Review

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Renee Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod, eds. *Aboriginal Oral Tradition: Theory, Practice, Ethics.* Fernwood Publishing: Halifax and Winnipeg with the Gorsebook Research Institute, 2008. 170 pp. ISBN: 978-1-55266-267-0.

Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice and Ethics is a collection of essays that examines how Indigenous oral history has been subjected to study as well as transformed across disciplines. Editors Renee Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod hope to illustrate the sustained presence of Aboriginal oral traditions in contemporary Aboriginal societies. Based on a 2005 conference that brought together Elders, scholars, and students engaged in collaborative research involving Indigenous oral history, this volume reflects the multi-disciplinary approaches taken by conference participants. The essays explore diverse topics including: oral traditions and knowledge of the environment, economy, literature, education, and health, as well as the effects of electronic media, public discourse, and the battle over intellectual property rights on oral traditions. Each author successfully generates critical awareness about Indigenous oral history by illustrating the connection between local knowledge systems and a globalized world. Broadly, this collection contributes to an important, growing body of work (performative, aesthetic, literary, legal, historical, and educational) by Indigenous scholars that addresses contemporary ethical dimensions related to access and use of oral history.

Within the collection, several articles stand out in their ability to demonstrate how the privilege inscribed in written records by the West has fostered a continued resistance to the inclusion of orally transmitted narratives not only in literary scholarship, but in other settings such as the classroom, the courts, and the theatre. With reference to the classroom setting, Andrea Bear Nicholas (Maliseet, Nekwotkok), addresses the destruction of Aboriginal language via the colonial enterprise in Canada. Her article draws upon examples of exclusion, oppression, and suppression of oral tradition within Maliseet history to illustrate how Indigenous peoples across Canada have undergone a similar process of linguistic genocide, which she calls 'linguicide" (19). While she argues passionately for the preservation of Aboriginal oral tradition, she warns of the danger of making oral histories more available in English, which may result in static stories passed on only in written English. These might well negate the meaning of oral tradition among Indigenous peoples in their language of origin and eliminate their active participation in passing it on (30). The article goes on to illustrate the benefits of immersion programs in Indigenous languages as a means

of protecting and preserving Maliseet and other oral traditions and cultural identities. Like Nicholas, Stephen J. Augustine hopes to preserve Aboriginal traditions in their original languages, but the focus of his work is on one of the rare positive colonial interactions between white Europeans and Indigenous peoples. Augustine writes about the continued impact of the writings and speeches of Baptist Silas T. Rand, a sympathetic missionary who worked among the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island from 1847-1889 (46). The work of Rand, who argued for the Mi'kmaq claim to their country, illuminates a number of interesting points related to oral history. First, as Augustine reflects, Rand's work solidifies the "consistency of the Indians and their understanding of the treaty negotiations and that the Mi'kmaq never surrendered their […] territory" (48). Also unique about Rand's writings is they provide a rare reflective insight into treaty negotiations as they describe the process of translating Mi'kmaq oral history. A strength of Augustine's work is his illustration of the value of preserving oral history via written record for Aboriginal Peoples.

Contributions by Mildon and Driskill extend their analysis to other settings. Drew Mildon illuminates that, despite clear directive from the Canadian Constitution, the Canadian legal system has struggled with how to receive and weigh oral history evidence (79). Using literary theorist Jacques Derrida, Mildon shows how "throughout the history of colonialism, this distinction – 'writing equals civilized and oral equals primitive' – has been used to maintain and ingrain the hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized" (80). Mildon shows through examination of key court cases that this assumption is apparent in the Canadian legal system as elsewhere. He makes a strong argument for the inclusion of oral history testimony in Canadian courts and its treatment as equal to evidence in written form and shows how the work of certain judges may be beginning to "decolonize the judicial mind" (94). Moving from righting past wrongs to envisioning a more positive future, Quo-Li Driskill's innovative essay draws on his own experience with Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the oppressed" to critically evaluate how grassroots theatre may draw on oral tradition to heal historical trauma and engage decolonization.

In an interesting twist, at least one article in this collection also highlights the potential problems even when researchers do value the non-written word. In this connection, English Professor Sophie McCall's article explores the impact of recording technologies on oral tradition, which she establishes as a contentious issue in Aboriginal studies. McCall uses the noteworthy performances and installations of Anishnabe artist Rebecca Bellmore to illustrate that recording technologies are far from being neutral data storing devices (99). As McCall notes, "collectors and editors have used record making systems to define and

represent Aboriginal oral traditions in particular ways without either consulting with Aboriginal storytellers or attributing the stories to them" (99).

The remaining essays in the collection can be seen as extending the call made by Maori scholar Linda Tuwai Smith to "decolonize methodologies"[1] by illustrating how local Indigenous epistemologies govern the successful use of oral history. Catherine Martin (Mi'kmaw, Milbrook First Nation) provides a reflective account of her involvement in the making of the CBC television short film "The Little boy who lived with Muini'skw (Bear Woman)," notably produced in both English and Mi'kmaq. Martin's essay poignantly illustrates the myriad of ethical, moral, and personal considerations she made as a Mi'kmaq woman during the process of writing the script for the film. Martin describes how she was initially wary of writing the script because Rand's transcription of the story had also been re-written by a non-Mi'kmaq author, leaving her questioning whether the version of the story she was working with was accurate (53). So, she brought the story to the elders of her community, who provided her with "advice and permission to move forward with telling this beautiful story" (54), resulting in the creation of the documentary already mentioned. Martin's ethical and thoughtful treatment of Mi'kmaq oral history extends beyond formal or institutional definitions of 'consent" and provides a stirring example of how local cultural knowledge can be used sensitively and sustainably in a global setting.

In his provocative essay, Greg Young-Ing (Opsakwayak, Cree Nation, Treaty #5) explores the ways in which Indigenous Traditional Knowledge ("TK"), is currently protected and regulated internationally. Oral tradition, Young-Ing illustrates, is an important aspect of TK; for it not only contains content that makes up a significant proportion of TK, but "it is also the traditional means of preserving and transmitting TK" (61). To explore local means by which TK is protected, he uses such diverse examples as legal cases in Australia, analysis of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (specifically Article 31), and the life and work of Haida artist, Bill Reid, in Canada. He shows that in Reid's case, since he paid homage to Haida traditions throughout his career, he was granted a "type of license by the Haida Nation to transform their artistic tradition in a respectful manner" (71), illuminating the flexibility and fluidity of Haida customary law which regulates the production and reproduction of cultural imagery. The discussion of Reid's sensitivity to customary law is particularly powerful at demonstrating the complex relationship between local Indigenous customary law and European systems regulating intellectual property which Young-Ing speaks of elsewhere in more general terms.

In her innovative essay which challenges how culturally relevant benefits of collaborative research are defined, Michelle Grossman critically examines

[1]Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

collaborative life story writing texts by Indigenous Australian women in the late 1980s and 1990s. Foregrounding the text "Warlpi'ri Women's Voices"[2] in her analysis, she illustrates the importance of "exploring how the politics and poetics of encounter in the arena of collaborative life-writing play out" (116). As Grossman demonstrates, the contribution "Warlpi'ri Women's Voices" makes is in both its content, but also in its form, as "the voices and subjectivities of Indigenous Australian authors as active agents in the production and management of both text-as-social-relations and text as cultural artifact" (116). Grossman's essay raises important critical questions about the limitations of how "collaboration" has traditionally been defined in life narrative writing and alerts us to the concerns and possibilities regarding the written publication of Aboriginal oral histories.

Finally, filmmaker Tasha Hubbard (Cree, Treaty Six Territory) employs the work of Okanagan storyteller and writer, Joanne Armstrong, to illustrate the possibilities for Indigenous writers and readers to "find a literary critical approach to indigenous writing in light of colonialism, yet also one which acknowledges and moves beyond colonialism" (139). Hubbard's reflective and cutting prose illuminates the need to, and a means of, re-conceptualizing Indigenous literature. She argues for a paradigm shift, one which honours a holistic understanding of Indigenous knowledges as well as the relationship between such knowledges and literature (150).

Overall, this collection adds to a new and essential body of literature by Indigenous scholars such as Jo-ann Archibald and Shawn Wilson.[3] In different ways, each author extends formalized, theoretical, and institutional guidelines (RCAP, SSHRC, NAHO) regarding the use of Aboriginal oral history in practice. In particular, contributions by Mildon, McCall, and Hubbard add breadth to this emergent body of scholarship which critically examines the relationship between Indigenous epistemologies, orality and literacy. This collection will be deeply valued by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, students, and public servants working with oral history sources. While Stephen J. Augustine states in the preface, "there is no standard methodology in collecting and analyzing oral traditions" (5), each author, by presenting successful local efforts to maintain and celebrate oral tradition, lays the groundwork for a hopeful future.

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[2] Petronella Vaarzon-Morel et al., eds., *Warlpiri Women's Voices: Our Lives, Our History Warlpiri Karnta Karnta-Kurlangu Yimi* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 1995).

[3] Jo-ann Archibald/Q'um Q'um Xiiem, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2009).