”

In a few minutes, instead of giving me the paragraph or two I was waiting for to insert in Chapter XV, Barney laid a short poem on my desk.

“Barney.” I scolded, “I thought you were going to help me fill in—”

“I just wrote this to get wound up,” he said.

The poem he wrote to get wound up was:

The Drifting Lonely Seed

[the full poem in italics is placed here.]

Thus wound up, Barney went on to write what I had asked—how he decided that he wanted to write: “To put the past history in writing so it will always be remembered someday!”⁸⁵

Allen’s tone is patronizing. She explicitly rejects the poem as the answer Blackhorse Mitchell chose to give to her question about writing. Readers encounter the poem through her rejection. In framing the poem as a warm-up exercise the reader reads past the poem to the final sentence that passes as an acceptable answer to her question: “to put the past history in writing.” Allen follows this sentence with an apology for “Barney’s” lack of “discern[ment for] proper tense forms.” She begins her next paragraph apologizing for the way “people will pop up, unannounced and unintroduced.” She reminds the reader, “He is learning, but such techniques of story telling are unnatural for him and for most Navahos.”⁸⁶

In the second edition, the reader’s first encounter with the poem is on a page of its own. The second encounter is by reference only. This scene takes place in both editions in the chapter titled “So This is The Institute!” This chapter begins with Broneco arriving at the Institute of American Indian Arts. He moves from medium to medium (weaving, sculpture, painting), and finally lands on creative writing. He expresses his excitement in the following statement: “It’s been a long time I have waited for this kind of work. At last, I have found the choice of my own to dream as I please.” When you ask Blackhorse Mitchell himself how to read “The Drifting Lonely Seed,” he instructs the reader to read it as a critique of the boarding school system. In the text itself, Blackhorse Mitchell describes writing the poem for an entire page before moving on to a description of the assignment he has given to write his story “in the past tense, present, and future.” He also explains his reluctance to use the future tense, not in terms of skill deficits, but in terms of the metaphysical meaning of using future tense in Navajo language and storytelling protocol.

Anthony K. Webster devotes a chapter to this poem in his book *Intimate Grammars: An Ethnography of Navajo Poetry*. In this chapter, Blackhorse Mitchell recounts the feeling he had in Allen’s classroom—it was a place he was not able to speak, a place where he was confined in the role of coming to English, where writing was a form of coming to literacy.⁸⁷ Webster points out that Allen’s goal was to “teach English” and the method was “creative writing.” But Blackhorse Mitchell has already stated, in the body of *Miracle Hill*, that creative writing was “a place to dream as one pleases.” He and Allen are working from different relationships to writing. In his view Allen wanted him “to sit and learn.”⁸⁸ In his work with Webster, Blackhorse Mitchell contends that Allen shaped the book to present a positive experience of the boarding school educational process—as an example of her success as a teacher, creating the clear style Chow argues is indicative of colonial educations.

For Blackhorse Mitchell, “The Drifting Lonely Seed” is like all of his writing; “it always has to do with freedom.”⁸⁹ As Webster notes, Allen cannot control Blackhorse Mitchell’s reason for writing: “Mitchell was not writing to learn English, he was writing in English to express his desire for freedom.”⁹⁰ The entire first edition of *Miracle Hill*

must be read differently once you understand the poem. Blackhorse Mitchell explains, “I was trying to say something/because a lot of times/when you’re in a boarding school/your teacher does not allow you.”⁹¹ Reading this way is not reading for error analysis, it is not reading loose, it is reading American Indian English attentive to the choices each author is making, and in light of what they know about language as such, and what they know about the individual languages they are working in.

The individual lacking, or refusing, fluency and literacy is Allen. In a 2008 interview with Webster Blackhorse Mitchell expressed frustration with Allen’s view of *Miracle Hill*: “She didn’t see what I’m trying to s— [long pause] STILL she didn’t see what I was trying to say.”⁹² During this interview, he reads and recites “The Drifting Lonely Seed” to Webster, and provides the following commentary: “Now if she was intelligent/she could have found what I’m saying/and she thought that was a gre:at pi:ece of writing.” Webster asks, “What did she think it was about?” Blackhorse Mitchell answers, “She thought I was learning my tense.” Webster responds, “Ah.” Blackhorse Mitchell continues, “Grammar Skills.” Webster repeats, “She thought you were learning your tense grammar, I see.” Blackhorse Mitchell concludes, “She didn’t see/my thinking is: listen to me/again/as an instructor/she did not see what I’m saying.”⁹³ Webster reads this as Allen’s failure to “approach his poetry as the informed thoughts of an individual.”⁹⁴ The poem is not about how he started writing this memoir at all; it’s about the piece of cotton and his identification with it floating “untouched, untamed, and alone”:

Walked atop my desk, stepping daintily,
Reading forth my hands, I found you,
Gentle, weightless, tantalizing.
I blew you out through barricaded window;
You pranced, circled round me,
Sharing with me your airy freedom.

Chow ends the chapter “Not Like a Native Speaker” emphasizing the role, responsibility, and power that language has to help us face the future. She writes: “Instead, the history of colonialism, together with its innumerable episodes of power struggle, should alert us to how language, an other that is by nature multiple and legion rather than unified, dwells (in us) and always dwells (in us) a future, in the sense of a calling forth of the unknown.”⁹⁵ Reading with this understanding of language helps us hear Blackhorse Mitchell’s work in terms of the power he has defined as freedom. What for Allen was a lack of clarity on the part of the author, and a failure in instruction on the part of the teacher, is for others a matter of style. This change in reading moves Blackhorse Mitchell beyond Allen’s (and others’) characterization of Blackhorse Mitchell as an exemplar student moving from Navajo into English, where Navajo and English are conceived of as singular and firmly bounded languages that stand in for singular and firmly bounded cultures.

RETHINKING THE MEANING OF ENGLISH, WRITING, AND WRITTEN ENGLISH

I have argued for a shift of reading practices away from error analysis, the Achebe/Ngũgĩ debate, and endangered languages/revitalization models. Once we agree to work with the text, making meaning with the author (Leap), and rethink the meaning of English for all writers and readers (hooks, Achebe, Chow), we can face the intimacy of the composition process and the power of writing from the perspective of writers like Blackhorse Mitchell, who think of written English as a space where such interventions are not only possible, but the space writers wait their entire lifetimes to open up. Making Achebe's point that to write like a native speaker is neither desirable nor necessary, Blackhorse Mitchell's lessons for the reader are how not to write and not how to read like a native speaker—unless, of course, writers are engaging in the process of standardization, assimilation, and the project of deferring to the language.

The grammar of colonialism will remain unexamined if we refuse to rethink language and if we refuse to rethink writing. What can it do, and what can readers and writers do with it? The space opened up by Blackhorse Mitchell's work allows us out of the "school" in the same way that the seed drifts across the table. We are once again in the schoolhouse of the world, where the debate is no longer about learning English or how to write, but about the drifting that Blackhorse Mitchell characterizes as freedom. Once the debate shifts from learning a static English, I can meet the reading and writing challenge outlined in Merrill's argument: "a text's potential for political effect lies largely in the agency of its community of readers—who might, through subtle and certainly wry literary strategies within the text itself, be brought to understand that this ground is not so very common in the end."⁹⁶ Leap's work with young people challenges us to find a common ground that is flexible and fluid, as Merrill describes in her work with story and storytelling cycles. Fluid ground helps to shape a community of readers who are interested in what student writers and student essays might do. Reading this way—attentive to the writer and willing to see and listen to what they are saying—is what readers are required to do if they hope to understand what the writer and the text are doing, at each and every moment, and through each and every reading.

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NOTES

1. Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell and T. D. Allen, *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navaho Boy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967); Blackhorse Mitchell, *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004).

2. Anthony K. Webster, *Intimate Grammars: An Ethnography of Navajo Poetry* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 86.

3. For scholarship analyzing such expectations, see Paul V. Kroskrity's commentary essay published in a 2011 special issue of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* on Naïve Americans and language in which he calls for more work that traces Native agency through Philip Deloria's "think of expectations in terms of the the colonial and imperial relations of power existing between Indian people and the United States." Paul V. Kroskrity, "All Intimate Grammars Leak: Reflections on 'Indian Languages in Unexpected Places,'" *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35, no. 2 (2011): 161–172, 162, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.35.2.y8741385m74gh055>.

4. Blackhorse Mitchell, *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 164.

5. Kroskrity, "All Intimate Grammars Leak," 162.

6. I've chosen to call *Miracle Hill* Blackhorse Mitchell's book in an effort to emphasize William Leap's notion of text, as well as to move away from genre designations (memoir or novel) that reflect certain concerns of certain critics, but are not usually a part of the writer's compositional process. I chose this designation to further emphasize my critical focus in this essay, and my desire to work in a way related to the way Blackhorse Mitchell writes, a criticism that allows me to dream, following Craig Womack's call for "a theory that at least lets me dream."

7. Blackhorse Mitchell and Allen, *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navaho Boy*, vii.

8. *Ibid.*, viii.

9. *Ibid.*, x.

10. Blackhorse Mitchell's biography appears on the copyright page of the 2004 edition.

11. Zolbrod is also the author of *Diné bahane': The Navajo Creation Story*, published by the University of New Mexico Press. Language on the back cover markets the book as "the most complete version of the Navajo creation story to appear in English since Washington Matthews' *Navajo Legends of 1847*."

12. Zolbrod, foreword, xvii.

13. *Ibid.*, xii.

14. Blackhorse Mitchell and T. D. Allen, *Miracle Hill*, xi, vii.

15. William L. Leap, *American Indian English* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 3.

16. *Ibid.*, 275.

17. William L. Leap, "Written Navajo English: Texture, Construction, and Point of View," *Journal of Navajo Education* 11, no. 1 (1993): 7–8.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, 8.

20. *Ibid.*, 7.

21. Leap, "Written Navajo English: Texture, Construction, and Point of View," *Journal of Navajo Education* 11, no. 1 (1993): 7–8.

22. Leap, *American Indian English*, 42.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, 43.

25. This term is used in Edward T. Hall's seminal book *The Silent Language* (Doubleday, 1959) and in his subsequent work *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1976). He developed his ideas of high context and low context cultures working with the Navajo and Hopi in the 1930s. The language concept refers to how much meaning is explicit and how much is derived from contextual clues. Low context cultures such as American culture, broadly conceived, have an aversion toward ambiguity.
26. Ibid., 45.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 46.
30. Leap, "Written Navajo English," 48.
31. Paul Zolbrod, foreword to *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navajo Boy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), xv.
32. Teresa L. McCarty, *A Place to Be Navajo: Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Indigenous Schooling* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), vx.
33. Ibid., 26.
34. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebelious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1–25, <https://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/22170/17985>.
35. Tsianina K. Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 86. The book's title uses language from the Meriam report of 1928. Lewis Meriam, et al. *The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and Submitted to Him, February 21, 1928* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 87, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924014526150>.
36. Examples of curricular materials developed at and by the Rough Rock School can be found at their online bookstore, <http://www.roughrock.k12.az.us/boostore.htm>. For in-depth discussion of the school's history and curricular program, see McCarty, *A Place to Be Navajo* and in Teresa McCarty's essay "The Rough Rock Demonstration School: A Case History with Implications for Educational Evaluation," *Human Organizations* 46, no. 2 (1987): 103–12.
37. Claudene Arthur, Sam Bingham, Janet Bingham, and Rock Point School, *Between Sacred Mountains: Stories and Lessons from the Land* (Chinle, AZ: Rock Point Community School, 1982).
38. This model has been beautifully embodied in Kevin Willmott's 2009 film *The Only Good Indian* and in Laura Tohe's poetry collection *No Parole Today*. For additional insight into Richard Henry Pratt's philosophy of education, see his memoir *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867–1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964). Robert M. Utley's introduction to this work contains a sentence highly pertinent to this article's focus: "In the classroom Pratt sought above all to equip the children with an ability to speak, read, and write the English language, for this was the most vital prerequisite to a satisfactory adjustment to the white man's world" (xiii). Pratt describes this process as a baptism in which the Indian must be got "under holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked" (335).
39. Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 25.
40. Ibid., xxi.
41. Ibid.
42. McCarty, *A Place to Be Navajo*, 65.
43. Webster, *Intimate Grammars*.
44. McCarty, *A Place to Be Navajo*.
45. Webster, *Intimate Grammars*, 57, 157.

46. For Pratt's idea of forcibly "baptizing" the Indian, see endnote 37.
47. *Ibid.*, 85.
48. Rey Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 37.
49. *Ibid.*, 35, 36.
50. *Ibid.*, 38.
51. Vicente L. Rafael, "Translation, American English and the National Insecurities of Empire," in *Formations of United States Colonialism*, ed. Alyosha Goldstein (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 343, 344.
52. bell hooks, "'this is the oppressor's language/ yet I need it to talk to you': Language, a place of struggle," in *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 295, 296.
53. *Ibid.*, 295.
54. Blackhorse Mitchell, *Miracle Hill*, 180.
55. *Ibid.*
56. hooks, "Language, a place to struggle," 297.
57. Blackhorse Mitchell, *Miracle Hill*, 214.
58. *Ibid.*, 223.
59. hooks, "Language, a place to struggle," 297.
60. Blackhorse Mitchell, *Miracle Hill*, 223.
61. hooks, "Language, a place to struggle," 298.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*, 301.
65. Christi A. Merrill, *Riddles of Belonging: India in Translation and Other Tales of Possession* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 10.
66. *Ibid.*
67. Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory (A Reader)*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 433.
68. Merrill, *Riddles of Belonging*, 8.
69. Webster, *Intimate Grammars*.
70. See, for example, the work of Elizabeth Hill Boone, Lisa Brooks, Simon J. Ortiz, Scott Lyons, Walter Mignolo, Kelly McDonough, José Rabasa, Phillip Round, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver and Craig Womack.
71. Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*, 59.
72. Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*, 35–60. Chow too looks at this debate through the influential exchange between Achebe and Ngũgĩ and uses the usual frame of refusing or choosing to work in the colonizers language to the exclusion of an indigenous language. The entire second chapter, "Not Like a Native Speaker: The Postcolonial Scene of Languageing and the Proximity of the Xenophone," is devoted to this debate.
73. Merrill, *Riddles of Belonging*, 9.
74. Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the English Language," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory (A Reader)*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 433.
75. Blackhorse Mitchell, *Miracle Hill*, 192.
76. *Ibid.*, 191.
77. *Ibid.*, 192.

78. Ibid.
79. Further analysis would require archival work on Allen and her relationship to Blackhorse Mitchell as well, perhaps including an interview with Blackhorse Mitchell.
80. Achebe, "The African Writer," 433.
81. Ibid., 434.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. "Laboratory of Domestication" is from Lomawaima and McCarty, *To Remain an Indian*, 168.
85. Blackhorse Mitchell and Allen, *Miracle Hill*, xiv–xv.
86. Ibid., xv.
87. For a full discussion, see Webster's work with Blackhorse Mitchell, *Intimate Grammars*.
88. Webster, *Intimate Grammars*, 77.
89. Ibid., 78.
90. Ibid., 79.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid., 80.
93. Ibid., 81.
94. Ibid.
95. Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*, 30.
96. Christi Ann Merrill, "Laughing Out of Place: Humour Alliances and Other Post-colonial Translations in *In an Antique Land*," *Interventions* 9, no. 1 (2007): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010601174229>.