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The Loss of Aesthetics:
Translation Issues of Native American Literatures

by

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INTRODUCTION

Every fall, I like to start off the school year by teaching my eleventh grade English students the three Native American stories included in their textbook. Up until the Fall of 2002, my purpose for teaching these stories was simplistic: I wanted my students to realize that Native Americans have their own stories that represent the first American literature.

The Fall of 2002 Semester was different. I had a student, a young woman, who felt she could not understand what the pieces in the textbook were really saying. She was not happy with simply reading the pieces and then moving on. She wanted to really understand what the pieces were saying, what the stories meant to the tribes they represented, and what, then, should the stories mean to her.

As the two of us sat side by side, we read one of the pieces over and over. The piece was about the creation of the world by the trickster Coyote. Slowly, my student began to make meaning of the words, attaching the definitions of words and phrases she knew to how the words and phrases used in the text. It was a pleasurable moment for me as a teacher to see a student truly seek for knowledge from a piece of literature. Then my student turned to me, excited, and made a comment to the effect that the piece must be an allegory for Christ and his role in the world.
My student’s comment stopped me cold. Her conclusions couldn’t possibly be correct. How could a Christian figure be in a piece of literature that supposedly pre-dated the introduction of Europeans to the Americas? Was it a mere coincidence of characters? Did all cultures have a supernatural being that acted a protector of the people? Or was our understanding of the piece a really bad interpretation?

It is from these questions that I initially began my research. As I looked into how my student and I could have made these connections, I began to suspect that my student and I had not conducted a bad reading of the text, but rather the translation of the text, which did not bear the name(s) of the translator(s), was perhaps flawed and the meaning and message that the pieces contained prior to translation had been skewed or misrepresented. This has lead me to examine how Native American Oral Texts have been translated, what has been lost in these translations, and how current technology can help create new translations of these texts that will do a better job of retaining the essence or ‘spirit’ that the original texts contains.

Native American Literature is a pre-literate Literature. This means that many of the stories told by Native Tribes pre-date a written form of communication in the Americas. The stories are therefore communicated orally between individuals and groups and have been preserved in the memories of
tribal story tellers, carefully passed down to the next generation of story tellers. To make the memorization of the literature easier, the stories have a form that is similar to poetry and music, with set patterns and styles. Due to the pre-literate nature of the stories, Native American Literature has been labeled as Oral Literature.

Oral Literature, also known as Oral Poetics, is a literature that is defined by the performance that both creates the literature and shares the literature with an audience. Oral Literature requires both a speaker/performer and an audience. The speaker does more than just speak the words of the literature. He/she becomes the literature, conveying the story through the use of voice and movement. The speaker performs the piece by speaking, chanting, singing, or just making vocal sounds that form no word but emote. At the same time, the speaker can dance, stamp his/her feet, pound on drums, shake rattles, pantomime, act out the movements of a character, move abruptly, or stop abruptly. The speaker may even be accompanied by a chorus of individuals who play roles in the re-creation of the story for the individual performance. Oral Literature transcends the words that are spoken. Oral Literature is performance where every motion, every shake of the rattle, every movement of the speaker or chorus, and every pause, comes together to create meaning.
Just as important as the performance of the Oral Literature is the presence of an audience. Oral Literature requires an exchange to occur between the speaker of the literature and an audience. The performance of many pieces of Oral Literature requires the audience to respond to the speaker. The audience interaction can range from the stamping of feet or clapping of hands during the performance, to answering the calls of the speaker with verbal responses that include words or sounds. The exchange between the speaker and audience is considered an integral part of Native American Literature, as true meaning for Oral Literature is created in the way that an audience responds to the speaker. As meaning is created in the exchange between the speaker and audience, an experience is created and shared by both. This shared experience is unique. The experience evokes a multitude of feelings and senses, creating an experience that can only be described as beautiful. It is this sense of the aesthetic that is so important in Oral Literature.

Most literate cultures, particularly Western cultures, value the written word over the spoken word, and expect the written word to be capable of communicating all the thoughts, emotions, and ideas necessary for a successful work of Literature. Written literature is able to function separate and independent of its creator. This is significantly different from Oral Literature which is intrinsically tied to its creator, who is the speaker of the literature.
While Native American Literature comes from a pre-literate culture, when it is translated, it is typically translated for a literate culture. The translators have historically tried to take the complicated and complex Oral Literature of Native Americans and translate it to conform to the above expressed Western concept of literature because that the reader from the Western culture expects the translation to conform to the Western format.

Current study of Oral Poetics and Native American literature demonstrates the inadequacy and distortion associated when expression of a complex multi-faceted cultural literature is conformed and translated into familiar categories of literate Western culture.... Although the most basic characteristic of oral poetics – actual performances – is no mystery, this feature is rarely transported into our purview when critically analyzing the literature (Recovering Presence 84).

Translators have focused on the words of the Oral Literature because that is what they have been taught is important. However, this focus on the words that can be written and the creation of a structure for the literature based solely off the text has led to an incorrect, even convoluted, understanding of what Native American Literature really is. The written word is a passive form of communication. Oral Literature is an active form of communication. Without
the active form of communication, the aesthetic experience that is shared in the performance of the literature cannot be actualized, making most translations simply a shabby re-construction of the original piece. This loss of the aesthetic beauty of the literature leaves the reader with only a shadow of the original piece and this has served to misrepresent the Native American people it originated from. The best representation of Native American Literature should seek to represent all the elements of the literature, including the non-verbal aspects that are hard to capture. Without the non-verbal elements, the translation cannot convey the aesthetic.

Another issue with translating Native American Literature is the problem of language. Traditionally, translation occurs when a work of literature in one language is given an equivalent in a new language. This type of translation typically involves the translator being fluent in both the original language and the new language. This fluency allows the translator to wrestle with choosing the appropriate words to convey the meaning of the original words into the new written word. Native American literature does not allow for this type of translation. Very few translators of Native American literature are able to speak the language of the tribes that they work with. These translators instead become reliant on tribe members who are fluent in both languages to help them understand the original work in order to create the translation. This
creates an additional barrier to overcome when creating a translation, because the translator trusts that the words and phrases rendered by the helping tribe member are similar to the original, and this may not be the case.

In order to correctly represent Oral Literature, a translator must find a way to “recover the original expression as expressed orally by Native Americans with a double act: retaining the unique expressive qualities of oral performance while making that language understandable to a Western culture” (Talking Books 1). Modern Translation of Native American text must seek to preserve the performative aspect of the text. Without the meaning that comes from the performance, the literature becomes only a shadow of its self, and there is a danger that the literature of Native Americans could be lost.

The fact that my student and I came to such an outlandish interpretation of the Native American piece that we read is not surprising given the difficulties that exist when trying to translate Oral Literature. The translation process is a rocky process, and is filled with different philosophies and methods. Given the problems that accompany the translation process for Oral Literatures, it is imperative that the process of translation be examined carefully and an adjusted, or even different, approach to translation be used in the future. By critically examining the issue, new and better translation can hopefully be created, allowing non-Native American speaking people to enjoy
the aesthetic nature of the rich and diverse literature of the pre-literate Americas.

The following chapters seek to examine the issue of translation as it applies to Oral Native American Literature. While translation of Oral Literatures have some unique and distinctly different issues than the translation of written literatures, both start in the same place, which is how to best approach the act of translation. My examination starts with the commonalities that all acts of translation share and the theory that guides it. From translation theory, my analysis moves to three modern translators of Native American texts. By examining how they create a translation we can identify what is being lost in these translations. By identifying what elements of the original works have been left behind, we can then seek to re-capture these elements and create translations of Native American texts that more fully represent the literature as it is before the act of translation.

As an end note, I have added some information about what Native Americans are doing to preserve their literature and culture currently. It is important to note that while Native American Literature has been primarily translated by non-Native Americans, this is now rapidly changing as the Native American people are taking a place of power and authority over their own lives and their local communities. It must be acknowledged that as those from who
the literature originates began creating translations, new methods of preservation may emerge.

In the future I would like my students and myself to be able to access a translated piece of Native American Literature and be able to enjoy the literature as closely as possible to how it must have been when performed in its original language. I hope that my students will be able to see past the written words on the page and instead have an aesthetic experience with the literature.
CHAPTER ONE

TRANSLATION THEORY

While the translation of any literary work has its own set of unique problems, when approaching the multi-dimensional manifold that characterizes Native American Literature, it brings intangible challenges for the translator. One of the challenges that the translator of oral texts accepts is the need to compensate for the non-verbal modes of expression inherent in oral literature. This includes music, dance, pantomime, the stomping of feet, the movement of the storyteller's arms, etc. While not everything in the field of translation theory applies to translating native oral literature, the basic concepts and theory are applicable. Because the translation of Oral Literature involves many of the same acts as traditional translations, it is important to understand how the fundamentals of translation apply and how they can help with the creation of a translation. It is equally important to understand that while Native American Translation fits within the cannon of Translation Studies, Translation Theory currently cannot fully serve the unique translation requirements of Oral Literature because if its focus and value of western modes of literature.

Translation is neither simple nor easy. Every piece of literature that is considered for translation is given different consideration for how to translate it, and no two translators use the same method. In 1944, Herbert B. Myron of
Boston University wrote “Translation Made Tolerable.” While Myron focus was on translations from French to English, his take on translation is applicable to all types, including Oral Literature. Mryon argued that in order to create a translation, the translator must be aware the act process of “translation is both an art and a science” (404). This statement was a revolutionary idea at the time. Typically translators tended to favor one approach over the other, with some translators trying to take a fully scientific approach to the act of translation, creating rules for how to approach and translate sentences and phrases, creating rules for how wide a variety of words can be employed in the translation, and basically creating an inflexible translation process. Other translators took a fully creative approach to the act of translation by focusing on what was communicated by the original piece rather than focusing on how it was communicated, and then creating a work that the translator felt was reflexive of the original’s method. Myron was among the first translators of his time to suggest that there is a middle ground between the two methods, and that a thirds style of translation that embraced the best from the other two methods would serve the process best. His ideas created a natural and needed evolution in translation, allowing translators a fresh and new approach.

The creative and scientific approaches are categorized as either literal (scientific) or ‘free’ (creative) translation. Myron’s concept that a combination
approach of literal and ‘free’ translation took the best of both concepts and allowed for a greater range of possibilities in the translation process.

In general, a translation must neither be “free” nor “literal.” It must be “faithful,” that is to say, a faithful imitation (not adaptation or approximation) of the original. It must be faithful both to the language of the original text and to the idiom into which it is being translated. It must be faithful both to the letter and to the spirit (404).

A faithful translation should seek to be more than just the words on the page. Myron suggests that a faithful translation must somehow seek to preserve the heart of the original text through more than just the written word. Some translators, particularly inexperienced translators, try to do literal, or word for word, translations. A literal translation occurs when the translator tries to find equivalent words in the new language for each of the words in the original piece. However, simply going through the original work word by word and choosing the best word in the target language is not sufficient. A literal translation risks creating a new text that bears no relation to the original in terms of meaning due to the translators focus on the individual words instead of the overall meaning of the text. A ‘free’ approach to translation is the opposite of a literal translation. In a ‘free’ translation, the translator seeks first to understand the deeper meaning of the original before translation, and in the
act of translation seeks to create a new work that would carry the same message as the original without being held to the same structural parameters of the original, such as word choice and sentence length. This method of course ignores the structure of the original and seems to be more an exercise of appropriation than translation, meaning that the work labeled a translation is more a new creation with a similar message, than a translation. Myron established that translation has a duality to it, that it is through a combination of the literal and ‘free’ approach that a translation can be the most success. Since neither method alone was capable of creating a faithful translation, the only solution seemed to be to take the best of both methods in an attempt to create that faithful translation.

The combined use of literal and ‘free’ translation can provide a solid approach for the translator of Oral Literature. The translator that employs the dual approach that Myron espouses allows for the preservation of the tribal culture. The translator is able to focus not only on the preservation of the words of the literature but also on how to best preserve the performance of the literature through creative means. It is the preservation of the multi-layers of the Oral Literature that is important when creating this type of translation.

Myron’s concept of there being a duality to the process of translation is a goal to work toward, but does not explain what the process of translation
should look like and what it trials it encompasses. Many different theorists in the field of translation theory have evolved different ideas about the process of translation. In 1923, Walter Benjamin wrote “The Task of the Translator” in German. In his essay, he writes that “Translation is a mode” (16), meaning that translation is a process through which the message of the original piece is conveyed through a new piece. His essay provides keystone ideas about the translation process, particularly about how the process should start by focusing on if a text can be translated, because he believes that not all text are capable of being translated. Understanding that the ability of a piece to be translated is the cornerstone in the process of translation, he states:

The question of whether a work is translatable has a dual meaning.

Either: Will an adequate translator ever be found among the totality of its readers? Or, more pertinently: Does its nature lend itself to translation and, therefore, in view of the significance of the mode, call for it? (16).

As Benjamin points out in the above quote, the translator is as important as if the text lends itself to the translation process. Many times, the process of translation is only concerned about the work being translated, without examining who the translator is, and if the translator can accomplish a translation that will best represent the original.
Benjamin reminds us that the role of a translator is as important as the translation. As he points out, not all literature can lend its self to the translation process, and a translator should be able to recognize when a work can or cannot be translated. The final version of a translation must be able to reveal the specific significance of the original piece, and if the translation is unable to do so, then the translator should be able to identify the piece as being untranslatable.

Oral Literature has been traditionally translated without concern for if the work can be translated effectively enough to create what can be labeled a good translation. Much of the significance of the literature goes beyond the words that are spoken and is wrapped up in the non-rhetorical aspects of the work. When translators of Oral Literature focus only on the rhetoric of the literature, then a part of the text is lost. This loss, according to Benjamin, means that work is not translatable. Therefore, if the translation of Oral Literature fails to make even an attempt at preserving the performance of the original, then it should not be considered a full or faithful translation.

When regulated to traditional modes of translation, Oral Literature is not translatable. However, Oral Literature is translatable if, and only if, the performative and aesthetic nature of the work is acknowledged and included in the translation. This will result in a successful translation which brings
together the multi-variable modes of expression that are actualized in the moment that the audience embraces a conscience other than their own and enjoys an aesthetic moment of discovery.

The process of achieving this aesthetic moment of discovery in a translated piece occurs through a unidirectional process of communication. The unidirectional process of communicating an original work from the language of its creator into a different language must go beyond the surface of just the words to encompass the ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ of the original piece. When translators work with the Oral Literature, the soul of the piece is bound up not only in the words that the speaker says, but in the actions and motions that occur as the story is told. It is imperative as translation studies continues to expand to include non-Western style texts, such as Oral Literature, that translators recognizes that the soul of Oral Literature goes beyond just the words that can be written on the page and is part of the accompanying performance.

A traditional requirement for a translator has been fluency in both the original language and the target language. The idea is that the translator, fluent in both languages, would be able to best figure out how to preserve the essence of the original piece in its translation. However, translators of Oral Literature are traditionally unable to speak the language of the tribe that they are
translating from. This forces the translator to work with a speaker of the native language in creating a transcript of the Oral Literature, prior to attempting to create a translation. The translator of Oral Literature does more than the traditional translator of Western texts. The translator must wrangle with what aspects of the text can and cannot be translated while dealing with a language barrier that prohibits the translator full access to the culture of the tribe and the fullness of the original performance. Without full access to the language and therefore the original aesthetic of the literature, the translator must rely heavily on the member of the native tribe to create a transcription that will allow the translator to preserve the culture of the tribe through the translated text.

The ‘spirit’ or ‘soul of the Native American text is found in the message that the work conveys. The message of the Native text represents the culture of the native tribe. Because the culture of the tribe is represented by the translation, it is important that the translator recognizes, understands, and incorporates the culture of the native tribe in to the translation. Jeffery F. Huntsman wrote in his essay, “Traditional Native American Literature: The Translation Dilemma,” that “Too often, even large-scale cultural differences are overlooked by translators concentrating on the details of word and phrase” (89). Huntsman’s words act as a word of caution for translators. The translator must be sensitive to the culture of the tribe that the text is being
translated from. A translator who focuses on the rhetoric of an oral text may overlook a concept or image that is unconsciously communicated during the act of performing the text. This concept or image does not have to be spoken to be present in the oral text. The translator who overlooks non-spoken concepts and images may leave out important elements of the text that serve to share the culture of the native tribe with those who experience the literature.

When working on a translation, it is important for the translator to refer to the original work for guidance in the act of translating. While this may seem like an obvious point, within the translation of Native American Oral Literature, this is frequently overlooked due to the translators’ inability to understand the tribal language along with limited access to the performance. Many times, the translator is working from a crudely written transcript in English that was created with help by a member of the tribe that the literature came from. Due to the translator’s inability to read or understand the literature in its original language, the translator tends to ignore the original performance after the completion of the crude transcript in English. The translator does not necessarily understand the importance and intentions of the performative aspect of the texts. By looking back to the original text, both as a performance, and then as a written work in the native language, the translator can still examine patterns and phrases that may not be relevant or evidentiary in the
English transcript. Unfortunately, this has been proved almost impossible to do. Translated works that have ignored the original text have been ambiguous at best. Translations created in the past have left much to be desired because it is difficult to know if the pieces convey the 'soul' or message that original piece intended to due to the neglect of the original text in its original form.

A translation should attempt to preserve the original for the reader by trying to keep what is possible of the rhetorical elements that created the original work. Translation of Oral Literature diverges significantly from traditional translations. Traditional translations of Western Literatures involve two products or texts: the original text and the translated text. Oral Literature involves four texts important to the translation process: the original text, a written version of the original text in the native language, a crude transcription in English, and the final translation. When the translation is complete it should include the latter three texts when placed upon the written page. When the original work in its native language is laid by the side of the literal translation and the final translation, there should be a clear line of delineation between the three, a sense of connection between the works. This allows the translator to take in consideration the original piece of work, along with the culture of those he/she is trying to translate from, and still try to retain the all
important ‘soul’ of the piece. However, this does not make up for the elements of the literature that cannot be written down.

The concept that a translated work should have a clear line of delineation between itself and the original text is supported by Toby C.S. Langen, a professor and medievalist at Western Washington University. In her essay, “Translating Form in Classical American Indian Literature,” she writes; “I find myself wary of any translation that does not offer some sort of access to the translation process as to the original..... the relation of the translation to the original, whatever that relation may be, ought to be of interest to an evaluator” (191-192). If the original work is obscured and hidden from the reader/evaluator, then the translation may have something to hid, particularly in regards to Native American Oral Literature. As new translations of Oral Literatures appear, the texts should be traceable back to the original untranslated text. By being able to trace the translation back to the original piece, the concern that the translator may have an ulterior motive in creating the translation and may have changed to the story to present a politicized perspective is alleviated. By laying the original work along side the translated work, the reader/evaluator can look and study both in order to come to his/her own conclusion regarding the validity of the translation in regards to how well it represents the tribal people it originated from.
A translation should aspire to communicate the original text in a way that allows the meaning and culture of the original text to be shared with the reader without making the reader feel as though the translation is only a shadow of the original. Walter Benjamin wrote that “A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully” (21). The idea that the translated work of literature actually “shines” back upon the original means that the translated work is faithful to the original text while accepting that it is a translation. The concept that the translated work can allow the original a fresh perspective, or maybe interpretation, is a noble idea. A translation becomes a new medium for understanding the original work, extending the original to those who could not understand it in the text’s original language. An effective translation can open up an already known work and allow it to be examined through a different set of ideas and parameters. This should also be the idea with Oral Literatures. The translation should first seek to preserve the intent and message of the original, while opening it up to be examined and understood through the ideas and parameters of an audience of non-Native Americans. Through doing the above, those who do not understand the culture of Native Americans can hopefully come to learn, understand and value the rich heritage and
contributions that Native Americans have to offer the world through their Literatures.

Translation Theory is only applicable to Native American texts to a degree, but cannot be fully applied due to the issues that are unique to translating Oral Literature. Translation Theory grew out of the Western understanding of what makes a text. The Western literary tradition values the written word over non-rhetorical methods of communication. Native Oral Literature values the non-rhetorical modes of communication over the rhetorical. Oral Literature is also an active form of communication between the creator and the audience. The active form of communication is difficult to capture with the written word. Since Oral Literature diverges from Western texts in terms of rhetoric, translation theory is unable to fully apply to Native American text translation. Traditional translation theory has only concerned itself with the written word and has not really provided a method to preserve and incorporate the performance of oral texts in a translation. Therefore, it is up to the translators of oral texts to designate methods of translation that allow for the preservation of the performative and aesthetic aspects of the texts.

It must be noted as well, that no two performances of a Native American texts are the same. Each time a speaker performs the story changes slightly. Different words might be emphasized, the speaker might move
physically in a different way than during the previous telling of the piece. Even the audience can change a performance because of their active participation in the performance of the piece. As translation into a written language is preformed, the flexible nature of the Native American Oral Literature is solidified and made unchanging.
CHAPTER TWO
TRANSLATORS

In a perfect world, all languages would have the same syntactical basis, all words would have a sister word in other languages, and translations could be done by children in the school yard. This is not a perfect world. Words do not all translate directly and most cultures have assigned value to words that are difficult to transmit into another language through the act of translation. The difficult nature of translation encourages translators to take a variety of approaches to translation, resulting in a multitude of critical approaches to the same issues. Translators working with oral texts exemplify the idea that there can be multiple critical approaches to the same problem of translation. An oral text, particularly Native American Oral Literature, values the aesthetic nature of the text. The aesthetic nature of oral literature is favored due to the pre-literate nature of Native American texts. Therefore, the rhetoric is only one element of the native text, that when combined with music, chanting, singing, movement, etc... comes together to create a finished piece of literature. A translator of an oral text must create an approach to the multiple layers of the text, and develop a way to express the layers in the finished piece in order to have a translation that is representative of the original text.
Even though translators of Native American texts have to confront the same problems when translating, they have come to value different aspects of the literature, resulting in a diverse style of translations. Three of the current experts on translating Native American texts, Jerome Rothenberg, Dennis Tedlock, and Dell Hymes, exemplify the diverse nature of translators in the process of translation. Each of these men has chosen to value something different in their translations, resulting in distinct and diverse translations. The different approaches to translation used by these three men exemplify both the problems and the successes of translation.

I. Jerome Rothenberg

Jerome Rothenberg is a poet, and labels himself as first a poet and then a translator. Rothenberg has used his knowledge and experience as a poet to inform his work as a translator. As he advances his approach to the task of translation, Rothenberg advises other translators of oral texts to employ the skills and creativity of a poet to the process of translation. As a poet, he writes, "...I find myself engaging in translation every moment that I write: experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings brought into a language that we take as common and that isn’t" (We Explain Nothing 65). For Rothenberg, the very act of creating poetry is a type of translation, where he must find a
way to convey concepts that are experienced by him in a poetic form that others may understand. He draws a parallel between the act of creating poetry and the act of translation. The problems that Rothenberg faces in an effort to communicate his feelings, thought and perceptions through his poetry, are the same problems he faces when try to translate the feelings, thought and perceptions he finds in Native American Literature. The parallel between his work as a poet and his work as a translator informs his process of translation.

As a translator, Rothenberg identified a threefold issue in regards to translating Native American texts. The threefold issues are "those that center on orality, those that center on the sacred, and those that center on the question of imperial displacement" (65). While he does not believe these questions can be answered in finality, he does believe that the process of translation allows these questions to be explored. He also believes that his position as a poet and translator allow him to examine these questions using creative methods that encourage thinking about the texts in a way that can expose more than just the rhetoric of the Native literature. In the original preface to Shaking the Pumpkin, a collection of Native American texts that he translated, he writes; "As a poet I was able to experiment with more direct approaches to translation... I became interested in the possibility of 'total translation' - a term I use for translation (of oral poetry in particular) that takes in account any or all
elements of the original beyond the words" (xx-xxi). As a poet, Rothenberg is use to trying to express abstract concepts into words on the page. He has found that by using the same processes for translation as he uses for writing poetry, he is able to create a translation that he believes he is able to compensate for the loss of the non-rhetorical part of oral literature. Rothenberg attempts to take the abstract, non-rhetorical aspects of Native literature and express those aspects through the written word creating a type of performance on the printed page that appeals to the sense of sight – much how a performance would. As he gathers the moment, he uses his personal poetic expression to enliven the text. This activity of translation is driven by his personal, expressive techniques rather than the poetic moment that is the original text. The expression of the non-rhetorical aspect of Native literature through the written word frames his critical approach to translation.

Rothenberg values the use of poetic values in creating a translation of oral texts. He also recognizes that a poet is an artist, and that means that no two poets approach the creation of poetry using the same voice or values. As the creation of poetry accomplished using diverse methods, the translation of oral literature should also employ the same diversity, with the translation carrying the artistic voice of the translator.
In each case the translator’s voice is very different- which is the way it should be. For the translator – if he’s to match the interest of the original – must extend its meaning into his own language and by means of his own voice. (This assumes a poet’s voice to begin with.) He needn’t lose his personhood but may extend that too and make it real – in translation as well as in any of his other workings. This has always been the way of the great poet/translators – Catullus or Chaucer or Marpa or Pound – and its beginnings here may hopefully mark the real emergence of Indian poetry into the consciousness of the non-Indian world (Shaking the Pumpkin xxi).

Rothenberg’s celebrate the different voices of the translator is a different approach to translation. There are some experts in the cannon of Translation Studies who believe that the translator should not be identifiable in the translation. Rothenberg believes the opposite. Since no two translators can approach a translation through identical methods, the translator becomes a part of the translation. To deny that the translator is a part of the text is not possible. Instead, Rothenberg encourages the translator to embrace his/her place in the text and seek to make the translation reflective of this.

Rothenberg is not concerned that when he translates a work that it be fully representative of the original piece in its native language, or that it be
even fully faithful to the culture that it came from. The translation becomes a kind of hybrid of both the original piece and thoughts/feelings of the translator. If this means that the new piece does not resemble the original piece in terms of format, or word order, then that is acceptable and even preferable. He reiterates the point, saying that translation “is not the reproduction of, or stand-in for, some fixed original, but that it functions as a commentary on the other and itself and on the difference between them” (We Explain Nothing... 65).

Rothenberg recognizes that the translation cannot be identical to original text. In his opinion, to try and create a translation and call it the original in another language would be to sell the work short. This means that the translation must act as a mediatory to the original for the reader who is unable to experience the text in its original form. This approach may seem like it breaks the rules of translation, but as Rothenberg says “If we translate poetry, we should be ready, as with poetry, to break the rules that keep us from the poem itself” (64).

Rothenberg’s critical approach to translation using the values of a poet is evident in the following piece of literature. The text has been translated by him from the Seneca tribe.

WE GOT EVERYTHING WE NEEDED HERE
AND AINT IT SOMETHING!
herezsometobaccozhere
deezsometobaccozhere
Shaking the Pumpkin 33
While unfortunately we don’t have access to the original piece as it was told by the Seneca tribe, this piece still illustrates the aspects of translation Rothenberg values. Note that the piece is in a poetic format that is also highly rhythmic. The words are placed so that the reader will blend the sounds of the separate words together, mimicking a chant. It can only be surmised that this work came from a chant, and Rothenberg, by using a poetic blocking form and by separating the changing chant into stanzas, is able to produce a piece of literature that reads and reflects what is expected in a piece of Native American Literature. The title of piece provides further analysis for the reader, by giving context to what the chant mean.

It is important to note that Rothenberg has never translated directly from a live performance by Native Americans. All of Rothenberg’s translations are in fact re-creations of Native American Literatures originally translated by someone else. Jerome Rothenberg admits to ignoring the original work when performing the act of translation. Instead, Rothenberg examines an English language version and re-writes it in such a way that he feels better communicates the understanding and beliefs of the tribal people where the work originated. He tries to re-work the piece in some way that it would both reflect its poetic value as well as better represent its place as a piece of Native
American Literature as he envisions it should look. While these works that he ‘translates’ are highly entertaining to read and to watch be performed by Rothenberg himself, one has to question if what Rothenberg really does should be allowed the label of ‘translation’. His works are only concerned with the presentation of the written words. There seems to be no regard for culture or physical performance. Regardless of whether or not Rothenberg’s translations qualify as translations, it is important to note that Rothenberg’s works do carry a prominence in the area of oral texts, and has contributed to the study of Native American Literature.

Rothenberg acknowledges that there is an issue of orality in regards to Native American Literature; he ignores the issue of the unspoken communication that occurs during a performance of the literature. Rothenberg’s translation loses the aesthetic moment that occur in the multi-variable performance that characterizes oral poetry, which does a serious disservice to the literature. The only concession that Rothenberg makes to the performative aspect of the literature is the formation of his poetry upon the written page. While an interesting layout of a poem can make for a different reading of the text, it can in no way replace the sounds of the storyteller’s feet moving, the dancing or shaking of tribal members during the story, or even the
props used to aid in the telling of the story. Hence, in the Rothenberg translation, the aesthetics of the literature are lost.

II. Dennis Tedlock

Within the cannon of Native American Literature, the name Dennis Tedlock is frequently mentioned in conjunction with Jerome Rothenberg. While Tedlock and Rothenberg are colleagues, occasional collaborators and share a similar philosophy about the role of the poet in the process of translation, Tedlock has a distinct style of translation. Tedock’s method of translation seeks to compensate for the loss of the performance through varying the ways of expressing the rhetoric of oral literature in writing. Key to the translation process for Tedlock is his use of the tape recorder.

When Tedlock first worked among the Zuni Indians in the 1960s, he worked aided by the recent availability of the tape recorder. He found that the tape recorder was invaluable to the process of translation because it allowed him to preserve the performance of the text more accurately than he had been able to do previously.

Across from the storyteller sits the mythographer, who inscribes a record of what the storyteller does by voice. But this mythographer is not scribbling furiously away in a notebook while the performer waits to
see whether it will be necessary to go back or whether it will be possible to get on with the story. Instead, the initial version of the inscription is being made by a device....

It is not only the voice of the storyteller that is set free by sound recording, but also the ear of the mythographer.... In short, the mythographer who postpones the use of pencil and notebook will hear precisely all the dimensions of the voice that the spelling ear tunes out (Spoken Word 3-4)

By using the tape-recorder, Tedlock could enjoy the performance of the Zuni text without concern of missing something. Earlier translators who worked with native tribes in obtaining oral texts had to make written transcripts of the texts as the text was performed. Since the human hand is unable to write as fast as the voice can speak, the performance of the text could not be authentic. Without the tape-recorder, the performance was frequently interrupted so that the transcriber could accurately record the text. However, this means the actor cannot create the same performance that would occur if he/she was able to present the text uninterrupted. With the use of the tape recorder, not only was Tedlock able to enjoy the oral text as an audience member during the performance, allowing him to experience the aesthetic moment of the text prior
The results of this effort have convinced me that prose has no real existence outside the written page. Narratives of the kind presented here have been labeled and presented as “oral prose” for no better reason than that they are not sung or (in most passages) chanted. Earlier field workers, including my predecessors at the Zuni, were hampered in their recognition of the poetic qualities of spoken narratives by the fact that handwritten dictation was their only means of collection.... But now that the tape recorder has become practical and accurate as a field instrument, it is possible to capture true performances and to listen closely, as many times as may be necessary, to all their sounds and silences (Finding the Center xix).

Tedlock believes that by listening to a recording of a piece of Native American literature, the translator can use all the sounds (and pauses) to construct a translation that goes beyond the rhetoric of the text. By listening multiple times to a recording, the subtle nuances of the performance, the lower tones, the rushed speech, the chants, the extra sounds, can be captured and then represented in the translated text.

In order capture all the subtle nuances of the narratives, Tedlock created a method of writing the translated pieces so that, although the language is different, the layout and sound of the piece keeps its authenticity. It is in the
ability to read the piece as it was performed that Tedlock believes the narrative receives its best and most correct form of translation. To help his readers understand how his method works, Tedlock has created a guide to reading his translations (see following page). While Tedlock acknowledges that his translation fails to include the movements of the storyteller, he says of his method of translation, “What we have, then, is the possibility of a performable translation” (Spoken Word 13). Tedlock hopes that a reader of one of the piece of Native American story that he has translated could read the piece aloud and come closest to experiencing the way that the Zuni people enjoy their narratives being performed. Through this reading of the piece, the reader is able to create his or her own performance, which in turn creates a new moment of aesthetic pleasure.

The following reading guide was developed by Tedlock to teach readers how to express the words and phrases of his translated texts. In order to preserve the aesthetic nature of the text as he understood it, he developed a system of symbols meant to let the reader know when to pause, read the words quickly, loudly, softly, or slowly.
Guide to Reading Aloud

She went out and
Went down to Water's End

On she went until
She came to the bank
And washed her clothes.

Up on the hills
HE SAW A HERD OF DEER

The would sit king.

O--------n he went

KERSPLASHHHHHHH

AaaaaaaaAAAAAAAH

Pause at least half a second each time a new line begins at the left-hand margin, and at least two seconds for each dot separating lines.
Do not pause within lines (even at The end of a sentence) or for indented lines.

Use a soft voice for words in small type and a loud one for words in capitals.

chant split lines, with an interval Of about three half-tones between levels.

Hold vowels followed by dashes for about two seconds.

Hold repeated consonants for about two seconds.

Produce a crescendo when a repeated vowel changes from lower case to capitals.

Excerpt from Finding the Center, xxxiii-xxxiv
By instructing the readers of his translations on how to understand the symbols that represented the different ways of reading the text, Tedlock hoped to provide his readers with a method that would allow them to go beyond the words of the text. If the reader is able to go beyond just the words of the text, and can connect with the aesthetics of the text, then the reader can possibly reach the culture of the tribal people.

Tedlock takes the idea of reaching the culture of the Zuni tribe further, noting that no two performances of any piece are alike. By allowing a reader the experience of a translated work that follows the original piece in terms of how the lines and phrases were meant to be spoken, or not spoken, the reader has the ability to create his or her own performance of the piece. The reader who creates his/her own performance of the text is replicating the performance of the piece, and can experience more than just the words as they are written upon the page. Instead, the reader can feel and try to understand the rhythm behind the words that help to create the aesthetic nature of the text.

To truly understand the method of Tedlock’s translation, it helps to see how it has been done to compare it against a more traditional translation of the same story. The first passage is a translation of a piece of Zuni Oral Literature by Ruth L. Bunzel that was created in the 1930s. The second passage is by
Tedlock in the 1960s, using his method of following the speech patterns of the narrator.

_They laid the deer down side by side. They laid them down side by side and they made the boy sit down beside them. After they had made him sit down they gave the deer smoke. After they had given them smoke they sprinkled prayer meal on them. After they had sprinkled prayer meal on them the people came in_ (On the Translation 61).

The deer saw the people.

They fled.

Many were the people who came out after them

now they chased the deer.

Now and again they dropped them, killed them.

Sure enough the boy outdistanced the others, while his mother and elder sister and brother still followed their child. As they followed him

He was far in the lead, but they followed on, they were on the run

and sure enough his uncles weren’t thinking about killing deer, it was the boy they were after.

And ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAD COME
KILLED THE DEER

killed the deer

killed the deer

(Finding the Center 21).

Even taking in consideration how the story could/would have evolved among the Zuni people in the thirty years between the performances, what makes Tedlock’s translation of the above text interesting is how he tries to compensate for the loss of the performance through the representation of the words on the written page. Although the movement, singing, pantomime, etc... of the piece is missing, it is not fully lost. Tedlock’s method replicates the speech patterns of the storyteller, letting the reader of the piece imagine when the tone slows done, speeds up, gets louder or softer. While this does not show how the speaker performed the piece, it does leave the reader with clues as to how the storyteller may have performed the piece as well as allowing the reader an opportunity to replicate the verbal patterns of the piece. While this cannot compensate for the loss of the performance, Tedlock shows some innovation in his translation methods that can be commended for trying to preserve what had previously been lost, and this contribute towards the
creation of a translation method that will do a better job of preserving the literatures of the Native Americans.

III. Dell Hymes

Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock enjoy a gentle rivalry in regards to how they accomplish a translation. Hymes’s method of translation takes the counter position of Dennis Tedlock’s: where Tedlock is concerned about preserving the performative aspect of oral literature through the written word, Hymes is most concerned about replicating the patterns that emerge from the oral text. To clarify the importance of the patterns of speech in oral literature, Hymes writes of translating Chinookan Oral narratives:

Verses are recognized, not by counting parts, but by recognizing repetition within a frame, the relation of putative units to each other within a whole. Co-variation between form and meaning, between units and a recurrent Chinookan pattern of narrative organization is key (84). Hymes’s concern with looking for patterns within the spoken text in its original language means that he uses the patterns that he identifies in the original work to give structure and meaning to his translation. He believes replicating the patterns is the best method to create a successful translation.
Most of Hymes’s work has to do with the re-examination of translations done by Franz Boas and his students during the 1930s, although he has done field work and continues to so. As Boas worked in the field, creating translation, he and his students made sure a transcription of all narrations were completed first in the native language prior to the translation. As the purpose of Boas’s field work was to preserve the literature of native tribes for anthropological reasons, preserving the native language of the tribes was key to his work. Hymes writes of these;

We must count ourselves lucky to have records of the verbal art of even a dozen gifted narrators, a dozen from among the hundreds who must have died unrecorded and are now unremembered. It is not surprising that the attention of the recorders was focused on recording itself, on publication of the texts, on preparation of grammars to help elucidate the texts. What is strange is that no scholarly tradition arose of continuous work with those texts. (In Vain 6-7).

These records that Hymes is referring to represent the foundation of Native American Literature that the ordinary reader has been exposed to when reading what has been labeled Native American Literature. Hymes’s method of translation primarily relies on examining and re-examining the records in the Native Language, looking for patterns among the sounds of the text and
looking at where the speaker uses the same words or phrases over and over for emphasis. From here, Hymes proposes re-translating many of these narratives so that they reflect that pattern of the original piece. This use of rhetoric, he believes, is the key to a sound translation.

Hymes acknowledges, just as Rothenberg and Tedlock do, that the translated piece cannot fully be the original. Translation “...involves not only translation by also transformation, transformation of modality, the presentation of something heard as something seen” (Use All 86). This translation from verbal to written is a difficult place for the translator to negotiate, and Hymes recognizes here that a translation is not so much a translation as it is a transformation of the text into something different. This is where his argument about focusing on the rhetorical structure fits in. “The Translation cannot claim to show significant new structure, but only show new possibilities of verbal choice and rhythm” (In Vain 43). Therefore, if the structure of the original is reflected in the structure of the translation, then the translation becomes effective, even if it loses other aspects of the original text.

The following is an example of the type of work that Hymes has done in his review of the Boas translations. From his review of the translation and the original transcription of the text in the native language, Hymes is able to create his own translation.
Workingman’s Song of the Tli:tLEGi:d of theq’u:mky’utyEs for his First-Born Son.

1. Original Transcription

1. hants’e: noqwi’ lakwe: ky la: qEn gya: q’e: na’ ye: 
   bEgwa: nEmts’e: da dask’wa, ya ha ha ha.

2. a:le: winuqwi’ lakwe: ky la: qEn gya: q’e: na’ ye: 
   bEgwa: nEmts’e: da dask’wa, ya ha ha ha.

3. le: q’e: noqwi’ lakwe: ky la: qEn gya: g’e: na’ ye: 
   bEgwa: nEmtsqe: da dask’wa, ya ha ha ha.

4. Lats’ae: noqwi’ lakwe: ky la: qEn gyaq’ e: na’ ye 
   bEgwa: nEmtsqe: da dask’wa, ya ha ha ha.

5. e: aqElae: noqwi’ tLEky la: qEn gya: q’e: na’ ye 
   bEgwa: nEmts’e: da dask’wa, ya ha ha ha.

6. qats ky’ eatse: tso: s tsa: yake: yatso: s yage: s
   ’na: kwatsao: s age: s dEso: tso: s dask’wa,
   ya, ha, ha, ha.

2. Literal Translation:

1. Born-to-be-a-hunter at-my becoming a-man, Father, ya ha ha ha.

2. Born-to-be-a-spearsman at-my becoming a-man, Father, ya ha ha ha.

3. Born-to-be-a-canoe-builder at-my becoming a-man, Father, ya ha ha ha.

4. Born-to-be-a-board-splitter at-my becoming a-man, Father, ya ha ha ha.

5. Will-be-a-worker at-my becoming a-man, Father, ya ha ha ha.

6. That-you you-will-nothing need of all you wanted-by-you, Father, ya ha ha ha.

3. Boas’s Translation (1925)
1. "When I am a man, I shall be a hunter, O father! ya ha ha ha!"
2. "When I am a man, I shall be harpooneer, O father! ya ha ha ha!"
3. "When I am a man, I shall be a canoe-builder, O father! ya ha ha ha!"
4. "When I am a man, I shall be a board-maker, O father! ya ha ha ha!"
5. "When I am a man, I shall be a workman, O father! ya ha ha ha!"
6. "That there may be nothing of which you will be in want, O father! ya ha ha ha!"

4. Hymes Translation:

"Born to be a hunter, Born to be a board-splitter,
when I become a man, when I become a man,
Father, Father,
"Ya ha ha ha.

Born to be a harpooner, To be a craftsman,
when I become a man, when I become a man
Father, Father,
"Ya ha ha ha.

Born to be a boatwright, That you, you will need nothing,
when I become a man of all you want,
Father, Father,
"Ya ha ha ha.

(In Vain 49-51)

This piece shows the work that Hymes is attempting to do in terms of searching for patterns and replicating them within the translation. Although Hymes' translation of the piece does not initially appear to be very different
from the literal translation or Boas's translation, there are actually some significant changes. Note in the version in the Native language that there is the repetition of particular letters and phrases. These letters and phrases have the literal translation of "born-to-be-a" in lines 1-4 of the literal translation. However, in Boas's translation, he chose to change the phrase to "When I am a man." While this choice seems logical to the European idea that you have a trade upon manhood, the Boas translation loses the meaning that comes with the idea of being 'born for something'. Also, due to Boas's change, note that in his translation, the first through fifth lines picks up the phrase, "When I am a man." Neither the original transcription nor the literal translation has this phrasing. For Boas to add this phrasing to the first five lines, he imposed a different pattern onto the piece, and in Hymes opinion, this changed the meaning of the narrative.

As state previously, Hymes looks for patterns within the piece that he translates. "The Workingman's Song..." has a great example of the hidden pattern that Hymes looks for and believes influences a good translation of a work. The first four lines repeat a particular pattern that changes in the fifth line, and leads to the sixth line being fundamentally different, allowing the sixth line to act as a conclusion. Hymes writes of this interpretation:
...the structure is plausible in terms of the clear differences in content of each of the four segments. The analysis is supported by consideration of the refrain, *ya ha ha ha*. It comprises four elements, on different in part, three identical. In this it is a direct image of the pattern established in the first five stanzas, in which the first element varies as against the identical repetition of the remaining three (as between stanzas, of course, not within). On the hypothesis that in refrains the *ya* element symbolizes the "figure," the *ha* elements the "ground," the structure of stanzas 1-5 is confirmation and the functional significance of line 1 of stanza 6 is highlighted (50-51).

In other words, it is the relationship between the structure of the phrase *ya ha ha ha*, and the elements of the poem that tell us that only the first four stanza can be the same, with the *ya* indicating that one element of each of these stanzas needs to different. Looking at Hymes's version of the piece, you can see that he restores the structure, keeping it closer to the literal translation while making it accessible to a wide range of readers outside of the field.

Hymes desire for pattern and a structure created or based on the structure makes the most sense in the finished versions of his translations. By comparing his translation to the literal translation and the original transcription, the connection between the two is easily identifiable.
The only problem with Hymes's translation is that in focusing on the pattern of repetition in already translated works, he totally ignores the aesthetic aspect of the Native American Literatures that he seeks to preserve. Nowhere in his work is there an attempt to preserve what the original performance of the work may have been like, and although his work probably represents the verbal words of the original in terms of meaning, without the performative aspect of the piece, the translation fails to be a complete translation.

Of the three translators, Tedlock is the only translator that concerns himself with any of the performative aspects of the literature. Rothenberg and Hymes both embrace the Western ideal of what is valuable in literature, which is only the use of rhetoric to convey meaning. This means that the elements that contribute to the aesthetics of the native work, including music, chanting, singing, pantomime, etc... are still lost in the pieces of literature that proclaim themselves to be representative of Native American Literature. While Tedlock seeks to preserve the performative aspect of the literatures, he too is bound by the Western values that seem to say that the written word is the only method through which the words can be preserved, and he could not recognized a method of translation that does not fully focus on the written page.
With changing times and technology, the loss of the performance does not have to continue when translation occurs. Rothenberg, Tedlock, and Rothenberg were revolutionary twenty-five years ago with what they were doing and accomplishing in terms of translation. Since then, more and different ways of sharing information have come into existence, along with the empowerment of Native American tribes. The combination of these changes makes it seem that the time is ripe for another evolution in the field of translation in regards to oral literatures.
CHAPTER THREE

An Argument for Translation

When I was in the fifth grade, I discovered a series of books in the school library that contained myths and stories from around the world. Since my mother taught at the school I attended, I usually spent an hour or so everyday waiting for her in the library, reading. This series of books very quickly became a favorite of mine. I especially enjoyed reading the Native American stories, with the trickster coyote, the beautiful Indian Princesses that could change into animals, and the brave warriors that always saved the day. While it is great that this literature served to introduce Native American stories to a non-native audience, there were some significant problems with the stories I read. These stories were not credited to a particular tribe, but rather claimed to represent all Native American people. The stories started with traditional Anglo sayings, such as “Once there was...” or “Long ago....” There was also no mention of a performative aspect that connected with the culture of the native people. Rather, each story was treated as an individual story with no relation to the other Native American stories and there seemed to be no concern about these stories being anything more than myths. Yet, through these stories I believed I had learned about Native American culture. Of course I thought that all Native American people were the same, with the same
stories, same beliefs, and the same way of living that really didn’t seem too
different from the Anglo way of life. Obviously these stories, and others like
them, only serve to perpetuate the stereotypes and misconceptions about
Native American, and fail to allow non-native readers to understand Native
American Literature.

Arnold Krupat, a professor of Global Studies and an expert of Native
American Literatures at Sarah Lawrence College, wrote “We need to
acknowledge the very nearly disabling fact that most of us (non-Indians, but a
great many Indians too) are going to experience Native American narrative art
almost exclusively in textual form” (An Approach 324). It is interesting that
Krupat chose to use the term “disabling” here. The term “disabled”
traditionally means that weakened or ineffectual. When something is labeled
‘disabled’ that traditionally means that it is unable to perform the function that
it was originally intended to perform. So when Krupat use the term,
“disabling”, he is indicating that the written translations of Native American
Literature is unable to completely accomplish the task that the translators
desire it to. Thus, the readers of the literature are unable to understand and
experience Native America Literature fully through the translation. If Native
American Oral Literature is only available through the written word, then the
aesthetic experience that is integral to the Native American Literature is no
longer available to those who seek to truly experience the literature. If the literature remains elusive in the translation, then what is the point of even creating a translation? Yet if translations are not created, the literature faces extinction. While Krupat doesn’t offer any solutions to concern he raises, it is something that those who seek to create translations in the future need to consider and wrestle with as they attempt to create translations. He also reiterates the point that it is important that a translation of Native American Oral Literatures be adequately representative of the original.

As stated earlier, Oral texts have multiple layers and it is the combination of all the layers serves to create the literature of native tribe it originates from. To date, no matter how innovative translators have been many, if not all, of the aspects of the performances from Oral Literatures have been lost when put to the written page. This is a problem that plagues all Oral Literatures, not just Native American Oral Literatures. John Miles Foley, professor of English Literature at the University of Massachusetts and expert on comparative oral literatures, wrote of the loss of the performative aspect of literature:

...the outside scholar then performs the ritual act of textualization: he or she extrudes an acceptable inert, bookish object from the once-living, recorded experience, forever eliminating much of the meaning that had
managed to survive that far. Gone are all the performance parameters (voice, music, gesture).... The performance of verbal art, now repackaged for ready consumption by modern Western cultures, has become but a dim shadow of itself.... Ripping the event out of its context and editing it into an object constitutes the first translation; fashioning an English-language facsimile from the edited, original-language epitome is the second.

Such is the tried-and-true way of dealing with oral and oral-derived works: we edit, translate, and then read them into submission.

But can we do any better (viii)?

Foley starts here by identifying the person who is creating the translation is an outsider. This outsider, the scholar who seeks to preserve the stories of the Native American people, is the one deciding what and how the literature should be preserved. Foley acknowledges that the scholar feels need to take the literature and put it into a format that is the antithesis of the original text. In every way the translation is what the original was not. But Foley ends by asking if this can be done better. It can be done better.

Translation does not have to fail when trying to transcribe and translate the literature in its fullness. Now is the perfect time for the process of translation to change. To continue to ignore the technology that is available for
use with translation is to ask that Native Americans continue to allow their literature to misrepresent their culture. The disregard for the full text does not have to continue. With the advances in current technology, a whole new approach to translation of these literatures can be done in a way that would attempt to preserve the performative aspect for those who cannot experience the literature directly as it is performed by a Native American Storyteller. This method, though, would mean collaboration between scholars and Native Tribes. The collaboration is especially important as a member of a Native American tribe would be able to best understand his/her literature and know what should/should not be preserved in order to capture the all important essence of the text that will make it a successful translation.

A new approach to translation requires that one look to the past to understand what can possibly work in the future. One important person to past translations was Alice Fletcher. Fletcher was an ethnographer during the late 1800s and lived among the Sioux people for about six years. During this time, she recorded the stories and songs of the Sioux people (National Anthropological Archives). She went on to publish her book, “Indian Games and Dances with Native Songs.” Although Fletcher did not concern herself with the issues laid out in the previous chapters regarding how to create a translation, what makes her translation significant is her description of the
dances. Since her book was focused on the games and dances of the Sioux people, she knew that she needed to explain how they moved, when they moved, etc. . . . To accomplish this, she laid out in detail the motions that the dancers did in relation to their surrounding and the words that they spoke during the performance. Fletcher realized that an important aspect of the Sioux games and dances were the non-rhetorical elements and she wanted the readers of her book to be aware of what those non-rhetorical elements were. Lacking modern instruments of recording, Fletcher did the best she could to share with the readers of her translation what the performance must have looked like by recording many details of the performance through the use of descriptive, written words.

In the early 1900s, the anthropologist Franz Boas was working at Columbia University. He and several of his doctoral students did field work among different Native American groups, seeking to preserve their oral stories before the tribes became extinct. Boas and his students relied on the use of the phonograph to record the songs of the tribes they worked with because the phonograph Boas felt that by using it, he and his students would be able to better preserve the stories accurately. Typically, the story would be recorded onto the phonograph and then listened to over and over until a written translation could be completed. What Boas started was continued on by future
translators (Briggs et al. 479–528). For example, when Tedlock worked among the Zuni during the 1960s, he used a tape recorder to record all the stories he was told because the tape recorder allowed him to take his time with a translation and to better listen for the subtle nuances of the performances that may not have been evident in the first performance.

The above translators all have something in common; they all realized that there was something more to the literatures that they were trying to preserve than just simply transcribing words. What has kept any of them from being fully successful is that ultimately they all tried to use the spoken word to convey everything that was not spoken. Here is where the next wave of translation must start. This brings us to the questions that need to be asked before translation of Native American Oral Literatures can begin. Who is the audience of the translation of these oral literatures? What is the purpose of these translations? Once we can answer these questions, translators can seek to accomplish translations that serve a purpose outside of just the written word.

There are two groups of non-native people who use translations of Native American Oral Literatures; scholars and their students, and tourists. The first group uses the oral literatures to learn about the stories, the beliefs and the culture of the tribe who they originate from. The academics seek to learn about how and where Native American Literatures fit with literature from
around the world. They hope to learn something that will change them. The second group, the tourists, seeks the stories for enjoyment. If they are changed by the literature, fine. If they are simply entertained for a period of time, equally fine. Neither group is better than the other, but rather is different. Trying to create translations that serve both audiences, though, is difficult. The best solution would be to create translations that can serve the academic community, but that are done in such a way that non-scholars can also access them for enjoyment. By becoming available to both target audiences, the purpose of the texts come into focus; they are meant to teach, preserve and when appropriate, entertain.

To keep the translations of Native American Oral Literatures moving forward toward better translations, modern technology can be used in new and innovative ways. Available to researchers and translators is a wide variety of technology that would make it possible for literature to be preserved in a multitude of ways and more widely available then it has ever been before.

Already, the video recording has been used to preserve the performances of Native American storytelling and aid in the translation process similar to how Tedlock used the tape recorder. While these video recordings have not been used to the degree in which they could, one can find recordings of tribal dances and ceremonies at the Library or even on some tribal websites.
The video recording is invaluable to the field of translation because it allows for the performance to be captured in such a way that almost all the aspects of the performance can be shared with those who were not in attendance. It can also allow for comparison of multiple versions of the same story or ceremony. While the video camera is not in and of its self the answer to the translation problem, it can be employed as a device in helping better translations to come forward and allowing more people to see what a performance can be like. It allows the translators to see and focus on the aesthetics of each unique performance and try to find commonalities between them in order to create a translation. Translators of Native American texts may not come up with the perfect way to translate oral literatures, but by recording and preserving the literatures via video, the stories will still be available to translators long after all the storytellers are gone, thus preserving that would otherwise be lost.

The interactive computer and internet also can provide new and innovative ways to create translations of a text. Foley wrote the paper, *From Oral Performance to Paper-Text to Cyber-Edition* in 2005, outlining how he believes the internet(computer) could be used to create innovative translations. Foley’s concern with past translations is a two-fold problem. The first being readability, the second being fidelity. This is a problem that translators are always wrestling with, and Foley believes that the internet (computer) can be
used to better balance both. His solution is a “tiered strategy” combining the conventional methods with the technology of the internet. The idea is that a written version of an oral story would be placed upon the page, with a translation alongside of it. The internet page can also employ musical capabilities, allowing the individual reading the piece to also hear it at the same time, allowing for the pauses, instruments, audience, to be given an equal placement to the written words in the text. Foley also suggests that specific passages and words can be turned into links that allow the reader to click open photos, explanations, glossaries, etc… that would allow the reader access to all of the additional information that one would need to be able to experience the literature without overwhelming the performance with too many notes. Everything needed would be a click of a computer mouse away.

Foley’s method allows the glossary that accompanies the books of many oral literatures to become easily accessible and an active part of the translation. As the original performance of the piece was multi-sensory and performative, his method would allow the written word to become multi-sensory and performative as well. The texts can also be published via the internet, allowing many who may be unable to access Native American texts to interact and share them.
Beyond the use of video and internet, more tools are becoming available that would allow real-time access to Native American Literatures as has never been available before. While the full uses of these technologies are even lost on this author, they should have place within the translation process as new innovating ideas enter the translation process. Of note are the two-way camera capabilities of the computer, along with speech capabilities. It is now possible for someone in Alaska to talk face to face with someone in Australia by using the internet. This could be a possible way for researchers to watch performances in real time and even interact directly with a performance. In the next year or so, Apple Computers plans to release a version of the popular I-Pod that will allow books to be downloaded and read, but not have the bulk of traditional books. It is possible that this new type of I-Pod would allow for texts like Foley suggest to be downloaded onto a handheld book, allowing the reader all the flexibility of the internet and many of the privileges of the performance.

While the translation can never fully measure up to the original, where technology will take translation remains to be seen. It should be exciting to see researchers in the field of translation work to preserve texts that do not conform to the Anglo written modes of storytelling, be preserved in a way that does not compromise the values and context of the original.
A Note of Fluidity and a Defense of Stance

In recent years, scholars have begun working on new ways to preserve the oral traditions of Old English versus. Primary among those pieces being studied and re-translated to include its performative tradition is the English epic Beowulf. While the context of Beowulf is believed to date back to the early sixth century, the text was not written until sometime in the early eighth century. Later scholars, who could not help but see the similarity between Beowulf and the Greek epics written by Homer, worked to revise Beowulf into a similar poetic style of The Iliad and The Odyssey (Maring 219). Scholars who work with Old English texts have recognized that the translations are problematic and are now working hard to try to restore Beowulf to a form that is a better representation of what it was originally. This effort, though, is very difficult since written versions of the Beowulf text have existed for hundreds of years and there does not appear to be anyone left who has learned the story of Beowulf through the oral tradition. Instead, Old English scholars must work to discover how the text might have been shared orally through the variety of written versions. The work of the Old English scholars trying to re-examine and re-conceptualize texts like Beowulf would be more successful if they had access to a performance or performances of the text as it was once sung.
There are those who believe that the moment a Native American story is recorded and then presented as text that the nature of the text is irrevocably damaged. As repeatedly stated, oral literature is not stagnant, but rather is fluid, with each performance different from the previous, each performer different. The concern is that once a performance is recorded and presented to its target audience, the fluidity would be damaged. The major concern is that the viewers, who watch a recorded version, may first question the performance of narrators in the future, mark the non-recorded performances as not authentic since they will differ. This could eventually cause those who tell the stories within the Native tribe to be reduced to performing each story identically to the previous story in order to remain ‘authentic’ or ‘valid’.

While this is a valid concern and issue, it is also imperative that this type of preservation be performed. The primary target audience of these translations, as stated previously, is an educated audience. These translations, and recordings, will probably be referenced infrequently outside of an academic setting. Since academia is about education, these recordings should be accompanied by educational tools that seek to instruct the audience that the pieces are fluid and would differ performer to performer. It could even go as far as to encourage the viewer to attempt their own re-creation of the text.
Karin Barber, a professor at the Center of West African Studies at the University of Birmingham, and expert on oral and written literature of West African Tribes, makes the argument that while each performance of an Oral Literature is different, the text of each performance remains the same in terms of what the text is going to convey and do.

Literary theorists, then, have been ready to embrace the idea that written texts provoke, entail, or coexist with some kind of performative dimension. However, they have been less ready to contemplate the corresponding claim, that performances within oral traditions entail some kind of textual dimension....

In oral traditions the co-presence of performance and text is of course more difficult to see, because there is no visible, tangible document to contrast with the evanescent utterance. Nonetheless, it is clear that what happens in most oral performances is not pure instantaneity, pure evanescence, pure emergence and disappearance into the vanishing moment. The exact contrary is usually the case. There is a performance – but it is a performance of something. Something identifiable is understood to have pre-existed the moment of utterance. Or, alternatively, something is understood to be constituted in utterance
that can be abstracted or detached from the immediate context and re-embodied in a future performance (Text and Performance, 265).

Barber implicitly states that there is a text to each performance, a core or heart that the story-teller must convey with his/her performance. Many scholars can’t see this because they focus on how each performance is different. While the differences are important, the sameness should also be recognized. Barber recognizes that before each performance begins, the performer thinks of what he/she is going to say, what the story teaches. It is understood before the first word is spoken, which story is going to be told. In the Hopi culture, there is a performance of a piece called the Snake Dance. The purpose of the dance is to call for rain. This dance is performed yearly in many of the Hopi villages. While each performance is different, there are key aspects of the event that make it considered to be a Snake Dance. This is what Barber is calling the text of the performance.

While the repercussions of committing oral literatures to an absolute state must be recognized, what will be lost by not doing so must also be acknowledged. There is no form of translation or preservation that will allow Native American Oral Literatures to be exactly how they are within a tribe. It must also acknowledged that there is a risk of many stories and performances being lost and Native American’s continue to intermarry with non Native
Americans and leave tribal life. Through preserving the stories in a visual format, creating a library of performances by a wide variety of storytellers in their different settings, important cultural, anthropological, and literary works of the Native people can be saved. The visual recordings will also allow those who may never have the ability to see a performance of Native American stories in person, to be able to see the performances long after those who can perform them are gone. Preservation has always been the goal of those who seek to translate the oral narratives of the Native Americans, and while it is a flawed and slightly dangerous process to the fluidity of the literature, it is an important method of preservation that should be done and used to further research and preservation of the literature for the future.
CHAPTER FOUR

Preservation of Poetics by Tribes

There are currently five hundred and sixty-three federally recognized Native American tribal governments in the United States. Beyond these tribes, there are an uncounted number of tribes who are unable to become federally recognized for a variety of reasons but still view themselves as organized tribes ("Native Americans in the United States"). While this may make it seem like there must be a large number of Native Americans in the United States, the numbers have greatly diminished since colonial times. The reasons for the dwindling number of Native Americans have been documented in history texts and will not be discussed here. However, the effects of the minimization of Native American tribes upon their literature has traditionally not been recognized or accounted for in modern translations of the literature. Because the dominate Anglo society in the United States actively sought to destroy Native American tribes or assimilate the members, it becomes reasonable to suspect that the Native Americans may not have completely or accurately shared of their literature with the non-natives who have sought to preserve it. Even if the native speaker sharing the text with the translator attempted to share the culture of the work accurately with the translator, the native speaker
is bound by the restraints of the Anglo methods of communication, which
irrevocably can change the meaning of a text. This means that the works of
literature that are purported to be representative of certain Native Tribes may in
fact not actually do so.

Traditionally, Native American literature has been treated as an inferior
literature by dominate Anglo societies. It was actually believed for a long time
that Native Americans lacked a true language because they lacked a written
language. Anglo settlers to North America made little or no attempts to learn
native languages because they believed there was no language among the
Natives worth learning. Instead they forced the Native American people to
learn their language and communicate using Anglo methods (Vaughan 937).
The arrogant belief that the Native American people lacked culture and
literature served to diminish what Native Americans would contribute to world
literature because the attitude of the settlers established a standard of exchange
between the Native American and the Anglos. This standard of exchange
taught the Natives that they were inferior culture with nothing to offer other
cultures. These feelings played a role in causing Native Americans to be less
willing to offer up their literature along with its accompanying performance
entirely when the Anglos finally decided there was a literature worth
preserving.
When translation of Native American stories began, translators worked with Native Americans who could speak both the language of the tribe and English in order to complete the translations. The translator did not so much translate the Native American stories as he/she made it accessible in terms of rhythm, sentence structure, and other grammaticism, to the English readers. This meant that the translator was entirely dependent upon the native speaker to give an accurate portrayal of the literature in English. In most accounts of those who have worked as translators there is an underlying assumption that the Native Speaker shared all openly and willingly with the Translator. While we can observe that the Native American people have had little say in how their Literatures were portrayed and represented to Anglo societies, they did manage to wield some control over what was shared with Anglo translators. Greg Sarris, a member of the Kashaya Pomo Tribe, wrote in his essay “Encountering the Native Dialogue,” that his grandmother’s cousin, Essie Parrish, the last religious leader of his tribe, practiced this when working with a university scholar to preserve the stories of the tribe. Indians certainly may adapt their texts for recorder-translators.... Aunt Essie, for example, used formal frames to open and close the stories she told linguist Robert Oswalt.... With Oswalt, she customarily opened by saying, “this is a story of”... and closed with “This is the end of that”.
She used frames whether telling stores or describing cultural practices such as gathering and preparing wild potatoes. What Oswalt wanted was language, linguistic units that he could study and translate, and that is what he got.

I have never heard a Kashaya speaker use formal frames when telling a story or anything else.

Sarris goes on to indicate that Oswalt published some texts sharing what he had learned from Sarris’s “Aunt Essie”. This was initially confusing to Sarris, because as a tribal member, he had been admonished by his “Auntie” to learn and keep the secrets and stories of his tribe for his tribe. However, his Aunt Essie seemed to be contradicting herself by sharing these stories with the “white man”. When Sarris questioned her about this, she responded by telling him;

‘He is from the university, that man. See how he does? I tell him things, stories. He picks them up like leaves in his machine and carries them back to his place. Then he listens and looks. Like at each leaf. Beauty is the whole tree. That’s the secret. That’s the story. Can this white man know that?’

So while the ‘Auntie’ is willing to share stories with the translator from the University, she fails to explain the meaning of the stories to the translator,
leaving him fumbling to make meaning of what she has taught him. The translator felt confident that he could figure out the meaning, but the ‘Auntie’ was confident that the sacredness of her culture was not destroyed in the sharing of it with those outside of her culture. Sarris affirms this, writing;

She brought up something fundamental about culture and storytelling, something perhaps I only sensed at the time. Different people with different perspectives and presuppositions about language and narrative approach the stories differently and know (or don’t know) certain things as a result.

Sarris, as a member of the Kashaya Pomo tribe, understands the fundamentals of the stories that originate from his tribe. He carries within himself a key to decoding meaning from the stories and how the stories teach him about his culture and his people. The university scholar did not understand the literature in the same way the Sarris did.

Our approach to a story is very different from that of the university scholar. He recorded and understood the stores as complete units, the texts each containing the sum total of all their possible meanings.

For us a story or teaching is never complete.... A story’s meaning... is partly dependent on the life beyond it....
Sarris goes on to explain that for his people, all stories and all life are tied together. To understand the meaning of the stories one must look beyond the story. Yet the translator didn’t understand this and sought to find all the meaning in the text from the story itself. Only a native member of Sarris’s tribe, a member fluent in the understanding of the stories, would be able to know that when creating a translation of a story from the tribe, that the translation will somehow need to show how it is tied to the world around it, and that the translation must teach the reader to view the story this way in order to connect to the culture it represents.

It is obvious that what Oswalt published and labeled as Kashaya literature was not truly the literature of the tribe. It was changed to fit the parameters laid out by the Anglo academics, making it no longer Native American. This example serves to illustrate that it is possible that other works of preserved literature from other tribes also suffers similar changes when shared with outsiders. This means that much of the literature representing Native American must be question as to its authenticity and ability to convey the culture and stories of the tribe it seeks to represent. Of course this has always been the problem with a literature that is being preserved by those who live outside of the culture that the literature originates from. However, the preservation of Native American Oral Literatures by the Anglo-academic
community has been deemed necessary because it has seemed the Native Americans have lacked the ability to preserve these literatures themselves.

This is changing. Native American Tribes are now slowly taking a more active part in the representation of their people and this includes the representation of their culture as it is seen in translations of their poetics. Where traditionally non-native American academics, such as Rothenberg, Tedlock, and Hymes have made decisions regarding what and how to translate the work of the native people, now the native people are making the decisions about how to best represent the translations.

The feeling that this needs to change is voiced by Marcia Pablo, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation (CSKT). She wrote in her essay, “Preservation as Perpetuation;

In the filed of ethnography, for too long we have watched the extraction of our traditional knowledge from our elders – knowledge used not to benefit our people but to launch a professional career or create a “professional expert” on our tribal lifeways. These careers have been built on the shoulders of our elders, the true Ph.D.s of our culture.

There is a sense of resentment towards the Anglo driven academics that have traditional sought to collect and preserve Native American Literatures. In studying and preserving these literatures the effort turned from truly being
about preserving the literature because the loss of it would be a loss to the world, and became more about furthering the academic career of those who worked in this field. When the focus leaves the literature and moves to the career of the translator, the translation becomes questionable.

Pablo is concerned that the literature of Native Americans be preserved for the benefit of future generations of Native Americans. “We at the CSKT Preservation Department are infusing our values, our Cultural Truths, into the process of complying with the law in an effort to give something back to our communities and to perpetuate our lifeways for future generations.” Pablo wants to see the customs, stories and culture of the native tribes preserved in such a way that they can serve to teach future generations about what their cultural beliefs, values, and stories are about. Understanding ones cultural background leads to a strong sense of identity and pride, which is essential to the continual preservation of the native tribes. The preservation of these cultural beliefs can be best done by those who belong to the culture. Those who live outside the culture can not be successful in preserving a culture to which they do not belong. Therefore, it is imperative that as native tribes gain the resources to preserve their Oral Literatures that they do so.

This new involvement is due in part by the inclusion of Casinos on reservations, a major source of income for Native American tribes that once
found themselves either relegated to living in poverty upon the reservation or forced to assimilate into American cities and suburbs where living and practicing cultural activities became difficult or even impossible. Currently, two hundred and twenty-two federally recognized tribes operate a total of three hundred and sixty gaming establishments in the United States. As a result, “many tribal governments have seen substantial improvements in their ability to provide public services to their members, building schools, making infrastructural improvements and shoring up the loss of native traditions” (Native American Gambling Enterprises). While the establishment of Native American Casinos is not without controversy, it is hard to ignore the benefits that tribes are enjoying as a result of financial prosperity. One of the results of this financial prosperity is the ability of tribal governments to create cultural preservation offices and fund projects that seek to preserve Oral Literatures and Histories using methods that the tribes find appropriate rather than continuing to surrender their preservation to academics dominated by Anglos.

The Hopi Tribe of Northeastern Arizona is one of the most active tribes in terms of regulating and preserving the representation of their people. The Hopi Tribe has formed the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office which oversees the preservation and representation of the Hopi Culture in the public domain. On the website for The Hopi Cultural Preservation Office an explanation is
given for why the Hopi have begun to preserve their own culture and why it is important to them to do so.

Through the decades the intellectual property rights of Hopi have been violated for the benefit of many other, non-Hopi people that have proven to be detrimental. Expropriation comes in many forms. For example, numerous stories told to strangers have been published in books without the storytellers' permission. After non-Hopis saw ceremonial dances, tape recorded copies of music were sold to outside sources. Clothing items of ceremonial dancers have been photographed without the dancers' permission and sold. Choreography from ceremonial dances has been copied and performed in non-sacred settings. Even the pictures of the ceremonies have been included in books without written permission. Designs from skilled Hopi potters have been duplicated by non-Hopis. Katsinas dolls have also been duplicated from Hopi dancers seen at Hopi. Although the Hopi believe the ceremonies are intended for the benefit of all people, they also believe benefits only result when ceremonies are properly performed and protected.

It is interesting to note that the Hopi see the re-telling of their stories without permission from the storyteller as theft. While early translators did not intend
to ‘steal’ the stories of early native tribes, but were instead concerned with preserving something that they feared would be lost, the fact remains that translators who benefited financially from these translations did not pass the money on to the people from who the literature came from. While the above passage reflects the current views of the Hopi Tribe, it should be noted that other Native American tribes have similar feelings regarding their representation in the public domain.

Due to the ‘theft’ of their literature and culture, the Hopi now require anyone who wants to do research on any aspect of their tribe to submit in writing a request to do the desired research. The request is reviewed, and if permission is granted to the researcher to go forward with their project, it is with an understanding that the copyrights of any research done on the Hopi people remains the property of the Hopi people. No longer can an outsider profit from information taken from the Hopi. This has become possible because the Hopi people now possess the financial resources to create and maintain a Cultural Preservation Office that can ensure and enforce the above standards for preservation of the Hopi culture.

Another tribe seeking to take control of the way their culture and literature is represented is the Sioux people. On the website for the Sioux
nation is a disclaimer about how literature attributed to the Sioux people actually represents them.

...of all the religious ceremonies which the Lakota people perform (none) are exactly alike in the sense that they all mirror one another down to the smallest detail. Actually all of our ceremonies are basically similar in content and form but no two men ever conduct a ceremony in the exact same manner of the other. Since the knowledge of our ceremonies has been written about by anthropologists who have and are still studying our culture, one of the problems which results when someone "writes" a paper or book about how our spiritual ceremonies are done is that non-Indian people start to believe that what they see in print is the only true way of doing things and any deviation from what they read then becomes something which is to be considered incorrect or wrong.

The Sioux people are using their website to communicate the fluidity of their ceremonies and literature, a fluidity that has not be previously recognized in the literature. Due to the performative nature of Native American Literature, no two performances can be identical, nor are they meant to be. But Western concepts of literature demand a type of inflexibility in how literature is represented, and this inflexibility is not true to the culture and nature of the
Native American people. This problem was reiterated and cautioned against in 1994 at a workshop conducted by the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, a division of the National Park Service. In the paper published from this workshop, those participating stated

Reducing oral traditions to a written form has a cultural impact that needs to be considered in research.... written texts turn oral traditions into fixed literary images widely disseminated in the larger American society in a manner that Native Americans cannot control. This is a critical concern when sacred knowledge is misappropriated for scholarly research, and a dynamic oral tradition is reduced to a static point of reference.

Fixed literature lacks the fluidity of oral literature. This obviously has some serious consequences and noted in the above quote. The authors’ state that this can allow parts of the literature considered to be sacred to lose is sacredness and to be studied in a way that can make the members of the tribe feel that their beliefs are being ridiculed. This is not an unmerited concern, as many of the beliefs of Native people have been considered ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’.

What this really means is that the translated literature has not truly preserved both the story and the culture of those it came from.
While the Hopi and the Sioux tribes are at the forefront of Native American tribes that are taking measures to preserve their own culture and literature, many other tribes are following suit. For example, all of the Native American tribes with casinos in San Diego, including the Pala and Viejas Tribes, currently have language centers where tribal elders are actively teaching younger members of the tribe their native language while working to preserve the literatures and beliefs that go along with the language. No longer are these tribes waiting for the academics to come to them and preserve their culture through western methods and ideas, but they are taking control of their beliefs and deciding how best to preserve them.

While tribes were once incapable of preserving their culture due to a lack of funds, the money generated by the casinos on tribal land has allowed the Native American tribes to take back control of their culture. It is expected that more tribes will follow in the footsteps of the Hopi people in creating iron clad agreements and arrangements for studying their culture and literature that would leave control of how the tribe is represented in the hands of the tribe. This will allow the native tribes to preserve the sacredness of their texts, control how the texts are preserved and represented to the world outside of their culture. Only by native tribes taking control of the preservation and
translation of their literature will the world finally be able to enjoy Native American Oral Literature that can be truly considered authentic.
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