



Teaching Guide for: 'Of Avians and Indigenes': Preliminary Notes on the Orientalization of the New World Native and Natured Others

Thomas C. Gannon
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Literature Compass 1 (2004) AM 054: 1–17, 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2004.00054.x

Further Reading

★ Given this essay's underpinnings in colonial discourse theory – and the very use of “Orientalization” in its title – Edward Said's foundational text in postcolonial theory, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978), might be profitably consulted. Native American theorists have also critiqued Euro-American colonialism and imperialism in a manner that can easily be deemed an indigenous American version of postcolonial theory, notably Vine Deloria, Jr. (*For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* [Routledge, 1999]), Gerald Vizenor (*Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* [UP of New England, 1994]), and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (*Anti-Indianism in America: A Voice from Tatekeya's Earth* [U of Illinois P, 2001]).

★ But the essay is also deeply imbued in what has come to be called ecocriticism, the “bible” of which might well be Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Harvard UP, 1995). Buell's championing of a viable “ecocentric” literature and worldview incorporates a vast variety of both Anglo- and Native American authors, from Thoreau to Leslie Silko. (Buell's more recent *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* [Blackwell, 2005] is a more concise “survey” of ecocriticism to date.) As for “deep ecology” and animal rights per se, Paul Shepard's *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Island, 1996) is a seminal illuminating text on species alterity. For a notable Native scholar's view of animals in literature – and an essay indebted to Shepard – see Gerald Vizenor's “Literary Animals” (*Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* [U of Nebraska P, 1998]).

★ Also influential in this essay is what may be called Native ecofeminism – involving the relationship of another race, another gender, and other species (and the land). Anything by Linda Hogan is à propos here, but a great start is her collection of short essays, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (Simon, 1996) – veritable prose poems on species alterity, on “crossing the borders” between human and non-human. For poetry per se, see “Eagle Poem”

author Joy Harjo's *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1975–2001* (Norton, 2002). Finally, much of the poetry and prose in the following anthology can easily be dubbed Native ecofeminist: *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America* (ed. Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, Norton, 1997). (See sample syllabus for more Native ecofeminist texts.)

* Felton Gibbons and Deborah Strom's *Neighbors to the Birds: A History of Birdwatching in America* (Norton, 1988) provides an excellent cultural history of Americans' interactions with birds – for better or worse – including the mass extinctions of the Carolina Parakeet and Passenger Pigeon and the “colonialist” introductions of Old World species such as the House Sparrow and European Starling. Fascinating, especially, are the stories of the numerous bird-lovers with literary aspirations (and some with literary talent), including Audubon, Thoreau, Burroughs, Ernest Thompson Seton, Aldo Leopold, and Rachel Carson.

Useful Links

* *Black Elk's World* (University of Nebraska Press) includes an online annotated edition of the classic *Black Elk Speaks* and supplementary materials on the Lakotas' “traditional world” <http://blackelkspeaks.unl.edu/index2.htm>.

* Since the dead body of Martha, the last Passenger Pigeon, ended up at the national museum in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian Institution's own web page on the *Passenger Pigeon* is of great interest, a curious combination of muted scientific detachment and yet poignant tribute <http://www.si.edu/resource/faq/nmnh/passpig.htm>.

* *Joy Harjo* (at Storytellers: Native American Authors Online) includes a picture and brief biography of this major contemporary Native poet, along with an extensive bibliography and related links <http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/joy/>.

* The author's earlier essay, “A Most Absorbing Game’: Peterson's *Field Guide* & the New World Bird as Colonized Other” (*Ampersand* 11, 2002), is a reading of Roger Tory Peterson's famous *Guide* from a more concertedly postcolonialist perspective <http://www.mprsnd.org/11/tg001.htm>.

Sample Syllabus: Native Ecofeminism (ENGL 345)

Course Description/Objectives:

This course is an introduction to Native American women authors who, in their writings, have expressed a deep consciousness of the relationship between women and the land & other species. For Native women, this relationship has often been fostered by both an affinity for Western ecology and their own indigenous traditions. Coming from many tribal affiliations, such women have also employed many genres in exploring eco-relationships: thus we will read lots

of poetry, lots of short creative nonfiction (essays), some short stories, a book of – *gasp!* – literary criticism/theory, and – *whew!* – a novel. The most difficult part of this course is its call for some ideology-adjustment on your part, since it has been expressly designed to call into question much of the dominant patriarchal and speciesist Western worldview. I can only ask that you “give it a chance.”

Besides your frequent and brilliant oral contributions in class and many informal written responses to the readings, you will also be expected to write two formal essays (details forthcoming), including an oral presentation of the second essay towards the end of the semester (see schedule below). Most of all, you can also expect to *think* a little differently, by semester’s end, than heretofore.

Required Texts:

Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon, 1986.

Harjo, Joy. *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems: 1975–2001*. New York: Norton, 2004.

Harjo, Joy, and Gloria Bird, eds. *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writing of North America*. New York: Norton, 1998.

Hogan, Linda. *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*. New York: Simon, 1996.

———. *Mean Spirit*. New York: Ballantine, 1990.

Hogan, Linda, Deena Metzger, and Brenda Peterson, eds. *Intimate Nature: The Bond Between Women and Animals*. New York: Ballantine, 1998.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*. New York: Simon, 1996.

[Also, a few handouts of supplementary readings, to be provided by your instructor]

Schedule of (Tentative) Reading Assignments:

WEEK 1: Allen’s *Sacred Hoop*: Introduction (1–7); *Reinventing*: Introduction (19–31); Silko’s *Yellow Woman*: “Old and New Autobiographical Notes” (196–200); Introduction, “Interior and Exterior Landscapes,” “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,” “Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit” (13–72)

WEEK 2: Silko’s *YW*: “The People and the Land ARE Inseparable” (85–91); *Intimate Nature*: Silko’s “Story from Bear Country” (3–5); *Reinventing*: Silko’s “When Sun Came to River Woman” (486–488); handout: Silko’s “Snake Mountain”; Allen’s *SH*: “The Ways of Our Grandmothers” (11–50); “The Sacred Hoop,” “Whose Dream Is This Anyway?,” “Something Sacred Going on Out There” (54–117)

WEEK 3: Allen’s *SH*: “How the West Was Really Won,” “Who Is Your Mother?,” Kochinnenako in Academe” (195–244); “Answering the Deer” (155–164); *Reinventing*: Allen’s “Going Home, December 1992” (150–156); Boyne’s “Invocation: Navajo Prayer” (32–34); Gould’s “Coyotismo” (52–53)

WEEK 4: *Reinventing*: McGlashan’s “The Island of Women” (67–71); Woody’s “The Girlfriends” (102–104); Hunter’s “Old Great-Grandma” (121–122); Tremblay’s “Indian Singing in 20th-Century America” (169–171);

Dauenhauer's "How to Make Good Baked Salmon . . ." (201–206); Midge's "Written in Blood" (211–212); Cook-Lynn's "Aurelia" (222–229); Noel's "Understanding Each Other" (233–234); LaDuke's "Ogitchida Ikwewag . . ." (263–269); Rose's "The Endangered Roots of a Person" (269–270); Endrezze's "The Constellation of Angels" (281–288); Fire's "Hard-to-Kill Woman" (300–308); Hill's "To Rose" (309–310); Tapahonso's "All the Colors of Sunset" (319–325); Coke's "The Change" (325–331); Brant's "Stillborn Night" (352–358); Goose's "Whale Song" (482–483); Armstrong's "I Study Rocks" (498–502); Wilson's "Dry Rivers – Arizona" (508–510); Trask's "Sisters" (519–521)

WEEK 5: Hogan's *Dwellings* 11–76 (including the Preface, to "Deify the Wolf"); *Intimate Nature*: Hogan's "First People" (6–19)

WEEK 6: Hogan's *Dwellings* 77–159 (from "Creations" to "Walking"); *Reinventing*: Hogan's "Skin" (331–332)

WEEK 7: *Intimate Nature*: Introduction (xi–xvi); Underwood's "Who Speaks for Wolf," Menchú's "The Nahual," Woody's "Why I Love with Admiration Every Salmon I See," Brant's "Prayer," Trask's "The Dog that Runs in the Rough Seas," Lockwood's "Caribou," Arkeketa's "Clan Eyes," Tall Mountain's "The Last Wolf" (20–52); *Intimate Nature* encore – some seminal non-Native ecofeminist texts: Griffin's "His Power: He Tames What Is Wild" (209–212); Kingsolver's "Making Peace" (250–257); Cerulean's "Looking After God's Birds" (85–89); Walker's "The Universe Responds" (323–327); Levertov's "Come into Animal Presence" (315); Piercy's "Crows" (342–343) . . . **[Essay #1 due]**

WEEK 8: Harjo 3–107 (from "Watching Crow . . ." to "The Myth of Blackbirds"); handout: Gannon's "Of Avians and Indigenes . . ." (note especially his reading of Harjo's "Eagle Poem")

WEEK 9: Harjo 108–200 (from "The Song of the House . . ." to "When the World . . ."); *Reinventing*: Harjo's "Warrior Road" (55–61); Allen's *SH*: "This Wilderness in My Blood" (165–183; note especially the sections on Hogan & Harjo)

WEEK 10: Hogan's *Mean Spirit* 3–206

WEEK 11: Hogan's *Mean Spirit* 209–375

WEEK 12: Student presentations of own Essay #2 research & tentative conclusions

WEEK 13: Student presentations (continued)

WEEK 14: Silko's *YW*: "The Border Patrol State" (115–123), "An Essay on Rocks" (187–191); Allen's *SH*: "Stealing the Thunder: Future Visions for American Women, Tribes, and Literary Studies" (262–268) . . .

[Essay #2 due]