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Jackpine Roots: Autobiography, Tradition, and Resistance in the Stories of Three Yukon Elders

CYNTHIA CARSTEN WENTZ

Recent criticisms of Native American collaborative autobiographies have focused on the ethical implications of colonialism. Hertha D. Wong notes that “as Native Americans and Euro-Americans clashed and negotiated historically, representatives of these two distinct cultures interacted textually within the pages of transitional autobiography.”¹ Early collaborative Native American autobiographies, which emerge out of the contact situation of the late nineteenth century, must be viewed in the larger context of cultural control. To many Native Americans this critical period represented a time of adaptation to reservation life along with its threat to cultural identity. With virtually every area of Native American life and self-expression under attack from Euro-American colonizers, the question of who controlled the inscription of American Indian lives is crucial. Although many early ethnographers viewed the collaborative autobiography as a means for “preserving” Native culture and identity, the strong control exerted by non-Indian collaborators over the process of cultural textualization in many cases amounted to acts of colonialism.

Arnold Krupat points to collaborative autobiographies such as *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American*

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Indian, solicited and edited by Paul Radin, and *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story*, compiled and edited by Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, as examples of Native life stories that reflect the overriding control of the non-Indian collaborator. Krupat argues that Radin and McWhorter substantially influenced the narrative process by soliciting information that their Native collaborators were sometimes reluctant to provide, later patching this anecdotal material together to create a sense of continuous narrative.² Moreover, Krupat provides convincing evidence that the language and narrative order of the final versions of these life stories were substantially altered to appeal to Euro-American literary sensibilities. Further, in comparing the final text of *Crashing Thunder* with earlier unpublished versions of the autobiography, Krupat notes that Radin clearly modified the syntax, diction, and rhythm of the “retranslated” narrative of the final version to conform to “if not Victorian, at least pre-modernist concepts of stylistic elegance.”³

McWhorter’s heavy-handed editing is similarly evident in *Yellow Wolf*. Krupat argues that although *Yellow Wolf* sought to narrate his life story according to the Plains custom of the coup story, which tells of actions performed in war, McWhorter, “true to the Western conception of autobiography,” structurally orders the final version of *Yellow Wolf*’s narrative into a cohesive, chronological “story of a whole life.”⁴ These non-Native collaborators clearly exerted ultimate control over the inscription of Native lives, producing autobiographies that conformed to the values and aesthetics of Euro-American culture. Further, these autobiographies, by imposing non-Indian narrative standards not only on the means, but also on the meaning, of “telling one’s story,” mirrored colonialist standards.

The ethnographic method of “salvaging” Native cultures was based upon the assumption that these cultures were “conquered,” and therefore destined for extinction. Critics have thus cited these autobiographies as texts reflecting the racist and paternalistic attitudes of the dominant culture. The “authentic” Native American was often inscribed as a relic from an exotic and “primitive” human past. James Clifford argues that strategies of textualization which locate cultures in an idealized pristine past inscribe them in an eternal “present-becoming past.”⁵ According to Clifford, this model assumes that the ethnographer captures that which is essential about a culture—its past, rather than its present or its future. Salvage ethnography, in preserving the voice of the authoritative ethnographer, implies that

a culture is too weak or unsophisticated to recognize or preserve the significant elements of its own identity.⁶

In his own autobiography, Frank B. Linderman's lament that "[t]he real Indians are gone," reflects his concern with the preservation of an "authentic" Indian identity.⁷ Collaborator/editor of *Plenty-Coups: Chief of the Crows* and *Pretty-Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows*, Linderman directed the process of collecting these autobiographies with questions focusing on precontact Crow life. Linderman claims that Pretty-Shield refused to talk about the readjustments of postcontact life, saying: "There is nothing to tell, because we did nothing.... There were no buffalo. We stayed in one place, and grew lazy."⁸ His questions, however ("Tell me of your girlhood.... Begin with your first memories";⁹ "Tell me more about your life when you were a little girl, about things you liked, and things you feared";¹⁰ "Who made the stone arrow-points?"¹¹), reveal Linderman's own focus on Pretty-Shield's early life and precontact tribal culture. Ethnographers of the early social sciences explicitly framed their goal in terms of cultural preservation.

Trained ethnographers of the early twentieth century, many of them followers of Franz Boas, consciously sought out Native American individuals whom they considered to be "authentic" bearers of a past culture. Krupat notes that Radin believed that the "scientific observer" of culture must choose as his informant a "real Indian," one who was not "a Christian looking back upon a romantic past."¹² Ironically, Radin's first collaboration was with a Native American informant, the Winnebago Warudjåxega, a recent convert to the peyote religion who viewed precontact Winnebago culture and religion as false. Krupat points out that although Radin's "real Indian" clearly eschewed a "romantic" vision of his culture's past, Warudjåxega's anti-traditional perspective "might itself constitute a distorting lens that could separate the scientist and his audience from an accurate view...."¹³

Of Radin's later collaborative endeavor, *Crashing Thunder*, Krupat states that regardless of Radin's attempt to approach the reconstruction of a "genuine" Indian past "scientifically," the final interpretation remains that of the non-Indian collaborator, who is "the one who arranged and retranslated, who inserted, deleted, and cued our attention to a range of Western literary models to guide our understanding" of the words of the Native narrator.¹⁴ Krupat's critique of the "salvage" project thus reveals the ultimate control of Eurocentric attitudes and

aesthetic sensibilities in the production of this type of collaborative autobiography.

However important these criticisms are, they fail to recognize that Native collaborators often exert a significant amount of control over the narrative process. A careful examination of the collaborative process involved in the production of Native American autobiographies provides insight into such control. One of the more positive consequences of recognizing the problem of colonialism in Native American autobiography is that the collaborative process is beginning to be clarified. Many contemporary non-Native collaborators exercise ethnographic caution, providing methodological information and revealing the relational character of their fieldwork in the finished text. These texts require that we modify the narrow view of collaborator as colonialist and that we take seriously the dialogic aspects of collaborative autobiography. Among the more important results offered by these contemporary autobiographies is access to the strategies of narrative control exerted by Native collaborators. An analysis of these strategies makes it clear that many Native American autobiographers continue to resist the imposition of Euro-American cultural values and aesthetics in the act of inscribing life histories.

In her work with three Yukon women, Julie Cruikshank encountered this kind of resistance. In *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*, Cruikshank notes that in telling their life stories these women refused to focus on events ordered chronologically, a convention of Euro-American autobiography, not Native American narrative. Rather, all three chose to place primary focus on traditional stories, kinship structures, and geographic locations. The control exerted over the ethnographic process by Cruikshank's Native collaborators is particularly evident in their insistence upon using oral tradition as the primary focus of their narratives. All of the narrators demonstrate a concern to pattern their lives after mythical precedents. Angela Sidney overtly voices this concern when she states, "Well, I've tried to live my life right, just like a story."¹⁵

Michael Fischer suggests that autobiography as ethnic self-construction is essentially an act of memory in which the individual consciously seeks to situate life experiences within the "ethical vision" of a community. Drawing upon Arnold Rampersad's insights into African American autobiography, Fischer notes that "potent" autobiography depends upon "a retrospective or prophetic appeal to a community of spirit, be

it religious or social...."¹⁶ From this perspective, Sidney's statement may be understood to reveal her desire to articulate her memories, and in turn to have her life story inscribed in terms of the cultural values of her community which are embedded in tribal, and, more specifically, clan, narratives. To ensure that her autobiography conforms to this vision, Sidney, as well as the other Native women narrators, employs strategies of resistance to the control of her Euro-American collaborator. In response to Cruikshank's attempt to introduce "interview" questions, Sidney, as well as the other Native narrators, insistently redirected their conversations to focus on oral tradition. When asked to talk about their personal lives, Cruikshank notes that the women repeatedly responded with traditional stories, many of which focus upon strong female protagonists.¹⁷

These narrators clearly chose to have their life stories inscribed according to Native American aesthetic tradition, rather than in accordance with Euro-American conventions of autobiography. At the same time, Cruikshank claims that these women were aware that much of their audience would be Euro-American, and they wished their stories to be understandable to them. They were therefore willing to negotiate the narrative process to ensure that their lives would be remembered as traditional and yet be understood by nontraditional people. Cruikshank makes the dialogical character of her work clear, stating that these women "patiently trained [her] to understand conventional indigenous literary formulae so that [she could] *hear* stories told mostly in English sprinkled with place names, kinship terms, clan names and personal names" in Native languages.¹⁸ Her Native collaborators were obviously active participants in the ethnographic process.

Cruikshank reveals that she, like many ethnographers, entered into the process of collaborative Native American autobiography with culturally bound notions of autobiography. Influenced by Euro-American conventions of autobiography, Cruikshank admits that in her initial interviews with her collaborators she attempted to direct the conversations toward historical events and personal experiences—data that can readily be ordered into chronological narrative. Although her Native collaborators answered her questions politely, Cruikshank reveals that they "quite firmly shifted the emphasis to 'more important' accounts they wanted me to record—particularly events central to traditional narrative."¹⁹ Cruikshank gradually came to realize that these women were drawing upon oral tradition to reflect

upon their life experiences. She thus began to regard oral tradition less as historical evidence than as "a window on ways the past is culturally constituted and discussed."²⁰ This understanding led Cruikshank to reject the expectation that these narratives should conform to Euro-American autobiography with respect to the chronological ordering of events, but she also realized that they could not be inscribed according to Euro-American literary conventions of "historical veracity."²¹

Cruikshank's realization that these Native women utilize oral tradition as a meaningful context for understanding and communicating personal experience led her to radically alter her ethnographic agenda. Rather than attempting to elicit information, Cruikshank became an astute listener; she began to record their stories without interruption, asking for details and clarification when reviewing the transcriptions with the narrators. In this way, she came to understand that she was being tutored in cultural knowledge essential to her ability to act as a knowledgeable inscriber of their life stories. Cruikshank notes that Angela Sidney, in particular, exhibited a talent for understanding "the kind of context a cultural outsider needs to be taught before that person can actually begin to hear what she is saying."²² Sidney carefully tutored Cruikshank in clan and kinship terminology and customs, personal names, place-names, historical tales, and traditional stories. Given this framework, Cruikshank was able to understand the cultural interrelationships that Sidney perceives to be at the heart of her self-understanding. When Sidney relates her regret at having her puberty seclusion cut short because her mother is ill, Cruikshank is able to understand the significance of the traditional stories associated with puberty that Sidney has told her. Cruikshank also notes that this cultural knowledge provided her with the realization that these stories offer a way for Sidney to strive intellectually for "balance between the old ways and the new...."²³ One of the puberty stories told by Sidney focuses on the interruption of a young girl's seclusion. In the story, the girl lifts her traditional puberty bonnet, turning everyone she looks at into stone, including her mother and herself. Sidney refers to specific landscape features associated with the story, telling Cruikshank:

On the Stikine River, there's three rocks.
They call them the Three Sisters—that's those boys—
Don't know why they call them "sisters."

That girl and her mother, they're there too.
Those rocks, one looks like it's lifting up its bonnet.

Sidney then reflects on the traditional authority of the story, which rests on being established by the elders and validated by features of the landscape and its meaning in the present:

That's all happened on Stikine River—it's a true story.
Those grandparents told that story—that's how we
know it.
Lots of things used to happen like that.
Why not now, I wonder?²⁴

Because Sidney insisted that Cruikshank learn significant toponyms and traditional stories prior to relating her life story, Cruikshank was able to discern the complex connections among life memories, clan and kinship structures, local geography, and historical and ancestral lore that Sidney draws upon in her reflections on self.

Oral tradition became the focal point not only for the narrative process, but also for the process of interpretation. Because Cruikshank wanted the finished autobiographies to remain true to the focus on oral tradition in conformity with the narrators' intentions, these texts reflect some distinctly unorthodox characteristics in comparison with Euro-American conventions of autobiography. Unlike Euro-American autobiographies, these life stories resist strict chronological narration; because these women draw upon traditional narratives in telling their stories, their narratives move freely between ancestral and historical time. They also do not focus upon individual autonomy, but on the way in which individuality fits into and is shaped by the community and its oral tradition. Kitty Smith, for example, responds to the question of how women's lives have changed in her lifetime with stories about the challenges faced by her mother and another woman born during the same decade, both of whom were confronted with the conflicting expectations of their own versus their husbands' kin. One woman needed to leave her husband and child to take care of her mother; the other was abandoned by her husband who later abducted their daughter. Cruikshank recognizes the relevance of these stories for Smith, who chose to leave her husband to live with her mother's clan. Smith thus chooses to reflect upon experiences in her own life within the broader con-

text of her community. Specific places and landscape features also figure more prominently in these autobiographies than they do in conventional Euro-American life stories.

Once Cruikshank was sufficiently well-versed in her collaborators' cultural contexts, her narrators began to tell their life histories. Each of the narrators punctuated her accounts with frequent references to oral tradition, including ancestral stories, historical tales associated with clan and tribal members, songs, and place-names linked with these literatures. Cruikshank therefore juxtaposes sections of life history with appropriate traditional narratives to preserve the intricate relationships these women seek to establish between individual experience and shared values articulated by oral tradition. Although Cruikshank admits that this strategy "is a specific intervention" on her part because she is responsible for the final selection and arrangement of traditional stories and their relationships to the personal narratives, the resulting text is clearly resistant to Euro-American autobiographical expectations. The focus upon individual autonomy, a characteristic of many Euro-American autobiographies, is missing in these Native life stories. The inclusion of oral tradition reflects the Native narrators' overriding concern that they talk about themselves in relational rather than individualistic terms, and clarifies the fact that these women intentionally choose to construct their identities within the cultural context of clan and kin, the landscape, and traditional lore.

Cruikshank notes that Sidney, when asked to respond to a question or clarify a point in her narrative, patiently returned to the use of stories which "added a bewildering variety of characters and events, some from historical memory and others from a timeless repository of myth."²⁵ Sidney views oral tradition as the primary vehicle for reflecting upon appropriate behavior, stating, "They used to teach us with stories. They teach us what is good, what is bad, things like that.... Those days they told stories mouth to mouth. That's how they educate people."²⁶

Like Sidney, Kitty Smith uses stories as an essential component in her narratives. According to Cruikshank, unlike Sidney who uses story as a framework for her life's experience, Smith relates events from her own life to validate the relevance of her stories.²⁷ Many of her stories begin with the declaration, "This is a true story," or conclude with an assertion of familiarity with geographical features associated with her stories. For

example, her story about a grandmother and grandson who kill a giant owl that terrorizes the community ends with the statement, "I saw that place. It's a rock now. It looks just like burned bones right there at *Noogaayik*."²⁸ Smith establishes her authority with regard to oral tradition by grounding her lifetime of nearly a century in the territory of her community: "My roots grow in jackpine roots.... I grow here. I branch here.... I'm the oldest one. If I don't remember more, then nobody does."²⁹

Annie Ned, a strong adherent of the power of formal traditional language, relies upon speeches and songs to explain the events in her life.³⁰ Ned emphasizes the power of the spoken word and the importance of accurate repetition.³¹ She insists that she tell her story according to the right formulae of oral tradition established by the "old people." At frequent intervals, Ned's narrative falls into patterns of traditional formal speeches, returning to ancestral authority: "Well, long time people—my grandfather, some old grandmothers—they told me this story. They told me. They teach us."³² All of the women, thus, draw upon traditionally shared aesthetic resources in talking about themselves.

The juxtaposition of personal history with traditional lore also reveals the dialogical character of the narrators' self-reflections. In contrast to many Euro-American autobiographies which preserve the convention of monological self-inscription, these Native womens' autobiographies include voices from their respective communities. Kitty Smith, for example, relies almost exclusively upon traditional oral expressions to talk about her life. Cruikshank notes that "she rarely talks about her own life for more than a few minutes" without drawing upon traditional narratives that mirror her experiences.³³ A resourceful and independent woman who left her first husband to return to her mother's people, Smith chooses to interject stories in which the female protagonists exhibit intelligence and independence. For example, her story about a woman who is "thrown away" by her community and survives on her own by learning to fish parallels Smith's own experience as a successful trapper during her first marriage. Likewise, her version of "Star Husband," in which twin sisters cleverly construct a device out of skin and rope to escape from the world of their star husbands because they miss their own kin, reflects her own choice to leave her first husband and return to her mother's family. Smith does not offer intimate details and subjective motivations in connection with events in her life, but rather

allows the stories to speak for her. According to Cruikshank, even though her decision to leave her first husband "must have flown in the face of clan arrangements," Smith does not discuss the repercussions of the event.³⁴ A possible justification for her move appears, however, in her "Star Husband" tale. Although the star husbands of the story are good sons-in-law, meeting their clan obligations to provide for their wives' families, the young women choose to leave their husbands. When their families ask them, "Why did you fellows run away?" the girls respond:

"Well, we're lonesome.
You think we're going to stay when we don't see our daddy?
When we don't see our mamma?
When we don't see our sister and brother?
It's pretty hard—you people up there stay just one place."³⁵

Smith thus relies upon the oral tradition to explain why a young woman, even with a good husband, might want to return to her family.

Smith also includes in her narrative long portions of conversations as she remembers them. This technique allows her to reconstruct her memories in a dialogic fashion, situating herself in the community through remembered interactions with others. She recalls the excitement of meeting unknown kin for the first time by recreating the dialogue associated with the event:

So I learned this people's language [Tlingit]. I talk Coast Indian language, too. One time in Carcross, a Tlingit man came in from Juneau: he's sitting with his wife, talking to his wife. He sees us: "I guess they've got skin [moosehide]," he tells his wife. "Should be you ask for skin. [T]hey belong to Whitehorse people." Me and Susie and Kitty Walker—we were there. There used to be excursion to Whitehorse, train. Lot of people come. They talk their own way: "Moose skin, you should ask those ladies. They got some to sell, I guess." He tells his wife, but I hear him, me. "ANYBODY ... GOT ... SKIN?" they tell us, real loud, really slow. I answer him in Tlingit. He looks at me! "Ah, where you come from?" "You know Paddy Duncan?"

"Yes."

"That's my daddy's people. That one is his brother. *Should* be I talk that way," I tell him. They grab me! Gee, they're surprised.³⁶

Through this dialogue, Smith is also able to reveal that she is multilingual, something about which she is clearly proud yet discouraged by custom from openly boasting.

The use of dialogue allows Smith a degree of latitude with regard to self-revelation. In many Native American communities, revealing too much about oneself, especially in terms that may appear to be boastful, is considered to be inappropriate.³⁷ Smith's dialogic strategy, however, allows her to talk about herself through the speech of others. For example, she reconstructs a conversation that took place between herself and her mother's brother³⁸ when she made the decision to leave her husband and return to her mother's family alone:

"You've got no sense!" he told me. "You don't know nothing! Winter's coming now!"

"Well, you've got lots of dry meat, gopher, everything." I laugh. I don't think about nothing, that time!

"How you think you're going to sleep with no blanket?" he tells me.

"I'm going to sleep with my grandma!"

"Well you beat me!" he told me.

"So long as my grandma is living, I don't care. I'm going to sleep at my grandma's back," I told him.

"Grandma's my boss now." *Dúska*, her name.³⁹

We learn of Smith's courage and determination, as well as her family loyalties, through dialogue. The inclusion of other voices in the narrative gives her the freedom to talk about herself in a way that is traditionally acceptable. As a result, the inscription of her life history conforms to the aesthetic sensibilities of her Native American community rather than to those of a Euro-American audience.

The narrators also choose to relate their family histories in ways that resist the genealogical conventions of Euro-American autobiography. All of the women begin their life stories with clan histories. Sidney narrates her family history as a formal *Shagóon* which follows a matrilineal pattern: mother's clan history, followed by the father's clan, and ending with the

husband's clan. The presentation of her family history thus clearly diverges from those of Euro-American autobiographies, especially those of males, which often begin with the autobiographer's male relatives and say very little, if anything, about female relatives.⁴⁰

Annie Ned also presents a formal *Shagóon*, but begins with her father's clan. Her reversal of the traditional order may be accounted for by the fact of her mother's early death and because she was raised by her father's people. She begins her family history with her paternal grandfather, who Cruikshank notes was a central figure in Athapaskan-Tlingit trade: "We'll start off with Hutshi Chief first. We'll do the women next time." Ned, who has a high regard for traditional power, makes it clear that she is relating her family history as a spokesperson for communal elders. She begins her *Shagóon* with the following declaration:

I'm going to put it down who we are. This is our *Shagóon*—our history. Lots of people in those days, they told their story all the time. This story comes from old people, not just from one person—from my grandpa, Hutshi Chief; from Laberge Chief; from Dalton Post Chief. Well, they told the story of how first this Yukon came to be.

You don't put it yourself, one story. You don't put it yourself and then tell a little more. You put what they tell you, older people. You've got to tell it right. Not *you* are telling it: it's the person who told you that's telling that story.⁴¹

It is customary in most Native American oral traditions to begin a narrative by establishing the authority of the ancestors rather than the individual narrator. It is highly unconventional, according to Native American aesthetic sensibilities, for an individual to claim that he or she is individually telling the story, because the story is considered to be an ongoing production shared by all members of the community, including those who are no longer living. Ned clearly wants it to be known that she does not speak for herself and that her life history must be told according to traditionally established formalities. Her insistence upon "telling it right" is obviously resistant to Euro-American conventional autobiography which often invests the narrator, as the single living descendant of a family line, with ultimate authority over the way in which a family history is inscribed.

In many respects, Smith's family history is the least conventional of the three with respect to both Euro-American and tribal conventions. She does not frame this part of her narrative as a formal *Shagóon*, opting instead to tell stories about her mother and father and other clan members. More than half of Smith's family history focuses upon the death of her mother's brother, who was hanged for killing a white man. Her story suggests that the killing may have been in retaliation for the deaths of an Indian grandfather and grandson who were "accidentally" given poison left by a white miner in a baking powder can. Smith implies that within the cultural context of her community the killing would have been justified:

Used to be they didn't kill people for nothing, long time ago. When they get over it, then they're friends together. This way, however many people died, they're going to pay them. Then they're good friends again. Then they make a big party. They make a big song.⁴²

Smith concludes her narration of family history by revealing the confusion and sorrow experienced by her family and community over this incident:

When her son was hanged, my grandma said, "I don't know if I can forget it, that Whitehorse River way. I wish they'd throw me in the water when I die so I could follow down. My son got lost that way." That's her son who died. They hanged them up.... Three, four people died for that man. Well, they don't know, that time.... They don't know policeman business.⁴³

This portion of Smith's narrative, then, is not so much about establishing family relationships as it is about the disruption of family continuity by contact with white culture. Her family history is thus doubly resistant, both in terms of style and content, which is clearly aimed at voicing pro-Native sentiments.

These Native women's autobiographies also articulate a distinctive view of time and place that radically diverges from Euro-American autobiographical form. European and Euro-American conventional autobiographies proceed chronologically through historical time; place is often incidental to the life events narrated by the autobiographer. In stark contrast, these Native autobiographies shift back and forth between historical

and mythical time, with both being intrinsically interconnected to place. Place-names are featured prominently in the mythical stories these women tell and also in their narration of historical events. For this reason, the narrators devoted a great deal of attention to acquainting Cruikshank with geographical locations and to teaching her the names of places. Cruikshank and Sidney visited a number of locations, the place-names of which Cruikshank recorded on topographic maps. She notes that Sidney sometimes remembered the names of a place only after seeing it again and that the recollection of a place-name stimulated memories of song, stories, and events associated with it.⁴⁴ In her narration of life events, place-names serve as reference points for Sidney that act to situate her life in relationship to time and place. As she talks about events in her life, Sidney employs place-names, descriptive of specific features of the landscape, that have complex associations with historical and ancestral time. The area around the head of the Tagish River is mentioned frequently in Sidney's narrative. She recalls family hunting and trapping expeditions in this area and also that her son, Pete, was born at the head of Tagish River. Sidney carefully maps this area out in her versions of traditional stories, describing specific features of the terrain and providing corresponding place-names and their origins. According to her stories, all of the places around Tagish were named by Fox in ancestral times, and it was here that Wolf gave the people the bow and arrow and snowshoes. Her narrative thus links personal and mythic time in common space.

Ned, on the other hand, associates traditional songs with place. Cruikshank reveals that during driving expeditions Ned would often interrupt conversations to sing songs connected with geographical locations. Ned claims that many of her songs belong to particular clans that occupy specific territories established by ancestral travel. She introduces many of the songs with references to clan, historical event, and place of origin, revealing intricate associations among ancestral time, historical time, and place:

This is another song made by a Wolf man, Casey Fred, for his girlfriend. He was at one end of Desadeash Lake, and she was at the other end. The wind came up, making it too dangerous to cross the lake. He wanted to see her, and he could see her fire, so he sang....⁴⁵

The landscape also serves as a reference point in Smith's narrative. For example, she describes her childhood travels down the Tatshenshini and Alsek rivers to *Yaakwdáat*:

When I was a little kid, I traveled lots—walked around on snowshoes. I've been down to *Yaakwdáat*, too, in summertime, by boat—down Dalton Post River. It goes to *Yaakwdáat*, that river. Klukshu Creek goes right clean to salt water, to *Yaakwdáat*, salt water, right there. Right there is that Indian city, *Yaakwdáat*.⁴⁶

At the same time, Smith tells of a surging glacier associated with this location:

People were staying at a flat place where Champagne Creek [Alsek] and Klukshu River [Tatshenshini River] meet—Some kind of Coast Indian people. They all died there, people—all washed down to salt water.... That happened before my grandmother's time.... There was a flood in my grandmother's time, though. But not as big as when that man did that: it's after him. In his time, that ice came right up to that mountain—That's why they call it *Nálúdi*, "fish stop."⁴⁷

Smith thus uses place to talk about time, linking events in her own life with ones that took place both in ancestral and historical time.

Clearly, for these women, place is invested with layers of cultural meaning that they deliberately draw upon in the act of self-reflection. Unlike many Euro-American autobiographies, which emphasize subjective experience and events in isolation from place, these Native women's narratives are inextricably bound to their cultural landscape. Cruikshank points to the link between time and locations in space in these narratives, noting that all of the women, in teaching her place-names, recounted events from the past to explain the names. According to Cruikshank, "by imbuing place with meaning through story," these Native women, "seemed to be using locations in physical space to talk about events in chronological time."⁴⁸

By choosing to reconstruct their memories according to a traditional worldview and to narrate their stories by interweaving their personal experiences with the landscape and with mythic narratives and events in oral tradition, these women ultimately reject values of individual autonomy pro-

jected by Euro-American culture. These women envision the narration of their life stories as acts of cultural continuity in a situation of change and political domination engendered by contact with whites. Each of them voices her concern that many of the old ways are disappearing and her wish that the stories be preserved. Each, in her own way, also worries that once the elders are gone the young people in their community will no longer have a traditional model upon which to pattern their lives. These women thus view the narration of their life stories as a means for resisting changes and compensating for potential losses occurring in the lives of young people in the community, changes that have no doubt been brought about through Euro-American contact and domination. It is therefore crucial to these Native collaborators that their stories follow the pattern that they perceive as paradigmatic to their respective traditions. Only by exerting strong control over the narrative process were they able to collaborate to produce autobiographies that reflect the worldview and aesthetic sensibilities of their communities rather than those of Euro-American culture.

In their resistance to Euro-American autobiographical conventions, these Native women's life stories diverge in many respects from earlier "colonialist" autobiographies. The integration of traditional with personal narratives retains the women's focus on shared values and aesthetics of the community. Although Cruikshank arranges the personal narratives in approximate chronological order by life stages, the juxtaposition of oral literatures preserves to a great extent the episodic character of Native American oral traditions which tend to move back and forth between historical and ancestral time and between personal and traditional narratives. This editorial strategy also reflects the dynamic character of Native American oral tradition, making the text resistant to the salvage model of ethnography. Unlike colonialist collaborative autobiographies aimed at preserving the essence of "disappearing" cultures, these autobiographies highlight ways in which Native American individuals creatively employ cultural knowledge to think about cultural change as well as continuity.

Although each of the women expresses the desire that her life story may serve as an ethical model for future generations, each demonstrates an awareness that the old ways must be balanced with the new, and that oral tradition provides a means for arriving at that balance. The narrators' awareness of cultural change is evidenced by their willingness to have their personal and tradi-

tional stories inscribed in the English language. In explaining her motives for recording her stories, Smith refers to her great-grandchild, saying, "Well, she's six years old now. She's going to start school now. Pretty soon paper's going to talk to her!"⁴⁹

As Cruikshank reveals, each of these women had her own compelling motives for having her life story inscribed for two cultures. The narrators actively entered into the autobiographical process, asserting their stories as the key both to self-understanding and to cross-cultural understanding. These women insisted, however, that the final versions of their autobiographies be presented in a form understandable to a Euro-American audience. Although decisions regarding the arrangement, editing, and publishing of the narratives in the final text were controlled by Cruikshank, the collaborative nature of the work is apparent in the privileging of Native American aesthetics and traditional values over Euro-American conventions of self-inscription.

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Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation In Native American Autobiography. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

NOTES

1. Hertha D. Wong, *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 116.

2. Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 75-136.

3. Krupat compares the language of a paragraph from the original autobiography with that of the final *Crashing Thunder* text which reflects this stylistic editing. The final sentence of the paragraph, "As soon as the sun rose I would go outside and sit looking at the sun and I would cry to the spirits," reads in the final text, "As soon as the sun rose would I go outside and there gazing steadily at the sun, make my prayer to the spirits, crying." Krupat notes that "in particular, the inversion ('would I' for 'I would'), the substitution of the more meditative-reverent 'gazing' for the neutral 'looking,' the addition of the descriptive 'steadily,' and the rising inflection of the participial terminative, all seem strong markers of a literary motivation." See Krupat, *For Those Who Come After*, 88. I think it also relevant to note that the substitution of the word "prayer" for "cry to the spirits," and the placement of the word "crying" at the end of the sentence clearly imposes a Christian interpretation upon an American Indian religious activity.

4. *Ibid.*, 123.

5. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 113.

6. *Ibid.*, 113-15.

7. See Wong, *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years*, 92-3.

8. Frank B. Linderman, *Pretty-Shield: Medicine Woman of the Crows* (New York: The John Day Company, 1932), 10.

9. *Ibid.*, 20.

10. *Ibid.*, 99.

11. *Ibid.*, 54.

12. See Krupat, 81.
13. *Ibid.*, 82.
14. *Ibid.*, 106.
15. Julie Cruikshank, with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 146.
16. Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Arts of Memory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 196-98.
17. Cruikshank, 347.
18. *Ibid.*, 16.
19. *Ibid.*, 14.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Paul Eakin provides insight into the notion of historical accuracy in autobiography, arguing that although many autobiographers "are apt to encourage our trust in the historicity of their accounts," a complex interrelationship between fact and fiction actually exists in the reconstruction of memory that takes place in the autobiographical moment. Eakin's argument reveals that the Euro-American convention of historical veracity is essentially an elusive cultural construct. See Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 9-18.
22. Cruikshank, 21.
23. *Ibid.*, 33.
24. *Ibid.*, 105.
25. *Ibid.*, 25.
26. *Ibid.*, 73.
27. *Ibid.*, 165.
28. *Ibid.*, 262.
29. *Ibid.*, 163.
30. *Ibid.*, 267-68.
31. *Ibid.*, 267.
32. *Ibid.*, 318.
33. *Ibid.*, 165.
34. *Ibid.*, 161.
35. *Ibid.*, 221.
36. *Ibid.*, 247-48.
37. See Sidner Larson, "Native American Aesthetics: An Attitude of Relationship," *MELUS* 17:3 (Fall 1991-1992): 53-67.
38. According to the matrilineal kinship structure of Yukon Native peoples, the mother's brother is the individual ultimately responsible for one's well-being.
39. Cruikshank, 228.
40. Benjamin Franklin, whose autobiography became a model for those of later American males, begins the discussion of his "ancestors" with his paternal grandfather, then proceeds to his uncles and his father, his elder brothers, and eventually to himself. Of his mother's genealogy, Franklin reports:

My mother, the second wife, was Abiah Folger, daughter of Peter Folger, one of the first settlers of New England, of whom honorable mention is made by Cotton Mather, in his church history of that country entitled *Magnalia Christi Americana*, as a "godly, learned Englishman," if I remember the words rightly.

Franklin continues with a brief anecdote about the modest writing career of this grandfather, whose one published piece "was in favor of liberty of conscience," and "written with a good deal of decent plainness...." He tells no more about his maternal "ancestors." See Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 4-11.

41. Cruikshank, 278.

42. *Ibid.*, 177.

43. *Ibid.*, 178.

44. For a discussion of the way place-names act as narrative strategies that connect Western Apache community members with historical tales, ancestral stories, and shared traditional values, see Keith Basso, "Stalking with Stories," in *Western Apache Language and Culture: Essays in Linguistic Anthropology* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1990), 99-137. Basso claims that the recitation of place-names evokes vivid images of geographical locations that reinforce complex connections among individuals, the community, and the landscape.

45. Cruikshank, 328.

46. *Ibid.*, 203.

47. *Ibid.*, 207.

48. *Ibid.*, 347.

49. *Ibid.*, 16.