

# land and language: translating aboriginal cultures

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## **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*

*kukwstumlhkacw  
tsexox*

## **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'amitié 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 contribution 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 susenato 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 [pause] 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 waitingroom  
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 lacota 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 humour 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”  
together with alan kilpatrick and anna and rick chevallos  
we speak of latinos hispanics chicanos wetbacks and self-definition  
suddenly monique is on stage again this time in a bearclaw dress  
she speaks of fleshcoloured band aids white sugar white flour alcohol  
postcolonial stress disorder ethno-stress “talking back to walt disney movies is okay”  
then she falls down growls on all fours “I’m still in recovery from discovery”  
she acknowledges the work of nick deleary and floyd favel starr  
moves on to “native theatre guerilla theatre native performance structure  
decolonizing theatre the chiapas massacre working toward a memorial  
60 million of our relations gone in the first 100 years following contact  
what are the consequences of not creating art out of these atrocities”  
standing in the rain forest december 22nd chiapas murder  
then speaks of the strong women’s song “this is for kingston p4w”  
a good talk last night about this and who has permission to tell stories  
whose story the kingston riots and so on into the am

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 muskoguee from oklahoma

phil deloria james riding in arizona ofelia u arizona poet linguist  
who works with sun tracks alan kilpatrick ucal sandiego  
who translates 19th century cherokee texts  
george charles upiq from alaska ucal santa barbara

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//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 overlancers 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 appalled 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

wherever that might be  
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 indigenouslyness  
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  
o keo 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 ssshht  
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 t ribal 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 sanatorium 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 *à 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 i/mage 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 piquat 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 mooses’ 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 pabulum  
“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 haudinosaunee  
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 activy”

“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 lines 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

swooooooooosssssssshh

### 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.