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Defying Assimilation, Confounding Authenticity: The Case of William Apess

By Gordon Sayre

Following increasing critical interest in issues of race in colonial and nineteenth-century North America and a surge in the popularity of Native American literature, many readers are looking for literary expressions of American Indians prior to 1850. Little printed in English exists, and still less has been widely accessible. The new edition of the works of William Apess,¹ edited by Barry O'Connell, is therefore a significant event for Native American literature and nineteenth-century American studies in general. In the large and handsome volume containing Apess's five publications, which originally appeared between 1829 and 1836, readers will encounter a provocative intellect and personality who will challenge preconceptions about Native American culture and identity. This essay will examine the significance of Apess's autobiography and his vision of race and ethnicity, as well as the politics of such re-editions and their role in canon-formation.

The republication of works by women and members of ethnic minorities is essential to the success of efforts at increasing diversity and cultural awareness in the college curriculum; however, the tidy presentation of "emerging voices" in publishers' new series (with the editors' names prominently displayed on the cover) can have the effect of diffusing the cultural shock which many of the texts should deliver. A tendency persists, particularly but not exclusively with American Indian autobiographers, to either accept the author as part of mainstream literary history, reject him or her as a degraded half-caste, or, most commonly, hypostatize the author as representative of the entire ethnic identity. Nicholas Thomas has recently described this process as "a legislation of authenticity: others are acceptable in so far as they conform to their proper natures, but are degenerate and improper in 'acculturated' or hybridized forms" (179). The effect is a binary opposition between assimilation and authenticity. William Apess, I will argue, resists this fate, though largely in spite of his new editor and publisher.

Before this edition of the complete writings, Apess was best known from a short essay, "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man," featuring a strong anti-racist appeal ("I would ask, why is not a man of color respected?"), which had appeared in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* and in an anthology

edited by Bernd Peyer. The values expressed in "Looking Glass" are familiar and sympathetic to many readers today, but the full corpus offers much more than a catechism for the politically correct. *On Our Own Ground* transcends the company in which Apress is found in the *Heath Anthology*, Vol. 1, that of Samson Occom, Hendrick Aupaunut, John Wamunaucon Quinney, Elias Boudinot, and Catherine Brown. His importance as an autobiographer and Christian Indian reformer prior to the Civil War is matched only by the two Ojibway, Peter Jones/Kahkewaunaby and George Copway/Kahgegahbowh, most of whose works were published after 1850 and whose lives and tribes are as much a part of Canadian as United States history.

As a member of a tribe pronounced extinct by New Englanders from John Mason to Herman Melville, as a New England native in an age when already the Indian was supposed to have been removed to the deep south and far west, and as a skilled ironist of the myths of Puritan and revolutionary history, Apress forces readers to reassess nineteenth-century American literary history on several counts. His book may also shake up the academic marketplace. New England is, of course, proud to have been home to most of the canon of American literature before the Civil War, and even though Apress is profoundly critical of New England institutions, the publication of his works by the University of Massachusetts Press as the initial volume in a new series "Native Americans of the Northeast Culture, History, and the Contemporary" represents New England's bid for a share of the Native American literature canon, which hitherto has been a mostly western club. Finally, and this is the issue which I wish to focus upon, *On Our Own Ground* challenges the scholarship on Native American autobiography, which has been concentrated on oral accounts by ethnologically "authentic" and frequently illiterate subjects.

One of the leading critics in the field, Arnold Krupat, does not even mention Apress in his 1985 book *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography*, and the introductory chapter "An Approach to Native American Texts" (first published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1982) really leaves no place for him, because it assumes "a complex but historically specifiable division of labor. There simply were no Native American texts until whites decided to collaborate with Indians and make them" (5). This began only after 1830, he observes, when there came "the development of the Indian autobiography as an attempt to preserve, complete, or correct the record in the name of historical justice" (6), a project which had its golden age alongside that of Boasian ethnography between 1887 and 1934. These texts are a result of cultural contact, yet their bi-cultural production often sows doubts in many readers' minds, for as Krupat admits, "every aspect of the Indian autobiography, including the particular sense of self conveyed, is at least theoretically ascribable to its non-Native editor as much as to its Native

subject" (*Ethnocriticism* 220). If no anthropologist or amanuensis is involved, a text such as that of Apress constitutes "an autobiography by an Indian rather than an Indian Autobiography" (*Ethnocriticism* 220). This distinction has the effect of excluding Apress. A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff takes the opposite view, choosing Apress, Copway, and Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins for her article "Three Nineteenth-Century American Indian Autobiographers" and explaining that "[b]ecause narrated autobiographies are oral literature, they are not included in this study" (267). Krupat, however, privileges the "as told to" variety of Indian autobiography and the sense of a speaking voice which the genre tries to represent. In his 1989 book *The Voice in the Margin*, the popular Bakhtinian concepts of monological and dialogical discourse are applied to both "Indian Autobiography" and "autobiography by an Indian," and Apress's religious "salvationism" is said to produce "a monomyth which in William Apress's autobiography is expressed in relentless monologue" (144). Krupat does not question Apress's authenticity as a Pequot, but does challenge the value of his "voice" (since monologue is bad and dialogue is good in the formula derived from Bakhtin). At points he appears to hear only silence in Apress—"In Apress's case, indeed, there is the implication that when the Native lost his land, he lost his voice as well" (*Voice* 147)—and to dismiss him as too assimilated: "Apress proclaims a sense of self, if we may call it that, deriving entirely from Christian culture" (145). He praises Apress's later political writings, but less for what they contribute to an understanding of his life than for the critique of race prejudice adopted for the anthologies, where "the 'Looking Glass' prominently adds the voice of social justice to the voice of salvationism, integrating the two" (174).

H. David Brumble, III, another leading scholar in the field influenced by Krupat, also privileges oral narratives, though for different methodological reasons. He too calls American Indian autobiography (which is the title of his 1988 study) "bicultural documents" (11) and features many of the same such documents in his analysis as Krupat and Herta Wong do in theirs: Sam Blow-sake/Paul Radin, N. Scott Momaday, Black Elk/John Neihardt, and Geronimo/S. M. Barrett. Brumble, however, is more wary of the amanuenses, and much of his work tries to read through their editorial mediation toward native oral traditions. Brumble's bibliography of American Indian autobiography includes many stories collected and published by anthropologists with no literary intent, and Brumble's motivating interest in autobiography is largely ethnological, attracted by the notion of a primitive self still alive in the industrial age. Oral personal histories are central because his primitivist goal is to "go back beyond the first glimmerings of literacy" (4),² and the importance of these texts is organic and historical: "we need to understand the early autobiographical narratives in order to fully appreciate the autobiographies of the later, literate Indians" (19).

William Apess defies the critical constructions of Krupat and Brumble in nearly every detail. He wrote his books in English starting in 1829, with the avowed purpose of correcting the historical record himself on behalf of his own people. The oral traditions he relied on most strongly were the Puritan sermon and the historical anniversary address *à la* Daniel Webster. Unlike his contemporary Black Hawk, whose utterance was translated and edited for white consumption, Apess's writings were not sponsored, translated, edited, mediated, polished, or converted by anyone. He took total responsibility for his own education and conversion and even published four of his five books himself. Though only a fraction of the work is conventional autobiography, three hundred pages of Apess's writings across eight years enable one to observe a political and spiritual evolution. Krupat quite justly writes: "All of his writing, I would suggest, may fruitfully be read as pieces of an extended autobiography" (*Ethnocriticism* 221). This autobiography resists ethnographic stereotypes and forces readers to acknowledge the interaction of Anglo and Native traditions.

Since the publication of *On Our Own Ground*, critics are taking notice. In his 1992 book, Krupat shifts to a more sympathetic treatment of Apess but reveals the awkwardness of trying to fit a stubborn iconoclast into a preestablished system. In the essay "Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self,"³ ten pages on Apess emphasize that his conversion to Christianity does not entail abandoning traditional Pequot values but that the "synecdochic" or communal social relationships in Apess's work and life arise from his evangelical Christianity, not from tribal bonds forged in his childhood. The salvationism which had produced the "monomyth" becomes instead the source of a more politically palatable communalism. Apess thus affirms his place in Christian fellowship by attacking, just as Stowe and Douglass would in the following twenty years, the hypocrisy of racists who claim to be Christians. Krupat's more recent treatment is therefore closer to Ruoff's, which places Apess within the styles and contexts of nineteenth-century Euro-American personal narratives. Ruoff's essay examines how "A Son of the Forest" bears a strong relationship to slave narratives in its emphasis on white injustice" and "follows the structure of contemporary religious confessions" (254).

Apess's writings and their critical reception are a site for the tensions between literacy and the literary on the one hand and traditional tribal orality on the other. As in the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, literacy was an element of the conversion experience for Apess, who expressed the importance that writing could have for his people: "Justice has not and, I may add, justice cannot be fully done to them by the historian. My people have had no press to record their sufferings or to make known their grievances; on this account many a tale of blood and woe has never been known to the public" (60). Yet literacy is not an

unnalloyed blessing. Leslie Marmon Silko, in her story "Lullaby," has dramatized the potential danger of assimilation, of adopting Anglo-American ideas along with the English language. Of a woman who unwittingly signs papers which relinquish custody of her children, we read: "Because it was like the old ones always told her about learning their language or any of their ways, it endangered you" (47). Black Hawk delivers a version of this message; his recorded voice tells of his defeat by the U.S. Army and can be read as evidence of his people's powerlessness in the political world of print.

In the conventional categories through which literary culture views the Indian, the tension between literacy and orality is often also one between assimilation and authenticity. Apess's literate independence precludes any question about his authorship—the kind of challenges answered by Phyllis Wheatley and many later African-American writers—but his Christianity and fluency in English can provoke attacks on his cultural authenticity just as it does for Wheatley. When I taught *On Our Own Ground* in a course on early American personal narrative, many students questioned whether as a Christian convert Apess could truly promote Native American sovereignty as he claimed to do. Others pointed to the precarious status of Pequot culture as proof that Apess was more white than Indian. Yet by provoking these questions, Apess can help readers to escape from the exclusionary binarism of assimilation versus authenticity. Apess faced many of the same problems of bi-cultural identity as ethnic subjects do today, and his autobiography demonstrates not only the sort of quest for ethnic identity which has since become familiar but also the subversive creativity of victims of racism who must define their culture through opposition and resilience. On several levels, Apess appropriated the literary modes of New England not to make a case for his assimilation and acceptance by white society, but to subvert and expose its arbitrary exclusions.

Apess's life was filled with wrenching cultural dislocations and conflicts. He was born in Cohrain, Massachusetts around 1798 to a mixed-blood father. While still a young child, his parents separated and sent him to be raised by his maternal grandparents on one of the two small Pequot reserves in southeastern Connecticut. Because their tiny homeland was surrounded by white New England, the Pequots by necessity developed what Gloria Anzaldúa has described as a *mezizo* consciousness: "a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks" (11), and an awareness peculiar to *la frontera*, the borderlands. As O'Connell describes, many Pequots were "bound out" as indentured servants, and many males continued throughout their lives to travel far from the tribe's tiny reserves in search of work (xxv): Apess grew up mostly in white families, ran away at age 15, walked to the frontier of New York and British Canada as a soldier in the War of 1812, and both fought against and lived among the Indians of that border region.

Mestizo and borderland communities can differ greatly in size and cohesion, however, and the Pequots' was unusually fragmented. Anzaldua writes that "unlike Chicanas and other women of culture who grew up white or who have only recently returned to their native cultural roots, I was totally immersed in mine. It wasn't until I went to high school that I 'saw' whites" (21). The contemporary Pawnee/Ojibwe writer Anna Lee Walters writes of her dislocations in boarding school and by marriage into the Navajo tribe but represents her childhood as "a world entirely Indian" (97, see also 43, 189), an oasis of warm community and oral traditions passed down by nurturing grandparents. Apress, by contrast, was alienated from his Pequot identity even as a young child and described his family as sharply divided. On one side were the Pequot maternal grandparents who raised him from the age of three, and on the other side his Christian parents and paternal grandparents. His father always lived away from the Pequot reserves, and yet the contrast between his father's home and his grandparents who raised him was not one of race or community but was instead defined by the former's Christian piety and the latter's abuse and "beastly vice of intemperance" (5). His Pequot grandmother beat him so severely that he was placed for his own safety with a neighboring white family, the Furnmans, who subsequently bound him out as a servant to two other white families headed by prominent judges, William Hillhouse and then William Williams. He returned to his father's home for brief and happy visits, but was never permitted to stay. After the abuse by his grandparents and the racial self-hatred inculcated by his white guardians, "so completely was I weaned from the interests and affections of my brethren that a mere threat of being sent away among the Indians into the dreary woods had a much better effect in making me obedient to the commands of my superiors than any corporal punishment" (10). He tells a poignant anecdote of encountering women picking berries in the woods. Though not Indians, their dark complexions caused the boy to believe they were, which "filled my mind with terror, and I broke from the party with my utmost speed" (10). Apress's brief accounts of his childhood show on a psychic, personal level how alienation and abuse led to racial and class self-hatred which he struggled to overcome as an adult.

Apress must have been, like many Puritan autobiographers, a precociously devout Christian. In fact, the first prejudice he suffered was a contempt for his youthful piety. When not yet ten years old, "I became very fond of attending meetings, so much so that Mr. Furnman forbid me. He supposed that I only went for the purpose of seeing the boys and playing with them. This thing caused me a great deal of grief" (13). At the age of eleven William became locked in a contest, typical of spiritual autobiographies, between a mature moral faith and the temptations of "associating again with my old schoolfellows and on some occasions profaning the Sabbath day" (14). There soon followed a sectarian contro-

versy consistent with the Second Great Awakening, for the Williams family "attended the Presbyterian church" (17), and Apress rejected their religion in favor of revivalist Methodism. Discrimination based on age, sect, and the classism that was so often encoded in Protestant sects combined to radicalize Apress on the basis less of race than of religion:

I thought I had no character to lose in the estimation of those who were accounted great. For what cared they for me? They had possession of the red man's inheritance and had deprived me of liberty; with this they were satisfied and could do as they pleased; therefore, I thought I could do as I pleased, measurably. I therefore went to hear the *noisy Methodists*. (18)

When a maid at the Williams home pushed him down the stairs, causing serious injuries, his conclusion was unambiguous: "The abuse heaped on me was in consequence of my being a Methodist" (22). Like many poor, lower class Americans of ethnic minorities, Apress turned to evangelical religion for a community that would welcome him and offer a powerful purpose in an inhospitable society. I have already suggested that Apress's writings reflect the course of his life even though they are not all autobiographical. *On Our Own Ground* includes a range of many genres available in the 1830s, most of which are rare in later Native American literature. In his first three books one finds spiritual autobiography, ethnography, Puritan sermon, and missionary narrative. As Apress became a skilled political organizer, his attention shifted outward and in his last two books were first-rate journalism and history, documentaries about the oppression of Indian tribes in Southern New England, and narratives of the battle between Indians and the dominant classes for the power to write history.

Apress wrote two versions of his autobiography, and each saw two editions. His first book, *A Son of the Forest* (1829, 1831), contains the longer, at fifty pages. The second is in the missionary narrative *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* (1833, 1837) to which the "Looking-Glass" essay was appended in the first edition. The author is the first of these five, his wife the second, and his aunt the fourth. Both autobiographies follow many conventions of the spiritual mode. *A Son of the Forest* concludes with his efforts to obtain a license to preach in the Methodist church and can be read as a confession statement preparatory for church membership. That an American Indian should produce such a text appears highly ironic in passages where Apress employed imagery common among Puritan authors to whom Indians were diabolical enemies. For example, on the way to his father's home he passed through a swamp: "I penetrated into the labyrinth of darkness with the hope of gaining the

main road. At every step I became more and more entangled . . . to my horror I found that the further I went, the deeper the mire" (42). Though nominally a Pequot and "son of the forest," he did not see the wilderness as his home but imbued the swamp with fears of darkness, the diabolical, and a loss of identity common in captivity narratives like Mary Rowlandson's and other texts of King Philip's War. He prayed to God to deliver unto him "a small piece of solid earth" (42) and then thanked Him for his Providence.

One senses from passages like this that if Apress were to escape the dominant discourses of his world, he would have to do so not by an assertion of his cultural difference, but by a subversive re-scripting of these discourses. His first attempt, however, is disappointing. In an "Appendix" to *A Son of the Forest*, Apress tried to deliver what readers then as now expect from a Native American writer: informed auto-ethnography, "some 'general observations' touching his brethren" (52). But the "Appendix" is actually a tissue of quotations from *A Star in the West* by Elias Boudinot (the missionary leader from whom the Cherokee newspaperman took his name) and other white writers such as Washington Irving and Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz. Its thesis is to prove the "Ten Lost Tribes" theory of Native American origins by reference to absurd philology, arcane geology, and a vague millenarian promise that Indians "will hereafter appear to have been, in all their dispersions and wanderings, the subjects of God's divine protection and gracious care" (53). Since Pequot culture was so suppressed, Apress knew little of his people's history, and he repeated the anthropology and history of the colonists. The "Appendix" calls King Philip a Pequot (4, 58) rather than a Wampanoag and refers to the Pequot War, the brutal massacre which made the name Pequot a rallying cry for Native American suffering and resilience, only by quoting Irving and William Robertson. It is ironic that Apress could not write an ethnography for his people, whereas John Dunn Hunter, captured as an infant and raised by Kansas and Osage on the Great Plains, published five years earlier a work which included a fascinating ethnography of tribes to which by blood he did not belong.

The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe version of the autobiography is just fourteen pages, and differs from the account in *A Son of the Forest* most notably in its stronger attack on Euro-American racism. Here he excuses his grandmother for beating him, writing: "My sufferings certainly were through the white man's measure; for they most certainly brought spiritual ignors first among my people" (121). When Mr. Williams scorns his Methodism, Apress this time attributes it to racism, proclaiming: "How hard it is to be robbed of all our earthly rights and deprived of the means of grace, merely because the kin is of a different color" (130). The second book begins a pattern of increasing political engagement and tribal consciousness in each publication across his eight-

year literary career. Yet interestingly, the second edition of both *A Son of the Forest* and *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* were altered to reduce political volatility, the former by deleting the protest against the Methodist Episcopal church for denying his application for a license to preach (he switched to the Protestant Methodist church, which accepted him), and the latter by deleting the "Looking Glass" essay. O'Connell attempts to reconcile these apparently contradictory trends by placing the composition of the shorter autobiography of *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* before the longer version in *A Son of the Forest*. The evidence is, I believe, inconclusive.

In 1833 Apress's itinerant preaching led him to Mashpee, Massachusetts, home of the tribe of the same name.⁴ Over the next two years, he was adopted by the tribe and became involved in a popular and legal struggle to secure sovereignty and freedom of worship for the Mashpee. The book which documents the process he entitled *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Mashpee Tribe: or The Pretended Riot Explained*. It is an unusual and challenging text resembling a film documentary, combining newspaper articles, letters, resolutions and petitions, legal briefs, excerpts from histories, and even proceedings of the Massachusetts legislature, all with a narrative "voice-over" by Apress. The title, a reference to the Nullification crisis of 1832, in which South Carolina declared federal laws null and void because they interfered with the slave trade, is only one of Apress's many clever subversions of Jacksonian political ideology to promote the sovereignty of Indian nations.

Apress had two major goals at Mashpee. The first was to throw off the official overseers, who had power to embezzle money from the tribe. One such abuse was cutting firewood on Mashpee land which was sold at the white overseers' profit. The "pretended riot" occurred when Apress and a few Mashpee confronted the woodcutters and unloaded their cart, for which Apress was arrested. The text evokes constitutional and revolutionary ideology in support of the Mashpee and turns this conflict into a type of the Boston Tea Party: "I ask the inhabitants of New England generally how their fathers bore laws, much less oppressive, when imposed upon them by a foreign government" (211). His efforts were finally rewarded with an act of the Massachusetts Legislature in March 1834, which granted the Mashpee, though not full citizenship, the right to local self-government accorded other communities in the state.

The second issue involved a church at Mashpee built and supported by Harvard College and by a tax on the tribe. Under the leadership of a pastor named Phineas Fish, it had become a congregation of non-Indians. One of the

finest passages in the text comes when Apess narrates his first arrival at the church for Sunday services:

The sacred edifice stood in the midst of a noble forest and seemed to be about a hundred years old. . . . Hard by was an Indian burial ground. . . . I turned to meet my Indian brethren and give them the hand of friendship; but I was greatly disappointed in the appearance of those who advanced. . . . most of those who were coming were pale faces, and, in my disappointment, it seemed to me that the hue of death sat upon their countenances. It seemed very strange to me that my brethren should have changed their natural color and become in every respect like white men. (170)

Apess possessed a genius for mimicking and ironically undermining popular prejudices about Indians. Next to an "Indian burial ground" such as that elegized by Frenau, Apess elided ghost-like "pale faces" with dead Indians in order to ridicule such elegies, which celebrated dead Indians while denying the claims of living ones. Anglo-American churchgoers are figured as bleached natives, red, rather than white, becomes the "normal" color or majority race from which others derive. The issue of the writer's and other Indians' assimilation as Christians is subverted by projecting it onto whites who would appear to become Indians by claiming the right to attend the Indians' church. Indians have not changed their color by becoming Christians, Apess implies, rather the Euro-Americans have changed the rules of the church, denying the universal promise of salvation and equality to those who need it most. Apess sought to remove Reverend Fish and return the church to Mashpee control, but this did not occur until 1840.⁵ The latter parts of *Indian Nullification* demonstrate Apess's considerable determination in the cause, as he employed complex polemics and pedantry against Fish and in defense of his own reputation. At Mashpee, Apess acquired the skills and styles of a lawyer to add to those of preacher, missionary, and historian.

Apess's last publication was a stirring finale to his career of political activism and historical subversion. Delivered in January 1836 at the Odeon in Boston, the *Eulogy on King Philip* rebuts the speeches of Daniel Webster, particularly the "First Settlement of New England" of December 22, 1820, but also speeches honoring revolutionary fathers Washington, Adams, and Jefferson. Apess's oratorical skills shine when he observes that, "as the immortal Washington lives endeared and engraven on the hearts of every white in America, never to be forgotten in time—even such is the immortal Philip honored, as held in memory by the degraded but yet graceful descendants who appreciate his character" (277). The speech praises Roger Williams, the founding fathers, and mission-

ary Daniel Gookin, but denounces "one Stanish, a vile and malicious fellow" (284). Historical memory is therefore not segregated because, as the use of "King Philip" in place of his native name "Metacome" suggests, this hero is heroic through the images and comparisons of Euro-American history. It is not language of "a son of nature" which we read in this passage:

[H]e outdid the well-disciplined forces of Greece, under the command of Philip, the Grecian emperor; for he never was enabled to lay such plans of allying the tribes of the earth together, as Philip of Mount Hope did. And even Napoleon patterned after him, in collecting his forces and surprising the enemy. Washington, too, pursued many of his plans . . . (305)

Apess's strategy in the struggle for history resembles that in the earlier fight for respect of his religion—an adaptation and ironic reversal of the terms imposed by the dominant culture. Homi Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" describes well what Apess does with King Philip here: "The hybrid object . . . retains the actual semblance of the authoritative symbol but revalues its presence by resisting it" (115). Apess built his ethnic pride not by celebrating his ancestral traditions but through political engagement on behalf of another tribe, the Mashpee, and by employing the rhetoric of dominant colonial history in what Bhabha has called mimicry: King Philip as a mimic of Napoleon or Washington, the Indian Christian as a subversive mimic of the evangelical Methodist.⁶

Apess wrote and published without any editor or amanuensis. Yet the tradition of white sponsors for minority writers continues in the new edition of his writings. Mary White Rowlandson, Frederick Douglass, and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft each wrote in English with consummate "authority" and have eclipsed their editors and sponsors, Increase Mather, William Lloyd Garrison, and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. For example, the *Heath Anthology* attributes Ojibway tales from *Alcic Researches* to Jane, not Henry. Yet *On Our Own Ground* perpetuates the old pattern even as it takes exception to it, for it would be unthinkable for a rediscovered text or "emerging voice" to be published without a lengthy introduction setting it in an historical context and promoting its multicultural virtues. Barry O'Connell, professor of English at Amherst College, contributes to this publication a 65-page introduction, short prefaces to each of the five texts, and extensive footnotes.

A new strategy of assimilation versus authenticity is at work in *On Our Own Ground*. As well as being accepted into a literary or historical discourse dominated by Anglo-American men, Apess is assimilated with other racial minorities. O'Connell capitalizes upon Apess's consciousness of race by stressing the

mixture of African with his European and Pequot ancestry. It is a well-established fact that Native and African Americans, as part of the lowest classes in New England society, lived and raised families together. O'Connell makes the most of ambiguous census data (xxvii, n17) suggesting that Apress's mother was a certain Candace Apress, who had been classified as a negro slave. Then, when in *A Son of the Forest* William introduces his future wife Mary with the comment, "About this time I met with a woman of nearly the same color as myself" (46), O'Connell concludes that she was a woman of color. In her conversion narrative in *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* Mary says: "My father was a descendant of one of the Spanish islands, or a native of Spain. My mother was an English woman" (133). O'Connell's assertion about William's father-in-law that "He was, it would seem, of either mixed Native and Hispanic American ancestry or African and Hispanic or possibly all three" (46n45) merely refers back to Apress's color for proof. Perhaps this circular logic is justified by an assumption of the multi-racial past of all peoples. Yet one could also ask if perhaps miscegenation or *mestizaje* is here being used as a political tool to promote Apress as a kind of pan-minority, coyly reversing a history of the use of blood quantum and miscegenation laws to try to extinguish the land claims of a Pequot people considered too racially heterogeneous to be a tribe (see Trigger 170, Hauptman and Wherry 137).⁷

The Pequot language is the issue in another shaky claim in O'Connell's introduction, which asserts authenticity in spite of evidence of assimilation. Aunt Sally George is one of the five Christian Indians and is also remembered in *A Son of the Forest* for her preaching to "people from Rhode Island, Stonington, and other places" (40). In the most hesitant language, O'Connell asserts that she preached in Pequot: "The specification of where 'people' came from makes it probable that they were all Native Americans, possibly only Pequots but they could also have been Narragansets. . . . Pequot was unquestionably her first language, and she exhorted, I suspect from Apress's account, in her native tongue" (ix-ixi). If the group included Narragansets, could they have understood Pequot? Probably so, but only because both spoke dialects of Algonquian, a fact which O'Connell does not mention, instead implying a greater particularity and therefore authenticity for the Pequot language and culture. Anthropologists write of the "Monhegan-Pequot" language and cite evidence that it may have been spoken by Nianatics as well. Apress never translates or transcribes any Pequot words in his writings. The "organic power of communication" (150) that Apress saw Sally George blessed with is the power of oral traditions alive in communities of both Native Americans and evangelical Protestants, not confined to ritified ethnographic units of the Pequot, Narraganset, and Mashpee separately. *On Our Own Ground* presents Apress sometimes as a *mestizo* representative of all oppressed

minorities in Southern New England and at other points as the repository of a Pequot culture so exclusive as to be distinct even from neighboring and related tribes.

Beyond these ambiguities, a few errors of fact caused me to grow irritated with O'Connell's constant editorial presence. Of his journey from Kingston, Ontario, back to Colchester, Connecticut, after his tour of duty in the War of 1812, Apress wrote in *A Son of the Forest*: "I now started for home, a distance of more than three hundred miles. This was a long journey to perform alone, and on foot" (36). It was indeed a long way, but the achievement is not enhanced by O'Connell's footnote claiming the distance "would in fact be considerably farther, more on the magnitude of five to six hundred miles." The true distance is indeed 350 miles overland. In the *Eulogy on King Philip*, when Apress mentions Mary Rowlandson, O'Connell includes a biographical footnote stating: "She was ransomed after six months of living with Indian war parties" (300n22). In truth it was less than three months, February 10 to May 3, 1676 (Stokin and Folsom 50-1). A third and most mystifying error concerns Washington Irving as a source or influence for Apress. O'Connell cites Irving's "Philip of Pokanoket" from the *Sketch Book* (1819) as one of several previous eulogies of King Philip. But he fails to inform the reader that ten pages of another Irving essay, "Traits of Indian Character," is part of the material Apress borrowed from Boudinot for the Appendix to *A Son of the Forest* (60-9).

To O'Connell's credit, the introduction does address the objections of my students concerning Apress's authenticity and demands for Apress his rightful place in a canon of Native American literature which may resist him. In asserting the centrality of Christian discourse in Apress's life and the society he lived in, O'Connell writes:

Many assume a Christianized Indian is no more than a convert to Euro-American ways. The language of evangelical Protestantism that Apress employs often strikes contemporary ears as formulaic and monotonous. This violates expectations of how an "Indian" writer should talk, as though it could only be inauthentic for a Native American to speak through any medium originating in European culture. (iv)

Later, discussing Sally George, he writes: "For a Pequot to convert to Christianity is not, in this understanding, to take on white ways but only to claim one of her rights as a human being" (lxvii). The conclusions one should draw from Apress about race in early nineteenth-century America, however, do not emerge as clearly from the introduction as do those concerning religion and political self-

determination. A tension remains between a desire to foreground Apress as a Native American and particularly a Pequot, as proof of the continuous survival of the tribe (which recently has won federal recognition and a lucrative gambling concession from the state of Connecticut) and an urge to make Apress a person of color, a *mestizo* whose appeals on behalf of all oppressed races are so rare and so progressive for the 1830s.

Apress's significance for issues of race and ethnicity can be best understood, I believe, if we define the terms as sociologist and philosopher Maria Lugones has. She explains "race" as a fiction defined through a specular process of projection. The other is created in the psyche of the white metropole, a definition consistent with Henry Louis Gates's assertion that "Race . . . pretends to be an objective classification, when in fact it is a trope" (49). "Community" for Lugones is a geographical term employed in nationalism and defined by inclusion and exclusion, the circumscription of a cultural territory, be it reservation or borderland. This should not be confused with "culture," which she defines not as a place but as a language of behavior. By these definitions, we can see that though Apress was born into a Pequot racial identity and raised in the small Pequot community, ascriptions which excluded him from surrounding white New England, he learned very little of the Pequot culture as a child. Lugones's terms can help us to interpret a chilling scene in the autobiographies, which O'Connell also evokes at the end of his introduction. It was this incident which caused the young William to be sent to live with the Furnmans as a foster child.

[M]y grandmother, who had been out among the whites, returned in a state of intoxication and, without any provocation whatever on my part, began to belabor me most unmercifully with a club; she asked me if I hated her, and I very innocently answered in the affirmative as I did not then know what the word meant and thought all the while that I was answering aright; and so she continued asking me the same question, and I as often answered her in the same way, whereupon she continued beating me, by which means one of my arms was broken in three different places. (5-6)

This is a complex tragedy of misunderstanding and violence, and it is even more sensational in *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe*, where his grandmother "had fomented herself with the fiery waters of the earth" and beat him with whips "of unnatural size" (120). I have chosen this version from *A Son of the Forest* because it better represents the problems of language. As for many Indian autobiographers, the grandmother stands for the tribal traditions, which she unfortunately failed to pass on to him. That he failed to under-

stand her, though four years old, suggests not that he was too innocent to know the word "hate," but that she was speaking Pequot and William had learned to speak only English. The episode is in fact the strongest evidence of an enduring Pequot language in all Apress's writings, and it is odd that O'Connell does not cite this rather than the much weaker evidence for Sally George as a Pequot speaker. Apress's racial self-loathing, expressed later in the berry-picking scene, could be regarded as originating in this experience. When she asks "if I hated her" and he answers "yes" he is sincere on one level (we might call it the English level), which has learned little Pequot culture and no reason to respect his elder, whom he sees only as abusive. Yet he would have liked to have said "no" in Pequot, if only he could have understood the word "hate" in Pequot, for he came to hate his Indian heritage only in English. He could neither hate nor love his grandmother within the Pequot language and culture. Apress's assimilation was a negative one caused by his inability to learn Pequot culture as a child. He learned his culture only later, inspired by the Mashpee, and he learned it in English, the language he wrote so well.

The peculiarity of Pequot, and the question of who spoke such a language or when, is in any case not fundamental to the power of the scene. Apress's autobiographical angst of ethnic division or "dis-identity" bears striking similarities to that of later writers, such as Richard Rodriguez, or Walters and Anzaldúa mentioned above. Yet while Rodriguez confesses repeatedly how his assimilation into "public" English culture has separated him from his parents and his childhood, Apress could not evoke such a warm intimacy of a family and ethnic home. Apress neither asked to be accepted as assimilated, nor did he wish to stand syn-echdochically for his vanishing tribe. A brilliant historian and a devout Christian who outwitted the racist ideas of his time, his story is a dignifying but not comforting one for the Pequots, whose population has endured at less than 200 souls for more than 200 years. Such is the power and significance which William Apress, autobiographer, can convey to readers and scholars of autobiography.

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Notes

1. All references to Apress's works are to O'Connell's edition. In most of his books, the author spells his name "Ape." Editor O'Connell has standardized the spelling to "Apress" throughout the new volume because this was the spelling Apress chose to print on his final publications in 1837. O'Connell suspects the change may reflect a desire "to make more difficult people's mispronouncing and being witty at the expense of 'Ape's,' possibly an almost irresistible racial slur for Euro-Americans in their developing lexicon of anti-Indian and antiblack racism" (xiv, n2). I have followed O'Connell's spelling, but retained the spelling "Ape" where it appears in quotations from other scholars.

2. These quotations suggest that Brumble practices the type of ethnocentrism termed "denial of coevalness" by Fabian, who examines how notions of the temporal distance between "modern" and "primitive" peoples prevents the former from acknowledging that both share the same world and the same rights and threats.

3. This essay was first published in Eakin and appears as a chapter in Krupat's *Ethnocriticism*. My page citations are from the latter. The synecdochic self of tribal people "marked by the individual's sense of himself in relation to collective social units or groupings" (212) is contrasted with the metonymic self "strongly marked by the individual's sense of herself predominantly as different and separate from other distinct individuals" (212), and more typical of European and Anglo-American autobiography. The contrast is sound, but the choice of terms seems an unnecessary continuation of other critics' fondness for naming theoretical constructs with rhetorical terms (e.g. Jakobson, deMan, Genette).

4. Apress spells the name "Mastspsee," but I have shifted to modern usage.

5. For more on the Mashpee struggle for cultural integrity, see Clifford's account of the 1977 trial held to determine the question of recognized tribal status (277-346). It is ironic that the two dates of six from 1790 to 1976) at which the jury decided that the Mashpee did constitute a tribe were 1834 and 1842, just after Apress's work, and that while the Mashpee, among whom Apress articulated his identity, failed to gain federal recognition, the Pequot subsequently succeeded.

6. On mimicry, see "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha's notion of hybridity, as distinct from the popularization of the term, refers primarily not to the ancestry of colonial representation and individualization that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and strange the basis of its authority" (114). Apress is 'hybrid' not because of his multi-racial ancestry but by virtue of his subversive appropriation of Anglo-American colonial history and religion.

7. David Chioni Moore has pointed out in his article, "Alex Haley's *Roots* and the Rhetoric of Genealogy," that although that hugely popular book documents the rapes and imposed names and marriages (including at least one with an Indian) of Haley's slave ancestors, by following the branching roots through the Irish and English slaveholders, "Alex Haley could have identified any of these non-African ancestors as his root, but as a matter of practice and American social mandate, that is hard to imagine" (15). Hard to imagine for an African-American's roots, in which "the so-called one-drop" rule identifies all Americans of any visible Africanness as Black" (15), yet easier to imagine for a native American, where the trope of blood has been used by the dominant classes to exclude, rather than include, individuals as members of tribes.

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Revising Freely: Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Disembodiment

By Ben Stote

In thus dragging you again before the public, I am aware that I shall probably be charged with an unwarrantable, if not a wanton and reckless disregard of the rights and proprieties of private life. There are those north [and] south who entertain a much higher respect for rights which are merely conventional, than they do for rights which are personal and essential. . . . [Many who] have no scruples against robbing the laborer of the hard earned results of his patient industry will be shocked by the extremely indelicate manner of bringing your name before the public. . . . [Yet] all will agree that a man guilty of theft, robbery, or murder, has forfeited the right to concealment and private life; that the community have a right to subject such persons to the most complete exposure.

—Frederick Douglass's open letter to Thomas Auld, in *The North Star*, September 8, 1848¹

I have had very little sympathy with the curiosity of the world about my domestic relations.

—Frederick Douglass's private letter to Amy Post, August 27, 1884²

Frederick Douglass was "Easily the handsomest civil rights leader ever . . . (121). One finds this startling declaration in the pages of a 1992 *Smithsonian* magazine in a review of William McFeely's 1991 biography of Douglass. On own the declaration might inspire some perverse objection: "I don't know. I think Martin Luther King, Jr., was handsomer . . ." More absurd and alarming than Douglass's winning this beauty contest is, of course, the assumption that it should be held in the first place, that any civil rights leader's looks are worth bringing up to the serious readers of the serious *Smithsonian*. Knowing the subject of the review, McFeely's biography, changes matters: by the speculative, explanatory energy it devotes to Douglass's physical and sexual presence, McFeely's book gives the review's beauty contest context and relevance, what speech-act theo-