

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Integrated Circuitry: Catharine Brown across Gender, Race, and Religion

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7c7174fh>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 30(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Nelson, Joshua B.

Publication Date

2006

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Integrated Circuitry: Catharine Brown across Gender, Race, and Religion

JOSHUA B. NELSON

At the close of the eighteenth century, the missionary zeal of the Second Great Awakening had failed to open many roads into Cherokee country. Although our lands had been drastically reduced by treaty and war over the course of interactions with the British, French, and Americans, the Cherokee nevertheless represented a powerful military and political force impervious to unwelcome overtures from evangelistic missionaries, however enthusiastic. By the close of the nineteenth century, though, missionaries' inroads were well established, and thousands and thousands of Cherokees had converted to Christianity. Among the earliest and most influential of converts was Catharine Brown, the daughter of a relatively affluent family from an Alabama town and an early attendant of the Brainerd mission school, established in eastern Tennessee in 1817 under the direction of the largely Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. On her arrival the missionaries were doubtful that the proud and beautiful Cherokee woman could acclimate to their strict lifestyle, but she soon became a favored student, whose enthusiasm led many of her family and other Cherokees to the new religion. Less than two years after her conversion, she was sent to take charge of a school at the town of Creek Path, and only three years later, in 1823, she died of tuberculosis at the approximate age of twenty-three. After her death Rufus Anderson, a ranking official with the American board, began a biographical article on her for that body's publication, the *Missionary Herald*, but he found the subject matter compelling enough to warrant a separate edition, culled from Brown's letters and others' recollections and documents.¹ Her memoirs, though heavily edited and frequently altered by Anderson's ready hand, offer a rare opportunity to consider the adaptation available to a subject.

Joshua B. Nelson (Oklahoma Cherokee) is a PhD student in English at Cornell University. He currently lives in Park Hill, Oklahoma, where he is conducting research for his dissertation on Cherokee literature.

The few critics, such as Theda Perdue, Carolyn Ross Johnston, and Arnold Krupat, who have written about the young Cherokee seem to suggest that her conversion to Christianity and her approximate six years spent with the missionaries at Brainerd eradicated all vestiges of Cherokee culture in her identity. A careful, tribalist reading of her memoirs and further writings uncovered by Joel Martin, however, demonstrates the need for a theoretical model of interaction attuned to the complexity of multiple layers of experience, for by placing them within a cultural context, we find that Catharine Brown's "Cherokeeness" becomes a more salient feature than previously supposed. I propose the metaphor of circuitry as descriptively powerful and plastic enough to accommodate such multiple fields of experience from alternate fundamental assertions. This model's attendance to processes of interaction rather than to apparently inert colonial phases is harmonious in practice with many Native scholars' call for the reinfusion of traditional values; that Brown's agency exercised from within a Cherokee tribal paradigm brings her to an identity frequently thought of as untraditional suggests "traditional values" may offer more options than ordinarily supposed.²

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

It is tempting to cast the meeting between American Indian people and missionaries who brought the congressionally mandated doctrine of civilization to their proselytizing in Hegelian terms, pitting opposite if unequally powerful opponents in a fight to the assimilationist death.³ Most scholars who have written of Catharine Brown see her as a Cherokee converted *imprimis*, a *rerum primordia* on the Cherokees' road to civilization, as did the missionaries who were her contemporaries. According to Anderson, Brown was indeed the first Cherokee baptized at the Brainerd mission school, but this fact reveals very little about the confluence of multiple forces that her conversion represents, forces such as intertown tension in Cherokee country, the spiritual revival of the nineteenth century, the erosion of matrilineal power in Cherokee society, the American nationalist land-grab, anxiety among Cherokees over white belligerence and the growing threat of removal, and deepening immersion in the economic structures of Euro-America.⁴ The Brainerd school might never have been established had not the earlier Cherokee convert Assistant Chief Charles Hicks (later Principal Chief) encouraged Cherokee councils and missionaries to open schools in Cherokee lands.⁵

Perhaps this same complexity discourages theoretical interpretations of an earlier Cherokee converted by Moravian missionaries and discussed by the ethnologist James Mooney: "Later they established missions among the Delawares [Lenni Lenape] in Ohio, where their first Cherokee convert was received in 1773, being one who had been captured by the Delawares when a boy and had grown up and married in the tribe."⁶ Where to begin the categorizations, from what opposition? Is he Cherokee, Lenni Lenape, male, Christian, pagan, displaced, adopted, civilized, or Indian? The urge to pit one element against another may come readily, for as Wendy Doniger writes in her foreword to a collection of Claude Lévi-Strauss's lectures, "language

itself predisposes us to attempt to understand ourselves and our world by superimposing dialectics, dichotomies, or dualistic grids upon data that may in fact be entirely integrated. And underneath language lies the binary nature of the brain itself. . . . The simplest and most efficient way to process experience seems to be by dividing it in half, and then to divide the halves in half, reformulating every question so that there are only two possible answers to it, yes or no.”⁷ Lévi-Strauss, whose structural anthropology depends on binary theory, adds another dimension to its wonders: “It is only the present state of scientific thought that gives us the ability to understand what is in [myth], to which we remained completely blind before the idea of binary operations become familiar to us.”⁸

The binary model has its utilities, but its interpretive capacities fail when more than two pertinent elements enter a junction, and the “us” to which both authors refer universalizes a Euro-American, pseudoscientific theory based on conflict. Apart from Fredric Jameson’s critique of structuralism’s synchrony, its out-of-time logic,⁹ there are at least three analytical troubles with binary thinking: first, its insistence on absolute and exclusive value. Supposing there are tensions between the Cherokee and Lenni Lenape aspects of the man Mooney discusses, a binary limits him to Cherokee or Lenni Lenape identity, for according to the logic of the dialectic he cannot be both, even through the development of mediation, which is analogous to a synthetic and new creation—an evolutionary hybrid. We cannot know how this man thought of himself, but as Anne McClintock astutely notes, “race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together. . . . Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways.”¹⁰ McClintock’s emphasis on experiential reciprocity is well taken, yet she, too, narrowly defines the spheres in postcolonial Eurocentric terms, privileging currently acceptable neo-Marxist realms. In the midst of the Second Great Awakening, religion, too, becomes a salient realm of experience, especially for the colonizer, for whom its intricacies and intimacies render it far more than simply a function of class.

Second, attempting to work out tensions through a dialectic model can lead to the construction of faulty pairings, such as pitting Cherokee identity against gendered or religious identity. Some argue that there are fundamentally opposed precepts of Christian and tribal identity, a position undoubtedly shaped by the many disgraces in Christian and Indian history, but significant numbers of Christian Indians have discerned fundamental and supplemental tenets; for many, such as Brown, no preclusion of fundamentals results, and the aggressive, conflictual precept of dialectic interaction does not apply. The final problem extends from the first two, in that a binary construction’s inability to account for degree or scale of power lends itself to arbitrarily limiting, normative definitions. The initial binary forces become static, essential components against which all future interactions are measured—the “Cherokee” in 1800 must be the same “Cherokee” of 1900, with regard neither for subversion nor for adaptive cultural perseverance strategies that negotiate apparent inconsistencies. As Jameson notes, the dialectic model obfuscates a synchronic styling of history.¹¹

In her book *Cherokee Women* historian Theda Perdue mentions Catharine Brown in passing, where she finds no harmony but only conflict between Christian and Indian:

Few women in the Cherokee Nation could equal Catharine Brown or, at least, her memory. Most did not seem to want to. They preferred their traditional religion, which did not distinguish between the physical and spiritual worlds, which emphasized harmony and balance, and which placed the needs of the community above those of any individual. Those Cherokees who converted to Christianity became part of a hierarchical religion that promised little control over the physical world (that is, illness and weather), defined relationships to the natural world and other human beings in terms of dominion and submission, and placed responsibility for salvation, behavior, and success squarely on the individual.¹²

Perdue's work on Cherokee women is outstanding, but she does not fully interrogate ways in which Brown might have reconciled apparent contradictions in her life. Discourse dedicated to division gives rise to the tired trope of "walking in two worlds"; when describing American Indians, the cliché gets elaborated with all the aesthetic pith of a greeting card: Indians "walk with one foot in a moccasin and one in a wingtip" or "have a foot in two canoes." These metaphors offer little toward understanding the complexity of identity and agency. Power comes from multiple sources, multiple energies that work in conjunction, not in vivisection from broader operations, be they historic, communal, or otherwise.

Traditional Cherokee stories, such as those involving powerful supernatural threats, teach a similar lesson, for communities of all sorts—not individuals—must come together to triumph over such beings. In the story of *Ūñtsaiyĩ* a collection of men imprison the evil gambler; women's collective power defeats *Nũñ yunu'wĩ*, the Stone Man; *U'tluñ'tã*, the Spearfinger, would not have been killed without the aid of the animal community—*Tsí'kĩlilĩ*, the chickadee, pointed out the monster's vulnerable point.¹³ These and other traditional stories emphasize harmonious union of diverse powers (among many other messages). Catharine Brown's experiences across spheres such as gender, religion, and race incorporate similarly diverse power circuits.

CIRCUITOUS IDENTITY AND AGENCY

Before turning to Catharine Brown and Cherokee tradition, I'd like to propose a circuitous systems model of identity and agency theory that will try to minimize the simplifying aspects of language and maximize the dimensions of experience we can effectively use to conceptualize the depth, the heterogeneity, and the multitextuality of being and doing. First, if we can accept that the individual is the fundamental unit of society according only to a particular construction and that identity may be reformulated based on a communal model, as Jace Weaver, Eva Garrouette, Satya Mohanty, and others

have persuasively argued,¹⁴ then agency and autonomy, too, may be recast as extending from the collective rather than from the unilateral actions of a supposedly untethered, singular being. Far from asserting that the individual does not exist, I only mean to reiterate a potential state of identity wherein the reciprocity in her or his constitution is paramount—the communal is as much a part of the individual as she or he is of it. Second, just as communities incorporate, operate within, and reveal multiple and perhaps innumerable fields, so may individuals, as they live economic, religious, spiritual, social, familial, cultural, and psychological lives. In short, the lives of communities and individuals are heterogeneous and complex; we walk with feet in a thousand shoes of a thousand shapes. No theory can accommodate all of these circuits, but surely we're ready to consider more than two at a time.

Space for such diversity opens by conceptualizing such fields along a continuum rather than as polar coordinates separated by emptiness or even negotiated by mediation: between order and chaos are convention and rebellion; between tradition and revolution are rigidity and adaptation. The power moving along such an epistemological continuum is like energy flowing through a circuit: it moves at times in parallel, at times in sequence, encountering resistance, building potential. We might as well see a person's movement through the communities she or he inhabits, such as family, town, religious group, or work, as circuitous. Our lives are thus akin to an intricate motherboard of multiple circuits operating separately and in conjunction—the critical point we must recognize is that circuits merely in proximity effect sometimes dramatic changes, to both content and medium, locally and to entire systems, relative to the measure of power.

Personal identity is itself a circuit. I understand agency as the deployment of power across it. The energy and its path are hardly separate components, and one does not exist without the other. Identity, then, is as much that which is done as that which is had. I have tried to emphasize, however, that personal identity or agency exists not in isolation but through and across that of others. Through this complementarity, and with a sense of scale of power, we can strike a balance between the fictions of univocal individuality and the utter negations of personal agency. As any electrician can tell, though, crossing circuits can be a hazardous business. When this happens, the difference in energy causes malfunction, particularly in cases where the difference is vast: larger circuits may be damaged, perhaps weakened, but able to continue functioning; smaller circuits may suffer irreparable harm. This result is known as a "dead short."

TRIBALIST READINGS

A dead short, however, is not inevitable. Separate circuits may be made to converge, but rarely will they do so without careful schematic planning, which is here analogous to the agency of Catharine Brown, agency she exerts in relation to the multiple circuits of the missionaries far and near, her family, other Cherokee people engaged in similar interactions, such as peer Cherokee women, or her Cherokee students. Just as town bodies of Cherokee people exercised agency in opening a path for the educational benefits missionaries

brought, Brown found that many of the circuits of her life could converge, despite expectations to the contrary. Her blending of Christian and Cherokee traditions echoes the verb-based Cherokee language, a language that prioritizes doing in constructing meaning rather than the “thingness” of a phenomenon. To demonstrate: **ᏩᏈᏍᏗ**, the word for *church*, means “where they gather to study”; **ᏍᏚᏚᏗ** is “Gospel,” meaning “spoken outward”; and the word for *God*, **ᏍᏚᏚᏗ**, is “Creator.”¹⁵ A review of the syntactical structure, and the suffixes, prefixes, and affixes of Cherokee verbs, which conjugate for time, direction, texture, duration, number, causality, and animation among other factors, would also emphasize the primacy of process in Cherokee epistemology, in contrast to the noun-based structure of English.¹⁶ An epistemology rooted in thingness increases the likelihood of seeing Brown’s life as a concatenation of discrete events in displacing series rather than as a sophisticated, active, cumulative integration.

Perhaps seeing Brown as an Indian who then became a Christian, Theda Perdue and Carolyn Ross Johnston suggest that there are diametrically opposed, fundamental aspects of Indianness and Christianity, much in the same way that missionaries and many members of Congress in the nineteenth century argued that Indian culture and Christianity were mutually exclusive. Contemporary Christian missionaries, even those as conservative as the Southern Baptist denomination, have largely abandoned this position and now encourage missionaries to respect indigenous cultures and to develop syncretic models of Christianity and indigenous customs and values. This paradigm shift depends on a strategic essentialism of sorts, wherein indigenous thinkers and others forced evangelists to reexamine missionaries’ complicitous roles in the genocide of the Americas and to scrutinize those elements of their doctrine that they considered foundational. For Mark Custalow, National Native American Missionary of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, the immutable doctrine concerns the sufficiency of God’s grace for salvation; so long as teachings do not contradict this tenet, the mission board’s official line seems to encourage cultural practices such as sweat lodges or other cleansing ceremonies.¹⁷ The evangelical work of early Native Christians, such as Brown, Hicks, Elias Boudinot, and many more, demonstrates the changes that may eventually be wrought by integrative spirits.¹⁸ Such changes do not excuse the immorality of imperialism, but they do offer examples of Indian agency in contrast to the proliferative narratives of victimization.

One of the most intriguing convergences in Catharine Brown’s case concerns her understanding of Christianity through her Cherokee cultural framework. An account of a dream in which Brown meets a “little boy” was not included in her memoirs, but it survives in the letters of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. Joel Martin reproduces it in *The Land Looks after Us*:

In my sleep I tho’t I was traveling and came to a hill that was almost perpendicular. I was much troubled about it, for I had to go to its top. I knew not how to get up. She said she saw the steps which others had gone and tried to put her feet in their steps, but found she could

not ascend in this way, because her feet slipped. Having made several unsuccessful attempts to ascend, she became very weary, but although she succeeded in getting near the top, but felt in great danger of falling. While in this distress in doubt whether to try to go forward or return, she saw a bush just above her of which she tho't, if she could get hold it she could get up, and as she reached out her hand to the bush, she saw a little boy standing at the top, who reached out his hand; She grasped his thumb, and at this moment she was on the top and someone told her it was the Saviour.¹⁹

As in her memoirs, this account offers glimpses of textual dimensionality invisible to binary logic, despite its unsettling shift in point of view that reveals its overt mediation. The little boy is most likely one of the Yûñwī Tsunsi', whom Mooney describes as "'Little People,' who live in rock caves on the mountain side; they are little fellows, hardly reaching up to a man's knee. . . . They are great wonder workers. . . . They are helpful and kind-hearted, and often when people have been lost in the mountains, especially children who have strayed away from their parents, the Yûñwī Tsunsi' have found them and taken care of them."²⁰ For many Cherokee people, the Yûñwī Tsunsi' represent a powerful spiritual force in the world.²¹ Catharine Brown likely believed an extraordinary being communicated with her through her dream. Dreams were a powerful source of knowledge about matters both uncommon and everyday in Cherokee culture,²² and through her dream knowledge she was able to place her feet where she wanted them to go, divergent though dependent on the steps others had taken before her. This path was not available to Catharine Brown the individual outside of history and community but was opened by—was the consequence of—the spaces created when Western political and religious expansionists met Cherokee people who respected their traditional values and adapted to a rapidly changing world.

Just as Cherokee, if less dramatic, is Brown's concern for "her people." For Brown, as for many Cherokees, a fundamental compassion and concern for others extends from a model of identity intimately connected with community. This priority finds expression in Brown's preoccupation with "[preparation] for usefulness among my people" given "their awful situation while out of Christ";²³ she echoes this sentiment throughout her memoirs. In a later, more comprehensive biographical essay on Brown than the sketch in *Cherokee Women*, Perdue revises her assessment of Brown (that few women wanted to equal her in her Christian devotion) and attends to the melding of the personal and the communal, rightfully foregrounding the value of community: "The missionaries interpreted her behavior as evangelical, the ardent desire of believers to spread the gospel, but Catharine's concern may have stemmed from the Cherokee concern for community. Unlike Christianity, which concentrated on the salvation of individual souls, Cherokee religion focused on community well-being. Convinced of the correctness of Christianity, Catharine agonized not over her own soul, but over the collective soul of her people. . . . Her baptism seems to have opened the door for other Cherokees. Soon over a hundred adults joined her in Christian fellowship."²⁴ This concern for the well-

being of the community has been noted by contemporary Cherokee scholars like Garrouette, who calls it a “responsibility to reciprocity,” and Weaver, who perhaps overreaches: “Natives define their identity in terms of community and relate to ultimate reality through that community.”²⁵ Community can be central to Native identity, to be sure, as plentiful social scientists, poets, literary critics, and others have noted, but a number of Native people are selfish and define their identities according to very individualistic agendas—and they are still *Native* people, perhaps even those who deserve the closest scholarly attention. A little essentialism may be necessary, but we should take care in where we locate it, and a pragmatic approach to identity can help us move theoretically along with the diversity of lived experience.

That said, the model of community-integrated identity well explains Catharine Brown’s insistence on reaching out to her community. Perdue, however, continues to see in Brown’s conversion a causal disconnect between her need for integration with the community and the community’s willingness to extend it: “At the same time she sought and found community in her new faith, conversion drove a wedge between her and the vast majority of Cherokees. . . . Instead of uniting her people through Christianity, Catharine found herself estranged from many of them because of her faith.”²⁶ Although Perdue in this essay suggests that Brown’s conversion to Christianity did not effect total erasure of Cherokee culture, her insistence on structuring the juncture of Christianity and Cherokee culture as antagonistic elides a great deal of the complexity of Brown’s and other converts’ experiences. A number of Cherokees opposed to increased contact with Euro-Americans generally and the missionary project specifically would have ostracized her, but others welcomed her. Anderson records, “Catharine and [her brother] David were employing themselves diligently at Brainerd. Once, in particular . . . these two young Cherokees, aided by a pious Indian woman of great age, collected a little group of their people, who had come to spend the Sabbath there, and held a religious conference, with prayer and praise, all in the Cherokee language.”²⁷ Not long before her death, Brown spoke with concern to a Mrs. Potter, a missionary’s wife, of her work with local Cherokee women: “I have no desire to live in this world, but to do good. But God can carry on his work without me. I hope you will continue the meetings of females. You must not be discouraged. I thought when I should get to the Arkansas, I would form a society among the females, like ours. But I shall never live to get there.”²⁸ Brown’s transformative energy that refigured multiple circuits in Cherokee country fused as many connections as it shorted, and in time these would become increasingly important.

Perdue’s suggestion that Brown’s evangelism was a relative failure expects a great deal of a woman who died at twenty-two or twenty-three, in the earliest stages of proselytizing in Cherokee country. Considering the prominence of Christianity among Cherokee people today, Brown’s evangelical work could easily be reframed as part of a larger historical circuit, wherein she appears more an innovator than an anomaly, especially given her age in a community that generally looks to elders for spiritual guidance. Perdue also normalizes both the Cherokee and Christian religions, which for her “stood at odds . . . on

fundamental issues. Cherokee religion promoted cosmic balance, not sacred hierarchy, and community welfare, not individual salvation.”²⁹ Cherokee religion was incorporated in the daily lives of individuals and was therefore largely an individual or local experience, guided by certain commonly held tenets.³⁰ Central among these was, as Perdue notes, the well-being of the group—but we might wonder if missionaries such as Samuel Worcester, Daniel Butrick, and others were in fact preaching sacred hierarchy and abandonment of the community. Certainly, such is not what Brown took from them. She writes, “O may I be enabled to follow the example of my teachers, to live near the Saviour, and to do much good. I wish very much to be a missionary among my people. If I had an education—but perhaps I ought not to think of it. I am not worthy to be a missionary.”³¹ Her self-effacing concern for her community exhibits both the centrality of Cherokee community and Christian agape—concepts clearly different but directly opposed only rhetorically.

Finally, Perdue’s willingness to develop a normative definition of Cherokee community in the early 1800s marginalizes an important and growing component of Cherokee society. Of Brown’s impending move to run a new Cherokee school, Anderson writes, “When it was known at Creek-Path, that she was to take charge of the school, the most enthusiastic joy was occasioned among the people. They seemed to feel that the preparations could not be made too soon. Not less than fifty Cherokee men, besides negroes and boys, assembled immediately to build a house, which, in two days, was nearly completed according to their stipulation.”³² Whatever “wedge” lodged between Brown and the Cherokee communities of her time—local communities primarily in charge of their affairs—they seem to have worked around it. Brown, like other missionary educators, would have served at the pleasure of the community; that she stayed at Creek Path for nine months speaks as much of communal agency as missionary zealotry. That Anderson’s or the missionaries’ (or Perdue’s) political agenda results in selective information must be kept in mind, for they might exaggerate the response to the school or equivocate the greater enthusiasm for education than for Christianization. Anderson might also have occluded Brown’s continuing ties to community or traditional practices, either by choosing to omit materials such as the story of her dream or by simply not being able to understand that which was before him.

The treasurer of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions once met with Catharine and wrote of her:

Her prayers are distinguished by great simplicity as to thought and language, and seem to be the filial aspirations of the devout child. Before Mrs. Chamberlain took charge of the girls Catharine had, of her own accord, commenced evening prayer with them, just as they were retiring to rest. Sometime after this practice had been begun, it was discovered by one of the missionaries, who, happening to pass by the cabin where the girls lodge, overheard her pouring forth her desires in very affecting and appropriate language. On being inquired of respecting it, she simply observed, that she had prayed with the girls, because she thought it was her duty.³³

Unaccustomed to eloquence and intelligence from Cherokee women, the missionaries assumed they must have neither; besides seeing only what they expected to see, the missionaries also neglected to question their narrow, culturally determined definitions of what constituted intelligence or spirituality. Brown likely retained and practiced a great deal of traditional Cherokee spirituality, such as when she periodically left the mission. Anderson notes, “In the warm season of the year, the adjacent woods was the place of her retirement. . . . She not unfrequently spent whole days in fasting and prayer. One fine summer’s day, she had been absent nearly all the forenoon in the woods, and . . . I felt anxious for her safety. . . . She returned, expressing much concern that she had caused me so much anxiety, and added, that she was sorry she had not told me of her intention to pass that day in the mountain.”³⁴ Perdue also sees Brown’s retention of Cherokee tradition in her reclusion in nature and her uncharacteristically frequent fasting: “even in her biography, written primarily to convince potential contributors of the efficacy of Indian missions, evidence emerges that calls into question the missionaries’ success in the complete eradication of Native culture. . . . There are no clear examples of apostasy. Instead, we have ambiguous practices that probably represent a blending of Cherokee and Christian beliefs.”³⁵ Ross Johnston concurs: “Although she was a Christian convert, she also continued traditional Cherokee practices such as fasting, and she participated in women’s prayer groups, often in the forests and mountains. Brown and her parents continued to enlist the help of traditional healers. Thus, she may have retained more of her Cherokee beliefs and been less acculturated than the missionaries’ account claimed.”³⁶ Though there may be a threshold beyond which adaptation becomes not syncretism but assimilation, it is neither clear that Brown crossed it, nor by whose authority—past or present—it was established.

Like the missionaries, contemporary scholars may see only what is familiar to them. In the anthology *Native American Autobiography* Arnold Krupat writes of Catharine Brown, “We will not learn of Cherokee lifeways in the early nineteenth century from Catharine Brown. But hers, too, is a Native American life, one that needs to be taken into account in any generalizations we would make about Native people in the Americas.”³⁷ The implicit assumption here is that Brown’s Christian conversion renders her not-Cherokee, although she can still be “Native American” in some esoteric way. Craig Womack rejoins: “When an Indian converts to Christianity, not all of him gets converted, no matter how thorough his newfound convictions.”³⁸ That part remaining—the part that believes in the Yūñwī Tsunsi’ and Nūññě’hī to the same degree as believing in Jesus as the Messiah—must be understood from a cultural perspective as familiar as possible with tribal epistemologies. In his book *Red Matters* Krupat has called this an indigenist perspective, in which “[the ‘earth’] is the source of the values on which a critical perspective must be based.”³⁹ Krupat reads “land” or “earth” literally in indigenist criticism and sees such a perspective as based on a “geocentric worldview,”⁴⁰ missing the potential metaphoric meaning of “land” as “place where you are” (in Cherokee cosmologic terms), which is itself linked to community. What besides Cherokee lifeways do Brown’s inexhaustible concern for community, especially women, her

outdoor fasting, her interpretation of Christian precepts through Cherokee cultural symbols, and her worship in the Cherokee language teach us? Of his own critical method of choice, cosmopolitanism, Krupat has written, "Cosmopolitan criticism must be open to the work of indigenists as much as to the work of nationalists if it is genuinely to be responsible,"⁴¹ as his limited reading of Brown demonstrates. Cosmopolitanism might even best *begin* by proceeding from a thoroughly developed indigenist base.⁴²

Brown's work as a teacher conflated power from many spheres; pertinent here again are community, gender, and religion, both traditional and Christian. In gathering together the female groups at the Brainerd school for prayer meetings and in her teaching at the Creek Path school, Brown negotiated agency across a number of circuits that could have dead-shortened in less careful hands. Communal agency is central to this interaction; the school at Creek Path would not have existed had the surrounding communities not elected to extend an invitation to the missionaries at Brainerd,⁴³ and the Brainerd missionaries, too, served at the pleasure of the communities. Clearly, if Brown hoped to keep her post, she needed to attend carefully to the expectations of the Cherokee families with students at the school. The administrators of the Brainerd school no doubt had expectations of Brown and the school occasionally at odds with those of the community, and the expectations of the Cherokee girls and mothers must have contrasted sharply at times with those of the white women at Brainerd—that Cherokees and missionaries sometimes crossed paths does not mean, however, that they were unable to find common ground.⁴⁴

As before, gender, race, and religion move in conjunction in Brown's dream of evangelizing to Cherokee women living west of the Mississippi. For Brown a community of women—Cherokee, Christian, Women—was of abiding importance as a source of much-needed spiritual and physical strength in what can only be described as desperate and dangerous times for Cherokee people. Stories of the first woman, Selu, reinforce the primacy of woman's power; Selu is the Corn Mother, without whose gift of corn the Cherokee would not be.⁴⁵ As Perdue notes, Cherokee women exerted substantial agency and power in traditional communities, which were both matrilineal and matrilocal, and women played roles in governance and warfare. They were responsible for a great deal of labor and retained control of property and children during marriage and in the event of divorce, which they could initiate; men not wishing to be divorced had little recourse. Women also exercised control over sexual and reproductive matters.⁴⁶ In short, Cherokee women were well accustomed to managing their affairs and formed strong ties with communities of women in extended kinship networks; these ties were stronger than those they formed with men, who were never guaranteed a place in a household the way women of a clan were.⁴⁷ Catharine Brown's religious and educational work with Cherokee girls and her dream of continuing that work are coextensive and inseparable from her experiences in the circuits of Cherokee and gender roles. Her devout belief in the salvation of Christianity led her to an integration of the spheres of her life, many of which I have neglected, such as class, age, and clan affiliation.

In her lifetime Brown had firsthand experience of the depredations of white settlers. Anderson explains her father's motive for moving his family to Arkansas: "The old grey-headed man, with tears in his eyes, said he must go over the Mississippi. The white people would not suffer him to live here. They had stolen his cattle, horses, and hogs, until he had very little left."⁴⁸ Brown's willingness to distinguish between the whites at Brainerd and those stealing her family's property and safety is remarkable, and her strategy of positive resistance through the focused integration of multiple circuits is illustrative.

NOTES

I am indebted to Laura Donaldson, the participants at the Graduate Association of Multicultural Studies "Intersectionality" conference at the University of Georgia in September of 2004, and peer reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. Catharine Brown, *Memoir of Catharine Brown: A Christian Indian of the Cherokee Nation*, ed. Rufus Anderson, 2nd ed. (Armstrong, 1824; Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1825; repr., Signal Mountain, TN: Mountain Press, n.d.), 19 (pagination refers to the Mountain Press edition); Arnold Krupat, *Native American Autobiography: An Anthology* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 114; Theda Perdue, "Catharine Brown: Cherokee Convert to Christianity," in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*, ed. Theda Perdue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 88; Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), 44–45. For a historical summary of people, places, and events see Mary Higginbotham, "The Creek Path Mission," *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 1, no. 2 (1976): 72–85. Many primary sources survive in the Papers of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in the Houghton Library's archives at Harvard University, and several references to Brown may be found in *The Brainerd Journal: A Mission to the Cherokees, 1817–1823*, ed. Joyce Phillips and Paul Phillips (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Brown's (misnamed) memoirs were published in 1824 in a difficult-to-find first edition by Samuel Armstrong; in a second edition the following year by John Haven publishers in New York and Crocker and Brewster in Boston; and in at least a third edition by the American Sunday School Union in Philadelphia in 1832. Mountain Press's 1998 reprinting of the second edition, which I have used, ameliorates the scarcity of those prior (this date is taken from the publisher's Web site, <http://www.mountainpress.com/books/na/details/gn-0153w.html> [accessed 1 May 2004] and is not found in the edition itself). For the sake of clarity, each subsequent reference to this volume will attempt to identify either Brown or Anderson as the primary speaker—would that conclusive differentiation could be so easy.

2. The term *traditional* is deeply problematic and often tied to important questions of authenticity, identity, and representation. For my purposes I use the term here pragmatically to denote values and customs commonly thought to predate colonial contact while stipulating that the definition is enigmatic and elusive.

3. James Treat, "Introduction: Native Christian Narrative Discourse," and "Indian Spirituality: Another Vision," both in *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada*, ed. James Treat (New York: Routledge, 1996), 6–13, 34–36.

4. Laura Donaldson, *American Sampson: Haunting the Native-Christian Encounter* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming); Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 3–11; Brown, *Memoir*, 25; Phillips and Phillips, *Brainerd Journal*, 91.
5. William McLoughlin, “The Cherokees and Moravians,” in *Cherokees and Missionaries: 1789–1839* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 35–45.
6. James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, 19th Annual Report, Part 1, 1897–98 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900; repr., New York: Dover, 1995), 83.
7. Wendy Doniger, foreword to *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*, by Claude Lévi-Strauss, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), viii–ix.
8. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 23.
9. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 5–22.
10. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.
11. Jameson, *Prison-House of Language*, 96–98.
12. Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 170–71.
13. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 259, 311–21. For the sake of consistency I have retained Mooney’s orthography.
14. Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31–45; Eva Marie Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 113–39; Satya Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 48.
15. Ruth Bradley Holmes and Betty Sharp Smith, *Beginning Cherokee*, 5th ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 22, 249; Durbin Feeling, *Cherokee-English Dictionary*, ed. William Pulte (Tahlequah, OK: Heritage Press, 1975), 177.
16. William Pulte and Durbin Feeling, “Outline of Cherokee Grammar,” in Feeling, *Cherokee-English Dictionary*, 241–305.
17. Mark Custalow, “Native American Church Planting,” North American Mission Board, http://www.namb.net/lightupthenation/body_cpt_12_nativeamerican.asp (accessed 19 April 2004).
18. Carolyn Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838–1907* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 42–45; Theda Perdue, introduction to *Cherokee Editor: The Writings of Elias Boudinot*, by Elias Boudinot, ed. Theda Perdue (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 8–12.
19. Joel W. Martin, *The Land Looks after Us: A History of Native American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71.
20. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 333.
21. *Ibid.*, 331–36; Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 71–72; also see Richard Bushyhead, “The Little People and the Nunnehi”; Kathi Smith Littlejohn, “The Cherokee Little People” and “Nunnehi, the Gentle People”; and Barbara Duncan, “Edna Chekelelee”; all in *Living Stories of the Cherokee*, comp. and ed. Barbara Duncan

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 183–87, 68–74, 125–26; *Stories of the Yunwi Tsunsi: The Cherokee Little People*, ed. Jeannie Reed (Cullowhee, NC: Western Carolina University, 1991).

22. Martin, *The Land Looks after Us*, 71–73.

23. Brown, *Memoir*, 59, 66.

24. Perdue, “Catharine Brown,” 80.

25. Garrouette, *Real Indians*, 129; Weaver, *That the People Might Live*, 32.

26. Perdue, “Catharine Brown,” 81.

27. Anderson, in Brown, *Memoir*, 40.

28. Brown, *Memoir*, 93.

29. Perdue, “Catharine Brown,” 89.

30. Most of the research literature on Cherokee religion relies heavily on James Mooney’s ethnological work in the Qualla Boundary near the beginning of the twentieth century; most of his writing relies on the male informant named Swimmer. The vast and geographically diverse territory once inhabited by the Cherokee, the degree of town autonomy, the privacies of clans, the separation of social gender roles, and the dynamism of culture and religion generally should lead us to question the nearly sacrosanct status afforded Mooney’s early work, itself shaped by the protoanthropological theories of John Powell, Daniel Brinton, Frederic Putnam, and others, preceding Franz Boas’s cultural relativism. For a concise introduction to the theoretical history of the Bureau of American Ethnology and the broader fields of ethnography, ethnology, and anthropology see Lee Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 26–53; for a critical biography of James Mooney’s early years and his time working with the Cherokee see the first two chapters of L. G. Moses, *The Indian Man: A Biography of James Mooney*, rev. ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

31. Brown, *Memoir*, 61.

32. Anderson, in Brown, *Memoir*, 42–43.

33. *Ibid.*, 24–25.

34. *Ibid.*, 115–16.

35. Perdue, “Catharine Brown,” 86.

36. Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis*, 43.

37. Krupat, *Native American Autobiography*, 115.

38. Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 183.

39. Arnold Krupat, *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 10.

40. *Ibid.*, 12.

41. *Ibid.*, 23.

42. Elsewhere in his anthology of autobiography, Krupat approaches Native-Christian convergences more judiciously, as when he writes of Black Elk: “We know that the western insistence that things be *either* this way *or* that—that Black Elk ‘really’ be Lakota *or* Christian—tends to falsify the kinds of dual, syncretistic, or situational modes in which Native people operate” (*Native American Autobiography*, 220). Why Brown loses her Cherokee identity while Black Elk remains a Lakota is unclear. Perhaps to some, a Christian Indian must be from a western tribe to remain tribal.

43. Anderson, in Brown, *Memoir*, 38.
44. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*.
45. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 242–49; Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 13–15; Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis*, 24–27.
46. Perdue, *Cherokee Women*, 17–40.
47. *Ibid.*, 41–49.
48. Anderson, in Brown, *Memoir*, 25.