



nova americana in english

Indian Stories Indian Histories

Edited by
Fedora Giordano and Enrico Comba

Herman E. Bender, Enrico Comba,
Colin F. Taylor, Arnold Krupat, John Purdy,
Chris LaLonde, Paul Beekman Taylor, Elvira Pulitano,
David Stirrup, Tiina Wikström, Alfred Young Man,
Marina Gradoli, Raeschelle Potter-Deimel,
Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, Riku Hämäläinen,
William K. Powers, Sandra Busatta,
Marla N. Powers, Franco Meli,
Helga Lomosits, Petra T. Kalshoven



otto editore

INDIAN STORIES, INDIAN HISTORIES

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Indian Stories, Indian Histories
Indiani del Nord America
Storia. Folclore. Arte. Letteratura Americana
Edited by Fedora Giordano and Enrico Comba

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INTRODUCTION

FEDORA GIORDANO AND ENRICO COMBA

University of Torino

Indian Stories, Indian Histories is an offspring of the American Indian Workshop, the interdisciplinary association of European and American scholars brought together by the belief in the importance of the cross-fertilization of anthropology, history and literature for a correct approach to the field of Native American Studies. Gathered for the first time by Christian F. Feest during the 1980 Convention of the European Association for American Studies in Amsterdam and represented by the *European Review of Native American Studies*, a result of Feest's and Sylvia Kaspricky's enthusiasm, the association has greatly contributed to foregrounding Native American studies in European Universities.

We had the pleasure to organize the 24th Meeting at the University of Torino in May 2003, and – as those who had experiences with editing the Proceedings of international conventions will understand – we are pleased to be able to publish this volume one year after the Convention.

As things go, not all of the fifty papers originally presented at the Convention are published here, and again, as things go, it is not the editors' fault. About half of the speakers were happy with presenting research just, or in the process of being, published elsewhere; on the other hand, due to international trouble, some people who had agreed to come, later found travelling problematic for various reasons.

We were glad that Herman Bender, Marla Powers, William K. Powers, and Alfred Young Man sent us their contributions for publication. We do however regret not being able to include the presentations by our cherished guest speakers, Native writer Linda Hogan and Italian novelist Ernesto Ferrero, author of the well-known *Cervo Bianco*.

In choosing *Indian Stories, Indian Histories* as the Convention theme, we invited contributions on oral history, storytelling, literature, stories told through visual arts, artefacts, songs, ceremonies and visions.

What we had in mind was a contribution to the interdisciplinary debate in history, literature, anthropology and ethnohistory for the re-definition of what is to be considered *true* history and stories, the shifting of focus from Our side to Their side of the story, the recognition that real history is not made only of data and documents, but also of

traditional stories and personal memories, as traditional storytellers and Native authors have shown. In Native American literature oral history and storytelling have become a prominent feature, while the continuous flow of creativity of Indian writers finds new ways of crossing aesthetic and historical borders, and shows how the Native American historical imagination has always used stories, rituals, art and material culture, the history of a certain landscape, to keep the past alive and create communal feelings. New histories have been found in visual arts and artefacts, fields previously disregarded by the Euroamerican point of view, and today they play an important role in the discourse of visual arts, linking tradition and modernity, in the process of redefining cultural identity and retelling Native history.

In the substantial revision of the concepts of history and of story, they have been shown as necessarily interrelated. At the same time other concepts are changing: what Euroamericans call myths, for instance, may be seen as historical narratives of places and ideas. Thus, the distinction between traditional and modern societies, the former defined as transmitting the past through oral history and myth alone and the latter through writing is no longer useful, since traditional stories and documentary history overlap today in the perception of contemporary Native American societies as well as in the work of writers and artists.

Indeed, such is the centrality of the ongoing redefinition of history that tracing the debate on *Indian Stories*, *Indian Histories* would mean surveying the whole corpus of Native American art and literature and the work done in anthropology, ethnohistory, literature, the visual arts, ethnomusicology both by Native and non Native scholars of the past fifty years at least. This discussion looms all through the Convention papers, even if not always openly addressed.

What has been achieved in the discussion is the foregrounding of the Native American point of view and of the Native voice, as most papers deal with the many ways in which traditional, modern and postmodern Native cultures have storied life and universe. Fewer papers have tackled the discussion of history *per se*, while some have discussed – as is the American Indian Workshop tradition – current issues in Native Studies.

In answering the call for papers, John Purdy offered to organize a session to honour Louis Owens, whom many of us had personally met both in the U.S. and in Europe (he had been a Fulbright lecturer in Italy in 1980-81), and whose recent untimely death had grieved all his readers. We welcomed this proposal and therefore a number of papers in this volume are specifically devoted to Louis Owens storyteller, as the panel was named.

We have arranged the papers following the transition and dialogue of stories and histories from ancient times to modernity, beginning with a very ancient form of oral history, stories told through stones that speak of cosmic beings, continuing with stories of the relationship of sky and earth beings, ceremony and trickster stories.

Herman Bender in his paper suggests a series of links between landscape, the Kolt-erman petroform effigy of Southeastern Wisconsin, the history and migration of native populations and the stories of their lore. Bender supposes that it could be a representation of *haztova hotoxceo*, a thunderer, or “two-faced star people” of the Cheyenne, related to certain constellations. Indeed, these images made of rocks may be stories writ on the ground in stone by the ancestors of present day Cheyenne during their migration towards the Great Plains.

Enrico Comba has tackled the widespread story of the Girl Who Climbed to the Sky, showing that, far from being a just-so story, it is considered as sacred by many Plains cultures, it is associated with important religious rituals and is part of a secret knowledge, linked with the origin of the world and of humankind.

The O-kee-pa ceremony of the Mandan was their most important ritual and was a dramatization of the creation story of the earth and its people. Colin Taylor’s paper – partially based on an 1830 manuscript by George Catlin – endeavours to include the Mandan O-kee-pa into the general structure of Plains Indian ceremonial of the XIXth century.

Trickster the buffoon and the transformer is seen today as the *topos* of mediation between oral tradition and contemporary Native culture. Traditional Trickster stories are discussed by Arnold Krupat who offers new understanding of the complexities of trickster tales studying both recent scholarship and new comments by traditional oral narrators. The double nature of trickster, which has troubled many anthropologists, is thus given new light through its unique didactic function in traditional storytelling.

Contemporary Native writers and artists find in this mythical being of the Origins the model for ironic reversal in a postmodern discourse. John Purdy’s “Hard Laughter: Humor and Survivance in Louis Owens’s Novels,” starts from personal conversations with the author to re-examine the trickster aspect of Owens’ storytelling. Focussing on the main characters of his last novel, *Dark River*, Purdy shows how Owens carried on his aim to disrupt stereotypes in comic and violent ways, complicating with humor and irony the notion of the “Indian” as victim and balancing the tragic ending with insider jokes.

In “Opening Louis Owens’ Fiction” Chris Lalonde concentrates on Owens’ first storied work of fiction “Nalusachito,” showing that it is an opening for themes and concerns central to later novels and essays. Most prominent are Nalusachito, the various meanings of *kerf* (cutting, the historical cut that severed Choctaw from place and people, the need to cut inside the cutting), name play as a critique of Modernism *indians*, the frontier as contact zone, the role of oral tradition and of writing the stories to know oneself, place and others.

Paul B. Taylor’s essay investigates roots and meanings of both Euro-American and Native personal and place names in the fiction of Louis Owens. In his analysis he shows how the writer used names as symbols and stories, especially in *Dark River* and *The Sharpest Sight*.

Elvira Pulitano in “Crossreading Texts, Crossreading Identit(ies)” explores Louis Owens’ essays as an experiment in critical theory which appropriates subversive mimicry and diaspora and tackles postcolonial theory towards a new reading of the Native American experience. Owens’ strong reliance on the power of language and stories to alter the world allows him to enter the dominant Eurocentric aesthetic discourse with trickster subversion, using a mixed-genre, hybrid discourse which is also a celebration of mixed heritage.

David Stirrup in “Artefact and Authenticity: Narrative Strategy in Contemporary Native American Fiction” discusses the notion of story as artefact. This notion is complicated by Susan Power in *The Grass Dancer* and Gordon Henry Jr. in *The Light People* by the function of white anthropologists, whose presence works in the text both as ironic reversal of narrative control and as reference point for themes of conflict, survival, celebration and mourning, foregrounding the role of story in negotiating self and community.

Trickster also opens the dialogue between Native visual arts, artefacts and Native history, as some papers enquire into oral history and historical events, religion and modernity and give voice to Euro-American and Native American frontier dialogues on nature and culture. Native American re-readings of historical events come to the foreground as “Trickster Shift” in Tiina Wikström’s paper, which elaborates on Allan Ryan’s study, analyzing the work of visual artists Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, Gerald McMaster and Jane Ash Poitras together with that of Highway and King. As trickster artists they work with humor, wit and compassion using stereotype reversals, re-readings of historical events and of contemporary issues to establish “new kinds of relationships of power and authority that question established order and engage the viewers in a creative, interactive manner.”

A very interesting instance of contemporary Native American reading of history in visual arts is offered by Alfred Young Man. “Lost Homelands” surveys land issues in First Nations history and foregrounds the work of the same name in photographs and mixed media by Cree artist Edward Poitras.

The essay by Marina Gradoli, “Telling History,” centers on the innovative ways in which D’Arcy McNickle and N. Scott Momaday tried to recover Native history in their narrative work.

Raeschelle Potter-Deimel brings us to observe the Texas Lumbee and their relationship with the past. The hope, anger, fear and death, lying dormant in written historical facts, take on new meaning as these events are brought to life today in the oral history of this “Tribe of Tribes.” As diverse as the Lumbee themselves so are their religious and economic ideals and practices. Separate entity or group involvement in performance, with specific patterns found in rhythms and steps, display differences within a strong union of the tribe.

Bernadette Rigal-Cellard's "The Virgin is an Amerindian" surveys the literature on Kateri Tekakwitha, the most relevant icon of Christianity in Native North America, trying to understand the reasons for her controversial recognition by the Holy See, which still delays her canonization into sainthood.

Riku Hämäläinen's paper opens the section on Current Research. He concentrates on ceremonial art and on how, among the Plains Indians, visions have functioned as links between this world and the supernatural world. Visionary art, reflecting individual vision, is a concrete physical representation of the personal experience with the supernatural world, and, to be fully understood, should be viewed in the context of the whole religious field.

William K. Powers' paper continues the discourse on American art, concentrating on representations of objects that have become distorted, exaggerated, more than real, less than real, marking a transition from traditional reality to contemporary hyperreality. Drawing on the works of Umberto Eco and Claude Lévi-Strauss, he discusses the relationship between artistic production and reproduction, monumentalism and diminution of traditional objects, and how and why the concept of hyperreality manifests itself in the skewed relationship between art and myth.

Sandra Busatta discusses contemporary market issues for Navajo weavers, showing how, from the 1860s, dealers have discouraged weaving innovations not conforming to the primitivist ideal of "genuine" native art and prevented any change of their traditional loom.

Over the past two decades, the dream catcher has become a ubiquitous symbol of Native American art. Marla Powers's article addresses the secular origin of the dream catcher, its global distribution, and mythical infrastructure which appeals to both Indian and non-Indian. There seems to be no evidence for an archaic object called dream catcher and Powers traces the origin of its shape in the older game found among Plains Indians called "hoop and javelin."

Franco Meli compares recent white environmentalist discussion on land preservation with the discourse on land ethic in works by Lame Deer, Vine Deloria, Jr., N. Scott Momaday and Edward Poitras.

Helga Lomosits's paper presents the results of the Lakota Project. This is a team research on modern Lakota perceptions of visual records, such as photographs, on their historical context, and the related issue of native people rights.

Finally, conceptualizing "Indian Hobbyism" as a knowledge-intensive leisure activity in Western culture, expressed in and through play and display, Petra T. Kalshoven explores whether and how "Indianist" play communities in Europe have generated unique bodies of knowledge by combining expertise from literary study, museum visits, and interaction with Native people with dedicated experimentation on the Indianist playground.

We wish to thank Dr. Rinaldo Bertolino, President of the University of Torino, for sponsoring the Congress, Dr. Thomas Skipper and Ms. Simonetta Romagnolo of Milan U.S. Consulate for bringing Linda Hogan to Torino, the Canadian Embassy, the “Luigi Einaudi” Foundation for their hospitality, and the CRT Foundation for funding the publication of the Proceedings.

Torino, September 2004



Linda Hogan during the Convention. (photo Assandri)

HERMAN BENDER is an independent researcher with a background in geology (technical emphasis) and a technical field in industry. An amateur astronomer and historian, he is internationally published in the fields of petroform, archeoastronomy, applied geophysics and cultural landscape studies. He conducts public seminars and has spoken at various universities including Princeton, Marquette and the University of Wisconsin campuses. Through his company ASHCo (America Septen History Company), he provides cultural landscape and environmental surveys. He has and continues to work with members of a number of Native American tribes including the Northern Cheyenne, Lakota, Ojibway, Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk as a speaker and consultant who specializes in Plains and Woodland Native American astronomy traditions and related cosmologies.

SANDRA BUSATTA is Teaching Assistant of Cultural Anthropology in the School of Psychology at the University of Padova and is working towards a Master in Social Anthropology at the University of Wales, Lampeter. She is in the editorial Staff of the magazine HAKO on Native American Cultures and has published *Oro, Catene e Sangue* and *L'Apocalisse Piumata*. She has edited the catalogue of the exhibition "Da Massimiliano a Montezuma" and "Terra Indiana. Gli indiani d'America nel 21° secolo" (in press).

ENRICO COMBA is Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Torino. His main fields of interest and research are the religious systems and mythologies of the Plains and North West Coast Indians. Among his publications: *Cannibali e uomini lupo: metamorfosi rituali dall'America indigena all'Europa antica* (Torino: Il Segnalibro, 1992) a comparative study of human-animal transformation in rituals from the North West Coast and from ancient Europe; *Il cerchio della vita* (Torino: Il Segnalibro, 1999) on Plains Indian animal symbolism and cosmologies; *Introduzione a Lévi-Strauss* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000) and *Testi religiosi degli Indiani del Nord America*, (Torino: UTET, 2001).

FEDORA GIORDANO is Associate Professor of American Literature at the University of Torino. Her publications in Native American studies include a book on ethnopoetics, essays on cultural contacts and on P.G. Allen, N. Naranjo-Morse, Wendy Rose, R. Salisbury and G. Vizenor. She has translated into Italian *Papago Woman* (Gallone Editore 1998), has served as editor and contributor to the *European Review of Native American Studies*, to the North American section of the *Dictionnaire Critique de l'Esotérisme* (P.U.F. 1998) and is editor and contributor of *Gli Indiani d'America e l'Italia* (Edizioni dell'Orso vol. I 1997, vol. II 2002).

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ARNOLD KRUPAT's most recent books are *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (2002), and *The Turn to the Native: Essays in Criticism and Culture* (1996). *Here First: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers*, co-edited with Brian Swann, appeared in 2000. With Michael Elliott, he has written the section on Native American fiction for the forthcoming *Columbia History of Native American Literature Since 1945*, ed. by Eric Cheyfitz. He has published a novel, *Woodsmen, or Thoreau and the Indians* (1994), and has completed a second novel, *What to Do?* He teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

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HELGA LOMOSITS finished her Ph.D. in Visual Anthropology in 2001 at the University of Vienna. She continues to serve as the European Officer of the Native Law Centre of Canada in the area of International Analysis and Indigenous youth diplomacy and cultural policy development including the Young Professionals International, a project funded by the Federal government of Canada with assistance from DFAIT. She lectured Visual Anthropology at the Department of Ethnology, Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Vienna in 2002.

FRANCO MELI is Associate Professor of American Literature at IULM University, Milan, Italy. He has published on Melville, Thoreau, Steinbeck and extensively on Native American Literature: in particular, on Momaday, Silko, Ortiz, Welch and Henson.

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MARLA N. POWERS is associate professor of anthropology at Seton Hall University. She is the author of *Oglala Women in Myth, Ritual and Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), and of numerous articles on women in Lakota culture.

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ELVIRA PULITANO is an “assistante docteur” in the English Department at the University of Geneva, in Switzerland, where she teaches Native American literature and postcolonial theory and literatures. A Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico, she has written essays on the work of N. Scott Momaday, Gerald Vizenor, and on contemporary Native American drama. Her first book, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, was released by Nebraska University Press in 2003. Her areas of research and teaching also include Anglophone Caribbean literature and the indigenous literatures of Australia and New Zealand. She is currently working on a comparative study of Aboriginal Australian, Maori, and Native North American literatures.

JOHN LLOYD PURDY is Professor of English at Western Washington University. He has published numerous articles on and interviews with Native American authors, including Louis Owens, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, Sherman Alexie, Paula Gunn Allen and Elizabeth Cook Lynn. For seven years, he also edited *Studies in*

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BERNADETTE RIGAL-CELLARD is Professor of North American Studies at the University of Bordeaux. She teaches the only MA and doctoral seminars in France on Native literatures. She is known both in Europe and the United States through publications in French and in English on Vizenor, Momaday, Welch, Owens, Erdrich, King, Allen, Indian autobiography, and syncretic Native and Christian religions. She recently published *Le Mythe et la plume* (Paris: le Rocher, 2004), the first reference book in French on North American Native literatures.

DAVID STIRRUP gained his PhD. at the University of Leeds, UK, in 2003, and is now lecturing in English and American Literature at the University of Kent. His main research interests are contemporary Native American literature, especially Midwestern writing; representations of community; and intersections between Ethnography, Anthropology, and indigenous forms of cultural production in Art, Film, Photography and Literature. A co-edited anthology of writings on Native American verbal expression, provisionally titled *Native American Storytelling*, is forthcoming (2005/6) with the University of Nebraska Press.

COLIN TAYLOR was initially trained as a Physicist. A life-long interest in North American Indians however has led to extensive researches in Anthropology and degrees in both disciplines (MSc and PhD.). He is a Fellow of both the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and the Institute of Physics (London). He has written and edited a large number of books on the NAI, covering topics like weapons and warfare, material culture, religion, arts and crafts, astronomy (most known *The Native Americans*, co-authored with W.C. Sturtevant 1991, *Native American Weapons* Univ of Oklahoma Press 2001). Taylor has acted as a lecturer and/or consultant for a number of European and North American organizations and museums and is Hon. Curator of NAI ethnology at the Hastings Museum – which is extending its NA collections and displays.

PAUL BEEKMAN TAYLOR is Emeritus Professor at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, where he has taught Chicano and Native American Literatures as well as Medieval English literature. He has published articles on Linda Hogan, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Rudolfo Anaya. He has two articles in press on Louis Owens.

ALFRED YOUNG MAN, (Eagle Chief) Ph. D. is a Cree, Full Professor and Chair of Native American Studies, Univ. of Lethbridge, Ab. Canada; earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ in 1997. Major published works include *North American Indian Art: It's a Question of Integrity* published by the Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops, British Columbia 1998 which served as the introduction for his doctoral thesis "The Socialization and Art Politics of Native Art." He has had numerous articles, essays, and book reviews printed in many learned journals, newspapers and refereed publications and has travelled extensively presenting at conferences and universities in Canada, the U.S., Japan, South Africa and Europe.

TIINA WIKSTRÖM is a member of Cross Cultural Contacts research group, presently working on her doctor's thesis at the Department of English, University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research area includes Tricksters and the theme of survival in modern North American Native literature, especially Louise Erdrich's novels. She has participated in several conferences on Native studies and has published articles, book reviews and translations on Native materials both in academic publications and journals. She has also given lectures on Native American literature and art. She has recently written and translated articles for *Pohjois-Amerikan intiaaniuskonnot: Kirjoituksia perinteistä, muutoksesta ja jatkuvuudesta* ("Indian religions of North America: Essays on traditions, change and continuity").

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Foregrounding the Native American point of view and the Native voice, papers deal with the many ways in which traditional, modern and postmodern Native cultures have storied life and universe in artefacts, religion, visual arts, literature, history and oral memories. Included are a tribute to Louis Owens and a debate on current issues in Native American Studies.

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