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Hanay Geiogamah's Body Indian and Foghorn as "Plays with a Purpose"

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Danica Čerče,
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Abstract: In her article, "Hanay Geiogamah's *Body Indian* and *Foghorn* as 'Plays with a Purpose,'" written against the backdrop of critical whiteness studies, Danica Čerče discusses how Geiogamah's theatrical rhetoric intervenes in the assumptions about whiteness as a static, privilege-granting category and system of dominance. By focusing on various techniques and strategies mobilized to define and affirm Native Americans' authentic rather than imposed identities, the article shows that humor is one of the prime textual devices in Geiogamah's plays to renegotiate what Walter Mignolo calls "the racist structure of power."

Danica ČERČE

Hanay Geiogamah's *Body Indian* and *Foghorn* as "Plays with a Purpose"

Introduction

Charles Mills argues that American nation's social contract, i.e. "a set of intersubjective agreements" mediated by institutions and cultural practices in order to map the sociopolitical power relations of the nation, is one in which exclusion, inequality and domination are the norm ("Race" 445–6). This discriminatory concept, which "privileges whites at the expense of people of color" (Mills, "Breaking" 44), is perhaps best evident in the case of Native Americans.[1] Decimated by centuries of genocide, expropriation, slavery, colonial border wars and "devious codes of extermination" (Vizenor, *Natural* 105), they were assigned to live in conditions of politically sustained subalternity, which, in Walter Mignolo's words, "foregrounds racialized oppression and socio-economic subordination" (381). In recent years, as a result of successful campaigns for land rights and sovereignty connected with a worldwide struggle for indigenous peoples' rights since the 1960s, Native Americans have witnessed a considerable improvement in their political and economic situation (Wilmer 1). However, and despite the impressive strides of 573 federally recognized Tribal Nations in asserting the inherent sovereignty of indigenous tribes and assuming responsibilities for their peoples' healthcare and education, the statistical data show that the status of Native Americans is still far from satisfactory. This is particularly noticeable in high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, suicides[2] and school dropouts. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), their employment rate is the lowest of any racial or ethnic group in the United States and more than one in four Native Americans still live in poverty, with personal income nearly seventy per cent less than the national personal income. Poverty, coupled with poor housing and malnutrition result in high rates of disease, particularly diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The life expectancy of Native Americans born today is about five years below the U.S. average (Peralta).

To object to what George Lipsitz refers to as "the possessive investment in whiteness" (*The Possessive*) and the patterns held in place to preserve the lines of demarcation between the empowered and disempowered cultures (Suleri 112), indigenous communities continue to manifest their protest. In addition to various forms of political activism, indigenous literature has undertaken an important role in voicing their views. Constituting an intercultural encounter for the white reader, and intervening in the institutional and historical processes that have enabled and maintained the dominant position of those identified as white on the one hand, and the concomitant political, economic, and cultural subordination of indigenous Americans on the other, it articulates discourses of "conscious antagonists," as Edward Said refers to those who, "compelled by the system to play subordinate or imprisoning roles within it," react by "disrupting it" (*Culture* 335). Performing this function, Native American literature has earned the label "literature with a purpose," which—according to the Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver—can be applied to all postcolonial literatures (44). However, and despite sharing affinities with other postcolonial literatures in that it has also "emerged in [its] present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted [itself] by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing [its] differences from the assumptions of the imperial Centre" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2), its status remains unclear in the postcolonial scholarship.[3]

In this study, I focus on Hanay Geiogamah's plays *Body Indian* and *Foghorn*. My reading is not concerned with "literariness" as a principal object of study and appreciation; rather, it is framed by an interest in how the two plays function as "a form of public good" (Gonzales and Agostini xvi) or what David Carter and Kay Ferres define as "the public life of literature" (140). Drawing on some of the issues taken up by critical whiteness theory, the study aims to show how the playwright challenges the romanticized figure of the Native American as an uncivilized "savage" and intervenes in the institutional and historical processes and logics that have retained the American indigenous population in the web of hegemonic power. I argue that one of the main textual devices that Geiogamah employs to do what he

[1] With reference to the descendants of indigenous peoples in the United States, the specific name for each people or nation is the preferred term. An alternative is Native Americans, which is preferred to American Indians or Indians or Natives.
[2] According to the National Congress of American Indians demographics data, Native Americans have the highest rate of suicide among all ethnic groups in the United States.
[3] Several critics have expressed scepticism towards the applicability of the term postcolonial to both Native Americans' life and literature (Krupat 73). In Arnold Krupat's view, this is for the simple reason that that "there is not yet a 'post-' to the colonial status of Native Americans (ibid.).

sees as "the challenging task of the new Native American theatre" is humor (Geiogamah "The New" 162).

Native American playwriting

In a society in which healthy social interactions between white and indigenous people are impeded because of the assumptions about binary oppositions such as domination and subordination, center and margin, self and other, upon which the logic of coloniality stands (Suleri 112), literary texts are an important site for the renegotiation of such "exclusionary rather than genuinely inclusive" social contract (Mills, "Race" 446). However, several nineteenth-century critics argued that for those like the Native Americans, with what they described as "primitive languages," there seemed to be little or no hope, short of translation, for literary achievements (Krupat 75). Arnold Krupat rejects this linguistic determinism of the early critics, but draws attention to the fact that most of what is known today as Native American literature is written in English and under the influence of forms and genres of Western literature (75). Some other non-Native scholars are also reluctant to acknowledge the "authenticity" of literature in the settler colonizer's language and employing Western literary forms of expression (Weaver 24). As Frantz Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, among others, have noted, the issue of language is "crucially related to the need for a secure cultural identity" and to the achievement of self-esteem and self-determination in relation to the world (Crow and Banfield 6). Weaver explains that Native Americans write in English not only because publishing opportunities in most Native languages are almost non-existent, but also because many of them do not speak their native languages due to the long-lasting concerted effort within the dominant culture to "eradicate tribal languages." English is thus the only language available to communicate across the community and to make their protest comprehensible to European Americans (Weaver 13). As for the literary forms, Ngugi wa Thiong'o maintains that the crucial question is not that of their origin, but of their "development and the uses to which they are continually being put" (25).

First plays by a Native American author were published between the late 1920s and early 1950s by the Cherokee playwright Lynn Rigg. The contemporary era of Native American playwriting is connected with the rise of Native Americans' activism in the late 1960s and the 1970s, manifested in the form of various movements demanding increased civil rights, tribal sovereignty, and self-determination. Among them, the American Indian Movement (AIM), founded in Minneapolis in 1968, rapidly became a militant force for indigenous Americans' rights throughout the country (Darby 156). During that period of political unrest, Hanay Geiogamah, a Kiowa-Delaware activist and one of the most prominent contemporary Native American playwrights, recognized the political potential of theatrical performance. He claimed that the role of Native American artists was to "establish a strong identity base in their work to help confront and clarify the endless confusions resulting from non-Indians' beliefs and misperceptions of Indian life, […] to help untangle the mass of confusions that stereotyping, assimilation, and acculturation have created in the minds of Indians themselves" (Geiogamah, "The New" 163).

Geiogamah's plays are included in two anthologies of Native American drama: *Seventh Generation: An Anthology of Native American Plays* (1999) and *Stories of Our Way: An Anthology of American Indian Plays* (1999). The two plays discussed in this article, *Body Indian* and *Foghorn*, first staged in 1972 and 1973, respectively, were published in 1980, together with the play *49* under the title *New Native American Drama: Three Plays by Hanay Geiogamah*. Generally regarded as Geiogamah's major plays, they were performed by the Native American Theatre Ensemble, founded by Geiogamah himself.[4] As Jaye Darby has noted, they display a "distinctive American Indian aesthetic of theater" fusing the inheritance of tribal cultures in Native American communities with current issues, "while at the same time recognizing […] western theatrical traditions (Darby 157). In particular, they show the influence of Bertolt Brecht, known for his non-traditional styles and techniques in portraying the contradictions, struggles and conflicts of contemporary social life.

Geiogamah's Theatrical Rhetoric

Some critics compare Geiogamah's theatrical rhetoric to the radical black theatre of the 1960s. Among the opposing voices, Jeffrey Huntsman argues that Geiogamah is "more interested in survival and self-knowledge of his people than in reproach and confrontation," urging them "to note their condition, whether it arises from external prejudice or from their own mistreatment of one other" (xi). Huntsman justifies his opinion by pointing to Geiogamah's statement that the most important role of a Native American author is to communicate with his or her own people (Geiogamah, "The New" 163). Weaver

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[4] Founded by Geiogamah himself, the Native American Theatre Ensemble was meant to "represent a resident company in Indian Country and develop Native performing arts within interested tribal communities" (Darby 156).

positions Geiogamah's work within what he calls the "communitist tradition" in the Native American playwriting, that is, combining "community" and "activism" to describe a "proactive commitment to Native community, including the wider community" (43). In communities that have been rendered dysfunctional by the effects of settler colonialism, to promote communitist values means "to participate in the healing of the grief and sense of exile felt by Native communities and the pained individuals in them," claims Weaver. In his words, Native American authors "prepare the ground for the recovery and even recreation of Native American identity and culture," or, as the critic contends in the title of his study, they write "[t]hat the people might live" (43-4).

Indeed, Geiogamah sees the stage as a means of Native Americans' self-realization and of presenting their cultural authenticity. To perform this educational function, Geiogamah places the realities of contemporary Native American life in the context of a long history of his peoples' oppression and struggle. It is probably safe to claim that the most consistent theme in his plays is "the past in the present, the past bearing down upon the present," as Katharine Brisbane observes for contemporary dramatic activity in Australia (xv). While this theme has various realizations in Geiogamah's plays, taken as a whole, his dramatic output constitutes a reinterpretation of American social history from a Native American point of view and invites its audiences to reconsider the relationships formed on the basis of that history. Understanding the need for Native Americans to free themselves from a "massive psycho-existential complex," as Fanon calls the psychological internalization of colonizer's values about the colonized, marked by a sense of inferiority (*Black* xvi), Geiogamah challenges the binarisms of colonial discourse, accountable for the disruption of the reciprocity of recognition in cultural relationships.

To empower his people, Geiogamah uses several theatrical devices to engage both the "target publics," as Michael Lipsky defines the representatives of American governmental bodies that have the capability to put into effect the political goals of the protest group, and the "reference publics," all those who are supportive of the protest goals (1146). These theatrical devices include language, humor, structure, and dialogue. Beginning with the language, it is generally regarded as the most important vehicle through which the colonizers effected the "spiritual subjugation" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 287). According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, language is "inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history and relationship to the world (290),[5] therefore decolonization can be achieved only with "the full independence" of culture, language, and political organization (Weaver 12). Several other theorists see "cultural syncreticity" as a valuable and unavoidable feature of all formerly colonized societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 30). They claim that "the English language is not inherently incapable of accounting for postcolonial experience, but it needs to develop an 'appropriate' usage in order to do so" (11). In their view, "the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that postcolonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (37). Like a number of other Indigenous authors, Geiogamah has liberated himself from the linguistic and cultural chains, and reformed the colonizer's language to become an expression of his own experience. The "english"[6] he uses indicates his "refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 37–38). In the "Author's Note" to *Body Indian*, for example, Geiogamah writes several suggestions for the actors in order to imitate the real speech of the protagonists and establish an authentic-sounding Native American dialect, such as dropping the final "g" (goin'), jamming words together (lotta), adding a grammatically superfluous final "s" (mens), leaving a hiatus between a final and an initial vowel (a old one), and others (*New Native* 17).

Referring to black American authors, Lorraine Hansberry observes that, since they must also write for the market that is the object of their protest, it is important for them to write so that the "audience is constrained to applaud the very protest directed towards it" (Davis iii). This is also how Geiogamah writes. "Theatre, to me, is probably the most peaceful form of resistance against a colonial government. There's no bloodshed. That's the reason I do theatre, to bring about change. To bring about the healing process. But also, to enrich human beings," Geiogamah reveals in his interview with Charlotte Stoudt (Stoudt 60). Influenced by Brecht's theatrical innovations, as several other American playwrights who

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[5] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, one of the most prominent Kenyan writers and theorists, writes exclusively in the Gikuyu language, one of the Kenyan languages. In Ngugi's view, writing in their peoples' mother tongues, associated with backwardness, underdevelopment and other negative qualities, will contribute to the restoration of the harmony between all aspects of language. However, this alone will not cause the renaissance of Kenyan and African cultures unless that literature carries "the content of their peoples' anti-imperialist struggles to liberate their productive forces from foreign control" (290).

[6] The lower-case "e" in "english" denotes local, non-standard English.

used theater as a form of social protest (Powers; Bradley), and in accord with the Native Americans' wisdom that "in laughter is truth" (Huntsman xvi-xvii), Geiogamah employs humor and parody as important textual vehicles not only for defamiliarizing whiteness, but also for restoring dignity and social hope among his people. As the Australian sociologist Ghassan Hage has observed, dignity and social hope, access to which seems to be exclusively a white entitlement, allows people to imagine a future for themselves, whereas the withholding of it from minority constituencies in effect denies them a participatory role in imagining the future of the nation (22).

Body Indian

Set in present-day western Oklahoma, the play *Body Indian* addresses the personal and social costs of alcohol abuse among Native Americans. It depicts a two-day drinking gathering of Bobby Lee and his Kiowa relatives and friends. The play begins with Bobby struggling on crutches into his one-room apartment, where the party is held. Handicapped by the loss of a leg in a train accident during one of his previous drinking sprees, he is carrying groceries and wine he bought with the money obtained from leasing his allotment of reservation land.[7] Bobby tells his companions that he intends to use the rest of his lease money to enter a six-week alcohol rehabilitation program. However, by the end of the play, in the process of the progressive erosion of kinship ties introduced in the opening scene, he has been either asked for money or had it all stolen. Finally, the drunks take Bobby's artificial leg and pawn it to buy more wine.

Citing Geiogamah's comment that *Body Indian* "is a play of the past and the present, but hopefully not of the future," depicting "how Indians abuse and mistreat one another in a dangerously crippling way," Darby describes the play as staging a "poignant appeal" for the restoration of "the traditional tribal values of respect and responsibility" disrupted by the forced displacement (160–61). The play's intense and shocking realism also suggests other interpretive possibilities, depending on how readers relate to the text or what David Richter calls "readers' identity politics" (246). Despite presenting a situation of "near hopelessness," the play's theme is survival, claims Jack Marken (376). Seeing the main character's suffering as "redemptive," Huntsman also describes it as "a play of optimism and triumph" (xvii). Norma Wilson, on the other hand, views the play as "a bleak dramatization of the effects of alcoholism" (85). There is truth on both sides: the play brings a social problem into the light of community attention and demonstrates that Native Americans can survive the most hopeless of situations on condition that they regain their lost sense of community. The audience is reminded of this imperative with the sound of an approaching train mixed with the sound of drums and dance rattles at the end of each scene (Huntsman xiv).

The recurring sound of a train can also be viewed as a reminder to European Americans of their brutal displacement of Native Americans from their homelands and of the established system in which white bodies "dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy" (Bhabha, *The Location* 51). Although, in Geiogamah's words, his plays are primarily intended for Native Americans, *Body Indian* also addresses a white audience and challenges their assumptions about the superiority and entitlement implicit in whiteness. The third scene, in particular, abounds in critique of what Said defines as a "cultural discourse, relegating and confining the non-European to a secondary racial, cultural, and ontological status" in order to ensure the "primariness of the Europeans" (*Culture* 59). Geiogamah's exposure of the harsh reality of unemployment and poverty, materialized in bad housing conditions, poor diet, limited educational possibilities and dependence on government support, is imbued with sadness and sometimes even despair as in the following dialogue:

> Alice: I can't even get on state welfare. They say my husband is able to work. He's able, but there's no work.
> Betty: All those white people think Indians have it good because they think the government takes care of us. They don't even know. It's rougher than they know. I'd like to trade my house for a white lady's house on Mission Street. I'd like for a white lady to have my roaches. You see them at the store, and they look at you like your purse is full of government checks. I wish my purse could be full of government checks.
> Alice: I wish I had a check from anywhere. (Geiogamah, *New Native* 23–24)

Clearly, Geiogamah uses the stage to affirm his people's cultural substance in the face of ongoing cultural, economic and political subjugation, and to expose the forces that still prevent liberation, whether these be the oppressions of the whites or "the attitudes or behavior ingrained within the

[7] Because of the U.S. federal allotment policies in Indian Territory in the late 1880s and early 1900s, each Native household received 160 acres of land as replacement for millions of acres taken from the tribes. Under the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, many Native Americans leased out this land (Darby 160–1).

oppressed themselves" (Crow and Banfield 17). In these circumstances, Geiogamah's characters seek refuge in excessive drinking. Obviously aware of the controversial nature of the play's content, Geiogamah writes in the "Author's Note" that the acting should nowhere give the false impression of the play being primarily a study of the problem of alcoholism among Native Americans (*New Native* 8). Given that—as Diana Taylor emphasizes—performance may function as "an act of transfer," conveying social knowledge, values and memories from one group to another and from one generation to the next (2), Geiogamah is "counting upon the repertoire and embodiment" to challenge white audience members' stereotyped expectations of contemporary Native American life, notes Julie Pearson (122). According to Pearson, the play communicates "the colonialist discourse of alcoholism," as Eduardo Duran labels a historical awareness of the political causes of alcoholism, systematically utilized by the colonizer to disempower the colonized and reinforce its own power (Pearson 122; Duran 28). Another pernicious effect of this discourse is its internalization by Native Americans demonstrated in the tendency to express their rebellion against what are perceived as white social norms with alcohol addiction (Pearson 122).[8] Showing the host of the party broke and alone at the end, the play allows no doubt that this kind of resistance is destructive—alcohol addiction causes new problems, rather than solving any.

Vine Deloria Jr. has observed, "Indians have found a humorous side to nearly every problem […]. The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it" (635–6). Throughout the play, described by Geiogamah as "his toughest" (Pearson 122), humor tempers the truth. For example, when women complain about their chronic lack of money, Bobby says: "Every Indian needs to have a government check for twenty-five thousand. They could give you womens fifty thousand. Then you could buy all your kids shoes, clothes, bicycles, pay rent, pay fines, buy shawls and earrings, and put the money you have left in the bank to live on. That's the only way you'd ever have the money you need" (Geiogamah, *New Native* 22).

Although the play provokes laughter, it critically portrays the underbelly of a country that has systematically supported the "racialized nature of social policy" (Lipsitz, *The Possessive* 5). Echoing with a call for justice, inclusion and equality, *Body Indian* passionately engages both Native American and white spectators. Whereas some of the former identify with the irony of the characters' lives and the discrepancy between their desires and behavior, and react to the play with strong laughter, others denounce it as "a disservice to the Indian community," claiming that it merely "perpetuates stereotypes and adds to distorted representations of Native Americans" (Pearson 124). For white spectators, *Body Indian*'s act of transfer is a better understanding of contemporary Native American political and socio-economic conditions (Pearson 125). Faced with the effects of the American government's failure and the larger American society's complicity in addressing the Native Americans' poverty with all its attendant ills, many of them are imbued with strong feelings of moral indignation and forced to rethink the concept of whiteness as manifested in their past and present attitudes to Native Americans. Reinstating knowledge, dignity and hope for Native communities, and given that—as Homi Bhabha has observed—"the author of social action may be the initiator of its unique meaning, but as agent he or she cannot control its outcome (*The Location* 13), *Body Indian* can probably be seen to contribute to the "undo[ing of] the racist structure of the colonial matrix of power" and a "genealogy of de-colonial thought" (Mignolo 391). A similar intervention in the the racist structure of power and distorted presentation of Native Americans within the dominant society is also performed in Geiogamah's play *Foghorn*.

Foghorn

For decades, Native American characters, like other minority characters in American literature and entertainment media, were highly stereotyped and never fully developed or given any agency. This was particularly true in film, given that until very recently, creative control was almost exclusively in the hands of white producers (Haugo 190–191). However, the distorted images constructed by white Euro-Americans during the expansion and domination of the "Frontier" are not yet a thing of the past. On the contrary, they are still present throughout American culture, claims Jodi Van Der Horn-Gibson, among others, pointing in particular to the figure of the Native American in the twenty-first century theatre, film and story adaptations of *Peter Pan* (126). Various popular images from the past, described by Robert F. Berkhofer, among others, including those of the "noble savage," "bloodthirsty redskin," or "redskin devil," disseminated through "Karl May's colonial fairy tales," for example (Weaver 18), continue to reinforce the mainstream understanding of European identity as superior in relation to all "others" (Said, *Orientalism* 15). With dominant cultures typically acting in an ethnocentric way in defining their identity and those of all "others," it is thus important for Native authors to mobilize

[8] According to Duran, during the 1970s, the perception of alcoholism as a mode of rebellion was so strong among Native Americans that one popular prevention poster bore the slogan, "Drinking won't make you more Indian" (28).

strategies of indictment, argumentation, persuasion and advocacy in the service of a central agenda, that is, to investigate and destabilize the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its "dominant discourse" (Tiffin 95).

Technically a modern multimedia satire, with elements such as lights, graphics and electronic music juxtaposed with traditional elements of the tribal past, *Foghorn* is a penetrating confrontation with enduring racist stereotypes and cultural hegemony. Premiered in Berlin in 1973, when conflicts between the United States government and the Native Americans' communities over treaty disputes and land rights issues were particularly intense, the play includes two crucial events from that period, the Native Americans' occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969 to 1971 and the 1973 Wounded Knee incident (Johnson). The opening scene, presenting Native Americans on a forced journey, alludes to the march of the nineteenth-century victims of the Trail of Tears.[9]

Despite its setting in tragic episodes from the Native Americans' struggles with the whites, beginning with the landing of Columbus in 1492, *Foghorn* proceeds "by playful mockery rather than bitter denunciation," as Geiogamah explains in the "Author's Note." The author further suggests that "[a] production should aim at a light, almost frivolous effect (the basic seriousness of the play will emerge all more effectively if the heavy hand is avoided)" (*New Native* 49). In Huntsman's words, the play appears as a set of loosely connected mocking remarks, much like a minstrel show (xviii). However, funny in isolation, the scenes are tellingly connected, expressing protest against the Native peoples' assigned position of inferiority and the strategies of homogenization and assimilation, which had served the American melting-pot ideology since the late 19th century. It has to be remembered that, by the end of the 1960s, the dominant ideology of assimilation had created specific institutional practices, described by David Theo Goldberg as: "[t]hose who could not be assimilated were wiped away, representationally, symbolically and, in many instances, physically" (5–6). Scene 4, for example, which includes a schoolteacher's hysterical praise of white civilization and the English language, is well illustrative of what Weaver describes as: "The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom" (13):

> You Indians are going to be educated. […] You are going to learn how to be Christians, how to worship God and live a clean, wholesome, decent life. You are going to learn how to be civilized people, civilized Indians. […] You are going to forget all your Indian ways, all of them. You can start erasing them from your minds right now, right here, right this instant. No more of your disgusting sign language. No more of your savage tongue. No more greasy, lousy hair. No more blankets. You are going to learn English language. […] The English language. The most beautiful language in all the world. The language that has brought hope and civilization to people everywhere. The one true language. OUR language! […] I am going to teach you your first word of English. Listen carefully, for it is the word, the one word, you must know first to become civilized. […] The American way begins with Hell-O." (Geiogamah, *New Native* 61)

The above passage, which describes the cruelty of assimilation strategies used by the dominant culture, contrasts ironically with that from the 1969 Alcatraz Proclamation in scene 2: "We will further guide the majority inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our way of life–in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all white brothers from their savage and unhappy state" (Geiogamah, *New Native* 55–56).

Similarly, the United States senator's speech after the landing of Columbus appears ludicrous if compared with the 1969 Alcatraz Proclamation. The senator says, "[w]e've been victorious over them [Native Americans] on the battlefield, now they must settle on the reservations we [the white settlers] have generously set aside for them" (Geiogamah, *New Native* 52–53), whereas the Alcatraz Proclamation reads:

> We wish to be fair and honorable with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, who as a majority wrongfully claim it as their, and hereby pledge that we shall give to the majority inhabitants of this country a portion of the land for their own, to be held in trust by the American Indian people–for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down to the sea! (Geiogamah, *New Native* 55)

Throughout the play, Geiogamah relies on joking and mockery, which adds to the effectiveness of the basic seriousness of the content. Although Geiogamah claims in Kenneth Lincoln's *Melus* interview that he deployed humor because "it removes the power from insults" (Lincoln 71), this strategy's effects are often sharp and biting. While the object of the humor varies from scene to scene, its function does not.

[9] The term refers to a series of forced relocations following the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

The scintillating satirical strain, which runs throughout the play, allows the author to playfully expose the most traumatic events since European arrival and destabilize their power through mockery. Humor is then the prime vehicle in the play for elaborating dignity and hope for Native Americans. Although it provokes laughter, *Foghorn* is not only a source of inspiration for Indigenous viewers. It is also a serious drama about the United States' history of exile, dispossession, and indifference to sustained suffering, constituting a penetrating indictment of white American racism and genocidal horror. As the Assiniboine Sioux playwright William S. Robe says, "when people of color do it, playwriting (or any other art form) is political, because we empower ourselves, we take control of our past, present and future" (Pulitano 19).

Bhabha, among others, has noted that stereotypes are a major strategy of colonial discourse, premised on the ambivalence of that which is always already known, and that which must be anxiously repeated. In Bhabha's words, problematizing stereotypes and acknowledging their status as an ambivalent node of power and knowledge "demands a theoretical and political response that questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination" ("The Other" 293). This is particularly important because of what critics call the "colonized mentality" or "internalized inferiority complex" (Pyke 551). George Tinker notes that Native Americans "have internalized the illusion of white superiority just as deeply as white Americans have;" as a result, they "participate in [their] own oppression" (Weaver 20). Geiogamah seems to be aware of the dangers that stereotypes pose, or of "allow[ing] to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of [us]" and be "perpetually overdetermined from the inside," as Jean-Paul Sartre observes for the Jews (Fanon, "The Fact" 324-25).

In addressing some of the most painful social wounds, Geiogamah juxtaposes white and Native American cultures and philosophies to challenge not only the whites' false, myth-laden perception of Native Americans, but also the whites' images of themselves. In most cases, and following oral tradition, Geiogamah does that in an extravagant, rambling way, piling on fact after fact about the moral vices or physical shortcomings of the latter and proceeding slowly to the climax. In scene 5, for example, Pocahontas tells her handmaidens about Captain Smith's impotence in a string of similarly exaggerated descriptions of the man as the one that follows:

> He had such big legs. Such big, uh, arms, such big, uh, uh, chest. Such big, big head. Such big, big hands. Such big, big feet. Such big eyes. Such big mouth. Such big ears. Ooooooh, aaahaaa.
>
> Delaying the unraveling the story to gauge and/or intensify the interest of her audience, Pocahontas finally concludes her account, which culminates in the following disclosure:
>
> "And the big captain was standing above me, looking down at me, breathing like a boy after a footrace, and I saw that his …
>
> He said to me, I love you, dear Pocahontas. I promise you it won't happen the next time, I promise, I promise, I promise" (Geiogamah, *New Native* 63–64).

Presenting whites as impotent (Captain Smith), corrupted (Watergate spy), incapable, wicked and villainous (Lone Ranger), narrow-minded and ignorant (First Lady), to mention a few portrayals of white Americans, Geiogamah undermines the illusion of white superiority as a rendered and unquestionable normative. Given that, according to Fanon, self-consciousness exists only by being acknowledged or recognized by the other (*Black Skin* 216),[10] this misconception about the superiority of the white race has caused the lack of "reciprocal recognition" (*Black Skin* 225). Deprived of the acknowledgement of the other in historical relations between the colonizer and the colonized, crucial for winning what Fanon calls "the certainty of oneself" (225), the colonized have become "self-colonizing," that is, they take part in their own oppression (Weaver 20). Using the stage to bring to light some episodes in American history of which white America would prefer to remain conveniently silent, Geiogamah exposes the contradictions between the perception and the social reality, defining and affirming the Native Americans' real, rather than imposed identity. As he writes in his play "49":

> We are a tribe!
> Of people with strong hearts.

[10] Fanon's theory is based on Hegel's perception of recognition in *The Phenomenology of Mind.* See also Brian Crow and Chris Banfield.

Who respect fear
As we make our way.
Who will never kill
Another man's way of living. (Geiogamah, *New Native* 132).

Conclusion

Gerald Vizenor has noted that "the post-Indian warriors," as he calls Native American authors, "encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses, and they create their stories with a new sense of survivance" (Manifest 4). Indeed, by subverting the pervasive negative stereotypes promoted by whites to justify their oppression and superiority, and elaborating a sense of dignity and social hope for Native Americans, Geiogamah performs an important role in "the fantastic and terrible story of […] survival / [of] those who were never meant to survive," as the Muscogee poet Joy Harjo writes in *She Has Some Horses*. Engaged in the critique of the reproduction of whiteness and in the struggle for the assertion of Native Americans' authentic rather than an imposed cultural personality, Geiogamah continues to perform both personal and collective empowerment of his peoples, thus preparing the grounds for the society that, in Bhabha's words, "entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (*The Location* 4). Given the present social and political situation in the world, particularly in the "new" Europe, characterized by a critical lack of productive cultural interaction, Geiogamah's effort to question the foundations of white supremacy in the United States can be read from a much wider perspective.

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