BRIDGING THE GAP: DREW HAYDEN TAYLOR, NATIVE CANADIAN PLAYWRIGHT IN HIS TIMES

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ABSTRACT

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In his relatively short career, Drew Hayden Taylor has amassed a significant level of popular and critical success, becoming the most widely produced Native playwright in the world. Despite nearly twenty years of successful works for the theatre, little extended academic discussion has emerged to contextualize Taylor's work and career. This dissertation addresses this gap by focusing on Drew Hayden Taylor as a writer whose theatrical work strives to bridge the distance between Natives and Non-Natives. Taylor does so in part by humorously demystifying the perceptions of Native people. Taylor's approaches to humor and demystification reflect his own approaches to cultural identity and his expressions of that identity.

Initially this dissertation will focus briefly upon historical elements which served to silence Native peoples while initiating and enforcing the gap of misunderstanding between Natives and non-Natives. Following this discussion, this dissertation examines significant moments which have shaped the re-emergence of the Native voice and encouraged the formation of the Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada.

Finally, this dissertation will analyze Taylor's methodology of humorous demystification of Native peoples and stories on the stage. Of primary focus in this discussion is Taylor's use of a distinctly Native aesthetic as a means of constructing his works for the theatre, despite surface appearances of primarily western influence. To provide evidence of this Native aesthetic, Taylor's work and aesthetic goals, as expressed by Taylor, will be explored critically: First through a post-colonial critical framework

and then through a Native-centered critical structure. Following these discussions, this study will focus on a textual analysis of several of Taylor's works for the theatre. These analyses demonstrate the manner in which Taylor actively works to demystify perceptions of Natives by utilizing Native sensibilities of humor, character, story, and setting. This dissertation supplies answers to questions such as: What are the historical elements that serve to foster Taylor's emergence as a leading voice in Canadian Native theatre? What are Taylor's personal aesthetic goals for his theatrical work, and do these goals arise from primarily a Western or Native influenced perspective?

For my Mother, Susan R. (Earl) Adamek, my Father, Jonathan T. Young, and my brothers: Evan T. Young and Phillip E. Young. To those teachers who encourage me to build and cross bridges on my own, especially Bob and Marcy Brower, Circle M, and the memory of my good friend, fellow Human Be-ing, and adventurer, Hollis Littlecreek. "Have fun," and "Take care of your-self."

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INTRODUCTION

Drew Hayden Taylor, a 42 year old Ojibway Canadian of mixed descent, hails from the Curve Lake reserve in Ontario, Canada. Currently, Taylor headquarters himself out of Toronto, where he works as a widely published humorist, commentator, filmmaker, and playwright. Since 1988, Taylor has found himself riding the wave of popular interest in the contemporary Native theatre of Canada. In his relatively short career as an award winning playwright, Taylor has amassed a significant level of popular and critical success, swiftly becoming the most widely produced Native playwright in the world. While not always easy, success has arrived steadily and quickly, leaving Taylor often shaking his head and wondering just how this blue-eyed-Ojibway-reserve-kid landed as a central figure in the world-wide re-emergence of the Native Canadian theatrical voice.

While Taylor has undoubtedly discovered his own answers regarding the contexts and events of his successes, little extended academic discussion has emerged to provide a foundational context regarding Taylor's work, biography, and career. This dissertation addresses this gap by focusing on Drew Hayden Taylor as a writer whose theatrical work, in part, strives to bridge a perceived gap between Native and non-Native audiences by demystifying the perceptions of Native people and their lives. Taylor's work on stage replaces non-Native stereotypical imaginings of "Indians" with dimensional, layered portrayals of Native characters and their lives. One element of Taylor's theatrical style that is responsible for his effectiveness as both a playwright and cultural educator is his ability to portray his characters and stories through a remarkably humorous, informed, and accessible vantage point. Taylor's approach reflects his own approaches to cultural identity as well as the expression and understanding of that identity.

This dissertation, by examining historical, biographical, and aesthetic elements of Taylor's career to date, seeks to provide a contextual and critical foundation through which to view Taylor's work. Specifically, this study will address the following questions: What are the contextual elements, both historically and personally in regards to Taylor's biography, which serve to foster Taylor's emergence as a leading voice in the contemporary Canadian Native theatre? What are Taylor's personal aesthetic goals for his work in the theatre and how does he achieve them? Is Taylor's aesthetic drawn primarily from a Western or Native influenced perspective? And lastly, given Taylor's aesthetic values and practice, what can be gained by viewing his work critically from an inherently Native-influenced perspective?

This dissertation is significant in that it provides a deeper look at a body of work and career that up until this point has received little in-depth academic examination. By providing a contextual, historical, biographical setting through which to frame Taylor's works for the stage, as informed directly by Taylor's input, this dissertation opens the door for further investigations and discussions surrounding not only Taylor's theatre work, but other contemporary Native theatre artists as well. By examining potential methods of critically framing Taylor's works, this dissertation also is significant in that it purposefully moves away from a rather common assumption of post-colonial construct and intent on Taylor's part in favor of a more fitting Native aesthetic and critical lens. Through analyzing examples of Taylor's efforts towards a sense of humorous demystification of Native peoples, this work provides an alternative method for viewing both Taylor's works and a Native centered aesthetic of theatrical construction. Lastly, through a discussion of historical and contextual concerns regarding the attempts at silencing (and subsequent misperceptions) of Native peoples, this study allows opportunity for a

re-examination of historical and current perceptions of Native peoples, cultures, life ways, and creative efforts in a informed and grounded manner.

In order to most effectively frame this dissertation, I shall use the remainder of this introduction to first provide background information regarding Taylor and his work in the theatre, followed by a review of the limited amount of literature available directly relating to his theatrical practice. In addition, this brief review of literature will also discuss issues regarding non-Native projections of imagined "Indian-ness" in Native peoples. Since the body of material available on this subject is extensive, I will focus on scholarship directly informing my work, while referring readers to other potentially helpful resources.

Following these discussions, I will provide an outline for the structure of the overall dissertation, breaking the work into chapters with a brief statement of the purpose of each division. Finally I shall clarify the goals of this study by carefully limiting the scope of my work.

Drew Hayden Taylor and the Native Voice on Stage

In 1987 a short article entitled "Legends on Stage" by Native humorist and author Drew Hayden Taylor appeared in Maclean's magazine. In his article Taylor briefly profiled the (re)emergent Native voice of the contemporary Canadian Theatre, then in its infancy with the seminal appearance of Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters. Taylor enthusiastically told his readers that, until Highway's work, "few Canadian plays have successfully crossed the boundary between Native and White experience" (Taylor "Legends"). With the critical and popular success of Highway's Rez Sisters however, the gap had been recognized and occasionally bridged, most importantly, by distinctly Native voices.

Unaware of the tremendous growth in popularity of Native theatre in Canada soon to follow, Taylor predicted a rosy future for Native generated theatrical works. Interestingly

however, Taylor asserted this success would largely remain outside of the purview of mainstream, non-Native audiences, with Taylor saying, “it is at the community level that Native theatre will continue to flourish. That is because its primary goal is not to entertain, but to make connections with indigenous cultures” (Taylor “Legends”). Shortly after this prediction, Taylor made his own entrance into the Native Canadian contemporary theatre as a playwright, with success following in relatively short order.

This study is one that will rely heavily on Taylor's own commentaries regarding his career and the contemporary Native Canadian Theatre; therefore his previously published works will play a pivotal role in my explorations. In regards to both the history of the contemporary Native theatre in Canada and Taylor’s aesthetic, particular attention will be given to three essays by Taylor: "Legends on Stage," "Storytelling to the Stage,” and "Laughing Until Your Face is Red.” In "Legends on Stage," Taylor profiles the Native Theatre of Canada, providing both a glimpse of the past and the future. "Storytelling to the Stage" explores Taylor's views of Native theatricality, as well as his opinions on the rise of the contemporary Native Theatre in Canada as a natural extension of centuries old traditions of Native orality and storytelling. Taylor’s "Laughing Until Your Face Is Red" elaborates on his experiences as he endeavors to bring his theatrical comedies to largely non-Native audiences. In this same essay Taylor also provides a description of the shift in his own perceptions regarding to audience responses to his work.

Also serving a vital role in my study will be two interviews by separate authors: Birgit Dawes’ "An Interview with Drew Hayden Taylor" provides a summary of Taylor's work and career up to 2003, as well as commentary from Taylor directly regarding his rise to fame, his writing aesthetic, and methodology. An elaboration of these topics is the focus of John Moffatt and Sandy Tait's essay, “I Just See Myself as an Old - Fashioned Storyteller: a Conversation with

Drew Hayden Taylor." Specifically in this interview/essay, Taylor provides details concerning his biography and creative aesthetic, as well as providing further insight into his career and his works for the stage.

Taylor's Funny You Don't Look like One series (four volumes of collected articles) provides a significant amount of information and biographical clarification. These four volumes: Funny You Don't Look like One: Observations of a Blue – Eyed Ojibway; Further Adventures of a Blue – Eyed Ojibway; Furious Observations of a Blue - Eyed Ojibway; and Futile Observations of a Blue - Eyed Ojibway, provide primary contextual information regarding Taylor's views on subjects as far ranging as politics, family, dating, travel, stereotype, religion, education, popular culture, and diet. Rounding out these sources are a wide variety of newspaper, magazine and other popular press profiles of Taylor and critical reviews of his works published since 1989. While these articles are generally quite short, they do serve to occasionally provide a valuable perspective. They also testify to the continuing and growing intent in his work.

Currently, there exists minimal extended academic inquiry into Taylor's plays. Pallavi Gupta makes brief mention of Taylor alongside Thompson Highway, Thomas King and Beatrice Cullen (among others) in his dissertation exploring the representation of non - Natives and their representation in Native authored poetry, novels and plays. Gupta applies a post - Colonial framework in this study, focusing on the ideas of Homi Bhabha (as well as Judith Butler) in surveying how Native representation of non - Native's "affect the relationship between oppressing itself and oppressed other" (Gupta 2004). Gupta's thesis is an important one; however, given Gupta's specific focus as well as the limited attention paid Taylor in terms of career and context, Gupta's dissertation provides little assistance for the specific aims of my study.

Mirjam Hirch also adopts a post - Colonial critical frame in her unpublished Master's thesis, Subversive Humor: Canadian Playwrights Winning Weapon of Resistance. In her study Hirch attempts to examine both Taylor's and Tomson Highway's work as a means of "post – colonial resistance to the dominant culture of the colonizer" (Hirch 4). In her chapter on Taylor, Hirch interprets Taylor's use of humor as a subversive form of mimicry and hybridity of Colonial popular forms; Hirch asserts that Taylor's work is actively "debunking stereotypes" and "reinscribing" Native characters and stories from "within the colonizer's language rules" (Hirch 5 - 6).

Hirch's thesis aligns itself closely with Robert Nunn's, "Hybridity and Mimicry in the Plays of Drew Hayden Taylor." Nunn's work is an article length explication of Nunn's theories around Taylor's alleged strategy of using humor as a means of subverting Colonial forms through hybridity. Nunn alleges that Taylor's work is more of a post - Colonial hybridization of existing forms, resulting in a new or refreshed form, rather than simply a post- modern mimicry or parody of Western forms. This notion of Taylor's work as a form of parodic mimicry or subversive hybridization is an important one which I will return to specifically in my discussions around the critical reading and viewing of Taylor's plays. Nunn's assumption of the inherently post-colonial nature of Native-authored work reflects a great many post-colonial approaches to contemporary Native generated works.

The appropriation of elements of Native culture in the creation of fictive, stereotypical constructs of imagined "Indian – ness," is a widely established, widely studied topic. Works for both popular and academic presses, by Native and non-Native authors alike explore the subject

from a multitude of vantage points.[1] In addition, the majority of these works tend to focus primarily upon the American Native experience rather than the Canadian. While there are significant similarities in histories and events regarding Natives and the foundation of these two countries, there remain enough differences to make the connections tenuous at best.

I have, however, found myself relying consistently on one text for foundational information, due in part to its focus upon Canadian history, as well as its clarity and structure, not to mention a ringing endorsement from Taylor himself (Taylor "Tracing"). This work is Daniel Francis's The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture. Now in its sixth printing since 1992, The Imaginary Indian clearly lays out a history of both the development and implementation of many various non - Native images of "Indians" in Canadian culture and history. Throughout, Francis persuasively traces the rise of the "Indian" image in Canada as well as the resulting un-realistic expectations of Natives from many non-Native peoples. In reviewing Francis's work for a 1993 issue of Books in Canada, Taylor recalls as a child watching members of his reserve community "flashing all the stereotypical though inaccurate "artifacts" of being "Indian" for tourists" (Taylor 1993, Tracing). Of this puzzling experience of his youth Taylor reports,

> Prior to reading Daniel Francis's new book ... I never really understood why all that happened. Francis has done an amazing job of tracing down through Canadian history the perceptions, both real and supposed, both good and bad, that the dominant culture had and has of this country's aboriginal people. (Taylor "Tracing")

[1] Francis's text is only one of many however that wrestle with stereotype and the fictive imagery and expectations of "Indians." For a variety of views and insight, start with: Dickson; Mihesuah, 1996; Phillip J. Deloria, 1998, 2004; Berhofer 1979; Huhndorf; Meyer and Royer; Kilpatrick; Bird; and Rollins and O'Connor.

Because of his accessibility and thoroughness, not to mention this direct connection to Taylor, Francis's text has proven a valuable and informative asset to my historical research surrounding Taylor's emergence as a strong voice in the contemporary Canadian Native Theatre.

While Francis's text provides a significant amount of foundational material surrounding the context of the imagined Indian, Taylor's views provide an even clearer window into the issue. Given that this study's purpose is to examine Taylor's demystification of the Native peoples, I have chosen to utilize Taylor's own frameworks of the imagined Indian, his own descriptions of their qualities, as well as his models of demystification as a basis for my own work. Throughout his essays Taylor peppers frequent references to these ideas, particularly in articles such as "Whatever Happened to Billy Jack," where he outlines several categories for stereotypical Native/Indian roles (Taylor Funny 72-74). In "The Seven "C's" of Colonization," Taylor pokes fun at reigning ideas of historical "conquest" of Native peoples and the key figures in these legends, while in "Living the Indigenous Myth," Taylor ruminates on the ideas of myth and legend (Taylor Further 47-49; Taylor Furious 110-113).

Finally, in addition to Taylor's published works, interviews, and profiles, as well as Nunn's descriptions of hybridity and Francis's tracing of The Imaginary Indian, Taylor has been most helpful to me on a personal level in providing information for this work. Taylor has been quite generous with his limited time and attention; as a result, my own e-mail correspondence and telephone conversations with Taylor have served to add a great deal of detail to portions of this study, particularly in the areas of Taylor's personal and professional biography and artistic identity.

Structure, Limitations of the Study, and Key Terms and Issues

This dissertation is composed of five separate chapters, with each chapter focusing upon a historical, biographical, or critical element of Taylor's work for the theatre. Chapter One is devoted primarily to Taylor's biographical details, specifically in the areas of community, identity, and influence. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a biographical overview of Taylor that extends beyond the heavily edited, condensed versions so prevalent in popular press and short academic considerations of Taylor. Section One provides contextual details regarding Taylor's identified band of tribal origin, the Mississauga band of the Ahnishinabeg/Ojibway in order to aid the reader in moving beyond generic assumptions that often fill in the blanks when Taylor is described as "Native" or "Indian." Similarly, Section 2 presents biographical elements of Taylor's life, as provided largely by Taylor himself, will be developed as a means of shedding light upon how the various ingredients of identity, education, community, and opportunity have combined to inform Taylor's success within the contemporary Canadian Native theatre.

Chapter Two is also divided into two sections, the first of which centers upon examining specific elements of North American and Canadian history, which, when viewed through largely non-Native historical filters, have contributed to both the silencing of Native peoples and subsequent misperceptions on the part of non-Natives. Rather than a comprehensive historical overview, this section is comprised of select moments in history, (such as the peopling of North America); where possible, alternative view points and sources outside of popularly accepted historical interpretations will be provided. The intent behind the offering of these alternative viewpoints is not to espouse some sort of conspiracy theory, hell-bent on toppling the dominant constructs, but rather to remind readers that these constructs, despite their long record of being unquestionably accepted by the popular masses, are fallible and often based largely upon biased

interpretation. Section two continues this historical examination by providing a contextual view of the Canadian government in regard to various attempts at silencing Canadian Native peoples. Particular attention will be paid to the manner in which the Canadian government has historically progressed from policies of ignoring, aligning with, protecting, assimilating, silencing, and finally beginning to accommodate (albeit begrudgingly) her Native peoples.

Chapter Three focuses upon a contextual outlining of the history of the Native Canadian Contemporary theatre. As a historical study, this chapter is more a collection of snapshots arranged in chronological order than it is a comprehensive overview, with frequent leaps of years and even decades, in the chronology. Though still relatively young in years, the history of Canadian Native theatre is inexorably tied to a web of influences and events as vast and varied as the history of Canadian Native peoples themselves; such a rich history is fodder for a comprehensive study in itself, filled as it is with such a rich variety of influences and aesthetics.

To narrow the scope of this chapter, I have elected to frame my historical examination on elements selected by Taylor as integral to the (re)emergence of the Native performative voice. Initial discussions will focus upon Taylor's assertions of a long standing (and surviving) history of Native performativity, as well as the potential healing aspects of the current contemporary Native generated theatre works.

Moving through the Residential School periods, the World War II years, and into the contemporary periods, this chapter will then elaborate on shifts in Native conditions which occurred in those periods, primarily as those elements which served to both enliven and silence Native peoples. Particular attention will be given to the early works of the Native theatre (including Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe and Tomson Highway's seminal The Rez Sisters). Additional focus will be devoted to the early influences of individuals in the formation of the

Native Contemporary theatre in Canada such as Shirley Cheecho, Tomson Highway, and James Buller. In addition, the chapter will highlight the influence of various organizations such as De Be Jeh Mu Jig Theatre Group, Native Earth Performing Arts, and the Association for Native Development in the Visual and Performing Arts in forming both a foundation for future Native successes.

Chapter Four continues to expand upon considerations of Taylor and his work by moving away from historical and biographical factors in favor of examining potential critical lenses through which to filter his theatrical efforts. This will be accomplished in a comparative reading of elements of Taylor's aesthetic, first through a post-colonial lens, followed thereafter, by a Native centered/non-Colonial biased lens. In this chapter, composed of two sections, I will call into question a rather standard assumption of those few who have written on Taylor's work academically. That assumption being that Taylor, assumed to be writing from the vantage point of an oppressed minority, as if by default, automatically adopts a purposeful post-colonial strategy. A similar assumption is that his works, by default as well, are best described by a categorization of post-colonial. While I will explore the limits of this study momentarily, it is important to note here that it is not my intent to dispute the overall value or appropriateness of the post-colonial theory as a critical framework. Rather, it is my intent to urge a reconsideration of the appropriateness of categorizing Taylor's work (and intent) as post-colonial.

Following the discussion of Taylor as seen through a post-colonial lens, chapter four will conclude with the exploration of an alternate, more Native centered lens as described by Native writer Thomas King in his article "Godzilla vs. the Post-Colonial." Discussion of King's categories which comprise his alternative viewpoints to colonial frames, as well as his logic

behind these frames, will serve in part, to inform the textual examination of examples of Taylor's work undertaken in the following chapter.

Through Taylor's commentary regarding his aesthetic and sense of cultural heritage as a storyteller for the theatre, as well as through King's framework, followed by a textual analysis, Chapter Five aims to unfold examples of how Taylor's work endeavors to bridge the cultural gap between Native and non-Native. This chapter is divided into five sections, the first three of which focus upon elaborating elements which serve to individuate Taylor's aesthetic as distinctively Native, as opposed to representing him as merely appropriating Western constructs.

Section One of the chapter provides an overview of Taylor's regard for the Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada (and its successes) as a natural extension to a centuries long history of Native storytelling, theatricality, and performativity. Section Two elaborates on Taylor's de-emphasis of conflict as a prime ingredient of his work which separates him from a traditional Western aesthetic. Interlaced with these discussions are textual examples from Taylor's scripts as well as commentaries by Taylor providing support for this assertion. Section Three expands upon this non-Western, Native focused reading of Taylor's works by providing both commentary and textual/script examples of Taylor's emphasis of community focus in his works, in direct opposition to the traditional non-Native theatrical emphasis upon protagonist/antagonist character hierarchies. Section Four discusses Taylor's use of comedy, in particular his experiences with bringing his first comedy The Bootlegger Blues, to a primarily non-Native audience, and his early experiences in attempting to bridge the cultural gap he had identified several years previous. This section focuses upon Taylor's experiences in dealing with reluctant audiences, as well as the subsequent shifts in his understanding as a result of these experiences. Finally, Section Five, through a textual analysis of Taylor's The Bootlegger Blues, completes the

chapter by explicating the manner in which Taylor attempts to de-mystify the Native image, thereby offering opportunity for non-Native audiences to move away from their imagined perceptions of "Indian-ness" to a greater theatrical understanding of Native peoples and their stories, in turn perhaps prompting a further (re) consideration of their stories as well.

In examining the work and career of a living figure such as Taylor, it is vital to remember that the story is far from fully written. While this study investigates in some detail Taylor's career, biography, and aesthetic, I will not attempt to position this study as a concrete, comprehensive work, encompassing all there is to know regarding Taylor. Rather, my work should be considered as an initial understanding of a significant work in progress; to imply otherwise would be a disservice to Taylor whose interests are broad, efforts are wide, and whose career seems to have only just begun.

In examining Taylor's work in detail, it is not my intent to lionize or sanctify Taylor as the sole voice of the Contemporary Native Canadian Theatre, nor as the sole spokesperson for Canadian Native concerns, both positions I believe Taylor would be hesitant to assume. Rather, it is my intent to highlight elements of an individual voice that has served to aid significantly in furthering both Canadian and international awareness of the Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada, as well as Native histories, issues, characters, and stories in general.

It is important to recognize Taylor's influence, but also that the Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada is not an organized creative movement, but rather a generalized descriptor of an incredibly diverse array of Native theatrical efforts. Taylor's aesthetic is but one approach in a Native theatrical community that is comprised of a great many artists who may share some commonality in terms of culture of origin and creative/social goals, but produces their work in a broad spectrum of styles and venues. Works range from classical and contemporary Western

productions, musicals, cabarets, Native language works, historical dramas, collaborative efforts, community/amateur groups, performance art pieces, original contemporary Native works, multi-media performances, ensemble and solo artist pieces, and more.

Similarly, the history of the contemporary Native Canadian Theatre, though relatively short in years, is one that is full of a variety of broad influences and unique voices, many elements of which are ripe for separate study themselves. Due to the focus and limits of this study, my examination of the contemporary Canadian Native Theatre is a summary one rather than comprehensive, focusing on the voice and interpretations of one contributing figure in this story. Likewise, my historical investigations of Canada's Native peoples, overall Canadian History, and my considerations of the influence of the Canadian government upon Native voices and peoples are equally general in nature.

As a means of avoiding an overwhelming amount of information and points of view, I have limited my selection of significant elements upon which to elaborate by focusing largely upon Taylor's commentaries regarding historical influence and context. As a result, the historical considerations of this study, though largely chronological in nature, are also highly selective, and should be viewed as a collection of snapshots--filled with detail, but not the entire story. Exclusion of a particular significant voice, event, or work in this collection of snapshots should not be taken as an implication of disinterest on either Taylor's or my part, but rather a recognition of a need for and clarity and focused discussion concerning Taylor's work.

Also potentially overwhelming are the vast numbers of descriptors of Native peoples available in this era of cultural and political sensitivity; a problem that becomes even more problematic when the issues of clarity and brevity are introduced. I have elected to adopt the general term of "Native" when describing peoples of First Nations, Aboriginal descent.

Likewise, in describing or referring to peoples not of Native origin, I have opted generally for the use of "non-Native," as well as occasionally the descriptor of "Newcomer." On the other hand, the terms "Indian" and "Imagined Indian" are ones I have chosen to use when referring to non-Native, fictive, imagined suppositions and expectations of Native lives and histories. While I am highly aware of the fact that there is no such element as a general, singular Native/Indian culture (and I ask the reader to remain equally aware of this factor), I have adopted these terms in the hopes of maintaining a level of clarity in descriptions and designations.

While a great deal of this dissertation will focus upon Taylor's uses of humor and his distinctively Native approaches to theatrical construct, I will not attempt to offer an overall, general definition of either Native humor or Native performativity. Such an endeavor in either topic is futile. Native humor is as broad and varied as non-Native, employing elements as diverse as slapstick, parody, puns, sexual innuendo, teasing, sarcasm, wordplay, wit and social commentary. Likewise, Native performativity and theatricality (in both historical and contemporary contexts) occupies an equally broad spectrum, from the most basic storytelling environment to complex rituals and performances involving advanced theatrical effects, and beyond, to stylized language plays, Mystery dramas, and contemporary works based in a sense of realism and naturalism. Academic research into these areas is extensive for the most part (with the exception being Contemporary Theatrical efforts), and when possible, I will direct the reader to sources that will offer additional information.

In addition, this study will not attempt to delineate Taylor's works according to the academic trend of identifying aspects of a generic, overly generalized Native Trickster. While Trickster images and characterizations do exist in some aspects of Native works, Taylor purposefully avoids the use of Trickster imagery and characters in his work in an effort to both

avoid the academic “spot-the-trickster-syndrome” as well as due to the fact that Taylor believes aesthetically, it is “an overused cliché” (Dawes 12).

While discussing the Imagined Indian and non-Native misperceptions and expectations regarding Natives, I will not in this study provide an elaboration of these categories and expectations other than brief considerations of Taylor’s own thoughts on these ideas. Rather my focus is upon how Taylor attempts to bridge the gaps of understanding caused largely by these unrealistic expectations. The area of misrepresentation and misperception of Native peoples, their histories, and their life ways is one already widely studied and commented upon from a vast array of sources and vantage points. When possible, I will reference the reader to other sources, many of whom are far more eloquent and informed on the topic than my self.

While offering a critical stance of the often overly assumptive nature of many works surrounding Native people’s, theatricality and history, and Taylor’s work and career in the theatre, I am also endeavoring to maintain an awareness of my own assumptions in this study. In the hopes of limiting the possibilities of error in assumption and interpretation on my part, I have elected to focus my study around Taylor’s commentaries. While this strategy does not entirely remove the need for interpretation and assumption on my part, it is my hope that it will aid me in keeping these assumptions closer to the mark of Taylor’s originally expressed intent.

Information for this study is drawn from a variety of academic resources, including the fields of ethnography, folklore, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, archaeology, literary circles, and popular culture (to name but a few). As a culturally aware, practicing professional theatre artist and educator, my interests in this study arise primarily from a theatrical focus. Of interest to me is Taylor’s intent, his approaches towards achieving that intent in a theatrical manner, and the historical and creative contexts surrounding his successes in these efforts; it is

my hope that by maintaining this largely theatrical lens, individuals from other fields of study will find information and inspiration to further their own investigations into Taylor's aesthetic and career, as well as the other forces that serve to propel the Canadian Contemporary Native theatre in general.

Lastly, the limits of this study in regards to my own positionality must be further acknowledged. Though I have spent the better part of my life examining and researching different aspects of Native cultures, histories, and methods of creativity from a variety of vantage points and approaches, I in no way wish to adopt the stance of "speaking for" either Taylor or Native peoples in general. As the significant body of works by Native authors as diverse as Taylor, Vine Deloria, Basil Johnston, Marie Ann-Harte Baker, Daniel David Moses, Shirley Cheecho, Thomas King, Alexie Sherman, Louise Erdrich, Louis Owens and Tomson Highway demonstrates (and the list goes on for pages and pages), Native people are more than able to speak for themselves in a manner that is both highly eloquent and highly valuable. What is needed instead, is a willingness to listen coupled with a willingness to collaborate on efforts of constructively increasing mutual understanding and innovation in a manner that allows for equality of voice and interpretation.

While working directly from Taylor's own comments as a source for my study, I am still limited to my own subjective understandings of these elements from a distinctively non-Native vantage point. However, I refuse to adopt the viewpoint of "I am not of this culture, so I am not able to speak of these matters." Rather, I opt to enter into an investigation of these interests with an awareness of my positionality as a member of the culture that gave origin to expectations of "Indian-ness," but also from the stance of an individual who desires to meet Taylor (and voices of similar intent) at least half-way, by opting to view his work in a manner more fitting to his

expressed intent, critical filters, and identified sources of inspiration and cultural connection. I, in turn, invite my readers to do likewise.

CHAPTER I
BLUE EYES, HAIR DYE, OLD TALES: BIOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

This dissertation focuses on Drew Hayden Taylor as a writer whose theatrical work, in part, strives to bridge a perceived gap between Native and non-Native audiences through a process of demystifying of the perceptions of Native people and their lives. Taylor's work replaces non-Native stereotypical imaginings of "Indians" with more complex, layered portrayals of Native characters and their lives on stage. Taylor's effectiveness, as both a playwright and cultural educator, arises from his ability to portray his characters and stories through a remarkably humorous, informed, and accessible vantage point. Taylor's aesthetic is one that reflects his own conception of cultural identity as well as his expression and understanding of that identity.

In that regard, Taylor's identity as an Ojibwe man, from both the reserve and urban environment (who is also of blended blood parentage), is crucial to his work and sense of self. Taylor readily expresses his concerns around love relationships. He half jokingly sweats the passing of the years, his health, and aging. He also has a rabid interest in reading, and carries a vast wealth of knowledge around the science fiction, movies, books, and popular television programs of his youth. Taylor craves variously: good coffee, newspapers and Thai and Italian food. Partially out of vanity and partially out a concern of avoiding diabetes (a condition rampant in many Native communities), Taylor is a fitness buff. As a recognized leading voice in the contemporary Native theatre of Canada and as a recognized expert in

"Native humor", Taylor both travels the world, and regularly risks his neck in Toronto traffic as he bicycles the city streets. [1]

This more realistic portrait of Taylor's life and work is equally (if not more) interesting to consider than some hollow fantasy of a Shaman author who speaks for all Native people. Overly romantic notions of Taylor (or any other Native individual) as a repository of Native wisdom and spiritual knowledge may be tantalizing to some, but in fact, like most generalizations, are simplistic and naïve: It is important to resist the urges to thrust a pastel colored dream catcher and a portrait of Coyote into Taylor's hands when we create a portrait of the author. [2]

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate how the various ingredients of identity, education, opportunity and relationship have conspired to inform Taylor's current level of success. This chapter is divided into two sections, with the first briefly summarizing the historical context of the Ahinshinabeg/Ojibway-Mississauga peoples, Taylor's identified culture of origin; the second section focuses on Taylor's biographical story, detailing major events and relationships in his life up to his entry into the professional theatre as a playwright.

Of Puckered Seams and Migration Tales: Cultural Context and References

The Native people of the Americas are one of the most studied and written about peoples, with the Ojibway in particular having received a considerable amount of scholarly and popular attention. Conduct a search of the U.S library of congress or similar institutions and you will find literally thousands of articles and books on the subject of the Ojibway, easily overwhelming any interested party with the array of information available from a wide variety of sources and differing levels of authority and accuracy.

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[1] While Taylor is both hesitant to recognize the "official" recognition of expert, as well as to attempt to define a standard form of Native humor, he is recognized internationally as an authoritative figure on the subject.

[2] For a sampling of Taylor's feelings around the prevalence of academic discourse on Coyote and other allegedly prevalent "Trickster" imagery in Native generated works, see Dawes, pp. 12.

The Ojibway culture, like many Native cultures, is incredibly developed (and diverse) in terms of philosophies, religious and spiritual belief, history, societal values, and lifeways. To attempt to encapsulate this history into a few short pages and present this history to the reader as a concrete, authoritative summation runs the risk of weakening a vital and vibrant history. With this in mind, I have chosen in this chapter to focus ever so briefly upon a contextual history of the Ojibway people.

Depending upon the source, the name Ojibwa (spelled variously as: Ojibwa, Ojibwe, and Ojibway, among other historic phonetic spellings) arises from any number of locations and meanings, all from outside the tribe. Original translations of the designation "Ojibwa" run the gamut of a description of the distinctive style of moccasins worn by the Ojibwa (with puckered seams), to a description of their practice of inscribing "historical and religious information … on birch bark or rock surfaces" (Hoxie 438), to the more grisly use of the word as a description of the puckering of skin as enemies as they were burned at the stake by their Ojibwa captors (despite popular perception, it has been widely established that this method of execution was not an innovation of Native people, but rather one adapted from Europeans) (Taylor Funny 50-52).

Although they have readily adopted the designation of Ojibway, the Ojibway people largely refer to themselves as the Ahnishinabeg which, like Ojibway, is also found to have a variety of spellings, a few of which are: Annishinaabe, Anishinabeg, Anisshinaabek. Translated, Ahnishinabeg is said to mean variously "the People" (Pritzker 588; Doig 187), "Original People" (Woodhead 22), "from whence lowered the male of the species" (Vizenor 3), or "original man" (Vizenor 5), or "spontaneous being" or "Human Be-ing" (Littlecreek).

The people known as the Ahnishinabeg/Ojibwa dwelt at one time in great numbers on the East Coast of the North American continent, but uprooted their homes on the advice of powerful

prophecies which predicted tremendous changes and tragedy if the people failed to relocate. In order to insure the survival of the people, the move to the west began, guided by spirit and "the sacred migis shell," which, as tribal based histories recount "arose from the eastern sea and moved with the seasons … through the inland waters, guiding the Ahnishinaabeg through the sleeping sun of the woodlands" (Vizenor 21). The shell, said to resemble a cowry, indicated safe routes and stopping points for the Ojibway people on their centuries long trek to new homelands and safer territories. As the large group of people moved along their pathway to the west,

> Three groups began to emerge in the Ojibway Nation. Each group took upon themselves certain tasks necessary for the survival of the people … The group called Ish-Ko-Day'-Wa-Tomi (fire people) were charged with the safekeeping of the sacred fire as it was carried along.[3] These people were later called the O-Day'-Wa-Tomi, and still later, the Potawatomi.
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> The group called the O-Daw-Wahg' (Trader People) were responsible for providing food goods and supplies to all the Nation. They took charge of the major hunting and trading expeditions. These people were later called the Ottowa.
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> The people that retained the name of Ojibway were the faith keepers of the Nation. They were entrusted with the keeping of the sacred scrolls and water drum of the Midewiwin. These people were later mistakenly referred to as the Chippewa. (Benton-Banai 98; Hoxie 438; Tanner 1987, 2-4)[4]

[3] Here Banai's reference to a sacred fire refers to a physical fire which was kept lit through careful attention, but also to the spirit of the people as they traveled through difficult conditions (Littlecreek).

[4] Banai's reference to the scrolls of the Ojibway refers to birchbark scrolls which were incised with mnemonic symbols and images that recorded historical, spiritual, and cultural documents of the People. His reference to the water drum is one that indicates a caretaking of the tools necessary for maintaining and supporting the spiritual needs of the people. The Midewiwin is a religious facet of the Ojibway community involving rigorous years of training and apprenticeship to achieve membership. The organization is comprised of various levels of knowledge addressing the various needs of the people including healing and divining, but also self care and the practical gathering of and use of knowledge in order to preserve the self and the community (Littlecreek; Banai 67-78).

The confederation of the three tribal groups (the Pottawatami, the Ottowa, and the Ojibwa) persists to this day and is known as the "Three Fires" confederation.

The migration of the Ojibway is believed to have largely followed what is now known as the St. Lawrence Seaway, arriving finally in the Great Lakes region of North America. Upon their arrival,

> Five hundred years ago … the migis shell appeared in the sun for the last time at Mooningqwanekaning, or Madeline Island, in Anishinabe Gichigani, Lake Superior, the great sea of the Anishinaabeg. (Vizenor 21)

Upon the culmination of their journeys, the Ojibwa settled in the Great Lakes area of North America. Over time the Ojibway homeland "spread over a thousand miles of territory from Southern Ontario across the upper Great Lakes country of the United States and Canada as far as Montana and Saskatchewan" (Tanner 1996, 438). Historically the Ojibwa have always been a large tribe, which, "although classed as one people in the Algonquian linguistic family… they have several alternate regional names and are divided into about one hundred separate bands or reservation communities" (Tanner "Ojibwa" 438).

The Ojibway never organized as a formal Nation, but rather, "the large Ojibwa tribe has been considered on one hand, an unorganized collection of perhaps fifty local bands, or, at the other extreme, a single people with widely scattered sub groups" (Tanner Atlas 61). Helen Hornbeck Tanner, in The Encyclopedia of North Americans Indians (1996) elaborates further, stating that the Ojibway,

> Never formed a single organization, but the overlapping of regional groups forms a chain that ultimately links them together. Personal connections through kinship were extended by membership in patriarchal clans. Although there were originally

> only five or six Ojibway clans, twenty one were identified in the mid-nineteenth century with some geographic variations. (Tanner "Ojibway" 439)

These "geographic variations" Tanner refers to above are broken into three primary bands within the Ojibway, with band names based largely upon geographic location, in this regard, "the Ojibwa of Sault Ste. Marie were named *Salteur* or *Saulteux* by the French. Ojibwa bands that moved west of the Great Lakes Woodlands on to the Plains are known as the Plains Ojibwa or *Bungi*" (Doig 187) and finally, the Mississauga, Taylor's group of origin, "named after a band located on the Northern coast of Lake Huron (Doig 187).

In her work Atlas of the Great Lakes Indian History (1987) Helen Hornbeck Tanner relates that as of 1768

> The Mississauga identified the extreme Eastern end of their territory as the Gananoque River, a short tributary of the upper St. Lawrence … The Northwest limit of Mississauga villages was the mouth of the Mississauga River, on the north shore of Lake Huron. The term "Mississauga" never occurs west of this point, but farther east in Canada often appears in conjunction with or interchangeable with various spellings of "Ojibwa". The principal Mississauga concentration [in 1768] is found on the northwest side of Lake Ontario near the Humber River in the vicinity of modern Toronto. The Mississauga-Ojibwa bands were located on the Ontario peninsula, along the east coast of Georgian Bay and around the southern end of Lake Huron into southeastern Michigan. By 1768,

> Mississauga Ojibwa were the predominant population in the Saginaw valley. (Tanner Atlas 61)[5]

Tanner's outlining of Mississauga territories and their history is continued by Michael G. Johnson as he summarizes that the Mississauga grouping of the Ojibwa:

> [They] Remained close to their traditional homelands around Sault Ste Marie, Ontario and spread eastwards perhaps as early as the mid seventeenth century to trade with the French and Indian groups along the St. Lawrence … but as the 18th century advanced a generalized Great Lakes [Ojibwa] culture emerged with a blending of customs, dress and materials which reflected their interaction with Europeans and other tribal groups in the promotion of the fur trade. During the 19th century many bands in Ontario adopted farming, log cabins and wooden cottages along with more traditional pursuits such as the collection of wild rice and maple sap. (Johnson 34)

In the past it was easy to infer by comments similar to Johnson's that Native groups such as the Ojibway-Mississauga adopted European life freely and easily. While this is largely true in their acceptance of gunpowder, fire arms, and iron implements, as well as their adaptation of some European decorative techniques in personal ornamentation, other elements such as farming, the Christian religion, and European style housing and education may have been the result of pressure from European cultures intent on "civilizing" their misguided perceptions of "Indian Savagery" out of the Mississauga-Ojibwa people.

Regional sub-groupings of the Ojibwa were largely patriarchal and autonomous in leadership until contact with Europeans and subsequent partnerships between Native and

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[5] According to Tanner, the year 1768 is significant as a measure of Native territory in that it was a year of relative peace and stability in the region, with no battles occurring between the many factions (both Native and non-Native) attempting to establish or maintain homelands. See also the map in Tanner Atlas pages 58-59.

European representatives of the fur trade developed. While Ojibway communities recognized various leaders within their groups based upon need, the position of a continual "Chief" arose from non-Native sources. During the fur trade period, "for their own advantage, traders worked to increase the power of [a largely nonexistent] headman. These efforts ultimately led to a patrilineal line of chiefs" (Pritzker Native 590). This strategy was also widely employed by representatives of various factions of European military organizations and governments, and later by the U.S. and Canadian forces as they sought to gain control of Native lands through treaties and coercion.

Various authors attribute the Ojibway band system to have originated with seven to eight different clans. These original clans are identified by Edward Benton Banai, a spiritual leader educator, and member of the Ojibway Nation as the Crane, Loon, Fish, Bear, Martin [Marten], Deer, and Bird (Benton-Banai 74-78). Each clan was charged with a different task in the spiritual and societal maintenance of the lives of the people, with the clan designations also serving as a means of defining hunting and gathering territories and relationships between various family groups, preventing the possibility of intermarriage within the same clan (Benton-Banai 74-78; Littlecreek and Young). Taylor's Otter clan is one of many alternative clan groupings that have developed over the progression of Ojibway history.

Personal Biography

"I am Otter Clan from the Mississauga Band of the Ojibway Nation, otherwise known as Curve Lake, Ontario." Drew Hayden Taylor[6]

Drew Hayden Taylor was born on the Curve Lake Reserve, in Ontario, Canada, originally established as the Mud Lake Indian Reservation No. 35 in 1829. The reserve held an original

[6] Source: personal e-mail to Dale J. Young, 2005.

land-base of approximately 1600 acres and was confirmed by the Williams Treaties of 1923 (trentu.ca). Members of the Curve Lake band set up their small settlement "on a small peninsula about 37 kilometers north of Peterborough, Ontario, on the banks of what was then known as Mud Lake." (collections.ca). Currently approximately 1350 people claim enrollment in the Curve Lake band, with 700 of them calling the Reserve home, and the remaining 650 living out of the territory. The Reserve today is home to a business center which houses corporate offices, a restaurant, retail stores and other business ventures; additionally there is the Whetung Ojibway Centre, a Native owned and operated cultural arts center; the reserve also advertises conference facilities and a yearly Powwow (curvelakefn.com; whetung.ca). In 1964 the Reserve legally changed its name from the Mud Lake Reserve to Curve Lake Reserve No. 35.

Taylor was born on the Reserve just two years prior to this name change, in 1962, and readily admits to the important role his upbringing on the Reserve has played in his creative works, referring to the reserve as the place “where my creativity and inspiration originates” (Taylor Futile 112). In a later essay, Taylor explains,

> I spent my first eighteen years on the Reserve, and practically all of my dramatic work deals with being Native and to some extent dealing with life on the Reserve; and, that includes a fair amount of my non-fiction work too. (Taylor Futile 139)

Taylor was born to an Ojibway mother and a European/Canadian Father. His last name of Taylor originates from his Mother’s family (Glaap 218). Taylor reports that his Father has been completely absent from his life and that he was raised by "a hard-working single mother"(Taylor 41), who, according to Taylor, didn’t quite “run fast enough” when she met his father (Taylor Funny 9). When discussing his mother, Taylor says

> I have a great respect for my mother and the fact that she raised me under [difficult] circumstances and managed to look after me when it was not fashionable to be a single mother or a latch key kid. My mother is very much old school, her first language is Ojibwe, and she actually has a difficulty in understanding what I do for a living. Her personal philosophy is, if you aren't working class you have no class…the whole artistic thing [referring to his career and interests] has come out of nowhere and neither of us know where it came from. I have a great respect for her and love her very much. (Young) [punctuation Taylor's]

Far from living a luxurious life, Taylor indicates that for the first seven years of his life, he and his mother

> Lived in a house with no electricity, no running water, stuff like that, and an old, very ancient wooden house; and then the Reserve got a big housing grant, I think it was in '69 or something like that, and we actually got a house with electricity and running water and stuff like that, and we were able to enjoy the comforts of home for a change. (Young)

Until their momentous move to the new house (which Taylor's mother still lives in today), life in Curve Lake was that "of any Native person in the 1960's and seventies complete with wood stoves, water from a hand pump, all the usual accoutrement[s] that came with the privileged Reserve life" (Taylor Futile 102).These "accoutrements" included childhood journeys to the outhouse, often with only catalogues as toilet paper. Memories of these childhood journeys to the little shack out back led Taylor to quip "the outhouse in January was still the outhouse in January. The winter winds do not recognize blood quantum." (Taylor Futile 102). In regard to his

outhouse memories and the reported lack of toilet paper, Taylor jokingly claims “I now wake up screaming with visions of my books ending up waiting their turn in a two holer due to a paper shortage” (Taylor Futile 52).

Even with such occasional hurdles, Taylor reports that life at Curve Lake offered a level of security and insulation. Despite the levels of social unrest and change during the sixties and seventies, within the community of Curve Lake Taylor states: “I could expect life to change very little. Living on a Reserve was, in many ways, an oasis against momentary trends, fads, and other patterns of a fickle society” (Taylor Furious 127).

Life on Taylor’s “oasis” was occasionally interrupted by visits from the outside, as Taylor recounts in a discussion of a summertime arrival of a group of Pentecostals to the Reserve during his youth. These missionary minded folk were determined to teach the Curve Lake residents both Christianity and the game of lacrosse (ironically enough, played by various Native groups for centuries, who originated the game). “After two weeks of mastering the lacrosse sticks and ball, they packed up and left, taking the sticks and balls with them. Leaving behind a group of Native kids who could now play lacrosse but had nothing to play with except a bible they left behind” (Taylor Furious 19). This sense of security seems due in part to the presence of a large family. Taylor tells readers that his mother is the oldest of fourteen siblings, leaving Taylor surrounded on the Reserve by many Aunts and Uncles and over sixty cousins (Taylor Furious 137). Life in the house with his mother was fairly quiet, but Taylor confesses his grandparents’ home was always extremely busy, especially around the Christmas holidays. (Young)

Now that his career has developed into a current level of success and growing public recognition, Taylor readily admits that the life he leads is quite different from that of the majority

of his family members. When questioned about this family's reaction to his work, or if they tease him in regard to his successes and travels, Taylor reacts warmly, with a significant degree of respect evident in his voice as he states:

> They've gotten to the point now where they don't ask how is Drew, they ask **where** is Drew? They know I lead a pretty interesting and exciting life and I quite enjoy it so they live vicariously through me. I have to send them a lot of postcards. We live different lives. They're all like either married or divorced or separated with a bunch of kids, living a typical sort of middle-class lifestyle. We actually come from two different perspectives on life, but family's family so we have a good time. (Young) [emphasis Taylor's]

As both a child and adult, Taylor describes himself as a constant reader, with an interest in books so voracious that Taylor recalls his grandparents once expressing concern to his mother over his appetite for books. Of his youth Taylor recounts:

> I always read. I couldn't imagine not reading. Growing up on a Reserve, in central Ontario, Canada, there was little else to do. When I was five years old, my mother would bring me home comic books. Lots and lots of comic books. I sat on the steps on the living room looking at the bright exciting images on the pages trying to figure out what the story was. I was so excited because the next year I would be going to school. It wouldn't be long before I would be able to actually read the comic books, not just study the dramatic drawings. (Taylor Futile 91; 119-120)

Despite his grandparents' concern over his preoccupation for all things literary, it is this love of reading that Taylor credits with his success, as he acknowledges

> I am no different from any other Native kid on any Reserve, or in any city for that matter. I'm not any brighter, cleverer, or even more gifted--I'm sorry to say--than anyone else. In fact, I'm quite average. Basically, the truth be told, I got to be an award winning playwright, travel the world, meet interesting people in interesting places, do fun and fabulous things … because of the simple fact that I love to read. That's it. Reading and imagination. These are the keys to what I do. (Taylor Funny 25)

Taylor indicates that his childhood overall was a positive one, but occasionally reveals to his readers that his distinctively non-Native appearance (fair skin, light hair, and blue eyes, the result of his mixed parental origins) did occasionally present an obstacle:

> As a kid I knew I looked a bit different but, then again, all kids are paranoid when it comes to their peers. I had a fairly happy childhood, frolicking through the bull rushes. But there were certain things that even then made me noticed my unusual appearance. Whenever we played cowboys and Indians, guess who had to be the bad guy (the cowboy)? (Taylor Funny 9)

Taylor spent grades one through two attending Mud Lake Indian Day elementary school located in the Curve Lake community, and then was "bussed off the Reserve to a nearby White school with all the other Native students" [Lakefield, Ontario] for the remainder of his public education (Taylor, 2004 118; 2001 150). Of this time Taylor playfully admits that he was "A Geek! A Geek amidst a village of jocks!" (Taylor Furious 150). In the school environment Taylor's negotiations and renegotiations surrounding his identity as a blended blood, Ojibwa, and self- described book worm and Geek continued. Taylor describes his persona while attending Lakefield District Secondary School in nearby Lakefield, Ontario as follows,

> Picture this: the library club, the yearbook committee, no sports, and being able to name all the classic *Star Trek* episodes by year, guest star, and writer. I was seen and acknowledged as a geek. Teased and ignored - if it's possible to be both teased and ignored?" (Taylor Funny 12)

Taylor also reports early forays into the world of the writer and journalist in his high school years. The summer of his sixteenth year, apparently in an attempt to quell the summer doldrums of living in a small town, someone suggested to the young Taylor that he write a newspaper article for the Reserve paper, covering the local tribal Band elections. Taylor did so, and upon completing the article, immediately experienced the challenge presented many young artists when, "I proudly showed it to my mother and she said very distinctly to me, 'Why do you want to be a writer, it's not going to get you anywhere?" Recalling this moment form his current level of success, Taylor repeats his Mother's statement, with some obvious delight: " 'It's not going to get me anywhere…I still remember those words" (Taylor Furious 150).

Taylor also sought encouragement from teachers in his desire to be a writer. Taylor recalls in one essay how he once approached his tenth grade English teacher and asked him if it were possible to earn a living wage as a writer in Canada. He recalls that, "at that particular moment, he was digging through a filing cabinet looking for something. Without looking up, he muttered 'not really'. It wasn't until almost ten years later that I started writing again" (Taylor Further 12).[7]

Interestingly enough, Taylor, who now supplements his living through book tours and public speaking announcements throughout the world, has described himself as the kid who "used to break out in hives before a public speaking assignment" (Crew, 1994). Apparently,

[7] Though it is not reported how Taylor's relationship with his tenth grade teacher fared, Taylor's relationship with his mother is extremely strong, filled with love and strong humor, and appears to have weathered this minor challenge very well.

aside from the jitters about public performances, Taylor's grades were average, or at the least, not up to his abilities, as Taylor reports that, the feedback he consistently received from his classroom instructors was "Drew could try harder" (Taylor Funny 11). In later years, Taylor recalls not having enjoyed his High School experiences:

> I'm not phobic or neurotic about it. I don't break out into a cold sweat when I smell chalk dust or feel my bowels clench at the sight of row after row of lockers. Like most people it merely brings back memories of that time period when most adolescents are trying to figure out who they are. And High School has to be the worst place to do that in. (Taylor Funny 11-12).

Recently, in an turn of events most formerly lackluster students can only dream of, after finding success in his adult life, Taylor took particular relish in a triumphant return to his alma mater as the first inductee to their "Hall of Fame" honoring the accomplishments of former students (Taylor Funny 10-13).

After completing his studies at Lakefield, Taylor faced the dilemma of many young people, whether to remain at home in his community, or to leave home for college and other experiences outside the confines of his familiar surroundings. Like so many of his peers, Taylor opted for leaving the Reserve. Taylor set off for Toronto, later claiming that, "work and education were the reasons I originally came to Toronto those many years and fewer pounds ago. I sought to explore the world outside the Reserve boundaries and taste what the world has to offer" (Taylor This 44).

By his own admission, however, Taylor's decision to leave the Reserve was not nearly so romantic, but more pragmatic: a choice based not only increased opportunity, but familial connections and relationships. Of opportunities available to him on the Reserve, Taylor recalls

that at "a very early age I discovered that there was not a thriving film or theatre industry on my Reserve" (Taylor Furious 117, 146); and of relationships, Taylor points out,

> My Mother is the oldest of fourteen in a small reserve with a population of about 800 at that time. So, as a result, by the age of 18, I was acutely aware of the simple fact that I was related to every single girl on the Reserve … So I heard Toronto beckoning, where I was related to practically no one. I admit, it's definitely not one of the more inspiring journeys in search of higher education, but you must admit, it is highly understandable. (Taylor Furious 146)

Interested in pursuing a career as a modern storyteller, Taylor elected not to attend a university degree program. His stated reasons reflect his current preoccupations as a storyteller and dramatist: "I believed, at that time, that as a writer, I should not have to spend three or four years in the University to learn how to tell a good story. I thought this because all the good storytellers I knew as a youth had never gone to University, and yet could weave wonderful tales of magic and humor" (Taylor Further 19). Instead, Taylor opted for a two year certificate program at Toronto's Seneca College, majoring in Radio and Television Broadcasting.[8]

The pursuit of a higher education, according to Taylor, can be a contested subject within the Reserve community, with those who venture off the Reserve for a Western or European-based education often regarded with a mixture of disapproval and admiration:

> Many Reserves and Native educational organizations are constantly encouraging and extolling the virtues of education to the youth. Yet, there are many individuals in these communities who believe that the more educated you become, the less "native" you become. They scorn and disdain those who want to

[8] Seneca advertises itself as Canada's largest college with over 100,000 students (part/full-time) and 260 programs. Seneca currently offers both 2 and 4 year programs focused on career related education and preparation. For more on Seneca College, see www.sencac.on.ca.

> or have gone through the conventional educational process. Evidently, scholastic knowledge and learning deprives an individual of their cultural heritage. I must have missed that in the sweat lodge.
>
> Conversations with elders and traditional teachers have convinced me that this is not a traditional belief or teaching. Many elders urge and encourage the pursuit of education. In fact, the two worlds of traditional and scholastic education can, and often do, travel the same roads, albeit one on horseback and the other on a vintage 1953 Indian Scout motorcycle. In fact, those that are often wary of formal education are usually locked somewhere between both worlds, they're neither traditional nor particularly well educated. Unfortunately, it is their own insecurity that is being revealed, proving the need for educated native psychologists. (Taylor Further 105)

Taylor frequently pokes fun at the often overzealous and over inquisitive world of academia, reporting, “There is a strange race of people who spend their entire life fulfilling some need to constantly study and analyze other people’s writings and work … but seldom attempt the same work themselves. It’s sort of like people who watch pornographic movies but never have sex” (Taylor Funny 86).

Despite his earlier, somewhat skeptical assessments of higher education, Taylor admits a shift in his attitude. He even reveals a hint of regret that he did not pursue a four-year degree when he says, “Ah, the foolishness of youth. If I knew way back then what I know now ... I would have definitely furthered my pursuit of education, for unless one knows as much as they can about the world around them, they cannot fully appreciate the world in them” and continues by noting that, “education is more than a solitary collection of information islands in some

fathomless sea of knowledge. One of the truest journeys in life is to continuously add to those islands, because those islands will hopefully grow to become a solid landmass, and even a continent" (Taylor Further 19-20).

Making Good as a Reban…

In the urban environment of Toronto, Taylor faced, in greater extremes than his childhood experiences, the obstacle of his identity and non-Native people's preconceptions of what a Native should and should not be.

> It wasn't until I left the reserve for the big bad city, that I became more aware of the role people expect me to play, and the fact that physically I didn't fit in. Everybody seemed to have this preconceived idea of how every Indian looked and acted. One guy, on my first day of college, asked me what kind of horse I preferred. I didn't have the heart to tell him "hobby". (Taylor Funny 9)

Experiences such as these further emphasized for Taylor the discontinuity of largely non-Native expectations of "Indian-ness" vs. Native realities.

In a similar vein, Taylor relates a story which placed him in the center of a rather odd attempt at cultural parity. In an effort to earn extra money during his stint at college, Taylor applied for a position as a security guard at the college pub. To his great surprise (Taylor then weighed in at 165 lbs.), Taylor got the job. Shortly after starting, Taylor was informed by another member of the staff that Taylor received the job because he was a Native, and hiring a Native staff member might reflect well for the pub in the college environment. Years later, Taylor recalls, "It was the first time in my life, and I think the only time (summer jobs on the Reserve not included), that I was hired for politically expedient reasons" (Taylor Furious 24). Almost predictably, Taylor's career in the bar security field was short lived.

Taylor was not always as secure in his chosen stance on his identity as he is today, as demonstrated by his descriptions of an early career/personal identity crisis. When presented with the relatively easy earnings of movie extra work in the Toronto area, Taylor sought to increase his success at obtaining jobs. In an effort to match up to the film industry's standards of "Indian-ness", Taylor reports dying his hair dark black in an attempt to look more "Indian." Taylor later confessed that despite this addition to his appearance, film directors were not beating a path to his door in their hurry to hire him (Taylor Funny 10-11).

Aside from this misguided attempt to "re-make" himself through the eyes of others, Taylor's early resume reveals a man who not only held the talent, but the drive to make a success for himself. At his recent appearance at Bowling Green State University (2004), Taylor tended to downplay his successes to his audience with claims that he was more or less "in the right place at the right time" when opportunity arose. Despite this self-effacing demeanor, Taylor quickly found an audience for his work. In Toronto, Taylor eventually found work within his chosen profession of a modern storyteller, working variously as a Native Affairs Radio Reporter for the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) and as an author for Maclean's, Southern News, The Globe and Mail, New Magazine, This Magazine, Aboriginal Voices, Toronto Star, Windspeaker, The Regina Prairie Dog, and The Peterborough Examiner. He also served as a creative consultant for Canadian television shows such as Spirit Bay, Danger Bay, and Liberty Street; (Dawes 4-5). Additionally, Taylor produced copy and artistic direction for seventeen films and video documentaries. He also created scripts for several television shows in Canada, including: The Beachcombers, Street Legal, North of Sixty, Prairie Berry Pie, and Tales from the Longhouse (Dawes 1-5).

Early in Taylor's career as a writer he received a rather surprising invitation which was to change his career trajectory as a writer significantly. The invitation came from Tomson Highway, then Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto, who, according to Taylor, "phoned me one morning to tell me Native Earth got a big Playwright in Residence grant, and asked if I would be interested. I initially said no…I knew nothing about theatre. … I had to be coaxed into taking the job" (Young). It was the eventual acceptance of Highway's invitation on behalf of NEPA (Native Earth Performing Arts) that led to Taylor's entrance into the contemporary Canadian native Theatre, and a succession of experiences that were to change his life[9]. It was, in Taylor's estimation, a most unusual entrance into the theatre community:

> I had absolutely no history or connection with theatre prior to Native Earth, During the 1988-1989 season I was invited to be playwright-in-residence for Native Earth because I had written for television for a few years. I'd been a journalist, and I had worked on some documentaries as a writer and soundman, and more recently had been writing series television. I didn't care about theatre because I knew nothing about it. The number of plays I had seen I could count on my fingers. Growing up on the Reserve, theatre was something done by dead White, English people. Native Earth received a grant for a Playwright-in-residency program and evidently I was high on the list. So I was offered a 20 weeks of work. I'd get a good salary for just coming in and sitting through rehearsal. Without thinking much about it, I said, "Yeah, why not." So I took the job, absolutely uninterested but, as clichéd as it may sound, was almost immediately bitten by the theatre bug. And since '89 I've had approximately 26 productions of about 10 plays I have written. Looking back, I feel so privileged to

[9] For more on NEPA see www.nativeearth.ca

> be a part of the birth pangs of what is now known as contemporary Native Theatre." (Taylor "Storytelling" 5)

As Playwright-in-residence at Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto, the rehearsals Taylor attended were for a new production of Tomson Highway's second major work, Dry Lips Oughtta Move to Kapuskasing. These early observations accounted for, by Taylor's report, his initial theatre training.[10] During these rehearsals Taylor met Larry Lewis, who was directing the production. Taylor credits Lewis as being the "director and dramaturge that basically created Native Theatre." (Young). Lewis directed many of Highway's early works and eventually collaborated significantly with Taylor on his work for the theatre as well. Of the start of this working relationship with Lewis and the Native theatre, Taylor recalls the informal and spontaneous atmosphere:

> So I sat around during rehearsals a little bit, and Larry was there, and then I had to write a play as part of my placement there; and I asked him to dramaturge it, and he said "sure, why not!" So he came in and we did it [Taylor's script], and I wanted to take it out in the backyard and put a bullet through it, it was so bad, and bury it. (Young)

Lewis eventually left Native Earth and Toronto to take the post of Artistic Director of De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Native theatre on Manitoulin Island. While there, Taylor recalls, Lewis "produced The Rez Sisters, and by doing that, he basically exhausted the canon of Native theatre available

[10] Of course we must include here a brief mention of Taylor's performance in a community college production as "Dingle the Elf" in his college days. For more information see Wagner, 3/27/94.

to the theatre company; and he phoned me up, and asked me to write a play for him, and I did a little play called Toronto at Dreamers Rock , and that was the start of it all" (Young).[11]

Despite Taylor's modest reports of his period of initiation into the theatre, his early years were eventful and challenging. Over the next two years, under the guidance of Lewis, Taylor would write six new plays, all produced by Lewis and the De Ba Jeh Mu Jig Theatre on Manitoulin Island. Despite the rigor of the period, Taylor speaks affectionately of these times as alternately his period of formal training and as his "theatrical boot camp" with Lewis reportedly filling the role of "the Joseph Mengele of dramaturgy".[12] As an editor Taylor reports that Lewis "was very brutal with his pen. He would slice and dice entire pages. He was very quick. I would give him a script and it would come back to me just covered in pen marks. It was baptism under fire shall we say" (Young).

Though Taylor had a small amount of success in film and television prior to his work with Lewis, this was his first experiences working with an editor who was as ruthless as he was efficient. Taylor admits that he would often find himself demoralized by the process, saying "I hated workshopping, and I hated the whole process, but, it's a necessary evil; and I soon built up some calluses" (Young). As a result of these extensive sessions with Lewis, Taylor developed a stronger sense of structure and dramatic efficiency, enabling him to develop and expand his own self-editing abilities. As he notes, these skills remain: "By now, I don't require as much slicing or dicing or dramaturgical restructuring, because I now have started to figure out how to tell a story a little more clearly and linearly" (Young).

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[11] Toronto at Dreamers Rock is to date, Taylor's most successful script, having approached its one millionth performance in 2004. Taylor half jokingly refers to it as his "retirement fund" due to its popularity and the subsequent residuals it draws (Taylor 2004, 114).

[12] Just in case, it should be pointed out here that Taylor is saying this with the greatest sense of humor and jest, along with a genuine affection for Lewis' abilities as an editor, no matter how ruthless he was with his pen.

Sadly, Larry Lewis, who it appears quickly became a close friend and mentor, passed away in the mid 90's, leaving behind a legacy of innovation and empowerment within the Native theatre. Of his collaborations with Lewis, Taylor says "he came and basically created me" (Young) and later continues, "He, as much as Tomson Highway, was responsible for the creation and development of Native Theatre in Canada, even though he wasn't Native. He had his ashes spread over an inland lake at the Wikwemikong Reserve on Manitoulin Island, his adopted home" (Young)

Taylor is often asked of the influence Tomson Highway (long regarded as the founding father figure of the contemporary Native Canadian Theatre), may have exerted over Taylor's own work. Taylor is quick to acknowledge both his high regard for Highway, as well as Highway's influences on the formation of Canadian Contemporary Native Theatre, but in regards to any aesthetic influence, Taylor responds,

> I often say Tomson offered me the chance to stick my big toe in the sea of theatre, but Larry taught me to swim. Because we have such different styles and different perceptions of theatre; to Tomson theatre's an art form, where each sentence and action is layered in metaphor, where I am just an old fashioned story teller. (Young)

Despite the intensity and rewarding aspect of his collaborations with Lewis, Highway, De Ba Jeh Mu Jig, and NEPA, Taylor initially seemed in denial of his blossoming career as a professional theatre artist,

> Up until I was two or three plays into it, I thought it was just a passing fad for me because I never wanted to be a playwright. I just sort of woke up one morning and discovered I was a playwright. It was quite horrifying! And I didn't think I would

> become that successful, let alone one of the most produced Native playwrights in Canada. (Young)

In spite of his initial period of denial, in the 16 relatively short years of his career, Taylor has amassed an impressive resume, including: twelve scripts, all of which are in fairly steady production throughout North America and the world (the majority of which are published); Additionally his work has garnered him several major awards for his work in the theatre including: The Chalmers Award, The Canadian Author's Association Literary Award, The University of Alaska Native Playwriting Competition, and The Dora Mavor Moore Award (thegatheringofgoodminds.com).

As a result of his success and the popularity and accessibility of both the author and his work, Taylor has traveled throughout the world as an unofficial ambassador for Native theatre, and as an expert on Native humor. His written works for the theatre have been anthologized in several volumes focusing upon Native theatre and literature, as well as being published in stand alone volumes. Taylor's non-theatrical essays and newspaper columns have also been published in four separate books, known as the Funny You Don't Look Like One series. Additionally Taylor has a collection of short stories, Fearless Warriors (Talon Books 1998) in print, and written and directed a hour-long documentary on Native humor for the National Film Board of Canada, called Redskins, Tricksters and Puppy Stew(2000). Drew also has written several works for television, including 1999's The Strange Case of Bunny Weequod, a mystery story with its dialogue all written in Ojibwe (a first in Canadian television), which was screened on Canada's CBC television network on several different occasions.

There is an interesting component of irony in the tale of Drew's creation of The Strange Case of Bunny Weequod, in that Taylor does not speak the language. Regarding this, Taylor elaborates,

> I represent a growing population of Native people in Canada and the world, who belong to a first generation that do not speak our ancient language. I am told that, when I was younger, I was almost fluent: that I straddled the English/Ojibway linguistic fence somewhat more comfortably. I wish I could remember those years.
>
> That was then, this is now. With fourteen years of education in English, add to that the influence of television, radio and other forms of English based media, I cannot converse with my mother the way she could with hers. I have tried to learn Ojibwa again with little success. (Taylor Futile 10)

Despite his lack of fluency as an adult, Taylor does admit a certain level of comprehension, but adds,

> I can listen to my Mother's tongue and understand. I retain those abilities to some degree; but, I suffer from what I have heard wonderfully referred to as the Dog Syndrome. It goes something like this: you have a dog. You tell the dog to roll over. It hears you and understands what you are saying and does what you tell it to do. But the dog cannot respond the way it heard the command. My Mother tells me in Ojibway to turn the kettle on…I hear the words. I understand the words. I turn the kettle on. But I cannot respond in the way I understood it. The Dog Syndrome. A far too common affliction in many cultures with their own language. Dog by the way, is *Nemush* in Ojibway. (Taylor Futile12)

Taylor frequently refers to the ideas of language within his essays and columns, and although for the most part he adopts a humorous approach in his commentaries, he also is unafraid to reveal an awareness of the situation facing indigenous language preservation and a hint of sadness at his own place within that process,

> I am a writer. A teller of stories. A contemporary storyteller who writes tales about his own people, in English. Occasionally I throw some Ojibway into the tale; but, in order to do that effectively I must contact an Aunt back home for assistance in translating or consult a local Ojibway language instructor. On a personal level, I find it embarrassing having to do this but I have no choice. Practically all my work deals with documenting as best I can, the humour, the drama, the essence of being Native in Canada. …Yet for obvious reasons, something is missing when I write about my people-the language from which these stories sprang. I mourn that.
>
> There is a saying I once saw on a button pinned to a jean jacket years ago. It said "The voice of the Land is in our Language." I believe that. We sprang from the land and the language sprang from us. So what I offer as an Aboriginal writer (who writes in English) is a filtered perspective. It's like asking a person in another room to describe a painting to you. Based on the description, you try to imagine it then describe the mental image to yet another person. It's an interpretation of an interpretation. Still, the writing is my interpretation and I guess that's better than no interpretation at all. (Taylor Futile 10-11)

From 1994 through 1997 Drew's career as a playwright also swerved into the arts management arena when he was awarded the position of Artistic Director of Native Earth

Performing Arts, a position once held by Tomson Highway. During Taylor's tenure as Artistic Director, the company staged eight productions while continuing to experience growth and more and more popular success. In 1997 Taylor unexpectedly resigned from his post in protest over the sudden termination of then NEPA General Manager Eva Nell Havill (Toronto Wire). When asked whether he felt he had burned any bridges in the Native Theatre Community over his resignation, Taylor responded with

> It's [NEPA] gone through five Artistic Directors since me. I left in '97 and they have had five or six [since then], in fact one lasted two weeks. It's been quite tumultuous, and of course the sudden departure of myself kind of ruffled the waters a bit; and now [Native Earth] wants to talk to me about two of my plays for possible production next year… You know, new regime, new people on the board, and it's been over seven years. Time to move on. (Young)[13]

Always in motion towards this goal of "moving on", Taylor is currently in the pre-production phases of work towards the United States professional debut of Buz Gem Blues, at the Trinity Repertory Theatre in Rhode Island. Taylor is also in the negotiation stages for another American premier of one of his works, this one in Toledo, Ohio, the production being Sucker Falls (Taylor's adaptation of Brecht and Weill's The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny, centering the story around deception, greed, Indian land rights and casinos.).[14] Taylor reports that he has recently been approached to adapt and "Indian-ize" Mozart's The Magic Flute in England. Taylor also continues to travel extensively on various speaking and promotional engagements, as he calls it, "spreading the gospel of the Native Theatre!"(Young).

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[13] For more on Native Earth Performing Arts consult their excellent website: www.nativeearth.ca/

[14] This production currently is being negotiated to take place with a professional production at Owens College sometime in late 2006 or 2007.

Questions of Identity

Throughout his career Taylor consistently addresses his life and identity as an individual of blended blood. Though to many eyes Taylor appears to not match the "typical" appearance of a Native man[15] due to his fair skin, blue eyes, and light hair, Taylor emphatically and repeatedly identifies himself as an Ojibwe man, stating "because of my childhood, my allegiance and consciousness is to my Ojibway heritage" (Taylor Furious 103). Of this he states "it's often more than simply how you look. It's how you think, act, where you live, and point with your lower lip" (Taylor Furious 104).[16] Continuing with this line of thought, Taylor states:

> I am worried about and touched by the same issues any dark haired First Nations person, any place in Canada, might be. And while I may not face those prejudices forced upon my darker skinned cousins, they do not have to face the reverse preconceptions people like I must deal with. It all evens out in the end. (Taylor Furious 106)

Taylor reports that, due to his mixed blood status, and his fair appearance, it is often assumed that he is a member of the Metis First Nations rather than the Ojibwe. Admitting some curiosity himself around the distinction, Taylor once raised the question to Metis author Maria Campbell,[17].

> The lovely and patient Ms. Campbell told me the Metis are a culture unto themselves. They have their own brand of music, style of dress, even a language of their own. And since I was raised on the Reserve by my Mother and her family, also with a specific culture and language, and [I] identified completely with that,

[15] I must state here, at the risk of stating the obvious to many, that there is no typical Native male or female, just as there is no typical African American, Jewish, Anglo, Asian, etc. appearance.
[16] Pointing/gesturing with the lower lip as a way of avoiding the rudeness of pointing at something or someone with a finger.
[17] Campbell, along with Linda Griffiths, is co-author of The Book of Jessica (1989).

> to her I was essentially Ojibway, regardless of the melanin content of my skin. Needless to say, that cleared up a lot for me and answered a lot of questions. (Taylor Furious 103)

Taylor discusses his own issues surrounding the concerns over his identity by waxing philosophical on the subject:

> I've often tried to be philosophical about the whole thing. I have both White and Red blood in me. Guess that makes me Pink. I am a "Pink Man". Try to imagine this: I am walking around on any typical Reserve in Canada, my head held high, proudly announcing to everyone "I'm a Pink man!" It's a good thing I ran track in High School. (Taylor Funny 9-10)

Often criticized for dwelling too much on the topic of identity in his writing, Taylor emphatically states that, personally, he has put the issue behind him, due in part to advice once received from an elder who told Taylor, "you either are something or you aren't. You can't be half. But it is possible to be two things, not just one." (Taylor Funny 97).

Taylor, in essentially straddling several different major components of various identities, seems to have taken this advice to heart. He states also that on the public level he would also gladly put the whole identity/authenticity debate behind him, but for the fact that bias and expectations continue to rear their ugly heads. Given the ill-informed misperceptions and unrealistic perceptions held by many non-Native people towards Native peoples (as will be discussed further in future chapters), it may not be surprising that Taylor, often much to his chagrin, seems forced to repeatedly address identity issues.

However, these biases do not emerge solely from non-Native sources, as Taylor recounts in a public response to a letter written to him by Lynda, a woman of mixed-blood status who was

wondering how to deal with the angry judgments directed towards her from her own Native people:

> Most of my life I grew up with "you're not Native are you?" and "You don't look it", and a dozen other variations. Recently I was walking down the street and a Native panhandler accosted me for money. Being in a hurry for a meeting, I waved him off. As I hustled away, he saw the First Nations jacket I was wearing and screamed after me "First Nations! I don't think so!" Another time I was entering a money machine [cash station] alcove in a bank. There was a young Native woman standing there warming herself. She took one look at my jacket, sneered and said: "What tribe wannabe?"
>
> My advice to Lynda? Get used to it. I don't mean that to sound harsh, but for every one of those types of people out there, I have met a thousand who will welcome you. It just seems that sometimes in the great balance of life, the ratio of good to bad will get a little erratic and bunch up on the bad side. Sometimes it seems like the "unbelievers" are the only kind of people you'll meet. …
>
> What these people are failing to acknowledge is that it's pretty well accepted that after five hundred and five years of occupation and intermarriage there are precious few individuals out there who can claim complete full-blooded Native ancestry. They're just seeing in you what they refuse to see in themselves. (Taylor Further 97-98).

In a separate article, Taylor continues with this thinking in acknowledging the tendency of conquered, oppressed and variously victimized peoples to take on the identities and judgments of their oppressors, as well as his hope to see that trend reversed in regard to Aboriginal Canadians:

> Native people of this country are constantly being referred to as "Canada's tragedy," "the Dispossessed," or "the sad and unfortunate story of Canada's Native People." It's always something depressing like that. And if you're always called names like this, pretty soon you'll start to believe it. I refuse to be tragic, or sad, or depressed; there's too much to be delighted with in our cultures. Someday I want to see headlines like "those happy people of Manitoulin Island" or "those laugh-a-minute Crees in Northern Alberta". (Taylor Further 60)

Taylor notes that it is all too easy for individuals, Native and non-Native alike, to fall under a cloud of anger and cynicism. Though rarely reluctant to point out hypocrisies and other idiosyncratic behaviors in both Native and non-Native people's actions, Taylor always manages to stop just short of responding in-kind to the often cynical judgments and misrepresentations leveled at him. Instead, he steps into the fray with a strong sense of humor, minus the wagging and pointing fingers of accusation. When asked how he was able to avoid falling into this trap of a negative outlook, Taylor says

> It's from my own personal growth. I never had a mentor in that particular direction or whatever; for my own growth as a person, as a Native person, and as a person who deals with the concepts of identity; and also having that judgment passed upon me…I've since been reluctant to pass judgment upon other people…the old "let me walk two miles in his moccasins" routine. (Young)

When questioned further as to the presence of any significant role models in his life who assisted him in developing his sense of self and his definitions of identity, Taylor responds with

> Oh God! Well, I mean…I've spent most of my career writing about that so I don't have one particular answer or I'd run out of things to write about then. The

> definition of identity and identity itself is always a fluid issue because there is no one answer and everybody will have their own perception of [it]. That's one of the reasons I wrote Toronto at Dreamers Rock…the play was about the perception of what being a Native means, and people, these three teenagers from three different time periods have completely different perceptions of what being Native is.
>
> I've always touched on identity in a lot of my other work. I mean, something like Someday or Only Drunks and Children also touches on the concept of Native identity from the perspective of Grace. AlterNatives deals with the concept of identity: you know, should Native people only write Native stories? Is there such a thing as a Native science fiction writer? All these things….
>
> So it's a constant search, a constant battle to find out what is identity and I don't have one set answer for you…but I long ago got over looking for other people to enforce it or reinforce it [Drew's sense of self], so I took it upon myself and I kind of got to the point where I am the master of my own domain. (Young)

Upon moving to Toronto as a young man to Toronto and his subsequent progression towards success and fame in his chosen career, Taylor has faced more challenges to his identity than his blended blood status. Additional criticisms surrounding his sense of self have arisen due to his status as a city dweller versus a reserve dweller.

> Unfortunately, there are many people who live on these reserves who feel you aren't a proper Native person unless you are born, live, and die on that little piece of land put aside by the government to contain Indians. How quickly they forget

> most Aboriginal Nations were nomadic in Nature. When I tell these people to "take a hike" I mean it in the most aboriginal of contexts. (Taylor Funny 44)

Taylor readily acknowledges the changes that have occurred in his lifestyle since relocating from a slower paced Reserve lifestyle to the urban environs of Toronto:

> Instead of the easy "I'll-get-there-when-I-get-there" saunter so many of my "rez" brothers and sisters have, I now have my own "I have to get there in the next five minutes or life will end as I know it" hustle.
>
> I've traded roving the back roads in pick-up trucks for weaving in and out of traffic on my bicycle. Instead of blockading roads to defy authority, I refuse to wear my safety helmet. Where once I camped on deserted islands, I now get a thrill out of ordering room service in a hotel. (Taylor This 44)

Many Reserve dwellers, according to Taylor, look down upon any trappings of success or achievement acquired off the Reserve, as outside the world of what they consider to be the measure of a true or authentic Native person:

> There are also those who believe that the more successful you are, the less Native you are. If you have money, toys, a nice house, two accountants, and a vague idea of where the Caribbean is, then you are obviously not one of the indigenous people.[…] I know many successful Aboriginals who are every bit as "Native" as those who still subsist on Kraft Dinner and drive 1974 Dodge pickups with multi-colored doors. (Taylor Funny 106)

Yet to those Native who might be take exception to his urban lifestyle and levels of success, challenging Taylor's (and other Urban dwelling Native individuals) authenticity as a "true"

Native, Taylor responds perhaps a little defensively, by labeling this view as rather a defeatist one.[18] Of this dilemma Taylor says:

> As cliché as it may sound, I think everybody has their own unique definition of what being Native means. Very few of us exist in the world our grandparents lived in, where the definition was, no doubt, far from ours. And this definition will, no doubt further evolve in the coming millennium. (Taylor Funny 106-107)

Of his own self proclaimed status of someone who lives in both environments (and the subsequent place in between) and the debate and seeming hostility his success has caused, Taylor says:

> This land we call Turtle Island has many different types, kinds, and varieties of Native People. And in the struggle to classify ourselves for sake of argument, an "Urban" or "Rez" Indian, we forget to appreciate what ever we personally decide to classify ourselves. I've explored a lot of my background as a mixed-blood Native Canadian. However, I often forget I'm a mixed environment Native Canadian-half Rez; half Urban. I guess that makes me a Reban (Taylor Furious 108).

Despite his success, and his urban status, including a readily admitted proclivity for Thai food, Italian food, and coffee shops, Taylor's adamantly reports his heart lies firmly on the Reserve:

> By trade I am a writer (though some might argue). I write plays, scripts and short stories--all oddly enough, taking place on a Indian Reserve. In the past I used this simple fact to tell myself that although my body lived in an apartment … my

[18] While these issues figure heavily into much of Taylor's work for the theatre he is decidedly not the only First Nations/ Native American writer to deal with the complex emotions and issues surrounding Urban vs. Reserve images of success and home as themes in their storytelling. For examples see also the works of Sherman Alexie, Louise Erdrich, Thomas King, Hanay Geiogamah, as well as Tomson Highway.

> spirit was somehow fishing in an unspoiled, unpolluted lake, nestled in the bosom of Mother Earth, somewhere up near Peterborough, Ontario. (Taylor Funny 44)

Elaborating further on this point in a later commentary, Taylor continues by adamantly reporting, "I don't have to explain that I've spent 18 years growing up in that rural community. It shaped who and what I am and if psychologists are correct, barring any serious religious conversion, I should roughly remain the same. The reserve is still deep within me" (Taylor Funny 91). Then, unable to deny himself such an opportunity for a punch line, Taylor provides some substantiation for his claims, regaling his reader with Native-based barometers which qualify him for "official" citizenship on the Reserve:

> Given a few seconds of preparation, I can still remember the lyrics to most of Charlie Pride's greatest hits. I can put away a good quart or two of tea. I can remember who the original six hockey teams were. And I know the contrary to popular belief, fried foods are actually good for you. (Taylor Funny 91)[19]

Despite his relatively light hearted responses to the challenges of his own position in the urban vs. reserve dichotomy, Taylor is quick to remind readers that his sense of self and identity are firmly tied to both his home reserve community and a full and active membership and participation in his Native/Ojibway heritage. As an adult Taylor frequently returns home to Curve Lake and visits with his family, citing connections to community and home as a source of rejuvenation and a place where life most often moves just a bit slower than Taylor's current environment of meetings, airports, hotels, book signings, speaking engagements, and rehearsals.

However, as Taylor says, "the more I go home these days, the more I can see the steady, encroaching fingerprints of Canadian society making their way into the bosom of my beloved

[19] In further discussions with me on these parameters, Taylor also added the importance of recognizing that "lard is a spice" as an additional barometer of Reserve citizenship (Young).

community" (Taylor Funny 127). A few of the fingerprints Taylor speaks of includes new street signs marking the once unidentified roadways of the small village, leash laws for the once free-roaming village dogs, and even the availability of pizza delivery (Taylor Funny127). Taylor, always mindful of the fact that his physical community is located in a environment still controlled by the Canadian Federal Government, remarks that the changes he has witnessed are the vestiges of a continuing, "alien invasion-a bureaucratic one, the completion of one started over 500 years ago" (Taylor Funny 127).

Often tiring of the continual debates around authenticity, blood quotas, and identities, Taylor frequently responds, perhaps only half-jokingly by poking fun at the what frequently threatens to become an overblown dilemma, and even threatens to withdraw from the cultural debate completely in favor of his own solution:

> I've spent too many years explaining who and what I am repeatedly, so as of this moment, I officially secede from both races. I plan to start my own separate nation. Because I'm half Ojibway, and half Caucasian, we will be called the Occasions. And of course, since I'm founding the new nation, I will be a Special Occasion. (Taylor Funny 14)

Taylor's efforts reveal a sense of balance achieved through coming to terms with negotiating his own identity time and again, until finally making peace with himself as a result of these negotiations and renegotiations of self.

With characteristic good humor, Taylor nudges not only himself but his audiences to reconsider their understanding of a variety of issues, many (but not all) of which are culturally based. Simultaneously he reminds us that he is not one of these individuals who claim to be "locked somewhere between both worlds", but rather one who is attempting to bring these

perceived differing locations a little closer to the realization that, at least in Taylor's own estimation, there are not separate worlds, only separate experiences of the one world.

Taylor's sense of humor about himself provides hints towards the personality of a man who has enough self-confidence and awareness to poke a little fun at himself and those that might make too great a commotion regarding either his mixed-blood or "Urban vs. Rez" status. [20] The level of self assuredness required for Taylor's vantage point, though claimed by Taylor to have arisen from primarily his own efforts and experiences have been given shape by a strong mother and family, a sense of community and belonging, and artistic inspiration and collaboration with individuals like Larry Lewis.

Taylor's hope is that, in between laughs, self perceived insults, reconsiderations of their own perceptions, and the enjoyment of a well drawn story, Taylor's audiences-both Native and non-Native alike, might just get the hint, learn a little something, adjust their preconceptions, and begin to bridge cultural gaps a little more ably and readily.

[20] Taylor's use of humor as a coping/teaching/defense mechanism is not an innovation on his part, but rather a reflection of his Native upbringing, where, despite stereotypes of the stoic Indian to the contrary, Native people for the most part relish a strong sense of humor. Taylor's ideas around humor will be discussed in greater detail in a forthcoming chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER II

OF MYTHS AND SILENCING: CONSIDERING NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE CANADIAN HISTORY

In an essay appearing in his 1996 anthology of short works, Funny You Don't Look Like One: Observations of a Blue Eyed Ojibway, Drew Hayden Taylor addresses the fictive non-Native constructs of "Indian" expectations: "As a Native person living in today's world, I am only too aware of false impressions a lot of people have of our Aboriginal society. I have yet to find one of these stereotypes that I fit into properly. I don't know, maybe my white blood throws the Bell curve off or something" (Taylor Funny 73).

In this same essay, inspired after Taylor watched Billy Jack on the late night movie, Taylor, through humor, provides insight into the non-Native created mystique of Indian characters and stereotypes in film. Taylor builds four main categories of stereotypical portrayals that, "the majority of Native people are lumped into by the media" (Taylor Funny 73). Taylor classifies these types as "the ever popular sidekick," the "fiery young Aboriginal radical", the all too common "borderline psychotic," and finally, the "mystical, all knowing Indian" (Taylor Funny 73-74). While acknowledging stereotypical expectations of Natives from non-Natives, Taylor also playfully debunks them. For example, his description of the "mystical" Indian provides an example: "You know the type, they melt in and out of the bush almost as effortlessly as they speak metaphorical wisdoms in poor English, about Humanity and the world-without cracking a smile. You couldn't swing a dead cat without hitting that type on shows like Little House on the Prairie, Grizzly Adams, etc." (Taylor Funny74).

This tactic of humorously acknowledging and then debunking non-Native expectations of "Indian-ness" is a common one in Taylor's work, as in "Pocahontas and Belief," where he

gleefully injects the now legendary (and largely fictive) life of Pocahontas with several humorous doses of reality. Taylor employs similar strategies of highlighting stereotypes in the theatre as well, with his approaches ranging from the subtler uses of self conscious jokes and asides, to the more overt examples, such as in Taylor's Blues Plays. In this series of three plays, discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation, Taylor's Native characters appear initially to inhabit stereotypically Indian personas (the wise elder, innocent girl, warrior activist) only to quickly shake off these generalized stereotypes in favor of more rounded (and ultimately more interesting) depictions of Native characters. In addition, those peripheral, non-Native stereotypes (which frequent the non-Native mystique of Indian-ness) are also not safe from Taylor's attention in these Taylor's plays, as he alternately takes on New Age mystics, Politically Correct Do-gooders, Wannabes, and Academics in equal measure.

This strategy of demystification is one commonly employed by Taylor in his efforts towards bridging the understanding between Native and non-Native peoples. Taylor's goals of demystification are ambitious indeed, as non-Native misperceptions and fictive constructions of images of Native peoples and lives, it could be argued, significantly widen the gap between Native and non-Native. To do so creates, at times, a tremendous hurdle standing in the way of genuine empathetic connection on the part of Taylor's largely non-Native audiences.

Not long after European incursion into North America (once the continent was recognized as holding elements of value to European interests), the image of Native peoples began to be alternately ignored, appropriated, edited, and ultimately shaped into an overly generalized, largely uninformed depiction of a single, generic "Indian" culture. These earliest edits of images of Natives into an expectation of "Indian-ness," authored by non-Natives who were unwilling to see the complexity and wealth offered in Native communities. These original

perceptions of Natives as savages, ignorant innocents, heathens, mystics, and drunkards, are largely the basis of the unrealistic expectations and assumptions surrounding Native peoples still widely prevalent today. As Robert F. Berkhofer reports in Gerald Vizenor's The People Named the Chippewa,

> The idea and the image of the Indian must be a White conception. Native Americans were and are real, but the *Indian* was a White invention and still remains largely a White image, if not stereotype […] The first residents of the Americas were by modern estimates divided into at least two thousand cultures, practiced a multiplicity of customs and lifestyles, held an enormous variety of values and beliefs, spoke numerous languages mutually unintelligible to many speakers, and did not conceive of themselves as a single people …
>
> By classifying all these many people as Indians, Whites categorized the variety of cultures and societies as a single entity for the sole purpose of description and analysis, thereby neglecting or playing down the social and cultural diversity of Native Americans then-and-now for the convenience of simplified understanding … Whether as a conception or as a stereotype however, the idea of the Indian has created a reality in its own image as a result of the power of the Whites and the response of the Native Americans. (Berhorfer as quoted in Vizenor 19-20)

Maria McCloughlin echoes Berkhofer as she underscores the nature and possible reasons for European projections of the fantastic upon Native peoples:

> The Indian mystique was designed for mass consumption by a European audience, the fulfillment of old and deep-seated expectations for the "Other" … in

> a certain sense, for five hundred years Indian people have been measured and competed against a fantasy over which they have no control. They are compared with beings who never really were, yet the stereotype is taken for truth. (Mcloughlin 98-105)

McCloughlin's comments articulate the European fascination with the exotic "other" (the European formation of images of Native peoples as alternately savage and bloodthirsty or innocent, lost souls in need of salvation). This reductive belief is neither naive nor harmless. Images of the Native peoples of North America in various guises of "Indian-hood," it could be argued, inevitably reveal themselves to be devised as a means of ultimately ignoring, disavowing, controlling, and attempting to silence Native peoples.

Taylor narrates the re-emergence of the Native voice to prominence from a nearly silent recent past, a silence which can be viewed as the direct result of false perceptions of Native people and the traumatic events arising in part due to these perceptions. Throughout a great deal of his commentaries regarding his work for theatre Taylor argues that the shaping of Natives into demonized hordes or childlike helpless wood spirits arises out of a history of domination, assimilation, and cultural destruction at the hands of explorers, trappers, land speculators, religious institutions, educators, historians and scientists, the popular and mass medias, and the Canadian government.[1]

This historical process of appropriation and reconfiguration of the Native persona into a cartoon-like version of itself by non-Native influences is a well established and highly documented one, with opinions and interpretations arising from a wide variety of stances and sources, both Native and non-Native. While a great deal of the work surrounding these ideas

[1] Taylor's implications are prevalent in a great deal of his essays and commentaries, but start with "Storytelling to the Stage."

focuses upon the American historical perspective, Daniel Francis's The Imaginary Indian focuses on a discerning Canadian historical perspective: "While Indians are the subject of this book, Native people are not. This book is about the images of Native people that White Canadians manufactured, believed in, feared, despised, admired, taught their children. It is a book about White-and not Native-cultural history" (Francis quoted in Taylor, Tracing).

Francis traces a history of the appropriation, reconstruction, and ultimate implementation of largely fictive images of Indians in Canadian history; he also discusses the impact of these appropriations and revisions of Native lives, cultures, and histories. As Taylor reports in his review of The Imaginary Indian, the book, "shows the development of the "Imaginary Indian" through the years, from the trustworthy ally of the early 1800's to the disappearing alcoholic wretch of the early 1900's" (Taylor Tracing).

With the historical and cultural contexts supplied by Francis's The Imaginary Indian kept close at hand, it is the purpose of this chapter to highlight historical elements of the mythologizing and silencing of Native voices that created the gap of knowledge Taylor seeks to bridge in his work for the theatre.

This chapter focuses on the formation of a history and subsequent ideologies which contributed to the attempted silencing of Native peoples. It is not my goal to present either a conspiracy theory of history, or a cause and effect interpretation of events in this chapter. Rather, by re-examining elements of historical and ideological formation through plausible alternative views of selected events and ideas, a contextual view of the historical events surrounding suppression of the Native voice in Canada emerges.

To do so illustrates how the roots of Taylor's desire to bridge the gap of understanding between Native and non-Native Canadian audiences mirrors larger cultural concerns in Canadian

life, a situation far deeper and more pervasive than a simple lack of contact between modern audience members.

Structurally this chapter is composed of two main sections, the first of which focuses upon providing a general historical overview and reconsideration of various elements of North American/Canadian History, with attention placed upon a non-Native tradition of ignoring Native participation and presence in the history of Canada. The second section provides a brief contextual description of the Canadian government and modern composition of Canada. Given the far reaching nature of the Canadian Government, in this section the focus will be upon highlighting elements of shifting governmental attention towards Native peoples. At the risk of redundancy, I must again stress the general nature of this contextual exploration. My primary purpose is to provide historical context for Taylor's theatrical work and career. Indeed, I am providing only snapshots of historical reconsiderations. Where pertinent, I will include further references and sources to guide the interested reader further.

Building a Bridge that can be Crossed

The following section of this chapter focuses upon highlighting Canadian Nation building myths, namely the arrival of First Nations, the disregard of these Nations and their histories as unreliable by scholars, the idea of "discovery" and exploration, and the level of involvement and awareness on the part of many Native peoples in the European influx into the Canadian territories. [2]

The majority of Native cultures view themselves as the original citizens of the Americas, with their presence originating directly from a spirited connection and birthright from the land of the continent itself. Contrary to this, the commonly accepted myth by many non-Native scholars is a gradual emigration from Asia, with pre-history Native peoples entering from the North and

[2] My usage of the word "myth" here is in the popular sense, as in Webster's Unabridged definition, which reports myth as: "any invented story, idea or concept; an imaginary or fictitious thing or person" as opposed to commonly held popular perceptions of history being factual and truth based (Webster's, 1272).

disseminating outward on a gradual Southerly expansion.[3] These theories are "according to the scientific theory of a creation, which is based primarily on archaeological and linguistic evidence, the ancestors of the aboriginal peoples of Canada came to North America from Asia, across what is now known as the Bering Strait (Somewhere between 30 and 50,000 years ago)." (Miller 2-37).

Commonly held, primarily non-Native beliefs assert that Native ancestors migrated to North America from Asia across a strip of land that was revealed by a warming of the environment, a reduction of ice coverage and lowering of sea levels.[4] These early travelers migrated across this land bridge (known as Beringia) which varied in width and terrain, reportedly followed game and other food sources, possibly over a span of several centuries.

According to Dan O'Neill (2004), the first Western theorizing around the possibility of a one time Bering Land Bridge was put forth by Fray Jose de Acosta, a Jesuit missionary in 1590. Since that first recorded hypothesis, the idea of a land bridge has shaped common assumptions about possible migration patterns. Yet, on the whole, such a land bridge remains largely theoretical and an educated "best guess" given that the area is now covered by the waters of the Bering Strait. While it is plausible that the Bering Land Bridge did exist, according to Olive Patricia Dickason, securing archaeological evidence is hampered by the fact that "bones have not preserved well in its [Northern American continent] soils, and identifying early campsites and tools can be difficult. The two Americas are the world's only continents where the evidence of early human presence has been based on artifacts and [not] skeletal remains" (Dickason 3)[5].

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[3] The very term pre-history is indicative of the Western belief that a "true", reliable history began with European contact and written accounts, inferring that prior to contact, there were only a large group of people with no tribal, cultural, and linguistic separation.

[4] See Farb 191-197.

[5] Dr. Dickason is a Metis historian and author, professor emeritus at Univ. Alberta, now retired, who writes widely about Native historical issues.

The problem of discovering reliable skeletal remains and other archaeological remains connects to the possibility of misguided assumptions, as Peter Farb suggests in his discussions of the search for apparently scarce skeletal remains of North America's first citizens:

> It is further possible though, that numbers of Paleo-Indian skeletons have been located, but have been ignored and even destroyed because of a misconception: the belief that the early skeletons would have a primitive appearance and reveal a people with heavy brow ridges, stooped posture, and gangling arms. In other words, anthropologists were adhering to the notion that only what appears primitive is old, many skeletons of early humans in North America could have been overlooked because they were assumed to be those of modern Indians. (Farb 214-215)

In short, Farb posits the possibility that important archaeological remains and artifacts (long the building blocks of non-Native assumptions of history) may have been passed over due to stereotypical assumptions held by overly confident European searchers. While Farb's assertions may appear a bit simplistic, given the scope of the many years of past research, it does give rise to an interesting consideration: could it be possible that researchers are missing (or dismissing) evidence based on misdirected assumptions and expectations of what they believe the past to look like?

Earlier in the same work Farb highlights further hesitance of many scholars to fully examine potential sources of data:

> Proving that humans reached North America more than 40,000 years ago is difficult because archaeologists have often refused to admit as evidence any but very sophisticated tools, rejecting simpler kinds of artifacts. Signs have been

> discovered that may point to an earlier human presence: carbon from possible campfires, various pieces of stone that appear to be crude scrapers and choppers, and tiny flakes that seem to mark some sites as tool workshops. But archaeologists often disagree about this evidence. Some insist that the stones may not be artifacts at all but only the accidental work of nature, such as stones smashing against each other in a stream; the so-called hearths may be from lightening caused fires. Nevertheless, such hints of the first dawn of human life in the New World have been found in so many places that more and more respected archaeologists have come to believe that humans crossed into North America considerably more than 20,000 years ago, and possibly more than 40,000 years ago. (Farb 185)[6]

Recent scholarship has also begun to question the reported primitivity of these travelers, as well the alleged status of Beringia as the sole source of arrival for these early citizens. As Dickason elaborates:

> There is no reason to conclude that because Berengia offered a convenient pedestrian route, it was therefore the only one available or used. Nor is there any reason to believe Berengia's inhabitants were land bound, ignoring the rich marine life on and off its coasts […] the argument that humans at this early stage had not yet developed the skills to undertake travel by water under dangerous artic conditions is tenuous at best, particularly in view of the sea voyages that

[6] Though the work by Farb, from which this citation was drawn was published first in 1968 (with a revised second edition released in 1978), and may themselves be rather dated, his discussions around scientific dismissals due to assumptions and misperceptions remain valid. For more examples see Farb, pp. 187-192. See also footnote #9 of this chapter.

> occurred at other latitudes [with in these same purported time periods]. (Dickason 6)[7]

There is debate amongst some members of the scientific community surrounding the possibility that the first citizens traveled via coastline rather than inland routes, and from the South, possibly in tandem with a possible Beringia migration. Regardless of debates around dates, progress, routes, and modes of arrival, one assumption can be regarded safely as a fact: Native cultures were present and thriving long prior to even the earliest European contact.[8]

Despite this marked presence and long history of survival on the North American Continent, Native oral and pictographic accounts of settlement (with inhabitants either originating from the land or arriving via various migrational routes) have long been consistently sidestepped by accepted historical accounts. Native accounts of history remain largely ignored, despite the presence of generations of Native voices which could potentially provide neglected details of past events. In discussing this longstanding tradition of silencing Aboriginal first citizens' histories, J. R. Miller states that "well into the 1970's historians and Canada still had their faces resolutely turned away from first nations" (Miller 5).

Sarah Carter seconds Miller's sentiment when she asserts that,

> Just 30 years ago, students at Canadian universities were told that there was not any Aboriginal history to teach, and no history courses were offered that dealt in a substantive way with the topic of Aboriginal and European contact. At that time there would have been very few books and articles about which to base a course,

[7] The sources on Berengia and the Bering Land Bridge are wide and varied, covering many disciplines and ideas. However, for more information, start with these sources: O'Neill, Dan; The Last Giant of Berengia, Boulder, Colorado; Westview Press (2004).;Barton, Miles; Prehistoric America: A Journey Through the Ice Age and Beyond, New Haven, Yale University Press (2002); and Dixon, James; Quest for the Origins of the First Americans; Albuquerque, University of New Mexico (1992).

[8] These lists is far from a comprehensive list of the extensive discussions of Bering travel and Native migration, but for more on Beringia/coastal migration and possible waterway travel of ancestral first nations, see also: Dillehay/Meltzer 1991; Dillehay 2000, 1991; Koppell 2004; Dillehay (Anthropology Today); Floren 2003.

> or even part of a course. The history texts then available provided very little insight in Canada's first nations. (Carter 5)

To substantiate her argument, Carter quotes a history text by Edgar McInnis, published in 1947 (and used in college classrooms into the 1970s). The general tone of McInnis's broad dismissal of Native peoples is as follows:

> The Europeans who came to the shores of North America regarded it as a vacant continent, which lay completely open to settlement from the old world. In the final analysis this assumption was justified [...] the aborigines made no major contribution to the culture that developed in the settled communities of Canada [...] they remained a primitive remnant clinging to their tribal organization long after had become obsolete. (McInnis as qtd. in Carter 5) [ellipses supplied by Carter][9]

Donald L. Fixico traces the roots of such a blatant ignoring of Native history to Frederick Jackson Turner's Germ Theory, a theory of historical conquest which adopts the stance that

> America was settled by Europeans who migrated from East to West, and that the American experience (disregarding American Indians) borrowed its foundation from European ideologies of settling the land and expanded westward. Frederick Jackson Turner introduced his famous thesis at the newly born American Historical Association Conference in Chicago in 1893, but in his explanation of the American frontier and the development of an American identity, he mentions American Indians only two or three times, and the impact of his view led to two

[9] McInnis was the author of several texts about Canada, including: The Unguarded Frontier: A History Of American -Canadian Relations, New York, Doubleday & Co., 1942 (with new editions through 1970); and Canada: A Political And Social History, New York/Toronto, Rinehart & Co. 1947 (with new editions through 1982). See also Creighton: 1944, 1974.

> generations of Turnerian historians whose intellectual descendants even today know very little about American Indians and their history. (Fixico 95)[10]

Though Turner's theories are discussing primarily the settlement of America, it can be reasoned that his ideas are also reflective of, at best, a general bias of indifference or a purposeful "ignorance" regarding Native peoples that would include many Canadian scholars as well. In large numbers early historians and scholars, following the lead of scholars like Turner, Fixico argues, "wrote Indians out of their textbooks for whatever insecure reasons of justifying the past actions of America's [and subsequently Canada's] heroes, racial bigotry, or white guilt. By ignoring the dark episodes of the destruction of Indians and their cultures, historians in effect denied that these things ever happened" (Fixico 86). Turner's suppositions speak for a blatant disregard of Native peoples, perpetuating not only a lack of knowledge, but also an image of the North American continent as a land empty of civilization or culture prior to European arrival.

One rationalization often supplied for the lack of inclusion of "pre-history" Native influence in discussing the peopling of the Americas is a perceived lack of reliable evidence. This lack of evidence, as pointed out by Dickason, arises from a European cultural reliance (or fixation) primarily upon the found object/artifact and the written word as a primary indicator of historical legitimacy and authenticity (Dickason x). Consequently the lack of any written record from Native peoples made those same Native peoples' stories not only difficult to follow and codify, but also easy to ignore.

As Taylor discusses later in this dissertation, Native oral history traditions have often been ignored as unreliable, or relegated to the realm of stories appropriate only for children, not appropriate therefore for serious academic/historic consideration. This dismissal arose despite the existence of many developed native systems of symbols, pictographs, and mnemonic devices

[10] For More on Turner's ideas, see Turner's The Frontier in American History, New York, Holt and Company, 1920.

which carried the details of Native histories. These were for the most part dismissed as too vague or abstract, yet, as Sarah Carter describes in her work, Aboriginal People and the Colonizers of Western Canada,

> Aboriginal societies left more records, or documents, than earlier generations of Non-Aboriginal historians were prepared to recognize.[11] Winter counts, for example, of Northern Plains people are chronologies comprising lists of names, or titles for each year, recording the most significant event for that year, which is presented by pictographs. Calendar sticks with marks and symbols, like the pictographs of winter counts, served to jog the memory of oral historians. There are also rock paintings, rock effigies, birchbark migration charts, and carvings.[12] Drawings on shirts, robes, teepees covers, and shields portray past events and exploits. The past was also preserved through symbolic regalia and expressive performances as during the ceremonial performances of the Ojibway Midewiwin (Healing Medicine Society). (Carter pp. 7) [13]

Despite the previously overlooked sophistication and diversity of the historical material of Native Oral historians and their devices for recording their histories, they were still too easily relegated to an unreliable status due to a Western belief that oral histories were inevitably altered by the individual "Storyteller," with the assumption being that histories varied greatly depending upon elements such as audience and performer. This claim is dismissed by Carter, who disputes these demeaning criticisms as follows:

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[11] For further examples of these visual records see: Berio (2000), Dewdney (1962) (1975), Keyser (2000), Szabo (1994).

[12] For discussions on Native texts and literacy, see Edwards (2005); also Erdrich (2003).

[13] The Midewiwin of the Ojibway developed and maintain a very developed mnemonic system of record keeping by incised patterns and symbols on to birchbark scrolls, which were maintained as sacred objects in the personal and collective bundles of its members. These rolls covered ceremonial procedure, but also songs, stories, and historical data, and were apparently readily recognizable from person to person and community to community, if they were initiated into the meaning of various symbols. For more detail see also Dewdney (1975).

> It is clear that the intent of much storytelling in oral societies is not to convey accurate information about the past, but some accounts are intended for this purpose. In Cree narratives, there's a basic distinction between … the factual account, and the … counseling text. Speakers carefully distinguish between what they experienced themselves, and what had been told to them by others. All historians choose their topics, and the way in which interpret and present them, in the light of their own predilections and interests. All sources, whether oral, documentary, or material, must be read critically, rather than literally. (Carter 7-8)

While it is true that a great deal of Oral histories were indeed stories, and therefore open to some degree of interpretation, there were other modes of orality that adhered to a sense of detail and accuracy. In addressing this idea further, Carter notes that

> Aboriginal peoples primarily used oral narratives to preserve and convey their own past. There are sacred narratives involving non-human characters, and more factual, often historical narratives featuring human characters. There are also fictional, entertaining, and often humorous stories, involving the interplay of humans and non-humans. Academic historians have been slow to recognize any of these as legitimate sources. There is concern that oral sources are prone to be shaped and altered by the storyteller's present-day purposes, and that it is impossible to sift through to the "facts." However, this attitude is becoming less prevalent. The rich oral literature of aboriginal peoples can no longer be dismissed as something "quaint" but not reliable, if we hope to come to a multi-dimensional understanding of cultures in contact. (Carter 7-8)

New Neighbors: Sickness, Agency, and Trust

Popular conceptions of Native life prior to European contact tends to be that of idyllic villages absent of strife, their inhabitants living in pastoral bliss and unchanging harmony with their neighbors and their environment: communities largely self sufficient and unaware of the larger world around them. A common addendum to this interpretation is that the limited world view of Native peoples was broadened significantly (and in some points of view, positively), with the arrival of European traders and missionaries and the importation of wonderful goods and tools supposedly previously unimagined, which arrived alongside the then prevailing European concepts of God and Man. When examined closely, of course, events of the past reveal these mythologies to be highly inaccurate, embodiments of differing ideas and attitudes around Native and European concepts of the Universe, ownership of the land, and negotiated territorial and bureaucratic agreements.

Like any people living in close contact with the land, Native peoples faced hunger and illness brought on by long cold winters and periods where game and other food sources grew scarce. Unlike many of their European counterpoints, most Native communities followed a pattern of periodically moving their villages and settlements in order to avoid taxing the land of all available resources and to ensure a constant supply of food. These migrations varied in frequency and distance, from seasonal moves of several miles, to gradual movement of thousands of miles over several generations, often displacing other Native nations along the way.[14]

Native migration patterns, territorial disputes, and trade relationships prior to European contact indicate that, contrary to popular beliefs, Native life was far from unchanging, idyllic, static, or without conflict. As scholar Bruce Trigger acknowledges: “Europeans did not introduce

[14]See Miller 2002, 18-19; also Banai.

change to the Aboriginal peoples of what is now Canada. They were merely the latest form of change for them" (Trigger as quoted in Miller "Introduction")[15] What is significant however is the scope and nature of the changes brought to the peoples of Native North America by the arrival of non-Native newcomers. These arrivals and subsequent explorations set many Native populations on their ears, as Native Canadian playwright, Tomson Highway relates: "As early as that first encounter, extraordinary events began to occur among us. That initial meeting touched off a shockwave that was felt by Indian people right across the continent. And it is still felt to this day." (York iii)

As encounters between Natives and Europeans increased in both frequency and scope, significant differences in perceptions and outlooks between Native peoples and these new visitors (who were initially welcomed as guests) became apparent. Perhaps primary to these differences centered on each group's sense of place within the Universe, their relationship to their God, and their subsequent sense of place within their natural surroundings.[16] The Europeans brought with them their belief in a supreme God who had created Man in his image, therefore (in their belief) anointing Man to a special, privileged status within a hierarchy of Creation. Within this hierarchy, the environment was subject to the whims and desires of Man, who was allowed to take what he needed in order to enforce and advance his nearer-than-thee-to-God supremacy. The focus, aside from the collecting of souls converted to European Christian agendas, was the gathering of material wealth and power, the environment being a subservient

[15] Native peoples appear to have faced issues of anger, jealousy, theft, border disputes, and other conflicts much like their European counterparts. Examples of these elements can be found in Johnston, 1995; also John Tanner's narrative of life with the Ojibwe people: The Falcon, a "captivity" narrative generally accepted by both native and Non-Native scholars as possessing some level of authenticity (Tanner Falcon).

[16] The use of the "word" group may be troubling to some in its use here, as perhaps also would be "culture" or "civilization", because in fact it was a variety of groups, cultures, and civilizations that were encountered at different times and locations. Forgetting this important fact is a danger of speaking generally, and I have chosen to use the word "group" as the least offensive of these terms, while asking the reader to remain mindful of the general terms through which, for efficiencies sake, I am summarizing both diverse large groups of people and significant chunks of history in admittedly broad and general terms.

landscape to be dominated and beaten back as a means to an end. Once Europeans finally took note of the opportunities in the North American Continent, they began to make use of resources, and despite a marked Native presence,

> They looked about these spaces and found them empty of visible marks of tenancy…to them the lands were satanic rather than sacred, and the traders and their employees could tolerate the wilderness only in the hope that eventually they could make enough money to leave behind and return to 'civilization' to live like humans. So they would grimly push out into the woods beyond the farthest reaches of civilization. (Vizenor 24)

The Newcomers goals in "pushing out" into the wilderness centered upon the furtherance of their own agendas of "personal gain and dominance, reinforcing their own belief in the imagined, God-given superiority over all other beings" (Dickason xi). Included in this self-centered sense of superiority of the Europeans was a belief in themselves as elevated above their Native peers, those who were to be regarded as sub-human, and therefore inferior. In part, these European assumptions of superiority were wrongfully based upon misperceptions of Native intelligence and lack of a developed sense of cosmology, arguably formed by Europeans from their own limited vantage points of cultural intelligence and an overblown estimation of the validity of their own cosmology.

In actuality, pre-contact Native Peoples were quite sophisticated in their spiritual views of the world around them. Native cosmologies, though on the surface different in intention and execution from the Christian-Church centered Europeans, were (and remain) actually quite developed. In general, these cosmologies placed them in direct and equal relationship with the physical and spiritual environment surrounding them, with their place in this environment no

lesser (and perhaps more importantly) no greater than any one element of the Creation. In contrast to the European belief in Man being a superior creation placed upon the Earth in the image of God, Native peoples tended to believe that all of creation was/is infused equally with the reflection of the Creator, and was therefore to be regarded directly as an equal relation. This connection to the Creator through the environment promoted a deep spiritual rooted-ness in the land, as well as a sense of responsibility towards that land and the need to preserve these lands for future use. This sentiment is reflected by Georges Erasmus and Joe Sanders in their commentary "Canadian History: An Aboriginal Perspective," as they comment on the disregard of traditional Native beliefs on the part of non-Native newcomers

> It was unfortunate that early Christian leaders believed that our people did not understand why human beings were here on earth. Our people did not think there were Gods in every leaf, but they did think that everything around us was given by the Creator. They believed that there was one Supreme Being, that there was purpose in all this, and that the purpose did not end when we died. (Erasmus and Sanders 4)

By commenting "we did not believe there were gods in every leaf," Erasmus and Sanders are drawing attention to a still popular misperception that in their regard for nature, Native peoples worshipped Nature. Erasmus and Sanders are quick to correct this error in perception however, as they point out Natives viewed and related to these elements of the creation as direct relatives in the reflection of the Creator. Their investment in the land arose from a sense of responsibility and care in the hopes of preserving these relationships in a positive manner for future use, the care of which was then to be taken up by subsequent generations.

Despite the contrasts, it can be ventured that both Native Peoples and their European counterparts were deeply invested in creating and preserving a future for themselves and those to follow. Primary in the differences between these two groups however, was in their approaches and attitudes towards these ideas of legacy and inheritance, a difference reflected in their varying views of ownership of the land. Erasmus and Sanders describe the general Native view in this regard as based on community.

> Ownership of land in the Anglo-Canadian- "fee-simple" sense of title was foreign to the thinking and systems of First Nations. Land was revered as a Mother from which life came, and was to be preserved for future generations as it had been from time immemorial. Land was used for common benefit, with no individual having a right to any more of it than another. A nation's traditional hunting grounds were recognized by its neighbors as "belonging" to that nation, but this was different than the idea of private ownership. (Erasmus and Sanders 5)

In contrast to this recognition of equal partnership and distinct boundaries, European settlement of North America is rife with stories of battles and debates over direct ownership and sale of the land. And while Native peoples were no strangers to conflict and often engaged in battle with other groups over territory and resources, Erasmus argues that despite their reputation to the contrary, Natives "were not a warlike people, but they did defend their interests" (Erasmus and Sanders 4). While it is readily established that Native groups did often disagree and engage in battles between disputing factions, it has also been established that these battles fought between Native groups tended to involve significantly less bloodshed with the outcome often far less severe in the loss of life and property. In addition, once peaceful agreement or compromise was

achieved, the oaths taken in these conciliatory meetings were regarded also sacred or sacrosanct and the responsibilities agreed to were to be honored completely.[17]

Any discussion of agreements between Native parties will perhaps invariably bring to mind the notion of treaties made and treaties broken. It is often assumed that Native people were nature-wise but politically un-savvy; that Natives were naïve participants in the treaty making process with the European newcomers.[18] But as Erasmus and Sanders reflect in their essay, this was not the case: "Our people understood what the Non-Native people were after when they came among our people and wanted to treaty with them, because they had done that many times amongst themselves. They recognized that a nation-to nation agreement, defining the specific terms of peaceful coexistence, was being arranged" (Erasmus and Sanders 4). A re-consideration of Native peoples as having an understanding of the treaty process changes the view of the stereotypical Native from an unwitting dupe of the devious European factions to intelligent individuals and cultures that were seeking honest partnerships and genuine accord with the European Newcomers. [19]

The assertion that Native Peoples carried more awareness of the ramifications of a treaty process than previously assumed reflects a relatively recent tendency in the study of Native histories, a perspective that establishes Native People's agency in their interactions with

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[17] See entries regarding warfare and conflict in Hoxie; Dickason; Farb; Johnson; and Pritzker.

[18] Consider the popular myth where Peter Minuit, a Dutch settler, reportedly purchased the Island of Manhattan for $24.00 worth of beads and trinkets. While this story has long since proven to be a myth, the subtext asserting an Indian personality both vain and naïve, easily swayed by a trunk load of shiny objects, is troubling in its continued persistence to this day. For more on the mythical bead purchase of Manhattan start with: thebeadsite.com. straightdope.com; Mooney, Kissel; Kuntzman; Mickley; Page.

[19] On a personal note, I once asked my friend Hollis, who had served in a significant portion of World War II (Okinawa) why he had gone when he was in fact Native, and the battle could easily be seen as not one his people needed to be a part of. He responded with several stories of his elders who had signed treaties previous to his birth which promised that "the sons" of his tribe would always serve in the defense of their "new" country. He stated simply that he went to honor a promise that was made by his relatives, and that when Native people of traditional upbringing knew of promises made with good intent, they honored them, and he stated that, "unlike your relatives, this is what we do" (Littlecreek).

Europeans. In discussing his own realizations on the subject of Native agency, historian J.R. Miller states that,

> Indian peoples were not the passive victims that were found in so many older accounts of Canadian History … indigenous peoples had in fact been active agents of commercial, diplomatic, and military relations with the European newcomers and their Euro-Canadian descendants. Indians … largely determined the terms of trade, the nature of military alliances and the outcomes of most martial engagements during the nineteenth century. Even after Indians became numerically inferior, and economically dependent upon, Euro Canadians, they continued to assert themselves in their relations with governments, churches, and the ordinary population. (Miller Skyscrapers ix-x)[20]

Sarah Carter elaborates further, reflecting upon these changes in perception of historical events when Native peoples are humanized and given a greater dose of credit than initially attributed to them. She notes that for many historians today, "Aboriginal peoples are no longer cast as 'passive victims' but as 'active agents,' genuine actors with strategies, and interests of their own that they rigorously pursued." To do so, she continues, gives Native peoples

> some control over their fate, despite their uneven power relationship that eventually favored the Europeans. As active agents they did not allow themselves to be victimized. The history of contact, then, is no longer seen as one dominant group imposing will and authority on an oppressed group; rather, it is seen as a process of reciprocity and exchange among all participants. (Carter 9-10)

[20] For a listing of various scholars whose works served to lead to the adaptation of Miller's own views, see Miller's comments accompanying this citation (Miller Skyscrapers ix-x).

Carter constructs a dynamic rather than passive image of the Native people. By noting that, "as active agents they did not allow themselves to be victimized," Carter is by no means implying that Native people were not victimized. Rather, she is asserting that Native Peoples exercised greater awareness of possible futures as a result of their contact with the newcomers and were therefore more active in the processes of trade and negotiation, as well as attempts at resistance to European oppression. Although the argument that Native peoples operated with a greater sense of awareness and agency than previously accepted accounts allowed does not lessen the severity, brutality, or speed with which European domination and oppression took hold. Rather, it provides a fuller portrait of the peoples being dominated and a more devastating picture of the effects of European domination.

Listening To The Children: A Patronizing Government And Silence Broken

The name "Canada" is widely reported to derive from the Native word "Kanata" [of Huron-Iroquois origin], meaning a village or settlement." Jacques Cartier, an early, non-Native explorer of Canadian territories, recorded hearing the name purportedly in reference to a route leading to a Native village known as Stadacona, which was built upon the site of present-day Québec City. Cartier adopted the name "Canada" in reference to this village, and later, also "in reference to the province of Canada, meaning the [land] subject to Donnacona, chief at Stadacona" (Lambs, 355; Wiehs 1). [21] In a relatively short period, the name Canada soon grew to reference progressively larger territorial areas, soon to encompass the entire northernmost section of the North American continent (Lamb 355)[22]. As Roger Riendeau relates, Canada is,

> a vast country, extending over 4000 miles from East and West and upwards of over 3000 miles from north to South. With an area of 3,850,000 square miles, it

[21] For more information on the Jacques Cartier see Creighton Canada 29-31; Creighton Dominion. 3-11, 15, 16, 23; Gough pp. 62.
[22] See also Harris and Hayes

> is the second -- largest nation in the world, exceeded in size only by Russia. Yet only about one eighth of the land is considered habitable, and only about one twelfth is cultivable, largely accounting for the fact that Canada's population has consistently been about one tenth the size of United States, even though Canada's land area is slightly larger than that of its other neighbor. Furthermore because of the limited quality of arable land available for settlement, well over 90 percent of the Canadian population lives within 300 miles of the U.S. border. (Riendeau, page 5)

Currently Canada's national population is roughly estimated to be 32,125,600 people (www.statcan.ca). Riendeau's above mention of the role in which climate and geography play in Canada's population distribution is borne out by 1999's Canadian Sourcebook, which reports that "nearly 40 percent of the population lives in the Ontario and Québec metropolitan areas of Hamilton, Kitchener, London, Montreal, Ottawa -- Hull, Québec, St. Catherine's, Niagara, Toronto, and Windsor" (Zapotochny 1999 3-1)[23]

Canada is controlled by a Federal system with primary power for specific governmental management focused in the administration of Provincial and Territorial governments. Canada is comprised of 10 provinces (Newfoundland, the Prince Edward Islands, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia] and three territories [the Yukon, Northwest, and Nunavut territories). The level of federal governmental intervention with provincial governments seems at times an issue of debate between various factions, much like the debates in the United States surrounding States rights vs. Federal intervention/big government. (Weihs 2; N.L.N. and R.K.N. and Ed. 452; Gow 994 - 995).

[23] For a map illustrating Canada's population distribution see: www.unitednorthamerica.org/canadapop.htm.

The nation of Canada was established formally in 1867, by the *British North America Act*, an act which united the Canadian territories into a self-governing Dominion of the British Crown. In 1931, Canada was "recognized as independent by Britain"; in 1982, via the *Constitution Act, 1981*, Canada achieved a greater level of independence from England through a proclamation of the British government and Queen Elizabeth II, which "formally ended all vestiges of British control" and made "Canada responsible for all changes to its Constitution" (N.L.N. 452 – 453). Despite these changes, significant British Royal influence is still present in Canada, in part via the office of the Governor-General of Canada, a post filled by a Canadian citizen who is appointed by the Crown. The Canadian Governor-General acts as Executive liaison between the Canadian federal government and the British Crown, with the power to dissolve, summon, and influence Parliament. While technically the Governor-General does exercise a considerable degree of power, the position is often regarded primarily as formal and ceremonial (N.L.N and Ed. 452-453; Zapotochny 2002 16:2; Marsh 996-997; Gough 89-90).

The Canadian government, democratic in philosophy and parliamentary in format, is comprised primarily of three branches: the Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary. While the divisions and their responsibilities bear some semblance to those of the U.S., they are in fact derivative of British parliamentary precedent. General public elections select political candidates by popular vote, the winners of which are called upon by the Governor-General to create Canada's government. In general, the leader of the winning majority party is elected Prime Minister (head of the Executive branch of the government), and establishes his or her Cabinet. Should the government experience a loss of confidence publicly and/or legislatively, Parliament and the government can be dissolved, with a call for new elections and the formation of a new government (Gow 994-995).

Unlike the United States Constitution, Canada's *Constitution Act, 1981* "is not an exhaustive statement of the laws and rules by which Canada is governed “but is rather a capstone document, many details of which are still currently under scrutiny and negotiation; yet it is a document which provides a distinctly Canadian shape to a government born primarily of British influence (N.L.N and R.L.K. and Ed. 452-453). Integral to this discussion of the *Constitution Act, 1981*, is the Charter of Human Rights, a document which states that Canada, "is founded upon principles that recognized the supremacy of God and the rule of law." Within the charter are delineated four "fundamental freedoms" which are guaranteed by the governments of Canada. These freedoms consist of "freedom of conscience and religion; freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; freedom of peaceful assembly; and freedom of association." (Colombo 110). Within the loosely defined parameters of the Charter lie many often hotly contested issues, including Native Peoples’ desire for increased self government and definition (Watkins 341-348)[24].

In addition to an acknowledgement of Universal fundamental freedoms guaranteed to the citizenry of Canada, Section #35 of *The Constitution Act, 1981* , “expressly recognizes and affirms the existence of three distinct categories of aboriginal peoples, whose rights are protected by the Constitution” (Chartrand 20). In addition, section #35 allows that “the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed” (laws.justice 10). Section #35 also provides for future potential lands claims and other legal inquiries involving Native peoples by clarifying that the term, “treaty rights includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired”(laws.justice 10). Lastly,

[24] For more non self-government and self-determination, see also Chartrand Who; Gioukas; Maruhiney; Miller Reflections; Russell; Warry. For more on Native rights in general, see: Laws; Poulkies; Cumming; Neu; Ponting.

section 35 professes equality in the treatment of Native peoples by asserting that "notwithstanding any other provisions of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to … are guaranteed equally to male and female persons" (Laws.justice 10).

It is in this consideration of categories of Natives, particularly in regard to control over who may decide the parameters and definitions of these categories, that contemporary political debate concerning Native issues arise. The three categories referred to above by Chartrand are, "the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada" (laws.justice). Historically, the basis of these three categories lies on previously established, problematic definitions, the origins of which can be traced back to a much less informed, pre-confederation period of Canada's history.

The term Inuit (translating commonly to English as "the People") describes a culture of people who were once commonly referred to in non-Native circles as Eskimos, a name which is in fact " a pejorative roughly meaning "eaters of raw meat." They [the Inuit] are one of the original groups to inhabit the northern regions of Canada populating small, scattered communities and villages throughout the Artic from Alaska to Eastern Greenland" (Freeman 1183-1184). The term Metis meanwhile, is "an old French word meaning 'mixed' and it is used here in a general sense for people of dual Indian-White [primarily French] ancestry "(Brown 1478). These distinctions are rarely as clear cut as the above statement seems to imply however, in the case of the Metis designation, as family roots are not always so easily traced. In turn, the Metis classification is also largely complicated by "the fact that biological race mixture … by itself does not determine a person's social, ethnic, or political identity" (Brown 1478).

While the cultures/classifications of the Inuit and Metis face their own difficulties with governmental classification and definition, to be legally defined as an "Indian" in Canada proves to be still more complicated. While the term "Indian" is often freely bandied about as a general

descriptor of any person who claims aboriginal descent, the Constitutional definition is problematic. Constitutionally, the term “Indian” refers specifically to a category of Native peoples known as Status or Treaty Indians. Harvey McCoe provides a concise definition of these terms:

> Among status Indians there are two groups: treaty Indians and registered Indians outside treaty areas. Treaty Indians are people who “took treaty.” A treaty is an agreement between the Crown and a specific group of Indians who are held to have surrendered their land rights for specified benefits. Registered Indians are people who reside in areas of Canada such as the Northwest Territories, BC, the Yukon Territory, and Nunavut, where treaties were never made, or people of Indian status in treaty areas who, for a variety of reasons, have not taken treaty. With the exception of specific promises contained in treaties, treaty Indians and registered Indians outside treaty receive identical benefits and privileges from the federal government. (McCue 1146)

In contrast to the government recognized and protected Status Indians, there are also non-status Indians who, “are of Indian ancestry but through intermarriage with Whites or by abandoning their status rights have lost their legal status while retaining their Indian identity” (McCue 1146). If the above mentioned parameter for definition of “Indian Status” seems outdated, it is because these definitions for the most part have remained unchanged since their first formal inception in 1876 (McCue 1146).

Non-Status Indians do not presently receive federal government protection or recognition. The distinction between status and non-status, registered and un-registered, is subjective and contentious at best. Similar to difficulties with a biological distinction

determining who may or may not be classified as a member of the Metis culture, the appearance (or lack thereof) of an individuals' name or their ancestors name, on a governmental treaty or register cannot be relied upon as the sole arbiter of either cultural/tribal existence on the group level; nor can it be relied upon to determine the extent of active participation and membership within that culture on an individual or familial level. While this problem will be discussed in a bit more detail later, it can be (and has been) argued that tribal identity and cultural composition cannot be arbitrarily removed or surrendered when involved parties are not fully aware of the measure of their actions.[25]

In terms of governmental regard of Native peoples, Canada's Aboriginal people have alternately been ignored or manipulated, depending upon the needs of the various factions vying for their resources or alliances. In the earliest explorations and subsequent settling of the Canadian territories, Native Peoples initially presented no obstacles to the European Newcomers and were therefore largely dismissed. Soon however, alliances with various Native peoples became prized in the various trade and military endeavors that served the process of building the Canadian nation. However, following the ending of military disputes with the close of the War of 1812, military alliances with the Native peoples were no longer needed, and as more and more settlers emerged into the Canadian landscape, subsequently the governmental view of the Native population shifted to a regard of Native peoples as an obstacle standing in the way of the inevitable and manifest progress of a new nation (Francis 213).

Despite shifting attitudes towards Native people, however, one view of Canada's Native people appears to have remained constant: the Canadian government's Indian policy based on "an image of the Indian as inferior." As Francis argues, "Officials repeatedly described Indians

[25] While peripheral to this dissertation, one example can be found in consideration of new found tribal wealth gained from gambling and other revenues which has prompted some non-status Natives back to the reservation/reserve (in both Canada and the States) in hopes of reclaiming their cultural identity and sharing in this wealth.

as children. Like children, Indians could not be given full responsibility to make their own decisions about their lives" (Francis 213).

Under The Indian Act of 1867, Native peoples were placed under a "protected" status. While this status allowed them to be protected from debt and to avoid paying federal taxes, it also heavily restricted Native travel without government approved passes, prevented them from using their Reserve land as collateral for loans to improve their status financially (provided these individuals were ever allowed access to any such knowledge), or from ever holding title to any land. Significantly, traditional Native practices around which entire communities were built, such as the Potlatch of the Northwest Coast tribes or the Sundance of the Plains tribes, were deemed inappropriate and banned from public practice. Not to be overlooked, these "protected" peoples which Canada deemed its "Aboriginal Citizens" were systematically ignored, refused the most basic of Canadian citizenship rights, the right to exercise a voice in their choosing their government, as they were refused the right to vote until 1969 (Francis 202).

Native women were placed in an even more precarious position as they were relegated to secondary and even tertiary status under their male counterparts. Under The Indian Act, if a Native woman married a non-Native man, her tribal and band rights were considered terminated:

> She then became a non-Indian in the eyes of the government; she became one with her husband, who became in effect her owner under the patriarchal legislation. She was stripped of her Indian status and not able to live on the Reserve with her extended family. Many Indian women who married out had no idea that they had lost their Indian status until they attempted to return to their Reserve following the breakup of their marriage. (Voyageur 90)

In a rather odd, but perhaps unsurprising twist, the reverse was not held to be true: if a non-Native woman married a Native man, she then became, in the eyes of the government, a Native woman and member of her husband's band and Reserve, eligible for all the rights accorded such a member, including land possession.

Related to these difficulties around marriage and loss of property and identity is the fact that, early on, Canadian officials recognized the very real danger their Native "children" faced in the midst of increasing numbers of nefarious land speculators and profiteers. Formed ostensibly to protect Indian interest, The Indian Act was initially drafted to "recognize and protect Indian land rights in defense against the loss of their land by manipulation or outright theft, with the act creating clear boundaries between settlers' land and Indian lands" (Giokas and Groves 52). Eventually however, loopholes were both created and discovered in this "protective" stance as more non-Natives sought to gather control of Native lands and resources. One such method came in the form of marriage, with non-Native men electing to marry into Native families in an effort to gain ownership of family and tribal allotments through marriages of convenience.[26]

Under the auspices of the Canadian government and its Indian Policies, to be identified as an Indian became a "legislated concept as well as a racial one, maintained solely through political institutions to which no Native, until 1960, had no access" (Francis 201). Through the machinations of *The Indian Act*, the basic rights and opportunities of citizenry were denied Indian peoples. They were isolated onto Reserves, presumably under the guise of allowing the Natives their land in order to preserve their traditions and way of life, the very traditions which were later damned by the government and religious factions which purported to protect them, and Native women whose marriages had ended were essentially set adrift by the government,

[26] See: Chartrand; Cumming and Mickenburg; Maruhney; Neu and Therrien; and Voyageur for further discussion.

who cut their ties from their families and Reserve, involuntarily dis-enfranchising them of the any connection to their base of support and identity.

As the Nation of Canada grew and changed, and as Native peoples began to resist more vehemently the non-Native influx into their territories and their lives, The Indian Act was revised to focus directly upon assimilation and absorption of Native Peoples into the growing non-Native based Canadian society. In short, the goal became one of the destruction of the "Indian" to be replaced with an idealized, Christianized, anglicized, and non-savage Canadian Citizen.

According to Francis in his work, The Imaginary Indian, the Canadian government had taken a lesson from their American neighbors' mistakes, when devising their assimilation programs,

> Assimilation as a solution to the "Indian problem" was considered preferable to its only perceived alternative: wholesale extermination. There is nothing to indicate that extermination was ever acceptable to Canadians. Not only was it morally repugnant, it was also impractical. The American example showed how costly it was, in terms of money and lives, to wage war against aboriginals. The last thing the Canadian government wanted to do was to initiate a full-scale Indian conflict. It chose instead to go about the elimination of the Indian problem by eliminating the Indian way of life: through education and training, the Red man would attain civilization. Most White Canadians believed the Indians were doomed to disappear anyway. Assimilation was a policy intended to preserve Indians as individuals by destroying them as people. (Francis 200-20)

In fact, while the Canadian government learned from its American neighbors and never chose to engage in an actual physical extermination of Native peoples, their policies of assimilation and

absorption reflected an equally insidious goal of "negotiated genocide" which eventually "involved land surrender treaties and policies designed to expunge aboriginal identity, aboriginal ways, aboriginal beliefs, and perhaps most important of all, aboriginal techniques for relating to and interacting with the land. The approach was not conquest, a treaty; never actual genocide, but cultural genocide" (Miller "Introduction" 26). One example of destructive assimilationist is the legacy of Canadian Indian residential schools. With the (mis)perceptions of Canada's native peoples as childlike, helpless souls in need of civilizing and salvation already in place at such an early date, the responsibility for the education of Native Peoples of Canada officially was made a Canadian Federal responsibility by the *Constitution Act of 1867*. Many early Canadian Indian Boarding Schools were run by various religious organizations "acting on behalf of, and funded by, the federal government" (Orlikow 736-737). These schools were largely similar in operation, purpose, and reputation of American Residential Indian Schools of roughly the same era. These schools, and their agents, often forcibly removed young Native children from their families and their homes, carting them off to large institutions, frequently far from their home communities and traditional lands. In many cases, contact with families was severely limited if not discouraged completely, resulting in children, often as young as four or five years old, left adrift in a completely alien environment, unable to understand the cultural machinations around them. Upon arrival at these institutions, children's clothing was destroyed and their hair was cut (which in some cases was tantamount to a severing of important ties to spiritual and cultural connections). Oftentimes on pain of severe punishment, students were not allowed to speak their language, interact with siblings or fellow community members, or practice traditional spiritual and cultural customs. [27]

[27] Without generalizing or weakening the abuses and indignities inflicted on children at Indian residential schools in both the Canada and the U.S., their legacy and impact have been extensively documented and widely studied, with

These schools, again, not unlike the Indian schools of the United States, were the start of a vicious, insidious cycle of abuse as "students' were sometimes forced into slave labor conditions, and subjected to levels of religious brainwashing and physical, mental, and spiritual torture and often extreme levels of sexual abuse, all of which regularly occurred in these institutions. Originally founded to "assimilate" Native Peoples into the allegedly more civilized non-Native society, the end result of efforts by these institutions proved to be that of providing examples of unforgivable extremes of human cruelty on so many different levels. This legacy is one that can be readily identified as one root of the cycles of abuse and despair that continue within the Native Communities of both the U.S. and Canada to this day. An additional legacy of Residential schools is the legacy of silence that erupted as a result of students' victimization at the hands of figures placed in roles of moral control and authority. As will be discussed further in the following chapter, generations of Native students, cut off from their families and communities, ashamed at their victimization, threatened with physical retribution and spiritual damnation if they revealed their experiences of abuse, grew to adulthood either cowed, ashamed, angry, resentful, rebellious, and to a great degree, silenced by shame, loss, and fear.

In addition to the supposedly positive idea of Indian Residential Schools, under assimilationist policies of absorption, Native people, though restricted in their movements and rights, were to be afforded opportunity for training and education. Ideally, as they learned the "civilized" ways of their European counterparts, they were to be afforded more and more opportunity to enter into the greater Canadian community. As the Indian gradually chose to learn more of the proper way to live, shrugging off his or her "Indian-ness" in favor of the much more acceptable (and therefore supposedly attractive) non-Native lifestyles, they would allegedly be

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the general details heavily established from both Native and non-Native vantage points. For more on Native Residential schools, start with: Barman and McCaskill; Carter; Dickason; Highway Kiss; Johnston Indian; Kirkness; Loyie; Miller "The State" and Shingwauk's; Razor; and Schissel;.

afforded more and more of the rights of those citizens. In reality, as is already well established, the opportunities afforded Native peoples were extremely limited in their scope, and the delivery of these opportunities extremely biased in their representation of correct and proper lifestyles and civilization.

The restrictive nature of Canadian Indian Policies regarding travel status, financial possibility, governance and the education of Native people, remained largely unchanged until 1969 when then Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, submitted a now infamous White Paper entitled Statement on Indian Policy.[28] The White Paper on Indian Policy was forwarded by the Chrétien administration as a means of eliminating "Indians as a separate legal category, supposedly in the interests of eradicating the ghettoization [of Native people in urban and Reserve environments] that was holding them back" (Miller "Introduction" 34).[29] The White Paper (as it is largely referred to today) "sought to end the Federal Government's responsibility for Aboriginal peoples and issues" (Long 391). If the recommendations of The White Paper were to have been applied as policy, Native People in Canada would have lost all vestiges of treaty rights and governmental protections, along with any opportunities of preserving tribal identities.

Reflecting a growing impatience and anger with an increasingly unresponsive, patronizing, and restrictive government, as well as the advent of a world increasing in its awareness of civil rights issues, the reaction from Native communities to the White Paper was almost instantaneous, and overwhelmingly negative, as detailed by David Long, "for many aboriginal groups in Canada, the White Paper symbolized the many problems associated with

[28] Though the above Statement on Indian Policy is largely referred to as The White Paper, in actuality a white paper is a general, descriptive term for a "a Government document which outlines both government policy on an issue and possible future action" (Franks 2503).

[29] In an irony not to be ignored, this "ghettoization" of Native peoples referred to in The White Paper can arguably be traced to be a result of the Canadian Governments own earlier policies towards Native peoples and their assimilation into urban-based "civilization".

colonization. A large number of aboriginal leaders from across Canada were motivated to immediately and categorically reject what they termed the genocidal implications of The White Paper" (Long 391). The outcry against The White Paper was loud and prolonged, leading to the start of a hoped for death knell of Canadian assimilationist ideals and a Euro-centered sense of superiority. With Native voices demanding to be heard and accounted for, the Canadian government finally was forced to sit up and take notice. While changes have been remarkably slow in coming, their have been gradual shifts towards the positive in regards to governmental recognition of Native peoples.

With this increased recognition however, arises a justifiably increased desire on the part of Native peoples for being allowed a greater voice in determining Native futures. Despite positive advances, the Native voice is still weakened considerably by governmental constraints, such as when the government maintains control over who is permitted legal designation as designated an Indian, as Paul L.A.H. Chartrand elaborates,

> One of the greatest challenges of the Constitutional recognition of the aboriginal people is the result that the courts decide the meaning of its terms. Even if the courts were to decide that aboriginal nations have a right to decide their own rules of membership, they would make decisions that would define the nations themselves. The political legitimacy of judicial definitions of aboriginal peoples forced by political weakness to accept that their most fundamental rights are being defined by courts of which they've never had a single member; they are faced with the prospect of being screened at the door of political negotiations and participation by judicial decisions. The task of recognizing and defining the

> aboriginal peoples must be legitimized by setting up specialized tribunals with representation from aboriginal peoples. (Chartrand 310)

Any changes in the relationship between Native peoples and the government of Canada have in part been largely stymied however by a slow moving government reluctant to surrender antiquated and impersonal definitions of Native peoples, as well as a general hesitance on the part of the Canadian Government to surrender its rather perverse parental role, a shift vital in finally allowing Native people a greater freedom in self determination and definition.

In consideration of Native rights and the silencing of Native voices, Paul L.A.H. Chartrand chides the Canadian government, arguing that "The Executive arm of the Government has a positive duty to protect the rights of the aboriginal peoples. Yet when aboriginal people attempt to take important issues to the courts, they are met at every turn with unconscionable obstructionist and delaying tactics by governmental lawyers" (Chartrand 311). While Constitutional acknowledgment and inclusion in the Charter of Human Rights does indeed seem a significant step in the right direction towards both addressing and moving away from a past of abuse and neglect, a single step does not serve to span a decidedly large gap between Native Peoples and the government that claims to represent them. Indeed, the history of Canada is short, while memories are long, and as Olive Patricia Dickason points out, there appears to be a belief among many Native people and their allies that "Unless the government negotiates self determination Amerindians could become a permanently disaffected group [much like what] has happened with the Irish in Great Britain (Dickason xiii-xiv).

While it is not necessarily the intent of this dissertation to point out all the wrongs inflicted upon one large number of people by another, nor to continue the tradition of pointing an accusatory finger at the descendants of the wrongdoers on all sides (an action in itself largely

more divisive than reparative), it is vital not to forget these events and their ramifications. Undeniably, a clear look at these events must include realistic looks at the domination and near destruction of entire cultures, but also the subsequent formulation of opinions and misconceptions that arose from European attempts to justify their actions and deceptions by casting Native peoples in a primitive, savage, subservient, negative and ultimately sub-human role.

Despite relatively recent advances in understanding and acceptance of difference and cultural diversity in Canadian society as well as the obviously fictive nature of popular imaginings and stereotypical images and perceptions of Native Peoples, these designations, and a multitude of others like them persist to this day. Additionally, if non-Native understanding of Native People is limited, then to some degree at least (perhaps much more than most non-Natives would be willing to admit), perhaps non-Native perceptions of themselves and their actions within the world is fictive as well. While these limitations cannot be condemned as intentional, and while they are absolutely not the sole source of tensions and difficulties between Native and non-Native peoples, such limited understandings have surely deepened the distance between peoples.

In the next chapter we will see how Canadian playwrights have worked to address these limited understandings and cross the cultural bridge renew Canadian life. Indeed, Drew Hayden Taylor's work is an example of how theatre can successfully manage to expose and invert these imaginings in an accessible, non threatening manner. In his plays, as we shall see, misperceptions and stereotype fall by the wayside, paving the way for stronger/ more realistic Native and non- Native empathetic connection and consideration, as well as perhaps, in Taylor's case, a potentially rewarding theatrical experience.

CHAPTER III

NEVER SILENT: MAPPING THE HISTORICAL TERRITORY OF CONTEMPORARY NATIVE CANADIAN THEATRE

In this chapter I will focus on what Drew Hayden Taylor calls the largely "unmapped" territory that comprises the history of the contemporary Native Theatre in Canada (Taylor “Legends”). Due to the nature of these theatrical roots being intertwined with the expansive web of Canada's history as a whole, distinct moments of theatre history will be selected as markers of development. Particular attention will be directed toward specific historical elements which both hindered and aided the rise of contemporary Native Theatre in Canada, and eventually conspired to prepare for Taylor's own levels of popular attention and success.

By necessity, this chapter is more summary than comprehensive; it is a series of postcard and snapshot images aimed at providing a context (albeit briefly), of the historical elements which gave rise to the contemporary Native Theatre in Canada. Criteria for the selection of these snapshot images themselves are largely provided through Taylor's own historical summaries. Primary in this discussion are two essays by Taylor: first, his 1987 article "Legends On The Stage," penned for MacLean's magazine just prior to his entry into the Theatre; and secondly, Taylor’s "Alive And Well: Native Theatre In Canada" written from his then post as artistic director for Native Earth performing arts, and appearing in The Journal Of Canadian Studies (Fall, 1996). Also of assistance in selecting these historic markers was an interview of Taylor by Birgit Dawes, appearing in Contemporary Literature, 2003.

Events in this chapter will follow a loosely chronological format, although with frequent leaps of years and even decades in between. Since this chapter intends to examine the elements

which gave rise to the contemporary Native Theatre in Canada as well as Taylor's career within that movement, and not its entire history (which remains yet to be written), I have chosen to end my summary in the year 1990. This year marks the first production and popular success of a full-length comedy by Taylor (The Bootlegger Blues), as well as a point where the contemporary Native theatre scene in Canada seems to have begun to emerge fully into the greater Canadian Theatre community. In this instance, the year 1990 is being used merely as an ending point for my study, not as a marker of termination for the contemporary Native theatre in Canada, as efforts have doubled, if not tripled in the fifteen years that separate 1990 from the writing of this study. With the increase in efforts and voices, the advances and successes have also increased, creating a history that is extremely varied and diverse. It is my hope that someone else will recognize the need to study these efforts further and in greater detail in the near future.

Careful note must be made here that it is not the aim of this chapter to unrealistically lionize Taylor as a messiah-like figure for the Native Theatre in Canada. Rather my goal is to position Taylor as a strong link in a creative spiral that continues to envelop a growing number of voices.

(Re)Emergence

Drew Hayden Taylor emerged into the theatre at a time when Native theatre in Canada was in a state of explosive creative action and ready to move forward. Taylor recognized the gap of knowledge between Native and non-Native audience members, he also came armed with the theatrical talent necessary to potentially cross this gap.

In the earliest stages of the development of the Contemporary Native Canadian theatre, non-Native audiences in Canada (and beyond) were not, until just recently, ready to release control over Native theatricality. Nor were they ready to surrender their own "imagined

expectations" of Native peoples in order for them to be replaced by more grounded, Native-generated definitions of themselves. The story of the emergence of Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada is one that parallels the history of the Native people in Canada, as well as the changes initially inflicted upon them, and later admirably achieved by them. The story of Taylor's emergence is not only one of how he stands upon the shoulders of those who witnessed and instigated these changes, but also of how Taylor manages to make room upon his own shoulders for those who wish to build upon his efforts as well.

Of Highways and Big Bangs-Contextual Commentary

Drew Hayden Taylor regards the appearance of Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters and its subsequent tremendous success across Canada, as "the Big Bang" of Contemporary Native Canadian Theatre (Wagner "Sowing"). As Taylor describes it, The Rez Sisters marked the beginning of contemporary Native theatre because that's when people stood up and said, "Hey, what's this? People are telling their own story and telling it well" (Taylor "Alive" 34). As Taylor relates to his readers, the arrival of the success of Highway's The Rez Sisters was far from a singular event, as

> There was a progression of events; it was like a puzzle, each bit falling into place. Native people were beginning to understand that there were alternatives. We began to assert ourselves … Each event was a step toward getting our voice back. (Taylor "Alive" 31)

Taylor frequently refers to this idea of loss and reclamation of the Native voice, such as when he discusses the then momentum and tone of Contemporary Native Theatre:

> We've been given back our voices to tell our stories. It is fascinating to see what stories are being told and what the voices are saying. I would say that a majority

> of plays produced in the past, and to a certain extent, now, are very, very angry stories. They are talking about things that have happened that have prevented them from talking in the first place." (Taylor "Alive" 35)

A frequent (and misguided) assumption on the part of non-Natives is that as a result of non-Native oppression, the Native voice disappeared without a trace; that an entire spectrum of voices and cultures were silenced completely by non-Native attempts at eradication and assimilation. While many Native cultures did disappear, and collective Native communities of Canada did teeter on the brink of disaster, Native voices never entirely disappeared, partly, as Taylor reports, due to their oral traditions.

> During the onslaught of Christianity, of the government, the residential school system, etc., traditional Native beliefs were deemed offensive and unnecessary. There were numerous attempts to stamp them out and replace them with White North American/European concepts. However, it is incredibly hard to eradicate the simple act of telling stories our culture persevered, and today we are getting our voice back. (Taylor "Alive" 30)

An important distinction, then, in regards to Taylor's discussions of "getting our voices back" is that the reference refers more to a re-articulation and a re-emergence of Native voices powered by Native sources, rather than a complete re-birth or re-invention. Taylor is often quick to remind his readers that "Native theatre has existed in several forms in Canada since time immemorial. It predates the political structure that currently run Canada. Native theatre is as old as the stories still being told by its original inhabitants. It is merely the presentation that has changed" (Taylor "Crucible" 25).

As will be discussed further momentarily, Taylor bases his work upon the assumption that the Contemporary Native theatre efforts are natural extensions of a lasting, continuing (and present) Native history of innovative orality, theatricality, and creative performativity. As Taylor reports, "the art of telling stories by using just the voice and the physical mannerisms is certainly old hat amongst the Aboriginal people" (Taylor "Crucible" 25-26). With the rise of the popularity of the Contemporary Native theatre, audiences are not witnessing a creation of a recipe from entirely new ingredients, but rather a modern reflection of, in some cases, quite ancient ingredients mixed in with a few components to more accurately depict both the history and the growth and development of Native peoples.

It is important to note also that Highway's The Rez Sisters was not the literal birth of Contemporary Native theatre; analogous to Highway's efforts were a small number of other dedicated Native theatre artists struggling to reach their audience. However, any large scale successes prior to Highway's were largely generated by non-Native authors and non-Native performers. Therefore, as a marker of arrival, Highway's The Rez Sisters is flagged as a moment where efforts towards Native generated theatre had, in a sense arrived as they managed to cross the wide cultural gap between Native and non-Native audiences, achieving the level of box-office support necessary for success. As Taylor reported to his readers in 1987, until the arrival of Highway and The Rez Sisters, "the imaginative landscape claimed by Canada's dedicated band of Native theatre professionals has been unmapped territory for the rest of the country" (Taylor "Legends").

In discussing the momentum gained by the Native theatre since the appearance of The Rez Sisters, Taylor urges audiences and artists alike to continue forward, saying "we have to keep that process going. Since the Big Bang of Native Drama, which began with The Rez

Sisters, we've developed a whole generation of talented Native actors and writers" (Wagner "Sowing"). Writing in 1996, Taylor is also quick to remind his readers to be aware of Contemporary Native Theatre as a work in progress, still growing and still developing,

> Because Native Theatre is so young-it's barely ten years old-we're still trying to find its parameters before cultural appropriation occurs-one way or another! People talk about taking our stories, but our stories are taking new forms too … The definition of Native Theatre is continually expanding. It is still growing. In the 1970's, Native theatre was either a dramatization of a legend or about a rather didactic social issue that had to be explained, with no plot or character. Now Native theatre can be practically anything. During the 1980's Native Earth was the only theatre company developing and producing Native theatre. I myself have six plays being produced across Canada this season [1995-1996] and only one by a Native theatre company. Previously, one play might be produced and then it would disappear. Now, people in other companies are saying "I hear that's a good play-I'd like to produce it"… The momentum is growing and growing and Native theatre, instead of being the exception, is now a dynamic component of Contemporary Canadian Theatre. (Taylor "Alive" 36)

Taylor believes in the possibilities inherent within the theatre to bridge gaps in cultural knowledge, empowering both Native and non-Native audiences alike toward increasing their awareness of issues and realities of Native life in Canada beyond the stereotypical. In regards to the often angry and accusatory tone of earlier Native theatrical works, Taylor is quick to recognize their value as a step in this progression of healing, recalling that "Tomson likes to quote Lionel Longquash from Saskatchewan who said that before the healing can take place, the

poison has to be exposed" (Taylor "Storytelling" 5) This idea of healing and education is one that is frequently heard throughout the Native theatrical community, such as in this commentary by Yvette Nolan:

> Healing can't happen without understanding. Once there's an understanding among the people themselves, like aboriginal people doing aboriginal theatre, then maybe the White audience will get some understanding of people's feelings, history, and situations. Then there can be some sort of understanding between the two groups. (Wheeler 12)

As Nolan indicates, theatre created by Native theatre artists remains an important and opportune place from which to begin. It seems only fitting that the voices and oral traditions of peoples once so severely muted, have now begun to serve in their capacity to empower and educate to an extent that perhaps was never imagined.[1]

Pre and Post Contact

With the arrival of initial non- Native settlement on the part of missionaries and traders, and the eventual formation of the nation of Canada, there were subsequent attempts to both assimilate and eradicate the Native populations of Canada, including determined attempts to silence Native theatricality and performance. While the influence of these attacks on non-Native efforts was extremely damaging and limiting, in effect crippling entire cultures, what shines through consistently when studying these rather dark historical periods of oppression are the vibrancy and foundational strength of Native cultures, and the near total inability of governmental and

[1] I am aware that the use of the word "healing" here is a potentially loaded and problematic one, given the often overly mysticized expectations of many non-Native readers. While I certainly cannot speak for others, by my own use of the word "healing" I mean to indicate a removal of "dis-ease", in this case prompted by lack of exposure, knowledge, and understanding.

religious efforts to quash the Native performative voice. Taylor sees the rise of the Native voice in Canadian theatre in similar terms.

According to Taylor's accounts regarding the rise of Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada, there has been a level of theatricality in Native culture long before non-Native influences. Taylor reports that a general Native sense of the theatrical developed over the course of many centuries, as an offshoot of both oral and ceremonial cultures that relied heavily on the use of stories and storytelling as a means of cultural preservation. He notes that

> at its origins, storytelling was a way of relating the history of the community. It was a way of explaining human nature. A single story could have metaphorical, philosophical, psychological implications … legends and stories were never meant to be quaint children's stories. They were told to adults as well as for children, and as you got older, you could tap into a whole new understanding of the story. It was like an onion, you could always peel away more and more to get to the core of the story. (Taylor "Alive" 29)[2]

As is the case of many orally based traditions, generally stated, the Native view of history and story was (and remains) a view of the past as particularly enlivened, with the use of words and language intended to bring into the tangible otherwise amorphous ideas and events. From this vantage point, stories in the Native oral canon easily lent themselves to a level of enactment, both at informal and formal gatherings, which eventually, over generations, gave rise to such a level of developed theatricality that, "when Capt. James Cook arrived on Canada's West Coast in 1778, he found Nootka Indians using masks, props, trapdoors, lighting and smoke effects in their religious dramas" (Taylor "Legends"). According to Taylor, this rise to the performative is

[2] Taylor provides a brief example of this for his readers in his 1996 article, as he examines several of the many layers contained in a version of the Creation Story (pp. 30).

not surprising: “Take any storyteller, watch him work with kids, suspending their disbelief and taking them on a journey, using characters and an interesting plot line. This is the basis of any good theatrical presentation” (Taylor “Alive” 30).

Support for Taylor’s claims of a long present theatrical tradition in various Canadian (and American) cultures are easily found, as historians and scholars have long acknowledged the levels of performativity in Native cultures. Historians regularly point out the level of sophistication in Native enactment. For example, Anton Wagner outlines a historical perspective on Native Canadian performance as follows:

> The most theatrical were those of the Nootka and Kwakiutl Indians of coastal British Columbia. Staged at night and indoors around a huge fire, their ceremonial cycles re-created incidents from clan mythology and visionary encounters between young initiates and supernatural beings. They were performed by members of dance societies wearing costume and intricately carved wooden masks. During the performances, some masks opened to reveal other masks beneath, monsters flew through the air on strings, actors disappeared into tunnels and trap-doors, and voices were transmitted through hollow kelp stems. These were stage effects unsurpassed in the Americas. (Wagner “Canada-English” 158)

The theatricality of the Northwest Coast Native peoples (and so many other tribes) is well documented through both written and photographic accounts, such as the photographic explorations of Edward R. Curtis, the paintings and drawings of George Caitlin, the early anthropological works of Frances Densmore, as well as museums such as the Field Museum in Chicago and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. Despite now evident distortions in the work of Caitlin and the highly staged/posed nature of Curtis’s works, not to mention an overly

Western-biased tone to much of early anthropological writing, these records nonetheless remain valuable documentation. These snippets of views into Native cultural performativity, though often incomplete, do succeed, often in spite of themselves, in demonstrating the rich levels of innovation, and developed spiritual and historical perspectives reflected in a long-standing history of Native theatricality and performativity.[3] This is the cultural legacy claimed by Taylor as justification as well as inspiration for the unique Native voice in Canadian theatre.

WW II and Post WW II to the 1950's

In a rather ironic turn of events, it was Native participation in a global battle for freedom which marks another significant milestone in the Native re-assertion of their voices and stories. As Taylor relates,

> Prior to World War II, it was illegal for Native people to leave the Reserve without written permission from the Indian Agent. With the advent of World War II, many Native people enlisted in the armed services. We were exempt from the draft because legally we were not considered citizens of Canada. However, because of our warrior traditions and some sort of bizarre loyalty to the King, many Native people enlisted and went to Europe. There they found there were different ways of doing things. They didn't have to just stay on the Reserve and do what they were told. After the war, many Native people had a more worldly outlook. (Taylor "Alive" 30-31)

Also inherent within the military experience was a level of education and income previously not experienced by many who had spent their lives living within often isolated Reserve communities. Understandably, with an increase in world view, empowerment gained through genuine

[3] Autobiographical accounts of Native figures also go a long way towards describing the action and intent of Native performativity. See: Spradley.

educational experiences, and the self sufficiency achieved through a steady income, Native people returned from the war with a renewed sense of possibility and a greatly increased ability to successfully negotiate their way through the pitfalls and obstacles of non-Native cultures. Upon arriving back to their communities, Native people also began to feel even stronger, the desire for change in their situation and place on the fringes of the Nation of Canada.

Though only briefly mentioned by Taylor, the next significant historical change was the previously mentioned changes to the Indian Act in the 1950's, which allowed for enrollment of Native children in integrated schools often closer to home. Changes in the criminal code also gave rise to an increase in a sense of community and culture through the removal of the bans on Native ceremonial and cultural performances (Taylor "Legends"). [4] Connections to their cultural ways were allowed to be re-cemented, and Native peoples' vantage points of their roles within the world expanded from one of defeat and regulation to one of increasing possibility and worth.[5]

As a result, communities were able to re-strengthen and renew themselves. As Native world view and their ability to communicate and negotiate within the non-Native cultural obstacle course of institutions and restrictions grew, so to did their ability and interest to express and enforce various refusals to remain under such a restricted largely governmental and non-

[4] This period of revision in 1951 was also the same period, in which changes were made in regard to governmental policy regarding Native ceremonial performances, with restrictions finally removed, allowing for ceremonial practice to re-emerge into the public life of Native peoples. Despite the positive aspect of a government finally opening its eyes to the needs of a people and reversing their earlier decisions, the changes were late, and significant cultural damage had already occurred, leaving people understandably fearful and hesitant in the aftermath.

[5] I in no way wish to re-enforce the once dominant view of Native peoples as beaten, incapable, subservient childlike peoples who would not have survived without the graces of the non-Native government and religious aid. Native cultures have thrived in their environment for centuries, including the period of time when a culture of dominance was rather swiftly thrust upon them with little or no contextual support and understanding. Rather, my message here is to highlight the manner in which cultures of Native people, already well versed in the adaptability necessary for survival in various environments, adapted once again to meet the challenges faced by oppression and assimilation, and rose in a manner that maintained as best as possible, cultural identity. Perhaps equally important is to recognize that while institutional interaction with Native peoples was historically negative, there were various individuals and organizations that genuinely sought to assist the plight of Native Peoples.

Native imposed system of "status quo" repression and silencing. Though change continued to be long in coming, Native voices emerged, such as that of Drew Hayden Taylor. Native people were being allowed to openly return to their cultural hearths while simultaneously stepping farther out into the world.

The 1960's

The 1960's marked a significant number of events which influenced the growth of the contemporary Canadian Native Theatre, beginning most importantly with 1960, when Native Canadian people finally achieved the right to vote. Long in coming, this is an event marked by Taylor and many other Native figures as significant in the growing sense of empowerment (and recovery of voice) of Native peoples across the Nation (Taylor "Storytelling" 2). Commenting on the acquisition of the vote and the events following, George Erasmus, a Dene Native and Chief Assembly of First Nations (Based in Ottawa, Ca.) marks the period as a time when Native people once again began fighting back against oppressive actions,

> There have been thirty years of activity since 1960 … First we organized National organizations and networks across the country to tackle issues which were long outstanding. We assumed control over schools. We reasserted our sovereignty, which had been dormant but never let go. The generation before me had become intimidated, subservient to a master from another part of the world. Now there's a renaissance among indigenous people. (Kuitnebrower)

In addition to the acquisition of the Native vote, the 1960's brought significant change in the marketplace for Native artistry. One of the first major figures to gain public recognition was Ojibway artist Norval Morrisseau, the effect of whose emergence Highway briefly highlights in Taylor's 1987 article. In the article Highway points out to readers that, "exactly 25 years ago

Norval Morrisseau's first solo exhibition of paintings started a revolution by sharing the sacred stories beyond our communities. Now we are extending that, taking the oral traditions into theatre and three dimensions" (Taylor "Legends").

Norval Morrisseau is a largely self taught Ojibwa painter of significant influence and renown in both the Native and international art communities. His highly iconographic, stylized work is often dubbed X-ray art, and Morrisseau is credited with the founding of the Woodland style or school of Native art, with several other Native artists following in his lead in terms of composition, style, and subject matter.

Morrisseau was born in 1931 on the Sandy Lake reserve in Northwestern Ontario, relatively removed from the influence of non-Native cultures. Morrisseau gained an extensive knowledge of the ancient stories and beliefs of the Ahnishinaabeg people as revealed through the oral tradition of his grandfather, "a sixth generation Shaman" (Robinson 81-82). According to Morrisseau's account, his grandfather

> was a born storyteller. He used to tell me that his grandfather used to tell him about *his* grandfather.[6] When we were at home we all lived and slept in one room. Grandfather used to tell us stories every night. Everyone listened because we were all stretched out in the one room … Every morning Grandfather would talk about the dreams he had the night before-maybe for two hours. We didn't see any petroglyphs on the trap lines but sometimes he would take me out in a canoe especially to see them on the cliffs beside the lake. (Robinson 82)

Morrisseau's subject mater for his paintings was influenced by these teachings from his Grandfather; his style of illustration was influenced by both the petroglyphs he refers to above and witnessing his Grandfather creating and working with various sacred scrolls and artifacts of

[6] Emphasis is Morrisseau's.

the Ojibwa spirituality (Robinson 81-82; also Geddes). Driven by his own intense sense of spirituality and history, Morrisseau soon began creating images that reflected his beliefs and pride in his people and their heritage. Filled with vibrant color and often seeming to pulse with movement, Morrisseau's work depicts many non-secular aspects of Ojibway life ways and teachings. The revolutionary aspect that Highway refers to in Taylor's article partly refers to this sharing of the images and stories that accompany many of these ideas, actions which have long been held as taboo by various members of Morrisseau's community as well as many members of the Native community at large. Despite these taboos, Morrisseau broke through the protests of his community, driven by a spiritual desire to both preserve the stories and empower the Native people. Here Morrisseau speaks to his desire to elevate the people back to a sense of memory and pride, stating,

> Since the coming of the White Man, we have fallen very low, forgetting our ancient legends and ancestral beliefs. The time has come for us to write and to record the story of our people, not only for ourselves but also for our white brothers so that they will understand and respect us. (Morrisseau "Travels" 100)

As Morrisseau continued to paint, he gradually came to the notice of several collectors and painters, including the anthropologist Selwyn Dewdney, himself an author of several works on Ojibwa rock paintings and petroglyphs. Morrisseau reportedly served as a guide on several of Dewdney's expeditions into Canada's back country, and Dewdney later published two of Morrisseau's manuscripts on Ojibway cosmology (Morrisseau "Legends"; redlakemuseum.com; Geddes). In 1962 Morrisseau's work was shown to art dealer Jack Pollock, who later in that same year hosted a solo exhibition of Morrisseau's efforts in his Toronto based gallery. The show was a complete sell out and served to propel Morrisseau directly into the international

notice of the art community. This acclaim was furthered by a solo exhibition on the French Riviera, arranged for Morrisseau by another art dealer, Dr. Herbert Schwarz. Of the highly successful and well attended event, Schwartz reported "Over 12,000 people attended the exhibition, including Picasso and Chagall" and that Morrisseau was dubbed "the Picasso of the woods" (Robinson 84; Geddes).

Despite his rapid rise to popularity, Morrisseau's work was not without controversy in non-Native circles as well. One example of this controversy being a mural he created for Expo '67, held in Montreal, the centennial year of Canada's confederation. One of several artists commissioned to paint a sixteen foot mural for the exhibition, Morrisseau's work, entitled Mother Earth With Her Children, "originally had the mother breast-feeding both a small boy and a bear cub" (Houle 9). The nature of human and animal drawing milk from the same motherly source raised a stir with Expo representatives, and the work was eventually altered to depict "a white-haired mother figure nursing a boy while the bear cub watched" as apparently the metaphoric nature of the initial image was lost on unappreciative expo officials (Houle 10).

While Morrisseau's works were very much against the grain of more conservative (and perhaps rightfully fearful) members of Native communities, his work also served to validate and empower other Native artists, including those in the theatre, in their own search for expression. In a personal interview regarding his own system of influences, Taylor reports of Morrisseau,

> he was the one who broke, I guess for lack of a better term, the color barrier where he managed to get Native art out there where it was no longer considered just an anthropological drawing; where it was now considered a viable art and as important, as revolutionary, and as reflective as any non-Native artist. I love his art, I love how he revolutionized the illustration of an icon. (Young)

Despite varying levels of controversy (or in turn perhaps because of the controversy and the ensuing conversations inspired by them), Morrisseau's work remains widely popular and his status as a painter and spiritual spokesperson for many facets of his culture are widely respected. Morrisseau stepped over the bounds of cultural privacy, bringing Native legend and spiritual thought to the forefront in a very public and lasting manner.[7] Though non-theatrical or performative in his work, the influence of Morrisseau breaking cultural barriers and bringing Native stories to the forefront of the public imagination in a distinctly Native manner is extremely significant. By "breaking down the color barrier" as Taylor noted earlier, Morrisseau's work and successes served greatly to empower and inform the future growth of the Contemporary Canadian Native theatre.

Also directly influencing the rise of the Contemporary Native Theatre was the 1967 production of George Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe. Taylor describes the production as "a milestone in terms of Canadian Theatre and more accurate representations of the urban Indian experience. It was, however, written by a non-Native person and, though I believe Chief Dan George was in it, most of the original cast for the production in Vancouver was non-Native. It did start people talking however-about the power of theatre and about the plight of Native people" (Taylor "Alive" 31). The Ecstasy of Rita Joe was commissioned by Malcolm Black, artistic Director of the Vancouver Playhouse, a large regional theatre, under funding from federal grants to mark the Canadian Centennial. As Christopher Innes, in his study of Ryga and his work reports,

[7] Morrisseau's life and works are fascinating and interesting, filled with great success and brilliance, as well as difficulties with drugs, alcohol, and poor health. For more on Morrisseau, start with: Morrisseau 1997, 1965, Hume 1979; MacKay; Geddes; Goddard; Gesell; Cotter; redlakemuseum.com; native-art-in-canada.com; or Stoffman. For more on the vibrant life of Jack Pollock, start with Pollock 1990 also Hume 12/11/92 and 12/13/92;

> The Centennial of Confederation was a natural opportunity for the Federal Government to win popularity by promoting pride in nationhood, and since the most obvious definition of national identity is culture, a logical move was to provide financial support for artistic self-expression. In particular theatre, the most social of all the arts, seemed a deserving candidate, having the additional advantage (together with universities) that largesse could be given highly visible, indeed concrete form as public buildings. Regional stages were founded across the country. But, after decades of complacent indifference, there was little apart from imported products to put on them. So Ottawa offered subsidies to any theatre producing new Canadian plays. Ironically, the first fruit of this initiative was to encourage one of the most radical and anti-establishment authors, and the work that captured public consciousness was a passionate denunciation of injustice, which proclaimed the colonial basis of society. (Innes "Politics" 29)

Of course, Ryga is the "radical" author. Ryga's story of Rita Joe was based loosely on newspaper accounts of a young Native girl who had been murdered in one of Vancouver's poor neighborhoods (Preston 212-213; Innes 1985, 29-30).The story is told in an episodic, dreamlike, flashback style, and centers around Rita Joe, a young Native girl, who alternately stands before a judge and then re-lives her attempts to survive in an assimilationist, unforgiving urban environment.

As a metaphor of Canada's Native peoples who, despite their best intentions, are "losing the battle of acculturation and urban life," Rita struggles with a downward spiral of cultural and personal survival until her story ends in a brutal rape and murder. Also central to the story are the characters of Jaimie Paul, a young Native male, representing the then current generation of

Native youth facing an empty future without purpose; and David Joe, Rita Joe's elderly father, representing the older generation of Native peoples, looking towards a future with a hope for healing and renewal while bleakly regarding a present that balances on the edges of despair (Preston 212; Ryga 127-130).

In The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, Ryga condemns the society which brought Native people to such dire and desperate straits and never shies away from highlighting the hypocrisies of such a society. Seen in the context of much of the radical theatre that has since followed Ryga, his The Ecstasy of Rita Joe is relatively tame, but within the context of Canada in 1968, the work teetered on the brink of revolutionary both in style and topic.[8]

The production premiered at the Playhouse Theatre in Vancouver in November of 1967, eventually traveling to both Washington D.C. and the Arena Arts Center of Ottawa (Preston 212; Ryga 127-130). Ryga's script was eventually published in 1970, following the tremendous success of the initial production which created quite a stir in the Canadian theatre going community. Critics largely applauded the work and audiences attending the performances of Rita Joe though overwhelmingly positive in their reactions, were stunned, "partly because of the raw and brutal action of the play, but also because racism towards Canada's Native people was rarely acknowledged and certainly not challenged in white middle class theatres such as the Vancouver Playhouse and the National Arts Centre" (Preston 213).[9] Joy Coghill, Artistic Director of the Vancouver Playhouse during its original production of Rita Joe reported,

> It wasn't taken as a sort of dramatic event that you applauded afterwards. It was such a moving experience that people didn't want to clap. They simply were

[8] For an in-depth discussion of Ryga's life and work see Christopher Innes' Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga, which includes extensive discussions of Ryga's biography, influences, thematic and political concerns, an overview of his works, and a listing of his publications. See also the introductory essay to Ryga's 1971 published edition of his plays by Parker; also: Carson; Boire; and Mallet.

[9] For more references regarding critical reaction to the production, see Innes, pp. 51.

> stunned in some very basic way. The performance ended with all the actors appearing from nowhere, coming out to stand looking at the audience. And as they walked away the audience always just sat there. The cast would be out of the theatre and up at the Alcazar drinking beer together, and the audience was still sitting there. Then gradually one person would move, and another and the theatre slowly emptied. (Innes 51)

Rita Joe was not Ryga's first foray into writing works that were highly critical of governmental and social issues, and was certainly not to be his last. He followed up The Ecstasy of Rita Joe with increasingly radical and politicized pieces like Grass and Wild Strawberries, an experimental, somewhat psychedelic script that also received a successful production in the years following his initial popular and critical successes with The Ecstasy of Rita Joe.

Ryga was prepared to follow this production with another, Captives of the Faceless Drummer, until the production was pulled. As Gina Mallet writes, "It didn't matter that Rita Joe didn't send anyone to the barricades or that Ryga subsequently wrote Grass and Wild Strawberries … which attracted the largest audiences of the 1968-69 season. The trouble was that a large number of subscribers hated the shows" (Mallet). Mallet points out that like most regional theatres, the Vancouver playhouse was "a civic theatre, dependent on mainstream subscribers who-like most theatre goers the world over-were conservative" (Mallet). Rather than adopt its own political agenda (or Ryga's), the Playhouse, in order to ensure fiscal continuity, was forced to balance creative concerns with the financial realities of their box office.

The controversial Ryga soon faded from Canadian stages; however, he remained a prolific writer, and according to Innes, remains, at least internationally, "The best-known English –speaking Canadian playwright" despite the fact that his,

> political stance, and the strong moral commitment that has given his work much of its force has proved consistently uncomfortable for the establishment, both in his doctrinaire socialism and his more recent move towards radical individualism. Characteristically his novels were released in England and even translated into Russian before being published in his home country. His drama is staged from Scandinavia to Mexico and Algeria, and has gained a particularly wide reputation in Germany. Yet not one of Ryga's plays written in the last decade has been given a main-stage production in Canada. (Innes 13)

Despite the lack of attention and acclaim given Ryga by his home audiences, Innes seconds Taylor's view of Ryga's Rita Joe as "a watershed event for Canadian drama, comparable to the breakthrough of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger in the English theatre just over a decade earlier" (Innes 52). Innes underscores the importance of the context of the drama and the impact the production on many following Native productions:

> Dealing with a burning but largely ignored social issue that threw their society into a harsh and discomforting light, it struck a chord in the Canadian public. As a play of undoubted stature in an excitingly unusual style, it showed that Canadian theatre had no need to rely solely on imports from the traditional sources of England and the U.S. It prompted an awareness of the existence of other plays that might have similar potential, and companies dedicated to the production of new Canadian drama began to spring up. (Innes 52)[10]

As mentioned by Taylor earlier, in the original production of Ryga's Rita Joe, the role of David Joe was played by a Chief Dan George. Already having achieved some celebrity in Canada with earlier film and television appearances, Dan George was a member of Canada's

[10] For a chronology of Ryga's works, see Innes, pp. 123-125.

Salish tribe who went on to subsequent fame in many film roles, including an eventual nomination for an Academy Award for his tremendous work as Dustin Hoffman's adoptive Native grandfather, Old Lodge Skins, in the 1970-71 film Little Big Man[11] (Mortimer 30-33). In the published version of Ryga's script, George comments, "I was amazed at the reaction the play received in Ottawa. People came to us to say that now, for the first time, they understood a little of what the Native Peoples have suffered and are suffering" (Ryga 35). In his commentary on the play, George also takes the opportunity to both echo and challenge the growing spirit of Native peoples in Canada, telling readers,

> The Indian people at this very time need to put their message before Canada because laws are being readied that will affect the Indian for years to come. They need above all, to create sympathy and understanding, for they are depressed economically. It is useless for people to hear if they do not listen with their hearts-and when their hearts are open, ears can hear. (Ryga 35)

And finally, in a gesture aimed towards reconciliation, George acknowledges both the power and the limitations of Ryga's work by connecting the themes of the play with contemporary Native concerns:

> The message of Rita Joe is true--this I wish to make clear. The manner in which the author got his message across is another thing. I am not surprised that some people were hurt by the general condemnation of all organizations which have dealt with the Indian people. It would be wrong to infer that all were conniving…the play seems to suggest this. This, of course, is not true. Many,

[11] George was the first Canadian Native nominated for an Academy Award, and achieved a significant level of popularity and success in an acting career late in life, beginning with Rita Joe. In addition to his significant resume of work as an actor, George was regarded as a gentle, kind, and knowledgeable man and was a popular and genuinely well respected leader and elder of his community, traveling and speaking extensively in support of cultural causes. For more on Chief Dan George's life, see Mortimer.

> many good people I have known have worked hard and sincerely for our welfare. But the message is true…of this there is no doubt and it should be heard by all. (Ryga 35)

Though written by a non-Native man, and directed and played by a largely non-Native cast and company, Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe served to add momentum to the slowly building pace of the emergence the Contemporary Native voice. While many critics and scholars may debate the extent of Ryga's influence on Contemporary Canadian Theatre at large, his theatrical legacy of influence upon the Native community is inarguable. As a result of his work, National Canadian attention, having long ignored a Canadian legacy of neglecting Native peoples, was finally directed, at least partially, towards acknowledging this legacy and its far reaching consequences.

The decade of the 60's marked the acceleration of the return of the Native voice through both political and artistic means. The acquisition of the vote in 1960 was a major stepping stone for the Native peoples of Canada, yet the '60's remained a decade of growing Native dissatisfaction with the stereotypes and sub-citizen roles foisted upon them a government and its public. Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe served admirably to bring public attention yet another step closer towards recognition of the struggles of many Native people. Ryga's play made great strides in exposing at least the surface area of centuries old wounds. Concurrently, while Ryga exposed the damage, Norval Morrisseau succeeded in opening a door and drawing a public into a greater exposure and potential understanding of Native peoples. Through offering up his interpretations of Native spirituality, Morrisseau not only achieved international acclaim, but also moved significantly towards bridging cultural gaps in knowledge through his personal uses

of iconography, and visual expression that traveled beyond the dime store novel, souvenir stand expectations of the general public.

While changes were occurring, what was needed was a strong foundation of support that would offer the hope of continuance to Native artistic and theatrical advancement. With the advent of the 1970's this foundation emerged.

The 1970's: Building Blocks And The Base Of The Future

In the 1970's empowered Native voices continued to emerge. While many of these artists worked in what might be described as a conventional manner, notice must also be taken of events such as The American Indian Movement's occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 and the growing militancy and impatience of Native people who were no longer satisfied to take a back seat to non-Native agendas. While Taylor only gives a brief recognition of these non-theatrical events, he does recognize a level of parallel development and the degree of influence and inspiration these movements offered to Canadian Native peoples (Taylor "Alive" 31; Dawes 8-9).

In "Alive and Well" Taylor acknowledges a growing level of support for Native creative endeavors in the 1970's as he discusses the formation, in 1974, of a Toronto – based organization called the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts (Taylor 1996, Alive 31). The ANDVPA was founded by James Buller, a Cree from the Sweetgrass band of Saskatchewan, who rightly believed that "performing and Visual Native artists gave power to the self-image of Native individuals and the entire communities" (andvpa.com). The Association's web page comments further on Buller's goals by adding that "He felt that if Native people had a venue for artistic training, in 20 years we would begin to see ourselves in popular media--in culturally specific print, on stage, on screen, in galleries--as writers, actors, performers and

artists. This reflection creates a positive self image for our youth and future generations" (andvpa.com).

Though there is very little academic record of the Association (ANDPVA), its long standing efforts have proven to have had a significant and lasting impact in furthering the rise of the theatrical Native voice. Essentially every Native theatre in Canada that has emerged from the 1980's and beyond has been touched by the influence of the Association, either through funding, networking, or staffed by alumni of its training programs.

Mandated by Buller's desire to provide opportunity for Native arts and artisans, the ANDPVA is still actively involved in supporting the Native arts in Canada today, enjoying a 27 year legacy of success (Burke "James"; Sexsmith). [12] One lasting legacy of the ANDVPA, as Taylor reports, was the Association's founding of the Native Theatre School,

> which was the first of its kind to teach Native people how to act, to teach them theatrical production, and how to write their own stories. The Theatre School operates during the summer for seven weeks; for four weeks the students train and for the other three they perform. In addition, they also write their own play as a collective, direct it, and then take it out on the road for a tour. It has been over twenty years since the school was created and many well-known Native actors have been a part of the school. (Taylor "Alive" 31)

Commenting in a 1992 newspaper profile of his career, Floyd Favel Starr, then Artistic Director of the Native Theatre School, describes the mission of that group as the following:

> In the White Man's world, art and life became separated. In Indian society, a basket maker could also have been the master singer, a hunter the master dancer.

[12] Taylor's chronology differs from the Association's webpage, with Taylor reporting the Association's inaugural year as 1974 while the webpage reports it as 1972 (Taylor "Alive"; andvpa.com).

> The arts were community based and we want the students to experience this once again. But we're not staging traditional folk art. Although the training is based on shared cultural connections, our students produce a contemporary theatrical voice. We're training our actors to work anywhere. (Citron)

The Native Theatre School operated under the auspices of Buller's Association for twenty years until 1994, when the School incorporated separately from the Association, calling itself the Centre for Indigenous Theatre. As a separate entity, The Native Theatre School continues to operate summer programs, in 2000 opening a summer program in Western Canada (Saskatchewan) which later was moved back to Ontario in association with Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario (indigenous.com; Carter; Sexsmith). Reflecting in a brief newspaper profile of the success of the Native Theatre School and the hopes of James Buller when he founded the program, Carol Greyeyes, Artistic Director for the Native Theatre School in 2000 states,

> He believed that a school for and by Natives, would give our people a real voice in the arts, training them to become performers, writers and directors. To create an Aboriginal body of work and talent, and to take that word and training back to their own reserves." (Sexsmith)

As an offshoot of Buller's program, the Centre for Indigenous Theatre has been slowly but continually expanding its programs, including in 1998 expanding its own summer training workshop into a "full time, post-secondary training program," offering a one year, eight month course of study (indigenoustheatre.com; Burke). In the academic year of 2000-2001 the program was extended to two years, and in 2002-2003, the course became a three year program. The Centre identifies itself as a post-secondary conservatory training program and is incorporated

with the Federal Canadian government as a not for profit institution. Due to federal and provincial funding and political divisions, the question of accreditation (and the accompanying right to grant post-secondary degrees) is one that is regularly examined and explored by the Board of the Centre, and remains on the table as a possibility for the future as the program continues to expand and strengthen. (Burke)

Despite the earlier successes of Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, and the strong initial efforts of Bullock and the ANDPVA, the wider public proved unready for Native generated productions that did not fit into their still very narrow sphere of understanding. Taylor presents a strong example of this when he discusses the events surrounding an accepted invitation to attend an international theatre festival:

> In 1979 the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts was invited to perform a play at the International Theatre Festival in Monaco. They found themselves in the awkward position of having no play to take. So they decided to remedy the situation as best they could. They contacted a Native poet by the name of George Kenny who had written a book of poetry called Indians Don't Cry. One of the poems was called October Stranger and had good dramatic potential. With the help of an experienced Native actor, they adapted it into a play … and they took it to Monaco. (Taylor "Alive")

Jennifer Preston reports that when the production of October Stranger arrived in Monaco, Buller discovered "that the show did not fit any of the festivals categories and that his company was doing something completely different" (Preston 137). Taylor is a bit more blunt in his description, recalling,

> It was pretty much a fiasco. Everybody in Europe seemed to be expecting buckskin, feathers, and beads. Instead these contemporary Native youth came in to do a serious play about a person leaving the reserve to go and live in a city and becoming acculturated; this was not what people at the Monaco Theatre Festival wanted to see. (Taylor "Alive")

Preston's account of the events in Monaco largely agrees with Taylor's evaluation, despite a slight difference in respect to Taylor's timeline.[13] Both Taylor and Preston seem to agree that, based on experiences like those in Monaco, non-Native audiences of the 1970's may not have been ready to cross the gap between their imagined Indians and the more grounded, life based portrayals of Native-generated characters and stories (Preston 137).

With the growing political and social momentum of Native Canadian peoples spurred on by the political movements of the 1960's and 1970's (particularly those in the U.S.), and by the forward reaching efforts of people and organizations like Fuller and the ADNPVA, the basis for the surge in creativity and production in the contemporary Native Theatre of the 80's and 90's was laid. Those interested in the creation of a lasting Native theatre by and for both Native and non-Native audiences were offered both training opportunities and a slowly growing infrastructure of support. Emerging artists took ready advantage of these opportunities and soon began to create a cadre of actors, directors, and playwrights that went on to directly influence the "overnight" explosion of Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada in the 1980's and 1990's. It seemed Buller's hope of a firmly established and visible community of Native artists within two decades of the founding of ANDVPA just might be realized.

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[13] Preston tells her readers that Buller and the Association actually approached Kenny in 1977, and that the production appeared at the 6th Annual International Theatre Festival in Monaco that same year. Preston also identifies the collaborator with Kenny as Dennis Lacroix, who was later instrumental in the establishment of Native Earth Performing Arts (Preston 137).

The 1980's: Highway to an Explosion

With Buller's realization that the production of October Stranger differed from any theatre represented at the theatre festival in Monaco came the idea to establish a separate festival focusing on the Indigenous theatre of the world. In 1980, Buller organized and produced the first World Indigenous Theatre Festival, held at Trent University, in Peterborough, Ontario, with a second occurring at the same location in 1982 (Preston 137). Though Buller died shortly before the second festival, his aims of furthering Native creativity were once again realized as "valuable connections were made at these festivals with members of Spiderwoman Theatre from New York City and Tukak Teatret from Denmark, as well as with other groups from all over the globe" (Preston 137).

Buller's impact was also directly felt in the formation of a company soon to be recognized as one of the foremost producers of Native generated theatre in Canada: Toronto's Native Earth Performing Arts. Here Jennifer Preston takes up the narrative:

> In the Spring of 1982 a new gallery, the Centre for Indian Art, was scheduled to open at the National Exhibition Centre in Thunder Bay, Ontario. A local company, Kam Theatre Lab, was approached to put together a production for the opening. Kam Lab wanted to do a show about Native Art, but because of a lack of knowledge on the subject they approached Jim Buller who in turn referred them to Denis Lacroix. Lacroix and Bunny Sicard, calling themselves Native Earth, wrote and directed Native Images in Transition with a mainly Native cast, as a co production with Kam Theatre Lab. The show was based on a painting at the National Arts Center entitled The Indian in Transition by Native artist Daphne Odjig. Through the use of masks and large cut-out figures, among other things,

> the performance explored Native art and culture and the effect Europeans have had on both. The show opened the new gallery on 2-4 October and then played the Ukrainian Labour Temple, Kam Lab's usual performance space, 7-10 October. This was the unofficial beginning of Native Earth. (Preston 137)

With the success of this production, Denis Lacroix and Bunny Sicard organized a community meeting aimed at gauging the measure of interest there might be in forming a Native-based theatre collective. Finding the interest high, the group became Native Earth Performing Arts, a title preferred over the "Native Earth Theatre Company because they wanted to stress a broader performance scope" (Preston 138). Taylor described the early NEPA as a company "formed by a loose group of artistic friends, urban Indians who wanted to act. The company functioned as a collective. Basically people saying: "I have an idea for a show, lets go do it." There was no overall structure to the company, no artistic director, no administrator, no core funding, just a room at the Toronto Native Friendship Centre and an occasional show. Then Tomson came and became artistic director" (Taylor "Alive" 32).

The history of Native Earth, as reported by Jennifer Preston, is one which can be divided into two phases: "From 1982 to 1986 there was no full-time staff, the shows were collective creations that were few and far between, and the structure of the company was very loose. The second phase began in 1986 with the hiring of Highway as artistic director" (Preston 137). When Highway came on board at Native Earth in 1986, he changed the structure and the aims of the organization, and in tandem with a newly hired administrative team, and NEPA members, Highway gathered more financial support for the organization and devised their first formal production season. Highway's stepping into the role of Artistic Director came after a stint with another Native Theatre Company, The De Be-Jah Mu Jig Theatre Group, founded just shortly

after NEPA. Both companies were to figure prominently into Highway's initial success as a playwright; one as inspiration, the other as the stage where his work experienced its first popular success and public notice.

In 1984, Shirley Cheecho, who Taylor describes as "an amazing painter, actress, model and playwright (Taylor "Alive" 31-32), founded the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Company on Manitoulin Island. Taylor reports De-Be-Jeh-Mu-Jig as being a "Cree-Ojibway word meaning storytellers or tattlers of tales" (Taylor "Alive" 31-32). Cheecho started the theatre company, "as a summer theatre company in the West Bay Reserve on Manitoulin Island. It was created partly to showcase Native legends, both traditional and contemporary, and also to raise some money by performing for tourists in the summer. Every year the company produced a play. Although the professionalism of the work was rough to begin with, it gradually grew" (Taylor "Alive" 31-32). Shortly after the formation of the group, they approached Tomson Highway to serve as Artistic Director for the small company, located on a Reserve on Manitoulin Island (Taylor 1996, Alive 32). While living that year on Manitoulin Island, Highway had occasion to visit many of the nearby communities, including one, as Taylor describes,

> About 45 minutes away, called Wikwemikong, or Wiki to the local people. It was there he first formulated the idea for a play that would become so important for Native Theatre. He noticed all these women rushing around, going to play a game called…bingo! He watched and saw people becoming really obsessed.[…]This is where he developed the idea for the play The Rez Sisters. (Taylor "Alive" 32)

Highway workshopped the play in 1986 with De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig on Manitoulin Island, then brought the script to Toronto in search of production opportunities (Taylor "Alive" 32; Preston

141). Highway shopped his play around Toronto, but was unable to find anyone willing to invest, so,

> Highway decided that he would have to produce it himself. It is a seven-character play and expensive to mount. Somehow Tomson managed to do it. He raised the dollars and co-produced it with his friend Larry Lewis, who directed it. The first week it did abysmally … Nobody came to watch it except the reviewers. They had never seen anything like it before! It was like a breath of fresh air, something new, something interesting, something invigorating. So it had wonderful reviews. Many times in the first week or so, the director and the stage manager had literally run out to the street and handed free tickets to people passing by the Native Canadian Centre to come in and see the show. Then word got out that it was fabulous. By the fourth week there was standing room only. They were turning people away. In the end the play got such a response that almost immediately there were offers from cities all across Canada to produce it. They ended up doing a production that toured from BC to Ontario, stopping in all the major capitols along the way, doing incredible business. (Taylor "Alive" 34)

In discussing the success of The Rez Sisters, Highway said "its greatest accomplishment is that it raised public consciousness of a specific segment of the women's community--Indian women, and older women at that" (Preston 143-144). Director Larry Lewis (soon to become a collaborator and mentor to Taylor) added to Highway's sentiment by professing that "a lot of non-Native people tend to think of Native peoples as statues in a museum, historical reference, sometimes in a romantic light, sometimes it's the drunken Indian, but whatever it is, it's a stereotype. Stereotypes don't allow for a living, breathing civilization and culture" (Preston 144).

With the limited availability of Native authored scripts, De-Be-Jeh-Mu-Jig and NEPA, by necessity, became laboratories for new works by Native authors, with both companies regularly work shopping high quality new scripts and productions, accumulating an impressive track record of over 20 years. Relatively early in their existence, NEPA received funding to establish the Playwright in Residency program, the program which gave Taylor his start as a playwright. Due to the momentum created by its production of Highway's Rez Sisters, along with the artistic guidance of figures like Lewis, Cheecho, and Highway, a strong staff and board, and a level of perseverance that is to be admired, Native Earth Performing Arts and the De-Be-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group continued to produce original Native generated and performed works for the stage. Both companies continue to build a strong audience base for Contemporary Native Canadian theatre, each with a long track record of mounting successful, original and innovative productions, many of which have subsequently toured and garnered significant public and critical acclaim

With the appearance of Highway, Lewis, and Cheecho as arts administrators, the founding of two pivotal companies--one urban, the other reserve-based--the success of Highway's works for the theatre, and the building of an appreciative Native and non-Native audience base, Contemporary Native Theatre emerged as an important center of theatrical activity in Canada. Activity became fast and furious as more and more companies and talent appeared. The centuries old momentum, so quickly lost with the arrival of the newcomer Europeans and their governmental and church enforced sense of superiority, was not only regained, but in a sense, surpassed as Native voices began to find not only renewed strength for their own voices raised in public expressions of their own stories, but also the opening of public venues for these stories to be heard from. At last, as Taylor related earlier in this chapter, Native

people were not only telling their own stories and being heard, but they were also "telling it well" (Taylor "Alive" 34).

Building up, Building Out, Remembering to Laugh

With an aesthetic that developed gradually from traditions countless generations old, and a pace initially set by non-Native domination and suppression, contemporary Native theatre finally began to surge forward in the 1980's and quickly developing a momentum that would carry it well into the 1990's and beyond. Not only were new works being created, but new faces were appearing to add to the ranks of the recently established old guard who were inspired by the likes of Bullock, Ryga, Morrisseau, and others. In the 1990's, the first wave of Contemporary Native Theatre artists continued to provide foundational support, mentorship, and training to an emerging second wave, and the Native Theatre scene appeared to grow faster by the day. It seemed a far cry from just a few years previous, when, as Taylor, writing in 1996 from his post as Artistic Director for Native Earth, describes the inaugural seasons of NEPA's Weesagachak Begins to Dance: "For the first season, back in 1989, Tomson had to beat the bushes to find plays to workshop. Today I have a big stack of plays on my desk. I have to make tough decisions and weed out six to produce. It's really quite striking, quite grand, to see how far Native theatre has come" (Taylor "Alive" 35).

Earlier in the same article, Taylor comments "What was once barren is now bountiful … today, at least two dozen playwrights of aboriginal descent are being produced. If that rate of increase continues, by the year 2020 it is conceivable that everybody in Canada will be a Native playwright!" (Taylor "Alive" 29), Taylor caps this sentiment by adding, "I feel so privileged to sit in the first row of Native theatre" (Taylor "Alive" 35).

But the growth of Native theatre and the growing recognition of Native peoples within the Nation of Canada was not without its tensions and difficulties. In 1990, amidst the flurry of activity and creativity in the Native theatre occurred an event which served to highlight not only the disregard many non-Natives still held for Native concerns, but also the levels of anger and frustration felt by Native peoples over this continued treatment.

Oka (after the largely non-Native town near the event) was an incident of Native protest over the proposed sale and destruction of Mohawk sacred burial grounds to make way for expansion of a golf course. Nearby Oka is a small Mohawk Reserve known as Kanehsatake, which was overseen by the monks residing in the Oka Monastery. According to Taylor, as the monastery would suffer financial setbacks through the years "the monks would sell parcels of reserve land to make money, and so the reserve of Oka looked much like a checkerboard with parcels missing here and there. The Mohawk community had been trying for 270 years to get a lot of this land back" (Dawes 8-9).

Taylor describes Oka as more than a protest over one event, but "an escalation of 270 years of frustration" over the manner in which the local Native people and their lands had been treated" (Dawes 8). What began as a protest soon became a tense confrontation between the Canadian military and the armed members of the Mohawk Nation (with one person killed), lasting several weeks. Finally, with the standoff in the National and international spotlight, the Canadian Government backed off and took the time to listen to the protesters complaints. According to Taylor,

> As there was a lot of validity in the Mohawk's protest against the way the land was brokered over the years, the federal government, in order to save face and make everybody happy, said, "We will buy the land known as the Pines, from the

> municipality and give it back to the Mohawks if you surrender." So all the Mohawks put down their guns, because nobody wanted a bloodbath or a gunfight; it was just a matter of this traditional burial ground. They were arrested, but only two or three of them went on trial, and the government bought the land as promised. I don't know where exactly it stands now, twelve years later, but things have calmed down substantially. (Dawes 9)

With the tension of the armed standoff dissipated, Taylor notes, the events at Oka quickly began "taking a place in aboriginal mythology as a stand against suppression and cultural absorption" (Dawes 8-9). When attention is called to possible similarities between events at Oka and those occurring some twenty years early at Wounded Knee, Taylor agrees, but is also quick to point out one major difference,

> Pine Ridge [The Sioux Reservation on which Wounded Knee was located] was different from Oka in that it was Indian against Indian: AIM was an urban-based organization, created in the cities by displaced Native people trying to find their tradition. They were called in by a lot of people in Pine Ridge to help them fight a corrupt tribal government, so they would go there to help protect these traditional people against another group of Native people, who were raised in boarding schools, who had been taught to hate their culture and their language. It was Indian against Indian, but different factions-urban against rural, traditional against assimilated. (Dawes 9-10)

While a major confrontation between Native peoples and the forces that had dominated them for so many decades, Oka was not the only such protest to occur, and certainly is not the last. Native

peoples continue to protest, file land claims and various law suits, and otherwise make their case for greater representation and visibility within the view of the Nation of Canada.

In the same year that tensions were so high in Canada due to the events at Oka, Canada witnessed the premiere of another Native Theatre first: the first Native generated, full length comedy- marking a potential expansion point for the overall tone of contemporary Canadian Native theatre. The play was Taylor's The Bootlegger Blues, which premiered for a run at the De Je Beh Mu Jig Theatre Group and subsequently toured Ontario for two months (Preston 156, Taylor Bootlegger 5). Despite the tensions, Taylor felt the time was right to begin his "Blues Quartet" as a means of highlighting and celebrating a rich Native sense of humor (Taylor "Alive" 7). Of this desire for celebration of survival, Taylor reports,

> It's been my experience that the majority of Native plays deal with the hardships and tragedies inflicted on Native people in the last 500 years. As a cathartic process, most Native playwrights are working out those demons through theatre. I, on the other hand, like to celebrate the characteristics that made it possible to survive--our humour. I want to celebrate the Native sense of humour. (Glaap 219)

The risk of premiering a comedy aimed solely at generating and celebrating Native humor was significant, especially at a time when (as demonstrated by Oka) there were still so many political and cultural issues yet unresolved in regard to the Native peoples. In treading on dangerous politically sensitive territory, with wounds still very real and very fresh and tensions high, Taylor risked not only being misunderstood, but condemnation from both sides of his audience if he were interpreted as making too light of Native concerns. Of the opening Taylor readily admits,

> We were scared, because we didn't know if people would appreciate it, because up until that time, the vast majority of Native plays were dark, angry, and

> accusatory toward the white population. Here we were daring to do something funny, something that dealt with bootlegging in a humorous context, and we just did it. (Dawes 16-17)

As elaborated in greater detail in the next chapter, with the anger and resentment of Oka still thick in the air, Taylor's Bootlegger Blues allowed for many an opportunity to break the tension and ease into a reconsideration of Native peoples. In this effort Taylor's Blues picked up in an area where Highway' s plays began -- the portrayal of Native characters and relationships beyond the dark, seemingly omnipresent stereotypical.

Native audience members, already empowered somewhat by seeing themselves depicted on stage by the likes of Highway and Moses, were delighted to see themselves cast finally in situations that carried no tragic overtones. Taylor's Bootlegger Blues purposely lacked any overt political agenda (though subtext really political statements cannot help but abound), but rather professed to celebrating Native survival by celebrating one of the many things that Native people have done so well with over the centuries: express themselves from a base of humor and laughter.

Regardless of the presence of an overabundance of alcohol on Taylor's stage, the characters of Bootlegger Blues (despite a hilarious drunk scene involving a fancy dancer and a jealous husband), were not portrayed as raving drunks; nor were there any visionary mystic elders, sham leaders, lovely nymph like Native spirit maidens, or stridently embattled warriors. Instead, there was a family -- a typical, mildly dysfunctional family; not too poor not too rich, not too successful, but far from failure; a typical family wrapped in the dilemma of how to do right in the world. While the then current political climate seem to prescribe a different, more polemic and politicized approach, Taylor's prescription was for more laughter, more celebration,

and less overt condemnation. Taylor's story seemed just the right ingredient at just the opportune time, and Native audience members responded accordingly with very positive reactions to the work.

Though initially hesitant in their responses, once they realized it was appropriate to laugh, non - Native audience members also responded to the piece enthusiastically. With the overly dark, stereotypical "imaginary Indian" roles removed from Taylor's stage, non-Native audience members were provided a less intense, more intimate window through which to view the machinations of a much more typical Native family. In turn, as a result, they were given the opportunity to also recognize a bit of themselves in the action on stage. Instead of a distanced response of "those poor people", non-Native audience members were able to respond to Taylor's Bootlegger Blues with recognition, as characters reacted to their situations and each other in a manner reminiscent of many audience members' own families. Instead of the level of distanced objectification, Taylor's characters (despite the distinctly Native surroundings and stories) struck a familiar chord. Taylor's situations were recognizable as the same sort of dilemmas played out in many Canadian homes, regardless of ethnic origins. As a result, like Native audiences, non-Native audience members reacted extremely positively to the work as well. The reader can almost hear the relief in Taylor's voice as he says of the production,

> I got the best review I think I ever got in my life from this elder who came to me after seeing the play in Ottawa: he shook my hand and said, “Your play made me homesick.” Then I won the Canadian Authors’ Association Literary Award for it, and it was published, and people really enjoyed it because it just sort of got rid of the doom and gloom about being Native. (Dawes 17)

As a combined product of Taylor's unique take on the world and the culmination of countless efforts prior to his own entry into the Theatre, Taylor's Bootlegger Blues marks a transition point - a point of both artistic and audience readiness. The humor in Taylor's Blues and audiences' response to that humor indicates a willingness to move beyond anger to laugh at our all too recognizable human foibles and triumphs. The issues remain, but to some degree, the effort begun by Taylor first with the initial success of Toronto At Dreamers Rock, followed closely by Bootlegger Blues, (and subsequently all of his later works), has provided potential points of connection between Native and non-Native audiences. Of the future of the Contemporary Native theatre in Canada, Taylor muses,

> There is so much more out there waiting to be written and said, as the cliché goes, the sky's the limit. Native theatre, in this new millennium, now has so many different directions to travel. That is the true joy in revitalizing an art form-the ability to explore new grounds and new forms. And what's more fabulous, the rest of the world is taking interest in this uniquely Canadian endeavor. (Taylor "Crucible" 28)

What remains to be written in terms of history, is the nature and outcome of these bridges (some new, some old) that have been built and crossed; what arises from these opportunities for genuine contact, reconsideration, and recognition that quite possibly may serve to reach beyond imagined, largely fictive expectations.

CHAPTER IV

REGARDING CRITICAL FILTERS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND OTHER NUNN-SUCH

The purpose of this chapter is to consider how Drew Hayden Taylor's work can be critically viewed. My approach will be to establish a reading of Taylor's intended aesthetic, first as filtered through a post-colonial lens, and secondly through a Native centered lens. To do so will expose what seems to be a common assumption in the limited academic exploration of Taylor's work to date: That his writing is the product of an oppressed minority and he can only be interpreted as a product of colonial control and resistance.

Of primary focus in my considerations of the post colonial framings of Taylor's works will be Robert Nunn's "Hybridity and Mimicry in the Plays of Drew Hayden Taylor", while an alternate reading of Taylor's plays through a Native centered approach, will come from my use of ideas as presented by Thomas King in his article "Godzilla vs. the Post-Colonial." King's article serves very well to elaborate considerations of a Native centered alternative to Colonial based theory.[1]

I should like to offer some observations regarding aspects of Taylor's work which Nunn's article highlights only briefly or not at all; in offering these observations however, I should also like to follow the lead of Mark Fortier, who, in the closing commentary of his work Theory/Theatre states, "There is a common academic practice in which a writer points out the failings in all previous literature on the topic at hand in order to argue that only his or her own

[1] Mirjam Hirch has also written a Master's Thesis regarding the work of Taylor and the post-colonial. Ms. Hirch was kind enough to share a copy of her thesis with me, and it was found to largely echo the sentiments of Nunn's article. Therefore, for sake of efficiency, I am choosing to focus entirely on Nunn's work. In addition, Nunn has written a second article which continues to examine Taylor's works, this time with Nunn basing his assumptions on a Trickster element of Taylor's work, despite Taylor's purposeful avoidance of Trickster figures in his writing (see Nunn 2002).

new and improved work will do. I want to end on a different tack … I want to end, therefore, not by criticizing or dismissing other works, but by emphasizing their importance" (Fortier 144-145). While it is my intent to critically evaluate Nunn's work, it is not my intent to entirely dismiss it. In particular, I find Nunn's work very useful as a model illustrating the distinctions between post-modernism and post-colonial, as well as the ideas of a post-colonial hybridity and mimicry. What I take exception with, as will be explored in some detail momentarily, is the assumption on Nunn's part of an intentional post-colonial stance by Taylor's.

Taylor and Nunn: Of Choice, Tone, Intent, and Hybridity

The act of interpretation at its best is an assumptive act; one that informs and potentially enlightens. At its worst, the interpretive act is one of over-assumption, often a power play of transference (in the psychological sense) that can not only be more than a bit invasive, but also misleading.[2] The use of a theoretical framework is ideally intended to provide a filter as a means of providing clarity in regards to, in this case, an author's work. Yet even with the best of intentions, theoretical framing, as apt as it may appear on the surface, may in fact only serve to further muddy the waters, distracting future readers and researchers.

In the early considerations of Taylor's work, it is important that the signposts placed to mark the context for future explorations are set as clearly and as closely to Taylor's intent as possible. It is my view that only after Taylor's own considerations have been taken into record should other critical/theoretical exploration begin. If all acts of interpretation are indeed assumptive, then it is best if those assumptions come from an informed origin, rather than from the belief that this is the only interpretation available, therefore it must be the best.

[2] I am working with a definition of assumption as, "The act of taking for granted or supposing; the act of taking possession of something: the assumption of power; arrogance, presumption" (Random House 127). The same dictionary defines interpretation in part as, "to construe or understand in a particular way; to bring out the meaning of (a dramatic work, music, etc.) by performance or execution … according to one's own understanding or sensitivity" (Random House 998).

Thomas King clarifies his perception on the pitfalls of assumption as he recalls the events of his own, ill - fated high school basketball career[3]. Reaching his adult height at an early age King caught the eye of an over eager high school basketball coach, who told him, judging entirely by King's height, that King, "had a talent for the game ... with my size, he said, I would be a natural player. I was flattered" (King 10). Despite his coach's enthusiasm, King, according to his own reports, proved far from a "natural," showing remarkably little predisposition for the game. Of his performances on the court, King reports, "Had I not been so very young and so very serious, I might've laughed at my attempts to run and bounce the ball at the same time. Certainly most everyone who saw me play did" (King 10).

Lest his readers jump too quickly to place the blame on the presumptions of his coach, King reminds them that:

> you have to remember that we both made more or less the same assumption. The coach assumed that because I was tall, I would be a good player. And once the coach called my height to my attention and encouraged me, I assumed the same thing. We spent the rest of our time together trying to figure out why I was so bad. (King 10)

With a torn knee derailing his basketball career and a strongly developed perspective which comes from a judicious hindsight, King sagely warns his readers that indeed, assumptions are dangerous things: "They are especially dangerous when we do not even see that the pretense from which we start a discussion is not the hard fact we thought it was, but one of the fancies we churn out of our imaginations to help us get from the beginning of an idea to the end" (King 10).

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[3] Thomas King is a Native author of numerous novels, plays, essays, and a radio comedy series (The Dead Dog Café). King is of Cherokee/Greek and German descent. For more information on King see Davies; also, www.nwpassages.com/bios/king.asp .

While keeping King's concerns regarding assumptions in mind, I would like to continue my consideration of Taylor's work by addressing Robert Nunn's "Hybridity and Mimicry in the Plays Of Drew Hayden Taylor." In regards to Native theatre, Nunn asserts in the opening comments of his article that

> Native plays seem to be *already* assimilated into dominant white culture. The institution of theatre itself, however marginal it may appear to the dominant culture, is an integral part of it. To write plays, then, is to *appear* to work within the dominant culture … What resists this gravitational pull is the difference asserted in not *adopting* mainstream cultural forms, but *mimicking* them. The hybrid thus created, I will argue, is not evidence of being half-way toward absorption, but on the contrary is a powerful form of resistance to absorption. (Nunn 96, italics supplied by Nunn)

Following his contextual designation of theatre as an instrument of the mainstream, and of Native theatre in particular as a subversive and post-colonial hybridic offspring of mainstream theatre efforts, Nunn states his specific purpose as being, "I want to examine in some detail, and with especial regard to the plays of Drew Hayden Taylor, a particular post-colonial strategy: the appropriation and mimicry of popular culture, which produces a hybrid rearticulation of the original" (Nunn 96).

It is these features of hybridity and syncreticity that Nunn focuses on, asserting that,

> [Taylor's] body of dramatic writing is unified by a central concern: to restore a sense of laughter as a core element of Native culture. And to do so, he appropriates popular cultural forms, particularly television comedy, walking a deliberately risky line between borrowing from mainstream popular culture in

> order to make it speak to the condition of Native peoples, and producing work that mainstream white audiences can enjoy as light comedies employing familiar conventions. (Nunn 104 - 105)

Nunn argues that by appropriating and hybridizing elements of popular culture, Taylor is not simply parodying elements of the dominant culture, but mimicking them from a post - colonial stance. It is this hybridic form of mimicry allegedly employed by Taylor that acts subversively against the assimilation of Native culture into the mainstream, non - Native culture.

In defining his parameters of the post-colonial, Nunn adheres closely to established definitions, citing Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's The Empire Writes Back, where the authors define the post-colonial as a term which applies "to all cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present - day" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2; Nunn 96). Nunn also categorizes Taylor's work as corresponding to their parameters for post-colonial literature, these being, "Works which emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial center. It is this which makes them distinctively post - colonial" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2; Nunn 96).

As if anticipating dissenting opinions from his readers as to his positioning of Taylor as “distinctively postcolonial” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2; Nunn 96), Nunn seems to imply that the only other theoretical framework available in which to categorize Taylor's work would be an apparently lesser distinction of a post-modern parodying of the mainstream. Nunn steers readers away from this possibility by implying that a post-modern parody would be a too simplistic lens through which to view Taylor's works. Nunn also derails any readers who might

recognize a sense of parity between the two terms of mimicry and parody by citing another well-established definition, this time drawing from the work of Linda Hutcheon, as he notes the following:

> The postmodern artist paradoxically acknowledges and challenges the center of his/her own culture by assuming a "marginal or ex - centric position" (Hutcheon 3) the postcolonial artist does not assume such a position. It has been imposed and maintained by the imperial center, and his/her mimicry/parody of its authoritative discourse is an urgent matter of survival and resistance. (Nunn 115)

On the surface, given Nunn's parameters, Taylor's work does seem to have emerged from, as Nunn reports, "the experience of colonization," and by working toward the level of demystification in regard to the imagined Indian, Taylor could certainly be interpreted as emphasizing "differences from the assumption of the imperial center" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2; Nunn 96). Indeed, Taylor's work for the theatre, as frequently (and readily) acknowledged by Taylor, is undeniably political. Political content in his work is unavoidable in Taylor's estimation, due to the simple fact that,

> being born Native and Canada is a political statement in itself. Anything to do with an oppressed people telling their story is bound to have some level of politics ... most of my plays intentionally or unintentionally do have a strong political message somewhere within the text. (Dawes 8)

In regards to Taylor's work, it is also undeniably true there is a constant, ready acknowledgment of the oppressive actions taken against Native peoples throughout the past 500 years. Likewise, there is an undeniably subversive edge to Taylor's works as he chips away at non – Native imaginings and stereotypes surrounding Native peoples. In these efforts Taylor not only

recognizes the oppression of his people, and his political content, but also seems to confirm Nunn's estimation of any post- colonial leanings on Taylor's part.

While I do not entirely disagree with Nunn's use of Taylor's work as an example for illustrating a method of post-colonial framing, there are several elements of Nunn's assumptions that I should like to clarify that cast doubt on any permanent identification with Taylor as post-colonial. These elements lie namely in the areas of Native humor, appropriation, positionality, tone, and focus.

Earlier in this chapter I quoted Nunn's commentary where he asserted that Taylor's "body of dramatic writing is unified by a central concern: to *restore* a sense of laughter as a core element of Native culture" (Nunn 104 - 105)[emphasis mine]. Nunn never elaborates further upon the statement, leaving the reader unsure just who exactly Taylor's is restoring laughter to (non - Native or Native peoples). And indeed, the use of the word "restore" by Nunn here is key in this instance, as a desire to "restore a sense of Native laughter" is never spoken of by Taylor as a concern. Rather, Native humor and an ability to laugh are frequently referred to by Taylor as one of two integral survival mechanisms that have always been present in Native cultures, especially during the European arrivals of recent history. Taylor recalls the following:

> I look at the terrible things that have happened to Native people over the past 500 years, some of which we're trying to document in theatre. And what has gotten us through these dark and painful periods, in my opinion, is our sense of humor and our storytelling. These are two things that help us keep a firm grasp on who we are and what we are.
>
> Native people have a very specific sense of humor, depending on where you are. In some places it's very sarcastic and biting and almost vicious, and in

> other places it's very laid-back. Humor is a healing force, a force that I try to use a lot in my material … I want to celebrate the Native sense of humor and how it helped us to survive the tragedies. (Taylor "Storytelling" 5 - 6)

Taylor's work then should not be viewed as attempting restoration of an absent laughter, but rather as an elevation and celebration of Native humor as an integral, long-standing element of Native culture. Taylor is not alone in his high estimation of Native humor and acknowledgement of its continual presence in Native history/life; many Native authors offer similar evaluations. Marie Annharte Baker develops this idea by suggesting that "to be able to laugh at oneself is one of the greatest gifts of an aboriginal heritage. For even the one who is the teensy bit Indian, the gift of this self - clowning is humongous. Sometimes our laughter is our only weapon" (Baker 48).

Vine Deloria, in his seminal Custer Died for Your Sins: an Indian Manifesto, includes an entire chapter on the importance and omnipresence of Native humor through both commentary and twenty-two pages of hilarious examples of a variety of Native jokes. Here, in commenting on the standard, stereotypically stoic portrayal of Native peoples, Deloria tells his readers,

> The Indian people are exactly opposite of the popular stereotype. I sometimes wonder how anything is accomplished by Indians because of the apparent over emphasis on humor within the Indian world. Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem and the experiences of life have generally been so well defined through jokes and stories that they have become a thing in themselves. (Deloria 146 - 147)

The depth and range of Native humor is as varied and wide as it is omnipresent, despite the often unwillingness of non-Native peoples to recognize it. While Taylor's uses of humor will be

covered in more detail momentarily, attention needed to be brought to Nunn's assumption of the loss of Native humor - a potentially misleading one which could serve to reinforce a "vanishing breed', or of a "custodial/curatorial" mentality held by many non- Native's[4].

A second issue raised by Nunn's article, albeit more indirectly, is the idea of Taylor's appropriation and hybridization of popular culture and mass media. There is no question that Taylor does appropriate (or hybridize) elements of mass/popular culture into his work. However, the inference seems to be that Taylor, simply by the very nature of being Native and growing up on a reserve, was an outsider looking into the mainstream culture; that, as an outsider Taylor was largely unaffected by popular culture and mass media, as if Taylor's life was lived in a primeval Native bubble, untouched by the mainstream culture's influence until adulthood. While it is possible that earlier generations of Native peoples in Canada may have lived in this manner, the spread of non-Native popular culture during Taylor's life has been one of relative constancy and speed, leaving almost no stone unturned, no reserve unaffected. Taylor is one of many Native peoples in his generation that grew up surrounded by mass media, popular and consumer cultures, and yet Nunn seems to be unaware of this possibility. This despite the fact that Taylor calls a major urban center his home-base after growing up in a Reserve community itself in close proximity to several smaller cities and a short driving distance from Toronto.

More importantly, Nunn's inferences appear despite Taylor's own frequent references to his love, since childhood, of television, comic books, science fiction, books and films. Taylor recalls his childhood in vivid terms:

> I was a single child of a single parent and spent a lot of time by myself and as a result I read a lot and developed a very fertile imagination; it must have had something to do with my later career ... I was always an avid reader, read

[4] See Conquergood's "Performing as a Moral Act".

> anything and everything, but some of my favorites that I would return to were The Outsiders by S. E. Hinton, The Wolf King by Joseph Lippincott, and The Black Stallion by Walter Farley, very boyhood kind of stuff, and oddly enough, the entire series (24 books I believe) of the Tarzan of the Apes series by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Speaking as a white-looking Indian growing up on the reserve, perhaps I related to the fish-out-of-water existence symbolized by Tarzan, the ultimate outsider in his environment. And yet, he rose above it to be master of his world...but perhaps I'm over analyzing. (Taylor Quoted in Moffat and Tait 72)

Like many young Native people who have grown-up since the 1960s and 1970s, Taylor has been undeniably influenced by elements of popular culture, mass media, and the consumer-based society, to a degree which many non-Natives seem unwilling to acknowledge. Tomson Highway, who like Drew Hayden Taylor, had few Native media role models as he was growing up, speaks eloquently of popular culture influences upon his creativity.[5]

> When I was growing up there was no Graham Greene to look up to, or Doris Linklater. We had no Tantoo Cardinal or Norval Morrisseau. Now kids growing up these days have them. All we had a look up to was Rock Hudson and Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor and Joan Collins. (Louks 11)

And in a separate interview Highway goes further:

> I can't help but be influenced by the fact that I've seen Superman or Joan Collins or Archie comic books, or for that matter, that I've heard the works of Beethoven. They're all irreparably, irretrievably, a part of my imagination now. I have

[5] A significant difference between Taylor and Highway is that Highway (Cree) spent the majority of his early years living a semi-nomadic life in remote areas of Canada. Despite this, Highway was still largely influenced by Mainstream cultural products, especially after being forced to attend a Native school away from his parents.

> absolutely no intention or any way of rejecting them. I'll use them to create something that is from my imagination. (Wilson, 354).

But it is not merely the icons of popular culture that Highway references, but also the prevalent non-Native expectation of primitivity and lack of modern influence on the part of some non-Native peoples, by noting that,

> It is impossible for me to live in a tent for the rest of my life, even though I was born in one; but I don't have any desire whatsoever to live in a tent for the rest of my life. It is nice enough for a couple of weeks in the summer, but I live in downtown Toronto, in a house with a microwave oven, and a piano and a washer and dryer. I take the subway to work. (Wilson 353-354)

Yet Highway points out, it is not so much his familiarity and assimilation of the icons or products of the consumer mainstream society that interest him, despite their inevitable influence upon his work. Rather his interests lie at least partially, in the product of this assimilation, an assimilation he points out, which is occurring on two fronts: the Native, and the non-Native. Here, continuing his commentary with Ann Wilson, Highway connects his experiences with the advent of Native Canadian artists:

> All these things are things which I appreciate, but what I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people, and the life of my fellow Canadians is the searching for this new voice, this new identity, this new tradition, this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent. It is the combination of the best of both worlds, wherein you take a symphony or a string quartet by Beethoven, study it, utilize the best of what you get from it, the best

> knowledge you get from the structure of the instrumentation, and apply that structure, utilize it. (Wilson 353-354)

Earlier I noted how Nunn highlighted the distinction between the post-modern and post-colonial in order to more effectively frame his argument for filtering Taylor's work as distinctly post-colonial. Specifically, he stated that a post-modern artist could utilize an element of choice in their identity either inside or outside their community, that they could purposefully select a paradoxical role on the fringes in order to both draw attention to, and seek to challenge "the center" (Nunn 115). A post-colonial artist however, according to Nunn's estimation, does not have this option of choosing a marginal or exterior role as an identifying position, but rather, their position of marginality has "been imposed and maintained by the imperial center" (Nunn 115).

In terms of Taylor's marginality or "ex-centric" positionality being thrust upon him, there is little to dispute. Being a person of Ojibwe/Native and reserve origin, from the very start Taylor has had the label of "outsider" thrust upon him from many in the non-Native communities. It would be naïve, given the subject matter of much of Taylor's works (not to mention the nature of the non-Native society), to assume otherwise. Yet there are other complexities within the area of identity and positionality to be addressed. Consider the possibility that not only has Taylor's outsider status been thrust upon him from a non-Native society, but also from the Native society as well. After all, Taylor bases much of his non-fiction, non-theatrical writing from a standpoint of wrestling with Native sensibilities wrapped in a non-Native appearance, not to mention the expectations and surprises that arise from such a mixture. Of the issue of identity and positionality, Taylor has said to me in a personal e-mail, "I've spent most of a career writing about that so I don't have one particular answer or I'd run out of things to write about then, the

definition of identity and identity itself is always a fluid issue because there is no one answer and everybody will have their own perception“(Young).

While positions of the outsider or peripheral dweller of non-Native cultures are largely ascribed to him, there is also an element of acceptance and choice inherent in the selection of these roles in Taylor’s works that seem to conflict with a post-colonial distinction. Similarly, there is another slightly paradoxical element to Taylor’s works which Nunn does not draw his readers’ attention to: that where Taylor purposefully chooses the role of a marginal observer within Native culture at large. In much of his essay work, Taylor deliberately chooses the marginal position of commentator upon his own culture in order to more “effectively acknowledge and challenge the center” of Native culture as well. This chosen or selected position of marginality by Taylor problematizes Nunn’s easy post-colonial/post-modern distinction of Taylor’s work. Nunn's implication is that Taylor did not choose his position, but rather, as a member of a non-central/mainstream culture, had it thrust upon him by a colonial power who discerns identity by cultural origin, thereby placing Taylor in a post-colonial frame.

However, this reading is disturbed when the tone of Taylor’s works is taken into account. There is a particular tone and voice to Taylor’s for the theatre, a purposefully non-strident voice than earlier, and much more seriously-toned Native pieces may have employed.

Taylor has repeatedly noted in his commentaries the trend of early contemporary Native theatre to highlight the results of oppression by depicting the extreme situations of Native peoples on stage. Taylor has recognized the importance of these efforts by often quoting Lyle Long claw’s statement, “before the healing can take place, the poison has to be exposed” (Taylor “Storytelling” 5). Within the newly formed contemporary Native theatre, this exposure of “the poison” arose in the form of dark, angry, often accusatory works for the theatre focused upon the

dysfunctional swath of destruction wrought upon Native peoples by non-Native colonialist efforts. Of these powerfully intense, often somber and brutal works (many written with violent, often graphic rape scenes) Taylor, only halfway jokingly, quipped:

> I couldn't help but wonder if in order to write Native drama you had to have a rape in your play ... nobody's ever done a study, but I'd say in most of the Native plays written and produced during the early years, there is a rape. And I began to think, why? There are many theories. One is that it represents the horrific amount of sexual abuse that exists in Native communities because of the residential school system, because of alcoholism, because of the breakdown of the extended family, because of adoption. And the sexual abuse becomes cyclical: the abused becomes the abuser. There is also the metaphoric rape of Native culture; in many communities that were matrilineal or matriarchal, you've got this other primarily patriarchal culture coming in, forcing its away in, and basically eradicating everything else and forcing that culture to do its will. (Taylor "Storytelling" 5)

While Taylor respectfully recognizes these works as integral and valuable to not only the contemporary Native theatre, but to Native and non-Native communities on the whole, he also expresses concern over the contemporary Canadian Native theatre's sometimes overly strident fixation upon the tragic and dysfunctional:

> I think the whole scene is still a large part of what Native playwrights and Native people in general are trying to work out through theatre, through their art. Which is all fine and understandable, but it just seems that on the whole, we as Native writers were rather fixated on that one point. I get a script on my desk, and I just

> look at it and say, "I wonder what the dysfunction du jour is in this play." There are so many different aspects of Native culture out there waiting to be explored that I think we're doing our people a disservice. (Taylor “Storytelling” 5)

Taylor’s concern arises not only at the danger of further alienating non-Native audience members (audiences will only endure so much finger pointing, confrontation, and brutality before they will begin to turn their interests, and support, elsewhere), but also an interest in broadening the horizons of possibilities by focusing upon a larger picture. As a result of this realization regarding earlier contemporary Native theatre works, Taylor recalls a major shift in his own work, reporting that,

> Like a light from heaven, this led me on a personal crusade to develop more interesting and varied characters in my plays, for I too had been somewhat guilty of that brand of stereotyping. And while these characters do exist in the Native community, it is important to note that the theatre should represent a cross-cut of a culture or a society. And I felt there was a lot more out there in the Native community that wasn’t being represented by our writers. We needed more varied representations to show the public at large, to show that we weren’t oppressed, depressed, or suppressed. I feel variety is the spice of theatre. (Taylor “Crucible” 227)

In deliberately turning from the darker, more accusatorial stare of many earlier Native works in favor of a lighter, humor based sensibility, Taylor has lessened the danger of non-Native audiences disconnecting themselves from his material. Taylor has also provided an opportunity for more Native audiences to enjoy their presence on stage, rather than be reminded of the desperate levels some aspects of Native life have reached. Additionally, by adopting a

decidedly less strident and overtly politicized tone to his work than his predecessors, Taylor takes a step further away from Nunn's categorization of his work as post-colonial. It is important to highlight the fact, however, as borne out by the above quote by Taylor, that his intent is not merely the subversion of a non-Native, European based paradigm, but also an existing paradigm generated by Native authors of the contemporary Theatre as they continue to settle into a theatrical aesthetic. This active shift of dual perspective created slippage and resistance of any limiting post-colonial readings of his plays.

From both vantage points of marginality, the one thrust upon him, and the one he has accepted as his own, Taylor directs his playful jibes through his plays to both Native and non-Native audiences alike. Taylor's work is decidedly subversive as he seeks to at least begin the process of healing a cultural rift between Native and non-Native peoples. He seeks to accomplish this in part by subverting the paradigms of stereotype and misinformation which have led to unrealistic expectations on the part of many non-Natives in regards to Native peoples.

Yet the tone of Taylor's pieces, though purposefully avoiding stridency and open rebellion, are also far from the level of "post-modern acquiescence" sometimes attributed to post-modernism[6]. Aside from being punny and sometimes a bit obvious, Taylor's humor is of a poking and prodding nature; it is a mild form of teasing, on the surface seeking to entertain and amuse, but sub textually seeking a measure of reconsideration and change. Here Taylor elaborates briefly on the idea:

> In my research, I have come across a term used by some Native academics to describe humour, specifically Native humour. They refer to it as "permitted disrespect". You have the other people's permission to tease or joke about them without getting into a fight. (Taylor "Storytelling" 97)

[6] See Fortier, 130.

In his work both on and off the stage, Taylor allows himself a large amount of permission to engage in a great deal of jibing, good natured, teasing types of humor filled with puns and near obvious jokes. His dialogue sounds not so much like that of an angry adolescent, but of a silly uncle who likes to engage in critical horseplay.

In adopting this form of teasing that often borders dangerously close to the disrespectful, Taylor is not mimicking or hybridizing non-Native forms so much as he is bringing to the fore a long standing Native use of a "ribbing" or "elbow in the side" style of humor for social control. This concept of teasing has been acknowledged by many other writers as a form of social management and communication. Vine Deloria's thoughts on the subject, though written in 1969, dovetails with Taylor's above commentary by adding that

> For centuries before the white invasion, teasing was a method of control of social situations by Indian people. Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the concerns of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within the tribe were held at a minimum. (Deloria 147)

Taylor's humor is often aimed at prodding Native and non-Native readers and audience members alike to adopt a change in thinking, as when he writes about his concerns over the spread of diabetes in the Native community and the generally high fat/high calorie menu of many Native peoples. In order to begin to combat this issue, Taylor playfully suggests "the concept of the Low-Fat Pow Wow" (Taylor Further 72), borrowing from the mainstream's fascination with diet and fitness in order to address a serious issue within the Native community.

In his teasing-style, Taylor also takes a more serious look at Native community foibles in articles like "No Time for Indian Time," when he outwardly criticizes those Native people

who tend to take advantage of the concept of "Indian Time" as an excuse to "escape or shift blame for the carelessness of their actions" (Taylor Further 78)[7]. Taylor ends his column by attempting to point his readers in a new direction by providing a quotation from a Native elder woman as she discusses the respect for time and timeliness as a respect for the self. (Taylor Further 78). In a similar example "Is Professionalism a Dirty Word?," Taylor first openly criticizes anonymous members of the Native theatre community for unprofessional behaviors, then focuses upon Native college students, who attempt to take advantage of their status as Native students and members of a minority culture to excuse themselves from poor and irresponsible classroom performances. As a further example of the ripple effect of irresponsibility, Taylor criticizes Native academics and university officials who attempt to support these students' claims in order to ensure their graduation, inferring that this is simply done to increase collegiate statistics regarding Native students' completion records (Taylor Furious 12 - 13).

In his zeal to apply a theoretical framework to Taylor's efforts, Nunn seems to imply there are only two possible categories for Taylor's work to fall into: the post-modern, or the post - colonial. Having effectively ruled out the post-modern distinction, Nunn frames Taylor's work as post – colonial, therefore attempting to take his readers with him as he strives to support his assumption that post-colonial is the best way to categorize Taylor's work.

In theory, the distinctions between the post-colonial and the post-modern in Taylor's case might appear just this clear. However, outside of the theoretical, within the blurrier, slightly messier and less distinct realities of the real world, this dividing line does not seem so distinct. If I were to frame Taylor's questionable status as a possible post-colonial author in the context of

[7] Indian Time has several interpretations, but generally is defined as a Native inclination to begin a task when it is appropriate to begin, rather than simply because a clock says it is time to begin. See Taylor Further pp. 78 for further definitions and discussion.

confirming a diagnosis, my final estimation would be that despite exhibiting significant symptomology the patient (Taylor's work) does not explicitly match enough criteria in order to warrant a full diagnosis.

I must admit, at first and even second glance, given the relative clarity of Nunn's arguments and the authoritative nature of his delivery, I readily joined in with Nunn's assumptions. On the same note, there is no arguing with Nunn in his clear use of Taylor's work as an effective illustrative model to demonstrate post-colonial ideas such as hybridity and mimicry. Yet, as I began to gain familiarity with Taylor's work for the theatre, as well as a familiarity with Taylor himself through his commentaries, interviews, and our brief conversations and e-mails, Nunn's assumptions no longer seem so authoritative. What essential elements does a post-colonial reading of Taylor's plays ignore? This question returns us to Thomas King and his warning that assumptions are especially dangerous, "when we do not even see that the premise from which we started discussion is not the hard fact that we thought it was, but one of the fancies we churned out of our imaginations to help us get from the beginning of an idea to the end" (King 10).

Godzilla is King

In his article entitled "Godzilla vs. the Post-Colonial," Thomas King tackles post -colonial theory as a "non - centered, non nationalistic" theoretical framework, largely incapable of giving voice to the oppressed (King 1). King claims the post-colonial framing of Native literature is successful at nothing more than cutting Native authors off from their culture and the source of their creativity. Though King's criticisms of post - colonial frameworks may not be breaking new ground, his eloquent, accessible approach, coupled with his provision of potential alternative framing devices, does offer an alternative entrance into clarifying and evaluating

elements of Taylor's work. These alternatives to the post-colonial are categorized by King as "Tribal, Polemical, Interfusional, and Associational Literatures" (ibid).

In establishing the parameters for his categories, King acknowledges that "creating terms simply to replace other terms is, in most instances, a solipsistic exercise," yet defends his efforts by telling readers that he does not merely seek to replace the post-colonial framework, but rather "to demonstrate the difficulties that the people and the literature for which the term was, in part, created have with the assumptions that the term embodies" (King 16). Lastly, King argues that "It may be that these terms will not do in the end at all. Yet I cannot let post-colonial stand--particularly as a term--for, at its heart, it is an act of imagination and an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become" (King 16).

King points out that the idea of the post-colonial must first be recognized as

> part of a triumvirate. In order to get to "Post," we have to wend our way through no small amount of literary history, acknowledging the existence of its antecedents, pre - Colonial and Colonial. In the case of Native literature, we can say that pre - Colonial literature was that literature, oral in nature, that was in existence prior to European contact, a literature that existed exclusively within specific cultural communities.
>
> Post - Colonial literature then must be the literature produced by Native people sometime after colonization, a literature that arises in large part out of the experience that is colonization. (King 11)

Expanding his discussion to include the ideas of pre-colonial and colonial literatures, King asserts that the pre-colonial distinction pushes the Native voice into silence:

> While Post - Colonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the oppressed against the oppressor ... the term itself assumes that the starting point for that discussion is the advent of Europeans in North America. At the same time, the term organizes the literature progressively, suggesting that there is both progress and improvement. No less distressing, it also assumes that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature, providing those of us who write with method and topic. And, worst of all, the idea of Post - Colonial effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before Colonialism ever became a question, traditions which had come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression. (King 11 - 12)

King argues that post-colonial categories, despite all well meaning intentions, are nothing more than a self - centered Western view of literature, in a sense an assumption of power and maintaining of the spotlight, where all creative work revolves entirely around the actions and effects of Western culture. What's more, despite an alleged intention of giving voice to the oppressed and subverting all oppressive paradigms, he argues, post-colonialism may in fact be reinforcing them. In King's interpretation, he asserts that the post - colonial denies any level of Native ingenuity, history, advancement, methodology, or subject matter unique from, or existing outside of, any relationship with Western culture.

In King’s alternative framework, tribal literature “exists primarily within a tribe or community” and is shared almost exclusively by that community alone. Tribal Literature is presented and retained in a Native language, with the assumption being (dangerous as that may

be, given our recent discussion of assumptions), that this form of literature is presented in the unique styles and structures inherent within that language, causing a reinforcement of a particular tribe or community's uniqueness from others, thereby maintaining a strong sense of identity within that community. In addition, Tribal Literature is largely invisible outside of that particular community, due both to possible language obstacles as well as a community lack of interest or investment in exposing themselves to an "outside" audience. Tribal Literature is a literature produced by, and solely for the consumption of its producers (King 12-14).

Polemical Literature is a Native literature (regardless of its language of composition), that examines the collision of Native and non-Native cultures. Works that fall into this category chronicle, from a distinctly Native perspective, " The imposition of non-Native expectations and insistencies […] on Native communities and the methods of resistance employed by Native people in order to maintain both their communities and their cultures" (King 13). This category may seem, upon initial examination, to resemble the post-colonial, except that King describes Polemical Literature as generated by Native authors who are distinctly emphasizing stories of cultural clashes from a distinctly Native perspective, positioning Native outlooks, values, and approaches at the forefront of their work (King 12-14).

King's Interfusional Literature is perhaps the most abstract of King's categories, and one that King admits, does not contain a great deal of successful works. Interfusional literature, according to King, describes "that part of Native literature which is a blending of oral literature and written literature" (King 14). Interfusional Literature succeeds in maintaining the storyteller/oral tradition by "creating an oral voice" within the written text creating a "metamorphosis-written to oral, reader to speaker" (King 14). More so than other categories, it

appears that Interfusional texts are performative, reaching for a stronger, more visceral interaction between reader, author, text and topic (King 12-14).

As a final category (although these categories are not chronological), King offers his readers Associational Literature. Works in this category are, according to King, written largely by contemporary Native authors who portray the normal, day to day pursuits and interactions of Native communities. Unlike King's Tribal Literature, Associational Literature does not completely sidestep the non-Native vantage point, but "avoids centering the story on the non-Native community or on a conflict between the two cultures" (King 14). Plotlines and narratives of Associational Literature are described by King as "flat," focusing upon the collective rather than the individual exploits and challenges of one or two characters. Events in storylines step away from the Western focus, which centers upon the standard forms (rising action, conflict, and climax with resolution) prevalent in not only Western literature, but popular/mass media as well. In doing so, Associational Literature perpetuates a long practiced Native approach to "creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of members of a community, a fiction that eschews judgments and conclusions" (King 14).

Importantly, Associational Literature provides potentially positive entrance to the works for not only Native audiences, but non-Native as well. Unlike King's Tribal Literature, Associational Literature offers a level (albeit limited) of empathetic access to non-Native audiences to particularly Native-focused works as told from a particular Native history and literary framework. As a result, Associational Literature allows non-Native audiences to:

> Associate with that world [Native communities and stories] without being encouraged to feel part of it. It does not pander to non - Native expectations concerning the glamour and/or horror of Native life, and it is specially avoids

> those media phantasms - glitzy ceremonies, yuppie shamanism, diet philosophies ... that writers such as Carlos Castaneda and Lynne Andrews have conjured up. (King 14)

Though no longer granting permission for non-Native audiences to participate in the fantasy of bows and arrows, papooses and beads, leather, and feather mentalities of popular culture, Associational Literature can offer non-Native audiences a normalized view of Native communities, stories, and characters, avoiding the overly romantic notions of the Hollywood dime novel portrayals in favor of more grounded, believable, and ultimately accessible portrayals. While not inviting non-Natives into their culture completely, Native authors working in the Associational style do offer a potentially clearer reflection of their communities and their issues. Simultaneously, these authors often challenge non-Natives to more clearly reflect upon their own community and cultural issues as well. With Associational Literature, non-Natives are free to play along, provided they are willing to yield the spotlight and center stage, graduating from the limited and unrealistic "star system" to a more potential filled, albeit more challenging initially, Native-centered approach.

And finally, for the Native audience, King argues Associational Literature provides a level of empowerment and reinforcement of a genuine Native identity, accompanied by realistic portrayals of Native community life and self-sufficiency beyond, or in spite of, Western influence. In presenting a literature that reflects both common Native story structures as well as normalized community life, Native Associational Literature reminds Native audiences,

> Of the continuing values of our cultures, and it reinforces the notion that, in addition to the usable past that the conference of oral literature and traditional history provide us with, we also have an active president marked by cultural

> tenacity and a viable future which may well revive itself around major revivals of language, philosophy, and spiritualism. (King 14)

King acknowledges potential disagreement to his views, recounting a friend's admonition to look deeper into the post-colonial framework, telling King that the "Post - Colonial was not such a simple thing, that much of what I was concerned with - centres, difference, totalizing, hegemony, margins - was being addressed by Post Colonial methodology" (King 12). King nods his head to this possibility of a deeper method to post-colonial assumptions, but remains adamant, saying, "it is unfortunate that the method has such an albatross - as the term - hanging around its neck. But I must admit that I remain skeptical that such a term could describe a non - centered, non nationalistic method" (King 12).

This "albatross" of a post-colonial "non - centered" framework is demonstrated in Nunn's article regarding Taylor's work. Following the parameters of his post - colonial assertions, Nunn examines Taylor's work as if it has both arisen and focuses solely upon the effects of colonization. Nunn's implication here seems to be that Taylor's work arises solely from his experiences of the world through clashes with the non-Native world (the clashes of the oppressed and the oppressor). If this is the case, and Taylor's work indeed did arise from such an extremely polarized vantage point, there would seem to be little hope of Taylor ever successfully crossing any cultural rifts.

As demonstrated earlier, Taylor does write with an acknowledgment and awareness of the oppressive nature and history that exists in non-Native relationship to Native cultures. But the non - Native cultures that inflicted the oppression, as well as the far reaching effects of this oppression, are not the sole focus of Taylor's work. Rather, these elements are key players in his storylines when he chooses to address the various intersections, by-passes and detours that exist

as his characters seek to negotiate through their experiences of the convergences and divergences of two equally separate and similar communities, the Native and the non-Native. While this may serve to disrupt any tailor-made fit for the distinction of post-colonial to Taylor's work, it serves quite well to inform an alliance with King's paradigms of Native centered literature.

CHAPTER V

BRIDGES, STEPS, AND EXTENSIONS-CONFLICT, COMMUNITY AND ACCESS: THE NATIVE STORYTELLER'S AESTHETIC

In 1987, just prior to his own entrance into the professional theatre as a playwright, Drew Hayden Taylor penned a short article for MacLean's which briefly profiled the rapidly rising popularity of the contemporary Canadian Native theatre. Integral to this article was his discussion of the then breakthrough playwright Tomson Highway. In his praise of Highway, Taylor points to the gap that characterizes the focus of his work:

> Few Canadian plays have successfully crossed the boundary between Native and white experience. Those that have, such as The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, have been written or co-authored by whites. Until Manitoba - born Cree playwright Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters ... the imaginative landscape claimed by Canada's dedicated band of Native theatre professionals had been unmapped territory for the rest of the country. (Taylor "Legends")

Within his article Taylor profiles the Native Theatre School, De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Company, Highway, and Native Earth Performing Arts. In the process, Taylor predicts a future for the newly born Contemporary Native Theatre in Canada. However, in a statement that would later prove uncharacteristic, Taylor points to alternate venues for the Native theatre in Canada: "Despite the success of The Rez Sisters, it is at the community level that Native Theatre will continue to flourish. That is because its primary goal is not to entertain a mass audience but to make connections with indigenous cultures torn apart by social change" (Taylor "Legends").

After experiencing the widespread success (and popular non - Native) notice of Highway, not to mention his own initial popular successes in the theatre, Taylor's tune regarding a "mass"

audience, or at least one outside of a "community" level, seems to have changed. However, Taylor's awareness of the rift or "boundary" between Native generated materials and the largely non - Native audiences of his work was only magnified. Taylor quickly discovered the difficulty of reaching non-Native audience members with his initial productions of The Bootlegger Blues, cited by Taylor as the first full-length Native generated comedy to achieve popular acclaim on the stage. Despite initial successes with an opening production, when The Bootlegger Blues toured, non-Native audience reactions puzzled Taylor:

> The thing I especially remember about that particular production was that was my first introduction to the racially divisive lines that sometimes exists when a non-Native audience is presented with Native humor, primarily on stage. Basically put, pigment - challenged audiences sometimes didn't quite know how to react to Native comedy. And since Native theatre was still quite young, many of us Aboriginal theatre practitioners were too experienced in that field either. (Taylor Furious 90)

Needless to say, as Taylor's career continued to expand, as his abilities as a distinctively Native playwright grew, and as the success of the contemporary Native theatre in Canada on the whole continued to grow, Taylor's awareness of the significant gap of experience between Native and non - Native audiences also grew. Accompanying that growth in awareness grew also the understanding that in order to reach his primarily non-Native audiences, he would need to find a way to at least temporarily bridge these gaps, if not dismantle them completely.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how Taylor’s work for the theatre endeavors to bridge the aforementioned cultural gap of knowledge and experience between Native and non-Native audiences and practitioners from a Native heritage of orality, theatricality, and

performativity. While on the surface, Taylor's plays can readily be compared to sitcom influenced comedies; his assertion is that he writes from a largely Native rooted storyteller's tradition. This chapter will have five sections, with each section addressing elements identified by Taylor as central to his theatrical aesthetic.

Section One will offer Taylor's views on a Native heritage of storytelling, specifically: Taylor's reasoning behind Contemporary Native theatre's success in Canada, why Native people have chosen the theatre as an expressive outlet, and why the theatre is a logical extension to a Native culture of orality and storytelling. Through an exploration of Taylor's Someday trilogy, section two will elaborate on Taylor's de-emphasis of dramatic conflict as a central element to his work, an element of Taylor's work which pulls him decidedly away from Western forms. Section Three, through a brief analysis of Taylor's The Baby Blues, offers an example of Taylor's writing with a communal/relational focus rather than upon a typically Western-based protagonist/antagonist approach. Section Four details the difficulties Taylor faced in reaching non-Native audiences in the earlier productions of The Bootlegger Blues as well as the revelations he came to in regard to his own work and the gap of knowledge/experience between Native and non-Native audiences. Finally, Section Five of this chapter focuses on Taylor's use of humorous demystification of Native stereotypes, as shown in The Bootlegger Blues, the first of three entries into his as yet unfinished Blues Quartet series (consisting of The Bootlegger Blues, The Baby Blues, and The Buz'Gem Blues). In addition, by examining Taylor's uses of conflict, community, demystification, and humor, these final two sections underscore not only Taylor's own opinions of his work, but also King's discussions regarding Native Associational Literature in "Godzilla vs. the Post-Colonial" (King).

Why Canada? Why Theatre?

In his interview with Birgit Dawes in 2003, Taylor elaborated on his belief as to why contemporary Canadian Native drama was experiencing a greater level of success than its American counterparts. Taylor attributed the success in part to Canadian Native visibility:

> I think the Native voice is much more prevalent in Canadian society: we have very strong political representation, and we have very strong cultural and artistic representation in the larger Canadian mosaic. And Native people are the constant and predominant nonwhite presence available in Canada, whereas in the states, it's the complete opposite. There are Native people there, but they are fragmented; they don't have any unified voice, and there are other cultures that are more represented in the media than Native people. Take the example of African-Americans and Native people and their representation in the dominant media in Canada and in United States. If you look at Canada there have been - to the best of my knowledge - no television series that deals specifically with a black population, but there have been at least three dealing with the Native situation, as well as a very popular CBC radio show called The Dead Dog Cafe. The Aboriginal voice in the past fifteen years has been amazingly strong and vital in the theatrical community. (Dawes 6)

And in a similar vein, Taylor ruminates on why the popularity of theatre/performance as a creative medium for Native artists has seemed to also have grown exponentially. Of this, Taylor reports, “We have novelists, we have short story writers, we have musicians, we have actors, etc., but in terms of artists per capita, theatre has become the predominant vehicle of expression” (Taylor “Alive” 29). In his interview with Dawe's, Taylor elaborates further:

> I have a theory of why Native theatre is so popular in general, and why it's popular in Canada. In the mid - eighties it occurred to people that theatre is the next logical progression in traditional storytelling - the ability to take the audience on a journey using your voice, your body, and the spoken word. And also the fact that unlike other media you don't need any secondary knowledge. (Dawes 6 - 7)

Taylor connects his theory of theatre as a logical extension of storytelling to his ideas of "secondary knowledge" as he discusses the move from storytelling to stage:

> Going from that [storytelling] onto the stage is just the next logical progression. Native people, who have an oral culture, really gravitate toward that more so than, say, the written arts, where you have to have perfect English or grammatically correct writing. The sometimes spotty education that has been granted Native people by the government and various religious institutions has not been that great. That's one of the reasons I became a playwright. I write the way people talk, and the way people talk is not always grammatically correct, therefore I can get away with it. (Taylor “Alive” 29)

Taylor also notes the tendency of Native storytelling to be relegated by the uninitiated to the area of "quaint children's stories," but hastens also to point out that, from a Native perspective,

> legends were never meant to be strictly for children. They were always told for adults - as well as for children - because as you get older, you can tap into a whole new understanding of the story. It's like an onion: you can always peel away more and more to get to the core of the story. (Taylor “Alive” 29)

Stories in Native communities therefore, according to Taylor, serve not only as entertainment, but also as a means of instruction and socialization. Even the simplest stories were generally layered in such a way that details could be returned to again and again over time, with new meanings to draw, new lessons to be learned upon each re-visitation. Of this layering Taylor stresses the importance of storytelling technique as a part of history and a "way of explaining human nature; it had metaphorical, philosophical, psychological implications - all within the story" (Taylor "Alive" 1). In his essay, "Storytelling To Stage," Taylor provides an example of this layering by relating a version of a Creation Story, then breaking down the story into its various layers of complexity. Taylor shows readers how the story can be interpreted solely on the level of entertainment, or as a deeper story of gaining self-awareness and knowledge. Continuing with his discussions of story and theatre, Taylor notes that

> Taking that type of story and then putting it into the theatre - the story which in obvious terms is the archetypal structure of self - exploration seems like a natural progression. You watch any storyteller work with kids and they're literally actors: working with the kids, suspending the disbelief and taking them on a journey. They use characters and an interesting plot line, which is the basis of any good theatrical presentation. (Taylor "Alive" 2)

Despite apparent echoes of Western theatrical/storytelling constructs that the above statements may appear to offer, Taylor emphasizes that he learned his awareness of the art and construction of stories and storytelling not through a western education, but rather through actively partaking in his own community's oral traditions. While Taylor's people undoubtedly maintain a level of spiritual and ceremonial action, Taylor states that his experiences with the

oral tradition were much more down to earth and far less romantic than any Hollywood style imaginings.

> I grew up in an environment of sitting around and telling stories out in front of my grandparents' house. There was a big old Willow tree and a couple of chairs and fire pit and we'd sit there. I'm not talking oral tradition in terms of Nanabush legends or "legends - of - my - people" or that type of thing, but more stories about funny things that had happened in the community, just talking into the night - I think that's where I got my concept of oral narrative and also the structure of humor, and the structure of how to write, because, you know, a good story has a simple structure. It has a set up, it has the middle, and has the ending. And that is the basis of any play, any novel, any essay, anything. A beginning, a middle, and an end. It sounds so simple ... where does your story start? Where does it end, and how does it get there? And so, by deconstructing any good story or any good joke that's told by a half - decent joke teller, you have the structure you need for, I'd say 80 percent of all good writing. Boy, it almost sounds like I know I'm talking about. Can I get one of those honorary degrees? (Moffat and Tait 81-80)

Taylor's references in the above quote invariably call attention to typically Western theatrical constructs at their earliest roots. The structures of these roots were of course delineated largely by Aristotle and his Poetics (and later by Freytag and his triangle). A problem that arises in comparing Taylor's aesthetic for comic construction to the dramatic constructs of the Poetics is that Aristotle was writing about the structures of tragedy in its written/literary form, whereas Taylor's work is designed as a blueprint for production and performance rather than as literature. Secondly, though sometimes offering tragic subtext, Taylor's work is far from being tragic in

form and nature. Despite these stumbling points, Aristotle's constructs of conflict, antagonist, protagonist, and catharsis (as well as Freytag's triangle of exposition, rising and falling action, and climax/resolution) are the story-building foundations for much of popular media and theatrical endeavors today. As a result, these are the prevalent elements to which Taylor is referring when he is highlighting differences between Native and non-Native theatrical and storytelling aesthetics. [1]

Taylor's emphasis on a clear beginning, middle, and end would seem to reflect Freytag's construction, yet Taylor notes two key elements which, in his perception, separate a Native theatrical/storytelling sensibility from that of a European construct: conflict and community. Taylor notes that a significant element which serves to individualize a Native aesthetic from a European one is first of all,

> The lack of all-consuming conflict ... there's no fight, there's no argument, there's no conflict really. The characters are given an objective, they achieve it, and they go on. And that is the basis of a lot of traditional Native legends. (Taylor "Storytelling" 3 - 4)

To illustrate this contrast, Taylor refers back to Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters:

> The Rez Sisters is about a group of women going to Toronto to participate in the world's biggest bingo game. They do that, then come back. There's no big fight, there's no big car chase, there's no big conflict per se. There's squabbling - but you know; there's squabbling in everyday life - but not in terms of European conflict: it's not like Shakespeare, where there's a sword fight and everybody dies. Hell of a way to resolve a story. (Taylor "Storytelling" 3)

[1] For more on Aristotle and the Poetics see Baxter. For more on Freytag, see Dukore; also Freytag.

As a result of the distinctly Native/non--conflict--based structure employed in the Rez Sisters, Highway experienced a difficult time getting the play produced. According to Taylor, "every artistic director he showed it to said, 'nobody cares about a group of seven women wanting to play bingo,' and, 'there's no drama in the story.' … What they were saying is that European drama, by and large is based on conflict. The story progresses through conflict, information is perceived through conflict - that is the Western dramatic structure - this is the opposite of Native theatre" (Taylor "Storytelling" 3).

There are those that might take exception to Taylor's interpretation that European/non-Native theatre is based largely on conflict. For example, William Archer, in his work Play-Making, recognizes the importance of conflict as an ingredient in the theatre but argues against the emphasis of conflict's centrality to Western works for the stage. Rather, Archer posits the primary focus of the non-Native/European theatre as one built more around "concentration" and "crisis" in the theatrical "presentment of culminating points of existence" (Dukore 666). As evidence of his assertions, Archer offers discussion of classic works by the Greeks, as well as Shakespeare and Ibsen. (Dukore 664-665). Despite the persuasive nature of Archer's arguments, his ideas remain largely in the shadows of the modern prevalence of conflict-centered works for the popular screen, television, and stage. Taylor is drawing his ideas about conflict (in his comparisons of native and non-Native theatre), from his readings of these contemporary forms of entertainment.

To understand the Native roots of theatrical focus and structure, Taylor directs his readers towards social and historical considerations, referring back to the community--based organization of most Native groups, a structure which was inevitably mirrored in their storytelling techniques and constructions:

> Stories were told in small family groupings. They'd be broken up in family groupings during the winter because it was easier to feed a small group of people than a large group of people. So you have these people living in close quarters, and if somebody had a problem, if somebody was angry, if somebody wanted to make a very aggressive point about something, it was discouraged and frowned upon because it would infringe upon the harmony and therefore the potential survival of the community. Overt or aggressive conflict was actively and urgently discouraged within the family or social group - and that manifests itself within the stories. A lot of the traditional legends are more narrative than dramatic ... in the overall spectrum, conflict was discouraged within our community, and our stories reflect that. (Taylor “Storytelling” 3)

Of note here is Taylor's distinction between "squabbling" and the level of dramatic conflict which generally drives Western theatrical constructs. Native culture, despite non-Native cultural depictions to the contrary, was <u>not</u> an idyllic existence absent of interpersonal conflict. As a whole, it is wise to assume that conflict did certainly exist within most, if not all, Native cultures; it was simply handled in a different fashion. Unlike a largely repressive Western, non-Native, non-community-based culture where issues of conflict were generally swept under the rug until they exploded into a battle which continued until a winner or dominant player emerged (a process largely reflected in Western theatre). In contrast, Native culture largely attempted to deal with disagreements in a manner which maintained the interest and the survival of the community as a central concern.

Likewise, the Native concern for community over the individual carried over, as mentioned earlier by Taylor, into the content and structure of their stories, which often contained

disagreements and “squabbles”. As Taylor point out, this presence of "squabbling" without dramatic conflict is highly evident in Highways work, but also in Taylor's efforts as well.

As a result of a lack of coherent central conflict or character, Taylor reports that when Native playwrights first brought their works for production consideration by largely non-Native theatre companies in Canada, they encountered significant resistance. Here he reports how one non-Native artistic director resisted these new plays:

> [They] Didn’t know how to handle this different way of telling a story. I have a play called Someday, which is about the “scoop up”- when Native children were taken away for adoption by the Children’s Aid Society during the 1950’s to 1980’s. It was produced in Montreal. When I was first trying to interest the artistic Director in producing my play, he said that the structure was against everything he was taught about drama. All the information came too easily, everybody gets along too well. He liked the story very much but felt it was missing something. And yet this was the same guy who had produced The Rez Sisters in Montreal. And Larry Lewis, who dramaturged both Someday and The Rez Sisters and later directed both, had a chat with him and explained things. The artistic director then went, “Oh. Yeah, O.K., I see.” (Taylor “Storytelling” 3)

Though Taylor oftentimes refers to the work of Highway as a means of illustrating his points, his own theatrical works differ in how they de-emphasize conflict and re-emphasize community. The following pages will examine examples of Taylor’s works with particular regard to how conflict is given a secondary position within Taylor’s storylines.

Conflict And The Someday Trilogy

In his Someday trilogy [Someday, Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth, and 400 Kilometers], Taylor depicts the efforts of a family attempting to reconcile itself in the aftermath of the Canadian "scoop up" referred to earlier by Taylor. The “scoop up” as it is referred to informally in both the Native and non-Native Canadian communities, was a program in place until the 1960’s which removed, often forcibly, Native children from their homes to be placed for adoption with non-Native families. As Albert-Reiner Glaap elaborates, “In Saskatchewan the programme was called AIM (Adopt Indian Metis); there was a backlog of Native children in the system. The central idea was to take children out of their culture so that they would become part and parcel of the white Canadian culture” (Glaap 224).

In the back story leading up to the events of Taylor’s script, a mother (Anne) was in the past accused of being unable to care for her child due to the fact that the child's father had long ago abandoned the family. As a result, the infant (Grace, later Janice) was removed from her arms and given up for adoption to an unknown, non-Native family. In truth, the husband had not abandoned the family but had enlisted in the Army in order to earn income to care for his family, but asked Anne to keep his enlistment a secret out of fear of losing his tribal status as a consequence of leaving the reserve. Anne, true to her word, carried this secret, along with the details of her eldest daughter’s removal from her home, carried the secret to her grave.

This element alone in Taylor’s trilogy would, in a western format, be enough to provide fodder and driving force for the majority of the story, with the character of the mother (Anne) depicted as a tormented soul, torn between preserving a secret she swore to keep for her husband, and the desire for her lost daughter to know the truth as to why she had been torn from her arms. In a typically Western construct, the audience’s attention would be focused by the playwright

upon Anne, and this secret may appear again and again, tormenting the conflicted mother, who might drop hints to her daughters of a terrible and dark secret she was withholding, leading to concern and consternation on their part, driving the action of the play forward.

In Taylor's entire trilogy however, there is little evidence of any such guilty secret, only a loving mother (Anne) who has never given up hope of seeing her daughter again and setting the world aright. However, in Taylor's work, this potential for conflict is left alone textually throughout the entirety of his three plays, with the details revealed only by a dreamed conversation between Anne and her lost daughter Janice/Grace in the last few moments of the final segment of Taylor's trilogy, 400 Kilometers.

By choosing to focus upon a single family as well as by underplaying the conflicts inherent within the situation, Taylor brings a nearly incomprehensible and overwhelming assault on Native peoples to a fathomable scale, beginning with Someday. The story opens shortly after news stories have announced that Anne and her younger daughter Barb have won the Canadian lottery. Through these news releases, Janice/Grace, an entertainment lawyer living in Toronto, learns of Anne and her whereabouts. Upon discovering the location of her birthmother (Anne), Janice (christened Grace before her removal from Anne's custody) returns to the Reserve and her birth home for an uneasy Christmas time reunion. Taylor's situation is rife with potential conflict. Yet just when tension begins to build, and a confrontation between Barb (Anne's second daughter) and Janice seems to be imminent, Taylor has Janice/Grace, overwhelmed by the situation, beat a hasty retreat from the house. She leaves behind a sadly disappointed family, and herself confused and unfulfilled. By not giving rein to the potential for conflict within his scenario, Taylor ends his play on a note of emptiness rather than that of resolution, leaving the audience to feel a sense of the loss and disappointment, and the empty heartbreak of a Mother

and daughter longing for reunion and reconnection to a part of their identity long brushed under the carpet and believed to be lost.

In his second installation of the three part story, Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth, Taylor allows the tensions between Barb and Janice/Grace to come to the forefront a bit more, where they actually do reach the "squabbling" phase he approaches earlier. That said, the arguments and tension never overshadow the story as they might in a western drama of a similar vein. In the first act of Drunks, Barb arrives in Toronto accompanied by Rodney (her boyfriend), and Tonto (longtime friend of Barb and Rodney's and soon to be love interest of Janice). With Janice not at home, they proceed to break into her apartment, waiting for her arrival in order to bring her back to the Reserve to say goodbye to her recently deceased birth mother, a woman Janice has only known for a very few short hours of her adult life. By the second act the trio has managed to bring Janice/Grace back to the Reserve home that was the setting for Someday. In this environment, the aforementioned tension between Barb and Janice is present, but not overwhelming, until finally emerging in a hilarious, extended scene where Barb purposefully gets Janice drunk. Barb manages to get Janice to open up, a step in the right direction towards saying farewell to Anne. Despite the tension between the two, conflict within the scene is kept at a minimum, dispelled by wry comments and a self conscious sense of humour:

> (Barb hands Janice her mug of wine. Janice reads the mug.)
>
> **Janice.** "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." (She reads the opposite side of the mug) "provided you're not dead already." That's uplifting.
>
> **Barb.** A birthday present from Rodney. Sorry, no fancy wine glasses, but I do have some Tupperware, if you -
>
> **Janice.** This will be fine. You actually brought me up here to get me drunk?

Barb. And say good - bye to Mom. (With the physical gesture, she urges her to drink)

Janice. I'm having a problem understanding this. If Anne was against drinking in this house, then -

Barb. Why all this? Mom used to say, "God works in mysterious ways, and so does Barb." Why should the mystery stop with Mom's being gone? You know, you've really got to quit asking why. Especially when it comes to hospitality.

Janice. Please, I've had this lecture.

Barb. Tonto?

Janice. The same. Quite an interesting man. Has he ever been to University?

Barb. He painted the residences at Trenton University one summer, but that's about it. That's our Tonto.

Janice. He could do better if he really applied himself... Rodney, too.

Barb. Don't underestimate Rodney. He's taken more university and college courses than there are pearls in your necklace. They're both kind of the same. They just learn what they want to know, then move on.

Janice. Some would consider that a waste of time and money.

Barb. Not everybody wants to be a lawyer. Some people are happy being who they are.

Janice. What if who they are is a lawyer?

Barb. Then God help them. Cheers. (Taylor Drunks 242)

Several exchanges similar to this occur later, as topics covered range from love lives, lottery winnings, and the true location of Amelia Earhart. The underlying tension occasionally surfaces,

only to be quickly dispelled by Taylor through humor, beat changes, and Barb's insistences that Janice continue drinking.

Eventually conflict does finally erupt, albeit briefly: During the course of a lesson on Ojibway culture for Janice's benefit, Barb, now severely drunk, accuses Janice of causing their mother's death and Janice (fairly restrained up to this point) abruptly punches Barb, sending her sprawling. Before the physical altercation gets out of hand, however, Taylor brings Rodney and Tonto in to investigate the commotion, only to be uncharacteristically shouted down by a indignant and equally drunk Janice:

> **Janice.** (Yelling) Get out!
>
> (Startled, the boys quickly do as they're told. Barb picks herself up slowly).
>
> (Taylor Drunks 257)

Surprised by this unexpected reaction, Tonto and Rodney, inevitably the comic relief in much of the script, stumble over each other to escape Janice's apparent wrath, but not before breaking the tension of the scene significantly. Janice however, not to be swayed from her course (and her Western upbringing in regards to anger and conflict) appears unwilling to give over so easily:

> **Janice.** I am so sorry for Anne's death, but I'm not responsible for what happened to her. I can't be. I can't handle more guilt. Why do you think I didn't want to come here? I've got scars of my own. I know I walked out of here, and I have to live with that fact. You don't think I realize that she's gone and that I'll never know what kind of woman she was or what could have happened between us? I grew up wanting to hate this woman, thinking my whole life was her fault. That's

why I ran out of this house. I was all prepared to dislike and pity some old Indian woman that lost me because of alcohol. Instead, I find this wonderful, sweet, caring woman that had her baby taken away by the system for no good reason. A baby she loved and thought to get back. I began to feel it all. I started to care, Barb, but I didn't want to care. If I care, I'll realize what I've lost.

Barb. Mom always said you couldn't miss something you never had.

Janice. She was wrong.

Barb. I guess. Grace, you're all I've got left.

Janice. I thought you didn't like me.

Barb. My brothers dead, my father, my mother. I'm an orphan. I don't want to be alone.

Janice. You've got Rodney.

Barb. It's not the same.

Janice: No, I guess it isn't. I don't feel well.

Barb. Neither do I.

Janice. Oh, you're poor face. What did I do? (Taylor Drunks 258)

Any remainder of potential conflict is immediately extinguished as Barb then proceeds to pass out. Janice, left alone, has no one to fight with but herself, and is finally reduced to tears after opening a Christmas present from her birth mother, left unopened since her last visit. Janice then quickly follows Barb's lead, and passes out as well.

In Western structures, following the well established pattern of rising actions, climaxes and falling actions leading to a resolution, such a scene would have built steadily until it erupted into a full-scale blowout, ideally giving the audience some sense of identification and dramatic

resolution. In Taylor's hands, however, any tension built up through the course of the scene is repeatedly dissipated, until (despite the fisticuffs and Janice's tirade) the entire scene ends with a fizzle and the literal thud of Janice's drunken, overwhelmed head upon the table as she passes out (Taylor Drunks 239 - 259).

In the final scene of Taylor's Drunks, which in Western dramatic constructs would which results in release and resolution, Janice and the trio of friends visit Anne's grave in order for Janice to say farewell. Taylor however, supplies only a minimum of resolution, as Janice/ Grace tells her mother:

> JANICE: Growing up in the home I did, looking the way I do, the schools I went to, the jokes I heard. I had to blame somebody. I feel so ashamed. You were so kind to me, so nice. And all I wanted was evidence, proof to justify my anger. And there you were, so sweet and excepting. My whole life fell away. Every thing I had wanted to believe was gone because of you. That made me even more angry. I hate myself now. I'm tired of being angry. I'm tired of mistrusting you. I'm tired of everything. I just don't want to fight it anymore. I'm sorry, you deserve better... (Taylor Drunks 263)

In a typically Western construction, this scene would have restored calm after a climactic moment of disorder. However, given Taylor's aesthetic, such is not the case. In the final scene at Anne's graveside, Janice says words of farewell to her mother. As she turns to leave, she takes one more look at her mother's grave and speaks:

> (She sees a Daisy growing off to the side. She picks it and gently places it against the headstone.)
>
> **Janice.** Co-Waabmem, Mom, From your daughter, Grace.

(Janice walks towards the car, exiting, the lights go down.)

End of Play. (Taylor Drunks 263)

In that final moment, in that final line of Taylor's script, Janice accepts just a bit more her birth name of Grace, and one assumes her blood family and heritage, as her own. She turns from her Mother's grave towards her new found friends (and sister) in a moment that should feel full of resolution and peacefulness. However, a sense of incompletion hangs over the entire final moments. Barb and Janice both achieved their objectives, reconciliation with a lost family, and the farewell of a lost daughter to a mother who never stopped loving her. Yet, by dispelling any conflict to its bare minimum, including the short-lived physical confrontation between Barb and Janice, Taylor's de-emphasis on conflict leaves this scene of resolution incomplete. Despite the completion of Barb's goal, despite the words of reconciliation, it becomes apparent that the real ending is beyond the close of the script, unwritten. Many of the loose ends (in regards to identity and relationship) remain untied and unraveled, and once again, the audience is left contemplating the enormity of the task ahead. It could be argued that this lack of resolution pushes the audience to make their own empathetic connections to Taylor's story as well as the ideally larger, far reaching, long term effects of the scoop up.

Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth is the second in a trilogy; an argument could be made that Taylor is saving all the conflictual fireworks for the final installments. The first act of Taylor's 400 Kilometers is a veritable garden of Eden for potential conflict. In the first pages of the story, Janice arrives at the London, Ontario, home of her adoptive parents, Lloyd and Theresa Wirth. The Wirths are an upper class, retired couple, who emigrated to Canada from jolly old England in their younger years. The Wirths, a nice enough, old English couple are the perfect

suggestion of the non-Native heritage of Canada and all that could be potentially wrong on the non-Native side of the fence.

Act I opens sometime after the events of Drunks, finding Janice in an even greater sense of confusion. It is soon revealed that she is pregnant as a result of her romance with Tonto and has run away from her home in Toronto to seek some clarity, only to discover that her parents are planning to sell her childhood home in order to see out the rest of their retirement in England. Her parents, by voicing well intentioned concerns with her choice in boyfriends, create tension in Janice regarding her Native/non-Native identity and her resulting relationships. To complicate matters further, a concerned Tonto shows up on the doorstep, after which Janice confesses to Tonto that she has recently begun to have continual dreams about her Native mother (Anne). She nearly miscarries at the very moment she is attempting to tell Tonto she is carrying their child. The first act ends with a trip to the emergency room for all involved, accompanied by barely controlled pandemonium on all fronts. Despite these emotional scenes, no clear guiding conflict emerges to shape the action. No conflict has been brought to center stage as the prime focus of Taylor's script.

The second act opens with a greatly relieved Janice returning home, with baby safe, and family and boyfriend fussing over her tremendously. This act is also filled with potential conflicts (including the subjects of urban vs. reserve status for the new family, cultural genocide, cultural education and adoption, language and authenticity, identity and the adult child desired individually, overly attentive parents, cultural ignorance and assumption, and many other topics all rear their heads). Again, while each one of these topics by themselves could justifiably be exploded into a full-blown traditional (western) theatrical conflict (each loaded enough to carry

an entire script on its own), Taylor never once allows any of them to ever expand fully into the maelstrom of conflict most western audiences would expect.

Even when a full-blown argument threatens to erupt over the repercussions of the "scoop up" and more specifically, Tonto's doubts as to whether the Wirths qualify as capable parents of an adopted Native child, Taylor dissipates the conflict: Tonto is quickly ejected from the house for his "rude" behavior by Theresa. He is then pursued in short order by Janice, who upon hearing of her love's ejection, leaves the house to bring him back.

Janice returns some time later, rain soaked, angry, and none too eager to be placated easily. After coaxing from her parents, she finally agrees to a nap. With fireworks surely on the horizon, Taylor refuses to villainize the Wirths. Just as he refused to bow to stereotype and portray Anne as a genuinely unfit mother, Taylor portrays the Wirths as well-meaning, thoughtful, capable and loving parents, who, like most parents, find themselves questioning whether they have done quite enough in the raising of their child:

> **Lloyd.** She's a smart girl.
>
> **Theresa.** I think we can take credit for that, DNA or no DNA.
>
> (There is a pause, a beat.)
>
> **Theresa.** I was thinking, while she was gone... I don't actually know a lot about Native people. Other than the obvious.
>
> **Lloyd.** I know. There weren't a lot of them in corporate law either. I think it may have met one of the golf club once but I'm not sure. It didn't come up in conversation. What should we do?
>
> **Theresa.** I don't know. (Taylor 400 102)

In the scene immediately following, the Wirths return from lunch, armed with a salad for Janice, who has been on the phone searching for clues as to Tonto's whereabouts. In a surprising move, before any further argument with her parents' actions unfolds, they present her with a gift:

> **Theresa.** While we were out, we picked you up something.
>
> (They hand her a large picture - type book.)
>
> **Janice.** "A Pictorial History of the Indians of Canada". Wow, the entire history of aboriginal Canada in two hundred and thirty seven pages. They must have left out Oka. Why did you get me this?
>
> **Lloyd.** Janice, when was The Battle of Hastings?
>
> **Janice.** 1066. Why?
>
> **Lloyd.** Who won it?
>
> **Janice.** William the Conqueror.
>
> **Theresa.** Who signed the Magna Carta?
>
> **Janice.** King John. Is there a specific point to this test?
>
> **Lloyd.** Your mother and I were talking over lunch and, well, we came to the conclusion that perhaps Tonto wasn't entirely incorrect in his assessment.
>
> **Theresa.** So we stopped off and bought you this book.
>
> **Lloyd.** And the snack.
>
> **Theresa.** It was hard to pick one out. Do you know how many books are out there written about Native people? Dozens! Even hundreds. I was amazed.
>
> (Taylor 400 106-107)

The elder Wirths' awakening to their daughter's cultural roots (and their own as well), are interrupted. A soggy and nervous Tonto appears in the driveway of the Wirth home, singing a Native song:

> **Theresa.** Is that man...singing...in the rain?
>
> **Janice.** I think it's a 49er.
>
> **Theresa.** A what?
>
> **Janice.** It's a type of song they sing it powwows. It can also be considered a courting song.
>
> (Janice quickly opens the door, revealing a nervous, soaked Tonto, with a small knapsack, still singing.)
>
> **Tonto.** "When you are far away,
>
> I think of you.
>
> You're beautiful to me.
>
> Hey Yah. Hey Yah."
>
> **Janice.** You're soaking. Where have you been?
>
> **Tonto.** Mardi Gras.
>
> **Janice.** Get in here. Are you insane?
>
> (Janice physically pulls him inside the house.)
>
> (Taylor 400 108-109)

Taylor's script, following Tonto's reappearance, avoids conflict. But again, Taylor immediately dissipates any conflict by not allowing any of his characters to dig in their heels and justify their arguments in confrontational tones. Instead, Tonto unexpectedly takes control, by

stepping out of stereotype and describing an epiphany he experienced while watching a matinee performance of Shaw's Antony and Cleopatra:

> **Tonto.** What I got out of this cool story of people from different cultures getting together, is that I had forgotten my own teachings. I have been taught that in the end there will be not just Native and non-Native, we will all be one people, one race. And here I was, subdividing the people in this house. I was wrong for doing that. I guess the thing I got me most was that Caesar and Cleopatra had a baby. At that point the gods were shouting in my ear. Granted they were forty years apart in age but the symbolism still works I think. In my eagerness to share what we, the Ojibway, have, I sometimes, unfortunately step on other cultural toes, which is wrong. You took this beautiful little girl, and gave her a good home and a place to grow. I cannot find fault with that. Nor should I. My problem is I have seen a lot of Native children raised in homes that pale by comparison to yours. When you spend a lifetime hearing and healing horror stories, you tend to believe all the stories have an undercoating of pain, regardless of how nice the environment may seem. I had no right to inflict my prejudices on you. Especially as a guest in your house. My mother would've whacked me upside my head of she were here. (Taylor 400 111-112)

Following his apology, Tonto offers the Wirths' a version of the sacred pipe (in the form of an English smoking pipe) in order to demonstrate his genuine apology, then offers a number of gifts in order to prove his positive intentions regarding their daughter. In all fairness, Taylor also allows an apology to emerge from the Anglo-Saxon corner, as the Wirths, finally able to get a word in edgewise over the ebullient Tonto, offer their own thoughts:

Lloyd. A noble endeavor, my boy. But I'm afraid you have us at a disadvantage. [Referring to the gifts Tonto brought with him]

Tonto. That's not necessary...

Theresa. But it is. We English are capable of our own epiphanies too.

Lloyd. While we still maintain we did all we could to give Janice a proper upbringing...

Theresa. Perhaps we could've been a little more culturally sensitive. We did however have all the James Fennimore Cooper novels.

Tonto. (to Janice)**:** Is that good?

Janice. It's a beginning. (Taylor 400 115-116)

Then, in the spirit of exchange inspired by Tonto, Lloyd and Theresa give the couple a photo album containing pages filled with Janice/Grace's baby photos. With apologies made by both the Native and non-Native factions, and the promise of a steak and kidney pie waiting offstage, Lloyd and Theresa, with a final fart joke, break any remaining tension between the four, and take their leave. Left to their own devices, Tonto and Janice quickly reach their own accord. All that remains is a reconciliation with Janice and her blood mother, still inhabiting her dreams. Throughout the production, Anne can be seen in various locations throughout the theatre and stage, with each appearance bringing her physically closer and closer to Janice. In a monologue that closes the show, Anne, standing immediately behind Janice/Grace, tells her the circumstances surrounding her removal from her birthparents' home. Janice finds herself finally able to embrace both herself and her birthmother.

In the end, a daughter finds her to love and home (both literally and figuratively), a family is reborn, friendships are cast, and no climactic battles or confrontations were ever

allowed to develop beyond the occasional flare up of emotions. Throughout the work there emerges plenty of squabbling, misspoken criticisms, and assumptions asserted and corrected, but never a full-scale, fully developed, narrative driving conflict.

Of particular interest here, in consideration of the Imagined Indian, is Taylor's inclusion of the Wirths in the apology process and the ordering and structure of those apologies. Significantly it should be noted that a nervous and drenched Tonto (the Native male typically romanticized as savage, noble, and stoic), proves quite insightful and sincere as he offers his apology. Secondly, by foregrounding Tonto's re-entrance as an interruption of Lloyd and Theresa's own apology to Janice, Taylor offers center stage to Tonto, whose story of his Antony and Cleopatra epiphany is both eloquent and occupies a significant amount of dialogue in Taylor's normally rapid-fire scenes. Tonto's gifts to the Wirths are considered and planned out, whereas the Wirths apology is brief; their gift, while appropriate and genuine, is much more a result of Tonto's initial actions than any forethought on their part. As a result of all these components, Taylor, while still maintaining the Wirths as a vital and contributing presence to his story, offers center stage to a distinctly Native perspective.

In lesser hands, such a storyline as that which comprises Taylor's Someday trilogy might emerge as a love fest of sorts, a disingenuous "we can all get along as one" scenario. But with careful construction and timing, including a plethora of well-placed one-liners and self-aware punch lines, Taylor crafts a story which avoids unnecessary and over-the-top melodramatics, yet manages to tell a part of the story of "the scoop up" and its long-reaching ramifications in an accessible, emotionally affecting manner. The trilogy ends, resolves if you will, not with a hero vindicated and elevated (nor a villain deposed and despise) but a family joined. By personalizing his story, bringing it to the level of one family's efforts to comprehend the nearly

incomprehensible, and refusing to engage in conflictual accusation, finger-pointing, glamorizing or villainizing, Taylor manages to grasp the far-reaching enormity of one culture's actions against another without oversimplifying, generalizing, or offering easy answers. Most importantly, partly by de-emphasizing conflict in favor of effective humor and good storytelling, Taylor deftly manages to avoid alienating an audience of primarily non-Natives. He invites them to take a longer first (and second) look at the issues facing Native and non-Native alike in the aftereffects of assimilationist policies like the scoop up.

Story ala Community

A second element which serves to differentiate Native Story/theatrical construction from that of typically western forms is a distinct lack of a hierarchy of characters within Native stories themselves. Instead of focusing on the dynamic between the hero and the foil character, antagonist and protagonist, Native stories, according to Taylor, largely focus upon a group as a whole. To illustrate his point, Taylor once again refers us to the works of Highway, noting:

> One of the things that Tomson does with his work is again part of the Native consciousness: no one person is any more important than any other person in the community. There is no central character in The Rez Sisters. You've got seven women and a Trickster figure, all of equal importance, all with an equal story. And again, a lot of people are not used to that. They are used to, you know, Hamlet at the center of the story, or whatever. A protagonist and an antagonist. But each of these women has her own story, and they're all of equal weight and equal strength within the context of the play. The same with Dry Lips Oughtta Move to Kapuskasing. All seven men are equally relevant to the story. (Taylor "Storytelling" 4)

In the previous chapter I cited Thomas King's identification of a communal or group focus as an important distinguishing feature of Native Associational Literature. King describes Native Associational Literature as "creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favor of members of a community, a fiction that eschews judgments and conclusions" (King 14). Similarly, as noted earlier, Taylor also identifies this quality of communal focus as a "part of the Native consciousness: no person is any more important than any other person in the community" (Taylor "Storytelling" 4).

Whether it be with his adult comedy/drama of a dinner party gone horribly awry (alterNatives), or his work for young audiences (i.e. the Girl Who Loved her Horses, or Toronto at Dreamers Rock), Taylor largely adheres to this structure in his theatrical work. With the exception of an early agit-prop experiment for young audiences (Education is our Right, a spoof of Dickens's Christmas Carol, where Taylor casts the Canadian Minister of Education in a Scrooge-like, villainous role), Taylor's plays purposefully avoid a typically Western construct of hero/villain-protagonist/antagonist relationships. Instead of using one or two pivotal players to drive the action of the story, Taylor employs a small group of individuals, equally weighted within the story, to tell his tales. The result is a scenario where a small group of characters, each with their own objectives in mind, come together in a common scenario or activity. While each character and their various degrees of relationship to the other characters will occasionally take center stage from time to time, no single relationship takes a central focus for the entirety of Taylor's scripts; instead, each story, each character, comes together equally in the work to influence the larger scenario as a whole.

Allowing equal emphasis and importance for each character requires a delicate balance not always readily apparent in Taylor's work. On the one hand, too much attention to one

situation or one character, and focus upon a community scenario is quickly overshadowed by the individual. Similarly, if characters and their contributions to the overall scenario are not clearly drawn, the script runs the risk of becoming muddied and confusing to audiences. Taylor avoids both pitfalls by keeping his casts relatively small and his storylines played out quickly and clearly (but not necessarily obviously).

Occasionally Taylor will insert a character device that would, in Western frames, serve to shift away from the communal to a more individual focus, such as in Someday, when he employs Rodney as a narrator/commentator for his story, or in 400 Kilometers, when Taylor brings Anne back from the grave as a dream/spirit commentator. Both are placed by Taylor slightly outside the action and in a more direct relationship with the audience: Rodney by his direct asides to the audience; Anne by her role as spirit, emphasized by Taylor at the start of the play by his placing her directly in the audience. In non-Native, Western formats, both characters of Rodney and Anne would most likely garner more focus, more pivotal positions in shaping and directing audience perceptions of the events of Taylor's stories. Taylor however, reduces this effect by minimizing his use of Rodney as a commentator, and then often placing him directly in the action when he is not serving as narrator. In doing so, Taylor reduces potential focus upon Anne's relationship with the audience by not having her interact directly with the audience and by gradually bringing her into closer and closer physical proximity to the action onstage as the story progresses, until she finally ends the story in her daughter's arms.

Even when pandemonium and seemingly disparate stories threaten to overshadow his overall storyline, Taylor manages to maintain this balance of the communal over the individual, as illustrated by his work in The Baby Blues. In this play, five characters are brought together at a mid-sized powwow, with each arriving from a particular vantage point within a fairly typical

Powwow community: Amos is an older Mohawk man, filling the elder's role, as he, "travels the Powwow trail dispensing food and wisdom" (Taylor Baby 10). Noble, "an aging fancy dancer" (Taylor 2000, 10), who, while still lacking levels of maturity, is beginning to feel the pangs and pains of middle age. Skunk is a "young and rakish fancy dancer", who, in the prime of his youth, "is everything Noble once was" (Taylor Baby 10). Jenny, a single mother and a fiercely "independent and strong woman who can handle the world" oversees the action as an administrator of the Powwow, and simultaneously holds a tight reign over her daughter Pashik, a seventeen year old younger version of herself "who wants to see the world no matter what her mother says" (Taylor Baby 10). Rounding out the cast in a hilariously limited non-Native presence, is Summer, a rather naïve new age wannabe, who treks to the powwow "seeking knowledge" of her 1/64th Native ancestry, and hoping for some sort of connection with her Native brothers and sisters (not to mention possible extra credit for college)(Taylor Baby 10).

Taylor writes his story with each of the five ostensibly attending the powwow to fulfill various goals: Amos to sell food and dispense knowledge (not unlike a good bartender or barber); Noble and Skunk to compete in the dance competition and test out their testosterone against each other (while obtaining any female companionship either can mange to "snag" along the way); Pashik in search of adventure and acceptance; Summer to ground her overly poetic and mystical self in her Native ancestry, and Jenny to maintain order on the powwow grounds.

As in most good comedy however, things barely go as planned. Summer finds her relationship in the arms of first Skunk and later Amos, who is more than happy (albeit temporarily) to fill the role of both wise elder and boyfriend. As he finds he is not too old to re-enter relationship limbo, Amos offers Noble a partnership in his Native food concession/wisdom business, before inadvertently discovering more of a kinship to Noble than he bargained for, as

Noble turns out to be the son Amos never knew he had from a love long past. Noble meanwhile, has fatherhood issues of his own after discovering Pashik is a daughter he was previously unaware of, the result of a past powwow dalliance with Jenny, whom he recognizes too late to make a clean get away. Jenny confronts Noble and seeks retribution for past child support (or admits she will settle for a father/daughter connection between Pashik and Noble), with Jenny refusing to return various vital parts of Noble's truck engine until he steps up to the plate. Pashik nearly gains more experience of the world than she bargains for before discovering a father and a little patience, and Skunk, barely avoiding the wrath of the newly overprotective father Noble, lives to see another powwow.

Whether their quests are for knowledge, experience, cash, companionship, retribution, or relief, each of Taylor's characters in The Baby Blues receives plenty of attention and action upon the stage. However, no single character manages to divert enough attention from Taylor's plot to drive the story from his/her particular vantage point. Instead, the loosely related characters are drawn closer and closer together through their various interactions, until finally discovering and forming (both literally and figuratively) a community family, each member an equal and integral contributor to both the tumult and the partial resolution of the chaos in Taylor's story. As a result, what emerges is not a simple character study of an individual, engaged in a hero's journey of comic discovery, but a humorous, nearly tangled collection of desires, assumptions, and discoveries, all joining together to portray a multi-faceted, multi-layered script where an entire community, rather than one or two individuals, finds themselves coming of age.

Laughter is Transitional: The Trouble is In Getting Them To Laugh…

This section will focus upon Taylor's experiences with bringing Native centered stories and comedy to his largely non-Native audiences. In particular, this section will highlight details

Taylor's initial experiences in producing his first full length comedy, The Bootlegger Blues and his audiences initially hesitant reactions to the piece. The first installment of what later came to be known as his "Blues Quarter," The Bootlegger Blues premiered at De Be Jeh Mu Jig Theatre Group on Manitoulin Island on August 2nd 1990.[2] The story, like Taylor's later The Baby Blues, occurs over a powwow weekend. The characters include Martha, a "58-year-old, good Christian Ojibway woman" and her daughter Marianne, a former wild child and currently an employee of the local tribal office (Taylor Bootlegger 90). Also included in the mix are David, Marianne's uptight common-law husband, a tribal administrator who works in the same offices as Marianne (Taylor describes David as "an Indian yuppie") (Taylor Bootlegger 15); Andrew (also known as Blue), Martha's youngest, a college student soon to become a special tribal constable; Angie, a friend of Marianne's and a potential love interest for Blue; and finally, Noble, in this manifestation a younger version of himself and visiting fancy dancer/lothario who threatens David's relationship with Marianne by tempting her to cast off responsibilities and join him on the powwow circuit.

Martha, in a grand attempt at raising money for a new church organ, follows some bad advice and illegally purchases some 143 cases of beer which she plans to sell at the powwow (Somewhere down the line Martha forgot that beer and powwows do not mix as alcohol is uniformly banned at such events). Stuck with a veritable wall of beer in her son's bedroom, Martha sets off to sell the beer on the reserve, naively unaware that this is highly illegal; simply put, Martha becomes a bootlegger. Meanwhile her children's romantic entanglements also pick up pace with Marianne casting off David in pursuit of Noble, and Blue struggling to contain his overwhelming desire for Angie, who he mistakenly believes to be a blood cousin (therefore making any sort of intimate relationship with her taboo).

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[2] Taylor's quartet, as yet unfinished, contains two other "Blues" titles: The Baby Blues and The Buz'Gem Blues.

The story of The Bootlegger Blues unfolds at a fairly rapidly as beer sells, Martha frets, the daughter runs off with the equivalent of an itinerant rock musician, cousins discover they are less related then previously believed, and the back garden reveals another potential bootlegging nightmare for Martha and her family. In recalling the origins of his play, Taylor says it was "not exactly Sam Shepard" (Taylor Furious 90), and that

> there were no searing insights into the aboriginal existence, or tragic portrayals of a culture - done - wrong - by that we have come to expect on the stage. In fact, it was the opposite of that ... my mentor, Larry Lewis came to me one day after having just directed the premiere of ... Dry Lips Ought to Move to Kapuskasing. He was somewhat burned-out by the process and said to me "Drew, I want you to write something for me that has people leaving the theatre holding their sore stomachs from laughing so much, not drying their eyes from crying or scratching their heads from thinking too much." Thus was born The Bootlegger Blues . (Taylor Furious 90)

Despite the levels of political and cultural concern inherent in his work, Taylor often refers to his Blues plays as having no overall motive other than to generate laughter. With the initial responses to the opening of The Bootlegger Blues positive, Taylor had begun to make a step in that direction.

According to Taylor, Bootlegger Blues was the first, “full scale Native comedy” produced in Canada (Dawes 16-17). However, comic success was not a guaranteed thing for Taylor and company. While waiting for the play to open, Taylor admits that

> we were scared, because we didn't know if it would be funny - we didn't know if people would appreciate it, because up until that time, the vast majority of Native

> plays were dark, angry, and accusatory toward the white population. Here we were, daring to do something funny, something that dealt with bootlegging in a humorous context, and we just did it ... and people really enjoyed it because it just of got rid of the doom and gloom about being Native. (Dawes 16 - 17)

After a successful run on Manitoulin Island, in front of a relatively aware and culturally mixed audience, The Bootlegger Blues set off to tour Ontario for two months, where Taylor discovered a much different reaction to his piece.

As an example of these reactions, Taylor cites his experiences with the show's run in Port Dover, Ontario - a small town on Lake Erie. In Port Dover, he recalls that

> Most of the pallid theatre patrons sported white or blue - rinsed hair, and were expecting normal summer theatre epitomized by frothy British comedies or usually mindless musicals. While my humble offering was a comedy (though I hesitate to say mindless), it wasn't the type they were expecting .... A wall of beer, two Indians climbing into the same bed, and a veritable plethora of jokes about alcohol and drinking from a race of people most of the audience more than likely associated with drunkenness didn't make the situation any more accessible and a touch uncomfortable.
>
> But what I remember most was the white audiences' puzzled reaction to the show. It had a talented cast, and a fabulous director. Overall, it was a very good production. You'd never know by the audience response. The first ten or fifteen minutes of the play was silence. All you could hear was the cast trying vainly to engage the audience, and the audiences' breathing. For all the cast's enthusiasm, this could have been a murder mystery. (Taylor Furious 91 - 92)

Taylor found himself puzzled by the audience response, or, better said, the lack thereof. He found himself at first doubting the merits of his writing, then in his material, finally the production itself. Yet the show had already proven successful on Manitoulin Island, not to mention the fact that audience members were staying rather than stomping out of the theatre, dissatisfied, during the course of the show. In fact, the production, according to Taylor, "beat the projection for audience attendance. By several important percents. So, obviously the people must have liked it" (Taylor Furious 92 - 93).

Finally, Taylor came to the conclusion that the problem wasn't him, his material, or his cast, but the audience This conclusion was confirmed for him as he overheard one audience member exiting the performance, say to another, "I guess it's funny, but I can't help getting over the fact that if a white man had written that, he'd be in deep trouble"(Taylor Furious 92). With that one overheard comment Taylor realized the lack of response from his non - Native audience was based in hesitancy and fear. With this production emerging in the same year as the release of Dances with Wolves, and with much of the country still reeling from the recent events of Oka, Taylor surmised his non - Native audiences were "looking for permission to laugh at this strange story about oppressed people that political correctness told them not to have their funny bone tickled by "(Taylor Furious 92 - 93).

It could be argued that Taylor's material became a victim of the overly politically sensitive times, not to mention persistent overly unrealistic non-Native expectations. Taylor described audience responses to his work in similar terms.

> Political correctness had invaded my career. Most of the audience were afraid to laugh, or uncomfortable with the prospect of laughing at Native people, regardless of the context. After so many years of being told the miseries and tribulations

> we've gone through, the concept of funny or entertaining (outside the powwow circuit) Aboriginal people was problematic. Other plays had been produced, like Tomson Highway's, had some humor, but were darker or more critical, and it seems that was what the audience was expecting ... perhaps in some way they wanted to feel guilty by what they saw, to be kicked in the ribs by social tragedy their ancestors had cause rather than give into the healing powers of humor. They did not expect Native people to be funny, let alone laugh at themselves. The audience had landed on Mars. (Taylor Furious 92)

Taylor's (and the production's) saving grace throughout this experience was the presence of small groups of various Native people in the audience for each performance, who, as Taylor reports, "needed no permission to laugh, in fact, try and stop them" (Taylor 2002, Funny 93). These Native audience members, albeit small in number, always began what eventually would become a unanimous flood of laughter, eventually opening the floodgates for the rest of the audience to join in and enjoy the comedy. On the whole, the experience, although surely nerve racking for Taylor, the audience, and his cast, seems to have proven cathartic all around. In particular regard to his non - Native audiences for this production, Taylor muses,

> I think part of the catharsis was also sense of relief from the Caucasian patrons that everything they've seen in the media wasn't always true, the fact that Native people worked continually depressed, suppressed, and oppressed. Yes, they found out, they have a sense of humor and a joy for life. (Taylor Furious 93 - 94)

Following the lead of the few Native audience members, Taylor concludes, non - Native audiences soon relaxed and, freed from fears of offending others as a result of their laughter,

were able to accept the spirit of the production. With a collective sigh of relief from cast and audience alike, the whole audience could enjoy the play as one group of diverse origins.

Taylor acknowledges the Native audience member laughter as valuable, not only for putting the non - Native audience at ease, but also as an indication that the show's humor could be successful in both the Native and non-Native communities. To Taylor, The Native audience members' laughter was "laughter of recognition because seldom had this world [of Taylor's play] been seen outside their own kitchen. Other than the rare movie like Powwow Highway, the humorous Indian was a rarely seen, though thoroughly enjoyed, animal. They were used to seeing the tragic, downtrodden and victimized Indian. According to the media, that was the only kind out there" (Taylor Furious 93 - 94).

In the Bootlegger Blues Taylor began his career by encouraging audiences to peek into the living rooms and backyards of Native families. By abandoning the then prevalent somber, overly romanticized, often overly accusatory notion of Native stories and settings in favor of more "conventional" portrayals of Native lives and situations, Taylor allowed Native audience members to get comfortable in their seats, to sit back and have a good belly laugh at both themselves and their neighbors (Native and non-Native alike). They needn't feel the need to be angry, defiant, or live up uncomfortably to an unrealistic expectation or overly romanticized stereotypes. While The Bootlegger Blues did not revive the Native sense of humor, as Nunn originally presumed was Taylor's intent, Taylor did offer it a place to reveal itself in order to receive long overdue notice from the non-Native and Native public.

Through his experiences in Port Dover with this initial production of The Bootlegger Blues, Taylor viscerally encountered the gap in cultural comfort and knowledge "that sometimes exists" (Taylor Furious 90) between Native and non - Native audiences for the first time in

regard to his own writing. By observation (rather than panicked rewrites), Taylor discovered not only the nature of the gap, but the means to bridge that gap by humorously addressing non-Native expectations and Native reality in a non-threatening manner, serving to ease tension, rather than increase it.

Through his sometimes obvious, sometimes stinging, always playful uses of humor, Taylor offers an invitation and access to portions of a Native story to a non-Native audience, much as King describes in his categorization of Native Associational Literature. With Taylor's work, non native audience members, many of whom often eagerly await the opportunity, are offered the invitation to see beyond their own expectations and stereotypes of Native people, as well as beyond their own stereotypical expectations of themselves. Equally important, Taylor simultaneously welcomes his Native audience members, endowing their lives with a sense of celebration by normalizing their stories and playfully nudging public notice towards a very diverse, but very present Native sense of life. Within this celebration and exposition of cultural normalcy and humor, Taylor maintains his level of permitted disrespect, unafraid to poke fun at his Native origins and relations as well as their all too human (and therefore inevitable) foibles, maintaining throughout a sense of respect, pride, and love for the subject at hand.

By presenting a de-mystified, non-tragic image of Native stories, characters, and settings on stage, Taylor’s work goes far in providing entertainment for his audiences. Simultaneously, Taylor’s work does double-duty by providing both an education for non-Native audiences and empowerment for Native audiences, recognizing the past and pointing towards a possible future. With a healthy dose of humor, Taylor strives to offer a boost towards the healing necessary in order to reach for that possible future.

Humorous Building Blocks

Though identifying himself as a humorist, Taylor also readily acknowledges a greater comedy writer than himself, saying:

> I'm a firm believer that God, the Creator, Mother Nature, whatever, is a far funnier writer than anything I could ever create. And my only talent is being able to acknowledge that, and read it … my only talent is recognizing that and bringing it up. Not many people realize the humor in the fact that Pocahontas's boyfriend was named John Smith. Would you let your daughter go out with a man who calls himself John Smith? (Moffatt and Tait 83)

As a result of drawing his comic moments from real life and the events that occur daily, Taylor's storylines tend to be based upon the easily recognizable and common-place. Unlike earlier non-Native imaginings of the "Indian" mystique, Taylor's characters display distinctly human and earthbound traits: they wear flannel shirts, drink milk out of the carton while standing in the kitchen in their underwear, eat macaroni and cheese, do naked cartwheels, and exhibit a love for science fiction and country music.

Overall Taylor's humor is light and rarely deeply offensive. His story, settings, and characters are generally straightforward and easily understood. This style has often led Taylor to be referred to as "the Native Neil Simon" (a distinction which Taylor alternately both enjoys and reviles). Alleged commonalities with Neil Simon aside, Taylor readily admits that he has never aspired to creating "high art" with his plays: "People like Daniel David Moses and Tomson Highway, who have, like, Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English Lit., they create what I seriously consider to be art, where every story, every page, has three or four different metaphors, different lines of understanding or subtext. I just see myself as an old - fashioned storyteller"

(Moffat and Tait 79 - 80). In summing up his overall objectives and contributions as a storyteller, Taylor, in a separate interview, adds that "As a Native playwright, I just want to tell some interesting stories with interesting characters to take the audience on a journey. As for my own contribution, I hope that I have provided a window of understanding between Native and non - Native cultures by de- mystifying Native life" (Dawes 17 - 18).

Humor Fills the Gap

Taylor's comedy aesthetic in The Bootlegger Blues resembles the sitcom sensibilities prevalent in popular television. In only 81 pages of dialogue, Taylor offers opportunity for well over 275 puns, word plays, sight gags, and double takes, averaging out to just over three jokes per page. The rhythms and tone of Taylor's humor is the gentle, nudging, occasionally obvious and self - conscious humor of a light farce. When Angie (who reveals herself as unschooled in the ways of the reserve and the powwow), queries Andrew, he responds:

> **Andrew.** You've got a lot to learn about reserve life, Angie White.
>
> **Angie.** Tell me about it. I've been here all day watching the dancers strut their stuff. Only I'm not quite sure what stuff it is their strutting. They don't show this kind of dancing on "Much Music". I don't know anything about this stuff - I wouldn't know a snake dance if it bit me. And a round dance, what the hell is that?
>
> **Andrew.** (TEASING). That's when everybody who's around dances.
>
> **Angie.** Oh, and why do the drummers drum on the ground?
>
> **Andrew.** Because they can't fly.
>
> **Angie.** You're making fun of me. Quit it. It's hard enough around here without you teasing me.

> **Andrew.** Listen, a devious of advice. The entire philosophy of this whole reserve can be boiled down into three letters of the alphabet, B. L. T.
>
> **Angie.** B.L.T?
>
> **Andrew.** Bingo, liquor and tournaments. (Taylor Bootlegger 28 - 29)

While reading Taylor's Bootlegger Blues, one can almost hear the rim shots echoing off theatre walls. Overall, the tone and humor of the play is fairly reflective of Taylor's uses of comedy as a tool to dispel tension and demystify throughout his work.

Though informed by the popular and mass media greatly, Taylor's humor arises from a distinctly Native perspective. In comments reflecting both his community influences and his interest in demystifying portrayals of Natives for greater empathetic understanding, Taylor notes:

> It's always difficult to separate one's self from one's work and one's life, since, for an artist, they are usually intertwined on many levels. I am a product of my community, and my work is a product of me…if nothing else. Perhaps I can, through my work, open a window or a door into that community for the rest of the world. (Glaap 231) [ellipse supplied by Glaap]

Occasionally Taylor's work, especially his humor, takes on (in King's terms) a Tribal Focus, aimed directly toward the Native audience and the few non-Native audience members who might be a bit more aware/informed than the average non-Native theatregoer. In The Bootlegger Blues an example of this tribal based humor takes place when Angie asks Marianne the difference between a tribal special constable and a provincial police officer, to which Marianne replies, "Well, a real cop arrests people, then has a donut. A special constable warns people, then has bannock" (Taylor 1991, 50). Or, as Bootlegger ends, Martha (having discovered her error in figuring Angie as a blood relative) changes her opinion and welcomes Angie to the

family as an acceptable suitor for Andrew, to which Angie replies, “to me scratch,” a rough attempt to speak the Ojibway phrase for “thank you very much.” In a definite play on words, Taylor has Martha correct her by saying, “Ch’meegwetch” (Taylor Bootlegger 85). Despite the relative tribal exclusivity of Taylor’s humor in the above examples, the danger of Taylor’s joke being “lost in translation” is minimal. In the first example, bannock (fry bread) is paired with the general non-Native equivalent of a stereotypical cop’s donut; the second example is supported by the set up of the rhythm and assonance established by Taylor between Angie and Martha’s lines, generating laughter without requiring audience members to fully understand the humor behind the joke.

Though Taylor elects to take on the differences between Native and non-Native people more directly in his subsequent “Blues” plays (The Baby Blues, and The Buz’Gem Blues), there is one instance in Bootlegger that directly points to a disjunction between Native and non-Native perceptions of the world. This moment occurs when Martha and David are speaking, with David still in shock about Marianne’s departure with Noble just moments before:

> **DAVID.** I didn’t think she’d actually do it.
>
> **MARTHA.** In my life I’ve seen two kinds of Indians, those that are happy doing what they are happy doing what they do, those that are happy doing what they do, and those that feel they should be happy but aren’t. I think it’s every person’s journey in life to choose which one they are.
>
> **DAVID.** Where do White people fit in?
>
> **MARTHA.** God only knows. (Taylor Bootlegger 79)

While unable to resist a good natured poke at the non-Natives (Taylor is often accused of having never met a punch line he didn’t like), Taylor resists adopting the obvious strategy of continually

pointing out the differences which separate Native and non-Native peoples, thereby presenting yet another opportunity for further alienation. Instead, in The Bootlegger Blues, as in the majority of his other work for the theatre, Taylor chooses to address/ portray elements of commonality, such as the mating dance and rituals that surround sex.

It has often been said that sex and the machinations of the human animal around the idea and activity of sex is one of the few things all human beings have in common. The subject of sex (attraction and relationship) is unavoidable, and an activity humans are often to be found pursuing, avoiding, longing for, engaging in, recovering from, or repressing our thoughts around. While it is true that Native people are often identified as sexual beings in non-Native portrayals, it is also true that most often, these depictions are crafted entirely out of Native hands, instead composed by non-Native individuals and corporations who present highly idealized, highly objectified personifications. Examples of such depictions are plentiful throughout the ages of popular culture and mass media: think of the long haired dark savages (both male and female) on the cover of romance novels, the countless Indian maidens and warriors of Westerns churned out by Hollywood over many decades, Cher's "Half Breed," the supposedly innocuous Land O'Lakes Maiden, or even Disney's super spiritually gifted and athletic, cliff diving, knockout of the "ideal" Indian female, Pocahontas.

Taylor, in a humorous, almost ribald fashion, takes overtly idealized Native sexuality away from non-Native hands, and by creating characters that are much more human in their desires and their fumbling towards achieving those desires, provides his audiences with an opportunity to see a much more down to earth, human image of Native stories and characters, as in this segment of dialogue when Angie flirtatiously explains to Andrew what she is looking for in her quest for the perfect man:

> **ANGIE.** Somebody six-foot four, biceps that could crack walnuts, money enough to buy me all the horses in the world, and every time he comes over to spend the night, he has to bring a shoehorn, if you know I mean? That's the *big* requirement? (Taylor Bootlegger 21)

Angie, as she describes her desire for a man who is amply endowed in all muscular areas is a strong example of Taylor's uses of innuendo and sexual humor. But she is not alone in her open sexual desire and attraction and the frustrations that accompany it. Andrew, upon being told by Martha of his alleged blood relationship to Angie, mutters a disappointed aside of returning to old habits when he says:

> **Andrew.** Oh well, it's back to the magazines.
>
> **Martha.** Pardon?
>
> **Andrew.** Nothing, just a dream going up in smoke. (Taylor Bootlegger 33)

Even Martha, who plays at being naïve, plays along, perhaps unknowingly, as she counts the receipts for the church organ fundraiser and comments on the sister who gave her the bad advice to sell beer in the first place. Here Martha says, "Not nearly enough for a down payment on an organ. That crazy Marjorie wants to get the most elaborate machine available. She always did have a fondness for big organs" (Taylor Bootlegger 89).

Marianne also has her share of moments where sex arrives, such as in this moment with David in the family kitchen, when, still in the throes of a night carousing with Noble (the details of which, steamy or otherwise, are never supplied by Taylor), she declares to David, "Other people drive cars too, you know. Cars with balls, that still have a speedometer in miles, and seats that go down (Taylor Bootlegger 36). Unfortunately, Marianne's thinly veiled reference to both virility and oral sex seem to go right over David's head, who as a notable reversal of the virile

Indian warrior construct of non-Natives, seems to be the only one of five characters in Taylor's script without any libido whatsoever.

Still later, when she is trying to encourage Angie's to pursuit of Andrew, Marianne uses a humorous comment about sexual frustration as the start of a whole grocery list of frustrations she is facing with David, saying,

> Listen, for the past ten years I've been living with a man whose idea of foreplay is stroking the band council. What do I have to show for it? A brand new Volkswagen Passat with every conceivable option in the universe. Three bathrooms--there are only two of us--go figure it. And a satellite dish that brings in 416 stations worldwide. Who cares about the top ten shows in Bulgaria. I got everything I ever wanted …except the David I fell in love with. (Taylor Bootlegger 50)

Though arguably rather generalized in terms of gender roles, Taylor works to depict his characters as having normally developed drives and desires, as well as the frustrations and excitements that accompany them. In doing this, Taylor removes that amorphous cloud of idealized images that depict Natives as the "orientalized other," and instead offers audiences the opportunity to replace those images with much more human, accessible, three dimensional and funny portrayals of Native characters and their relationships. The opportunities for finding human aspects in Taylor's characters are plentiful, whether they be in Martha's adopted innocence and naiveté, Andrew's blue balls, Noble's attempts to maintain his party- boy- player lifestyle, David's distractions, or Marianne and Angie's boy watching.

In the end, the presence of sexual tension in Taylor's The Bootlegger Blues is commonplace: Taylor's characters are just as sexually repressed, obsessed and bound by social

and cultural norms as those in the non-Native world. By lightly and humorously removing this veil of non-Native idealization instead of violently tearing it away, Taylor takes the opportunity to poke fun rather than offend or misdirect the audience's attention by sexualizing Native people. Through tempering larger sub textual Native issues in the humor of a sex farce, Taylor offers the opportunity to laugh at the love battles and victories being fought in The Bootlegger Blues, and simultaneously offers a chance for a much stronger level of empathetic connection between Native and non-Native audience members and his material.

Taylor's character names serve to demystify potential non-Native expectation; Taylor forgoes typically romantic Indian nomenclature in favor of the much more commonplace: Martha, Angie, Andrew, and David. The only two exceptions to this are Noble - apparently short for Noble Savage (a name which quickly lives out its oxymoronic properties in most unexpected fashion), and Andrew, who goes by the nickname Blue. The source of this nickname turns out not to be a Native designation based on a dream or vision, but rather an unfortunate and embarrassing encounter between Andrew's testicles and the zipper of his blue jeans, as well as a rumor regarding a certain collection of magazines found under his bed (Taylor Bootlegger 22). Angie's full name is revealed to be Angie White, ironic in the revelation that she is a one-time resident of the Reserve who had moved away at a young age, recently returned, and now a stranger to the reserve and the powwow.

In terms of characters, Taylor's women break the mold of popular non-Native expectation. Taylor casts Martha in the role of the elder, and immediately demystifies that role throughout the script by revealing Martha to be a devoutly religious Christian woman who talks to herself, allows herself to get flustered, inadvertently spouts an obscenity or two, plays favorites between her children, indulges in a little gossip, and sneaks the occasional cigarette.

The all seeing, all knowing, wise - elder myth is even further put aside when Taylor reveals Martha's gullibility and naiveté: She follows bad advice and purchases beer to sell to at the powwow -- a traditionally non - alcohol serving event. Faced with a veritable wall of beer that she cannot get rid of, Martha's role as the “wise elder” lessens even further as Taylor has her illegally bootlegging her beer by plastering fliers and posters throughout the reserve, including immediately next to the tribal police station.

Taylor follows a similar strategy with Marianne and Angie, undercutting the overly romanticized/idealized “Native princess” persona. He shows Marianne, an undersexed, overstressed, former wild child who is unafraid to speak her mind, ogle a man’s buns, long for a joint, or pick up a wooden spoon to belt out an all Ojibway version of a Hank Williams tune. Typical to many women of both Native and non-Native descent who are facing middle age and relationship stasis, Marianne’s needs are not complicated. She misses the excitement and spice of the man she originally fell in love with, as well as the life (and passions) she had before the responsibilities and pressures of middle aged-doldrums took over. Faced with a rapidly aging ten year relationship with an overly anal, inattentive common-law husband, Marianne rebels first by destroying her office computer, then the typewriter, and finally runs the risk of the destruction of her relationship entirely as she runs off with Noble in search of excitement.

Taylor goes a step further in his revision of the Indian Princess image with his depiction of Angie, who is several years younger than Marianne, and has just recently returned to her childhood home on the reserve after a long absence (unexplained by Taylor). Angie, equally outspoken and libidinous as Marianne, is on the prowl at the powwow when she spies Andrew. When sparks of attraction and romance fly, Taylor reveals in Angie a woman unafraid to express

her needs in a partner or act upon her attraction to Andrew, even though she is a little confused. As she tells Marianne:

> **Angie.** Well, for one thing, he isn't six foot four. Hell, I'm almost as tall as him, and you've got bigger biceps. And I sure as hell can't find out about the rest of him now. I had my future husband pegged as some tall blond god with more money than brains. (Taylor Bootlegger 49)

Instead of being overly idealized, every hair in place, every action demure, submissive, and sensual, Taylor's women are realistically naive, witty, angry, loving, needy, confused, assertive, and sexual. At the same time, however, there is a level of charm and an endearing quality to all of them: Their very human traits serve to generate a level of approachability outside of those found in the popular media; the result ultimately is Taylor's female characters, with all their comedic strengths and weaknesses, wind up appearing much more interesting and believable.

Mainstream culture's popular expectations for the Native warrior (or male) type, are also prime territory for Taylor's process of demystification. All three men in Taylor's Bootlegger Blues prove themselves to be decidedly male, but also decidedly non stereotypically warrior – esque in their behaviors.

Andrew, the youngest of the three men, reveals himself early on to be stereotypical in a fashion; with that said, however, the stereotype Andrew fits is not that of the young warrior, home from the trail and full of fire and passion, ready to prove himself to his fellow villagers. He appears as a typical college student. Taylor demonstrates Andrew to be locked in that transition from youth to adulthood, where, true to most young men's hearts of this age, Andrew is free spirited, a little clumsy, and more than a little focused upon sex and beer. Taylor demonstrates this "hops and barley" attraction in a hysterical moment when Andrew first returns to his

boyhood room after being away at college, and discovers that his Mother has, in a sense, redecorated:

> (As Andrew approaches his room, atmosphere music slowly comes up. It should have the same feel as "Chariots of Fire" or "2001: Space Odyssey". The room is suddenly flooded with light revealing an awesome sight to Andrew. An entire wall of his bedroom is covered with 143 cases of beer, stacked in neat rows. He shakes his head to clear it and looks again. He runs to it in slow motion. He reaches out gingerly and touches one of the cases to see if it's really there. He looks to the heavens.)
>
> **Andrew.** Thank you! They are all here, all of them.
>
> (Andrew shakes a case of Canadian, creating the telltale sounds of bottles rattling.)
>
> **Andrew.** The national anthem!
>
> (He reaches out to grab one when he hears his mother's voice.)
>
> **MARTHA.** Blue! Don't you dare touch that beer your room is the only play second find to store it. It belongs to the committee.
>
> (Crestfallen, Andrew looks back upwards.)
>
> **ANDREW.** (Disgusted) Thanks. I'll never be able to sleep. (Taylor Bootlegger 39)

The older, and presumably wiser, David, is also demystified, written by Taylor as overly anal and more wrapped up in his boss's opinion, health foods, and matching designer sweat suits than with either his wife or his warrior image. When David does try to make a stand in front of Marianne, eventually slamming his fist on Martha's table in anger, he undercuts this awkward

display of testosterone as he immediately turns to Martha and apologizes weakly for the outburst. Evoking more the image of an East Coast dwelling, preppy blue- blood than a stereotypical Native male, David even fails on a drunken rampage: he ends up driving his Volkswagen Passat into a lake after a pitiful drag race with Noble.

In David's defense, Taylor does allow his character to develop toward the end of the story, as David leaves to both deliver Martha's beer to and retrieve Marianne. Both Marianne and Taylor's audience may not take David's quest seriously, as Taylor dresses David for his exit in an old pair of track pants, a ratty sweatshirt, and a well used pair of yellow rubber boots. To top it off, David's chosen steed is neither a horse nor his luxury Passat, but a rather rough 1975 Camaro, complete with jacked up rear end, loaned to him by the local mechanic while David's car is drained, dried and repaired.

Of the three, Noble, given his first entrance in full powwow warrior regalia, initially promises to fulfill the romantic non-Native-romance-novel-aspects of his name. But Noble quickly reveals himself to be a bumbling, traveler on the powwow Highway, using his dancing as an excuse to shirk responsibility in favor of a self-involved quest for the next party, the next gathering down the road, and the next sexual escapade. When pushed by Martha, he offers up a weak rationalization for his lifestyle:

> **Martha.** What's your name again, boy?
>
> **Noble.** Noble.
>
> **Martha.** And what you do?
>
> **Noble.** Depends what I can get away with. I'm kidding. I'm a dancer during the summer, and I do all sorts of odd jobs in the winter.
>
> **Martha.** That's it?

Noble. That's enough. I have a good time. Make a living. Someday I'll be rich though, I saw it in a dream.

Martha. Oh yeah, how?

Noble. Don't know, the truck hit a bump, and I woke up.

(Again Martha doesn't laugh. Noble isn't charming her as he expected to.)

…

Martha. You should go back to church.

Noble. I like to think that I do in a way. That's why I go to powwow's. It's a chance to sleep under the stars, the light bulbs of Heaven, on the grass, listen to the trees and the insects. To me, that's the voice of the Creator. I'd rather hear the voice myself than go through a middle man.

Martha. Yet you drink.

Noble. You smoke. So we're both a little naughty. Who isn't? (Taylor Bootlegger 68-69)

Like the majority of Taylor's work, The Bootlegger Blues, avoids the glitz and romance of the popular non-Native settings for Native stories. Not one of his scenes takes place in a tepee, under a waterfall, or in talking forests for that matter; nor do his plays take place in the midst of sacred ceremonies, or around a council fire with tom-toms, eagle calls, and flute music drifting in from the background. Rather, Taylor's settings are purposefully every day -- simple and occurring largely in locations found in any community, any family, and any home.

For example, Bootlegger's first scene opens in "a large kitchen found in community centers everywhere" (Taylor Bootlegger 9). Avoiding the idyllic image of the tranquil, everything is in its place portrayal of popular Native imagery, Taylor's community kitchen is one

where "everything is a mess," where it is obvious there is a large-scale event taking place, an observation affirmed by Taylor's direction that there be drum music in the background with Martha onstage in a tizzy over demands for second helpings from over a hundred people (Taylor Bootlegger 9). The drumbeat Taylor indicates is not ceremonial, nor is it the menacing (albeit fictional) beat of Hollywood's “savages” on the warpath -- but rather the drumbeat of a powwow -- a annual yearly community event complete with foodservice, crafts stands, and dance competitions. The kitchen is the hub of the feeding activity, with Martha barely holding down the fort.

In the following scene, a moment of flirtation between Andrew and Angie occurs on the edge of the dance action. The scene takes place not in a sacred dance Arbor, built in a traditional manner and festooned with stereotypical symbols of Native finery, but rather next to a very modern set of bleachers, similar to what one would find located next to any community ball field. In an interesting bit of simultaneous action, Taylor places these scenes side by side onstage. In scene 3, Marianne is pouting as she types in the kitchen: She works there under orders of David, who is demanded she work through the powwow, typing up a report for the tribal council on a small portable typewriter. This action is his retribution for destruction of a tribal computer earlier that week. Scene four unfolds at the bleachers:

> (Noble enters in his fancy dancing outfit. He is 34 and looks quite impressive. He bends over to adjust his leggings.)
>
> **Angie.** Nice buns.
>
> **Andrew.** You like that type?
>
> **Angie.** He's colorful.
>
> **Andrew.** So's an infected finger.

(Noble stands, ready to dance. Marianne works on her report, miserably typing away in the kitchen. After a couple of seconds the sound of typewriter keys begins to sound like the drum thumping. Then the actual drum comes up and Noble starts to dance. With the first few thumps of the drum, he trembles. The drum song starts up in earnest, and so does Noble. He starts slowly but gradually he's moving faster and faster, with feathers flying. He's in full flight. The music seems to invade Marianne. She looks down on her typewriter. Her face tightens, she stands up, grabs the typewriter, lifts it up, swings it off the desk, then drops it with a loud crash. She smiles a self - satisfied smile. Happily she goes off to see the powwow. She waves to Angie and Andrew. Angie points to Noble and shouts something. Marianne sees Noble dancing and is mesmerized. She watches him for a moment then hesitantly goes to him when the music stops. Touches his shoulder gently, he turns around and she gingerly offers him her pop. He accepts it with a grateful smile. Their hands briefly touch.)

Marianne. Thirsty?

Noble. Drier than a camel's fart.

(Noble winks at her. Marianne is almost embarrassed.)

Marianne. My friend thinks you have nice buns.

Noble. Oh yeah, tell her to take a number. (Taylor Bootlegger 25 - 26)

In these parallel moments, Taylor allows his audiences a look at the images so often attributed to the powwow -- a handsome man dressed in traditional regalia, swept away by the music into a display of Native artistry, presumably stopping viewers (in this case, Andrew, Angie, and Marianne) in their tracks. Taylor teases the audience by highlighting the image of the powwow

warrior Native and the Native woman about to be swept off her feet by his masculine charms, only to dispel that image just as quickly by bringing his characters back to earth with a fart joke and a healthy burst of Noble's male ego. Ironically enough, Marianne is still charmed by Noble and leaves the scene on his arm, forgetting both David and her report.

Not to be missed however, is the tone of Taylor's description of Noble's fancy dancing. He reveals, not a sarcastic, clownish parody of powwow fancy dancing, but a demonstration of "the real thing." In his dance, Noble not only proves that he does have something to offer the world in the form of his dancing, but Taylor also offers an overt moment of recognition of the power and beauty of his culture, offering the same opportunity to both Native and non-Native viewer alike. In a slightly more teasing manner, Taylor occasionally offers further recognition of his cultural roots, as in this passage where he pokes fun at traditional inter-tribal rivalries, as Andrew decrees, "what's on the stove Mom? I'm hungry enough to eat a Mohawk, funny haircut and all" (Taylor Bootlegger 31).

The remainder of Taylor's scenes reveal themselves in equally familiar territories: the side of a village road, in Andrew's bedroom, or in the kitchen of Martha's home, which, like many North American homes is the central gathering place for family meetings and dramas to be played out. In Martha's kitchen Taylor dispels any images of the poverty stricken, ill kempt Native household by describing Martha's kitchen as "quite homey and clean, a kitchen a mother could be proud of (and she is)" (Taylor Bootlegger 31). Andrew's bedroom on the other hand, receives little description (other than the fact that there are 143 cases of beer stacked against his wall).

By writing for his times and those that live them, Taylor's work reaches a broad audience, in both the Native and non-Native communities. This is a definite step away from his younger,

pre - theatre days, when he predicted Native Theatre's greatest successes would be at the community level -- but Taylor is savvy enough to the potential limits of writing just for a Native audience: “Even with companies like Native Earth I'd say the percentage is 30 percent Native, 70 percent white. With other companies that have produced my plays, like Carousel Theatre or Fire Hall Arts Center ... the amount of Native Theatre - going is minimal, the audience is primarily non-Native” (Dawes 16). Despite the rapid expansion of the contemporary Native Theatre in Canada over the past two decades, if Taylor were to maintain a (as King might describe it) a tribal or polemical focus to his works, his production opportunities would be limited at best. So Taylor wisely expanded the scope of his work to a level where non - Native access and enjoyment was possible.

Upon writing for a larger, non-Native audience however, Taylor was soon faced with the difficulty of both reaching his audience and encouraging them to laugh at his Native centered works for the stage. The primary difficulty with reaching initially hesitant non-Native audiences, Taylor observed (aside from long held misperceptions of “Indian-ness” in regard to Native peoples) was a sense of non-Native hesitancy, a fear of offending Native peoples by appearing to laugh at them. It can also be argued this hesitancy arose from a slight confusion as Taylor’s works present stories and characters set purposefully in the near everyday lives of Native peoples. Rather than witnessing re-creations of ceremony or life and death tragic events, audiences are treated to Native people wrestling with relationships and other dilemmas of day to day life. Eventually, however, as Taylor relates in his descriptions of early productions of The Bootlegger Blues, with the assistance of enthusiastic Native audience members, non-Native audiences began to warm to the humor and accessibility of Taylor’s work, and responded enthusiastically.

This chapter has focused upon explicating how Taylor has managed to achieve his goals of bridging these gaps of cultural knowledge and expectation from a Native aesthetic as largely defined by Taylor and supported by earlier discussions of Thomas King's ideas around post - colonialism. By stepping away from post-colonial frames in favor of a Native centered lens (such as Thomas King's views of Associational Literature), this chapter has provided examples of Taylor's scripts which support his assertions that his work for the theatre arises as a natural extension of a long legacy of Native storytelling, orality, and performativity. Through textual analysis of specific examples of Taylor's work in terms of de-emphasis of conflict and communal character focus, this chapter has provided solid demonstrations of the effectiveness of this aesthetic, as framed by Taylor, in providing strong material for the theatre. Of equal importance is the manner in which Taylor has also utilized elements of this aesthetic, in combination with his own humorous take on the times and the people which inhabit them, in order to effectively demystify non-Native perceptions of Native stories and lives. The result is works for the theatre which are inviting and empowering to both Native and non-Native audiences, presenting not only the potential to re-examine Native stories, but non-Native as well.

In truth, Taylor' message may not be entirely new, as we are consistently being asked to consider and re-consider history and our perception of the people and stories around us. What is new and unique to Taylor's work however, is the manner in which Taylor has generated and given voice to his requests for (re)consideration of the Native peoples and the relationship they bear with non-Natives. Taylor accomplishes this through a humorous approach centered in a long history of Native history and storytelling. When viewed through an appropriate contextual and critical lens, Taylor's efforts for the theatre reveal a body of work aimed not toward destabilization and subversion, but rather reconsideration and construction. In an era where

bridges of this sort are sorely needed, and where many are attempting to cross these significant gaps in cultural knowledge and history, Taylor's efforts seem to be capable not only of successfully bridging these gaps, but also of withstanding the weight of repeated crossings.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is well established that popular views of North American Nation building myths often miscast individuals and entire populations into misinformed, overly generalized roles (think black hats and white hats, benevolent European saviors and ignorant, innocent savages). In these myths, the distinctions between mythological protagonists and antagonists are clear-black and white, no doubts or discrepancies in between. Such is what heroes and villains (in John Wayne movies) are made of, but not reality. Native peoples, the character actors of historical drama, alternately filled the usually overly romanticized roles of ally, victim, or bloodthirsty villain -- but always they were cast in the role of the subservient, lesser class; the uncivilized culture, futilely resisting their own inevitable decline to extinction and the inevitable advance and ultimate “civilization” of the Canadian territories.

With the passage of time and subsequent distancing from events comes the often imperfect “perfect hindsight,” where members of dominating cultures could choose to express their sadness at the loss of such a "noble" way of life. Sympathies were, and still are, expressed over civilizations that have long been supposedly “lost,” “destroyed,” or “beaten back;” it was the supposedly poor savage, ignorant of the ways of the world, still inferior in their knowledge, who were the unwitting dupes of inevitable progress and conquest. “So sad… What a tragic loss” people comment, as they continue to hold to a largely imaginary image of Native peoples and history. These perceptions and others, despite a constant Native presence, at times quietly, other times with a roar, to remind non-Native peoples, “We are still here.”

Such are the plot lines and subplots of countless historical, myth-based interpretations of events. (Mis) perceptions of both history and the cultures which alternately clashed and joined

together to create the image of Canada (not to mention that of the U.S.), continue to hold sway, and not just as story lines in movies or novels and textbooks. These black and white, either-or dualities remain prevalent in the manner in which people form opinions and, ideologies about their nation, themselves, their fellow citizens, and finally governmental policies. In the case of Canada's Native populations (as in the U.S.) these ideas of "Indians" remain largely based on idealized myths and stereotypes, and the outright ignoring of Native voices, their continual presence, and vibrant histories.

The re-emergence of the Native theatrical and performative voice in Canada is a powerful element in prompting (and at times demanding) reconsideration of these deep-seeded misconceptions and ideologies regarding Native peoples. Early Contemporary Native Canadian theatrical works such as Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters left audiences stunned at both the power of the performances and the anger and frustrations of contemporary Native lives highlighted by these Native generated theatrical works. These Native plays provided Native stories and characters with more dimensional, rooted foundations than typical non-Native authored portrayals. In addition, these early works ripped bandages off wounds and scars not yet healed properly, not for shock value, but rather, to assert Native demands for treatment and recognition. Such Native theatre works were profoundly moving and vivid, and often angry and accusatory in their drive to push out the infection of centuries of infection.

At a time when many Native theatre writers in Canada pointed angry fingers at non-Native incursions and highlighted colonialisms impact upon Native communities in dark, tragic, furious tones, Drew Hayden Taylor walked an entirely different path. In his work for the stage, Taylor purposefully swerved from the anger and despair prevalent in other Native theatre productions. While not dismissing or discounting this anger, Taylor focuses upon expressing his

stories largely through humor- humor informed by his uniquely Native point of view. The message Taylor presents may not be entirely new, but the method of voicing the message is truly unique.

Taylor identifies The Bootlegger Blues as the first full length, Native-generated comedy (Taylor Furious 81-97). This play is not the first example of a Native playwright using humor in his or her work. Many earlier contemporary Native works (especially those of Highway) are filled with many moments of humor. However, Taylor's use of humor is more pervasive than that of his peers. Unlike earlier contemporary Native theatrical works, which are primarily dramas with comic interludes, Taylor's plays are largely comedies with dramatic moments.

Stepping into the shoes of a storyteller- playwright, Taylor adopts largely humorous approaches to achieve several primary goals: the first, simply enough, is to tell a good story; the second, to empower Native audiences by giving them recognizable images of themselves which they can celebrate and enjoy on stage; and the third, to de-mystify the non-Native perception of Native peoples and their stories. In short, Taylor strives to normalize Native stories and characters largely through comedy; working to tickle away the layers of mythical Indians and imagined history to reveal the very human aspects of Native people and their stories.

Distinctly absent from much of Taylor's work are the feathers, leathers, and fringe so locked into non-Native expectations by Hollywood, history books and popular media. Instead of dancing shamans, warriors, savages, innocents, wise elders, princesses, nubile young girls who can talk to the spirits, and miracle inducing medicine men, Taylor presents his audiences with faulted, funny, sometimes noble, often awkward characters who are human and self aware enough to elbow the audience in the side and illicit their laughter. Instead of stories darkly depicting the downfall of one civilization at the hands of another, indicting conspirators and their

ancestors in the tragedy of assimilationist strategies, Taylor offers audiences stories of Native families and communities struggling with attraction, success, relationship, honesty, and the desire to do right for themselves and occasionally others.

Not too far underneath the simple appearance of Taylor's comedies however, lives a world of extremely topical fare. Far from utilizing humor as a means of glossing over or trivializing the wounds of the past and consequent current issues facing Natives, Taylor's work provides an important alternate entry point to these topics. Through his uses of humor to empower, dispel, and disarm, Taylor offers his audiences the opportunity for a greater empathetic (and therefore deeper) consideration of many of the same topics prevalent in the works of his peers. By presenting the nearly mundane side of Native life, by generating laughter in Native and non-native audiences alike, Taylor opens the door to genuine recognition; elements which stereotypes and polarized cultural separation would normally never allow. In short, Taylor's work attempts to build upon foundations laid earlier by Native theatrical efforts. He achieves his goal in part by removing any possibility of the aesthetic distancing generally offered audiences by overly angry, tragic, or accusatory works. It is all together too easy for an audience to step away from accusatory works and more difficult to disengage empathetically from a convivial sense of laughter.

Taylor playfully refuses to let his non-Native audiences off the hook by allowing them to maintain their generalized, fragmented, guilt ridden and overly imaginative, largely fictive perceptions of "Indian" people. Simultaneously, Taylor refuses to allow Native audience members to buy too fully into these imaginings as well. By skillfully bursting the bubble created by non-Native expectations of "Indian-ness," Taylor offers an opportunity for consideration of elements and issues of Native lives and stories in a human manner that urges viewers not to

dismiss, but to move beyond accusation, guilt, and stereotype to a potential healing of rifts and scars still fresh. Taylor's work offers opportunity not to forget, but rather to truly remember ourselves, and then forge ahead, minus any overly romanticized perspectives.

Taylor's works have struck a tremendous chord in theatre audiences in Canada and throughout the world. In relatively quick strides, Taylor has found himself eclipsing his own predictions for the community level success for Native theatre. He has found his work gathering tremendous popular and critical success, with his scripts being produced repeatedly throughout Canada and internationally, his columns and essays appearing in more and more publications, and his presence as a speaker in greater and greater demand throughout the world.

My work in this dissertation has sought to provide a contextual and critical framework through which to view Taylor's rise to success, by providing answers to several main questions. These central questions were:

1. What are the contextual elements, both in general historical terms as well as in regard to Taylor's biography, which serve to foster Taylor's emergence as a leading voice in the contemporary Canadian Native theatre?
2. What are Taylor's personal aesthetic goals for his work in the theatre and how does he achieve them?
3. Is Taylor's aesthetic drawn primarily from a Western or Native influenced perspective?
4. Given Taylor's aesthetic values and practice, what can be gained by viewing his work critically from an inherently Native-influenced perspective?

Community

By initially investigating elements of Taylor's biography, the framing of which was provided by Taylor himself, this dissertation has established how biographical elements such as community, relationship, and identity have proven pivotal in the formation of the foundations for Taylor's eventual success within the theatre.

In particular, this work establishes how Taylor's early experiences on the Curve Lake reserve served to both fuel his interests in reading and storytelling, as well as foster his initial formation of an identity; in particular his identity not only as a self described nerd and science fiction fan, but also as a budding author and as a Native man who comes from a mixed heritage, but lives and views the world as an active member in his Native community. Taylor's close relationship with his family and his active participation in their tradition of orality and storytelling are also demonstrated in discussions surrounding the initial formation of his awareness as to effective structuring of stories and humor for best audience response. Additional community influence is demonstrated in discussions centered upon Taylor's views of his shifting perceptions around the values and available means of education.

As explored in brief detail in this dissertation, Taylor's experiences moving between the environments of Toronto and Curve Lake, as well as his entry into the Contemporary Canadian Theatre community, have also served to both challenge and confirm Taylor's aesthetic and sense of identity. Confirmation of these influences are evidenced in this dissertation by a focus upon his discussions surrounding the debate between his identity as an Urban Native vs. a reserve Native, as well as by his elaborating on early experiences attempting to find work in Toronto. In addition to detailing influential reserve community and familial relationships, this dissertation provides details surrounding the significant influence of the mentorship provided to Taylor by Larry Lewis in the formative stages of Taylor's theatrical aesthetic and career. Lastly, this

dissertation elaborates upon Taylor's recognition of his predecessors, both directly, such as in the work of Lewis, Tomson Highway, De Be Jeh Mu Jig Theatre Group and Native Earth Performing Arts, but also indirectly, by Taylor's addressing the influence upon his career of the likes of Norval Morrisseau and James Buller.

Historical Discussions and Context

Integral to my discussions of Taylor's efforts in the theatre are the ideas of Native voice and the expectations of "Indian-ness" projected onto Native peoples by non-Natives. By providing a summary overview of not only Taylor's band of origin, but also a contextual history of Canada and a review of Canada's governmental structure and relationship to Native peoples, this dissertation first establishes a brief context for readers who may not be familiar with aspects of Canadian and Native history. This context, though summary in nature, is vital in assisting the reader in avoiding stereotypical assumptions regarding Native peoples and reminding readers of the consideration of history as a fallible, interpretive, and fluid construct. Secondly, through this contextual overview, the study establishes the perception of the "Imagined Indian" not as a relatively recent phenomenon, but rather a centuries old one which has its roots as far back as 500 years ago, beginning possibly as early as initial contacts between Natives and non-Natives.

Thirdly, this historical exploration details for the reader the lasting and far reaching effect non-Native writers of history have had upon non-Native perceptions by discounting or completely ignoring Native presence, contributions, and oral traditions in their historical considerations when formulating historically informed views of authority and reliability. By briefly examining the histories surrounding the peopling of North America, the legacy of the Canadian Native Residential school system, as well as other assimilationist strategies, my historical discussions provide examples of the manner in which early historical ideologies and

fictive representations of Native peoples have served to alternately to both inform and obstruct the relationship between Native peoples and the government of Canada.

Importantly, by reconsidering aspects of Native life prior to non-Native contact, as well as providing brief discussions of differing Native and non-Native perceptions and attitudes regarding spirituality and participation in the treaty process, this dissertation serves to continue earlier efforts of recasting Native peoples. Roles played by Natives in these negotiations were not as unwitting dupes, but rather as experienced traders and negotiators who were aware of the alleged intent and goals of the treaty process prior to various non-Native attempts at manipulating and silencing Native peoples through the treaty process. By re-casting the Native cultures into largely more aware and informed groups, this dissertation calls into question imagined perceptions of Native cultures whose main mistake was in expecting the integrity of their non-Native counterparts to be comparable to their own. Rather than excusing the behavior of the non-Natives, this re-casting of Native awareness and agency serves to further indict non-Native parties of the past by adding dimension and detail to the severity and long reaching effects of non-Native deception and other attempts to dominate Native peoples.

Lastly, the historical discussions in this dissertation serve to not only confirm Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters as the "Big Bang" of Contemporary Native theatre, but also to trace the elements prior to Highway's breakthrough hit which served to not only provide a foundation for, but to ignite and fuel this "Bang" as well as Taylor's soon to follow arrival. In short, this dissertation's brief historical observations provide the necessary details regarding the source of early levels of influence, restrictions, building of foundations, funding, and inspiration, which ultimately serve to support Taylor's emergence into public notice.

Aesthetic, Origins, and Audience

As elaborated upon in this dissertation, Taylor's aesthetic goal for his work has consistently been expressed by him in the following manner: "As a Native playwright, I just want to tell some interesting stories with interesting characters to take the audience on a journey. As for my own contribution, I hope that I have provided a window of understanding between Native and non - Native cultures by de-mystifying Native life" (Taylor, quoted in Dawes 17-18).

Regarding the cultural origins of Taylor's aesthetic, despite frequent surface similarities that might indicate otherwise, Taylor has always asserted a strong connection to Native methods and approaches to storytelling, influenced peripherally by non-Native influences such as sitcom television and Western theatre. Discussions within this dissertation in part serve to establish Taylor's sense of connection to a Native heritage of storytelling, humor, and performativity , as well as to establish Taylor's belief that his work as a modern storyteller/playwright constitutes a natural and logical extension of this heritage.

In addition, these discussions serve to provide examples for the reader from Taylor's own works which demonstrate a separation of Taylor from traditional Western theatrical constructs. In particular, these examples focus upon how Taylor separates his work from traditional Western dramatic formulations of stories featuring clear objectives, resulting conflicts, and an ultimate resolution (and opportunity for catharsis), the results of the relationship between a single antagonist and protagonist. Instead, this work demonstrates how Taylor opts for a more Native-based approach to construction that both de-emphasizes conflict and focuses upon a communal centered story, with no single character or issue rising to take center stage in the telling of the story. These alignments to a Native legacy of theatricality as opposed to the influence of a

system of typically Western constructs, are confirmed within this dissertation through textual analysis of examples drawn from both his Someday trilogy and The Bootlegger Blues.

In considering initial audience reception, this dissertation has also established the importance of audience receptivity and readiness in the timely emergence of Taylor as a prominent voice in Contemporary Canadian Native theatre. These assertions regarding audience and the timeliness of Taylor's work are initially confirmed by brief discussions of early efforts to approach audiences with contemporary Native theatrical efforts. These include James Buller and the ANDVPA's attempts to bring a modern Native piece to Monaco, audience reactions to Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, and Highway's difficulties in finding initial audiences for the breakthrough play The Rez Sisters.

The audience factor is emphasized in greater detail within this dissertation through examination of Taylor's initial difficulties in getting non-Native Artistic Directors to review his work for potential production, as well as in discussions detailing Taylor's experiences with reluctant, overly-sensitive and politically correct non-Native audience members during the 1990 production of his The Bootlegger Blues. Also central to these discussions were Taylor's own revelations and shifts in perceptions as he encountered Native and non-Native expectations of "Indian-ness," this time in regard to his own work for the stage.

Through a textual analysis of Taylor's The Bootlegger Blues, this dissertation has also presented solid examples of the manner in which Taylor strives to demystify non-Native images of the Imagined Indian in favor of more normalized, empathetic, and accessible portrayals of Native characters and stories. By providing textual samples from Taylor's scripts which focus primarily upon the manner in which Taylor's use of humor, character, story, and setting endeavor to demystify perceptions of Native peoples, this dissertation has offered insight into

this element of Taylor's work, ingredients previously referred to in discussions of Taylor, but never fully developed.

Critical Lenses

Through an examination of Robert Nunn's assertions of a post-colonial strategy of hybridity in Taylor's work for the theatre, this dissertation has further delineated Taylor's aesthetic in terms of tone, humor, and influence, as well as called into question general assumptions regarding Taylor's position as a post-colonial playwright. While not disputing the validity of post-colonial theories overall, nor calling into question the efficacy of Nunn's use of Taylor's work to demonstrate Nunn's own distinctions between post-modern and post-colonial, these discussions remind us of the dangers of ignoring authorial intent and assigning critical distinctions based merely upon superficial comparisons and the author's membership in an oppressed minority.

Also central to these discussions was the provision for an alternate, more Native-centered critical lens through which to view Taylor's efforts. Thomas King's critical filter was shown to provide a potentially more useful lens for examining Taylor's work than the awkward post-colonial lens. Particularly in the category of Associational Native Literature, this preference was justified through examination first of Taylor's own commentaries regarding his goals for celebrating (rather than rescuing) Native humor, the overall tone of his work, as well as the influences of mass media and popular culture upon Taylor's filters as an author. Further confirmation of the potential benefits of viewing Taylor's work through a more Native-centered critical lens (such as King's) is provided throughout the textual analysis of select elements of Taylor's scripts, particularly in sections regarding Taylor's efforts towards demystification of Native images and portrayals.

Future Focus

After addressing these questions of biography, historical context, aesthetic, and critical theory, this dissertation seems to only have touched the tip of the iceberg. There remains a tremendous amount of opportunity for study, not only regarding Taylor's work and the Contemporary Native theatre canon, but also within the areas of Native performance, actor training, the Imaginary Indian, cultural understanding, and more. In the following paragraphs I will highlight several of the areas I think are important for future consideration.

Taylor frequently refers to the Native Theatre School and its success in over two decades of training emerging Native theatre artists. What is the training aesthetic of the Native Theatre School and how has it developed from the institution's earliest days? Is there a significant merging and crossover between Native performance aesthetics of orality and theatricality and Western based approaches (including Stanislavsky's System, Strassberg's Method, and Chekov's methodology of actor training)? Are there elements of the Native Theatre School's aesthetic and a regard for young theatre voices that can serve to re-vitalize, inform, and deepen other theatre training approaches?

Of additional interest in this area of a merging and crossing over of traditions and approaches is the aesthetic and career of Floyd Favel Starr, a Native Canadian actor, director, theorist, and educator, who serves as a central figure in many contemporary Native Canadian theatre efforts. Arising from a variety of Native, Western and non-Western theatre traditions, including direct tutelage under Jerzy Grotowski, work in the Suzuki Method, and the study of Japanese Butoh theatre. How has Favel Starr integrated his work with these sources into his aesthetic? Into his work with Native actors and theatre artists? Are there elements of Favel

Starr's work which directly serve to continue the legacy of figures such as Suzuki and Grotowski while maintaining his own creative identity and aesthetic?

The necessity of further chronicling the history, depth, and breadth of the voices comprising the Contemporary Native Canadian theatrical effort also bears significant consideration. Such studies should ideally focus not on establishing general definitions and parameters for the work, but rather on celebrating and explicating the broad variety of aesthetics and methods employed by the diverse group of Native artists currently creating work for the Canadian Stage.

While there is a significant presence of Native theatrical effort in the U.S, these efforts have historically experienced lower levels of popular success and public notice. While American Native authors such as Hanay Geiogamah have written about these matters, further study is definitely warranted from both Native and non-Native perspectives. Topics could include the obstacles faced by American Native theatrical efforts, the current level and aesthetic of contemporary effort in the U.S., and critical and audience responses to the amount, quality, genres, and visibility of work available.

Work that seeks to demystify Native peoples in favor of more grounded, less romanticized portrayals deserves greater attention. There exist plenty of critical studies that already identify this as an issue/ingredient in the perception of Native peoples. Attention now can be shifted toward various creative and critical efforts to disarm, dispel, explode, or divert attention away from the legacy of misperceptions and stereotypes these myths only serve to continue. With the poison exposed, how do we continue moving forward in a genuine and informed manner that will both prompt healing and prevent further infection?

In order to broaden the critical lenses through which we may view works such as Taylor's, this dissertation very briefly refers to Dwight Conquergood's "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance." Conquergood describes various approaches to the genuine level of exchange which can be experienced in a Dialogical exchange between the observer/performer and subject. Further investigation into the application of Conquergood's frames to Native theatrical works, from a primarily theatrical perspective, could be informative in increasing the understanding of the manner in which Native artists (past and present) have to continually endeavored to reach out to their audiences, both Native and non-Native alike.

Of equal importance is the need to expand understanding of Native-focused, non-Colonial based lenses such as Thomas King's. These lenses potentially can serve to empower both Native and non-Native efforts by removing Western-centric biases from the center stage of theatrical attention. In doing so, filters such as King's offer new tools to interpret existing works, as well as encourages the generation of original works and interpretations. Future work in this area should first work to clarify and refine King's filter, as he readily admits within his article that the structure is incomplete. Additionally, future study should focus upon developing and encouraging new critical filters outside of post-modernism and the triumvirate of colonial, pre-colonial, and post-colonial frames.

Taylor and others within the Contemporary Native Theatre of Canada, aside from creating strong performance material, provide opportunities (and invitations) for audiences and theatre artists alike to turn away from the entrenched imaginings of history and cultures which have prevented genuine Native and non-Native understanding. Their work invites us to step through a doorway and realize our potential for empathetic connection through grounded,

informed, potentially powerful characterizations and stories. Tales arising from a legacy of laughter, survival, and community will prove far more interesting, dramatically engaging, and riotously funny than any stereotypical imaginings could ever be. It is my hope that this dissertation, through its detailed examination of Drew Hayden Taylor's career and theatrical aesthetic, may serve to reinforce and further the opportunities for understanding which will arise as a result of these invitations.

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