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author

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I The mysterious search for a Native American Literature¹

Attempts at defining 'Native American literature' have so far brought no satisfying results. Scott Momaday's concept that "an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself"² was (arguably) intended to aid troubled identity-seekers. It made room, however, for 'Indian' authors like Jamake Highwater, who certainly *was* a result of his own vivid imagination, if nothing else. The "simple definition that Native literature is literature produced by Natives ... providing we resist the temptation of trying to define a Native"³ also leaves the door ajar for impostors. At the same time, Canadian Métis authors are grouped with Native authors in a number of publications, even though their affinity to a Native identity is not so much a result of bloodlines but of social pressure and the effects of majority colonial discourse. And Inuit (Eskimo) authors are sometimes grouped with Native writers, and sometimes they are not — as if the difference between Native Indian and Inuit was based on more than an early colonial ethnographic misunderstanding.

There are more aspects to the problem. That Indian blood relationship alone and by itself should shape or even determine an authors' perception of the world is a racist ideology and as such not helpful at all. Furthermore, a definition of Native American Literature solely along racial bloodlines would of course also include works like Momaday's Ph.D. thesis on the American poet Frederick Goddard Tuckerman as well as any scholarly book or article written in the natural sciences by authors with an Indian bloodline. Besides, some authors like Frank Waters, who appears to be "part Indian"⁴ or to have "a small part Cheyenne blood"⁵ or whatever⁶, have never expounded on their Indian bloodline. And finally, authors of Black and Indian mixed descent like Alice Walker and Melba Boyd are today usually still simply pigeonholed as 'black'. Any more intensive look at Walker's *Meridian*⁷ must of necessity cast some doubt on this sort of categorization.

The problem is basically one of viewpoint. When scholars started looking for 'Native American Literature' after the success of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, they usually took a biographical approach combined with a search for 'Indian' topics. This continued the stereotype which limited Native Americans in the arts to 'Indian' material culture, folklore and traditions. Predictably, Charles Larson in his search for American Indian

Fiction⁸, unearthed several novels of doubtful authorship while overlooking a substantial number of books with non-‘Indian’ content. In a similar manner, surveys of ‘Native American Literature’ try to generate a pan-Indian storyline to which all texts written by Indian authors are, by hook or by crook, made to conform.⁹

This exploratory (and admittedly provisional) paper does not attempt to completely to away with Native ancestry as one of the constituting factors of Native North American Literature. However, it wants to transgress the limitations of the kind of romantic discourse that has dominated the discussion so far, and point out a possible solution by looking at Native literature from a more sociopolitical perspective.

Literature written by authors of Indian descent has been written and published since the late 17th century. A substantial number of pre — Momaday texts by authors of Native American descent was written with no specific concern for Native issues at all, others were written to controvert continuing aboriginal cultural practices, while some others in turn reflect the adaptation of Native communities to the conditions of contemporary societies. In the context of this essay, the range and scope of minority literature(s) is perceived of as depending on their respective community basis (national, ethnic, or regional) and on the interpretive community’s¹⁰ response. The position of the individual author within this system is discussed with reference to one of those authors Larson, Wiget, and others failed to notice¹¹: Todd Downing, Choctaw.¹²

II The writing career of Todd Downing

Downing was a University of Oklahoma graduate with interests in archaeology and Mexican cultures. His M.A. thesis won a national prize and the annual award of the Institute de las Espanas for excellence in Spanish studies.¹³ “Todd was the scholar of the [Downing] family”¹⁴, his sister wrote. An enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation¹⁵, he spoke Choctaw fluently. Downing’s literary career preceded the revival of *Black Elk Speaks*, and it preceded the works of Momaday and Deloria. He did not indulge the frills-and-beadwork appearance made popular by American Indian Movement activists. Quite the contrary: he is remembered by his friends as a perfect gentleman who would hardly ever leave the house without a tie. Downing was a man of letters, a scholar, and a teacher. He also was the author of at least nine mystery novels¹⁶, several stories and essays, numerous newspaper articles and scholarly reviews, a travel book, a pageant, and a Choctaw language coursebook. The variety of his literary works¹⁷ and the respective audiences he wrote for may serve the purpose of this article to

achieve a less limited and more accurate description of Native American Literature.

In the following, I will outline Todd Downing's career as a writer with particular reference to the respective audiences he wrote for. At the same time, his treatment of Indian motives will be discussed.

As a student, Downing wrote a gossip column for the Oklahoma Daily under the pen-name 'Professor Hoople', showing sharp wit and occasionally a good sense of humor. From 1927 to 1934, Downing worked as Business Manager as well as review author for *Books Abroad*. Coincidentally, the first review he wrote touched on a Native American Subject.¹⁸ Not until the later years of Downing's employment with *Books Abroad* do his articles show a certain focus of interest in two particular fields. One of them is the mystery novel¹⁹, the other is Mexico, with special attention given to the Indian cultures.²⁰ For his crime novels, Downing combined the two: all except *Death Under the Moonflower* use Mexico for at least part of their setting.²¹ Writing *Murder on Tour*²² seems to have been triggered by reading news articles about some murder cases that caused the cancellation of one of Downing's guided tours²³ to Mexico.²⁴ His private eye Hugh Rennert is an educated, gentle character, who prides himself on his ability to speak "the soft Mexican tongue"²⁵. Rennert, like Downing, is particularly attracted to the old Mexican cultures.²⁶ Just this, then, makes up the Indian content of this first novel — Aztec waitresses, the ruins of Toltec and other Mexican cultures, and the fact that the homicidal couple Rennert helps to arrest strip ancient gravesites. Their robbery means not only the loss of archaeological material, it also enhances the danger of an Indian uprising:

Among the ignorant ones, the country people, there are strange rumors. In Oaxaca the story goes about that the old kings are returning after their sleep of centuries — to sit upon their thrones. It is said that in Tzintzuntzan the Tarascans wait for their ancient capital to be established again. You understand...the danger — to us.²⁷

Solving the case, Rennert helps to prevent a possible Indian uprising. There are no further reflections on this.

Murder on Tour was a success, and his next novel was published for The Crime Club Inc., a series run by Doubleday, Doran & Company.²⁸ *The Cat Screams* immediately was chosen book of the month selection by the Crime Club for August 1934. It was the first instance in which the Crime Club chose an early novel by a mystery writer.²⁹ Notwithstanding some stylistic shortcomings³⁰, the story achieves density of atmosphere through the use of Mexican Indian folklore, including allusions to a possibly supernatural background to the murder cases. A small clay figure of the Mexican god Xipe plays a significant role in the solution of the case, and other than in *Murder on Tour*, Indian myths and folklore are treated with respect. Even though the

poor servant boy whose illness confines the characters of the novel to their quarantined hotel does not die of a curse but of acute appendicitis, the world of *brujos* and *curanderas* is present throughout. With its treatment of indigenous material and drug-related killings, *The Cat Screams* preceded Tony Hillerman's novels.

The Cat Screams marked the peak of Downing's success as a writer of mystery novels.³¹ Probably as a direct result of this start, he decided on a career as a writer. *Vultures in the Sky* (1935) was again chosen as a selection of the 'Crime Club', but most of the books following *The Cat Screams* were not only devoid of any Native material, they also returned to the settings and tone of *Murder on Tour*. After *The Lazy Lawrence Murders* (1941) Downing's contract with Doubleday appears to have expired.

The inclusion and treatment of 'Indian' material in 1930s novels was not unusual. Mathews' *Sundown* appeared in 1934, McNickle's *The Surrounded* in 1936, about the same time as Downing's mystery novels. However, there was apparently no direct connection linking one to the other, no perceivable sense of belonging to a common body of literature. The only contemporary text that links Downing and his writing colleagues of Indian descent is an article by Muriel Hazel Wright, herself a noted Choctaw historian. In this article in the *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, he is mentioned alongside Will Rogers, Lynn Riggs, John Joseph Matthews (sic) and John Oskison.³²

Downing's books, however, likewise his other writings, were up to this point never intended for a specific Native American (or even regionally Oklahoma Indian) audience. They had been aimed either at specialized groups (students, readers of foreign books) or at a national audience, with no particular focus on a regional or Native audience. Even though he never denied his Choctaw heritage, none of the published works discussed so far bear any marks by which the reader could have identified him as a Native American author.

For some time Downing worked as an advertising copy writer and edited *Pan American Ismo*, the monthly magazine of the Pan-American Association of Philadelphia.³³ It is around this time, 1940, that a split occurred in his career as a writer. On the one hand, he continued to write as a mystery story writer³⁴, on the other hand he voiced the desire "to produce other types of fiction than the 'blood-curlers' so eagerly read by thousands"³⁵. What he produced next was in fact a very different kind of literature, even though it was not fiction: *The Mexican Earth*³⁶ is a travel account as well as an Indian history of Mexico.

This is where assumptions set in. The atmosphere in the 1930s, the blatant materialism of American culture and the overt racism of many political systems with its hysterical peaks in the horrors of Hitler Germany all may have led to the production of this book. In *The Mexican Earth* Downing iden-

tifies as a Native person. The particular sequence tells about a party of Californians in Mexico City, one of them a student of “indigenous art and folk dances and the Aztec language in the summer school of the National University of Mexico”.

The high light of her day seemed to be the time she had joined (‘horned in on’ I would have said) a family of Indians at their midday meal... ‘I hate to think of going back home’ she told me over her filet mignon. ‘I’d like to *live* down here, where I could be with Indians all the time. I think it’s wonderful — the way they’re coming into their own.’ And on and on. I should have held my peace, had she not caught me at an inattentive moment with a question... I said: ‘You have Indians out in California, don’t you?’ She frowned. ‘Oh, that’s different. They’re not — well, yes, I guess they are the same race. But —’ The young man who was my host rattled silverware and introduced a new topic of conversation... Later, in his room, he laughed and said to me: ‘Miss Blank is quite a card, isn’t she? Uh — you understood she was just kidding you, of course. She knew all the time that you’re Indian yourself.’³⁷

The ‘Miss Blank’ sounds all too familiar; indeed she appears like a model for all the Americans and foreigners tramping around indigenous America and getting on people’s nerves. Downing takes sides, and he chooses not the side of the Misses Blank and filets mignon, but the side of the indigenous Mexicans. However, it is not questions of identity that are the focus of his contemplations at this point, but racism.

During the 1920s and 30s, the world — including the U.S. — experienced a tremendous upsurge of racist theories and racist political systems. Through translations of books and the mass broadcasting systems, no country could escape the impact of this hysteria, which by no means was limited to Germany or the fascist countries in general. Downing noticed this.

Indian. MESTIZO. White. In these days of so much chest thumping and shouting in parade-ground voices about race, it seems futile to try to get in a sane word on the subject, even if that word be confined to the problems of Mexico. Paradoxically, consideration of the question there is made more difficult by the fact that, so far as the American tourist is concerned, surface appearances show the question to be settled fair and square and to the greater glory of the Indian. He has been ‘taken up’ enthusiastically, his virtues worried out of him and extolled. The Americans who were so articulate during the Díaz dictatorship thirty years ago still stay with the beer and skittles of the changeless American colony but are seldom heard from now. Yet I find an individual of this *passé* type only a little more irksome than the one who puts too much effort into letting the world know that he is free of prejudice. At home he exclaims loudly: ‘Why, some of my best friends are jews!’ In Mexico he waxes sentimental over every pot in a market place, defective or not, simply because it is Indian. His words do not ring true to an Indian of Oklahoma. I doubt that they do to an Indian of Mexico.³⁸

The author does not complain here about the kind of treatment the U.S.-American Indians saw during the 1920s and 30s at the hand of the mass media, notably the cinema. Neither does it seem to occur to him that Native

Americans were not usually identified as such on the dust covers of their books. The issue at hand is racism in general, and even though he identifies himself to be of American Indian descent, he does not deduct any moral or other superiority from this fact. Downing sums up his contemplations with the statement: "The person likely to be most free of prejudice is the one who is unconcernedly silent about race and nationality and creed"³⁹. This, obviously, was Downing's ideal.

He himself considered *The Mexican Earth*⁴⁰ to be his most important work, and the National Library of Mexico named it as "one of the best books published in English about Mexico"⁴¹. The most important aspect of the book in terms of this essay is that it aimed several ways. Trying to educate a general non-Native readership on the issue of racism, Downing also provided a means of identification for a Native readership by identifying himself as one of them, and by giving an Indian viewpoint of Mexican affairs and history. After writing for the students at U. of Oklahoma and the academical readership of *Books Abroad*, and after writing crime novels for a general audience, this was the already the fourth readership Todd Downing wrote for.

The war ending with the defeat of Hitler Germany by no means put an end to racism and fascist ideology, but Downing, with *The Mexican Earth*, had said what he wanted to say. Only one more published mystery story has so far been located.⁴² The information that Marion Gridley used in 1947 appears to have been outdated.⁴³ One non-mystery novel, a piece of historical fiction entitled *Under the Rose*⁴⁴ was either never finished or never published. Apparently, the manuscript does not survive.⁴⁵

Sometime in the later 1940s Downing returned to Atoka, Oklahoma, to take care of his parents, working as a High School teacher. His writing career was all but over, even though his works seem to have remained popular for a while: In 1951, Muriel Hazel Wright wrote in her *Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma*: "Choctaw prominent in the history of the Indian Territory and Oklahoma since 1898 include...Todd Downing, novelist"⁴⁶.

It was not until the late 1960s that Downing, by now almost seventy years old and living in the old family house, broke his silence. The effects of the Civil Rights Movement were felt also by the Choctaw Nation. One of the results was the establishment of the Choctaw Bilingual Education Program which hired Downing as an administrative assistant. Downing, who had always held the opinion that "belonging to two or more cultures doubles your enjoyment of life"⁴⁷ obviously was the right man in the right place: "He was happiest when teaching in this program"⁴⁸.

Other than with *The Mexican Earth*, he now concentrated his efforts on the region and on the Choctaw Nation, thus writing for the fifth consecutive audience in his career as an author. He wrote the pageant *Journey's End*⁴⁹ and the Choctaw language course *Chahta Anumpa*.⁵⁰ *Chahta Anumpa* was

first published as a serial in B.R. Cook's *Indian Citizen*. Nobody seems to have been more surprised by the immediate success of this series than the author himself:

Many moons ago (as Choctaws do not say) Mr. B.R. Cook...suggested that I write a series of Choctaw lessons for his newspaper. I hesitated. 'Do you think many people would be interested?' I asked, having had experience in turning out manuscripts in which few people WERE interested...To my surprise, Mr. Cook decided to run the entire series three times, to meet the demands of readers who wanted a complete file of the lessons. These developed into the present *Chabta Anompa* — and now it is going into a third edition.⁵¹

Chabta Anompa was designed to serve a double purpose as a combined introduction to language and culture alike. Stories about the great leader Pushmataha as well as the Choctaw creation myth and the Lord's Prayer in the Choctaw language can be found in this small publication of only 23 pages. Downing, well beyond retirement age, was a professor again: at least in terms of his academic career he had completed the circle.

The pageant *Journey's End*⁵² was directly written for his home community:

We reenact some of the great scenes from Choctaw history: the confrontation of Pushmataha and Tecumseh in 1811; the signing of the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1831; the wintertime removal of our people to new homes across the Mississippi River; the signing of the Atoka Agreement in 1897; and the final merging of Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory into the State of Oklahoma in 1907.⁵³

The performances of *Journey's End* needed and found the cooperation of Choctaws and Whites. The text is not without bitterness: the Choctaws are shown to have been forced into signing away their lands in the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Greedy Whites are already waiting on their doorsteps, and the same wording is used when the Atoka Agreement is signed:

(Act I, Scene 1) Hardwick: Well, some of them are bellyachin'— sayin' this is their land and they've got treaties with the Federal Government guaranteein' their right to it. But old Andy [President Andrew Jackson, w.h.] has put it to 'em straight from the shoulder.... So it's in (their) best interest to go peaceable... I've got my eye on old Noxabee's place. Rich bottom land with a good house and the best live stock in these parts.⁵⁴

(Act II, Scene 5) Harding: Well, some of them are bellyachin'— sayin' this is their land and they've got the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek guaranteein' their right to it. But their Governor, Green McCurtain, has put it to 'em straight from the shoulder.... so it's in their best interest to go peaceable...I've got my eye on a good Boggy Bottom farm. The owner's a sick old woman and I can bamboozle her easy.⁵⁵

This bitterness and the undercurrent of accusation stands in curious contrast to everybody singing 'Oklahoma' in the end. Part of this impression is probably due to the fact that the pageant was presented by The Atoka County

Historical Society and the Atoka County Chamber of Commerce. There was nothing to be gained from a radical text that would only have alienated people. On the other hand Downing resisted the temptation to enliven the scenery with Choctaw dances or anything of the kind. Even the battle of Boggy Depot on Feb. 13th 1864, just outside of Atoka, where Federal soldiers massacred wounded Confederate Indians, was left out. What Downing obviously had in mind was, as in *The Mexican Earth*, yet another attempt at reconciliation: "If you wish to come to an understanding with a man, do not start by arguing about points on which you disagree. Fix your attention on what you and he have in common"⁵⁶.

III Different audiences and interpretive communities, and their impact on a definition of 'Native American literature'

The variety of Downings works is fascinating. It ranges from a master's thesis, scholarly book reviews and advertising copy to mystery novels and stories, and from a travel book and Indian history of Mexico to a play and a language course. As has been pointed out, these works were not written for the same audience. Some are of regional importance, some aimed at the Choctaw community, others were distributed and read on a national and even international level. To be more precise: *Chahtha Anumpa* was of importance only to the Choctaw community. Downing's articles in local newspapers (whatever their topic) as well as the play *Journey's End* were read, seen and performed by both Native and non-Native inhabitants of Atoka and the region. When working with *Books Abroad*, as was mentioned Downing developed an interest in Mexican (Indian) issues and pointed out good as well as flawed descriptions to a more general audience without particular focus on Native readers. The crime novels were meant for a general audience on a national and international level.⁵⁷ *The Mexican Earth* addressed both a Native and a non-Native audience.

All of these works were written by the same person to whom the definition of 'Native American author' does obviously apply. Therefore, his whole literary oeuvre could be called 'Native American literature', even though substantial parts of it were neither concerned with Indian topics nor written for an Indian audience.

Abstracting from the individual case of Todd Downing, the author/interpretive community-relationship can — with reference to the problem of Native American literature — be differentiated into a model with several points on a gliding scale that mark the intended audiences and their responses.

- (1) Texts for a limited audience: the writers' own people (and region), about Native or non-Native issues;
- (2) Texts for a larger Native audience on behalf of the writers' own people or about Native issues in general;
- (3) Texts for a larger non-Native audience on behalf of the writers' own people or about Native issues in general;
- (4) Texts for a general readership about Native issues, using Native characters, motives, material etc.;
- (5) Texts for a specialized audience about non-Native issues;
- (6) Texts for a general audience without particular reference to Native issues;

The first group of works in this system includes all Native regional newspapers, leaflets and magazines, some of which are also read by non-Native audiences. This field is closest to contemporary Native American everyday life. Authors usually reside in the community. This is also the field in which Native journalism started in the 1820s. A modern novel of predominantly regional importance to the Choctaw and their neighbours is John T. Webb's historical novel *Never On My Knees*.⁵⁸

The second field denotes the relatively few cases in which an author consciously addresses only fellow Natives or in which bulletins and newsletters circulate only in and between Native communities.

Works in the third group were written for a generally non-Native audience, even though they deal with Native American subjects. It includes almost all works by Native American authors read by a general audience prior to 1900, like e.g. William Apes⁵⁹, Sarah Winnemucca⁶⁰ or Charles A. Eastman.⁶¹ The reason for this, of course, is the fact that prior to this date, Native American authors could not count on a larger Native audience to be literate, leave alone able to buy expensive books. Authors posing as Native persons are most likely to be found here, too, since writing in this group does not necessarily require direct contact between the writer and his or her own community.

The fourth field is that of works consciously written about and using Native issues and materials, and for both Native and non-Native audiences. *The Mexican Earth* belongs with this group. This is where the majority of contemporary authors would be listed, whose works are read by a white audience (which is necessary for a success on the bookmarket) as well as by their own people. These books are multicultural — even though the response may be different, as in the case of Charles Storm/Hyememyohsts whose *Seven Arrows* met with praise from the reviewers only to be rejected by the Cheyenne.⁶²

The fifth group includes works like Downing's M.A. thesis and Moma-

day's Ph.D. thesis on Tuckerman, or, more generally, all works by authors of Native descent in the natural sciences, business, law etc. (except where they deal with specifically Indian-related themes and topics).

The last group, finally, consists of all those works that do not directly appeal to Native readership and do not deal with or make use of Native issues and materials, like John Tebbel's (Ojibwe) *The Conqueror*⁶³, Martin Cruz Smith's (Senecu-Yaqui) *Gorkey Park*⁶⁴, or, for that matter, all of Todd Downing's crime novels.

All groups coexist, though the third is gradually vanishing from the scene after the departure of Jamake Highwater. Together, the groups form a continuum rather than clearly defined sectors. As the case of Todd Downing shows, one piece by an author may belong to the first group, another one to the fourth, still another to the fifth. In fact one and the same author may during his writing career cover all.

It is obvious why the last two groups can not really be listed under 'Native American Literature'. They have nothing to do with Native topics, nor are they directed at a Native audience. To include them for the simple fact that they were written by authors of Native ancestry does not make any conceivable sense.

My conclusion at this point in time is that it could be advisable to separate the terms 'Native American Literature' and 'Native American author', and to define 'Native American Literature' not exclusively by the quantity of Indian blood in a certain author, but to consider the intended interpretive community and the themes and topics. The above model overcomes the borders of genres and of 'high art' vs. 'trivial' literature, political rhetoric or journalist writing; borderlines that do not exist in this form in a Native American system anyway.

Looking at the present condition of Native writing and publishing, the interaction between fields one, two, three, and four is apparent. The third group did not exist as 'Native American literature' before the formation of a tentative canon of works in the 1970s and 80s. Only then did these works gain additional importance as predecessors and ancestral voices to works that largely belong with the fourth group according to the above system. This literary heritage, however, does not conform with the definition of *tradition*. It is neither traditional in the sense of the old oral tradition nor is it really a literary tradition, for the simple reason that hardly anybody knew about these authors. This situation has changed: today, authors like Momaday, Ortiz, Silko, Vizenor, and Welch have won wide acclaim and are read, reread, taught and to an extent also copied by younger writers who in turn get on the market with new publications that draw on regional experiences and possibly even on regional language. Slowly, there is a canon formation, as Native authors and readers are getting more conscious of their range of

possibilities.⁶⁵ Combined with experiments in form⁶⁶ this may ultimately lead towards a sort of ‘national’⁶⁷ post-colonial Native literature within the political boundaries of North America. In this point, regional tradition and pan-Indian literature interact.

Within the context of the larger North American literary market, usually only works listed under (4) in the above scheme are taken notice of as liminal texts, that is, “texts that incorporate and manifest...the *borderline* position of [their] origin”⁶⁸. This relates them to other liminal works in the European and North American literary traditions. Within the American Indian literary scene, they form the core of an incipient literary tradition.

Different audiences and interpretive communities also account for the differing responses to a text inside a community and outside. *Seven Arrows* and *Hanta Yo* were received enthusiastically by a generally non-Native audience — and critically taken apart by the Northern Cheyenne and Lakota respectively. The North American literary market usually views and reviews Native American texts of the fourth group only, and — to return to the beginning of this essay — from a rather removed outside perspective which more often than not is overshadowed by a tinge of romanticism, meaning that the “Indian” content is usually sought for and (therefore) overrated. This in turn accounts for the fact that researchers in Native American literature have so far failed to notice authors like Todd Downing, and possibly others.

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Notes

- 1 A revised version of this paper will appear in a volume of essays edited by Arnold Krupat (ed.), *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*. Washington: Smithsonian.
- 2 N. Scott Momaday, “The Man Made of Words”, in: A. Chapman (ed.), *Literature of the American Indian* (New York, 1975), 97.
- 3 Thomas King, “Introduction: An Anthology of Canadian Native Fiction”, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, 60 (1986), 5.
- 4 C.L. Adams, “Frank Waters”, in: J.G. Taylor (ed.), *A Literary History of the American West* (Fort Worth, 1987), 935.
- 5 J.L. Davis, “The Whorf Hypothesis and Native American Literature”, *South Dakota Review*, 14 (1976/77), 62.
- 6 L. Cook, “American Indian Literatures in Servitude”, *Indian Historian*, 10 (1977), 4, has rigorously denied that Waters is of Indian ancestry at all.
- 7 Cf. Melba Joyce Boyd, “The Politics of Cherokee Spirituality in Alice Walker’s *Meridian*”, in: Wolfgang Karrer, Hartmut Lutz (eds.), *Minority Literatures in North America* (Frankfurt/Bern, 1990), 115-127.
- 8 Charles Larson, *American Indian Fiction*. Albuquerque: U. of New Mexico Press, 1978.
- 9 Cf. Andrew Wiget, *Native American Literature*. Boston, 1985.

- 10 Bo Schoeler, "Interpretive Communities and the Representation of Contemporary Native American Life in Literature", *European Review of Native American Studies*, 1:2 (1987), 27.
- 11 A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, *American Indian Literatures* (New York, 1990) is the first survey to mention Downing (on pp. 75 and 159).
- 12 I am thankful to Ms Ruth S. Downing and Mr Nenad Downing, Chattanooga, and to Mrs Margaret Hames and Mr Homer Blaker of Atoka, Okla., for sharing their time and information on Todd Downing with me. Thanks also to David Hass who proof-read an earlier version of this paper. All mistakes are the responsibility of the author.
- 13 Charlene W. Smith, "Todd Downing", Atoka County Historical Society (ed.), *Tales of Atoka County Heritage* (Atoka, 1983), 247.
- 14 Ruth Downing, "The Downing Family", Atoka County Historical Society (ed.), *Tales of Atoka County Heritage* (Atoka, Okla., 1983), 246-247, 247.
- 15 "No. 14069, George Todd Downing, Age 1, Male, 1/8, Census Card 5562", The Commission and Commissioner to the Five Civilized Tribes (eds.), *The Index and Final Rolls of Citizen and Freedmen of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribes in Indian Territory* (Washington, 1906), 322. His paternal Choctaw grandmother, Milissa Armstrong, had come from Mississippi on the Trail of Tears in 1832. His father, Sam Downing, was a respected member of the community who had served as a corporal with the Rough Riders, cf. Todd Downing, "Local Boys in Cuba Conflict", *Indian Citizen* (?), 1974.
- 16 Ordean A. Hagen, *Who Done it? A Guide to Detective, Mystery and Suspense Fiction* (New York/Los Angeles: Bowker, 1969), 123.
- 17 See Mary Marable and Elaine Boylen (eds.), *A Handbook of Oklahoma Writers* (Norman: Univ. of Okla. Press, 1939), 9-10.
- 18 T.D. (Todd Downing), "Jean Feron. La Métisse. Montreal. Edouard Garant. 1926", *Books Abroad*, 1:1 (1927), 26.
- 19 T.D., "Francis Carco. L'Ombre. Paris. Albin Michel. 1933", *Books Abroad*, 7:4 (1933), 455.
- 20 T.D., "Héctor Pérez Martínez. Juárez, el impasible. Madrid. Espasa-Calpe. 1934", *Books Abroad*, 8:4 (1934), 405-406.
- 21 Allen Hubin, *Crime Fiction 1749—1980. A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York/London: Garland, 1984), 122. Wayne Gunn Drewey, *Mexico in American and British Letters. A Bibliography of Fiction and Travel Books* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1974), 17-18, lists only *The Last Trumpet* (1937); *Murder on the Tropic* (1935); *Night over Mexico* (1937) and *Vultures in the Sky* (1935 as well as *The Mexican Earth*, 81.
- 22 Todd Downing, *Murder on Tour*. New York: Putnam, 1933.
- 23 Advertisement, *Books Abroad*, 4:1 (1930), 1.
- 24 Cf. Robert Bolen, "Choctaw teacher doubles as author", *The Southeastern*, Dec. 1973.
- 25 *Murder on Tour*, 64.
- 26 Unlike Downing, Rennert is identified as a white man: "A man with a white skin, he told himself, had no business thinking in this country". *Ibid.*, 121.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 28 *Fiction 1876—1983* (New York/London: Bowker, 1983), 306.
- 29 Anon., "We Aren't All Dry-As-Dusts" *Books Abroad*, 8:4 (1934), 398.
- 30 A review of the British edition (London: Methuen, 1935) criticized the "cheerful insouciance with ... pronouns" but conceded "some points of real originality", *Times Literary Supplement* (Oct. 24, 1935), 673.
- 31 *The Cat Screams* was adapted for the stage by Basil Beyea, cf. the review by G.J. Nathan, *Theatre Book of the Year* (1942-3), 7-10.
- 32 Muriel H. Wright, "Contributions of the Indian People to Oklahoma", *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 14 (1936), 161.
- 33 Smith, "Todd Downing", 247.

- 34 An essay on mystery novel writing entitled "Murder is A Rather Serious Business" appeared in Abraham Saul Burack (ed.), *Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction* (Boston, 1945), 357-9.
- 35 Marable/Boylen, *Handbook of Oklahoma Writers*, 10.
- 36 Todd Downing, *The Mexican Earth*. New York: Doubleday Doran&Co. 1940.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 9-10.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 8-9.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 40 A new edition of *The Mexican Earth* is currently being prepared by this author for University of Oklahoma Press.
- 41 Bolen, "Choctaw teacher".
- 42 Todd Downing, "The Shadowless Hour", *Mystery Book Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Nov. 1945).
- 43 Marion E. Gridley (ed.), *Indians of Today* (Chicago: Indian Council Fire, 1947), 33: "He writes...short stories for Mystery Monthly Magazine, is working on his first nonmystery novel...".
- 44 According to the information on the author accompanying the essay in Burack, *Writing Detective and Mystery Fiction*, 357.
- 45 After his death in 1974, Todd Downing's library went to Southeastern State College (now University) Durant, Okla.; but the Downing collection contained no manuscripts, nor any of the books he authored; acc. to Kay Parham, Library Direction, in a letter to this author, June 19, 1991.
- 46 Muriel H. Wright, *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of Oklahoma* (Norman, Okla.,: Univ. of Okla. Press, 1951), 114.
- 47 Quoted after James D. Morrison, "Chahta Anompa: An Introduction to the Choctaw Language, by Todd Downing", *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 53 (1975), 416.
- 48 Ruth S. Downing, Letter to the author, 13/1/90.
- 49 The text of this pageant has never been published. A copy of the hectographed typescript was made available to this author by Mrs M. Hames.
- 50 Todd Downing, *Chahta Anompa. An Introduction to the Choctaw Language*. Durant, Okla.: Choctaw Bilingual Education Program, 1971.
- 51 *Ibid.*, "Foreword to the Third Edition", 4.
- 52 Todd Downing, *Journey's End* (Typescript), 1970. The program leaflet of the 1971 performance identifies as authors of Act II, Scene 1: 'Geary Station on the Butterfield Trail, September 1858; and Scene 2: 'A Choctaw School 1860' Gladys Wilson and Cassie Williams respectively. After Downing's death, a revised form of the pageant was performed until 1976.
- 53 Downing, *Chahta Anompa*, 15.
- 54 Downing, *Journey's End*, Act I, Scene 1, 5.
- 55 Act II, Scene 6, 38.
- 56 Downing, *Chahta Anompa*, 7.
- 57 *The Cat Screams* and al of his crime novels after that were also published by Methuen in England. *The Cat Screams* is said to have also appeared in German and Swedish editions.
- 58 John T. Webb, *Never On My Knees*. Durant: Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, 1988.
- 59 William Apes, *A Son of the Forest*. New York: Author, 1829. Apes also wrote on behalf of the Marshpee he lived with: *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts. Relative to the Marshpee Tribe*. New York: Coleman, 1980 (orig. 1835).
- 60 Sarah Winemucca, *Life Among the Piutes. Their Wrongs and Claims*. New York: Putnam, 1883.
- 61 Charles A. Eastman, *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*. Boston: Little&Brown, 1916.
- 62 Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows*, New York: Harper&Row, 1972. The Cheyenne

- response was first formulated by Rupert Costo, "Seven Arrows Desecrates Cheyenne", *Indian Historian*, 5:2 (1972), 441-2.
- 63 John Tebbel, *The Conqueror*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1951.
- 64 Martin Cruz Smith, *Gorky Park*. New York: Ballantine, 1981.
- 65 Cf. Jim Ruppert, "Literature on the Reservation — Source for the Future of American Indian Literature", *MELUS*, 8:2 (1981), 87.
- 66 Post-colonial national literatures e.g. in Africa show that even though English may be used as the standard basis for communication, this does not exclude the development of indigenous form; cf. Vladimir N. Vavilov, "Prose Genres in the Making in African English Language Literature", *Research in African Literatures*, 18:4 (1987), 434ff.
- 67 Cf. Simon Ortiz, "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism", *MELUS*, 8:1 (1981), 7ff.
- 68 Hartwig Isernhagen, "Literature — Language — Country: The preservation of difference and the possibility of relation", *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kanadastudien*, 6:1 (1986), 85.