land and language: translating aboriginal cultures

Peter Cole, University of Victoria, Canada

Abstract
this article arose from my experience reviewing films books theatre dance art
I hadn’t realized I was reviewing a conference until I’d written it up
together with four other conferences all of which blended into my phd dissertation
it was a delight to attend an aboriginal conference
where all presenters were aboriginal rather than white indian experts
the lingering feeling was of delight camaraderie mutual nurturance community
any mishearings or other mis-takes in this article relating to the conference
I unreservedly blame on coyote raven and sasquatch
who kept putting their paws wings beaks hands and such
in the way of my ears eyes and nose as much as they could
any praise for this work I disclaim personally deferring it rather
to narrative chance chance operations and trickster discourse

Résumé
mon expérience comme critique de films de livres de théâtre de danse et d’art visuel m’a inspiré cet article
je n’avais pas pris conscience que j’étais en train de réviser un exposé jusqu’à ce que je l’écrive
en même temps que l’écriture de quatre autres conférences le tout se mariait bien avec le sujet de ma thèse de doctorat
ce fut un plaisir d’assister à une conférence autochtone
à laquelle chacun des conférenciers furent autochtones plutôt que des experts blancs en matière d’indiens
ce fut un sentiment de plaisir d’amiété de partage de communauté
quels que soient les passages confus ou les erreurs dans cet article concernant la conférence
j’accuse incontestablement le coyote le corbeau et le « sasquatch »
qui n’ont pas cessé de bloquer mes yeux mes oreilles mon nez
avec leurs pattes leur ailes leurs becs et autres autant qu’ils le pouvaient
je renonce personnellement à tous compliments pour ce travail je les offre plutôt à la chance du récit à la chance de l’action et au langage trompeur

kukwstumlhkacw
tsexox
paddle  paddle  stroke  paddle  swoooosh

yale university 1998
snowfall last night  freezing rain  the sidewalks extremely slippery
the air is crisp  full of energy  promise
we paddled up here this morning from warwick new york
in our vw golf  relieved to arrive  in the weather
we are surprised at the poverty surrounding  the campus

without a lot of ado  we enter the auditorium
sit near the front  eagerly anticipate  the first “event”  a playreading
the sounds of steam singing  in pipes  chants  operations
signs every where of first nations  absence
the amistad memorial  like an adjudicated addendum in the park
everything in new haven shuts down at 6 pm
tonight  we are at a dramatic monologue  by monique mojica
an expatriat native “american” living in and around toronto
she enunciates every other syllable like it was trying to get away
vocally imprints cadence and  stress like tent pegs
whack WHACK whack WHACK whack WHACK
“corn MAID corn CHIPS  I LOVED tonTO chickY  hopALONG casSIDY
then eases off to doo ops boom ba boom  ba ba bda  da da day
shoo bee  doo bee  wa aaad be my muffin
and I’ll be your marmalade princess buttered on both sides
like coyote in drag”  green sheer pink scarf  orange polka dot dress
burgundy sleeves  black boots  fur trimmed
arizona aquamarine right middle finger
decibels of jingly copper  round ring  left middle finger
single braid  jauntily placed  over right shoulder
sometimes we need to caricature ourselves to make a point
to newagers and other wannabes
she discusses research methods  methodologies
resurrects quotes from museums  texts  songs  immigrant transcriptions
from long dead mouths  john smith’s chapbooks  journals

aged 12 pocahontas and her entourage wear nothing
but deer horns and leaves  in the forest
“I belong to the deer clan  this is the first year  I dance  with the other girls
I must collect my own paint  wear my own colours”
heating pipes chant  monique does not acknowledge
their song  con tribution  they beg notice
her lyrics are to the tune of ludic skipping ditties  mother goose
jamestown  virginia 1600-something  who are these men
pocahantas’ relatives ask  whose families do not want them
starving  freezing  on our land directionless  without relations
talk of hybrid tobacco    halfbreeds   monique says she’s jewish
on her father’s side from new york she has ancestors from virginia
a great grandmother who moved to brooklyn after the civil war
monique married a mayan from chiapas she does guerilla theatre

the pipes rattle like chance percussion she shakes her rattle
sits cross-legged looks at the front row nervous laughter

“a virgin warrior woman with butterfly wings spider grandmother
serpent clothes skulls dangle between breasts
I birth a continent” “how many tongues cry”
pipes rattle decrescendo again and again unheard yet not inaudible
“we build alliances with our bodies” the singing pipes continue to beg notice
cantabile moderato sustenato obligato da capo

“I am third and youngest wife of a captain of the home guard”
sounds like a gilbert and sullivan opera
“I look after the children of the other wives who are not my people
they twist my hair wash it with harsh lye soap” the pipes sing like a john cage choir
“the women rub off the bear grease that keeps me warm
because they say the men don’t like my smell
rebecca hummingbird becky to the powatan people of virginia I cry for you”
her narrative about a possum with detectable muskrat blood
weasels and the department of possum affairs
draws brief applause which I think in this case means failure to connect
she caricatures first nations songs disnifies the indigenous falsettos

friday february 6th medicine river’s first us screening
tom king has a bit part in this film playing basketball yo! tom
we are told a cbc fellow wrote the screen play
graham greene plays wil on location reporter
his plane a navajo single engine seneca 1 is landing in medicine river
he heard his mother’s health was not good his only reason for coming “home”
it turns out she is dead maybe a ruse by the writer to get wil home
to be acted on by events and the people attached to them
“So you take your coffee white?” tom/harlan asks adding
“she’s in the cemetery over there the funeral was last week”
adding “you know we got some grant money for vans but we got cameras instead”
a fundraising plan of producing a calendar with photos of the elders
“hi I’m the friendship centre’s accountant” makeup three inches thick
another stereotyped native woman cut to horseraces
“I’m goin’ to get me another one of them ‘dogs” ha ha
thelma who wil is putting the moves on doesn’t want to get married et cetera
she doesn’t want the “complication of raising a man too”
wil struggles to put the crib together no ikea this one he’s wil but is he readying
“I don’t want to live with a man. I like the way I do things.”

Wil standing on the railroad tracks, Thelma sitting on them in a femmy dark flowered dress. Barby FN cut to Clyde in jail cut to the game cut to Wil alone in the gym afterwards cut to the maternity waiting room where Wil is called Mr. Heavyman and laughter at the gender role reversal. The nurse says “it’s a girl what will you call her?” “South Wing” he says seeing the sign behind her deadpan “it’s okay I’m indigenous.”

“So what happened to the important contract in Africa?” “Guess I’ll be staying a while.”

The Mounties put Clyde under his uncle’s supervision.

A group shot of elders end of Medicine River cut to “real” world. George Miles of Beinecke Library has been 28 years at Yale. He speaks of a meta/discourse of Native American studies “rising out of the foment and activism of the 60s.”

Then George (Tink) Tinker from Denver speaks of missionary conquest. He does a beautiful prayer song in what I take to be Lakota for which all stand.

Liz Cook and Jace speak of the theft of Native American studies. Liz is professor emeritus from Eastern Washington University. She speaks of setting the bar high. I assume this is a track-and-field metaphor.

“I’m really quite thrilled to be here in the colonies” flourish of laughter she’s from a small Sioux reservation in Dako TA.

Quoting a colleague she says “you know I really don’t like people who go behind the bush and beat around.”

“Remember now I’m retired” she says “so I can say anything I want. ‘I’m out of the loop’ to use an old George Bush phrase.”

They’re big on him down here he’s one of the good old boys from here.

“Post-Indian” language has a way of taking on a life of its own. She reads most of her words oralizes rather than is oral. It’s very much written in a conversational writerly way. She speaks of authors tapping into already legitimized discourses. “Native American studies having to fight off post-modernism et cetera. Not to mention simple lethargy and stupidity.”

There are liberal doses of humor throughout her talk. “The law has rarely been moral in the treatment of Indians.”

She goes on about racism colonialism Disney Pocahontas as history. Ken Burns’ Lewis and Clarke documentary the quote. “The wonderful thing about this country is that it started at zero” right!

Then “it is a crime to overturn a scrupulously cleansed history. As you know all rhetorical questions are accusations.”

Robert Warrior says his book “Like a Hurricane” is an attempt to keep the focus even without the political thrust. He speaks of Foucauldian philosophers who try to stay marginal. “The rights are not separate from tribal nations and traditions.”

What about faculties who compromise for personal gain?”
very powerful silence  then “in sovereignty and nationhood land is most important
who is behind the diminishment movement in the supreme court?
we must find out  if the enemy is out there  or is one of us”
adding “passive violence often goes undiscovered”
he speaks of native american renaissance  of first nations and the mainstream
“my culture is where I’m from and where I’m going”
he speaks of “colonial laureats’ and the deficit model of indianness”
how “novelists are rewarded for this  they see us as nonplayers”
he goes on about the need to pay attention when speaking in english
to always refer to “the great sioux nation”
he speaks of the epistemological roots of native american scholarship
the strategies of co-optation failing to address initial arguments
useful to our own constituents” then “postcolonial studies will never help us”
moves on to “this being held ‘in colonial trust’ is economic imperialism”
“native american students need to be defensive regulatory transformative”
“multiculturalism is not a defender of native american sovereignty”
“dissidents are attacked or ignored assimilators are nurtured rewarded
native indigenous nationalists is what I want  the people depend on us”

george charles  begins with a story and the lacota saying
“It’s a good thing you’re moving slow  because you’re going in the wrong direction”

9:20 am  february 7th  another day at yale  jace says goodhumouredly “two caveats”
the first is that each participant is here as themselves
not representing a tribe  nation or culture
the second that with respect to the papers for the respondents
they are all winging it, having not received them beforehand
“When you speak of this  as you will  be kind”
“the panel and respondents” include harry long  muskogee from oklahoma
harry long a methodist clergyman since 1949 speaks of “one drop of blood”
the cherokee trail of tears the 800 miles a quarter to a third of the people perishing
“each of us here has a special story to share singing is a way of communicating”
he says a muskokee lay prayer after no talk of jesus
then george in beige slacks white sweatshirt a viet nam vet a musician an actor
speaks first in kayana his language
“those that came before me first I would like to thank”
“we are grounded to the place we come from”
his great grandfather was a medicine man “at this distance I can say this”
his father was a maskmaker including prediction masks
“I remember the sound of hail on sealskin on the drum
‘beware of gifts from whiteskinned ones’” they were warned
“women owned the houses up there and they still do
my great aunt used a weather prediction drum back then we used dogs
to predict the weather” he smiles “opening the window on the tundra at night
is opening the window to the spirit world”
“our people’s history is written on the tongues of our elders”
he jokes about the linguists’ lingo parodies it respectfully
then the russian orthodox came in the moravian
german academics researched my people
“My father felt his own body saying ‘this is my church’”
“gratitude can be so powerful what it can do good for you”
“the way of the human beings know this the path of the power of words
be careful of thoughts that can become real
be careful not to hurt the thoughts of others”
“we believe in reincarnation but the young people are not remembering
to respect the spirits of animals” “the medicine song is your path
your way around down there” he speaks of the chant the essence of mystery
“there was no fixed meaning in the time when the earth’s skin was thin
the ‘I’ that approaches ‘me’ who is putting on the big spotted seal”
denotations are often the subtextual ones the so-called secondary ones
context creates meaning I figure
you cry the world rejoices you die the world cries
alan kilpatrick speaks of “losing irreplaceable human expressions”
he goes on about magical texts “words never meant to be translated”
“it is important too to resist translation” “translation is the activity
not the final product it is about patterns and about us it is about mutual re/discovery”
he speaks of magic of “translation as transmutation
despite a constellation of possibilities”
“the griffin and thompson papyrus has been translated as reconstitution”
now there’s the sound of a helicopter flying low  maybe the  cia or the vatican
he speaks of christianity  of criticizing indigenous beliefs
“the opacity of the sacred” “negotiating magical words  slippery words”

10:39 ofelia speaks in her language  her talk is of “acts or gifts of kindness”
she speaks of papago which includes  south arizona all the way to sonora mexico
where two thousand people live  of whom 60% are indigenous
for whom their indigenous language is their first  language
her phd is in linguistics  she says “we cannot run to the library
and look further  our elders our  speakers are our libraries”
“you need  not just language  but cultural knowledge
explanation of explanation  is itself another book
I don’t want to fill in some gaps  sometimes we say  nothing”
she speaks of collecting and storing languages just for the memory
for contemporary languages  “all languages need to be considered
opening to ‘other’  not so exotic cultures” “we  translate for our own members”
she refers to notes  speaks of  effect  instances of english not as a translation
from her language  but as written in english
she has moved away from direct translation
“giving someone a drink of water from cupped hands
what stays back  what I prefer to not give them
or what won’t move across language anyway  but nobody goes thirsty”

deloria speaks of content versus context
he quotes walter benjamin  says “it matters the context  the intention”
“looking at the sacred quality of language” “language acquiring its intentionality”
“we must go back to the generative moments”
he must have memorized a pomo dictionary before coming here
he comes across as an intellectual  an academic
speaking of “four paradigms”  “being caught between cultures
cultural no-person’s land a liminal place of social nothingness
biculturalism  and syncretism  the translator as broker  zen diagrams
r white’s middle ground which must be somewhere”
he moves on to mis/perception mis/recognition he’s on a roll
he speaks of parallelism and simultaneous native and non-native parallel events
says “I don’t wear a washington redskins cap”
then speaks of meaning simultaneity  a hybrid postcolonial subject
quotes homi bhabha “who talks  about ivy league indians”
he goes on about euros  including derrida  also of spivak
“I’m probably just pillaging” he names the name  “subjectivity”
“po/l/emic  how does power work  in translation
using native language as fodder  for appropriation” oration
“How do we constitute boundaries?  whose?”
he gave the euros a good workout in his talk
james riding in from arizona state u gives his “indian” name  his genealogy
speaks of “an intellectual foundation  based in indian tradition”
in his white shirt black vest  stetson he says
“to come in and tell us how to speak  is an absurdity”
“who has a right to translate? who owns knowledge?
what should scholarship give back to the community?”
“scholarly writing is very ambiguous writing  you get permission
but you give complete editorial control to the community”
he goes on about “presenting history correctly  rectifying problems caused by
nonindians” how the overlanders en route to the westcoast
represented “america’s first driveby shootings”
he talks about “capturing meaning over centuries” “island place becoming land”
of “coming into english  where meaning freezes”
brings to mind the quote  “rain just hitting the desert  that sound
the dampness of desert”  some people nod  “and this aroma happens”

oh wonderful a list from a white man in the audience  with a scruffy ponytail
about “exposing texts” “destructive incantations and curses”
and “going into the temple to study  without going there to worship”
the question/comment/accusation is directed at alan
who says “the power died with the owners of the text”  his parents
lots of mixed feelings from that ex  change  bad medicine lingers

ines speaks of indigenous scholarship  assimilation  conversion  political reality
being trained at the university to categorize and walking the earth
“you have to be a comprehensive scholar  you have to be a poet in both languages”

n scott momaday was born in oklahoma in 1934  lives in new mexico
teaches at the university of arizona
he speaks of sequence “in the dimension which we call time”
“time as a particle of eternity  eternity  a stillness  as far as we know
it is a door through which we perceive the ever present
our ancestors and progeny  a place to meet them”
he speaks of ancient paintings in a cave in spain
where he felt like he “passed from time to timelessness”
“time is in the middle distance  it passes away”
he speaks of the apron of sumaron desert  the colorado plateau  rio grande valley
“I think of those kiowa and their horses  their centaur culture
migration tenure invasion  the sacred journey of kiowa to rainy mountain”
the hopi say “we were always here”  “we know”
someone asked him how long it takes for a people to become indigenous?
he said he can’t remember then goes on about the imagination
“the great matrix of the oral  the 30,000 year tenure”  “identity being fixed in the earth”
“multiple use conservation   a sacred relationship”
he looks at everyone says “remembering my face in the mirror of masks” beat
then speaks of “the conquest of the cultural composite of cultures”
people are starting to get tired everyone at once it’s 2 pm low blood sugar
another poem is sutured in lots of monotones intact
I awaken to “always in the presence of the sacred”
“artificial tenses extensions of the present the past as a kitschy corner of time”
then he says “urset hears nothing until yahweh says ‘berries’
‘berries?’ time in context and timelessness”
“There is no time on my side of the table there is time on your side
it is a table for god’s sake I’m sorry”

at the break  monique talks about an anthropologist’s mother
who approached her proudly talking about “my daughter the mexican expert”
what is ‘a mexican expert’
the next part in which dr kevin mcbridge a tribal archaeologist and nonnative
talks of mashantucket pequot museum of the aboriginal research centre
“we’ are geared toward education there will be a scholar’s area
in the centre for 16 people an internship program”
he points without due respect to a slide of a woman with his right thumb
I am apalled at this gesticulation now he calls them “exhibits”
you can feel everyone shudder at his insensitivity
there will be a kind of wax museum hmm why not indian candles
dioramas wooden whites interactive computer video
he speaks of the importance of “building in a half day at the centre”
now there’s a panel on literature
al trachtenburg a yale prof from american studies moderates
the whitehaired ponytailed man with the fisherman knit
the young man in the blue sweater the short woman lauren tohe
the grey shockofhair woman and robert warrior brian wescott actor

robert warrior stanford u  has a phd from a religious organization
he gets right into it by quoting edward said
he speaks of intellectual excitement and of “criticism creating subject matter”
of bird “parading ethnicity and first nation’s autobiography”
wayne newton’s is forinstanced they say he does things
for the cherokee his people “an attitudinal shift to/ward cultural studies
looking for the smoking gun in the beineke library montezuma”
he speaks of native children being taken to carlyle school in pa from the southwest
he asks “what is an english department for?”
arguing citations citing argumentations he speaks of ahmed
refuses citation method talks of metadiscourse
conditions and trajectories critical space and fora
opposition and re-opposition and criticism in the public sphere
he speaks of “the invention of postcolonial discourse as a new imperialism”
discusses “hierarchies of values ethical imperatives plurotopic and iatopic hermeneutics
the existential encounter of art and science”
“there is no blueprint pay attention to loci of imagination”
he moves to postwar relativism “papyricizing indigenousness foregrounding morality” but how about feeling?
“in 1837 the native american intellect is spoken of by r w emerson
there is a need for robust awareness of our own” whatever and so forth
laura tohe is dene from the sleepy water clan
she speaks first in navajo her first language then gives her genealogy
saying she was brought up on the navajo reservation
she talks of translating native cultures
she talks of songs prayers stories for healing
art and poetry and feminism “there were no words for these
until recently no need for words for these”
she speaks of the poetic “seeing the world through poetic eyes
of creative artists not separating you from anybody else
in the community being uncreative would set you apart”
then speaks of “literary identity and being connected to the homeland
okeo my feet below the land homeland of the navajo
the four sacred mountains we are bound we are like this”
she speaks of thread and strand and a weaving “we belong to land
she went to grad school in lincoln nebraska in 1982
where there are no mountains no lizards no sagebrush
she drove to the river’s edge she was so homesick
“you go into the body of water your hand and foot the platte river
fort sumner in new mexico is four generations away”
“words are sacred words can hurt you couldn’t give out
your ‘indian’ name the name is part of your identity
what you called one another by kinship
this prevented incest you know to sound ssshhht
it is a name place holder you take the rhythm of everything
in writing this is a way of sharing it is shared memory
translation misses the nuances” “kwoidjo is living a spiritual life
this engenders everything responsibility to family community”
“what then of a tenure track what of native scholarship
not being valued as traditional scholarship?”
“in self-evaluation every year the other faculty members
didn’t have to explain themselves to the chair who said the administration needed it”
“values are important ever heard that one before?” “fuck” somebody said
kate shanley from cornell says “it is important to talk to the animals and take out the chant” she speaks disparagingly of newagers of appropriated tribal tunes she quotes uneuropean sounding names “you have to face your fears and the wilderness colonial presence tribal absence” “the american identity depends on indians vanishing but aboriginal people are needed too even by them thinking with the heart is good” “indigenous people often are absent from table of contents even of minority discourse books” there is always the definition involving pan-indians whatever that’s supposed to mean or prove must be from the percussion section the tympani “in indigenous stories there are conversations with one another narrative logics of indigenous epistemology the trickster would give imperialism a rough time” trickster figures are adjectives verbs not nouns though “adjective” “verb” too are nouns caught in the medusa gaze the politics sovereignty everything is sanitized or cerebralized or not translated at all she tells of “s/he/it” which is a new pronoun she made up general laughter as she pronounces the new pronoun “a variation on western carnival tropes” the talk goes on to “disease sin crime naming practices and the trickster to recuperating names to renaming — somebody has to” what does emile durkheim have to do with all this and who let him in? must be from a bookmark left by another epistem-borrower her talk moves on to “collective effervescences” and “really indigenizing” followed by more eurotalk about “effervescent forms of sociality” “trickster and time frame coyote old or young the embrace of contraries coyote and newage woman two-backed beast coyote speaking to in with a dream” “must be a dog god inversion backwardness in the sanatarium in green grass running water” jerry rigged people institutions and names great grandfather running water four people in the insane asylum escape and national disasters happen there is a siren outside in here there is talk of “lector of power” disguising ishmael “the word parodic surfaces detective discourse people and characters meld” she speaks of “a cleanedup coyote” an anecdote of birds in this book flying into skyscrapers in toronto the traditional flight path being blocked by progress a flock of indians flying into the side of a building a bit shocking even the second time around or third a short history of indians in canada and bay street being blackened “the whole sky for days” the term/in/us exploding with binaries comes up and the “loss of joyful belief” by monique
craig womack  oklahoma creek  u lethbridge  by way of national literatures
at u minnesota press  then brian wescott  winnebago  and an actor  say a few words
then womac speaks  again  harry long sings his prayer in skokee
after which elizabeth is thanked again
“there is talk of the need for tribal literature to be tied to specific landscapes
locating (rather than situating) literature of community”
the trickster turns the lights off  in real time  in and out of fiction
“the almanac of the dead rushes by  the trickster trope is invoked
there is not always celebration of this trope”
“the sun came down” and “napi  there was shape shifting
opening up words to infinite meaning  going too far”

brian wescott who is upiq  and enthusiastic  went to hollywood
and became semi-famous  he is both glassy eyed and  d bout de souffle
from alaska he is very full  of hollywood  he speaks of the pomo tribe in california
of images consumed  of a pomo pomo pomo writer  he goes on
I’m sure I must have missed some thing  perhaps a preposition  or filmography
he speaks of trying very hard to think  from the heart
I wonder if he’s “trying” with the head to think from the heart
trying “to translate across  gulfs”
he speaks of 500 nations  which is a documentary by kevin costner
give me a break  please  he goes on about “traditional education
as being considered coeval with static societies”
he was technical advisor for “on deadly ground” in alaska  woopie ding
he speaks briefly of bear spirit  then of just talk  then of being in the moment
he mouths  grand indian playing indian
what about “sheilah tousey” whom he invokes
when he speaks of actors who must “first honour text”
she should know she plays any tribe or community  if it pays
a female graham greene  I exaggerate  to make a point
can anyone I wonder write trickster  is it not the other way  around
the name james welch comes up  for heaven’s sake I think
how’d he get in here?  don’t they ever give up?
I think about the bringing to life of clichés  and first peoples
like in tomson highway’s rez sisters  the raping nanabush
the malicious violent trickster
jace  is mad sort of  he talks about many nations  bringing all stories together
chicano and first nations  learning together  from one another
what are the borders I wonder  and who made them

it is still  saturday night  and we just had a grabwhatyoucan meal
at the beineke library  with alan kilpatrick
strange to dine in a rare book library with  millions of dollars in books
behind plastic
a huge 1489 map of the world in the basement near the toilets
oh happy day prewestern hemisphere precolumbian
great talk about vizenor and thomas king looking at the columbus map
we think it would be good to do research here within and against
or just not enter certain conversations

we’ve moved to nearby sudler hall waiting for the l/iterati
7:15 and jace is glowing his face is happy his nose very red
even though we’re 15 minutes late
betty louise bell oklahoma cherokee teaches u michigan
“my brother would never believe this everywhere we go
he says keep your voice down” she is precious
the quality of whatever is not strained
jace puts his cowboy boots up crossed on stage
he doesn’t attend many readings I suspect

“look for me in the moon the old lady says talk of the public image of cherokees”
unkind image a beautiful hall more talk of cherokees and evangelism
“you all talk of genuine rocks from the cherokee nation sharp #2 pencils”
lucy evers says “I am your worst nightmare I am an indian with a pen”
“don’t mess with indian women you white house/s”
laura tohe talks of first nations women walking behind their men “steering them”
she went to albuquerque indian school she speaks of thunder beings
baseball bats chito harjo a creek from the early 1900s
ofelia of the tohono o’odham nation speaks of the birth of stars speaks a lot
in her own language and I started to understand somehow
language outside of itself perhaps despite itself and myself
“everything I write is retrospect you know” she says

hyphenated elizabeth speaks about the spokane rez reads poems
about her ex-husbands about a black hills museum
now she can’t even get the sequel to her first novel published
“it talks about the 5 or 6 dams on the missouri river”
a beautiful blanket over her left shoulder
she sees herself as a poet a fiction writer she’s very funny also very bitter and nasty
in an anti-colonialist way she documents overheard airplane conversations
including one woman and her husband who when they were in egypt explained
their kids had to go without toys because the parents moved around so much
“please” she said to her explaining emergency onboard procedures
“put the bag over your mouth and breathe” instead of being nasty in my writing
I leave blanks

ines reads from a manuscript she translated from navajo or apache
before graduate school it is long and beautiful it’s actually a prayer
maybe it’s the limited edition book with pictures by the german woman
with whom she collaborated in the 1970s
that’s now being auctioned on the internet for thousands of dollars
ines speaks of 13 different schools in elementary she attended as a child
she talks of chaining herself in california in protest against a lot of things
of moving to mexico for 7 years going to graduate school with 7 kids
her husband having left her I leave more blanks
because I’d rather listen than take notes
then she coughs and coughs gestures for the navajo woman to finish for her
she drinks water shakes she is not well in her body it seems
maybe there are bad spirits lurking
later up the stairs of the hall looking down I hear someone say
monique is giving her some herbs
I remember I have echinacea and golden seal in my shirt pocket
and vitamin c betacarotene calcium I had forgotten
she must have known in her spirit that she would cough
must have known I had brought some medicines from new york state
and forgotten to take them in the morning forgotten to give some to pat too

sunday february 8th 9:37 am jace is relaxed and we haven’t started
shock double take we are late by 7 minutes but now he’s going to start almost on time
he’s been incredible in terms of being watch bound
mind you not “clock/wise” as someone said “wasn’t the direction”
because the direction was around before clocks were
jace says “whitney humanities complex has not had
such a large sustained turnout in 5 years” semi-sustained applause
then he acts as almost an apologist for alan about whom he says
his parents died much too young they were ethnographers
jace says there are ten to twenty thousand speakers of cherokee
trudy richmond from the scanakoot nation in georgia says a prayer
then speaks of her friend who would light a fire at some distance from the reserve
to let her know she’s on her way she speaks of the quitip/pitipiaq people
who no longer exist “officially” they say “as political entities”
the piquat were chased and killed “finally the colonists said if they got rid of their dogs
they’d give them more land for their corn
the quinipiaq peoples where are they? where are we?
we don’t speak the language have no ceremonies
we say we are an ignorant people that is our history
the mohicans allied with the english the skataquiak went into the hills
now there are three recognized groups of extinct people of my nation”
I’m not sure what “recognized” means I assume it means by white people

the golden hill reservation is fewer than .25 acres the smallest and oldest reservation
in the usa consisting of one family there are 2 piaquot nations
two groups emerged treated as pt and nt people
looking for federal recognition this is what trudy is doing

jace introduces tink tinker who is really george
he is from an indigenous school in   denver   colorado
tink talks about a trip to bolivia “a central church built in 1639
two years after a big massacre 4 years before j elliott of boston
brought the gospel to native people to dispossess them of the land”
“now there are many generations of christians
and once a week there is a religious activity called church
with over a million catholic indians there are 12 catholic priests
white jesuits and franciscans dominicans dos nortes   cochabamba in august
in bolivia   mesoamerica   andes   amazon catholicism everywhere”
tink says there is little sense to them in celibacy love us to death
look after us “thy will be done” “rockefeller”
the sin of 500 years of evangelism spreading the word of jesus
how to posture ourselves for the next millenium of the indian experience
an exceptional talk by not the literati the grassroots church workers
“180 indians adopted a document unanimously that is consensus thinking
they generate their own theologism no jesus but creator
if there is any room for jesus jesus must fit in to who they are
into their ceremonies”
“there were many different traditions turning circle differently
sunrise works different down there”clockwise/counterclockwise”
as jace says but “that must be a cherokee thing”
understated humour does not trans/late/fer well onto the page
all ceremonies are done by both man and woman parity is so important
it is modelled everywhere he shows jace the watch which is to say the time

now john mack faragher a history prof professional historian of colonialism
reads a chronicle dealing with frontier movement from red jacket 1805 seneca
how to worship the great spirit
the panel members include left to right “first white frost” then jace
ines mescalero apache   a ucal person by the name of homer noley
chris jocks a mohawk from dartmouth college then john and the mohawk
an elderly rez/verend lay fellow from the seminary
who gives thanks and speaks of souvenir his prayers are marked in red
he uses word replacements with the king james as a template
“I would have written it in choctaw” he says “speaking of hermeneutics”
“it being originally biblical interpretation in particular”
he speaks of errors in translation “during the second century”
“the jews becoming gentiles” “martian’s strict dualism” “phantom jesus” “justin martyr and aristotle as christians” adding “the catholic church is the protector
of traditional translation” suuuure it is just watch
next he speaks of hermeneuts with his very soft broadvowelled speech
of zeus and pegasus athena am I in the right room he doesn’t look like
joseph campbell
“the crucifiers of jesus became interpreters missionaries in washington dc
you might as well be flying into athens” he says speaking of the columns
“what if the romans came here” he says hoping zeus isn’t here
“yes this is the new rome” “the old boatman putting coins on the eyes of the dead”
my people never had coins somehow he moves to “elysian fields”
and “athenian heaven” yo here we go “in southern california there is elysian park”
I guess that must mean something
“aristotle said some people are born to be slaves some to be masters”
where I ask myself does the spiritual authority reside
“we must remove the veil from moses’ face” that’s a take
ines speaks of the yale logo being light and truth “knowledge is like a tree
not just the branch and other parts but the whole tree”
she speaks of “symbolic systems generated by being land-based”
she speaks of “spiritual homeland not real estate” “it is an illegal plunder of the past
just as stripping fencing the earth and plowing are” “it must not be cut into
our mother when you dig a pit for a sweat”
she moves to talk briefly about the chumash “it is with hands
not a tool or implement you make an offering of perspiration”
she was very angry when she began to speak when she “began to teach” years back
a fellow named roy harvey pierce was her mentor
“way back like the old thing of honey and vinegar
the land was raped and people were clothed in nature”
“our pines are our cathedral nature is our bible”
she talks about the abomb detonations “as the cloud moved across the reservation
it created a new mythology about nomads in the crucible of the desert”
she spoke of ceremony as “aesthetic” “you pray for trees used as tipi poles
abalone shells are used even way out there”
a space of silence “we are in this together” a siren wails
“we are consumed by consuming” she says “the ‘new scholar’ surfaces from my work”
“we all walk this continent together” she speaks to a white audience here at yale
“we know that development is wrong”
“we all know about nonnatives speaking about native spirituality”
bringing her to the idea of “an apache ambush”
“I prefer the term ‘integrated’ to ‘holistic’”
she moves on to writing “about ethnopoetics studying tribal poetry
validating white interpretations—what is this?”
“we must begin with language with ‘respect’”
“is it a native or is it a north american experience”
“did you know the biggest tribe is the wannabe tribe”
oh say newager can you see “facing the west” checkmark this one history
“we welcome them to our fires to work with us
can we know the faith of the prophet without knowing the arabic language
of course not” she goes on about language and indigenous language
“they are distorting the words of our prophets ‘there’s no such thing as
navajo philosophy’ the department head at the university of new mexico told me”
lights go out at 10:01 the trickster puts the lights out
on “the world of the supernatural” “we need to keep in mind repatriation
of spiritual objects from museums” “harvard’s peabody” someone clarifies
she speaks of “singing to the rattles in the peabody”
“They have not been fed we cannot move without carrying that pain
we are in it together we are in it together we are in it together
the majority of our students are not native because of genocide
I don’t buy the term postcolonial stop thinking about land as real estate”

chris jocks is mohawk from southern california now at dartmouth college
he speaks of “where the nuns carried rulers and they never measured anything”
he was afraid of them so he obeyed so he obeys
“why do we engage in translation? people’s words and lives
extrapolating meanings from texts” he goes on about “analogies of cherokee”
of “georgia” and “dumping the tailings” translations become pablum
“because you like being called an expert you want to get tenure
and get your name in the corner of a book”
“you may have heard ‘translation benefits all native people’ this is a dangerous
misleading idea we think we know because we have words
but it often hides more than it reveals—I am a goad in this”
he speaks of six native languages of medicine masks and haudino saunee
of nondefined thing/s chiefs regalia sacred objects
native religion a checklist you can work with boxes they fit into
“What we have to do is change the definition of religion”
“translation can only bring us to the threshold there are piles of interpretation”
“do ideas wear out?” what of word journeys “the great law of peace
the category of nation longhouse tradition a bundle of traditions”
he compares the aboriginal garden and eurogarden speaks of crosspollination
he quotes “a late philosopher and ideologue of the warrior society”
winding down he speaks of “polysynthetic languages including mohawk”
he speaks of “being rooted in ground”

sue kidwell speaks of “land as a source of culture” “a ‘single drop of blood’ salvation
the coming of corn skin becoming corn they must kill her and drag her body
around the field now corn grows there corn is life death when I dance I am the corn”
she speaks of the great tree saying
“the tree of ines is not something you can deconstruct”
“people become chained to radiators for speaking their language”
she speaks of “culture as a moving target a process and slang is part of it”
she quotes n scott momaday “I stand in good relationship to all things”
she speaks of the navajo having “a sense of beauty balance harmony”

we learn a bit more of jace’s biography assistant prof at columbia law school
got his phd at union theological seminary in 1996 “I get the last word” he jokes
adding “it is deadly serious business” with humour
he talks about chief peter about “white wampum and black wampum
and taking out the black beads so all the wampum might be white”
and “the malleability of indigenous people”
“the only cultures that do not change are dead ones
“stasis” that box of 19th century ideas” then changes tack
“for ines english is her 3rd language” moves on to “religiocultural cartoons”
of chris “sharing ‘big ideas’ rather than the work”
he speaks of “‘yowa’ a word so sacred at one time
only certain people could speak it”
I would be surprised if it has lost any of its sacredness
“the yohiwa rather than the yawahi which is the cherokee jehova”
then he moves to “the elder fires above” “fractured myths”
and “speaking english not being a diminution of indianness”
through “allophonia you can speak to a broader community”
this is the burgundy shirted speaker back and forth it goes
“property rights and ownership of stories” “misrepresentation of text and task”
“people from south of the rio grande” “the first ad/vent of white people
into the western hemisphere” “the shared quest for a meta/discourse”
who says its either shared or a quest? there is talk of “community activism”
alter/natively I consider “communitism activity”
“the parameters of the discourse for native american policy is law
whose departmental home is in american studies” hmm?
the politics of aboriginality of academic indianness
12:04 time moves jace briefly crosses his arms he wants to be a scholar
I can sense it a speaker of bon mots his and others
a rainforest metaphor surfaces the word “canopy” and “people below”
“if the cornstalk does not produce ears how will it feed the people”
he speaks of the 4th year of tenure track and so forth

then “taking elders prerogative” ines says “we should do like jewish people do
with their holocaust keep it in their faces” she speaks of consumerism
“one day per week or month don’t buy anything!”
then with great emotion and energy
“behind corporations most are american is a hideous genocidal agenda
how many children died creating that product” “and how about napa soaps?
the struggle in bolivian mines these are about consumerism”
“What about the reception of native american studies
by more established disciplines” jace adds
chris jocks speaks of writing a novel for a tenure committee though jace tries to hold her back ines will not be bridled “I’m an elder I can speak any time” “linguists” she says “get information from first nations people yet they don’t speak at the conference” jace is shaking his right hand to get her to stop then a reference is made to “will rodgers a cherokee intellectual” “hey that’s redundant” someone says bringing lots of laughter end of conference paddle paddle

swooooooooooooooooohh

Notes on Contributor

Peter Cole is a member of the In-SHUCK-ch Nation of British Columbia and is currently teaching in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. A book based on his PhD dissertation is being published by McGill/Queen’s University Press. His interests include walking, cycling, hiking, paddling, travelling, reading, and writing.