Early Native American Writing is a collection of critical essays discussing the works of American Indian authors who wrote between 1630 and 1940 and produced some of the earliest literature in North America. The first collection of critical essays that concentrates on this body of writing, this book highlights the writings of the American Indian authors considered, many of whom have only recently been rediscovered, as important contributions to American letters.

American Indians writing in English offer a permanent record of the dramatic and often tragic confrontation between native culture and the communities of settlers arriving in the New World over four centuries. As white settlers arrived in North America, bringing with them disease, technology, and Christianity, they also brought writing – a tool that Native Americans, accustomed to an oral tradition, would adopt. As the essays in this volume suggest, writing in English became a way to convey protest and legitimacy for American Indians – a way to argue with missionaries, to record the ravages of smallpox, to mythologize contemporary heroes, to expose the depredations of the doctrine of manifest destiny. Serving in their own time as a means of addressing a heedless oppressor, Native American writings have since become a vital record of an experience whose history, as written by mainstream writers, is incomplete. The essays collected here seek to recover that history while bringing new attention to the texts themselves.
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NEW CRITICAL ESSAYS

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FOREWORD

A. LAVONNE BROWN RUOFF

Early Native American Writing: New Critical Essays is the first volume devoted to this significant but neglected area of American Indian written literature. Whereas most scholarly books on Native American literature concentrate on traditional oral or contemporary written literature, Early Native American Writing breaks new ground by focusing on how Native American written literature evolved from its beginnings to become a highly imaginative, polished, and vibrant literature that has won its authors international acclaim.

Early Native American writers faced the dilemma of how to survive as Indians while coping with the dominant society’s demand that they abandon their tribal cultures, world views, and oral traditions in order to assimilate to a Western European, Christian culture that revered written texts. George Copway (Ojibwe) dramatically describes this dilemma in Life, Letters and Speeches: “I loved the woods, and the chase. I had the nature for it, and gloried in nothing else. The mind for letters was in me, but was asleep, till the dawn of Christianity arose, and awoke the slumbers of the soul into energy and action” (11). Like the Native American authors discussed in this volume, Copway acted as a bridge between native people and the dominant society. To persuade his white audiences that native peoples were rational human beings, Copway emphasizes the innate ability of Indians to learn and to adapt. By appealing to his white readers as fellow Christians, he subtly underscores the equality of Indians with whites – an equality non-Indians too often ignored.

Copway’s statement introduces a crucial issue that several scholars discuss in Early Native American Writing: How did individual authors adapt their sense of Indian self and their writing to the expectations of their white teachers and audiences? In “ ‘Honoratissimi Benefactores’: Native American Students and Two Seventeenth-Century Texts in the University Tradition” Wolfgang Hochbruck and Beatrix
Foreword

Dudensing-Reichel discuss the authorship, form, backgrounds, and connection to contemporary colonial discourse of two texts by seventeenth-century students at Harvard’s Indian College: “Honorassimsi Benefactores” by Caleb Cheesateaumauk (Natick), dated 1663, and Eleazar’s “In Obitum Viri vere Reverendi D. Thomae Thacheri” (1679). Written in Latin and Greek, these tributes demonstrate the Indian students’ efforts to master European genres emphasized by their Harvard teachers. Such mastery was often used as a yardstick to measure whether Native Americans were capable of being educated.

The complicated relations between Indian student and white teacher is the subject of Laura Murray’s “‘Pray Sir, consider a little’: Rituals of Subordination and Strategies of Resistance in the Letters of Hezekiah Calvin and David Fowler to Eleazar Wheelock.” As their correspondence reveals, Wheelock, by emphasizing the father-child metaphor for their relationship, enmeshed his Indian students in powerful bonds of duty and debt, which he manipulated to make it difficult for them to escape. In “‘(I speak like a fool but I am constrained)’: Samson Occom’s Short Narrative and Economies of the Racial Self,” Dana Nelson uses the artist/creator metaphor to demonstrate the impact of Wheelock’s educational system on Samson Occom and other Indian students. Nelson stresses that Occom’s growing consciousness of the systematic robbery of his Indian selfhood is the underlying organizational principle of his narrative.

Whereas these earliest examples of written literature were university exercises, correspondence, or personal history not intended for publication, Indian authors soon used the written word to fight for Indian rights or to define their culture to non-Indians. In “‘Where, then, shall we place the hero of the wilderness?’ William Apess’s Eulogy on King Philip and Doctrines of Racial Destiny,” Anne Marie Dannenberg reveals how the author defies the myth of the disappearance of the doomed Indian warrior by making strong statements of cultural nationalism for American Indians and indicting whites for their treatment of his people.

As Daniel F. Littlefield demonstrates in “‘They ought to enjoy the home of their fathers’: The Treaty of 1838, Seneca Intellectuals, and Literary Genesis,” Maris Bryant Pierce and Nathaniel Thayer Strong used their mastery of English to take strong stands on tribal treaties. Especially significant is Pierce’s Address on the Present Condition and Prospects of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of North America, with Particular Reference to the Seneca Nation (1838), which urges the Senecas to resist removal while arguing that they can and must assimilate.

In “‘This voluminous unwritten book of ours’: Early Native Amer-
ican Writers and Oral Tradition,” William M. Clements stresses that Native American authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries incorporated traditional storytelling into their writing. Helen Jaskoski also emphasizes the importance of oral tradition in “‘A terrible sickness among them’: Smallpox and Stories of the Frontier.” She uses the smallpox stories by Francis Parkman, Andrew J. Blackbird, and William Warren to exemplify how scholars need to consult Indian as well as non-Indian accounts to understand the history of Indian–white relations.

Women, too, addressed issues of Native American cultural nationalism, as Carol Batker makes clear in “‘Overcoming all obstacles’: The Assimilation Debate in Native American Women’s Journalism of the Dawes Era.” According to Batker, Indian women journalists demonstrated a complex negotiation between Native and non-Native practices that emphasizes cultural dynamism rather than cultural loss as a paradigm for assimilation.

Many of the essays in Early Native American Writing examine the literary techniques that Native American authors used in their autobiographies and fiction. The genre in which native Americans have written most from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries is autobiography. In “‘An Indian . . . an American’: Ethnicity, Assimilation, and Balance in Charles Eastman’s From the Deep Woods to Civilization,” Erik Peterson describes Eastman’s second autobiography as a spiritual journey and an intricate “balancing act” of negotiation between two worlds in which the author juxtaposes contradictions and opposing forces to demonstrate a structure of inclusion. Robert Sayre, in “‘A desirable citizen, a practical business man’: G. W. Grayson—Creek Mixed Blood, Nationalist, and Autobiographer,” suggests that the fact that Grayson consciously wrote autobiography was a sign of his acculturation. Unlike such earlier autobiographers as Apess, Copway, or Eastman, Grayson does not use either the religious conversion or the spiritual journey as an organizing principle.

By the mid-nineteenth century, American Indian authors were beginning to publish fiction. In “‘I am Joaquin!’: Space and Freedom in Yellow Bird’s The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murrieta, the Celebrated California Bandit,” John Lowe argues that John Rollin Ridge’s 1854 romance utilizes the realization that the American dream has always depended on the appropriation of space for a concept of identity, and he demonstrates how the politics of displaced and relocated peoples can give rise to heroic and sometimes mythical folk literature.

Martha L. Viehmann’s “‘My people . . . my kind’: Mourning
FOREWORD

Dove’s *Cogeweal, the Half-Blood* as a Narrative of Mixed Descent” examines Mourning Dove’s use of the themes of biological mixed descent and legends of cultural contact, as well as the differences between Lucullus McWhorter and Mourning Dove in their appeals to white readers. Birgit Hans’s “‘Because I understand the storytelling art’: The Evolution of D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*” contrasts one manuscript version of this novel with the final published text, showing how a conventional romance became transformed into a powerful naturalistic novel.

The essays in this volume make it clear that early Native American writers soon learned that written English was a powerful medium for educating white audiences about the intellectual and creative abilities of Indian people, the value of their tribal cultures, and white injustice to Native peoples. The works of these Indian authors demonstrate both their mastery of a variety of non-Indian literary genres and their skill in using the written word as a sharp weapon in the cultural word wars. As Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwe) reminds us in *Manifest Manners*, “Tribal imagination, experience, and remembrance are the real landscapes in the literature of this nation; discoveries and dominance are silence” (10).

Works Cited


PREFACE

I may surprise you yet, James LaGrinder! even if I am a “squaw” as you call me . . . I may use the pen!

Mourning Dove, Cogewea

This declaration by the protagonist early in Cogewea follows on her resolve to record “the woof of her people’s philosophy,” the traditional wisdom that she sees passing away with the loss of elders like her grandmother. Such in fact was the work that Cogewea’s creator, Mourning Dove, herself undertook, later publishing a collection of traditional Okanogan stories. Cogewea might be a fictional model as well for many of the writers whose works are examined in this volume, as they also frequently expressed the intention of preserving a wisdom that they saw as dying away. The passage also reflects the adversity under which so many of these writers labored. Addressing an audience at best insensitive and all too often hostile, they undertook a labor that enjoyed little support from any source and was generally unrewarded. Against such odds, these authors made a unique contribution to American culture.

There is a theory that considers American Indian literature to be only those texts (oral and written) produced by Native people and addressed primarily to a Native audience; it is a comparative theory, and it offers a rewarding basis for studying those texts that it canonizes. Such a formulation, however, excludes the authors considered in this volume, for all of them wrote in European languages, and most of them directed their words to an audience of non-Native people. The works examined in the essays collected here must be seen, rather, as always involved in a dynamic negotiation across many boundaries, barriers, gaps, and silences characterizing the discourse.
Preface

of the emergent nation. Their undertaking speaks to a profound faith in the possibility of language to overcome ignorance and hostility, as well as a remarkable trust – which in the light of history may seem to have been misplaced – in the capacity of their audiences to be persuaded by rational argument and humane principles. This volume seeks to continue a process, recently begun, of recovering these authors and their works from marginalization and neglect and restoring them to the significant place they merit in American literature.

Support for this volume has been generous and welcome. My warmest thanks go to Eric Sundquist, series editor for Cambridge University Press’s Studies in American Literature and Culture, whose encouragement and help with this project is only one of the manifestations of his professional generosity. Susan Chang made early and astute suggestions, and Camilla Palmer was supportive through upheavals and personnel changes while the book was in production. The Faculty Research office at California State University, Fullerton, provided a grant toward editing the manuscript of the collection.

Several of the pieces gathered here are reprinted from earlier publications. This project originally grew out of a special issue of SAIL – Studies in American Indian Literatures, numbers 2/3 of the 1992 volume. Versions of the following articles appeared in the SAIL issue: “Honoratissimi benefactores” by Wolfgang Hochbruck and Beatrix Dudensing; “Pray sir, consider a little” by Laura Murray; “I am Joaquin!” by John Lowe, which appeared as “Space and Freedom in the Golden Republic”; “An Indian . . . An American” by Eric Peterson; “Because I understand the storytelling art” by Birgit Hans, originally entitled “Re-Visions.” Robert Sayre’s “A desirable citizen, a practical business man,” originally titled “G. W. Grayson,” is reprinted from A/B: Auto/Biography by permission of the author.

Finally, it is my pleasure to express my gratitude to three other groups of people without whom this book could not exist. The contributors have been unfailingly patient, waiting out wearying periods of review and cheerfully revising and reformatting documentation; I am grateful. Most constant has been my husband, Dan Brown, to whom I owe not only loving support and good humor but corrections of Latin translations. My son, Andrew Brown Jaskoski, has been a faithful typist and incisive critic. Finally, and most of all, we are all in the debt of the authors whose works are examined in these essays. It is my hope that this volume will contribute to the work of communication and education that they undertook in their writings.

Helen Jaskoski
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Contributors

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