

**TITLE:** James Welch's "Fools Crow" and the Imagination of Precolonial Space: A Translator's Approach

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When a translator engages in transferring a text from one language into another, an apparently benign activity, he or she actually appropriates the text. This otherwise relatively practical idea turns into a political statement when the text to be translated represents marginalized experience. Thus, Peter Hitchcock wonders whether the "violence of translation compounds or resists the epistemic violence of representing the oppressed."<sup>(n1)</sup> Hitchcock raises the concern that "in the name of fluency much translation has attempted to efface the labor of translation, a self-annihilation that, while smoothing the path between source and target languages, conspires either to domesticate the foreign text or otherwise to ameliorate its disruptive potential" (172). Certainly more often than not the translator smoothes over the disruptive elements of a text in favor of the target audience's comprehension. At the same time, this cultural practice, unlike any other, enables the translator to notice the disruption, the gaps, and the foreignness of a text.

Translating James Welch's *Fools Crow* into German, I first noticed then struggled with this particular text's "foreignness," its distinctiveness even among Native American novels.<sup>(n2)</sup> His novel positioned next to Blackfeet legends and stories, Welch gives the Blackfeet a voice within the mainstream of American fiction. The story serves as a point of reference for reconstructing Blackfeet identity. In the novel, culture is imagined from inside. The points of reference exist mainly within the Blackfeet universe. The Blackfeet in this novel are not seen or portrayed with a colonial mind-set, as neither the noble nor the displaced silent minority. They inhabit their world with confidence, relying on themselves rather than whites for their sense of self, of belonging. Louis Owens regards *Fools Crow* as "the most profound act of recovery in American literature."<sup>(n3)</sup> No longer do the Blackfeet have to adapt to the outside, to the mainstream's view of them as wild, silent, invisible, and incomprehensible. Ironically, my "appropriation" of the language, working with the text so "intimately," allows me to recognize this novel's accomplishment: in *Fools Crow*'s singular language we find an echo of the novel's precolonial context as in no other novel in English. This language, in turn, forces the reader to recognize and adapt to his or her own marginal position in relation to the particular text.

From a postcolonial view, Welch transforms the now-colonized land into the text in which he attempts to represent experience that re-envision the physical boundaries of the reservation, that imperialist creation. That is, as we shall see, the novel reappropriates the now-colonized land, both decolonizing it for whites and re-imagining it in a precolonial state for Native Americans.

At the beginning of every translation, the translator is faced with very basic questions. More than an ordinary reader, as a translator, I place myself, like a writer, into the continuing process of meaning — and text — construction. I am not, as Octavio Paz describes in his very insightful essay "Translation: Literature and Letters" "constructing an unalterable text from mobile characters; instead, [I am] dismantling the elements of the text, freeing the signs into circulation, then returning them to language."<sup>(n4)</sup> Walter Benjamin outlines the task of the translator as "finding that intended effect [intention] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original."<sup>(n5)</sup> Generally speaking, it is practically

impossible to pinpoint the exact meaning of one word in another language by itself, or even in relation to the words around it, because of the different cultural connotations associated with it. In his introduction to *The Craft of Translation*, Rainer Schulte ponders the same question: "How can equivalences be established between the semantic and cultural differences of two languages?" He goes on to say that translators generally hover specifically over this question. They "explore each word first as word and then as reflection of a larger cultural and historical context."<sup>(n6)</sup>

The task of the translator, positioned as she is between two cultures, is to "help bring about communication between the members of different linguistic and cultural communities."<sup>(n7)</sup> Paz, using the confusion of Babel as his starting point, says that "translation responded to the diversity of languages with the concept of universal intelligibility. Thus, translation was not only a confirmation but also a guarantee of the existence of spiritual bonds."<sup>(n8)</sup> This supports the idea that translation is more than a transfer from one language to the other; through the languages, translation communicates between two cultures.<sup>(n9)</sup> Translation initiates a cultural experience not only for the target audience but for the translator herself, which extends beyond Gayatri Spivak's initially intriguing but slightly insufficient idea that translation is "the most intimate act of reading."<sup>(n10)</sup> Translation leads me to examine and clarify my position if I deal with another culture in an analytical, comprehensive manner. Where do I stand within both cultures and ultimately between the two? And how does this in-betweenness influence my reading of the text?

As a translator I am in the singular position to discover the possibilities and limitations of a text's language, to witness a translation's accomplishment in terms of cultural communication, and to gain a better understanding about which parts of a text can cross the gap between the self and the other and which cannot. Spivak offers that "one of the ways to get around the confines of one's 'identity' as one produces expository prose is to work at someone else's title, as one works with a language that belongs to many others.... It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self." This process of miming the trace of the other indicates "one of the seductions of translating."<sup>(n11)</sup> Additionally, Spivak's comment hints at the possible role "the other in the self" can play in translation. In her essay "The Other Language; Or, Translating Sensitivity," Julia Kristeva pursues a similar idea in regard to the translator but most remarkably in regard to the non-native speaker.<sup>(n12)</sup> Kristeva asserts that as a foreigner one will always be regarded as "other," as not belonging to the host nor even to one's native language. There will always be something "strange, amusing, and exciting" that keeps one in this marginalized position, of which Kristeva believes the foreigner is "painfully conscious" (19). Situated between two languages, the translator is in constant limbo, negotiating the self in relation to the ever present Other. Yet, whereas this in-betweenness of the foreigner can certainly lead to a sense of loss and uncertainty — even suffering, as Kristeva points out — it leads me, as a German native and translator of *Fools Crow*, to the most profound bilingual and bicultural experience I know. It changes my awareness toward language and, more specifically, how language constructs different perceptions of reality.

The dislocation of the self I experience living in the United States curiously resembles the way a reader experiences *Fools Crow*. Welch's unique use of language in *Fools Crow* makes the reader aware that she is entering a foreign world. Just as my familiar points of reference are lost, the reader feels alienated until she adapts to the textual situation. Yet no matter how proficient we become in this "new language," there will be moments in which the text's melody or mentality differs from our own, resembling once again the situation of a non-native speaker in a foreign country, making us continuously conscious of our own marginal status. We are never "entirely

in time with the identity of the host," which in this case is the text.(n13) The reader, like the translator of *Fools Crow*, experiences what it means to be, borrowing Kristeva's term, a "divided subject" (19). Owens writes of *Fools Crow* in particular as a text that forces "upon the reader his or her own sense of radical displacement and marginality."(n14)

At first glance, the reader encounters a world that, because it is written in a language familiar to him, appears known, or at least accessible. Soon he will notice the text's difference and begin to engage in a constant, often unconscious dialog with his old identity and his new, "other" experience. The fact that the reader actually experiences the text is crucial for the transformation of his understanding. According to Kristeva, "experience extracts a vision, a perspective, finally knowledge." More significantly it "traverses the social and verbal events of the subject and completely modifies its makeup."(n15) The reader opens "onto the other which exalts and unsettles" him.(n16) In a position of "inconsolable questioning" and "ever-present anxiety" a translator inevitably develops his critical faculty. For the reader in the same bind, understanding of a marginalized experience is made possible. As "the new language serves as a pretext for rebirth: a new identity" for the translator (19), *Fools Crow's* "new language" serves as an entry point to understanding of a new identity, another identity for its reader.

*Fools Crow* does not simply offer an alternative vision but an alternative space in which the reader dwells. As receptor of the information and vessel for the foreign, fictive world, the reader becomes an active participant in the story. The reader's participation in the text merges the Euro-American idea of text, as an individual's account of history, with the Native American concept of understanding the self as part of the whole, part of a community. Slowly, one's perception of one's surroundings changes due to the acquisition of a "new" language. One is forced to question one's position in the world, the way in which one understands oneself in this world. One needs to participate and readjust the expectations one is bound to bring along from "Western" fiction and life experiences. Here, Paula Gunn Allen cautions "readers and students of American Indian life and culture to remember that Indian America does not in any sense function in the same ways or form the same assumptions that western systems do. Unless and until that fact is clearly acknowledged, it is virtually impossible to make much sense out of the voluminous materials available concerning American Indians."(n17)

There is no question that Welch succeeds in creating a reality foreign to the Western reader's experience and expectation. He produced a written text that approximates the way the Blackfeet perceived the particular Western landscape around and within them. The text changes the way we perceive reality and makes clear that we need a different language in order to be able to experience a different culture. Welch creates a "conceptual horizon — or 'map of the mind,'" as Louis Owens calls it, "through which the reader must pass." And since the "conceptual horizon" belongs to the traditional world of the Blackfeet, the "Euramerican is peripheral and alien" in this world.(n18)

As already indicated, much of this foreign experience emerges from the text's language. Of course, language is the translator's primary concern, "yet language is not everything." Spivak asserts:

It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a dissemination cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacey emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. (By juggling the disruptive

rhetoricity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvages of the language-textile give way, fray into frayages or facilitations.)(n19)

Spivak emphasizes the importance of "rhetoric" and "figuration" as the translator's challenge, much as I emphasize the syntax as the reader's challenge, as the space in which the text's difference becomes visible/audible. In this particular text, Welch was attempting what many critics believed to be impossible: to recreate or imitate the syntax of a language very few still speak. Welch's text is more than what Hans Nossack calls a mere translation from thoughts into "another reality — that of language."(n20) Unlike in his other novels, Welch here "translates" the verbal Blackfeet language into a written English language. English here "bears the burden of an 'other' experience."(n21)

Welch, who left the Blackfeet reservation when he was a child, does not speak Blackfeet anymore. Still, he must retain a sense of it, because he understood it when it was spoken around him until he was about four. He does, however, remember listening to the old people tell stories just as his father had heard in Blackfeet outside the Browning Mercantile, and this experience informs the language he uses for this novel. Furthermore, he took these stories and those relayed by his father, who heard them from his own grandmother, and translated them into a story of his own. He alters the English syntax primarily by avoiding complex grammatical constructions; the sentences are often short and declarative.

Whereas every translator faces certain problems and difficulties, translating this particular novel becomes an increasingly daunting task. And it is only through the process of translation that I am able to notice the difficulties presented by the text's smallest element, the word, the singularity of the words, and the way they are lined up to form a sentence. The closer I approach the level of the text, the more distinctive it becomes. Oddly, the shorter the sentences, the greater my problem with making them my own. For example, a sentence such as "Yes, you speak true, Fast Horse" carries a distinctly formal tone that we would never use in German.(n22) Of course, a native English speaker would not say "You speak true," either. Therefore, I decided to keep the formal quality: Ja, Schnelles Pford, du sprichst wahr (Yes, Fast Horse, you speak true).

Another example is the even shorter sentence, "It is this" (6). In the translation, I used folgendes (subsequent) because es ist das (it is this) or das ist es (this is it) would not work. Sometimes, however, a short combination of words sounded odd only in the beginning of the translation process. For example, I originally translated "I joke!" (6) into Ich mache nur Witze (I am only joking), which captures the meaning but not the speed of the sentence. Later, I found no problem changing it to the two-word expression Ich scherze! (I joke). Ironically, the more I narrow down from chapter, to sentence, from long sentence, to shorter sentence, to simple one-or two-word exclamations, my problems increase. Paz speaks of the lack of mobility and interchangeability of words in poetry: "The meanings of a poem are multiple and changeable; the words of that poem are unique and irreplaceable."(n23) In view of this definition, I find Welch's prose poetic in that the words seem locked in their relation to each other, making for the "strange" sound of the text, and in their relation to the region they express. Therefore, my starting point is not "the language in movement that provides the [writer]'s raw material but the fixed language of the [text]."(n24)

Additionally, Welch creates unfamiliar images in the English language, which hands control of the language over to the Blackfeet's perception of reality. He deliberately defamiliarizes familiar objects and animals by giving them descriptive names rather than their ordinary contemporary ones in order to give a dislocation akin to the omitted Blackfeet terms.(n25) For example, in the second sentence of the novel, we encounter

"Cold Maker," who is gathering his forces. As English readers, we can only guess who or what "Cold Maker" is.<sup>(n26)</sup> The abstract English term winter is turned into something that has a personal relevance within the context of the Plains Indians' lives. The change in the weather and Cold Maker's approach will have an actual impact on the lives of the people who live on the Plains. This language speaks directly from the land Welch's ancestors inhabited and exemplifies the relation between the Blackfeet and the world around them.

Just like these unfamiliar images, the narrative aspects of language require careful translation. Much of the narration, although third-person omniscient, develops scenes from a specific point of view. Predominantly the perspective is Fools Crow's but not always. Rarely is an account narrated without being observed by one character's consciousness. For example, Fox Eyes does not just get up and walk away from the group, but "White Man's Dog watche[s] Fox Eyes rise and walk slowly away from the group" (144). Then he "watche[s] the two men talk"; they do not talk unobserved. This creates a relationship between the sitting young man, anxious about the older men's decision making, and the older men actually making their decision. Characters see themselves not separated from but in relation to other characters and the world around them. Another example, the moment when White Man's Dog gets wounded in the Crow camp, illustrates this idea. The young warrior "hear[s] a pop and [feels] a warm pain in his side" (146). Activating these two senses does not seem unusual as a way to convey a character's situation. Yet it seems quite crucial here that the "pop" does not just happen, or is not just heard, but the character himself hears it before he feels its impact. The shot becomes something immediate and not abstract. Seemingly everything happens in relation to something else, suggesting the existence of a sentient universe of their own.

Curiously enough, as essential as this distinct and imminent relationship between the sound of the shot and the target's sensed pain seems, the French translation, for example, neglects to maintain this relationship. It reads, *un petit bruit sec &eacute;clata, et il ressentit une douleur au c&ocirc;t&eacute;* (a small dry sound exploded and he felt a pain in his side).<sup>(n27)</sup> In almost every instance, this French translation interrupts, even destroys, the sense of a universe related to itself; instead, it recreates a sense of a "realistic" connection between this fictive world and our outside world. Yet Welch's omission of such a connection is crucial to this novel's ontology and its singular position among other Native American novels.

Since the late 1960s, an increasing number of Native American writers have tried to establish a dialog and an understanding between white and Native cultures. However, most of their works depicted Indian experience within and as a result of the white, dominant culture. Even Paula Gunn Allen detects in this writing a "confusion of dualities" and criticizes some of these writers for describing the world "in terms of antagonistic principles: good is set against bad, Indian against white, and tradition against cultural borrowing."<sup>(n28)</sup> The feat of *Fools Crow*, therefore, lies in the omission of the contemporary problems and of the consequent oversimplifying dualities.

Unlike other contemporary protagonists, whose identity "depends mostly on binary systems of 'us' versus 'them,'" the characters in *Fools Crow* construct their identity predominantly by affirming "some form of commonality, some shared ground" with other tribes.<sup>(n29)</sup> Only slowly does white presence shape their sense of belonging to one particular group, "where difference from the other defines the group to which one belongs" (15).

The novel emphasizes, borrowing Susan Friedman's illuminating concept, "the centrality of space to the locations of identity within the mappings and remappings of ever-changing cultural formations" (14). Essentially, *Fools Crow* is the story of a young

man's growth within his tribe. He feels secure in his tradition, yet at the same time he recognizes the threat from the encroachment of white men. He knows what the imminent difficulties from outside potentially mean for his band. Somehow it does not matter to the spirit of Fools Crow that his entire way of life is threatened. In Fools Crow, Welch creates a sense of the endangerment of Blackfeet life but does not fully address the impact of its consequences. Instead, the novel treats the territorial problems caused by the white settlement of the western Plains with disbelief. Constant references allude to the whites' territorial domination; the "Napikwans" take over, not by killing the Indians, but "by standing right where you are," surrounded by thousands of grazing "whitehorns," reducing the Pikunis to a "part of the dust they kick up."<sup>(n30)</sup> As readers we know what will happen to the Indians.<sup>(n31)</sup> The white man's sheer presence becomes more and more threatening to the Plains tribes' survival, because it actually endangers that survival. By killing hundreds of thousands of buffaloes in record time, white hunters eliminated the most essential food and raw material supply of the Plains Indians and, with that, their way of life. Welch deliberately omits the fact that this decimation of the buffalo was government policy, designed to subdue the Indians. Later, he addresses this issue in Killing Custer.<sup>(n32)</sup> Fools Crow does not need to provide this knowledge. Rather, the text creates a world, an experience that is altogether "other," disconnected from the contemporary world.

The moment described in the novel outlines a sense of self that is anchored in the past rather than the present, and it offers an alternative vision to the colonial concept, which has pinned our idea of the Blackfeet to an experience marked by reservation reality. Prior to white presence, the Blackfeet created their identity in relation to space and location. White settlement eventually meant to the Blackfeet removal from that location. This displacement forced upon the Blackfeet an identity linked to and determined by their colonizer.

As part of its revisionist project, Fools Crow transcends existing territorial boundaries. The novel lets its characters roam the Plains in pursuit of food and war honors. By reading, the reader transcends the boundaries of today's reservation and restores a sense of spirit that belongs to the vast land beyond. Welch gives back to the land the culture that came from the broader land. A broader spirit is contained within a limited body — the reservation — and bestows richer meaning on the "limited" ground. That way, confines imposed on a land become less confining. The land's cultural value increases. From within, he inscribes new meaning onto the land, meaning that had been erased and then inscribed by the surrounding, colonized land. In his essay "Naming Place" Paul Carter examines colonial naming practice in Australia. The explorers, by naming, "brought history into being . . . [they] invented the spatial and conceptual coordinates within which history could occur."<sup>(n33)</sup> The traveler names things he encounters, not according to their descriptive quality, but to his state of expectations. Carter identifies this "existential necessity the traveler feels to invent a place he can inhabit," since it does not "reflect what is already there:" as an overwriting of space by the colonizer (405). Welch's rewriting then imagines a "Native textuality" that reclaims the land and its lost culture within it.

Welch practices one of the major concerns of postcolonial literatures: he is "developing or recovering an appropriate identifying relationship between self and place because it is precisely within the parameters of place and its separateness that the process of subjectivity can be conducted."<sup>(n34)</sup> By thus subjectifying the land and Indian experience, not only does Welch blur existing geographical as well as mental boundaries (thereby increasing the chance for understanding of the self and the other), but his text inadvertently responds to Janice Gould, member of the Konkow tribe, who emphasizes, "I think it is necessary to remember that many of us see our literature as

coming out of a kind of colonial experience, rather than as simply another kind of American experience." (n35)

Fools Crow's "unmaking of conceptual maps" (by inscribing a different meaning onto the land) places the text inevitably into a postcolonial discourse that exposes how "the reinscription, enclosure and hierarchization of space" provides "an analogue for the acquisition, management and reinforcement of colonial power." (n36) Fools Crow's importance here becomes even more striking when one considers that "'place' in post-colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment." (n37) Further, the visibility of this context in the novel highlights "the sense of dislocation from an historical 'homeland: [and] the experience of 'displacement' generates a creative tension within the language" (391). According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, "Place is thus the concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of separation.... [This in a way] indicates that in some sense place is language, something in constant flux, a discourse in process. The sense of 'lack of fit' between language and place is that which propels writers ... to construct a new language" (391).

To illustrate in regard to Fools Crow the importance and relevance of this idea that place is language and that the representation of marginalized experience prompts the creation of a "new" language, let me now address the hurdles that originate not from the context but from Welch's own "translation" endeavor. Here, I make a distinction between the names of individuals or tribes and the descriptive names for the animals. For the latter, I decided to use a word-for-word translation to remain as close as possible to the descriptive function of their names. I translated such descriptive terms as "blackhorns" and "wags-his-tail" literally into Schwarzhorn and wedelt-mit-dem Schwanz, because they describe an animal's defining characteristics.

Whereas the descriptive animal names, the language most characteristic of the text, did not pose much of a problem, the names of various individuals and tribes did. Dealing with the names of individuals was more challenging, since they are descriptive as well as identifying. Such names are referred to as "speaking" names because they have "expressive value." (n38) Keeping such names as "White Man's Dog" or "Yellow Kidney" in their original form (English) means "silencing" them for the target audience (German). Unless the target audience had sufficient knowledge of the English language, the names would mainly function as Eigennamen (proper names). Here, as in every other aspect of translation theory, opinions vary widely on how to proceed. In her essay "Eigennamen und sprechende Namen," Birgit Bödecker quotes two critics' opposing views. (n39) One believes that "the principle stands that unless a single object's or a person's name already has an accepted translation it should not be translated but must be adhered to." (n40) The other view holds that translatable names are disruptive to the eye if they appear in the original language. Both, no doubt, are justifiable arguments.

As a result of this discussion, certainly the most challenging decision-making dilemma, I originally decided to keep all the names of persons, tribes, rivers, and buttes in their original form in English. Before elaborating this idea, let us review one of the definitions of literary translations, offered by Armin Paul Frank: "A literary translation, whatever else it might be, is first and foremost the record of a transfer between cultures, literary and otherwise." (n41) Thus, keeping the names would make the process of cultural transfer visible by "introduc[ing] a signal of foreignness to the target audience." (n42) The names in their original form, thus, have the chance to become signifiers of a foreign milieu. This transfer would not only preserve the "foreignness" of the source text within the syntax of the target text but ensure a context-specific authenticity within the translated text. Further, since this specific context

has no parallel in Germany, as discussed earlier, featuring a number of "foreign" elements, I would emphasize within the German version the existence of a text home on the North American continent and not in the imagination of a nineteenth-century German writer, whose significance I will discuss later.

Gregory Rabassa observed that the "closeness to regional expression makes translation difficult, sometimes impossible when it comes to preserving the flavor of the original."<sup>(n43)</sup> Indeed, the regional distinctiveness of Welch's text presented stumbling blocks all along the way: down draws and swales, below cutbanks, onto buttes, over bluffs, and into coulees. These terms characterize a landscape unlike any found in Germany. Actually, the text itself and its components could hardly be more distant from the context of a German reader. Although I assume, at least through movies, a German reader to have a vague picture of the western prairies, this would surely exclude the more specific details. One of the most prominent western landscape features absent from German landscape, for example, is the butte. Since it is not as widely known as the Southwestern Mesa, I contemplated whether I should include a short description of what a butte looks like when it first occurs within the text. Someone recently offered *Berg* as an alternative, which translates into "mountain hill." To brace myself against such oddities, I decided to transfer the original word into the target text. The "sarvisberry," "servisberry," or "juneberry" posed another interesting problem. Whereas the bush itself can be found in Germany, it does not bear any berries. The berries are found only on the North American bush. Clearly, the difficulty with these geographical and natural items lies in their contextual specificity. Although they are small elements of the text, they represent the singular nature of Blackfeet thinking and western landscape. The singularity of these terms emphasizes the influence of spatial context on the actual creation of the text. The harsh and vast nature of the Plains resonates through the language of the book and is therefore inseparable from the text. Or to put it in Louis Owens's words, "Central to Native American storytelling . . . is the construction of a reality that begins, always, with the land."<sup>(n44)</sup> So, the context provides the writer with not only the content for the novel but the material for its language: the context becomes text.

It is altogether ironic, then, that I approach the translation of *Fools Crow* with the knowledge of a series of texts that have absolutely nothing to do with the North American context. Germans, like Americans, have a distinct but rather inaccurate image of the Native American who lived on the Plains of the American West. "The image the German population has had of the American Indian since 1880 has been largely shaped by Karl May," says Walter Ilmer, a research consultant to the director of the Karl-May-Society.<sup>(n45)</sup> "May created the legend of Winnetou [May's hero] and in so doing raised the sympathy and respect for the American Indians and their way of life." Karl May's *Old Shatterhand* novels, which feature a German immigrant trapper and his blood brother, Winnetou, are a cultural item without which, I dare say, no German grows up. It is possible that my generation was not subjected to the stories as reading experiences, but we certainly have all seen at least one of the six movies made from 1963 to 1968 that were based on the novels. Although one is not aware of it as a child, it is widely known that May had never set foot upon the American Plains or the Orient, where some of his other novels take place. (Apparently, he conducted his research in prison libraries while serving time for fraud and impersonating a police officer.<sup>(n46)</sup>) Winnetou's status as a distinctive cultural German entity is further confirmed by the knowledge that the movies were not shot in America but in Yugoslavia and that the casts consist mostly of German and French actors.

In his novels, May "wrote scenes based on events in the early 1800s but placed them in the 1860s and '70s," says Ilmer, providing a possible explanation as to why



May has never been popular in the United States: "His plots never rang true to the American ear."(n47) After all, Germans have always been more interested in American Indians and their way of life than in the actual American setting and the related problems. Over the last century, the American Indian has been, at least for German-speaking Europeans, "das Amerikanische am Amerikanischen."(n48) May did not provide Germans with their image of the American West alone; this legend of Winnetou is part of Germany's literary heritage. Germans have, therefore, not merely read the stories but participated in the myth of the 'American West.' Welch's *Fools Crow* would and could serve as a revision or correction of an inauthentic cultural image.

One could say that *Fools Crow* "inverts the subject-object dichotomy" established by "cultural mythmaking practices" and governmental politics or that readers experience an "epistemological vertigo" in the face of an Other.(n49) Certainly the text "halt[s] and] interrupt[s] the projection of meaning."(n50) An unsettling of the reader's expectations and comfort zone seems necessary for successful discourse and exchange between two cultures. Arif Dirlik argues that social change can follow "shifts in vision" because "culture is not only a way of seeing the world, but also a way of making and changing it."(n51)

Considering the reader's marginal existence in relation to this text, it is almost tempting to argue that the text actually becomes the "dominant" space. After all, there seems to be a reversal of who is dominant and who is marginalized in this exchange. Yet this exchange needs "willing" readers to be successful, and this notion automatically reduces the implications of a Native American text occupying a position of traditional white dominance. Exerting power, so tied to the notion of white dominance, is not a concern where textual dialog wants to provoke discourse and possibly deconstruct dichotomized thinking. The novel "decenters" readers not by becoming the dominant but by offering an "alternative space," an "alternative way of knowing."(n52) It becomes, to borrow Nancy Hartsock's words, "an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the center ... an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world."(n53)

Here, Kristeva's claim of the importance of experience arises again, because it is the text that we engage and thus it is the text that we experience. The text needs to make the reader its ally, absorb her in the experience, and then make her aware of the foreign experience from within. Yet the reader's displacement challenges her control of the text. Of course, one participates in the recreation of the fictive world through reading, and hence engages in a process of appropriation by "populating the words" of the text with one's "own intentions."(n54) Bakhtin asserts that "prior to this moment of appropriation, the word ... exists . . . in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (294). Crucially in the context of this discussion, he also acknowledges that "not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker" (294).

Kristeva argues that "according to current norms, the ideal translator is not supposed to let the slightest sign of the source language appear."(n55) She finds this conception of translation "debatable" yet "largely accepted and ... satisfactory" (20). It does scarcely seem an arguable position, since translation is a practice undergone for

the target audience. However, this means complete appropriation into the target language of the original. So, appropriation is as tightly linked to translation as Bakhtin says it is to the use of language in general.

Seen in these terms, *Fools Crow* is a text that "stubbornly resists" simple appropriation. For the translator this resistance is felt in the strangeness of the text that is not original to the English language it uses but to the world it is attempting to represent. Therefore, while I am in the process of appropriating the language, I cannot smooth over this text's "foreignness." If I were to do this, I would control the text in a manner that would defeat my very sense of the text's accomplishment. I would take away the means by which the text imagines a world foreign to Euro-American experience. Similarly, the acquisition of a "new" language and his awareness of displacement also, as already indicated, inhibits the reader's full appropriation of the words, as well as of the experience. The language creates "gaps in communication [that] signal a disabling of the traditional modes of 'speaking' the other."<sup>(n56)</sup> Further, the text avoids appropriation not only by creating a world "long gone" but by imagining a world based on that long gone. After all, despite its historical borrowings, this is a fictive account; therefore it cannot be proven or disproven, or even approached, by Euro-American tools of appropriation, such as history (which would represent a dominant rather than a marginal point of view). *Fools Crow* offers a radical and original alternative to the traditional, colonial concept of Native Americans and to the more easily assimilable ones written in standard English.

#### NOTES

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(n1.) Peter Hitchcock, *The Dialogics of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 170.

(n2.) Neither Leslie Marmon Silko in *Ceremony* nor Louise Erdrich in *Love Medicine*, not even D'Arcy McNickle in *The Surrounded*, changes syntax, names, and epistemology in this (literally) radical way.

(n3.) Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 166.

(n4.) Octavio Paz, "Translation: Literature and Letters," in *Theories of Translation*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 159.

(n5.) Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Theories of Translation*, 77.

(n6.) Rainer Schulte and Jean Biguenet, *The Craft of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), ix.

(n7.) Wolfram Wills, *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behavior* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1996), 32.

(n8.) Paz, "Translation," 152.

(n9.) In "Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English," Vladimir Nabokov asserts that "the person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text" and reinforces the idea that "the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase" (in *Theories of Translation*, 127,134). Octavio Paz counters this concept by saying that a "literal translation" would not be a translation in any sense, but merely "a mechanism, a string

- of words that helps us read the text in its original language. It is a glossary rather than a translation, which is always a literary activity" ("Translation," 154).
- (n10.) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 180.
- (n11.) *Ibid.*, 179.
- (n12.) Julia Kristeva, "The Other Language; Or, Translating Sensitivity," *Common Knowledge* 6 (1997):19-31.
- (n13.) *Ibid.*, 19.
- (n14.) Owens, *Other Destinies*, 194.
- (n15.) Kristeva, "Other Language," 29.
- (n16.) *Ibid.*
- (n17.) Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 7.
- (n18.) Owens, *Other Destinies*, 157.
- (n19.) Spivak, *Outside*, 180.
- (n20.) Hans Erich Nossack, "Translating and Being Translated," in *Theories of Translation*, 228.
- (n21.) Owens, *Other Destinies*, 157.
- (n22.) James Welch, *Fools Crow* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 7.
- (n23.) Paz, "Translation," 159.
- (n24.) *Ibid.*
- (n25.) "Blackhorn" is the buffalo's descriptive name, "whitehorns" is the descriptive name for cattle, and real bears describe grizzly bears.
- (n26.) The translator of the Swedish edition of *Fools Crow* chose to spare his readers some of the agony and decided to translate "Cold Maker" into "Wintermannen" (wintermaker). When I expressed my surprise at this, a Swedish friend said, "Well, a Swedish translation of 'Cold Maker' would be very strange." In this instance the translator decided to "smooth over" the strangeness to make understanding easier for his anticipated audience, disregarding that in fact even for an English reader "Cold Maker" "would be very strange."
- (n27.) James Welch, *Comme des Hombres sur la terre*, trans. Michel Lederer (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 155.
- (n28.) Allen, *Sacred Hoop*, 134.
- (n29.) Susan Stanford Friedman, "Beyond Gynocriticism and Gynesis: The Geographics of Identity and the Future of Feminist Criticism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 15 (1996): 15.
- (n30.) Welch, *Fools Crow*, 61.
- (n31.) Ironically, it is the scout Joe Kipp, who is half white, who offers the strongest suggestion of white presence and its consequence. Overlooking the Pikuni camp, he observes, "These people have not changed ... but the world they live in has. You could look at it one of two ways: either their world is shrinking or that other world, the one the white man brought with him, is expanding. Either way, the Pikuni loses" (Welch, *Fools Crow*, 252).
- (n32.) James Welch, *Killing Custer* (New York: Norton, 1994).
- (n33.) Paul Carter, "Naming Place," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 405.
- (n34.) Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 392.
- (n35.) Janice Gould, "The Problem of Being 'Indian,'" in *De/Colonizing the Subject*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 87.
- (n36.) Graham Huggan, "Decolonizing the Map: Post-Colonialism, Post-Structuralism and the Cartographic Connection," in *Past the Last Post*, ed. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1990), 125.

(n37.) Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 391.

(n38.) Birgit B&ouml;decker, "Eigennamen und sprechende Namen," in *Die Literarische &Uuml;bersetzung*, ed. Armin Paul Frank (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1989), 236.

(n39.) Eigennamen are one's proper or given names. Sprechende Namen not only identify a person but describe, "speak" of, a person's characteristics.

(n40.) B&ouml;decker, "Eigennamen," 236.

(n41.) Armin Paul Frank, *Die Literarische &Uuml;bersetzung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1989), 87.

(n42.) Brigitte Schultze, "Problems of Cultural Transfer and Cultural Identity: Personal Names and Titles in Drama Translation," in *Interculturality and the Historical Study of Literary Translations*, ed. Harald Kittel and Armin Paul Frank (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1991), 98.

(n43.) Gregory Rabassa, "No Two Snowflakes Are Alike," in *Craft of Translation*, 10.

(n44.) Owens, *Other Destinies*, 138.

(n45.) Quoted in Greg Langley, "A Fistful of Dreams," online issue of *Munich Found*, September 1996, [www.munichfound.com/pe/display.cfm?articleid=216](http://www.munichfound.com/pe/display.cfm?articleid=216).

(n46.) *Ibid.*

(n47.) *Ibid.*

(n48.) Roughly translated this means "the quintessential American." Klaus Martens, *Fremdvertrautheit* (St. Ingbert: R&ouml;hrig Universit&auml;tsverlag, 1994), 126.

(n49.) Greg Sarris, "What I am talking about When I'm talking about My Baskets': Conversations with Mabel McKay," in *De/Colonizing the Subject*; 28. Sarris here credits Vincent Crapanzano for the term "epistemological vertigo." For "cultural mythmaking practices," see Smith and Watson, eds., *De/Colonizing the Subject*; xviii.

(n50.) Sarris, "What I am talking about," 28.

(n51.) Quoted in Smith and Watson, eds., *De/Colonizing the Subject*, xx.

(n52.) *Ibid.*

(n53.) Quoted in *ibid.*

(n54.) M.M. Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293.

(n55.) Kristeva, "Other Language," 20.

(n56.) Hitchcock, *Dialogics of the Oppressed*, xvii.