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and captures the emotional turmoil of it. For that, even as a man with his set of prejudices, he deserves attention, concessionist or not.

It is interesting to note that as pressures of contact and Indian removal loomed ever larger, these suppressive environments worsened. A classic example, less extreme than executing alleged witches who held dissenting opinions, is the Boudinot-Ross dispute over freedom of the Cherokee press in the early 1830s. John Ross maintained the position that in the face of Indian removal one does not allow dissenting voices. A leader provides a unified front to fight the aggressive militarism of the federal government. Elias Boudinot resigned as editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix* over this very issue, disputing Ross with a democratic argument that insisted a newspaper present all sides of an issue, even if it meant giving voice to those in favor of removal. These were difficult times and both men were in impossible situations.

To return to Creek concerns, the Chaudhuri's point about a skewed reliance on only one faction of the tribe is well-taken, and I wish the editors' introductions to George Stiggins's history would have explained these complexities. An updated introduction that placed Stiggins in his rightful place as part of a Creek literary tradition is much in order. William Stokes Wyman's introduction, written in 1902, is a little dated to say the very least, and Virginia Pounds Brown's brief sketch tells little more than what years the manuscript fell into whose hands. At this point I guess people are tired of hearing me say this, but would it be too much to ask that even one of the people introducing the book be a Muskogee person? In addition to some of the earlier mentioned complexities of Creek life, a revelation that might emerge, for example, in a modern introduction, is an answer to the question, How did George Stiggins, who we know died in Macon County, Alabama, in 1845, manage to escape Indian Removal and keep his prosperous farm where he lived until his death?

Now, there's a story.

Craig Womack

University of Lethbridge

Feathering Custer. By W. S. Penn. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. 256 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

In the title essay of W. S. Penn's entertaining collection of articles appraising current trends in literary and cultural studies, the author explains how George Armstrong Custer lost touch with his plebeian origins and gradually reinvented himself according to dubious, heroic tales of his exploits that began to circulate among the American public when Custer was only twenty-three years old. Insecure about his legitimate place within American history, and uncertain of his worthiness in the eyes of more powerful, superior men, Custer eagerly conformed to popular mythology. Accepting a view of himself as a peerless military legend and an American hero, he willingly "forgot" that he was once a poor, not especially intelligent boy from the "wrong" political

party and the wrong side of the tracks. Along with his memory, he also apparently sacrificed his remaining humanity in an effort to win the actual place in history that his storytelling admirers had earlier fabricated. According to Penn, Custer internalized and abused the authority that as a boy he resented and defied.

Custer serves Penn in this volume as an icon of the co-opted individual and an unnerving reminder of how worldly approval can quickly corrupt us. In each of his humorous essays, Penn observes the perils of assimilation. People who seek recognition within a community that has marginalized them—for example, Native American writers and critics within the Anglocentric mainstream—necessarily risk becoming like the enemy they initially set out to resist or transform. The ten pieces included in Penn's collection explore some of the co-optative aspects of contemporary political correctness, especially its many prescriptive tendencies concerning American Indian identity and art. Penn warns us that Native American culture, like its nemesis, Custer, is in danger of conforming to a constructed, reductive, and inaccurate, even though favorable, view of itself perpetuated by Indians and non-Indians alike. Penn's candor is admirable as he carries out his critical task, never for a moment hesitant to enter even the most treacherous political territory.

Among the author's first targets is the theoretical jargon of literary and cultural studies. Indeed, there are some words, such as *problematic*, *intervention*, *positionality*, and its homely twin, *depositionality*, that he says he would prefer never to hear again. Penn has little sympathy for the highly politicized discourses (another word he would banish) of postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other schools of thought that he finds ultimately boring because they lead the mind so far from the realm of art they purport to address. Unlike many disgruntled detractors of theory and criticism, Penn does in fact understand the issues he lampoons, as his satiric portrayal of their proponents throughout his essays so effectively demonstrates. The "love of art," he complains, has been replaced in academia with a love of "turgid writing about art," and sometimes a love of turgid writing about "other turgid writing." To disconnect the reader from art is anathema to Penn, whose idea of a good literary critic is someone who tells us "a story of an idea or set of ideas that for however long takes dominion of our ideas and connects them, organizes them, gives them meaning." Such a critic is her- or himself a kind of storyteller, not a sociologist, a politician, or "a bureaucrat in hiding" (p. 225).

Together with the hideous language of critical coteries, Penn also attacks identity politics on the contemporary academic and literary fronts. He relates an embarrassing story about an unnamed critic who praised a bad novel by John Rollin Ridge based merely on its status as an Indian-authored text. This critic unwittingly revealed more than his ignorance about Native literature. However well-intended, his condescending lack of appropriate evaluative standards for Indian art—standards he would readily have applied to a novel by a white man—speaks volumes about his narrow view of Indian writers' potential. A kindred form of condescension also provokes Penn: that of the "groupie" mentality that slavishly admires all Indian writing without observing even the most obvious qualitative differences.

Exposing the underlying racism of such identity politics, Penn reveals how popularized Native American writing risks becoming a market commodity, and how Indian writers had better avoid Custer's habit of reconstructing themselves in their commodified image. The same advice extends to Native literary critics, who must also resist the reification of Indian identity and avoid playing a counterpart role to the marketable Indian writer: the marketable Indian scholar. Penn lampoons academic Indians who reenact their own tribal versions of demeaning departmental politics within the university. In one essay, the "Head Indian" on campus forgets what he shares in common with "the Newind," a recently hired junior colleague, and proceeds to lord it over him in a Eurocentric, patriarchal manner.

Though the essays in this volume will appeal to a far wider audience, professors in the humanities will be especially engaged by many of Penn's sketches of contemporary academic life. Some will readily agree, while others may balk at Penn's critique. Notably provocative, and reminiscent of some of N. Scott Momaday's remarks in interviews concerning teaching, are the author's comments on the difficulties of teaching today. Those of us in college classrooms, Penn charges, are "cowards": we refuse to challenge our students' "complacent minds because we get into trouble if we try." So we "give undeservedly high grades" to win favorable evaluations by those holding the reins of dubious power (p. 210). Rather than reclaim our own power by teaching the unmarketable humanities, Penn claims, we seek the approval of students, the public, and the administration by trying to appear as sociologists, psychologists, or various types of activists.

Nevertheless, beneath the cynicism in Penn's voice runs a swift current of enthusiasm for the ever-increasing presence of Native artists and scholars on the American literary scene. This scene, however, is a scene of writing; part of the cost of emergence of previously silenced Indian voices into mainstream cultural circles has been the loss of many aspects of oral traditions. Penn rightly observes that without the dramatic presence of the storyteller, oral material loses much of its inherently dynamic potential for adaptation to occasion and audience needs. He worries about the potential freezing of Native cultural material into the more static forms that writing necessarily imparts. Despite the sophisticated ways in which Native American writers have begun to manage Western aesthetic forms to their own ends, these very same forms threaten to reinvent Indian cultures in ways that may communicate to both Indians and non-Indians a less-than-authentic conception of Indian realities. The version of Native people invented today will require revision tomorrow, but we know all too well how resistant to change are instated views. Consequently, Penn argues, Indian people must be ever-mindful of the need to resist mythologizing, whether it is their own or the non-Indian other's. Penn admonishes Native people to beware the identity-arresting forces of the marketplace, as well as of contemporary academic "discourse."

Though Penn and Gerald Vizenor would not see eye-to-eye on a number of issues—Vizenor seems to love so many of those terminologies that Penn abhors—they share more than a common disdain of "terminal creeds." Like many of Vizenor's, Penn's critical essays are a generic cross between exposi-

tion and short fiction. Penn's mannered, authorial personae resemble the well-wrought narrators of short stories, and he often presents his arguments at least partially through the voices of characters such as Tonto, borrowed from *The Lone Ranger*, and "Uncle Gyro" (Penn's academic "Head Indian," perhaps modeled on the wacky genius from Donald Duck comics, Gyro Gearloose). Penn's humor also recalls Thomas King's, where reconstructed versions of the Lone Ranger, Tonto, John Wayne, and other popular culture icons are subject to whatever indignities Coyote can inflict. With *Feathering Custer*, Penn maintains his well-earned place among these first-rate Indian humorists as he plays adeptly the dual role of storyteller and critic, entertaining and instructing his readers in ways that strengthen our connections to the vibrant heart of literary expression. Eschewing the utilization of words such as *problematic* or *thematicizationalize* (p. 135) Penn's witty, sophisticated essays expose, at best, the silliness and, at worst, the viciousness of some of the most self-righteously defended "positionalities" of our times.

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In the Words of Elders: Aboriginal Cultures in Transition. Edited by Peter Kulchyski, Don McCaskill, and David Newhouse. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. 458 pages. \$70.00 cloth; \$29.99 paper.

As this volume's editors state in the introduction, works that present the collected experiences of First Nations/Native American elders come rarely in the form of an anthropological study or a general presentation of indigenous wisdom. For those looking for either one can certainly find both, but the reader will find no index in this book and, consequently, no fast and easy answers or references, which is as it should be. As this book presents the words of elders it should be read as if you were in the presence of one of these elders, listening.

In structure, the book is divided into eight broad Canadian culture regions: Eastern Canada, Central/Great Lakes, Anishinabe, Mid-north, Inuit, Plains, Dene, and Pacific Coast. It presents the commentary and experiences of sixteen elders, two from cultures within each region, on a variety of topics related to the experiences and issues relevant to their particular communities. Subjects range from the telling of portions of life histories, offering aspects of traditional life and knowledge, to modern issues such as treaties, the relationship between Natives and non-Natives, and traditional and Christian beliefs. While there was a structure to the interviews conducted with each elder, they only commented on topics of their own choosing. As a result, there is broad variation in each elder's narratives and there is never a complete picture of a particular culture provided. Moreover, while the elders come from a variety of different cultures, they also come from a variety of different social backgrounds. For instance, Margarat Paul, a Passmoquady elder from Nova Scotia, is a traditional singer in her community, while Wilf Tootosis, a Saulteau elder from Saskatchewan, spent a great deal of his life working in the