STAGING ORALITY – THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE ORAL
TRADITION OF STORYTELLING: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF PLAYS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH BY NATIVE AMERICAN
PLAYWRIGHTS AND PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English
with a Specialization in
American Literature

by
Karen Anne Malfara
Spring 2011
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the
Thesis of Karen Anne Malfara:

Staging Orality - The Metamorphosis of the Oral Tradition of Storytelling: An
Annotated Bibliography of Plays Written in English by Native American Playwrights
and Published in the United States

Joannna Brooks, Chair
Department of English and Comparative Literature

Caitlin Victoria Featherstone
Department of English and Comparative Literature

Randy Reinholz
School of Theatre, Television, and Film

April 4, 2011
Approval Date
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love and gratitude to my treasured partner, Laurie Rennie, for loving me, believing in me, putting up with me, and especially for finding endless ways to make me laugh and for laughing with me.

It is also dedicated to the memory of my father, The Man Who Brings Eagle Feathers, with deep appreciation for teaching me to read, write, and question.
It’s what’s wrong with writing –
It kills the voice.
The words written on the page
enter a burial ground.
But speaking brings them back –

-Diane Glancy War Cries
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Staging Orality – The Metamorphosis of the Oral Tradition of Storytelling: An Annotated Bibliography of Plays Written in English by Native American Playwrights and Published in the United States

by
Karen Anne Malfara

Master of Arts in English with a Specialization in American Literature
San Diego State University, 2011

Native American Theater provides a relatively new venue, in which the oral tradition of storytelling continues its evolution. Although, for the Native American community, the written play and its staged production may be relatively new forms of artistic expression, performance art itself is clearly rooted in the long-standing oral tradition. Native American Theater is a contemporary expression of an ancient art, a new iteration of the oral tradition, and a reinvention of the enemy’s stage, a stage which provides a space in which to reexamine, reimagine, and rewrite accepted histories, a stage on which to emphasize Native survival and continuance.

The contemporary Native American playwright temporarily encloses a story within the printed pages of a play, forming a cocoon of written words to shelter it, until the story is ready to re-emerge upon the stage, unfurling its wings and taking flight, reanimated, vocalized, and fully realized in a live performance. The play’s story then escapes its temporary confinement on the inked page, re-asserting its true nature, by connecting with an audience breath-to-breath, in a unique communal performance event. Actors resuscitate stories, lifting words off the static penned page and returning them to their native fluidic home in the oral tradition.

This thesis includes a bibliography, with annotation, of Native American plays as well as articles, essays, and other scholarship written about Native American plays and theater. The scope of this work is limited primarily to those works authored by persons of indigenous ancestry, written in English, and published within the federally constructed boundaries of the United States of America. Native American playwrights have transformed or reinvented the Euro-American stage. This thesis works to forefront and use the work of Native American scholars as a lens in its examination of some of these points of departure.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE .............................................................................................................................. viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some History ........................................................................................................... 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling and the Oral Tradition ........................................................................... 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysalis ................................................................................................................ 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence ............................................................................................................... 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Flight ..................................................................................................... 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation or Reinventing the Enemy’s Stage .................................................. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Decades ...................................................................................................... 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining the Future .......................................................................................... 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bibliographies ............................................................................................ 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PLAYS ............................................................................................ 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN PLAYS .............................................................. 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED ........................................................................................................ 73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

I am of mixed, predominantly European, ancestry. To my knowledge, I have no Native American blood in my lineage. I come from a family of enthusiastic travelers, and while growing up, I was often reminded that, if and when I planned to travel to a foreign country, I had a responsibility to learn something of that country’s people, culture, and language beforehand, and that while in that country, I should be curious, open-minded, and receptive to other perspectives, attitudes, and life-ways. Above all, I was always to be respectful. I was further admonished never to visit a country if I couldn’t be bothered learning about the land and its people, and when on its soil, I was to remember that I was a guest. I took those concepts to heart, realizing that although born in the United States, this is not the soil of my ancestors, and therefore I am perhaps a guest on this land I call home. Partly as a result of that epiphany, I have tried to learn more about the perspectives of this country’s indigenous inhabitants. I continue to learn, and Native American stories and plays have been a significant source of that education. They should be approached with a curious and open mind, and I attempt to write about them respectfully in this thesis.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Undertaking a thesis is no small task. Fortunately, for me, I received instruction, support, and guidance from a number of marvelous professors at San Diego State University (SDSU) during this lengthy process, and to them I am indebted. Please accept my sincere gratitude for all you have taught me. I am especially thankful to the members of my thesis committee, who have been so generous with their time, reading and commenting on the drafts of this thesis. Many, many, thanks.

First, I would like to thank my thesis chair, Joanna Brooks. I had the good fortune to take two of her classes that delved into literature authored by Native American women. It was in those classes that I was first introduced to Native American plays and was inspired to see their connection to the oral tradition of storytelling. Joanna has mentored me, guiding me to read the work of Native American scholars, to aid my understanding and appreciation of the literature. I thank her for all that she has taught me, for her insight and guidance, for all her support and encouragement, for reading multiple revisions of this thesis throughout its development and providing valuable feedback, for challenging me to do more and telling me when to stop, for asking me to consider many good questions, for suggesting I attend the Native American Literature Symposium (NALS), and for countless other things, such as reminding me to breathe. You have my admiration, respect, and deepest gratitude. Thank you.

My first class at SDSU was Native American Poetry and Fiction, offered by the American Indian Studies Department and taught by Caitlin Victoria Featherstone. Although I had read non-fictional accounts of Native American history prior to that time, in her class, I was introduced to the works of talented Native American authors, who brought history to life through memorable fictional characters, artfully painting a somewhat different picture of history than the one I encountered as a child. Victoria also mentored me as I wrote an undergraduate thesis exploring the Native American oral tradition, which was a rich learning experience for me and perhaps planted the early seeds for this graduate thesis. I thank her for
all she has taught me and for all of her support and encouragement over the years. Most immediately, I thank her for reading and providing feedback on this thesis. Thank you.

In addition to thanking Randy Reinholz for reading my thesis and providing feedback, I must thank him for his work with Native Voices at the Autry, where Native American plays are lifted off the page and brought to life upon the stage. I have seen a number of productions at Native Voices, which have given me a deeper appreciation of Native American theater, moved me to laugh and cry, allowed me to witness the often ceremonial qualities of this art form and to personally experience its healing potential and transformative power. Thank you.

Finally, I thank my partner, Laurie Rennie. I could not have completed this thesis without her support, encouragement, and sense of humor. Thank you for tolerating stacks of books in a very small living space, as well as my monopolization of our computer; for letting me interrupt whatever you were doing (many times) to read portions of plays, scholarship, and my thesis aloud to you; and for accompanying me on some long trips, in heavy traffic, to Los Angeles, to attend plays at Native Voices. Most of all, thank you for finding endless ways to make me – and us – laugh. I am so blessed to have you in my life. I love you.

Special recognition should be given to the staff of Montezuma Press for their diligent review and assistance in the editing and formatting process.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What follows herein are two partially annotated bibliographies of Native American plays as well as articles, essays, and other scholarship written about Native American plays and theatre. The scope of this work is limited primarily to those works authored by persons of indigenous ancestry, written in English, and published within the federally constructed boundaries of the United States of America. It is with some reservations that I impose these limitations. As a student of literature, my focus for purposes of this project must be the published play; however, I readily admit that no drama captured on the inked page can compete with its fully realized stage performance. Secondly, the demarcated boundaries of the countries established on the American continents are arbitrary. First peoples across the continents of North and South America are interconnected, often sharing blood ties, culture, language and many other similar realities and experiences. The literature should not rightly be separated by Euro-American standards. Rather, indigenous assertions of tribal affiliation should be honored and respected when discussing Native art and culture. However, given that I am an English speaker, and that most plays published south of the U.S. border would likely be written in Spanish, it is necessary for me to eliminate those from this present effort. Substantiating my reasons for overlooking Canadian publications is more difficult, especially since a simple web search reveals evidence of a significant number of Native theaters and publications of First Nations literature, including plays, in Canada. One such recent and noteworthy publication is Staging Coyote’s Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English. This two-volume work, edited by Monique Mojica (Kuna/Rappahannock) and Ric Knowles brings together nineteen plays written by fifteen different playwrights. Many playwrights, whose works have been published in the United States, have published works in Canada as well. Some of the playwrights, whose works have been published in the United States, were born in Canada or currently reside there and vice versa. It also appears that Canada is significantly more supportive of the artistic efforts of First Nations art and artists than is the United States of the Native Americans, who reside within its borders.
Native American racial identity is one that is highly regulated and patrolled both by the United States government and individual tribes primarily because of treaties between tribes and U.S. government and benefits associated with tribal status. The U.S. government has a legal obligation to provide health care and education for federally recognized American Indians. Membership standards are established in agreement with the American government and are based upon blood quotient. Typically one must be able to document their genealogy and demonstrate that they are at least one-quarter or one-eighth American Indian. This type of measurement standard was designed to capitalize on an assumed eventual extinction. The decision to limit the plays to those authored by playwrights of indigenous ancestry is not meant to tie the criteria to blood quotient. As Margo Lukens wisely cautions:

> [t]he idea is not to discern the “blood quantum” of the thought but the intertribal plausibility of the thought. How do we know it’s a Native play? Because the Native community or communities can relate to it. How do we know it’s significant? Because a wide, intertribal audience can relate to it. (Lukens and Yellow Robe, 118)

Scholar, Craig S. Womack (Creek-Cherokee), in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, emphasizes that a work’s usefulness to Indian people in helping them to retain their values and world views is a key consideration (42). Many Native scholars seem to agree that one must be Native American in order to pen what would be considered true Native American literature; although, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) acknowledges, in *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, that defining “Native Americans” and Native American literature” is a “highly vexed and controversial” topic in Indian Country (13). He identifies Cherokee writers as “those writers whose work is recognized by members of the expanded Cherokee community as being Cherokee – either through community affirmation or tribal enrollment,” explaining that “kinship and being” a good Cherokee are perhaps factors as significant as tribal enrollment (Justice 14). To the best of my ability, I have made effort to locate published works that appear to be acknowledged by the Native American community as appropriately representative works.

Playwright Sierra Adare asserts that she uses theater, as an interactive teaching tool, to bring history to life in an experiential way (264). In fact, many of the plays included herein would be worthy additions to a classroom curriculum, not just at the college level, but also a refreshing addition to high school and even elementary school English and History classes. Having Native and non-Native students perform plays imagined from a perspective
other than that of the dominant culture would undoubtedly be eye-opening and thought provoking. Presented to students properly, such activities could serve to foster awareness, tolerance, even acceptance, as well as inspire intellectual curiosity. The reader is encouraged to seek out and read some of these published plays, and when possible, seize the opportunity to see them fully realized in a live performance on the stage. The non-Native reader is also reminded to approach the plays listed herein with some knowledge and respect for the people, histories, and cultures from which they arise.

It has been estimated that when Columbus arrived in the Western hemisphere, there were between fifty and one hundred million people already living in it, and in North America alone, there were approximately five hundred diverse cultures speaking over three hundred distinct languages. Each one of the more than five hundred tribes that exists in the United States today has its own rich culture, world view, religious or spiritual beliefs, stories, language, and life ways. Each tribe deserves to be recognized and called by name. To the extent that I am able, I will identify the tribal affiliations of individuals and groups. For lack of more specific information, or when addressing what this author believes to be core values, commonly held beliefs, or issues confronted by all, most, or many tribes, I may refer, all too frequently, to “Native Americans” or “American Indians.” I mean no disrespect in my use of these terms.

**SOME HISTORY**

Repression works like a shadow, clouding memory and sometimes even to blind, and when it is on a national scale, it is just not good.

- Simon Ortiz (*from Sand Creek*)

Native American culture and tribal identities continue to persist in spite of centuries of massive colonial attempts to eradicate the first people of this continent. Historically, our federal government has outlawed Native religions, ceremonies, and dances, and put forth other extraordinary efforts to destroy Native American language, culture, and the people themselves. For over one hundred years until late in the twentieth century, Native Americans were prohibited from practicing their own culture, including language, in the United States. The Red Power Movement of the nineteen sixties and seventies brought about the reinstatement of certain rights to Native peoples, and out of these tumultuous decades also
came greater funding for the arts and the so-called emergence of a *New* American Indian Theater.

Colonization is the forceful domination of a sovereign people, as well as the exploitation of their resources. At the time of contact, in 1492, it is estimated that there were between seven and eleven million indigenous inhabitants in what we now consider the United States. From the time of contact through the seventeenth century, the European invasion and conquest, by genocide, war, and disease, as well as the colonists’ desire for slave labor, dramatically impacted the indigenous population. There were devastating waves of smallpox, measles, yellow fever, whooping cough, and other epidemics, from which indigenous inhabitants had not developed immunity. By 1600, the Native population was dramatically diminished to between three and four million.

The Indian Wars took place intermittently and focused on extermination. They continued through the nineteenth century as the colonists continued to expand westward embracing the ideology of Manifest Destiny. During the nineteenth century, the U.S. government, under the leadership of President Andrew Jackson, enacted the Indian Removal Act (1830), an official policy of legalized forcible removal. Over 30,000 members of Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole peoples were removed from their tribal homes of generations, in Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama to Oklahoma. On the ill-famed Trail of Tears, Native people were forced to walk approximately one thousand miles, one third dying along the way due to exposure, starvation, disease, and other abuses, all for the purpose of freeing up land for the colonists.

In the late 1800s, the extermination policy gave way to one of assimilation, and boarding schools were created. Through a form of legalized kidnapping, thousands of children were forcibly removed from their families, homes, and tribes to be transported by train to boarding schools, often run by churches, thousands of miles from their homes. These children were forced to don Euro-American clothing, submit to having their hair cut, accept new names, undergo religious conversion, and speak only English. They were punished for any resistance including speaking their native languages, practicing their religions, or engaging in other cultural practices. These children were from different tribes and therefore were not necessarily able to communicate with each other in their first languages. Male students were taught manual labor and females were groomed to be domestic helpers. The
boarding schools were geared to break tribes across generations and create cheap labor. Thousands died from loneliness, disease, and starvation. Those who returned to their families, years later, often were no longer able to communicate with their family members, having successfully forgotten their native tongues due to disuse, and were disconnected with the cultural practices of their tribes. However, boarding schools also inadvertently gave rise to Indian political movements as connections were made across tribal boundaries and awareness of shared experiences and a common plight developed. “Pan-Indian” groups eventually began to lobby collectively for Native rights. It was not until 1924 that American Indians were even granted U.S. citizenship.

The termination or relocation policy replaced assimilation efforts in the 1950’s. Under this policy, tribes were to be declared extinct and treaties terminated, if the U.S. government decided that enrollment numbers were too low. This would justify terminating health and education benefits for members of those tribes. Individuals were given small financial incentives to move from reservations to cities. Such an incentive could be as simple as a one-way bus ticket. Under this policy, the Indian population in urban areas increased significantly, as did inter-tribal communication, which although again problematic to Native peoples, had unintended ramifications similar to that of the boarding schools.

The Red Power Movement, modeled after the Black Power Movement, emerged in the 1960s and 70s. Many protests occurred, including Wounded Knee and a takeover of Alcatraz Island, in San Francisco, the latter of which lasted for about eighteen months. The overall success of the movement is evidenced by the fact that the termination policy was rescinded, many treaties were reinstated, American Indian programs of study were developed at universities, Native Americans were no longer prohibited from practicing their own religions, many tribes successfully reclaimed their sovereign status, and more funding was provided for Native American education and art. However, efforts to address ongoing colonization efforts continue. Persistent colonial efforts can be found in the stories we tell today.

History is a collection of stories told from a particular point-of-view. Different peoples will tell historic tales from different vantage points. To begin to approach an understanding of the truth, one must explore multiple versions told by a variety of voices and attempt to gain a glimpse of what really transpired. In Euro-American texts and other
representations, Native peoples are typically cast as being from static cultures, locked in, to long ago, rather than as the contemporary vibrant people they continue to be. This is evidence of present day colonialism in action. In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig S. Womack (Creek-Cherokee) calls attention to the fact that many contemporary non-Native authors, who write about Native American people, “write in the past tense and assume that the people whom they are writing about no longer exist” (Womack 28). The vast majority plot an inevitable eradication of Native populations. In *Muting White Noise: Native American and European American Novel Traditions*, James Cox asserts that stories depicting a stagnant Indian culture, a tragic Indian destiny, and ultimate erasure “affirm European American superiority and Native subservience” (Womack 6). He claims that “[t]his determined focus on ‘the olden days’….allows European audiences to confine ‘Indianness’ to a distant past and ignore the enduring legacies of colonialism” today, maintaining that this is evidence that Euro-American readers and audiences are not really interested in acknowledging a contemporary Native presence (Womack 63). Relegating colonialism and the colonized to the past precludes the necessity of taking any present day action or of acknowledging and examining ongoing colonial efforts.

Many European American novels are filled with stoic wise sachems, fierce hot-blooded warriors, and docile Indian princesses. Others imagine “Native Americans as culturally and racially inferior” (Cox 57). Texts have a very real power to dominate the imaginations of their readers and therefore influence their actions in the extra-textual world (Cox 43). Moreover, “the non-Native storyteller who participates in either romanticizing or villainizing storytelling traditions about Indian is directly responsible [emphasis mine] for violence committed against Native people” (Cox 11) because “the acceptance of non-Native representations of Native people” leaves readers “in a position to deny dignity, respect, and humanity” (Cox 38) to real Native people and to accept their eventual absence as inevitable, fated, unavoidable, and perhaps even necessary. Cox observes that “with no evidence to the contrary, a young non-Native might conclude that there are no other stories about Native people and no other futures for them but insignificance or absence” (xi). The repeated exposure to stories of eradication and absence, as well as the barrage of stereotypical images of American Indians has had a detrimental impact on contemporary Native people. Native American stories, literature, and plays frequently tackle long-standing stereotypes of the
noble savage and Indian princess, sometimes through farce, and often by presenting Native characters more accurately, as present day human beings contending with contemporary realities.

**STORYTELLING AND THE ORAL TRADITION**

Theater is the ideal vehicle for the presentation and preservation of oral tradition…Theater is about storytelling. We as a people are about storytelling.

- Bruce King (Oneida-Chippewa) (Rathbun, “Native Playwrights’”)

As humans, we are compelled to tell stories, composing, remembering, and communicating them to others, and the telling of those stories has taken many forms. Some stories are preserved on the page for the reader, others etched in memory only to be conveyed by spoken word or song via the breath of the teller. Some are projected before our eyes on the flickering screen, while others performed live on the stage by dancers, comedians, or actors. Born out of the oral tradition of storytelling, performance art is an ancient creative form that has flourished across cultures around the globe over centuries, one that persists and thrives in the twenty-first century on the modern theatrical stage.

In the western hemisphere, Native American cultures are probably the best known for their long and enduring history of the oral tradition of storytelling, where that tradition continues to be treasured and nurtured as a way of life. In contrast to the solitary experience of reading the written word, the oral transmission of stories is a time of communing with others. A skillful Native American storyteller may read an audience and adapt the story to be told in a fashion that conveys it as it was meant to be understood. To this end, the storyteller will use intonation, pace, facial expression, and gesture, as tools to convey meaning to the audience, all of which are lost, implied or inferred at best, when the words alone are fixed upon a page. Oral transmission ensures unique moments, as no two telling can ever be identical. Moreover, adaptations, variations, and modifications to suit each individual audience are acceptable and even desirable in the oral tradition, if those alterations preserve a story’s true purpose and, most importantly, keep the story alive. As author and playwright, Diane Glancy (Cherokee) so beautifully articulates in her poem:

It’s what’s wrong with writing –
It kills the voice.
The words written on the page
Enter a burial ground.
But speaking brings them back -  (War Cries 11)
In traditional Native American culture, stories are understood to be living things, ever subject to change and growth, only subject to death when no longer relevant to a contemporary experience. Due in part, to this remarkable adaptability, the oral tradition ensures that the stories survive ever-evolving to continue speaking to new generations.

Native American Theater provides a relatively new venue, in which the oral tradition of storytelling continues its evolution. Glancy, in her essay, “Further (Farther): Creating Dialogue to Talk about Native American Plays,” dubs Native drama a “new oral tradition with breath that is the condition of performance” (200). For the Native American community, the written play and its staged production are relatively new forms of artistic expression; however, performance itself is clearly rooted in the long-standing oral tradition. It is a contemporary expression of an ancient art, a new iteration of the oral tradition, and a reinvention of the enemy’s stage.

This reinvented stage can provide a space to reexamine and rewrite accepted histories, to emphasize Native survival and continuance, as well as to call attention to the intentional eradication efforts imposed by the colonizer. The staged play creates a space for reclamation and re-imagination of identity. Performances may be designed to unify and validate Native audiences by allowing them to laugh at or debunk established other-imposed negative stereotypes, while non-Native audiences are invited to reflect upon their own colonial misconceptions. Writers and Playwrights often use their pens as tools of subversion and change. Many Native American plays can be seen as calls to action.

**CHRYSALIS**

We are still here, still telling stories, still singing whether it be in our native languages or in the “enemy” tongue.”

-Joy Harjo (Muscogee)

The contemporary Native American playwright temporarily encloses a story within the printed pages of a play, forming a cocoon of written words, if you will, until the story re-emerges upon the stage, unfurling its wings and taking flight, reanimated and fully realized in a live performance. The play’s story escapes its temporary confinement on the inked page, re-asserting its true nature, by connecting with an audience breath-to-breath, in a unique communal performance event. Actors resuscitate the stories, lifting words off the static
penned page and returning them to their native fluidic home in the oral tradition with their bodies and voices.

Native American playwrights have transformed or reinvented the Euro-American stage rather than simply embracing or copying another culture’s art form. Many points of departure exist and can be identified when comparing them. For example, the ritual and ceremonial aspects of contemporary Native American Theater are prevalent across many of the plays, and this can be traced to the centuries-old performance traditions of indigenous peoples. Editor Mimi Gisolfi D’Aponte, in her Introduction to *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays*, asserts:

> The performative origins of Native American theatre lie in traditional ritual, public ceremony and storytelling. Native performance, broadly defined, includes great tribal ceremonies such as the Beautyway and the Coyoteway and the Blessing ceremonies of the Navajo; the Sun Dance of the Plains people; the Hopi Kachina dances; the masked performers of the Northwest Coast; the Pueblo Matachine dances; the Southern Kwakiutle Potlatch; the Iroquois ceremonial of mid-winter; the Sacred Arrow ceremonies of the Cheyenne; the Ghost Dance and the Sacred Clown ceremony of the Sioux.

> Native performance, broadly defined, includes the work and guidance of spiritual leaders, shamans and medicine men and women.

> Native performance, broadly defined, includes the oral tradition of storytelling by tribal elders; storytelling rich in spiritual legacy, in mythology, in transcendent values.

> Native performance, broadly defined, includes the explosion of contemporary, inter-tribal powwows, held throughout the United States and Canada. (xi)

Although the western stage may provide a new venue, performance itself has been a well established component of Native American life and culture across tribes for centuries. Contemporary playwright Marcie Rendon (Anishinabe) echoes D’Aponte’s observations while discussing her personal artistic endeavors:

> Theatrically, I am interested in combining Native oral tradition with Western playwriting. Historically, our storytellers sang, danced, and mimed the history of our peoples in the center of the village. I strive as a creator and writer for the same integration my ancestors had of dialogue, music, and movement by using the modern stage and tools of the playwright. (Darby and Fitzgerald, *Keepers* 2)

While acknowledging that the western stage offers a new location or space, these arguments insist that theatre is far from a fledgling art for Native American people. Perhaps it would
better be said that playwrighting, the crafting of the chrysalis, a paper container of written word to temporarily shelter a story, is the newer art form for these Native American artists.

Almost two decades ago, Paul Rathbun, in his 1993 “Native Playwrights’ Newsletter Interview: Bruce King,” asked the Oneida-Chippewa playwright and producer, “Why drama? Why a European form of theatrical presentation, plays?” (303). King corrects Rathbun’s question explaining that theater, or performance, has always been a part of American Indian culture. He says, “A lot of Native theatre – if there is such a thing, we’re still trying to define it – was done on a level where people participated in celebration….People made masks, people played roles, they had parts and had lines….And so ‘drama’ in that essence is nothing new to Native Americans” (Rathbun 304). King points out that some ceremonies even involve the use of scripts, all the theatrical resources, of what he refers to a “common theatre.” What is important for both types of performance, ceremony and the “common” stage, is for people “to invest some of their emotions and reaction” (Rathbun 304) as participants. Moreover, King insists that Native plays, like the ceremonies, share a strong spiritual focus (Rathbun 303-304).

Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby, in the Introduction to American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader, also discuss Native American Theater as a fusion of “ancient ritual and performance elements from the oral tradition” that draws on the “traditions, creation stories, aesthetics, forms of spirituality, histories, languages, and relationships to the land as well as centuries of cultural collisions, encounters, and convergences” of the many diverse tribes (iv). Although the rise of contemporary Native theatre might be justifiably traced to more recent decades, Geiogamah and Darby insist that “Drama in an array of forms, from the highly spontaneous to the carefully planned, has always been an integral part of Native peoples’ lives throughout history,” (Geiogamah and Darby, American Indian Theater in Performance v-vi) Likewise, in his essay, “Emergence and Discovery: Native American Theater Comes of Age,” in the same anthology, King draws the connection between the long standing oral tradition and theater, or performance art, explaining:

….Theater and performance are about storytelling….We are here today because we survived. Oral tradition, shaped and held through performance, maintains a sense of identity with the past, but it also has a sense of continued existence….Theater is the ideal vehicle for the presentation and preservation of oral tradition….Theater is about storytelling. We as a people are about storytelling. (168-9)
The theatrical stage provides a new site for the staging of some of the transformed ceremonies of the contemporary American Indian. Author Leslie Marmon Silko’s (Laguna Pueblo) character, Betonie, the medicine man in her novel, *Ceremony*, speaks to such transformations when he tells the main character, Tayo:

> The people nowadays have an idea about the ceremonies. They think the ceremonies must be performed exactly as they have always been done….But long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began, if only in the aging of the yellow gourd rattle or the shrinking of the skin around the eagle’s claw, if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. You see, in many ways, the ceremonies have always been changing….after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals….this growth keeps the ceremonies strong….things which don’t shift and grow are dead things. (126)

Silko underscores the belief that ceremonies, as well as the oral tradition, are alive, and stresses that it is imperative that they transform and grow, evolving as they are handed down generation to generation. Stagnation in a fixed and permanent state ultimately equates with death and disappearance. In order to survive, ceremonies must be adjusted – by those to whom they belong – to maintain their meaning for the people. The emergence of what is often referred to as the “New Native American Theater” is precisely this type of resilient survival mechanism in action.

The contemporary Native American playwright temporarily encloses a story within the printed pages of a play, forming a cocoon of written words, if you will, until the story re-emerges upon the stage, unfurling its wings and taking flight, reanimated and fully realized in a live performance. The play’s story escapes its temporary confinement on the inked page, re-asserting its true nature, by connecting with an audience breath to breath, in a unique communal performance event. Actors resuscitate the stories, lifting words off the static penned page and returning them to their native fluidic home in the oral tradition with their bodies and voices.

**EMERGENCE**

We are the new medicine people of tomorrow. People are preserving the old philosophy, and we are trying through films or through theatre, or through poetry, of writing a novel to preserve that way of life which is being threatened now.

> - Geraldine Keams (Navajo)
There is some documentation of Native American writing plays for, and performing upon, the American stage prior to the nineteen sixties and seventies. For example, Paul Rathbun, in his 1996 dissertation claims there are records in the Library of Congress, of an 1889 citation by writer Go-won-go (Mohawk), from Brooklyn, New York, “who along with one Charlie Charles, copyrighted a play titled The Indian Mail Carrier. No other information has been uncovered about the play script” (American Indian Dramaturgy 12).

The classically trained Chickasaw actress and Oklahoma’s first state treasure, Te Ata Thompson Fisher (1895-1995), performed her one-woman show, comprised of Native stories, for approximately seventy years, touring the Americas and Europe, even performing at the White House, at the invitation of Eleanor Roosevelt. Contemporary Chickasaw playwright JudyLee Oliva wrote the play, Te Ata, about this extraordinary woman and her life, and the Chickasaw Nation produced it in Chackasha, Oklahoma in 2006, making it “the first professional Native American play, to be produced by a Native nation” (Geiogamah and Darby, American Indian Performing Arts 3).

The performance career of the famed and beloved Will Rogers (Cherokee), an American icon, stretched over thirty years from 1902 to 1935. According to Stanlake:

Over those years, he performed in wild-west shows; in vaudeville, in the Ziegfeld Frolic and Follies; in Broadway’s plays and musicals; on radio; and in seventeen motion pictures (three of which he wrote, produced, directed, and starred in); additionally, he wrote books and a syndicated newspaper column. (Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective 5)

Although so many Americans today still recognize his name, few know of his Native American heritage. Nicknamed “The Cherokee Kid,” the bi-racial Rogers maintained close ties with his Cherokee community. Scholar, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), revises Rogers’ biography in Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History.

Rollie Lynn Riggs, a native of Oklahoma, wrote plays during the 1920s and 30s, and was quite successful during his lifetime. Some of his many accomplishments include Green Grow the Lilacs, Cherokee Night, and the libretto to Oklahoma! The 1943 Rogers and Hammerstein musical, Oklahoma!, was based upon Riggs’ Green Grow the Lilacs. The play depicts life in that state during the 1920s and 30s. According to Darby, Cherokee Night is considered by many to be one of the most important Native American plays of the twentieth century; although, it only had a limited run when it was first produced (Geiogamah and Darby, American Indian Theater in Performance vi). Rollins, however, did not make his
Native heritage very public during his lifetime – a move that Rathbun speculates might have proven disastrous to his career as a playwright, at that time in history but the Cherokee people do claim Riggs, with obvious pride, as part of their literary community (Geiogamah and Darby, *American Indian Theater in Performance* 12).

A number of plays were sponsored by the Cherokee Historical Association of North Carolina, during the twentieth century, to be written on Native subjects, albeit by non-Native authors. Two which are considered to be historically accurate, even providing powerful indictments of colonialism, are *Unto These Hills: A Drama of the Cherokee* (1950) and *Trail of Tears* (1966). Both were written by non-Native Kermit Hunter. D’Aponte credits them with “attempting to reconcile the immensely disturbing period of history shared by their ancestors [Cherokee and non-Natives] who lived in the ‘Great Smokies’ in the early part of the nineteenth century” (*Seventh Generation* xiv). Noteworthy is the fact that *Trail of Tears* continues to be performed at the Cherokee Heritage Center, in Tahlequah, Oklahoma today.

**TAKING FLIGHT**

Stage moves a people from invisible to visible. From silenced to vocal. From stoic to the broadest range of emotions possible.

- Marcie Rendon (Anishinabe)

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed enormous activity in the area of Native American Theatre. For example, the American Indian Community House (AICH), a non-profit, community-based, social service agency established to “improve the status of Native Americans, and to foster inter-cultural understanding,” (American Indian Community House) was founded by Native American volunteers, in 1969. Today, according to this website, it “has grown into a multi-faceted social support agency and cultural center with a staff of 35 that serves the estimated 27,000 Native Americans in New York City,” (AICH). The agency offers job training, health programs, counseling and case management, and also serves as a cultural center complete with a permanent Native American art gallery and theater, the first in New York City. Its Performing Arts Department promotes Native performing artists, maintaining a database of the names of Native performers: actors, singers, dancers, musicians, comics, and performance artists. It provides “a performance space and audience for music, dance and drama, written, directed and produced or performed by indigenous
produces an annual “‘Actors’ Showcase’ to which agents, directors, and producers are invited,” and hosts an Indian Summer program every June (AICH).

The American Indian Arts Institute (AIAI) was sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and founded in 1962, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, as a school for young Native artists. Lloyd Kiva New (Cherokee) was the director. In the mid-nineteen sixties, Rolland Meinholtz (Cherokee) established the AIAI’s theater program where young Indian artists from around the country performed short experimental pieces. A bulletin entitled “Indian Theatre: An Artistic Experiment in Progress,” served as the manifesto for their vision, opening with Lloyd Kiva New’s “Credo for American Indian Theatre,” in which he declares his conviction that they were “in the vanguard of American Indian theatre development,” (Geiogamah and Darby, American Indian Theater in Performance 3). This was followed by “Notes on Indian Theatre” and ended with a small attached anthology of plays written by Native playwrights. Although the school only lasted a few years, something extraordinary was set in motion. The school later reincarnated as the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), and a number of AIAI students, such as William S. Yellow Robe Jr. (Assiniboine-Nakota) and King, went on to become significant contributors to what later became known as the American Indian Theater Movement.

In the early seventies, the Native American award-winning playwright, Hanay Geiogamah, (Kiowa-Delaware) emerged. Speaking for many, Christy Stanlake, in her review of Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays, credits Geiogamah as being “one of the playwrights most responsible for the beginning of the Native Theatre Movement,” (144). A playwright, director, producer, and professor at the School of Theater, Film, and Television and the American Indian Studies program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Geiogamah currently serves as the Director of Project HOOP (Honoring Our Origins and People through Native Theater, Education, and Community Development), a national initiative, housed at UCLA, to advance Native theater artistically, academically, and professionally.

In 1972, with the help of Ellen Stewart of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club in New York City, Geiogamah also founded the American Indian Theater Ensemble (AITE), the first independent all-Indian theater company in America created to perform plays by Native playwrights for Native audiences, and Geiogamah recruited Native artists from
different tribes to create works and perform them. AITE’s first production was a musical titled *Na Haaz Zaan*, by Robert Shorty (Navajo) and Geraldine Keams (Navajo), a dramatization of the Navajo creation story, narrated in Navajo with an English translation accompanying it. Several of Geiogamah’s plays were also produced by this ensemble. After two seasons in New York and a European tour, the company’s name was changed to the Native American Theater Ensemble or NATE and it relocated to Oklahoma City. The ensemble disbanded in 1976, but by the mid-seventies the Native Theatre Movement was well underway. Some of the more than fifty artists, male and female, who worked in NATE’s program, helped to found, or became members of, other Indian performance companies that arose during that decade, including the Navaho-Land Outdoor Theater, in 1973, by Robert Shorty (Navajo); the Red Earth Performing Arts Company, founded in 1974, by Don Matt (Flathead) and John Kaufman (Nez Perce), in Seattle – one of the most enduring companies; and Spiderwoman Theater, founded in 1975 by three sisters: Muriel Miguel, Lisa Mayo, and Gloria Miguel (Rappahannock-Kuna), in New York City.

Spiderwoman Theatre is distinguished as the longest running women’s theater company in the United States. Known as a somewhat transgressive and radical troupe, it tackles political and social issues through drama, dance, and a healthy dose of comedy with the intention of educating. The work of the three sisters “is grounded in feminist performance and emphasizes issues in the lives of Native women as they intersect with non-Native culture” (Huston-Findley and Howard 2). Rendon celebrates the fact that “this incredible group of Native women….dared to be bold, loud, and outrageous,” (Armstrong, Johnson and Wortman 138). They were inspirational, in that they were “confident this was exactly the right thing to do….that theater was something to remain engaged in” (Armstrong, Johnson and Wortman, 138). According to Christy Stanlake:

Spiderwoman Theater’s plays….incorporate elements from the Red Power era and the experimental theatre of the 1960’s and 19770’s but their plays are more closely connected to their personal experiences as Kuna and Rappahannock women who hail from Brooklyn, New York. Their blended heritage itself, Kuna (from Panama) and Rappahannock (from Virginia), tells a story of Native American survival: how new Native identities with unusual geographies emerged to undermine forces of colonization. *(Native American Drama 27)*

D’Aponte esteems Spiderwoman Theater “a performance group to reckon with” *(Seventh Generation xx)*.
As young girls, the three sisters performed in their father’s snake oil shows dancing for money, but were embarrassed about being part of what they considered to be a “spectacle.” Instead, they were drawn to pursue theatre as an art form and a vehicle for storytelling. In 1975, Muriel organized a workshop of Native and non-Native women to form a troupe, but shortly after their first workshop, one woman died, another had a baby, and the ensemble dissolved. From its ashes emerged a somewhat radical feminist group: Spiderwoman. The name was derived from the Hopi creatrix, who gave life and taught the Hopi people to weave. The troupe chose the name to honor the deceased woman, Muriel’s close friend Josephine Mofsie (Hopi-Winnegago), who had performed a piece about Spiderwoman, telling the story while finger-weaving. The Spiderwoman performers defined their craft as “story weaving,” and each performer developed an identifiable flaw in her character consistent with Spiderwoman’s weaving instructions. The women asserted that finding the flaw is a step toward individual freedom. Anne Haugo, in her dissertation, *Staging Intervention: Native Women, Decolonization, and the American Theatre*, declares the performances of Spiderwoman Theatre were “about giving voice and declaring voice…about resistance, survival, and healing – healing the scars and open wounds of on-going colonization, and the sexism and racism that accompany it,” (133). These storied performances have the power to transform.

Stories may serve as part of the fabric by which the members of a community bind themselves together, creating, remembering, and asserting a shared identity. They are active agents in the world that “produce, guide, and, in part, define human lives” (Cox 70) and are believed by many to have the power “to remake the world” (Cox 60). Performed stories may, like ceremonies, offer healing and nourishment to individuals and communities, connecting and reconnecting them with their roots, reinforcing and internalized sense of identity and proper behavior, and sometimes serving to weave an individual back into the group with the common thread of story, setting a transformative process in motion not unlike that of western medicine’s psychotherapy. Such transformations may take place on an emotional, spiritual, or psychological level. Transformation, as a theme, informs Native life and thought, and this often manifests undeniably in Native authored plays.
TRANSFORMATION OR REINVENTING THE ENEMY’S
STAGE

What is the power of native stories? Did they create our people, our tribes, ourselves? Are our stories “a living theater” that connects everything to everything, as we say they do?....[N]ative stories have the power to create conflict, pain, discord, but ultimately understanding and enlightenment – a sacred third act.

- LeAnne Howe (Chocktaw)

While it is certainly important to acknowledge and review Native Theatre as a serious part of mainstream contemporary theater, it becomes apparent that it is also crucial to consider the differences between Native theater productions and those of European-American or mainstream theater. Haugo urges that, although it is imperative that essentialism be avoided when examining Native American works, it is also “necessary to consider Native cultural cues in the analysis of Native theatre, and to identify issues within the plays which engage with Native resistance movements” (Staging Intervention 18). The Native plays and films, of today, are often powerful acts of reclamation and decolonization. Native stories in any form may work to challenge the fictional foundations of colonialism, and as Geiogamah and Darby assert:

Contemporary efforts in Native theater and film seek to reclaim images, locate sites of significance, and center Native identities in their myriad and multivocal expressions….these are creative acts of self-determination drawing from tribal and personal sources of power and balance –spiritual, cultural, political, and aesthetic. (American Indian Theater in Performance v)

Upon examination of many of the published Native American plays, such as those in Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women’s Theater, these acts of reclamation become obvious, whether what is being taken back is history, religion, spirituality, traditions, human remains, or the representation of Native Americans (Darby and Fitzgerald). Native American playwrights using pen, voice, and performance, seek to reclaim what is rightly theirs and to revise those “stories that narrate the domination of Native Americans” (Cox 90). Native revisionist writers draw on “sources of worldviews, identities, and representations [that] are more nourishing and more specifically Native: oral traditions, individual and communal memories, dreams” (Cox 103) to develop stories that benefit Native people. Widely accepted versions of history may be unmasked as imperialist fictions of oppression and revised to reflect untold truths. Many Native plays also draw heavily on Native oral traditions, weaving cultural characters into the plots. Moreover, Native drama often strives
to challenge established stereotypes, reeducate theater-goers, and portray more accurate characterizations of Native life and people.

Gloria Bird (Spokane), in the Introduction to *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America*, points to Native authored literature, written in English rather than tribal languages, as a “site where ‘reinventing’ can occur to undo some of the damage that colonization has wrought” (24) since it continues to incorporate “a native perception of the world,” with the intention that the “literature will be viewed and read as a process of decolonization” (25). Many Native American plays, written throughout the 1980s, possess “a ruthless interrogation coupled with a sense of compassion and healing” (Darby and Fitzgerald, xi). I would assert that Native American Theater is then a true reinvention of the enemy’s stage to be experienced as yet another powerful act in the process of decolonization. Not only can theater serve as a tool of reclamation and provide a vehicle for Native American people to heal and re-imagine themselves, but it can also inspire Native theater-goers and provoke deep reflection in non-Native peoples.

Bird’s words imply an element of healing to be accomplished through the various forms of Native American literature. More recent works may be a part of what Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby, quoting Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna-Sioux) refer to as “the ‘third wave’ of Native writing” (Geiogamah and Darby, *American Indian Theater and Performance* xii), integrating contemporary issues with stylistic elements. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Gunn Allen avers the power of stories, a power that can offer validation and healing to listeners, and one that would certainly extend to theater audiences. The act of oral storytelling is a true communion of breath, mind, and spirit between teller and audience. Breath is inseparable from life and is revered by many as sacred. A story is invisibly carried on and in the breath when spoken by the teller and inhaled or ingested to be internalized by the listener. Within the listener it may take root to work its transformative magic. Similar to the accepted transformative intentions of oral storytelling traditions, Native American dramatic art can be created with the intention of inspiring transformation and deep healing in the community.

The members of a Native audience can connect with one another as they watch the enactment of perspectives that may not have been readily available to them before, since theater has been historically monopolized by Euro-American dominated performance art.
Native theater allows Native people the opportunity to share an encounter with the performers on the stage, who reflect common experiences back to them. This can serve to lessen feelings of isolation and promote solidarity among the members of those communities. Some Native American plays may be designed to unify and validate audiences by allowing them to laugh at or debunk established other-imposed negative stereotypes. The members of a mixed audience might be urged to reflect carefully upon their own ignorance. Additionally, humor employed in plays provides opportunities for laughter, something known to promote health and well-being. Not to be overlooked is the fact that Native playwrights also benefit from the healing power of storytelling.

A theatrical performance is a highly collaborative and interactive undertaking, one which rallies an entire community to come together. A fully realized theatrical event requires a community of people to fill many roles, from writer, to actor, designers, directors, producers, and audience members, among others. Since the play, unlike the written story, does not dictate every aspect of its performance, much of it is left open to interpretation. Each member of the theatrical community formed for a particular production brings his or her own interpretation to bear upon the play’s manifestation upon the stage, in each unique performance, clearly anchoring the staged performance in the communal and multi-vocal traditions of orality.

Yellow Robe asserts that “Native theater lies on the edge between community ritual and commercial endeavor” (Lukens and Yellow Robe 125). He insists that the Native American community must take an active role in the critical examination of Native American theater and form a long lasting and beneficial relationship with it:

The different systems of criticism have never meshed. Native community criticism arises from a collective ethic, and in a communal voice, but Euro-American theatrical or literary criticism is articulated as an individual’s point of view. Also, Euro-American theater’s early nurture within and easy relationship with the Christian church and its consequent freedom to represent aspects of religion on stage contrast strongly with Native communities’ sense of appropriate handling of ritual themes, characters, and objects in a theatrical context….However, it is necessary to find a way of peaceful coexistence between the two thought-worlds, because in order to strive for clarity there has to be room for discussion and examination” (Lukens and Yellow Robe 119-20).

Native communities, through their critical review of Native American plays, can and should take an active role in determining what benefits Native peoples and what does not. He and
Margo Lukens have drafted a “Code of Conduct,” suggested “for creating a means of communication and a cohesive working theater” defined by respect, sincerity, awareness, generational connection, language, breath, and sacrifice (Lukens and Yellow Robe 124-6). They assert that “Breath is the basic element of Native theater. Words from the mind and heart are written on paper, and these words are given life when spoken by the actor and shaped by the director” (Lukens and Yellow Robe 125).

Christy Stanlake, in *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective*, asserts that Native Theater is clearly “its own field of drama, one that enacts Native intellectual traditions existing independently from Western drama, yet capable of extending mainstream theoretical theories” (i) and that Native dramaturgy encompasses a network of specific discourses born out of Native American philosophies. The four discourses upon which she focuses include: platiality, storying, LeAnne Howe’s tribalography, and Gerald Vizenor’s survivance. She stresses the importance of probing Native American plays through the lens of Native philosophies and discourses in order to avoid “replicating a theoretical kind of colonization that derives from reading Native theoretical works with only non-Native, largely western-based concepts” (Stanlake 24). She asserts that:

….in order to read these plays, one must be prepared to read with a perspective that is sensitive to the ways in which Native epistemologies shape the dramaturgy. We must understand how Native plays both reflect Native cultures and, in a reciprocal way, give back to Native communities. (Stanlake 21)

Furthermore, Stanlake emphasizes the helpfulness of being grounded in Native American history and having “a basic understanding of the laws pertaining to Native American national government relationships, especially those regarding Native homelands, languages, spiritual practices, education, and identity” (Stanlake 22). This is not unlike Daniel Heath Justice’s contention that we need ‘historically rooted and culturally informed reading” (Stanlake 7) of all Native literature. Stanlake contends that “Native American drama is a separate field of theatre with a distinctive dramaturgy calling for critical understanding based particularly upon Native ways of knowing” (Stanlake 25).

LeAnne Howe (Choctaw) coined the term *tribalography*, which is the “ability for stories to create a rhetorical space in which people can thread their own stories and histories into the stories and histories of other people” (Stanlake, *Native American Drama* 30). Stories have transformative power that can be realized through performed plays. As the actors shape
their story upon the stage, audience members are provoked into threading their own stories, born of different lived experiences, with the stories and lives of the tellers, thus creating a larger collective story and community. In her article, “Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories,” LeAnn Howe argues that “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes” (118). She asserts that “[t]he story you get depends upon the point of view of the writer,” (122) and stories create “attitudes and culture, the very glue which binds a society together” (121). Thus, story is portrayed as an active force and one with muscle that can change the world regardless of the intention, or lack thereof, with which the writer creates it, and it is a product of the writer’s world view.

Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) coined the term survivance. Stanlake examines several plays in terms of his “survivance discourse, beginning with ‘mythic motion: trickster games,’ where the inconsistencies between absence and presence are exposed and the tight categories of indian behavior unraveled (Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective 181)” She discusses the way trickster narratives can be used to expose and invert what “Vizenor calls ‘terminal creeds,’ concepts that support indian simulations,” such as “the myth of the vanishing Indian” (Stanlake 181) and resist “new simulations through creations that incorporate endless movements: or “[m]aterial motion – the splintering and reconfiguring of many traditions and ideas” (Stanlake, 191) to deftly defy definition and the stagnating effects of categorization and focus instead on survival and endurance asserting a contemporary Native presence. Native authors work to “replot the assumed conquest of North America to assert Native survival, resistance, and presence:” survivance, and to imagine new stories that are life-affirming (Cox 7), “emphasizing a strong contemporary Native presence and dynamic Native storytelling traditions” in order to disable “narratives of conquest that help enact, enhance, and justify colonialism by assuring readers [or play-goers] that the only possible colonial plot is the inevitable absence of Native Americans” (Cox 65).

Clearly there are many differences between Euro-American and Native American plays. In a Native American story or play, that which is often accepted as reality-based and factual may be woven together with the mystical or the symbolic, calling into question the subjective boundaries that divide what is believed to be real from what may be perceived as unreal by some. The magic and the real, the unseen and the seen, things defined by western minds as incompatible, often coexist naturally entwined. There can be movement between
what is generally accepted as reality and the dream time or spirit world. Events from the
dream world may be interwoven with those from waking experience and considered just as
real, if not more significant than the latter, to the bafflement of a Euro-American audience so
accustomed to compartmentalizing life experiences rather than integrating life’s many
aspects into a unified whole. In *Our Stories Remember*, Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) explains
that, in American Indian life, dreams are accepted as sacred messages from the Creator.
There can also be communication between those who have passed on and the living and
movement between the now and the past, perhaps even the future. Relationship is perceived
and honored in all things. Recurrent themes can be identified across many of these works,
including healing, re-visitation of oral traditions, reclamation of identity, revision of history,
and issues of sovereignty. Accepted histories are often reexamined and rewritten to
emphasize Native survival and continuance, as well as to call attention to the intentional
eradication efforts imposed by the colonizer. Even the very structure of the Native American
play differs from that of the Euro-American play with plots being structured in a non-linear
or even cyclical fashion.

Like many Native American stories, written and oral, Native plays often embark upon
a circuitous journey, rejecting the western plot model that demands conflict, climax, and
resolution. Native plays most typically reflect an indigenous perspective of life following a
spiral path, witnessing a series of cycles, rather than being composed of a series of linear
events propelled toward the achievement of some ultimate conclusion. Perhaps the tendency
to “end” or wrap up a story reveals western culture’s need to have the last word, asserting the
author or playwright, as an agent of his or her culture, whose voice is ever privileged as the
ultimate authority. “The End” implies that a story has been told in its entirety, that there is
nothing left to be said, no other version to be told, and no other voices to be acknowledged.
It attempts to leave no room for revisions. A circular telling, however, leaves the future
open, suggests the possibility of other perspectives, and suggests an unflagging hopefulness
or faith in an inevitable natural return to balance. There is always room for revision,
retelling, and updating, which reflects values consistent with the oral tradition of storytelling
where no one telling is set in stone. A refusal to embrace western tradition’s linear
progression toward a definitive conclusion insists upon and embraces continuity and
possibility. It asserts a trust in the connectedness of all things and the cyclical nature of life.
It rejects non-indigenous notions that any man has the agency to know or write the finale of any story.

To create their works, Native American playwrights may “fuse ancient ritual and performance elements from the oral tradition with more contemporary approaches” (Darby and Fitzgerald iv). Darby asserts that:

The restorative quality of the mythic found in much of contemporary theater has a great deal to offer the theater of the twenty-first century. With unflinching candor in exposing social issues, this healing focus on integration, balance, and harmony contrasts with the emphasis on the ironic, tragic, fragmented, and chaotic, in much of Western literature and theater. (Darby and Fitzgerald xiii)

He describes Native American theatre as being grounded in ritual traditions and brimming with compassion, humor, and possibility. Native American performance art can be used as a vehicle to invite Native people to heal by re-imagining themselves through the transformative power of story “based on a [world] view of language, story, and performance” that is “infused by the sacred” (Darby and Fitzgerald ix). Many of the plays included in this bibliography are powerful, thought provoking, educational, and inspirational for both Native and non-Native audiences.

For a typical European-American theatrical performance, an audience would generally be expected to assume a passive role, the only imposed obligation being the suspension of disbelief. However, King argues that the interactive nature of many Native American plays is consistent with Native American rituals and ceremonies, as well as the oral tradition of storytelling, in which both the teller and listener are active participants. As part of some Native American theatrical events, performers “bother people,” getting audience members involved, breaking the fourth wall, dissolving the illusion of separation between those on stage and those in the audience, sometimes even bringing audience members onstage and incorporating them into the performance, intentionally blurring the roles even further (Rathbun, “Native Playwrights…” 304). One example of this occurs in Spiderwoman Theater’s Winnetou’s Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City, a humorous, irreverent, and somewhat angry performance piece, during which cast members run into the audience to recruit a member of the audience to participate in a mock ceremony on stage. This type of interaction with the audience serves to ensure contact and communion with the audience members.
It is evident that Native American theatrical performances resemble Native American ceremonies given that both share the components of story, spoken words, and movements, sometimes even song and dance, and each individual performance is unique, since it is a live event, ensuring some degree of variation between enactments. These similarities support the argument that, more than simple entertainment, Native Theater can and often does serve as a powerful medium for ceremony. Lloyd Kiva New suggests the spiritual component of Indian Theater saying that it is born out of American Indian traditions “which are closely tied to religion” (3). As Paula Gunn Allen explains, “whether the ritual traditions are in ceremony, myth, or novel, they nourish the people. They give meaning. They give life,” (101). This strongly suggests that Native American plays can also serve to nourish the people and give meaning. Perhaps it is this transformative intention behind many such productions that truly distinguishes Native American Theater from European-American stage performances. That Native American storytelling on the stage is intentionally complex and ceremonial in nature is readily visible in the light of the strong belief that language, story, and performance are infused by the sacred. Additionally, religious and spiritual practice for many cultures involves a coming together of people in a communal event. In some Native traditions, a community must gather to effect healing and transformation. When playgoers gather as a group to see a performance, they do form a community, albeit typically a temporary one, with playgoers and cast members sharing a form of communion. Together they participate in a unique performance of a story, and they all must contribute an investment of emotion, the key that allows for personal transformation.

Native theatrical performances offer a way to reach Native peoples interspersed throughout various cities in modern times, as well as extending that experience of communion and healing, to non-Native communities, a gracious and generous gesture. Performances may take place on reservations or in major cities. They may even be taken on the road to travel to other countries, or they can be communicated via the printed page, but they survive, and they attempt to seek out their audiences regardless of location. Ceremonies and stories will continue to endure across future generations via this new iteration of the oral tradition on the stage.
RECENT DECADES

The new Indian theater has progressed in starts, stops, bursts of optimism, and long stretches of uncertainty….its development unsteady, and the obstacles big and all too real. But….its potential is fascinating to contemplate.

- Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa-Delaware)

Following the powerful eruption of Native plays, ensembles, theatre groups, and performances of the seventies and eighties, a sporadic but continued growth of Native Theater in the U.S. continued well into the nineties. The American Indian Arts Institute (AIAI) experienced a resurgence of its drama program and several of the students of the 1990s had their work produced outside the Institute. For example, in 1997, prolific playwright William S. Yellow Robe Jr. founded the Wakiknabe Theater Company, an inter-tribal Native American theatre company, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he served as the artistic director. The word *wakiknabe* comes from the Assiniboine word *wakikna*, which means “we return home,” a statement that reflects the company’s purpose of providing a home for Native theatre artists to develop their craft (American Theater Web) and underscores that this represents a return to an existing tradition rather than a point of embarkation on a brand new venture. Another AIAI graduate, playwright and director Bruce King published numerous plays and “served as the artistic director of the IAIA Players, Indian Time Theater, and the Echo-Hawk Theatre Ensemble.” He currently works with the Haskell Nation’s University’s Thunderbird Theatre (Native American Authors Project).

In 1996, the Native American Women Playwrights Archive (NAWPA), at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, was established as a living archive “to collect, preserve, and make more widely known the work of living Native American women playwrights, with ‘American’ including Canada, Mexico, Central and Caribbean America, and Pacific Islands” (Armstrong, Johnson and Wortman iii). Originally born out of a collaborative effort between a graduate theatre student of Cherokee and African American heritage and Dr. William Wortman, a Humanities Librarian at the University, and inspired by the graduate student’s frustration over not being able to locate the resources she needed for research on Native women playwrights, it now comprises a collection of “manuscripts and plays [many of which have never been published] as well as production materials such as programs, posters, flyers, photographs, correspondence, articles, and audio visual materials” (Miami University Libraries, Department of Theater) and a number of other related records and documents. The
collection includes many historical materials from Spiderwoman Theater. The Opening of NAWPA was celebrated with a one-day conference entitled “Women’s Voices in Native American Theater” accompanied by an exhibit of photos, posters, and other historical documentation donated by Spiderwoman Theatre. “A second conference that included academic papers, performances, and a discussion of issues involving Native women’s theater, including the production of the works by non-Native companies” entitled “Celebration of Native Women’s Theater” followed in 1999 (Huston-Findley and Howard 3), and the most recent conference was held in 2007. Rebecca Howard, in her introduction to *Footpaths and Bridges*, says that “The dynamic core of NAWPA continues to be the playwrights and their works, and the promotion, preservation and attention that these works deserve in an atmosphere that is mindful of the complex issues surrounding such a collection” (1).

NAWPA’s stated mission is to “identify playwrights, collect and preserve their work, try to make it widely known, and encourage performances and continued creativity. NAWPA also provides an online directory, which offers listings of works it holds” (Miami University). The collections are currently organized three ways: alphabetically by title, by playwright name, and by material type. Access is “open under the rules and regulations of the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries,” (Drexel University).

Native Voices at the Autry, at the Wells Fargo Theater of the Autry National Center of the American West in Los Angeles, was established in 1999 and is the only Equity theater company in the country “devoted to developing and producing new works for the stage by Native American playwrights” (Native Voices at the Autry). Randy Reinholz (Chocktaw) is the Producing Artistic Director and co-creator of Native Voices. He has directed plays across the United States and Canada, is the Director of the School of Theatre, Television, and Film at San Diego State University, and is a faculty member of SDSU’s American Indian Studies Department. Since 1999, Native Voices at the Autry has held in excess of fifty workshops and presented more than forty staged readings of new plays by Native American playwrights featuring Native American actors. In recent years, through its collaboration with the University of California in San Diego (UCSD), Native Voices has also performed at the La Jolla Playhouse.

In 2003, Project HOOP (Honoring Our Origins and People) through Native American Theater was established at the UCLA American Indian Studies Center. According the
website it “is a national, multi-disciplinary initiative to advance Native theater artistically, academically, and professionally,” (UCLA American Indian Studies Center). Its purpose is to “establish and develop academic and artistic programs in the field of Native theater” with the broader goal of establishing:

Native theater as an integrated subject of study and creative development in tribal colleges, Native communities, K-12 schools, and mainstream institutions, based on Native perspectives, traditions, views of spirituality, histories, cultures, languages, communities, and lands. (UCLA American Indian Studies Center)

Hanay Geiogamah, a Professor of Theater in the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television and Director of the UCLA American Indian Studies Center together with Jaye T. Darby, a Professor in the College of Education at San Diego State University, are co-founders and directors of Project HOOP.

A couple of anthologies of plays by Native American authors were published prior to the close of the twentieth century, including: *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays* (D’Aponte) and *Stories of Our Way: An Anthology of American Indian Plays* (Geiogamah), both of which offer a sampling of significant plays by Native men and women across tribal affiliations, spanning more than sixty years, from *The Cherokee Night* (1936) to *Hokti* (1997). It is encouraging to note that the twenty-first century has already seen the publishing of a noticeable number of new anthologies, in the United States, related to Native American theater. *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader*, edited by Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye Darby is a groundbreaking collection of the views of leading playwrights, directors, scholars, and educators in contemporary Native theater. *Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women’s Theater* is the first major anthology of the contemporary works of Native women playwrights (Darby and Fitzgerald). *Footpaths & Bridges: Voices From the Native American Women Playwrights’ Archive* was published in February 2008 (Huston-Findley). It offers a sampling of works by Native American women playwrights whose works are maintained in NAWPA’s archive.

In order to make Native American plays available to a wider audience and reach those, who may be unable to travel to see a performance, Christy Stanlake has joined with the Alexander Street Press to create an online archive: *North American Indian Drama* (http://alexanderstreet.com/products/indr.htm). Its aim is to provide access to “the full text of more than 200 plays representing the stories and creative energies of American Indian and
First Nation playwrights of the 20th century,” some of which were previously unpublished. It is available to public libraries and educational institutions through sliding scale fees. This should prove to be an invaluable resource, if institutions are able to take advantage of it despite the current economic climate, which is so adversely affecting schools and government agencies. At the time of this writing, this author has been unable to locate a local institution with access to this relatively new collection.

**IMAGINING THE FUTURE**

I believe that this theatre movement will eventually transform how we see Native American people and how we understand the broader discipline of North American theatre studies.

- Christy Stanlake

Although various essays and commentaries continue to express a healthy optimism regarding the ongoing development and evolution of contemporary Native Theater, it is surprising and disappointing to discover that in the twenty-first century there has been relatively little scholarship readily available on the subject. The essays to be found on the subject have been somewhat limited to those books noted herein, along with a handful of published dissertations and articles. However, what might be considered a modest surge of recent publications does offer a glimmer of hope. Christy Stanlake’s recent publication, *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective*, a sustained critical examination of Native American drama, is one that offers hope that more scholarship specific to the field of Native American Theater is on the horizon.

Perhaps the current economic crisis impacting the United States is largely to blame, as well as the fact that the arts generally fall to the bottom of the list when it comes to funding, even in educational institutions. More funding had become available for the arts during the sixties and seventies, but that is not true of the present. The Project HOOP website discusses the fact that “Native theater remains the most neglected due to lack of funding, scholarship, curriculum development, and staffing,” (UCLA American Indian Studies Center). Given the current economic climate, the immediate future does not appear to be especially promising in terms of increased funding. It is surprising in a time when a number of successful casinos on tribal lands are promoting state of the art performance venues that more Native American performances are not being supported, staged, and promoted in those theaters.
In Geiogamah’s essay, “The New American Indian Theater: An Introduction,” written in 1999, he calls for support from the tribes financially and otherwise, as well as from the education community, colleges, universities, and American Indian Studies programs. It is possible that more attention is currently being focused on producing Native American films, which have been on the increase during this decade. Overall, however, it appears that Native Theater has much greater support and appreciation in Canada than in the United States. Websites for indigenous theater ensembles and groups seem to exist in abundance in Canada, with some even producing plays in indigenous languages. A number of plays and anthologies have been published by Canadian presses as well. Hopefully, there will be a resurgence in the near future in the U.S. It would be wonderful to see some of the U.S. tribes with successful casinos and performance venues support the work of Native playwrights and provide them with access to their stages. In 2006, the Chickasaw Nation produced an Equity-level, full-scale production of *Te Ata*, a play written by JudyLee Oliva (Chickasaw) and performed by Cherokee actor DeLanna Studi. *Te Ata* is about a Chickasaw actor, who “toured her one-woman show across the Americas and Europe for over seventy years” (Stanlake, *Native American Drama* 1). Perhaps we will see more examples of this type of tribal support come to fruition in the near future.

Lloyd Kiva New, in his 1969 *Credo for American Indian Theatre*, declared, “We believe that an exciting American Indian theatre can be evolved out of the framework of Indian traditions…The momentum is exciting, with every indication that the potential can be realized” (3-4). It would be truly unfortunate if funding were to stand in the way of that vision. Live theatrical events can be costly to produce, and in times of economic crisis, the arts typically suffer. Would be theater goers have less disposable income to spend on entertainment, and the more expensive theater tickets may be forgone in preference for more affordable movie tickets. The silver screen is another medium recently embraced by Native communities that provides a vehicle for an art form that has a great deal in common with performed plays; although the filmed performance accepts a more permanent form that one that is staged with multiple unique iterations. Perhaps greater emphasis is being placed on investing in and developing films, at this time in history, rather than live performances, given the film’s ability to reach a larger audience even during times of serious economic challenges.
Native American plays should not be relegated to the archives. As important as it is to publish them in print so they may be circulated to many, who might not otherwise have access to them, efforts must continue to ensure that they fully realize their orality vocalized on the stage in the live performance.

**THE BIBLIOGRAPHIES**

Intellectual sovereignty doesn’t presume an insistence on tribal-centered scholarship as the exclusive model of sensitive or insightful analysis. It does, however, privilege an understanding of community as being important to a nuanced reading of the text.

–Daniel Heath Justice (10)

The next section of this thesis is a partially annotated bibliography of Native American plays written in English and published in the United States. Following it is a bibliography, with annotation, of scholarship about Native American plays, also published in the United States, primarily as part of anthologies. Neither bibliography is represented as exhaustive; although, this author has attempted to provide extensive listings. The included critical writing is primarily that which has been written by Native American scholars. I privilege and foreground the critical and analytical scholarship of Native intellectuals recognized as leading authorities on Native art rather than those of non-Natives; although, I do draw from both.

In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig Womack states his wish “that tribes, and tribal members, will have an increasingly important role in evaluating tribal literatures”, explaining that:

Native literatures deserve to be judged by their own criteria, in their own terms, not merely in agreement with, or reaction against, European literature and theory. The Native Americanist does not bury her head in the sand and pretend that European history and thought do not affect Native literature, nor does she ignore the fact that Native literature has quite distinctive features of its own that call for new forms of analyses. On another political level, Native Americans have the right, for whatever reasons they choose, to decide how to evaluate their literatures, just as white critics, for decades have formulated schools of thoughts according to their own dictates. (242-3)

Perhaps the critical analysis of Native American literature should be undertaken exclusively by Native American scholars and writers, who have intimate personal knowledge of the culture that produced it, but as Native authored works continue to appeal to a wider audience,
for myriad reasons, many non-Natives, such as myself, will most likely continue to be compelled to pursue their analyses of these works.

Daniel Heath Justice in *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*, does not argue for the exclusion of non-Natives from the field of Native studies; instead, he insists that they earn their place in that field through respect rather than through the presumption of the “unreflective exercise of privilege” (217) and reminds us that “Native people are well qualified to speak on these matters without need of non-Native translation or interpretation” (Justice 8). He calls for “historically rooted and culturally informed reading” (Justice 7) of all Native literature and insists upon “intellectual sovereignty” (Justice 9). He holds to the conviction that privileging Native scholarship is “a matter of ethical accountability” (Justice 209) asserting that “to privilege Indian perspectives in discourses by and about Indians….is….to insist on the ethical repositioning of Indian voices from the margins of the discourse firmly to the center” (Justice 212). Literature by Native American authors is too often interpreted by non-Natives, who too frequently operate under assumptions propagated out of a different version of history and worldview.

Scholar, James Cox, calls for “read readings, which privilege a critical practice based on the work of Native creative writers and intellectuals and foregrounds the issues that they raise as important to Native people and communities” (203). He explains that “red readings develop a set of critical terms that includes Native community and sovereignty. Native writers focus on the present and their presence, on survival and resistance” (Cox 12). Red readings of Native works have value in the analysis of the methods utilized by contemporary Native writers to weave stories that serve as forms of protest against colonialism and strive to portray a healthy Native future.

Craig Womack advocates for a nationalistic literary approach asserting that “[s]overeignty is inherent as an intellectual idea in Native cultures, a political practice, and a theme of the oral traditions” (51). He argues that the “legal reality of tribal sovereignty….has something to do with tribal literatures” (Womack 6), clarifying that “When [Native] people assume they have the inherent right to interpret their own literature and history, even when their interpretations differ from those of dominant culture, they are setting themselves apart as a nation of people with distinct worldviews that deserve to be taken seriously. This is an important exercise of sovereignty” (Womack 29). Asserting that
Native people have the sovereign right “to present images of themselves and to discuss those images” (Womack 14) he suggests that Native Americans should perhaps have the exclusive authority to write and analyze Native literatures. He calls for Native people to actively engage in developing a Native literary criticism that is grounded in Indian country, sees through the lens of a Native worldview and political realities, “emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and…..roots literature in land and culture” (Womack 11).

A writer’s world view is internalized and manifests consciously and unconsciously in his or her writing. The interpretation of stories, plays, and other art forms emerging from a worldview foreign to one’s own would be ridden with challenges and necessitate a careful exploration of the culture that produced them prior to attempting to unpack them. Non-Native critics, who have not attempted to learn something of the cultural underpinnings of a Native text, might be likely to unwittingly impose their own cultural assumptions upon those Native works, and overlook intended meanings and Native American cultural assumptions present in the text. Therefore, the contemporary non-Native analysis of Native works has the potential to continue to serve as a vehicle of the colonization effort.

There currently exists a tremendous and continuously growing volume of published literary criticism, the vast majority of which is born out of a considerably homogenized European-American perspective, which typically overlooks and excludes the many voices from society’s margins. The American is typically taught to see him or herself as an individual with personal responsibility for his or her actions alone. This permits individuals to disassociate themselves from the transgressions of their families, communities, country, and culture. The individual can freely choose to accept a white-washed version of U.S. history as truth and disown any personal responsibility for investigating contrary evidence. Therefore, when faced with an artistic expression arising from a minority culture, many non-Natives may attempt to interpret and dissect it using European-American tools, without questioning their applicability to the work of artists outside of the dominant culture. This approach is likely to lead to misinterpretations that leave the observer with a sense of bafflement and otherness. Such moments of disconnection can provide the foundation for thwarting a sense of openness and receptivity, so crucial when approaching works of art, and
can instead foster a tendency to discount the perspectives of those from other cultures and render them inaccessible.

The insistence upon the interpretation of Native plays through the dominant lens would be the commission of yet another imperialistic, silencing act of violence against first peoples, serving only to reassert a hegemonic election to remain willfully deaf and ignorant of the larger community and interrelatedness of all beings. James Cox cautions against “an academic version of colonialism: the presumption that non-Natives know more about what is most important to Native people”(4) and he emphasizes the importance of privileging the work of Native American scholars in the process of analyzing and attempting to unpack or examine Native American literary works, especially if the individual conducting the analysis is a non-Native. He asserts that “discussions between primarily non-Natives about Native Americans” often “ignore Native intellectual history and erase Native intellectuals from the academic landscape” (Cox 4-5) constituting yet another act of colonial aggression.

Familiarity with “native cultural beliefs and practices” is “necessary for an informed reading of Native literature” (Cox 5). The bibliography of books and articles about Native American plays included herein focuses primarily on the scholarship authored by Native American scholars. Privileging and forefronting the interpretations of Native American literature by Native Americans offers an opportunity to broaden perspectives and perhaps build paths across chasms and gaps of cultural understanding, awareness, acceptance, and appreciation.

Although there is still not a wealth of scholarship readily available on Native American plays specifically, there is a considerable body of American Indian scholarship and criticism currently available on Native American literature in general, much of which is directly relevant and applicable to plays. Several new works specific to Native Theater have emerged recently, and the existing essays and commentaries express a healthy optimism regarding the continued development and evolution of contemporary Native Theater and responses to it. U.S. published essays can be found in a limited number of books and journals. A good number are available online. The bulk of what can be easily located appears to have been written only as recently as the late 1990s. It is curious that Native Theater appears to have been given relatively little written attention by non-Native critics over the past several decades. Perhaps, it is an indicator of the limited attention given to the works of artists relegated to the borders.
Christy Stanlake, however, envisions a promising future, insisting that “theoretical scholarship in the field of Native American dramaturgy is growing and attempting to approach Native American plays from perspectives that emerge out of the literature itself and the cultures that produce it” (htpt://alexanderstreet.com/products/indr.htm). She is herself a major contributor to this field. Her recent 2009 publication, *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective*, provides a history of Native American drama and develops a critical perspective with which to approach it while inviting others to join the conversation.

The critical writing listed in the second bibliography can serve as invaluable tools with which to gain a deeper understanding of Native authored plays and begin to unpack and discover deeper levels of meaning within them.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PLAYS

Adare, Sierra. “Takeover of the Andrew Jackson Reading Room.” *Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women's Theater*. Eds. Jaye Darby and Stephanie Fitzgerald. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003. 263-316. Print. This is an educational play that seeks to correct the lies told by the colonizer and to pose difficult questions to both Native and non-Natives alike. Adare’s purpose is to reclaim history. In fact, the playwright states that it was her intention to create “a vehicle for teaching American Indian history,” (266). Set in the reading room of a library, writers, both Native and non-Native, who are writing on Native topics, form a critique group. Assumptions and misconceptions collide with lived realities and it becomes obvious that the popular version of history, which has been taught in American schools for generations, may not be quite so accurate. One of the characters, Miriam, is a New Age “Indian” wannabe, whose ignorance calls attention to the colonial tendency to trivialize Native culture, often suggesting that the complexity of an entire culture can be assumed by someone outside of that culture simply by donning imitative costuming. Miriam has discovered that she has “some Indian ancestors” and is on a quest to discover her Indian roots and spirituality. Like so many non-Natives, she appears to believe that Indian spirituality is something one can simply decide to acquire with little or no effort, a commodity, perhaps. She has not made an effort to learn anything about Native American history. Lisa, another non-Native character, has decided to write about Indians “from the poor Indian’s perspective,” and for research she relies on the written works of non-Natives. When confronted by the Indian students in the group, who expose the inaccuracies of her sources, she refuses to accept that there could be another side or a different version of history. Both women give the Native characters ample opportunity to challenge their beliefs and assumptions and to reclaim their history.

is a story with ancient roots and a contemporary beat that weaves a tragic drama into an ending with hope for our future” (108). She asserts that she created it “to show all communities how disturbing the robbing of our ancestor’s graves is and how it affects Indian people” (108). According to Arkeketa, “this story [has] no boundaries for an ‘era’” since “repatriation is an infinite problem” (111). She states that her purpose as a writer is “to combat social injustices that indigenous people battle daily” (108), in this case archeological endeavors, or what she terms “legal grave robbing” (144) or “body snatching” (146) and “institutional racism” (145).

The main character of the play is Hokti, a female Indian attorney, who has a near death experience and is a recovering alcoholic struggling with her addictions, personified as an evil spirit. Hokti goes before congress to demand the repatriation of the Indian remains lying in museum repositories and private collections around the country. She calls upon the ghosts of the ancestors as witnesses, and they present some compelling statements, which move the Senators to not only accept guilt, but also to offer an apology and change the law.

This play educates the audience about the items put on exhibit in museums, which are so often taken for granted by the viewing public, clarifying that “remains” are the deceased loved ones of living people, not just ancient trinkets unaffected by public gawking. This play interrogates the assumed right of museums to claim ownership of personal belongings. It redefines the bones dug up by European-American archeologists, scientists, and other collectors, declaring them human beings rather than relics. Specifically, it demands that Native American human remains be categorized as such rather than “culturally unidentifiable human remains,” a convenient label that designates them as property and denies them their right to a proper burial. This play is a call to action to demand justice and equal human rights for a present day people and their ancestors.


We hope our book….has….”performed worlds into being,” in having taken an assortment of plays, statements, interviews, and essays and through the “performance” of revising and editing created a significant statement about the achievement(s) in and of theater by Native American women and the potential for continued creation of meaningful worlds (v).


---. “Cannibal Woman Camp Out.” *Performing Worlds into Being: Native American Women’s Theater*. Eds. Ann Armstrong, Kelli Johnson, and William Wortman. Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press, 2009. 110-113. Print. According to the editors of the anthology in which this play is published, “Owl Woman has been charged by the Cannibal women, a council of mythical Native women elders, to go out there and ‘get us a man’ (for what purposed isn’t exactly clear). These original ‘bad girls’ are being forgotten by their people and are no longer feared or reviled as they once were. Baker celebrates their unrestrained corporeality as she creates a comic and dystopian world ruled by Native women” (*Performing* ix).

Bruchac, Margaret. “Molly has Her Say.” *Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women's Theater*. Eds. Jaye Darby and Stephanie Fitzgerald. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003. 318-373. Print. This play is set in contemporary time. A young woman, Molly Marie is searching for a topic for her Master’s thesis focusing upon American Indian Studies. Although she is aware of her Pequawket Abenaki ancestry, she has disassociated herself from her heritage. As she opens herself up to the possible topics she might tackle, her ancestors, specifically, Molly Ockette, her grandmother, and Old Mali, an ancestor of many generations past, reach across worlds, time, and space to encourage her to see and hear them so that they may guide her back to remembering and knowing where she comes from and who she really is. Molly Marie’s grandmother was a healer, doctress, and medicine woman in her time. She “sings” her
granddaughter into being and whispers the stories she needs in order to be called home. She tells her the story of “The First Strawberries” to teach her about forgiveness and facilitate her healing. Young Molly needs to release the Anglo-American definitions that have been foisted upon her as a Native American woman. The grandmother wants her granddaughter to be able to see and accept who she really is and to do so with pride. The written Anglo-American historic accounts of conflicts that took place between Native peoples and non-Natives are juxtaposed against oral accounts of first peoples. The audience witnesses the disparity between the versions, making apparent the way in which written words can be utilized to eradicate a people and even alter their self perception. This play is historically educational. It exemplifies the process of self-knowing through re-connection with one’s community. Also clearly portrayed is the thin veil between the physical and spirit worlds and the belief in the existence of an ongoing communion between the living and their ancestors.

Clements, Marie. “The Girl Who Swam Forever.” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 51-70. Print. This play combines myth and reality and is set on land and underwater in the early nineteen sixties. A young girl runs away from a residential school and becomes pregnant by a white boy. She is transformed into a fish, specifically, a sturgeon. The play is partly based upon “the genesis story of the Katzie descendants on Pitt Lake and their relationship to the sturgeon and the owl” (Footpaths ix).

---. “Urban Tattoo.” Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women’s Theater. Eds. Jaye Darby and Stephanie Fitzgerald. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003. 205-228. Print. Marie Clements is both the playwright and actor of this mixed-media play. It is a one-woman show, in which, she, as Rosemarie, claims the character of the trickster Raven. She explains that the impulse for this play “came from blood memories, the place of dream and hope, the knowledge of transformation as a form of survival, and our own deep rhythm that propels us forward despite the gravity of past scars” (“Urban Tattoo” 206). She sees the play as raising the scars as warrior tattoos of our own making. Starting in the 1940’s, the story of the play stretches across decades. It “takes the themes of identity, displacement, and survival, and redesigns them into an
urban context” (“Urban Tattoo” 208). Darby, in his introduction to Keepers of the Morning Star, best describes this work as “a performance piece that employs poetic stream of consciousness and multimedia staging to probe the denigration of a Metis woman in an urban setting and her spiritual return to the tribal community” (Keepers xviii).

D’Aponte, Mimi G., ed. Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999. Print. According to a book review by Christy Stanlake, “This anthology is the first collection of Native American plays by American and Canadian authors to be published by a prominent press,” (144). It presents the works of multiple theater artists from various Indian nations. In her introduction to this anthology, D’Aponte offers that:

A simple listing of the subjects addressed in these seven plays is an almost overwhelming-identity crises, childhood trauma, alcoholism, incest, oppression, cooptation, violent colonialization, enforced assimilation, self-hate, self-acceptance, sibling rivalry, paternity, adoption, love relationships, parent-child relationships, community relationships.

Yet when we read and see these exceptional works of theatre, we experience horizons being pushed back, intense cultural life being created, performance lineage being disseminated, layers of life being revealed. We are privileged readers/spectators-privileged witnesses. (xxii-xxiii)

The included plays span a period from the early nineteen seventies to the late nineteen nineties.


Darby, Jaye T., and Stephanie Fitzgerald, Eds. Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women's Theater. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003. Print. This anthology is part of the UCLA American Indian Studies Center Native American Theater series. It is “the first major anthology of Native women’s contemporary theater [and it] endeavors to promote Native performance as an evolving art form” (xiv). In her introduction to the collection, Darby calls attention to the fact that “publications of [Native women’s] drama, for the most part remain quite limited” (xiv).

The anthology is comprised of eight plays, by both newly emerging and well established Native American playwrights. The individual plays draw upon Native storytelling,
music, dance, and ceremony and tackle a range of relevant contemporary issues facing Native Americans today, including repatriation, sovereignty, relocation, and appropriation, while using the power of story to move toward healing. Darby acknowledges that Native women’s literature, in general, is characterized by “transformative agency rooted in traditions thousands of years old” (xiv). An artist’s statement precedes each play, and the book concludes with a brief biography of each of the featured playwrights.

Daystar, Rosalie Jones. “No Home but the Heart (An Assembly of Memories).” *Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women's Theater*. Eds. Jaye Darby and Stephanie Fitzgerald. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003. 77-106. Print. Daystar created this play as “a performance work that would call attention to those generations that had to carry the burden of acculturation which took place from early reservation days until…the ‘tribal renaissance’ of the 1960’s” (“No Home” 78). The play is set “within historical times from 1800 to present: although “there are references to spiritual events which take place outside, and beyond, historical time: (Darby and Fitzgerald, *Keepers* 79). A Trickster/Storyteller character serves as the narrator of this choreographed performance.

Geiogamah, Hanay. “Body Indian: A Play in Five Scenes.” *New Native American Drama: Three plays*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. 3-44. Print. This play obviates the tragedy of alcoholism and calls attention to ways in which Native peoples may internalize negative stereotypes and unwittingly contribute to their won dismemberment as a community. Geiogamah suggests that many Native people, like the main character, Bobby, may understandably succumb to the temptation to numb the emotional and physical pain that lingers from the effects of colonial violence past and present, by abusing alcohol (or through other means) rather than supporting each other in the process of communal healing. Perhaps too, all Native people must go through the discomfort of a psychic process similar to the DTs, confronting the hideous truth and lasting images, in order to come through to the other side to a place of healing, new vision, and creativity. Geiogamah points to a positive transformation, a movement from a place of weakness and disability to a place of agency and strength. D’Aponte deems this the “most haunting of [Geiogamah’s] works.” In “Indians Playing
Indians,” Kenneth Lincoln claims this play “sets the stage for Indians to play Indians, after five hundred years of historical stand-ins” (91). He suggests that it employs a certain revitalizing dark comedy and applauds Geiogamah for his candid portrayal of Indians, asserting that “[t]he drama produces a homeopathic psychic medicine” by using “mythic humor and psychological realism to wake the people up to themselves” (93).

---. “Foghorn.” New Native American Drama: Three Plays. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. 103-126. Print. Stereotypes abound in this comedic play on a serious subject. This play is filled with almost slapstick humor and ridden with familiar Indian stereotypes ranging from blood thirsty savages to vanishing wise sachems, calling attention to their limiting effects. In “Indians Playing Indians,” Kenneth Lincoln claims that this play is “designed to entertain and teach as theatrical satire” (94). Huntman deems it the “most immediately accessible of the three” plays included in Geiogamah’s New Native American Drama (xvii).


---. New Native American Drama: Three Plays. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1980. Print. D’Aponte praises this collection as “significant and highly individual” (Seventh Generation xviii). In his introduction to this collection, Jeffrey Huntsman explains that Geiogamah’s purpose is “to present and thereby preserve living Indian traditions and….to demonstrate the facts of Indian life in America today, unvarnished by either Indian or non-Indian romanticizers” (xi). He further asserts that it is “designed to stimulate Indian people to think about their lives of quiet or confirmed desperation” and urge them “to note their condition, whether it arises from external prejudice (as in Foghorn) or from Indians’ mistreatment of one another (sic) (as in Body Indian)” (xi).

---. “49.” New Native American Drama: Three Plays. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. 195-226. Print. D’Aponte asserts that this play ‘brilliantly translates the essence of a tribal ceremony into a theatrical vehicle for evoking the solidarity of the Native community, particularly through its appeal to younger members by the character of the oldest Elder” (Seventh xviii).


---. *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. Print. This is a collection of six of Diane Glancy’s plays and includes an essay on how to discuss Native American plays, titled, “Further (Farther) Creating Dialogue to Talk about Native American Plays.” Glancy is known for her poetic language, for grounding her stories in history, and pushing the boundaries of the traditional play. In her review of this work, Jaye T. Darby asserts that “the entire collection forms its own integrative poetic whole, interweaving language, the need to belong, and the search for tribal connections” (*American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 83). She praises Glancy’s experimental approach which “disrupts conventional expectations for Western theater” (83).


---. “Pushing the Bear: A Script about the 1838-39 Cherokee Trail of Tears.” *Performing Worlds into Being: Native American Women’s Theater*. Eds. Ann Armstrong, Kelli Johnson, and William Wortman. Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press, 2009. 126-136. Print. The editors of *Performing Worlds into Being* point out that “Glancy (Cherokee) relies solely on words to construct an entire world in performance” (ix). This moving piece, absent any stage direction, makes obvious the undeniable connection between the oral tradition and the play, as actors “perform a world into being” through narration alone. This dramatization of the stories of the Trail of Tears employs first person telling of events and the emotional reactions to them which range from disbelief to fear and anger, from profound loss to a sense of hope, as if they are occurring in real time. Taking a different approach to teaching history, the play inspires each audience member to imagine the experience of walking the Trail of Tears through connection with these “personal” accounts.


---. “Stick Horse.” *War Cries: Plays by Diane Glancy*. Minneapolis: Holy Cow! Press, 1996. 83-143. Print. This play is about alcoholism among American Indian people and its effects on the individuals with this disease as well as their family members, friends, and communities. The focus of the play is Eli, a thirty-five year old alcoholic Cherokee man struggling to achieve sobriety. Glancy seems to suggest that healing from this insidious disease can be accomplished through “a sense of community and ritual, as well as connection to “[f]amily and hope” (142).


---. “Weebjob.” *Cries: Plays by Diane Glancy.* Minneapolis: Holy Cow! Press, 1997. 13-82. Print. Kimberly Blaeser asserts that this play contains “a retelling of a tribal myth: the turtle island creation story” (ix). Focused upon a family, the play dramatizes some of the many different directions Native Americans have travelled.


---. “The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance.” *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays.* Ed. Mimi G. D’Aponte. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999. 269-290. Print. According to the playwright, this play, composed of seventeen brief scenes, is a conversation or argument between a grandmother and her estranged granddaughter. The grandmother tries to connect the girl to her heritage through story, insisting that they are the carriers of their stories and histories. She asserts, “We’re nothing without them” (14), and when the girl asks her who she is without her stories, the grandmother tells her she doesn’t know, “no one ever asked,” making clear the power and importance of stories. Stories define who we are as human beings.

Diane Glancy reveals that her intention writing this play, was to:

combine the overlapping realities of myth, imagination and memory with spaces for silences…The voice speaking in different agencies…Shifting between dialogue and monologue. Not with the linear constrict of conflict/resolution, but with story moving like rain on a wind-shield. Between differencing and unreliable experiences. (Glancy, *American Gypsy* 4)

D’Aponte observes that the conversation between the grandmother and girl “connect them to the mysterious afterworld through the deer character-the grandmother’s spirit self” (*Seventh Generation* xxii).


This ‘evolving bingo experience’ is a stereotypical ‘history’ of Native Americans, complete with Indian chiefs meeting Columbus, multiple wars, Tonto and the Lone Ranger, ‘Indian’ advertisements, and Mr. President and the First Lady-most speaking their pieces against a background of contrapuntal musical selections. Farce and
melodrama abound, becoming the instruments of the sharp, satiric viewpoint of the playwrights who are telling the tragic tale of their conquered peoples. (*Seventh Generation* xx)

Rathbun asserts that Howe’s purpose is “to contest and displace stock images…. juxtaposing them primarily with the material presence of contemporary Native peoples” (*American Indian Dramaturgy* 37).

Huston-Findley, Shirley and Rebecca Howard, eds. *Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. Print. This anthology, with an introduction, by Rebecca Howard, offers a stunning sampling of works by Native American women playwrights of various tribal affiliations, whose works are maintained in NAWPA’s archive.


---. “Ola Na Iwi (The Bones Live).” *Hawai‘i Nei: Island Plays*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002. 143-227. Print. Set primarily in Hawaii, this is a fast paced play about repatriation of human remains, or more specifically: bones. A young woman steals the bones of an ancestor from a museum with the intention of bringing her spirit home to afford the ancestor the dignity, respect, honor, and peace she is entitled to as a human being. Characters portraying early nineteenth century scientists interrupt the action presenting their justifications for grave-robbing, but the unavoidable fact remains that the bones they exhume are not those of their white relations. Rather, they belong to non-white, no-Christians, who were viewed as less than human and therefore not accorded the same rights and respect. Through glimpses of 19th century events around the turn of the century, we are given a context from which to question what really constitutes theft. Does the cloak of scientific study absolve the person who digs up bones and trades them for money? Is the descendant, who returns a person’s remains to their rightful resting place really a criminal? Despite the serious nature of the questions raised by this play, there is plenty of humor. Some of the action could even be categorized as slapstick. Also noteworthy, is the fact that this is a Hawaiian play bridging the connection across the Pacific between indigenous people of the mainland and the island by inclusion in this Native American publication. References to similar treatment of Samoans and Philippine persons suggest the unacceptable treatment of indigenous persons around the globe by dominant societies. The widespread acceptance of non-white individuals as lesser beings is made appallingly evident in this play. It serves as yet another call to action for justice and equality.

---. “The Story of Susanna.” *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays*. Ed. Mimi G. D’Aponte. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999. 291-371. Print. This is an example of a non-linear play. It opens in the Old Testament following the main character, Susanna, through time to the present day, as she is repeatedly forced to
prove both her innocence and sanity. Christy Stanlake describes it as a “politically charged play that interrogates both biblical mythos and western notions of gendered space in order to invert power structures and reclaim both space and myth for women” (Native 46). Several female characters are introduced, all of whom have been the victims of violence and abuse. Ultimately, the play’s intention is healing and transformation.

Koostachin, Jules Arita and Jennifer Fell Hayes. “Asivak’s Creation Story (English and Swampy Cree Versions).” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 23-26. Print. In this very brief play, a boy and girl from enemy tribes learn to love and respect each other, and through their union is born Asivak, “known as the strongest soul, because he was created by the love of enemies…[who] found hope in each other” (Footpaths 25). According to Shirley A. Huston-Findley, this play, presented in two languages, English and Cree, “reminds us all of the beauty that may come when we embrace new ways of thinking and knowing” (Footpaths vii).

Kreipe de Montano, Martha and Jennifer Fell Hays. “Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth.” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 71-89. Print. This is an interactive play that requires audience members to participate as Pilgrims. It is set in contemporary time, shortly before Thanksgiving, but moves between the present and Dream Time and back to the early 1600s. Opening in present time with a Native American Thanksgiving prayer, the play works to reestablish the nature and purpose of the original Native tradition. A modern young Native girl is disconnected from her history. When her parents try to impress upon her that, for some, Thanksgiving is “a day of sadness and mourning,” she asks why they need to focus upon things of the past. The parents recruit a relative, who appears to be a medicine woman, to teach the girl. Although their encounter is brief, that night, in a fashion similar to Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, the spirits visit the girl taking her into the Dream Time on a journey to Thanksgivings past. She witnesses the first disastrous winter after the Pilgrims arrived on this continent bringing with them diseases that ravaged the Native peoples with whom they had contact. Millions of First
Peoples died. The girl bears witness as the Wampanoag people teach the Europeans to plant food in order to survive another season and as the Wampanoag are promised arms in exchange for food and survival skills. The final journey, on which the spirit takes her, is to another Thanksgiving celebration only a few short years after the Pilgrims’ arrival. She is horrified to learn that in 1637, the English held a Thanksgiving celebration to commemorate a massacre in which seven hundred Pequot men, women, and children were murdered at Mystic Fort in Gorton, Connecticut. The play closes with an honor song to encourage ongoing remembrance of those who died so that some could continue. They pray for healing of the country through remembrance. Educational in nature, the play is reclamation of the Thanksgiving tradition. It would be an ideal play to perform, especially in schools, around the Thanksgiving holiday.


Manuel, Vera. “Strength of Indian Women.” *Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive*. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 172-199. Print. LeAnne Howe asserts that this play “is what Choctaws would call *nukfokechi* – a thing that teaches and inspires” (“Tribalography” 123). It is a potent play to read and is performed using an all-female cast. A thirteen year old girl appears to be the central character as this coming of age story opens; however, she actually serves as the symbol for the coming of age of three generations of women who were robbed of their individual childhoods and have lived difficult lives as adults. The young girl’s coming of age celebration provides the occasion and catalyst for several women to break their silence and reveal to each other, for the first time, the horrible truth about the abuses they suffered in Indian boarding schools at the hands of Caucasian Catholic priests and nuns. They list numerous atrocities that committed against them spanning tortures that were psychological, physical, and spiritual. Silenced as children with threats and admonitions, they held the truth of those abuses, including the rape and murder of innocents, deep inside themselves for decades. Now, as grown women, and in celebration of a new generation free of legalized kidnapping and the violence of mandatory attendance at Indian boarding
schools, they speak out and begin the healing process. They work to reconcile their feelings of anger, shame, and despair, finally recognizing that they were doing their best to survive under terrible circumstances. While mending the dress and moccasins the young girl will wear at her celebration, the women give each other the gift of missing pieces of stories, weaving together a communal history that is more complete and fosters forgiveness, compassion, and understanding. The young girl is gifted with her family history. The play creates a space of sanctity, a confessional, where the truth releases these women to both grieve and forgive, as well as to celebrate their survival. They celebrate a new cycle, a return to traditional ceremonies, a baptism, in a sense. This play is a celebration of womanhood, strength, survival, regeneration, resilience, and hope. It is educational, disturbing, moving, inspirational, and transformative.


Mojica, Monique. “EHTNOSTRESS: Women’s Voices in Native American Theatre.” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 11-12. Print. Monique Mojica is both the playwright of and actor in this one woman show. She guides the audience through a brief history of Native theatre and the Native Performance Culture research project, the purpose of which is “to identify performance principles inherent in the ceremonial and social cultures of the Natives of this continent, for the purpose of construction a contemporary theatre methodology” (17). Mojica defines ETHNOSTRESS as “Post-Colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder,” (11) asserting to an assumed Native audience that “If you are still in ‘Recovery from Discovery,’ you may be suffering from Post=Colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder-or-ETHNOSTRESS!!!!!!!!!!” (13). Mojica cites her art as her form of resistance, insisting that they are one and the same. Her explicitly stated goal is to “create art out of atrocity” (19) and she reveals that her “work is propelled by what I most need to heal in my life,” (13). Her motivation is to illuminate the unexamined corners of “fear, shame and shadow” (14) in order to inspire healing transformation toward the ultimate goal of achieving wholeness in herself and her
community. The monologue is at once astute, enlightening, reflective, and introspective, angry and engaging, as well as enormously witty. As Mojica reveals dark historic truths lurking in the shadows, her presentation prompts laughter in classic trickster fashion. She admits to her affinity for this clownish character, asking “What else can one do with rage?” (20). She explains that the trickster or clown, is a cultural hero, a teacher and a sacred critic whose primary purpose is to “enter sacred ceremony to scandalize, scare, ridicule, and make people laugh,” all to teach them to behave and live better (20). Claiming the role of the trickster in this insightful performance, she does all of that, and she asserts Native survival, presence, and active resistance.


---. “The Indolent Boys.” Three Plays: The Indolent Boys, Children of the Sun, and the Moon in Two Windows. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. 1-71. Print. This play is based upon a true story of three Kiowa boys who, in 1891, were badly beaten by a schoolmaster at boarding school for fighting. They ran away in an attempt to find their way home, but froze to death. According to Christy Stanlake,

The play not only theatricalizes a story so important in Kiowa history that it was recorded in pictographic calendars of the Kiowas, but also educates the public about the painful Indian boarding schools, where Native American children in the United States and Canada were forced to live away from their families while receiving an education that forebode speaking Native languages, practicing Native religions and retaining Native cultural traditions. (Native 22).

This moving play gets under the skin forcing the audience to witness some of the painful realities of this time of legalized kidnapping in the United States.

Three Plays: The Indolent Boys, Children of the Sun, and the Moon in Two Windows.

Mosley, Denise. “Letters.” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 90-120. Print. This play is set in contemporary time. It dramatizes the power of words both spoken and written. Women of different ages and circumstances reveal their souls through letters in which they commit to paper their dreams, desires, hopes, and fears. A young girl addresses her diary entries to God, making the connection to prayer quite obvious and perhaps even suggesting that all the letters are written invocations. Many of the scenes take place at an airport, a place of travel, flight, and movement, suggesting the power of words to move and relocate. Each of the women is seeking love, connection and relationship, and their letters demonstrate the way in which our words connect us human-to-human, how they can inspire, and how they can evoke and invoke love or its antithesis.


Oliva, JudyLee. “Te Ata.” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 200-268. Print. This play is written by Chickasaw playwright, JudyLee Oliva, about the life and career, of Chickasaw actress, Mary “Te Ata” Thompson Fisher (1895-1995). Te Ata, a classically trained actress, performed a one-woman show from the 1920’s through the 1980’s around the world. Oliva was able to meet with her before she passed away in 1995, and she was allowed access to a collection of personal letters and other historical documents as resources for the development of the play. The playwright’s intention is “to share Te Ata’s story and secure her place in history” (Performing Worlds into Being 174). The play brings to life the conflicts and questions many Native American performers grappled with at the beginning of the twentieth century. Christy Stanlake shares that,
The 2006 Equity-level, full-scale production of Te Ata was the first professional Native American play to be produced largely by a Native American nation. The play featured some of Native Theatre’s rising stars. The artistic team included professional theatre artists from throughout the United States, while the cast was comprised of ‘actors from across ten states and eight Native [American nations].’ (1) Thousands attended the opening night performance hailing from a wide range of communities. This play, which is often credited with bringing Native Drama into the mainstream, celebrates Native Theatre as an inherently Native art form and strongly suggests that Native Theatre will continue into the future.

Rendon, Marcie. “Bring the Children Home.” Footpaths and Bridges: Voices from the Native American Women Playwrights Archive. Eds. Shirley Huston-Findley and Rebecca Howard. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. 27-50. Print. This play premiered at Children’s Play Theatre, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1994. It is set in present time during the winter and focuses “on generational relationships and passing on or reclaiming rituals, practices, and languages that were lost or repressed for previous generations” (Footpaths 5).


---. “SongCatcher: A Native Interpretation of the Story of Frances Densmore.” Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women's Theater. Eds. Jaye Darby and Stephanie Fitzgerald. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2003. 1-75. Print. According to playwright, Marcie Rendon, she based this play “on the real-life belief systems of indigenous people that exist as vibrantly today as in the past” (Keepers 2). There are few written accounts of the impact Frances Densmore’s interpretations and words had on Native Americans. Densmore, a non-Native woman, documented Native traditions from a Eurocentric perspective. Instead of working to better understand Native customs and celebrate a different world view, she imposed her own perceptions on the Native songs and customs she encountered. Rendon recognizes Densmore as an intruder into the private and spiritual lives of her ancestors and through the play, explores the
question of what sort of person Densmore really was. Her play works to de-center the privileged works of non-Native anthropologists and academics, asserting Native cultural authority. It interrogates the ramifications of according credibility to one version of a story over another. *SongCatcher* serves to undermine the American myth and covert message to Native peoples “that the real songs are locked up in Washington, D.C., instead of in the hearts and spirits of Native people themselves” (7).

As Ann Haugo observes, in her 1999 dissertation,

> Few of the common Indian images represent a contemporary traditional elder, or especially a younger Native man or woman, who takes a political and cultural interest in the survival of his or her traditions….Images of traditional life are usually relegated to the past, and often….traditions are spoken of in the past tense. (16)

However, this play seems to do exactly that. It focuses on a contemporary young Ojibwe couple, in 1998, dwelling in an inner-city apartment: Chris and Jack, and an elder Native man, Bill, who serves as their friend and spiritual advisor. The young woman is employed by the sanitation department, and the young man is struggling to discover how to be a “traditional” Indian. He turns to, and obsesses over, Densmore’s books. The contemporary setting serves to counter the stereotype of the vanished Indian. Chris and Jack disagree on the best method for pursuit of the “traditional,” while living in modern times. Their discussions foreground the importance of seeking the verbal guidance of a Native elder and pursuing a personal and internal journey versus learning about one’s spirituality from the colonizer’s uniformed or biased documentation. Over the course of the play, Jack comes to realize that Bill, the elder, has been trying to point him in the right direction all along and that he is available to help him connect with his culture in a more meaningful and traditional way. He learns to value the spoken words of this Native elder, to trust his own intuition, and to listen for the voices of the ancestral spirits around him. *SongCatcher* empowers contemporary Native playgoers and offers non-Natives an opportunity to consider that what is written many not always be as authentic or valuable as commonly believed. The play reclaims Native traditions and history and asserts a contemporary Native presence. Rendon successfully accomplishes her stated intention to interweave Native spiritual reality with ‘present time physical reality,” and assert their coexistence consistent with the belief systems of present day indigenous peoples (*Keepers* 2). The play further asserts the relevance of traditional Native values in modern
times, and cautions against succumbing to European-American values and non-Native versions of history.


….not only confronts directly the harsh prejudices against and within Oklahoma – Native communities at the turn of the century, but also functions as a ceremonial return to an ethos of sacred place and community. Riggs accomplishes this through a unique dramatic structure that relies upon Cherokee concepts of place, specifically those associated with clan placement upon Cherokee ceremonial grounds. From his construction of characters, to setting, themes, language, and dramatic structure, Riggs deliberately constructs a play that reflects Cherokee epistemologies that are part of Native American palatial discourse. This conscious blend Native theories with theatrical aesthetics alls us to see The Cherokee Night as the first major Native American play to use a distinctly Native form of dramaturgy. (Native 44)

Many Native American scholars have written about this play including Daniel Heath Justice, Craig Womack, Jace Weaver, and Jaye T. Darby. Mimi D’Aponte explains that this play “addresses serious issues concerning the Cherokee people in a raw, powerful manner, by utilizing semi chronological flashbacks about a group of adolescents whose difficult lives are represented during the course of seven scenes” (Seventh xvi), seven being representative of the Cherokee Nation’s seven tribes.


---. “Green Grow the Lilacs.” The Cherokee Night and Other Plays. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, Publishing Division of the University, 2003. 2-105. Print. This is the play upon which Rogers and Hammerstein based their 1943 musical Oklahoma!


…..developed in collaboration with the Colorado Sisters and performance artist, Murielle Borst (Kuna/Rappahannock). Its form is episodic, moving from ritual chanting and dancing to enacted scenes to monologues to ritual chanting and dancing. The storyweaving relates to the childhood of the sisters, its horrors and its hilarity. (xx-xxi)


---. “Winnetou’s Snake Oil Show from Wigwam City.” *Keepers of the Morning Star: An Anthology of Native Women’s Theater*. Eds. Jaye T. Darby and Stephanie Fitzgerald. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Theater, 2003. 229-262. Print. This is a humorous, irreverent, and somewhat angry performance piece, during which cast members run into the audience, thereby shattering the fourth wall, to recruit someone to participate in a mock ceremony on stage. The Author’s Note for this play, states that it:

…..is the result, the culmination, of all these feelings over all these years, the feelings of our culture being taken away from us. Years ago, “hobbyists” (non-Indian people who take up Native cultures as a hobby) were content to don the outward manifestations of our culture (clothes, jewelry, dancing, etc.). They didn’t give a damn about what was really happening inside of us. We had something to hold onto for the time being. As years went one, though, they started to become interested in the spiritual part of us. They suddenly knew more about Indians than Indian people themselves. The questions, as a result, becomes, for me, how do I approach this stealing of spirituality? Do I confront each incident of theft or do I ignore it, let it slide and then feel like I am a sellout? (Huston-Findley and Howard 270-271)

The idea for the title, characters, and some of the storyline was born during a European tour. The Spiderwoman artists learned that many Europeans had formed their ideas about
Native Americans primarily from a popular German novel, by Karl May. The novel is about a German man named Gunther, who travels to America and meets Winnetou, an Apache character modeled upon the stereotype of the noble savage. This unquestionably slapstick play is chockful of stereotypical depictions of Native Americans that force the audience to recognize their absurdity. The show closes with a powerful statement and assertion of survivance:

See me. I’m talking, loving, hating, drinking too much, creating, performing; my stories, my songs, my dances, my ideas. Now I telling you, step back, move aside, sit down, hold your breath, save your own culture. Discover your own spirituality. Now I telling you. Watch me. I’m alive. I’m not defeated. I begin. Now I telling you. (Darby and Fitzgerald 262)

Overall, the performance seems very ceremonial in nature. It confronts the theft of spirituality and is an undeniable act of reclamation.

Taylor, Drew Hayden. “Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth.” Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays. Ed. Mimi G. D’Aponte. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999. 201-268. Print. Drew Taylor is a leading Native Canadian playwright, a television scriptwriter, and the recipient of a number of awards. For several years, he served as the artistic director of the Native Earth Performing Company of Toronto. D’Aponte says that Taylor “uses a tragic-comic treatment of searing questions concerning self-identity, paternity, sibling-hood and adoption” in this play, and although his ‘touch is light, his search for answers [is] profound” (xxi).


University, 2000. 43-54. Print. This play is based upon a short story and “is set in a specific period of time on the reservation.”


---. “The Independence of Eddie Rose.” *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays.* Ed. Mimi G. D’Aponte. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1999. Print. D’Aponte dubs this “Yellow Robe’s signature piece,” explaining that it “has been the subject of dissertation studies, multiple productions and much praise,” (*Seventh Generation* xx) She further asserts it is:

…a powerful play, which spares the reader/spectator neither the pain nor the dilemmas facing its protagonist. Teenager Eddie seeks to escape his dysfunctional family situation while at the same time being determined to protect his younger sister from abuse. The specificity of his experience evokes in audience members clear recollections of their own youthful vulnerability. Eddie’s independence, if it is to be had, becomes ours. (*Seventh Generation* xix-xx)

In his dissertation, *American Indian Dramaturgy: Situating Native Presence on the American Stage*, Rathbun describes this work as “a resistant piece by social, historical, and Aristotelian standards” (4).


---. “Rez Politics.” *Where the Pavement Ends: Five Native American Plays.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. 55-70. Print. This play is based upon a short story form a collection entitled *Things I Meant to Tell You Later.* According to Yellow Robe, this play is a “response to the question of who is Indian and who is not.” It challenges the assumption that blood quotient is the only factor to be considered in determining who is Indian and calls attention to the fact that “the Native Nations of this country share blood with all the colors of the world” (x). Set in Montana, in the early seventies, the play focuses on two young boys struggling with their parents’ prejudices and conflicts over their own mixed blood identities. Ultimately, the youth resolve their confusion and decide to trust in their friendship, suggesting hope and promise for future generations.

---. “Sneaky.” *Where the Pavement Ends: Five Native American Plays.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. 127-169. Print. In this play, three brothers want to honor their newly deceased mother’s burial wishes by providing her with a traditional funeral; however, non-Native laws dictate the “proper” way to dispose of human remains, and the mother has been taken to a funeral home for this purpose. Of course, the brothers will also be expected to find a way to pay for the expenses. Instead, they “sneak” into the funeral home and reclaim the body. Through this journey, they explore the reasoning behind Native and non-Native practices around death. They reclaim their own traditions and examine their familial relationships, their ideas around what really constitutes family, challenging the cultural ideas imposed by the colonizer. It is well worth contemplating the title of the play. The colonizer has forced the Native to forgo his own traditions to the point of claiming control of Native bodies, even in death. The Native person must “sneak” to continue his traditional religious practices and ensure that a loved one’s body is not mishandled by non-Natives and subjected to practices contrary to Native beliefs. According to Yellow Robe, this play was quite difficult to write. He shares that the five brothers represent a way of life he once lived and explains that it is about “why we, as people, do the things we do.”
---. “The Star Quilter.” *Where the Pavement Ends: Five Native American Plays*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. 3-42. Print. According to the playwright, this one-act play that spans three decades was the hardest for him to write. It deals specifically with the lack of knowledge Montana residents have about Montana’s Native Nations. Dramatized by a relationship between a well-to-do white woman, Luanne Jorgensen, and a poor Native woman, Mona Gray, the play speaks to this lack of awareness. Luanne buys quilts that Mona makes. Her utter disregard and lack of any respect for Mona couple with her obvious sense of privilege and authority are appalling. She does not relate to Mona as a fellow human being. Instead, she uses her for her talents, her ability to create beautiful objects, something she cannot do. All of her interactions with Mona are driven by her insatiable desire for the acquisition of these objects, Mona’s quilts. She recognizes no space as being under Mona’s control, freely barging into her home whenever she pleases, and she takes credit for the quilts, assuming a right to do so by virtue of her possession of them. Even when Mona’s quilting leads to the loss of her vision, Luanne remains unmoved and unsatisfied.


BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES
ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN PLAYS


some of the earliest productions: “Na Haaz Zaan” and “Body Indian.” Brown notes that Geiogamah and his ensemble decided to “take the approach of survival in the future rather than reproach for the past” (173) when it came to the themes of plays that would be performed. He clarifies that the Ensemble’s “collective intent is not to exploit but to illuminate, not to lecture but to unlock movement and images within the heart” (174).


Dawes, Birgit. “Web/Sites: Tomson Highway’s and James Luna’s Remappings of Space and Time.” American Indian Performing Arts: Critical Directions. Eds. Hanay Geiogamah


Geiogamah, Hanay. “The New American Indian Theater: An Introduction.” *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader.* Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2000. 159-64. Print. In this essay, Hanay Geiogamah discusses the fact that times and circumstances have changed, and for some tribes the financial resources necessary to produce theatrical performances is now available. He discusses strategies Native producers and directors must develop in order to establish and maintain Native American theater companies. Geiogamah agrees with an opinion repeatedly stressed by others that Indian theater can be a vehicle for helping Native American peoples gain a deeper self-knowledge. He sees playwrights as being charged with working to undo the damage of “stereotyping, assimilation, and acculturation” (163), and asserts that “the most important function of the Indian dramatist is to communicate with his own people” (163).
Geiogamah, Hanay, and Jaye T. Darby, ed. *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader.* Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, 2000. Print. In this reader, is a community of Native American voices engaged in an active and relatively current conversation regarding “the possibilities of Native theater in its myriad forms and performance traditions” (iii). This work is meant to serve as a talking circle of people “committed to the artistic and academic development of Native theater” (iii). It offers essays, interviews, and reflections on the subject, as well as a bibliography of resource materials. One of the early chapters, “Setting the Stage: An Historical Overview” provides just that, a concise history of the Native American experience beginning with creation stories and closing with the end of the twentieth century. Its purpose is to provide a framework, the general understanding necessary for approaching Native American theater.


---. *Further (Farther): Creating Dialogue to Talk About Native American Plays.* *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. 200-204. Print. In her essay, prolific playwright, Glancy discusses the connection between story and stage, as well as the importance of place, in a play, specifically, the land for which the stage serves as a representation, and to which a Native American story must be connected. She also stresses the importance of having a story told from multiple points of view. Glancy refers to Native Theater as written oral tradition, the “New Wave oral tradition and the weaving of voices and groups of voices within that tradition” (360) or as
“spoken word art.” Her view of Native theater is that it should be experimental, saying that it is meant for exploration, especially during these early formative years. She envisions the Native Theater of the future as one that will combine fiction, poetry, myth, magic, and ethnography. Glancy asserts that the purpose of Native Theater is healing, in part, and she compares theatrical performances to sand paintings. For both arts, each event is unique and temporary, and each is a vehicle for healing. She expresses the hope that Native Theater will ultimately give voice to the pluralities that exist in Native American culture.

Haugo, Ann. “American Indian theatre.” The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature. Eds. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 189-204. Print. Ann Haugo asserts that the “Native American Theatre Movement is a relatively recent phenomenon” (189), which began with the formation of a few companies during the 1970s. She points out that although audiences were found, publication of Native American plays and scholarship on Native American theatre was lacking; however, she states that more published plays are currently available. Production of Native American plays is still limited. Haugo discusses some of the first successful Native playwrights, beginning with Lynn Riggs (Cherokee), who, in the 1930s, wrote over twenty-five plays, which were published during his lifetime; Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa-Delaware), who launched the American Indian Theater Ensemble, later known as the Native American Theater Ensemble (NATE), the first successful Native theater company; and Muriel Miguel, co-founder of Spiderwoman Theater, “a company that would become the longest continually running women’s theatre and longest continually running professional Native theatre in the United States” (190). She also discusses a number of other theatre companies that formed during the seventies and eighties.

Haugo sees Native American theatre as having grown out of and drawing upon the oral tradition to address social, cultural, and identity issues. She asserts that there is a diversity of themes and purposes in Native drama. Some are politically charged; whereas, others focus on storytelling, teaching, and preservation. Native drama affords the opportunity to challenge well established stereotypes. Haugo also comments on the structure of Native drama, which she describes as more fluid episodic narratives, rather
than conflict-centered. She puts forth the question as to whether it should adapt to the Western paradigm. Haugo also believes that there is much healing power to be found in stories and performance.


---. “Native Playwright’s Newsletter Interview: Lisa Mayo.” *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader*. Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2000. 320-341. Print. Ann Haugo’s interview of Lisa Mayo takes place in June 1995 just before the twentieth anniversary of Spiderwoman Theatre, a company co-founded by Mayo. During the interview they discuss Mayo’s current project of that time, *Daughters from the Stars/Nis Bundor*, which Mayo describes as a healing project about illusion and magic and “about making ourselves whole” (321). They also discuss other plays and the inspiration that has led Lisa Mayo to their creation. Mayo, who claims that much of her inspiration comes from the Marx Brothers and Laurel and Hardy, sheds light on her process as a performer, as well as the work involved in researching the characters she plays. She also discusses her experience as a writer.


Heath, Sally Ann. “The American Indian Community House.” *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader*. Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2000. 224-227. Print. Heath provides a brief history on the American Indian Community House (AICCH), which was founded in New York City, in 1969. What began as a volunteer agency to assist Native Americans who had relocated to the city, has grown to a social support agency with staff that “provides health counseling, alcohol and substance abuse counseling, and job training” (224), as well as
cultural support, presenting plays, musicals, readings, and concerts. It has been home to several Native American theatre troops, including: Off the Beaten Path, Native Earth, and Spiderwoman Theater.


King, Bruce. “Emergence and Discovery: Native American Theater Comes of Age.” American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader. Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2000. 165-168. Print. King describes theater as a living art, like the oral storytelling tradition, explaining that each performance represents a unique experience in which the invisible is brought to life. Actors communicate with a live audience and the audience’s response is immediate. He opines that the purpose of theater is to “make an audience feel” (165). King discusses theater as a “vehicle for the presentation and preservation of oral tradition” (167). He believes that theater empowers Native Americans “to confront and examine the present,” (167) and to look at who they are today in order to gain a better understanding of themselves.


Mojica, Monique and Ric Knowles. “Creation Story Begins Again: Performing Transformation, Bridging Cosmologies.” *Performing Worlds into Being: Native American Women’s Theater.* Eds. Ann Armstrong, Kelli Johnson, and William Wortman. Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press, 2009. 2-6. Print. *Performing Worlds into Being,* the larger work in which this conference presentation is published, takes its name from this creation story about Native theatre that celebrates “the power of words, the potential of creating new and possible worlds, and the performativity of Native art” (Armstrong v). Knowles and Mojica (Kuna/Rappahannock) ask how the stories can be transformed for healing and regeneration, recognizing that much of what has been created for Native theater over the past two decades has focused on a reexamination of history to take inventory and expose deep wounds. They suggest that now it is time to focus theatre on healing those wounds and moving into a transformed future. Mojica challenges Native artists to courageously create works that provoke, subvert, transform, and heal, saying:

If theatre is a tool of transformation, which we know it to be, then we have a responsibility that the stories that we tell will be stories of our becoming, of our becoming whole. Which means that the stories that we tell must be creation stories…It is not enough to make art out of atrocity and risk commodification of those
stories. It is not enough to leave the stories on the stage without finding a way to make them transformative. To take, and provoke, response-ability. (Armstrong, Johnson and Wortman 65)

Knowles and Mojica call upon the Western academy to not only address Native plays as text and “box it into archives” (5), but to be part of a collaborative effort to ensure that the plays realize their true nature in performance.

Miami University Libraries, Department of Theatre. *Native American Women Playwrights Archive (NAWPA).* Miami University Libraries. n.d. Web. 20 February 2011. http://staff.lib.muohio.edu/nawpa/ The NAWPA site offers an extensive collection of “manuscripts and plays [many of which have never been published] as well as production materials such as programs, posters, flyers, photographs, correspondence, articles, and audio visual materials” and a number of other related records and documents. The collection includes many historical materials from Spiderwoman Theater. The materials are organized three ways: alphabetically by title, by playwright name, and by material type. Access is “open under the rules and regulations of the Walter Havighurst Special Collections, Miami University Libraries.”

New, Lloyd K. “Credo for American Indian Theatre.” *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader.* Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2000. 3-4. Print. When he wrote this brief essay, in 1969, New asserted that American Indian theatre evolved from Indian traditions, “most of which are closely tied to religion” (3). He stated that “no pure traditional form of Indian theater presently exists – one must be created” (3).

Oliva, JudyLee, and Christy Stanlake. “Native Drama in the Mainstream: A Case Study of the Te Ata World Premiere.” *Performing Worlds into Being: Native American Women’s Theater.* Eds. Ann Armstrong, Kelli Johnson, and William Wortman. Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press, 2009. 163-178. Print. Playwright JudyLee Oliva and dramaturge Christy Stanlake discuss the process and unprecedented success of bringing the play Te Ata alive on the stage as a full scale mainstream production. The members of the cast and crew totaled close to two hundred and represented many Native American nations from ten different states. Over three thousand people attended across eight performances. The play was well received by both Native and non-Native audience members, as well as
by the critics. In their article, Oliva and Stanlake share the many steps and considerations involved from researching and scripting, to casting, staging, financing, and advertising, to dealing with a multitude of challenges and frustrations encountered at each step of the process. They emphasize the importance of holding on to the playwright’s vision when resuscitating a script into a live performance.


Reinholz, Randy, and Jean Bruce Scott. “Native Voices: New Directions in New Play Development.” American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader. Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2000. 265-82. Print. This essay discusses the process of developing a play from the solitary task of script writing, through workshopping and reading, to production and publication. The authors share that “new work by Native Playwrights has been slow to
be developed” (267), in great part due to lack of sufficient financial support. In 1993, they found that there were few known Native playwrights or available Native American scripts. They share the story of the birth and development of Native Voices: A Festival of Native Plays, at Illinois State University and go on to discuss three of the plays that were workshopped and developed during those festivals and subsequently produced by Native Voices.

Rendon, Marcie. “Theatre in the House/Raving Native Productions.” *Performing Worlds into Being: Native American Women’s Theater*. Eds. Ann Armstrong, Kelli Johnson, and William Wortman. Oxford, Ohio: Miami University Press, 2009. 138-42. Print. In this essay, Rendon describes her efforts to ensure that theatre thrives as an art form for Native peoples. She describes her successful “Theatre in the House” workshop process offering it as a model for others. She explains how she encourages workshop participants to create scripts that “incorporate their tribal stories – past and present…[and] utilize their songs, whether traditional or modern” (140). She also reminds them “to be consistent with the spiritual teachings of their people out of respect for their community” (140) when fashioning their plays (*Performing Worlds into Being* 140).

Stanlake, Christy. *Native American Drama: A Critical Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print. This long overdue reflection on Native American drama provides an historical and critical perspective with which to approach this art. Moreover, it opens the door, inviting others to engage in a conversation about Native drama. Identifying her own book as, “the first full-length examination of how Native Americans actively construct Native theater” (24), Stanlake begins with a brief history of Native American drama and then probes nine plays to exemplify how certain Native American intellectual discourses take shape, manifesting in them, and to assist in unpacking meaning in Native plays in general. She reveals that Native dramaturgy encompasses a network of specific discourses born out of Native American philosophies. The four discourses upon which she focuses include: platiality, storying, LeAnne Howe’s theory of *tribalography*, and Gerald Vizenor’s *survivance*. Stanlake stresses that this method of interrogation is crucial to avoid “replicating a theoretical kind of colonization that derives from reading Native theoretical works with only non-Native largely western-based concepts” (24). Her stated purpose is to develop “a critical methodology for reading the
unique aspects of Native American dramaturgy” (15), and she avers that Native theater “is its own field of drama, one that enacts Native intellectual traditions existing independently from Western dramas, yet capable of extending mainstream theoretical theories: (i). Stanlake both invites and challenges other scholars to enter into and engage in intellectual discourse, discussion, and analysis of, and specific to, Native American drama.


---. “Drew Hayden Taylor: The ongoing adventures of the Blue-Eyed Ojibwe.” Drew Hayden Taylor. n.d. Web. 20 February 2011. http://www.drewhaydentaylor.com/ This site provides a brief biography of Drew Hayden Taylor, access to excerpts from some of his works, a list of some of the awards he has received, information on upcoming performances and appearances, and links to various sites, some of which are for Canadian performance companies.

---. “Storytelling to Stage: The Growth of Native Theatre in Canada.” The Drama Review 41.3 (1997): 140-52. Print. At the time this article was printed, Drew Hayden Taylor asserted that Native Theater was “alive and well and living….amazingly strong, quite popular, and practically everywhere in the Canadian theatrical community,” (140) with more than two dozen produced Native playwrights. He provides some background history of the Native experience in Canada and some insight into the way in which Native theater evolved in that country. Taylor discusses “one of the fundamental differences between European and Native drama – the lack of all-consuming conflict” and suggests that the reason for this is that, traditionally, “[o]vert or aggressive conflict was actively and urgently discouraged within the [Native] family or social group” (144) something that carried into all Native stories including those portrayed on the stage. According to Taylor, theater is “a logical extension of storytelling….for Native people, who have an
oral culture” (140) and he celebrates the fact that the people have been given back their voices and are using them to tell stories again.

Theobald, Elizabeth. “Reaching Into the Stream.” *American Indian Theater in Performance: A Reader*. Eds. Hanay Geiogamah and Jaye T. Darby. Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2010. Print. 362-3. Print. In this essay, written in 1996, Theobald describes Native American theater as being set apart “because of the very action of nurturing, directing, and producing theater in a Native community,” which she asserts truly means something, explaining that it has “to do with the act of valuing our communities, ourselves, our families, and the rest of creation. And it has to do with the power of remembering” (362). Theobald claims that she does what she does, as a director, to tell the stories and to honor them, in order to “expose the poison” so that healing may follow.


