

# **Native American Autobiography: Connecting Separate Critical Conversations**

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Over the last forty years, three groups of scholars—scholars of Native American autobiography, autobiography theorists, and Indigenous theorists—have been holding three similar yet separate critical conversations.<sup>1</sup> The many intersections of interest within these three conversations notwithstanding, each group of scholars seems largely unaware of the work by the others. I contend that each group could benefit from knowledge of this work. In particular, scholarship on Native American autobiography would benefit from the concepts and vocabulary of autobiography theory, and both of these fields would benefit from the introduction of Indigenous theory. In this essay I trace one point of discussion—on the composition of Native American identity—to illustrate how diminished the conversations of the first two groups are without the presence of Indigenous perspectives.

My work on Canadian Indigenous autobiography has been informed by all three of these groups, not the least the recent burgeoning of the field of Indigenous literary nationalism combined with my position as a Cree-Métis literary critic. I began my inquiry by reading seminal texts by scholars of Native American autobiography whose work emerged over the past three decades in the United States.<sup>2</sup> While recognizable names in this field include Lynne Woods O'Brien (1973), David Brumble III (1981), Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen Sands (1984), and Hertha Dawn Wong (1992), probably the most eminent scholar in this field is Arnold Krupat, a prolific writer

of over a dozen titles whose monograph, *For Those Who Come After* (1985), is considered a classic.<sup>3</sup> My contention that Native authors write autobiographically as a continuation of varying Indigenous intellectual traditions challenges Krupat's key premise that "unlike traditional Native literature, the Indian autobiography has no prior model in the collective practice of tribal cultures" (1985, 31). Krupat defines *Indian autobiographies* as those written with a white collaborator—in his terminology, "composite compositions"—as opposed to *autobiographies by [literate] Indians* that "contain, inevitably, a bicultural element, yet are not compositely produced" (31, emphasis mine). Still, he argues that both are of bicultural composition and thus not traditional forms, but rather a consequence of contact with whites because "there simply were no Native American texts until whites decided to collaborate with Indians and make them" (5). While I appreciate Krupat's distinction between collaborative and single author autobiographies, I dispute that both are "bicultural" in the same way that I would disagree with the suggestion that novels by Native American writers like Thomas King, Tomson Highway, or Louise Erdrich are *bicultural compositions* simply because there were no Native American novels before contact. (In fact, novels and autobiographies, as those genres are currently understood, did not exist in 1491 either in Europe or America). Instead, we Indigenous authors have absorbed, adopted, and appropriated a myriad of styles, including European, and integrated them into our traditions in order to tell Indigenous stories. To categorize literacy and autobiography as "white" inventions while designating orality and "the communal self" as "Indian" only obscures the multiple and complex influences that have shaped the genre of Native American autobiography, including the influence of Indigenous intellectual traditions that continue to exist up to the present day.

I am also influenced by members of the second group, autobiography theorists, whose field has developed over the same stretch of time as the first group. A year before Lynne Woods O'Brien's *Plains Indian Autobiographies* was released in 1973, James Olney published *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (1972), noting in his acknowledgments how few studied this area: "there are no colleagues that it seems necessary to name either for thanks or for exculpation from responsibility for what I have written" (xiii). While Georges Gusdorf's 1956 essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" is often credited as a seminal work in autobiography theory, it was not until Olney translated it from French to English and published it in his 1980 collection, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, that it became widely accessible to English-speaking scholars.

Gusdorf posits autobiography as a uniquely Western genre that only becomes possible when humanity has “emerged from the mythic framework of traditional teachings and . . . entered into the perilous domain of history” (Olney 1980, 30). The resultant autonomous individual is not only a “gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires, inventor of laws or of wisdom,” but “he alone adds consciousness to nature, leaving there the sign of his presence” (Olney, 1980, 31); he alone is imbued with a consciousness of self that makes it possible to write self-reflectively. Gusdorf’s rhetoric is obviously invested in a narrative of progress in which humanity evolves from primitive to civilized, from myth and tradition to history and consciousness, a schema that has been soundly critiqued by Indigenous scholars as a rationale for imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

While there are obvious points of intersection—Krupat’s definition of autobiography seems premised on Gusdorf’s model of the self, for example—there is curiously little overlap of the interests of the first group with those of the second. With the exception of Wong, few scholars of Native American autobiography enter discussions about or use the language of autobiography theory. However, even though autobiography theorists—from feminist scholars in the 1980s like Mary Mason and Caren Kaplan to Paul John Eakin in 1999—have critiqued and abandoned Gusdorf’s model, scholars of Native American autobiography continue to hold keenly to it. While I do not fit easily within either group, in my work here and elsewhere I draw upon the insights of autobiography theorists, relying especially on the work of Eakin, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson to critique the work of scholars of Native American autobiography.

The third group, which provides a critical lens through which to examine the works of the first two, is composed of Indigenous academics. As a Métis scholar I am one of a growing number of Canadian Indigenous literary critics. However, because Canadian Aboriginal literary studies focuses on many approaches and many genres and is influenced by the larger population in the United States, our group’s topics of interest expand to include those generated south of us, within Native American Studies. Given the traditional exclusion of Indigenous people from academia on both sides of the border, which explains why there are so few of us in the first two groups of scholars, it is not surprising that this third group has very different intellectual interests from those of the first two. Our long-standing goals include the integration of Indigenous content into the university and school curricula and the appointment of Native faculty and extend beyond the typical concerns of literary studies to encompass issues of intellectual

sovereignty, that is, research protocols, control over data produced about our communities, language revitalization, and community connections.

Recently, several noted Native American theorists have found fault with Indigenous literary studies in Canada and the United States for its lack of relevance to the political goals of Aboriginal people. In a 2004 article, Devon Mihesuah reports on a decision she made shortly after becoming editor of *American Indian Quarterly* in 1998: because she “became worried that American Indian literary criticism threatened to take over the whole of Indigenous studies” (97) she decided to no longer accept articles on popular works of Native fiction. That the editor of such an influential journal could mark her discussion with extremely dismissive remarks—literary critics are “lit critters” determined to ignore activist writers (Mihesuah, 204, 99)—reveals the growing suspicion that Indigenous literary studies is so pervasive and politically irrelevant that it undermines the rightful work of Native American Studies to support the sovereignty of Indigenous nations. Similarly, in *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (2005) Cherokee scholar Robert Warrior critiques “the full-scale ascendancy of the novel as the focus of modern scholarship” explaining that “scholarly attention to the novel . . . has told us more about the preoccupations of literary studies than about the history of the critical contributions of Native writers” (xix, xx).

Warrior asserts that nonfiction—his definition includes autobiography—is “the oldest and most robust type of modern writing that Native people in North America have produced as they have sought literate means by which to engage themselves and others in a discourse on the possibilities of a Native future” (2005, xx). These texts, he insists, are part of our Indigenous intellectual heritage and easily align with political engagement. Building on Warrior’s points, I contend that Indigenous autobiographies are not examples of a European literary genre that has mutated to adapt to the life stories of Indigenous authors but, rather, that they are examples of vibrant, innovative Indigenous intellectual production.

In order to illustrate just how different the critical conversations among the three groups are, it is helpful to review ideas proposed by each on the topic of Indigenous concepts of the self, which is always described by scholars in the first two groups in comparison with the concept of self as understood in Western society. In *For Those Who Come After* (1985) Krupat begins with a description of autobiography, arguing that the genre

is marked by egocentric individualism, historicism, and writing . . . all present in European and Euroamerican culture after the revolu-

tionary last quarter of the eighteenth century. But none has ever characterized the native cultures of the present-day United States (29).

While my aim is not to argue that Native American cultures have been defined by “individualism, historicism, and writing,” it is difficult to reconcile Krupat’s argument here with the fact that some of the first Indigenous writers in Native North America—Samuel Occum (1768), William Apes (1829), and George Copway (1847)—wrote autobiographically, all with some measure of interest in individual experience and a sense of history. While some authors like H. David Brumble III categorize these texts as “pious accounts of their conversion to Christianity,”<sup>5</sup> Indigenous literary nationalists interpret the autobiographies as examples of “intellectual history” (Brumble 1988, 147; Warrior 2005, xxiii).<sup>6</sup>

In 1991 Krupat contrasted Western and Native American ideas of the self in his essay, “Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self,” first published in *American Autobiography*, edited by the distinguished autobiography theorist Paul John Eakin, and then republished a year later in *Ethnocriticism* (1992), albeit with a few variations. Krupat writes that

[the Native American] self would seem to be less attracted to introspection, integration, expansion, or fulfillment than the Western self appears to be. It would seem relatively uninterested in such things as the “I-am-Me” experience, and a sense of uniqueness or individuality. More positively, one might perhaps instantiate an “I-am-We” experience as descriptive of the Native sense of self, where such a phrase indicates that I understand myself as a self only in relation to the coherent and bounded whole of which I am a part. (1991, 174)

Drawing on rhetorical categories, Krupat suggests that Western autobiography “has been essentially metonymic in orientation” while “Native American autobiography has been and continues to be synecdochic” (178). A sophisticated understanding of metonymy or synecdoche is not necessary to understand Krupat’s basic point: modern Western autobiography is “strongly marked by the individual’s sense of herself predominantly as different and separate from other distinct individuals,” a relationship he calls “part-to-part” or metonymic; Native American autobiography is a “narration of personal history . . . more nearly marked by the individual’s sense of himself in relation to collective social groupings,” a part-to-whole relationship that he labels synecdochic (176). Krupat applies this model to autobi-

ographies as early as William Apes's *Son of the Forest* (1829), usually considered the first book written in the United States by a Native American, to contemporary works by Laguna-Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko (1981) and Anishinaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor (1987), all of which, he contends, demonstrate a synecdochic presentation of self.<sup>7</sup>

In his discussion of Apes, Silko, and Vizenor, Krupat is not arguing that the first influenced the others, that when Pequot politician and Methodist preacher William Apes wrote his spiritual confession, he began a literary tradition on which Silko and Vizenor modeled their works. Krupat barely credits Apes with any innovation whatsoever; even when Apes was provided a Western education he “engaged in a very particular form of synecdochic self-definition . . . in *typical Native American fashion*, hardly self-conscious at all” (1991, 185 emphasis mine). Given that Silko and Vizenor both are artists and intellectuals, one could easily account for their autobiographical styles by supposing that they are intentionally participating in a particular aesthetic or struggling with audience expectation. Yet Krupat does not consider these or any other reasons for Silko’s and Vizenor’s autobiographical style, confident that they, like Apes, use synecdoche to represent themselves, “like most Indians traditionally” (229), the implication being that because Silko and Vizenor are Native American, they can only imagine themselves as “I-am-we.” Indeed, this implication exists within Krupat’s descriptors. When describing Silko’s *Storyteller* (1981) Krupat notes that it “conceives of individual identity only in functional relation to the tribe” (1991, 185); as for Silko, she is a storyteller and “*she is what she does* to sustain her community” (185, emphasis mine).

Krupat would benefit from one of the basic insights on which autobiography theory is based, which is the distinction between the text and the lived life. While theorists disagree on just how referential an autobiographical text can be, it is widely agreed that the “I” of the text is a creation and an entity separate from the author, rather than a transparent portal to “reality.” Autobiographies, after all, are not unmediated reflections of their authors’ consciousnesses, but rather, intentional creative works.

Krupat does allow for an occasional exception to his rules and he includes the proviso at the end of this essay that Native American writer N. Scott Momaday could use metonymic strategies and non-Native writer Emma Goldman could use synecdochic ones, but he refuses the notion that this might invalidate his argument. Rather than provide an explanation for these exceptions, he seems to argue that they prove the rule. His conclusion is that “[s]o far as one may generalize, however, it does seem to be the case

that Native American autobiography is marked by the figure of synecdoche in its presentation of the self” (Krupat 1992, 231). A few years later, in an interview with A. Robert Lee in *Postindian Conversations* (1999), Vizenor comments on this when he responds directly to Krupat’s notion of synecdoche by stating that “natives are not as communal as [Krupat] might want them to be in theory” (62).

Krupat creates an overly strict and limiting dichotomy in defining the writing of one group as that which possesses certain characteristics and the writing of another as that which possesses the opposite. I would argue in response that any claims that one group of people lives, acts, or writes in one way as a product of their identity while another lives, acts, or writes in another way as a product of its identity is essentializing, prescriptive, and reductive. Moreover, while it is true that different epistemologies will provide different ways of seeing the world, I would not claim that these differences result in identical modes of expression in works of one group and the opposite modes in all works by members of another group.

Significantly, in the 1990s, a discussion similar to that taking place among scholars of Native American autobiography was occurring among autobiography theorists, not about the differences between Native and Western subjectivity but rather about the construction of the self in men versus women. In 1994 at an academic conference on autobiography, Paul John Eakin presented a paper that had much to say about the generalizations that scholars have made about the differences between men’s and women’s autobiography.<sup>8</sup> Eakin celebrated the contributions of feminist scholars who argued that the Gusdorf model of selfhood “did not fit the contours of women’s lives” (1998, 65–66) and thereby ushered in an era of scholarly attention to women’s autobiography that had to that point been neglected. He notes, however, that one of the unfortunate consequences of that attention is that a set of male–female binaries was established:

The three most prominent of these male–female binaries are these: the individual as opposed to the collective, the autonomous as opposed to the relational, and, in a different register, narrative as opposed to non-linear, discontinuous, nonteleological forms. (1998, 66)

Eakin’s critique of male–female binaries was part of a larger argument. He critiqued both the assumption that the autonomous, self-determined individual—literally the self-made man—was the intended subject of the

autobiographical genre as well as the early feminist responses that proposed that women were not self-generated and self-reliant but rather constituted differently, in relation to their families and communities; instead, Eakin argued that no one is autonomous and “all identify is relational” (64), “[a]ll selfhood . . . is relational despite differences that fall out along gender lines” (67).

Curiously, given the fact that both scholars, while in separate fields, knew and had worked together, at the very same time Eakin is critiquing and dismantling these binaries, Krupat relies upon almost identical ones to understand Indigenous autobiography. In “Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self” (1992), rather than the male-versus-female oppositions Eakin thinks unhelpful, Krupat’s opposes Western and Native American categories: the Western individual is opposed to the Native American collective, and the Western autonomous self is opposed to the Native American relational self, the Western or linear (and literate) autobiography is opposed to the Native American text, influenced by both the oral and the performative.

For example, in Krupat’s discussion of Apes we find the notion of the individual in juxtaposition to the collective: he writes that Apes is “like most Indians traditionally . . . usually more interested in their integration within a principled community rather than in their unique or ‘sacred’ individuality [as is standard in Western autobiography]” (1992, 229). Krupat defines “the metonymic sense of the specific uniqueness of otherwise comparable individuals” as a marker of Western autobiography and “the synecdochic sense of personal representation of a collective identity” as a marker of the Native American version (213).

These binaries are implicit in and fundamental to Krupat’s rhetorical categories. He writes,

Where personal accounts are strongly marked by the individual’s sense of herself predominantly as **different and separate** from other distinct individuals, one might speak of a *metonymic* sense of self. Where any narration of personal history is more nearly marked by the individual’s sense of himself **in relation** to collective social units or groupings, one might speak of a *synecdochic* sense of self. . . . (1992, 212, emphasis in bold mine)

It is not just that the construct of the Western self is individualistic but also that it is autonomous, imagined as “**different and separate**”; the Native



American self, according to Krupat, imagines itself as a member of a collective and therefore imagined as “**in relation**” to the larger group.

Just as the early feminists that Eakin critiqued had deduced that women, constructed in relation to others, therefore wrote differently from men, Krupat also proposed that the Native American self, in opposition to the Western model, is different at the textual level. Krupat built on the work of anthropologist Stephen Tyler, who speculated on what he calls the preference of the “Standard Average European” “for seeing as a way of knowing and for writing as a way of conveying what is known . . . [compared to the] non-Western preference for doing and speaking” proposing “a distinction between metonymy and synecdoche” (Krupat 1992, 215). Convinced by Tyler, Krupat concluded that the Native American “preference for synecdochic models of the self” is related to the “oral techniques of information transmission typical of Native American cultures,” giving the *coup* story and the telling of mystical visions as examples (216). He explained that

this manner of communicating the personal orally, dramatically, performatively, in public, to the extent that they inform any written text of an Indian is very clearly more likely to privilege the synecdochic relation of part-to-whole than the metonymic relation of part-to-part. Speech always assumes a present listener as opposed to writing, where the audience is absent to the author, the author absent to the audience. (217)

Autobiography theorists question Krupat’s notion that autobiographers have no audience since key to the autobiographical act—and Philippe Lejeune’s “Autobiographical Pact” for that matter—is the presence of the reader, the audience whether physically present or absent, also called the addressee.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Indigenous theorists are suspicious of a model that identifies the Euro-Western subject by his or her “seeing and writing” but relegates the Native American subject to “doing and speaking.” Cherokee scholar Christopher B. Teuton, in *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature*, notes that “[h]istorically, the study of Native America has been shaped by ideologically loaded binaries that privilege the West and denigrate the Indigenous Other” (2010, 8). Despite the fact that “Native American societies never defined themselves as oral cultures . . . definitions of oral and written discourses intimately linked to social evolutionary

thought are entrenched and veiled within the study of Native America” (Teuton 2010, 9). Teuton joins a host of Indigenous literary nationalists—Craig S. Womack, Jace Weaver, Robert Warrior, to name a few—who insist that there is a long history of Indigenous literary production that are examples of intellectual history and cultural heritage, relevant to contemporary Native identity and community.

Indigenous literary nationalism opposes the notion, implied in Krupat’s model of the synecdochic autobiography, that writing is foreign to Native American people rather than a mode of expression that is an extension of orature and with a large archive worthy of study. Craig S. Womack, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), contends that

[t]o legitimize a space for national critical studies and native intellectual history, scholars of Native literature need to break down the oppositional thinking that separates orality and literacy wherein the oral constitutes authentic culture and written contaminated culture. The . . . Mayan codices, written in Mayan pictoglyphic symbols before contact, and in Mayan in the Latin alphabet afterward, are a fascinating study in these regards because recent scholarship has shown that these books were used as a *complement* of oral tradition rather than a *replacement*. The books were recited and even read in precontact schools to educate the young in the oral tradition. (15–16)

Womack would disagree with Stephen Tyler’s—and by extension—Krupat’s separation and allocation of the activities of “seeing and writing” to Europe and “doing and speaking” to Native America.

The assumptions that are evident in Krupat’s essay in the early 1990s, that assigns literature to Europe and orature to Native America, continue. Teuton explains:

No two terms are more central to Native American literary studies than *orality* and *writing*. The idea that pre-contact Indigenous cultures were nonliterate peoples who passed on knowledge almost exclusively through oral storytelling traditions provides the standard cultural context for studying the contemporary literate texts Native American writers produce. (2010, 8)

These assumptions are difficult to dislodge. For example, Paul John Eakin, so quick to identify the problems with a dichotomy based on gender, does

not recognize that Krupat proposes a dichotomy based on ethnicity that raises similar problems. In the same 1999 chapter on relational lives, Eakin thanks Krupat: “I am indebted to Krupat for sensitizing me to the richness of Native American autobiographical expression” and footnotes him, suggesting that readers desiring “further discussion of Native American models of identity and identity narrative [should] see Krupat, ‘Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self’” (Eakin 1999, 73n). It is remarkable that Eakin is not able to see binaries in Krupat’s work parallel to those that he has critiqued in a different context; this is particularly so because in the footnotes in both versions of Krupat’s essay—both the version in Eakin’s edited collection in 1991 and in Krupat’s *Ethnocriticism* in 1992, Krupat writes,

It remains to add what recent feminist criticism has solidly established: that orality (speech, the voice, and the *mother* tongue) and textuality (writing and the *father’s* pen (is)) are, indeed, perceived as gender related in the West, where men tend toward metonymic presentations of the self, and women—in this like Indians and traditional peoples generally—tend toward synecdochic presentations of self. (Eakin 1991, 189n18; Krupat 1992, 217n18)

It is difficult to determine why Eakin does not question Krupat’s model but Eakin is not alone. Krupat’s ideas on the synecdochic nature of Native American autobiography have convinced and influenced many other autobiography theorists, including Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who in *Reading Autobiography* (2001) credit “both Krupat’s and Hertha D. Sweet Wong’s theorizing about the synecdochal character of collaborative life stories [as] informative for reading the differences of Native American writing” (151). Also, in “Giving Voice, Autobiographical/ Testimonial Literature by First Nations Women of British Columbia,” (2000), Laura J. Beard grounds her argument with the citation that “Krupat similarly argues that Native American autobiography is a contradiction in terms”(66); Beard again references Krupat when she states that “the concept is contradictory because the autobiographical project is usually marked by ‘egocentric individualism, historicism, and writing,’ none of which have ‘ever characterized the native cultures of the present-day United States’” (66). She differentiates between conventional autobiography in which the individual is unique, and *testimonio*, where “the self is defined not in individual terms but in collective terms, as part of a collective struggle and a communal identity” (65) to argue

that the testimonio allows the Indigenous person a voice to speak for her people. She quotes, as I have, Krupat's argument that there "were no Native American texts until whites decided to collaborate with Indians and make them" (quoted in Beard 2000, 66), and compares the influence of white collaborators with those involved in helping Indigenous writers like Rigoberta Menchú produce testimonial literature.<sup>10</sup>

The problem with Beard's (2000) subsequent discussion of Shirley Sterling's *My Name is Seepetza* and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* as testimonio is the narrow category her reliance on that genre produces in her examination of two very different works by two very different authors. Sterling wrote her novel as a mature student in a university creative writing class while completing a doctoral program; in comparison, Maracle was only eighteen but politically experienced when she dictated her life story to the editor of a socialist publishing house with the full intention of completing a second installment in the future. Beard ignores differences between the two works in genre, mode of production, extent of tribal or cultural influence, historical context, and literary qualities.

Beard's reliance on Krupat's logic—that literacy and autobiography are evidence of European (or "white") influences and exist in opposition to the influences of orality in Indigenous writings about the self—results in weak readings of Sterling and Maracle. For example, Beard associates "the often colloquial tone" of *My Name is Seepetza* with "Native orature" (2000, 73) despite the fact that the book's narrator Seepetza is only twelve years old, a much more plausible explanation for a colloquial tone. Sterling drew on the conventions of the epistolary novel when she made the decision to not write a straightforward account of her experiences at Residential School<sup>11</sup> but rather blend them with those of her cousins and friends.<sup>12</sup> Her use of a child-like narrative voice is not an inevitable result of her being a Native American and her work thus unconsciously reflecting traditions of "Native orature," but a considered choice that Sterling made as a writer.

At the conclusion of the novel, Seepetza decides to ask her grandmother to encase her diary in beadwork, which Beard interprets as a symbol of the hybrid nature of Indigenous women's autobiography that draws "on the written tradition of Euroamerican autobiography and on the traditions of Native orature" (2000, 73). This equation of literacy would seem to presume that all Europeans have always been able to read and write, ignoring the low literacy levels of the European working class only one hundred years ago.<sup>13</sup> The equation of orality with Native North Americans also ignores European oral traditions from early epic to folk tales told today. Such

reasoning sees the Native author as inevitably hybrid because she is drawing on a “foreign” practice of writing that will immediately destabilize her cultural identity as mediated in the text in a way that only invocations of orality can anchor.

Beard also suggests that Maracle relies on Native oral traditions in ending her autobiography as she does:

*Bobbie Lee: Indian Rebel* ends abruptly, with no closure to the original manuscript. Bobbi Lee’s life story is presented not as one that has achieved full significance but rather one that is still seeking significance and meaning. A Western desire for an ending, or at least the sense of an ending, is frustrated. (2000, 78)

There is a much simpler explanation for the ending of the book: Maracle’s Native identity or aesthetic is not needed to explain why her story is not modeled on the typical trajectory of someone whose life has achieved “full significance.” Maracle was only eighteen years old when she dictated her life story; she had every intention of producing another installment at a later date. The final words of the 1975 edition promise that

The second volume of this story, *Bobbi Lee: Indian Revolutionary* [sic], deals with Bobbi’s intense political development and growth between 1970 and 1975. Volume 2 will be available in Spring of 1976. (119)

Lee Maracle’s book was published by LSM Press (Liberation Support Movement Press), which was organized as a socialist collective. When the editor of the Press, Don Barnett, died on April 25, 1975, the collective’s activities ceased and Volume 2 was never released (Cardinal 2005, 145). Far from being evidence of Native orature, the “abrupt ending” is a generic marker of the ending of the first part of a serial political tract, with the second part to follow.

It should be noted that Beard’s recent monograph, *Acts of Narrative Resistance: Women’s Autobiographical Writings in the Americas* (2009), no longer reflects the influence of Krupat with its focus on the influences of orality in Maracle’s and Sterling’s work; instead, Beard considers their autobiographies as political discourse. But she is not the only scholar in the past decade to draw on Krupat’s early work. In 2002, Renée Hulan cites Krupat in discussing “perhaps the best-known Inuit autobiography,” Minnie Freeman’s 1978 *Life Among the Qallunaat* (Hulan 2002, 86). Hulan argues that in this autobiography “the self represented is not without individuality,

but is identified with the rest of the community. This is the ‘part-to-whole’ relationship that Krupat has called the ‘synecdochic self’ . . .” (86). As support for her claim, Hulan writes,

Throughout her autobiography, Freeman demonstrates her connection to the community by documenting experiences bearing on political issues, such as the racial prejudices expressed by a teacher who refers to students as “you natives” (Freeman, 195), or the stereotype contained in the white vision of Inuit as “smiling happy people” (Freeman, 194). (86–87)

Curiously, neither instance exemplifies Freeman’s identification with the community but, rather, both display non-Inuit or qallunaat perspectives—of the white teacher’s and the Other embodied in the stereotype—identifying her as inseparable from the collective. Hulan then describes Freeman’s discussion of two instances when she was used in advertising: the first in a commercial for ginger ale and the second in a photograph for an article with the caption “Eskimos buying bonds, keeping up with progress.” In both experiences Hulan describes Freeman reporting feeling uneasy, particularly because she thinks, in Hulan’s words, that she “was being used to show the qallunaat in the South how well the Inuit are treated in the North” (87). Hulan concludes that “[i]n such passages, Freeman speaks of her own experiences while placing them in the collective context” (87). The irony is that Freeman is objecting to manipulative portrayals of herself as representative of her community, while Hulan repeatedly interprets Freeman’s descriptions of self as just that.

This supposedly logical belief that an autobiography by a Native American is essentially different from what is simply termed “autobiography” (the descriptor “Western” is usually not deemed necessary in European and American scholarly discourse) is commonly stated and restated. In 1987, and then again in a new edition in 2005, Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat released *I Tell You Now*, an anthology of autobiographical essays by contemporary Native American writers like Simon Ortiz, Linda Hogan and Joy Harjo. In their 1987 introduction, Swann and Krupat wrote,

That form of writing generally known to the West as *autobiography* had no equivalent among the oral cultures of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. Although the tribes, like people the world over, kept material as well as mental records of collective and personal experience,

the notion of telling the whole of any one individual's life or taking merely personal experience as of particular significance was, in the most literal way, foreign to them, if not also repugnant.<sup>14</sup> (ix)

In the 2005 version, they modify this introduction a little, changing "That form of writing" to "the broad genre of writing," "tribes" to "tribal nations" and omitting the final six words ending with "repugnant" (2005, ix). Even so, Swann and Krupat still reference the "large and interesting group of autobiographies by Indian people," specifically the "more than six hundred titles in David Brumble's *Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies* (1981), before asserting that some Native Americans do not like to write autobiography. Swann and Krupat's language is toned down from 1987, when they stated that "some Native Americans, as we shall have occasion to note, still have hostile or ambivalent feelings toward the autobiographical form of writing" (ix); in 2005 Swann and Krupat only note that "even today [some Native Americans] have a certain wariness" (ix). In neither version do the editors remark on the irony that they are writing this in an introduction to an anthology full of autobiographical essays by Native Americans.

In the 1987 version of the introduction, Swann and Krupat provide four examples of writers who were reluctant to write autobiography: one is a female poet who tells them that "blithering on about your own life and thoughts is very bad form for Indians . . . I have heard Indian critics say, referring to poetry, that it is best if there are no 'I's' in it" (xii). The second is from a poet who was cautioned by a member of her tribe not to contribute and finally concluded that she would not, as she valued "the traditional sense of Indian peoples" in which the individual acted not "as personal self but, rather . . . as transmitter of the traditional culture" (xii). A third female poet initially "rejected the idea of what she called 'speaking your own stories'" but eventually contributed (1987, xii). Finally, "[w]hile at least one of the male poets acknowledged great difficulty with the form, writing autobiographically seemed more difficult for the Native American *women* than for the Native American *men*" (xii).

Swann and Krupat offer no analysis of these self-reports—a typical practice in autobiography theory—but rather accept them at face value as support for the truth of their claims. Even though the first example refers to critical discussions of poetry, and the second to problems of representation, Swann and Krupat offer no theories about the potential influence of an emerging literary sensibility among Native poets. Even though there might be numerous reasons why a

member of one's tribe or nation or family might caution one to not write a life-story, from cultural protocols that forbid the sharing of ceremonial knowledge to the shielding of family secrets, Swann and Krupat do not consider this. As for the third and fourth examples, Swann and Krupat accept the statements as though these are undeniably reliable representatives of all the feelings of members of Indian nations across America. Taken together, the four are enough of a sample for Swann and Krupat to suggest that the responses to the topic of writing autobiographically might be gendered and that such writing might be more difficult for Indian women than Indian men, or at least "might be worth some further study" (1987, xii). If three out of the four writers still managed to contribute to the anthology despite their hostility and ambivalence, presumably the autobiographical form is not so foreign and repugnant to them, and the writers not so hostile and ambivalent as Swann and Krupat maintain.

Notably, while the word *foreign* remains in the 2005 introduction, *hostility* and *ambivalence* were replaced with *wariness*, and "repugnant" was removed. Swann and Krupat's suggestion that the aversion to writing autobiography is stronger in women than in men has been deleted altogether in the new edition although the effect of their words can be traced through past scholarship.

For example, the contention that Native Americans find writing autobiography "foreign" if not "repugnant" has been so repeated that it has become an evident truth. For example, in "Constructing 'The Navajo': Visual and Literary Representation from Inside and Out" published in a spring 2000 edition of the *Wicazo Sa Review*, author Sam Pack quotes Swann and Krupat exactly to argue that the writing of autobiography was for Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, "in the most literal way, foreign to them, if not also repugnant" (146). The influence of Swann and Krupat's assertions can also be seen in Alicia Kent's use of their examples in "Native American Feminist Criticism in the Contact Zone" (1997): "[Swann and Krupat's] findings highlight two important points: first, autobiographical expression by American Indian women is somewhat different than by Indian men; second, this difference needs to be theorized" (102). Earlier in the article, Kent asserts without evidence that "autobiography as an expression of the individual self remains an alien (and alienating) endeavor for many American Indians, particularly women" (101). In addition, she seems to be unaware of the irony in using a quotation from Wilma Mankiller's autobiography as her article's epigraph. Mankiller writes, "The voices of our grandmothers are silenced by most of the written history of our people. How I long to hear their voices!" (quoted in Kent 1997, 100). Rather than supporting Kent's assertion that Indigenous women find autobi-



ography alienating, the quotation suggests that the academic disciplines that produce history about our people do not reflect us. Not only is Kent quoting a woman's autobiography in an essay arguing that Indian women find it difficult to write autobiographically, but she is also participating in the same silencing that Mankiller denounces by producing another version of history more concerned with the agenda of the scholar than with the experiences of Indigenous women.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, Krupat's contention that the Native American autobiography is essentially different from the Western model continues to have currency. In a 2007 article in *Studies in American Literature*, "More Than One Way to Tell a Story: Rethinking the Place of Genre in the Native American Autobiography and the Personal Essay," Tyra Twomey writes that

Native American autobiography is a problematic genre for historians and literary scholars alike for a number of reasons . . . [One] is the cultural specificity of the Western understanding of "autobiography," arguably a wholly foreign concept to the traditions of story-making characteristics of Native groups. The differences between Native autobiographies and their Western counterparts raise an array of problematic questions, not only about the conventions of autobiography as a literary genre, but also about the notions of self-hood and identity that characterize the people who write autobiographies. A case has been repeatedly made by literary scholars for the inability of Native American writers to conceive of themselves independently of their notions of tribal identity, for example. (22)

Even though Twomey is invested, like Krupat before her, in identifying the essential difference between Native American texts (and, by extension, Indigenous subjectivity) with those from the West, her project has merit. She argues that Native American autobiographical texts be evaluated for their "purposeful rhetorical action" rather than be faulted for their inadequacies when measured against the generic expectations of autobiography as defined in the European tradition. Twomey defines autobiography as

a Western term for a traditional Western art form, [that] carries in addition to "norms" for the telling of the Western "life story" an association with Western epistemological, ideological, and ontological preferences—such as the understandings of identity and individuality that predominate in Western culture. (46)

It is clear, on this point, however, that Twomey is not influenced by the discussions of genre in autobiography theory. In an article in *Teaching Life Writing Texts*, also appearing in 2007, Thomas R. Smith outlines the flexibility and indeed the slipperiness of contemporary definitions of autobiography:

Teaching a broad range of autobiographies written across centuries by people in disparate cultures encourages the interrogation of genre as a theoretical construct, for, even if autobiographies are chosen to illustrate the genre, the result will hardly be more specific than “writings with a varying degree of focus on the author’s life.” (34)

The benefit to Twomey, should she utilize the tools of autobiography theory, is that she would still be able to interrogate literary and rhetorical notions of genre as well as examine understudied Indigenous texts; however, she would no longer need to support the case “for the inability of Native American writers to conceive of themselves independently of their notions of tribal identity” (22). Although I argue against Krupat’s idea of the difference between the identity construction of an Indigenous person and that of a Euro-North American, I am not maintaining that their perspectives are necessarily identical. Instead I find the entire project spurious. To my mind, it is far more important to read autobiographies by Indigenous writers for content and context, as intellectual contributions to the community. The questions routinely raised by autobiography theorists, about factors influencing the production of autobiographies such as audience, elicitation, and collaboration, should be used as tools to investigate these texts seriously rather than to perpetuate a reductive game whose object is to prove that any Indigenous author is necessarily different from the white standard.

It is not surprising that in 1999 Paul John Eakin was not able to identify binaries in Krupat’s thinking similar to those that he himself had critiqued in a different context. Eakin follows standard academic practice to rely upon the expertise of a key figure in another area of scholarship, and my earlier demonstration of the echoes of Krupat’s ideas in the recent scholarship of Native American autobiography suggests that they are highly influential. What might have alerted Eakin by 1999 to Krupat’s use of the similar binaries to the ones he had suggested, and that they had outlived their usefulness, is a critique made in 1993 by an Indigenous theorist. Eakin’s apparently not being aware of it illustrates why academic discussions would benefit from Indigenous perspectives.

In *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to Native American Texts*, Pomo-Coast Miwok scholar Greg Sarris critiqued Arnold Krupat, among other non-Native experts on Native autobiography. Sarris occupied a unique position from which to comment, as he was an academic as well as a member of the Pomo community and had grown up listening to cautions from his Pomo elders about the dangers of researchers, since he, his elders and mentors, and Pomo culture in general, have been the subject of numerous anthropological studies.<sup>16</sup> Sarris recalls,

“Don’t talk much with outside people,” Nettie and Eleanor admonished. “Careful what you tell.” When the professors visited each summer, Nettie became silent. Eleanor gave short, flat answers and told stories no one in the house had ever heard. (1993, 82)

Sarris understood that Indigenous perspectives are valuable in order to understand Indigenous cultural material, and that, often, these perspectives are ignored by or are inaccessible to non-Indigenous scholars.

It is clear from the beginning of his work that Sarris’s Native American identity does not come with a static, fixed list of attributes that dictates his behavior or excludes him from membership in any other community. In fact, his scholarly prose mimics this shifting subject position by integrating autobiographical detail in a method he considers to be cross-cultural and generically disruptive. At the beginning of his text, before he talks about literary theory or his childhood in foster care, he describes the history of both the Pomo and the Coast Miwok tribes in California, their relationship with each other, and the waves of colonization that they experienced. This history helps to explain why, as a Pomo-Coast Miwok person, his mixed heritage is not unusual. But it is not his genetic material that is his strongest claim to membership in his community, nor is it his position as elected representative for his people.<sup>17</sup> It is his relationships with and knowledge learned from his mentors and elders: “Mabel McKay was one of the people who took me in, and from her I learned what is most important to me today.” (Sarris 1993, 11). I do not believe that Sarris’s work provides *the* Aboriginal perspective; in fact, although his scholarly prose is modeled on Native American storytelling, he labels his approach *holistic*. It is not his method that is specifically Indigenous, but rather his subject position. Because of his close relationships with other Pomo and Coast Miwok people, most especially with the elders, notably Mabel McKay, who recognizes him as family, Sarris is uniquely positioned to speak from *an* Indigenous perspective.

From this unique perspective, Sarris complains that in the work of non-Indigenous scholars of Native American writing, the “Indians are absent or they are strategically removed from the territory, made safe, intelligible on the colonizer’s terms” (90). It is worthwhile to consider his arguments in comparison with those by a contemporary critic, Amelia V. Katanski, a scholar in the area of Native American autobiography, who includes a chapter on boarding school era autobiography in *Learning to Write “Indian”: The Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature* (2005). Katanski, like Chadwick Allen, author of *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (2002), and Joel Pfister, author of *Individuality Incorporated* (2004), is a non-Indigenous academic studying the rhetorical employment of tribal and pan-Indian identity in the fight for sovereignty by Indigenous peoples. She takes issue with the assumption that “American Indian writers are automatically and essentially transformed by contact with the English language . . . rather than actively choosing from a repertoire of options within a particular context to represent a chosen version of the self” (137).<sup>18</sup>

Katanski repeats the criticism offered by Greg Sarris on the tendency of literary scholars to ignore the agency, motivations and political contexts of Indian “informants” in collaborative autobiography: “The Indians are absent or they are strategically removed from their territory, made safe, intelligible on the colonizer’s terms” (quoted in Katanski 2005, 138). In this metaphor, Sarris is equating the scholar as colonizer and the Native American, reduced from human being to subject of study. But there are key differences between Sarris’s and Katanski’s readings of scholarship. First, while Sarris is concerned that Native American narrators be acknowledged, Katanski is concerned with texts, specifically about the generic expectations accompanying them. Sarris argues that Krupat’s ignoring his own role as interpreter of texts makes him yet another collaborator in these so-called bicultural compositions. Krupat’s Euro-American point of view (1993, 88), Sarris argues, effectively shuts out any questions about the Native American narrators. In contrast, Katanski critiques Krupat’s argument about the Indian conception of self as synecdochic and the “nearly ubiquitous critical assumption that differing senses of self require different forms of life-telling to represent them” (135).

Second, Sarris argues that Bataille and Sands invent thematic patterns in the lives of the autobiographies they study in order to reflect their own interests rather than to consider the Indian in terms of his or her history, culture and language (1993, 90). Katanski, by contrast, critiques David

Murray's (1988) idea that the writing of an autobiography might destroy a Native American's sense of traditional self: Paraphrasing Murray, Katanski writes that "using the English language, and a Western literary form, necessarily indicates the obliteration of any traditional identity" (Katanski 2005, 137). Sarris articulates the need for scholars to recognize the particular cultural contexts of Native Americans while Katanski displays a concern with the separation of identity from literary form or genre. I make these comparisons not to deny the insights of Katanski but to point out that while Sarris discusses these texts in order to acknowledge people, the Native American subjects of the autobiographical texts, Katanski is concerned simply with the text as text.

This focus on the text is in keeping with a strange contradiction in Katanski's analysis. She states that: "[i]n *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, Sarris offers a method of reading that counteracts this critical 'removal' by seeking to understand the motivations and innovations of both parties in a collaborative text" (1993, 138). She concludes that "[s]cholars of American Indian autobiography must develop a critical praxis that also tries to make present the agency of authors in autobiographies authored solely by Native writers" (139). Theoretically I have no problem with this call to action. I fully support her argument that "critics must decouple form and identity when studying American Indian autobiography" (139). Yet even though she carefully considers Sarris's work, at no point in her discussion of it does Katanski identify him as Native American or discuss his Pomo-Coast Miwok identity, nor does she gesture to his frequent reference to his own "borderline status" or his critical reading method that is deeply autobiographical in nature. It seems contradictory that Katanski wants to "make present the agency" of Native authors and yet leaves out Sarris's Native American identity, a key factor in his reading practice. The Indian that is "absent" (or "strategically removed") seems to be Sarris himself.

As for Eakin, I have no reason to believe that he has ever intentionally disregarded Sarris' work. Instead, it seems almost certain that because Indigenous literary studies has been so segregated and marginalized from scholarship on Native American autobiography and autobiography theory, that Eakin did not know of Sarris's critique.

In Indigenous circles, while Sarris's work has influenced many emerging scholars, it is not universally applauded.<sup>19</sup> In fact, in *Tribal Secrets* (1995), Robert Warrior was one of the first to insist that Indigenous scholars draw on the work of our own intellectuals and he criticized Greg Sarris as someone who does not do so. Warrior writes that

few works by American Indians reveal a nuanced relationship either to the contemporary variety or to the generational history of American Indian intellectual production. To offer again one of many examples, even a text as theoretically sophisticated and concerned with local, Native critical categories as . . . Greg Sarris's *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* . . . all but eschews references to critical writings by American Indians. Though contemporary American Indian autobiographies and novels make their way into Sarris's argument, American Indian critical work—most notably that of Vizenor, but others as well—is conspicuously absent. For example, in *Slug Woman* Sarris argues that “tradition is not fixed, but an ongoing process” and then cites someone outside of Native American discourse. (xix)

On one level, Warrior is correct. His point, that Indigenous scholars need to draw on the intellectual efforts of our people, has revolutionized Native American Studies in the past decade. But on another level, Warrior misses the fact that Sarris draws on those intellectual sources and resources he has most intimate access to, his elders, his community, and his own story, his autobiography.

Warrior's call to intellectual sovereignty was long overdue in 1995, is even more so now, and, as he suggests, is key to other forms of sovereignty. But I would suggest that he needs to reassess a question he poses at the beginning of *Tribal Secrets* (1995): “how does construing the field in the terms of intellectual history rather than literary or generic history change the critical landscape” (xiii)? I ask back to him, ought not “autobiographies and novels” be considered critical work? Native American autobiographies, especially, offer theories about the world they describe, drawing on the Indigenous perspectives of their authors and the people described in them. The interaction between Sarris's own story and the literary works that he discusses is what I call *autobiography as theoretical practice*<sup>20</sup> and is part of the intellectual history that a new generation of Indigenous scholars, including myself, draw upon.

That being said, Warrior's first monograph, *Tribal Secrets* (1995), is a call for “analysis of the ways American Indian intellectuals write about and speak to each other about the role of intellectual work in the social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual struggle for an American Indian future” (1995, xvi). The key to bringing together the three groups of scholars that I identify at the beginning of this essay, to enrich what I called a “diminished conversation,” to dispel for once and for all the incorrect presumption that writing is foreign for Indigenous people, is to take seri-

ously the many Indigenous perspectives present in the historical archive. This would mean we would need to begin our conversation, not with the classics in Native American autobiography scholarship, including the subsequent conversations in Autobiography Theory, both which have determined to this point in time the vocabulary and the discussion, but with the recent and growing body of work of Indigenous scholarship to challenge long-held assumptions about Native American autobiography.

### NOTES

1. To clarify, I use the term *Indigenous theorists* to refer to those scholars who are members of Native North American nations and draw upon the intellectual traditions of their people, as well as the concerns of the Indigenous community generally, to inform their scholarship.

2. While there are occasional articles on Indigenous autobiography in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, no monographs exist in this period. In the past five years there have been a few additions that include focus specifically (although not always exclusively) on lifewriting: *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School* (2007) by Sam McKegney; *From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Narratives* (2008) by Deena Rymhs; *Taking Back our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy, and Healing* (2009) by Jo-Ann Episkenew; *First Person Plural: Aboriginal Storytelling and the Ethics of Collaborative Authorship* (2011) by Sophie McCall.

3. For example, Linda Warley, in “Reviewing the Past and the Future” (1996), calls *For Those Who Come After* a “foundational study” (75n5); in “Imagining Self and Community in American Indian Autobiography” (2006) Kendall Johnson relies on Krupat’s categories as defined in *For Those Who Come After* to discuss the field; in *Reading Autobiography* (2001), Smith and Watson state, “In Native American life writing, Arnold Krupat, Dexter Fisher, and A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff have been path-breakers...” (151).

4. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999).

5. Brumble writes, in *American Indian Autobiography*, that “[Charles] Eastman is the first Indian author who tried self-consciously to write autobiography after the modern, Western fashion (aside from the few Indians like George Copway, Samson Occom, and William and Mary Apes who wrote pious accounts of their conversion to Christianity)” (1988, 147).

6. Jace Weaver, in *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (1997), judges the work of Occum, Apes, Copway and their many other contemporaries to be “work [that] served Native purposes . . . as [these writers] sought not only to preserve and defend their cultures but also to assert their own and their fellow Natives’ humanity” (49).

7. In a 2009 essay, “Chances of Survivance: Gerald Vizenor’s Autocritical Auto/biographies,” Elvira Pulitano considers Vizenor’s rejection of Krupat’s notion of the synecdochic self (84).

8. This paper was later published as “Relational Selves, Relational Lives: The Story of the Story,” in *True Relations: Essays on Autobiography and the Postmodern* (1998) and republished by Eakin in a modified version, and with the new subtitle, “autobiography and the myth of autonomy” in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999).

9. See Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001), 8-9, 171.

10. Yet another example of the prevalence of Krupat’s ideas is in the preface of the anthology *Western Subjects: Autobiographical Writing in the North American West* (2004). In their introduction, editors Kathleen Boardman and Gioia Woods describe a resurgent interest in Native American “as-told-to” autobiographies, borrowing from Krupat to describe them as of “bicultural composite composition” in order to highlight “the oppositional potential of collaborative Native American/white autobiography” (16). Another example of Krupat’s influence is Diane Boudreau’s discussion of Indigenous autobiography in Quebec in *Histoire de la Littérature Amérindienne au Québec: Oralité et Écriture* (1993), where she refers to Krupat (through Barbara Godard) to argue that “Essentiellement préoccupés par la survie de leur culture, les auteurs amérindiens ne peuvent se dissocier de leur nation. Les intérêts de l’être individuel comptent bien peu face aux exigences de l’être social. Alors que, dans les sociétés occidentales, l’individualisme l’emporte souvent sur la collectivité, dans les sociétés orales, le groupe conteste l’égocentrisme” (121).

11. Known as boarding schools in the United States, Residential Schools in Canada were designed by the Ministry of Indian Affairs to “kill the Indian and save the child,” by separating Status Indian children (those registered by the Canadian State as Indians with the right to live on reserve lands) from the language, culture and influence of their parents and community. On June 11, 2008, the prime minister of Canada made an official apology to Residential School survivors. For the full text see: [http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20080611/harper\\_text\\_080611/20080611/](http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20080611/harper_text_080611/20080611/)

12. In conversation with the author, March 21, 2002.

13. In *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (1979), Harvey J. Graff determines that the illiteracy rate of employees at an Ontario lumber company in the 1880s and 90s was 48%, typical for the working class (222). Central to Graff’s argument is that in the late nineteenth century, literacy becomes the leading symbol for “progress,” associated with morality, rationality, and orderliness.

14. In the 2005 edition, the final phrase “if not repugnant” was omitted.

15. This notion that Native American women do not like to speak about themselves predates the 1987 introduction by Swann and Krupat. In *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives* (1984), the oft-cited work of Gretchen Bataille and Kathleen M. Sands, they repeat that modesty is considered to be inherent in



Indian women. The authors discuss a quotation by Vine Deloria, Sr.

While it must be recognized that Deloria speaks from a specific tribal perspective and that generalizations about qualities and the character of Indian women are always speculative, it is nonetheless clear that the quality of modesty has a direct bearing on Indian women's autobiography, since it suggests that those women willing to put themselves forward in order to record or write their narratives are atypical in calling attention to themselves. It also accounts for the frequent guardedness of narrators in focusing on their own emotions and private aspects of their lives. (18)

Despite their introductory cautioning against speculation, Bataille and Sands make a sweeping generalization about the "guardedness of narrators."

16. For specific titles of these studies see the Works Cited in *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*. Examples range from S. A. Barrett's *Pomo Myths* (1933) to L. J. Bean and D. Theodoratus's "Western Pomo and Northeastern Pomo" (1978). Chapter Five of *Slug Woman* takes issue with Elizabeth Colson's *Autobiographies of Three Pomo Women* (1974).

17. The Coast Miwok are now called the Federated Indians of the Grafton Rancheria; Sarris has served at least five elected terms as chairman.

18. While she does not include discussions or the vocabulary of autobiography theory, Katanski evaluates the work to date in her field:

Much of the work of the scholars cited here [Krupat, Brumble and Wong] celebrates the continuance of American Indian literature. Through their groundbreaking studies in the field these scholars have kept Indian autobiography visible within the academy and have enabled further interpretation and theorizing of these important texts. But by presupposing an inflexible relationship between identity and form, even seminal theorists of American Indian autobiography can be trapped into approaching the texts with strictly defined ideas about what type of self can be associated with Native autobiography, and what type of self (or self-representation) excludes a "Native consciousness." (2005, 138)

19. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* was brought to my attention by Sto:lo scholar and UBC professor Jo-ann Archibald, who discusses Sarris's work in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* (2008).

20. Credit goes to the Vancouver Autobiography Theory Reading group, particularly Laurie McNeill, for coining this term. I model *autobiography as theoretical practice* in my essay, "Writing Autobiographically: A Neglected Indigenous Intellectual Tradition" in *Across Cultures/Across Borders: Canadian Aboriginal and Native American Literatures* (2010).

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