

CHEROKEE LITERATURE

Cherokee Nation
Community and Cultural Outreach
December 2014
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Presentation Objectives

- Overview of literary contributions;
 - John Rollin Ridge, *Joaquin Murieta* (1854)
 - Cherokee Rosebuds, Cherokee Female Seminary
 - Native Literary Renaissance
 - Contemporary Contributions
- Discuss framework for understanding Cherokee literature; and
 - Sovereignty and Self-Determination
 - Education
 - Women's Issues
 - Culture – Language and Worldview
- Explore major ideas related to both Native and American cultural studies.

What is Cherokee Literature?

- Cosmological stories – “myths” and origin
- Family stories
- Local legends
- Historical fiction

Cosmological Stories and Ethnology

James Mooney's *Cherokee History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas*.
Published in 1900, collected and obtained stories during the
19th century in North Carolina.

- Informant based stories.
 - Important considerations: Audience, source, and purpose.
- Franz Boas and Louis Henry Morgan
 - Focused on modes of human development.
 - Boas, cultural relativism: People will grow according to environments.
 - Morgan: Differentiated between three levels: savagery, barbarism, and civilization.
 - Issue: "Preservation," "myths" and the "Vanishing Indian"

James Mooney, “How the World Was Made.”

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/cher/motc/motc001.htm>

- Community of animals who work to bring together multiple levels of our world: lower, middle, and upper.
- No dialogue, but there is a sense of personal and group responsibility.
- Central ideas connected to movement and mobility.

John Rollin Ridge,
*The Life and Adventures of Joaquin
Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit*

- Published in California in 1854, nearly fifty years before Mooney's publication.
- First novel
 - Written by a Cherokee,
 - Written by a Native American, and
 - Prototype for the dime novel.
- American Literature: Regionalism and Naturalism
 - Functions as social commentary, and
 - Features California as a regionalist text.

Ridge, *Joaquin Murieta*

- Character Development and Historical Relationships
 - Joaquin Murieta – model for contemporary romantic heroes, such as Zorro
 - Los Angeles Star* (1852): Horse thief known as Reyes Feliz hung after the unsolved murder of American General Joshua Bean. Feliz claimed to be a Murieta's cohort.
 - Rosita – Joaquin's mistress
 - Three-Fingered Jack
 - Known as Manuel Garcia who fought during the Bear Flag Revolt and the US-Mexican War.
 - Captain Harry Love
 - Head of first law enforcement agency, the California State Rangers, who led search party for Joaquin Murieta.
 - Minor Characters, including women, Asians, and Native Americans residing in California.

Ridge, Joaquin Murieta

- Historical Relationships: Global and National
 - Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848)
 - Allowed the US to annex land stretching from Texas to California.
 - US paid Mexico \$15 million to established boundaries, and included provisions to protect property and civil rights of Mexican nationals living within the new boundaries.
 - Gold Rush of 1848 – Sutter’s Mill
 - Population boom from 15,000 to 93,000.
 - Mexicans went from a majority group to a minority group.
 - Foreign Miner’s Tax Law (1850 and 1852).
 - Aimed at miners who were not natural citizens of the United States.
- Issues and Themes: Justice and Vengeance; Cultural and Racial Tensions; Landscape; and Heroes.

Native Studies and Literary Theory: Defining the Discipline

- How do we read for Native and Cherokee content?
- What is Cherokee about this text?
- Are these fair expectations?

Native Literary Theory

- Robert Warrior (Osage), *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1994).
Native people have the ability and the right to engage with their own texts on their own terms.
- Jace Weaver (Cherokee), *That the People Might Live* (1997).
Continuance: Combination of “community” and “activism” to signify a commitment to Native community.
- Craig Womack (Muscogee Creek/Cherokee ancestry), *Red on Red* (1999).
 - “Without Native American literature, *there is no American canon*” (7).
 - Intellectual Sovereignty: Apply specific tribal worldviews to texts. For Creeks, Womack builds “Red Stick” literary critical theory.
- Robert K. Thomas papers (1953).
Harmony Ethic: Resonates from Seven Clan values to maintain harmony within the community.
- Self-determination formed through land, language, religious worldview, and community values.

Cherokee National Seminaries

- History of Education and Religion
 - Integration into Cherokee Nation based on consent rather than force.
 - Owned, funded, and operated by Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory until statehood.
 - Example of equal opportunity to work and access to education.
- *The Wreath of Rosebuds*
 - Current scholarship
 - Devon Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary*.
 - Amanda Cobb (Chickasaw), *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852 – 1949*.
 - Issues: Individual v. Community Identities, Print Capitalism, Cultural Sovereignty.

From Mali's *The Seed*

But the most important seeds are not those that fill up this natural world. **They are the seeds that are sown in the human heart; the seeds of thought, that produce the fruit of action.** How careful should we be that only good seeds are planted there. Jesus said in the parable of the sower that the good seeds were the Words of God.

From Ida's "The Curious Garden"

At every step our eyes were caught by the green leaves and deep red blossoms of a luxuriant vine, whose delicate tendrils seemed to clasp lovingly around every thing that came within its reach. We traced it along until it led us to the center of the garden, where stood a noble rose tree, from the root of which it sprang.

But we soon turned from the vine to gaze on the tree, which was in full bloom, and the crowning beauty of this lovely spot. **This perfect flower once bloomed in Eastern lands, by few admired; trampled under foot, and surrounded by enemies, who did everything in their power to destroy it. But still it lived; and now is cherished in many a garden spot of earth.** This Rose is the Rose of Sharon – this Garden an aged Christian's Heart.

Common Themes

- Gadugi-based themes of mobility rather than individual based motivations;
- Community based thought and action; and
- Resistance rhetoric coded in religious language.

Betty Louise Bell, *Faces in the Moon* (1995)

- Multiple storylines covering three generations of women in rural Oklahoma.
- Native literary ideas, including homecoming plot and the kitchen table.
- Issues: Native Womanism, Kinship, Clans, and Recovery.

Chronological Overview of Cherokee Literature

- Early Cherokee literature marked by ethnography, such as Mooney's *Myths*.
- “Dark Ages” of the 1900s defined by allotment through the late 1970s.
 - Will Rogers, *The New York Times* weekly column from 1922 to 1935
 - Maggie Culver Fry
 - Editor, *Oklahoma Today*; Oklahoma Poet Laureate in 1977; and nominated for Pulitzer Prize for *The Umbilical Cord* (1974).
 - John Oskison, *The Singing Bird* (2007) – newly discovered work from the 1930s and 40s.
 - Lynn Riggs, *Cherokee Night* (1932)
- Importance of family stories to maintain cultural identity.
- Native Literary Renaissance in the late 20th century.

Native Literary Renaissance, early 1970s

- Term coined by Dr. Geary Hobson (Quapaw/Cherokee ancestry) at the University of Oklahoma.
*Author of *The Last of the Ofos* (2002), editor, contributor to Returning the Gift: Native Writers' Festival and Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers.*
- Few writers enjoying commercial publicity, but many publishing through small independent presses.
- Tahlequah Indian Writers Group.
 - Published *Echoes of Our Being* (1982) as an outgrowth of Tahlequah community writers.
 - Launchpad for many writing careers.
 - Robert Conley, Louis Oliver, Robin Coffee, Wilma Mankiller, Pat Moss, and Julie Moss.

Robert Conley

- Received Lifetime Achievement Award from Native Writers' Circle of the Americas.
- Next to Will Rogers, most prolific Cherokee writer.
 - *Real People Series*.
 - Poetry, *Rattlesnake Band and Other Poems* (1984).
 - Local legends: *Sequoyah* (2002) and *Ned Christie's War* (2002)
 - *Cherokee Thoughts: Honest and Uncensored* (2008).
 - *The Witch of Goingsnake* (1988)
- Cherokee writer focused on a Cherokee audience.
- Themes:
 - Emphasis on place
 - Education through culture and language
 - Balance and community
 - Western laws versus spiritual authority
 - Use of ambiguity

Native Literature Today

- *Turtle Island Liars Club*
 - Hastings Shade
 - Sequoyah Guess, author of *Grandma's Stories and Others I've Heard* and *Kho:Lvn*.
 - Woody Hansen
 - Ryan Mackey
- Daniel Heath Justice
 - *Kynship* series and *Our Fire Survives the Storm* (2006)
- Joseph Erb
 - Language specialist and animator.
 - *The Beginning They Told*: http://www.blackgummountain.com/The_Beginning_They_told.html
- America Meredith
 - *First American Art Magazine*, editor, artist, and writer.
- Jeanetta Calhoun Mish
 - Mongrel Empire Press, publisher focusing on Native and rural Oklahoma writers.
- Allison Adele Hedge Coke
 - *Red Dust*, Documentary
 - *Sing: Poetry from the Indigenous Americas*, Editor

Notes for Culture and Community Outreach

- Reference document for literature and theory will be made available at <http://www.cherokee.org/cco>.
- Download this presentation at <http://www.cherokee.org/cco>.
- COTTA grant recipients viewing online must fill out the post-presentation assessment to receive TA credit hours, available at <http://goo.gl/forms/dSYfBVmLtM>, or find the link on the CCO homepage.

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