

# "ORALITY IN LITERACY": LISTENING TO INDIGENOUS WRITING

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## **Abstract/Resume**

One of the characteristics of Indigenous writing around the world may be the use of oral features as deliberate techniques in literary production. The author considers the work of Patricia Grace (of New Zealand), Sally Morgan (Australia) and Marie Annharte Baker (from Canada) in these terms.

Une des caractéristiques des oeuvres indigènes autour du monde peut être l'usage des traits oraux comme techniques délibérées de la production littéraire. L'auteur examine les oeuvres de Patricia Grace (de Nouvelle-Zélande), Sally Morgan (d'Australie) et Marie Annharte Baker (du Canada) en ces termes.

In this paper I want to re-situate what has come to be referred to as the "Great Divide" in orality-literacy studies<sup>1</sup> within a continuum of cultural and linguistic difference. More specifically, I argue that the process of transcribing a storytelling event into a written text (and, therefore, oral/aural speech) acts into literary/visual figuration, and encourages readers and critics alike to reconsider the traditional opposition of orality and literacy as mutually exclusive terms of both textual and cultural signification. This is especially true where Indigenous writing from the so-called Fourth World is concerned, that literature produced by such Indigenous peoples as Maori, Aboriginal and First Nations writers in settler colonies such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada. By adopting a more inclusive approach to the topic (in terms of the mixing of discourses, genres and cultures), I hope to demonstrate that *oral* features function as deliberate narrative strategies within the *literary* production of Patricia Grace's *A Way of Talking* (1975), Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987), and Marie Annharte Baker's *Being on the Moon* (1990). These inherently hybrid texts at once give voice to Indigenous memory systems long silenced by the history of imperialism, and transform the usually solitary reading experience into a more cooperative and responsive act of listening.

In a highly influential book *Orality and Literacy*, Ong posits a technologically deterministic and evolutionary theory of literacy acquisition, in which the technology of writing brings with it new patterns of memorization and rational thought vastly superior to more primitive oral-traditional ones. Literacy, for Ong, is a stepping-stone to greater human understanding and self-worth. Moreover, its development is virtually inevitable:

[O]rality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing. Literacy, as will be seen, is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also of history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explication of language (including oral speech) itself. There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy. This awareness is agony for persons rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. We have to die to continue living<sup>2</sup> (1982:15).

Rejecting the universalist and ethnocentric claims implicit in Ong's autonomous model of orality and literacy, cultural anthropologists and social linguists such as Finnegan and Street argue instead for what Street

calls "an alternative 'ideological' model" (1984:95).<sup>3</sup> According to Gee:

The ideological model attempts to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded. Literacy only has consequences as it acts together with a large number of other social factors (1990:61).

Thus, just as the term "orality" cannot be used without invoking a range of physical, cultural, social, sexual, and linguistic signifiers (all of which change historically and contextually), the term "literacy" cannot be separated from the material conditions which make its "acquisition" possible.

This alternative model shifts analysis away from the search for universal, ideal types of literacy development to a more detailed and focused study of linguistic and cultural patterns in specific societies or contexts.<sup>4</sup> By re-situating orality and literacy within social space in this manner, that is, by moving from the phonetic and lexical levels of language to the larger meaning systems of semantics and discourse analysis, we are able to position the two terms not in absolute opposition, but rather in differential relation. Both orality and literacy become embodied by/in specific processes of speaking, writing and representing that encompass not only the individual text or utterance but also their place within a given discursive formation, including the persons involved in, acting upon, and/or affected by the sound-, word-, or meaning-units.<sup>5</sup> Orality *in* literacy rather than orality *and/or* literacy (and, concomitantly, literacy *in* orality rather than literacy *and/or* orality). As Gee writes, viewed this way,

the speech-writing or orality-literacy distinction begins to become problematic: what seems to be involved are different cultural practices that in certain contexts call for certain uses of language, language patterned in certain ways and trading on features like integration/fragmentation and detachment/involvement to various degrees (1990:56).

Within the context of Indigenous writing, the conceptual reframing which I suggest (or, as Gee puts it, the "integration") between orality and literacy becomes even more apparent. Mythographers working in the United States (collectors and transcribers of once-oral Native American texts), for example, are for the most part committed to an "orality in literacy" theory of translation.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in her analysis of written and oral literary traditions in the South Pacific (including those of the Maori in New Zealand), Finnegan concludes that

these were not (as sometimes supposed) two separate and opposed modes but, both now and in the past, form part of one dynamic in which both written and oral forms interact (1982:35).

And, in the introduction to their edited volume on Native American discourse, Sherzer and Woodbury write as follows:

Serious attention to the nature of oral performance in relation to social and cultural context and to the relationship among transcription, representation, translation, and analysis reveals that there is no simple dichotomy between oral and written discourse, between nonliterate and literate societies. Rather there is considerable and quite interesting continuity between the oral and the written, showing diversity within each: There are oral genres in Native America that have such "written" properties as fixed text, "planning," and abstraction from context, and written genres in European based societies having such "oral" properties as spontaneity and "repair," scansion into pause phrases, and context-dependent interpretability (1987:10).

So much for the critics' views. What about those of Indigenous writers themselves? The Aboriginal novelist Mudrooroo Narogin, in discussing attempts to assimilate Aboriginal speech patterns into "the Standard English discourse of white Australia" adopts an ideological approach to orality and literacy similar to the model espoused by Street and Gee:

This translation reflects an ideal or ideological position in which Aborigines are to be forced into the majority culture. It is assimilation on the discourse level, though in actuality it does not mean that the Aboriginal person has the option of being assimilated (1990:145).

As for Hirini Melbourne, while he advocates the development of a Maori literature written in Maori rather than English, he nevertheless recognizes that both oral and written traditions must necessarily play a part in this process:

What are the chances for a "literature" in Maori? This question is inseparable from that of the survival of Maori as used speech in everyday life...What we need is to set about discovering how the rich heritage of the Maori past, both oral and written, might provide a continuing basis for a "literature" in Maori (1991:140).

And, in her monograph *Oratory*, Toronto-based Métis writer Lee Maracle explodes the so-called gulf between White academic theorizing and Native Canadian storytelling:

Enough of that talk. There is a story in every line of theory. The difference between us and European (predominately white male) scholars is that we admit this, and present theory through story. We differ in the presentation of theory, not in our capacity to theorize (1990:7).

*Oratory*, according to Maracle, is both a "place of prayer" and a

method of persuasion:

Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people (1990:3).

In discussing her own writing, specifically *I Am Woman* (1988), Maracle concludes that

[b]y talking to my readers as though they were truly there in my heart, both the point of victimization and the point of resistance become clear...By using story and poetry I move from the empowerment of my self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book (1990:14).

It is this last point which I find most persuasive. For I believe that oral features operate as powerful mnemonic devices within Indigenous texts, enabling their authors to talk without threat of censure about past traditions or injustices, and reminding their readers to listen to what is being advocated/envisioned for the future.<sup>7</sup>

When I equate *reading* with *listening* in this context, I am making a connection between language and notions of self and other, the primary (some would say "originary") opposition on which most others (including that of orality and literacy) are based. In so doing, I am following the lead of Stewart, who argues that

the phonemic enactment of a text audits the voice of the other. Reading always with an alien ear, it brings the alien near (1990:32).

Here it seems to me that Stewart is emphasizing not so much the gap at the centre of cross-textual, cross-linguistic, or even cross-cultural communication as how that gap might be bridged. This finds expression in Stewart's concept of "phonemic reading," which "has to do not with reading orally, but with aural reading" (1990:2). Similarly, I suggest that listening to the voices occupying Indigenous texts not only provides an opportunity to generate a rich transference of knowledge between self and other (or reader and writer);<sup>8</sup> it further destabilizes the traditional opposition between orality and literacy:

The striking parallelisms between a highly literate experience such as that of rereading a valued book and the experience of listening over again to a known story, myth, or legend (whether one is literate or not) confirms once more that there is no gap between orality and literacy, and that oral modes or patterns of consciousness are not abolished in acts of communication at the

most sophisticated levels of literate composition and reception (Calinescu, 1993:187).<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in *A Way of Talking* Patricia Grace also outlines a "way of reading/listening." In this deceptively simple short story, Grace explores the very circuit of oral communication itself, both between Maori and Maori, and Maori and Pakeha, inviting "the careful listener to hear the covert messages of speech and action as well as the overt ones, and to respond accordingly" (New, 1987:225). And, although the story is threaded throughout with Maori words and syntactical structures, it is in her use of dialogue that Grace most clearly foregrounds the orality/aurality of her text.

Whereas New, in his analysis of *A Way of Talking*, identifies "four important *rhetorical stages* in the story" (1987:225; my emphasis), I have chosen instead to focus on five different *verbal exchanges*, each of them clearly marked in the text-by inverted commas-as dialogue. The first of these occurs right at the outset of the story. Rose/Rohe, who has just returned from the city in order to attend the wedding of her older sister, Hera (the story's narrator), and who "[t]alks all the time flat out and makes us laugh with her way of talking," has been regaling her family with tales of university life (Grace, 1975:1). Her storytelling is interrupted only when her grandmother gets up to go to bed: "At last Nanny got out of her chair and said, 'Time for sleeping. The mouths steal the time of the eyes'" (*Ibid.*). Here we glimpse the residual traces of Maori oral speech patterns operating within a standardized discourse of "English" imposed by the majority culture. And yet the reader is dissuaded from labelling this brief bit of dialogue idiomatically incorrect by the narrator's ensuing comment: "That's the lovely way she has of talking, Nanny, when she speaks in English" (*Ibid.*).

The second important verbal exchange takes place at the home of Jane Frazer, a local Pakeha dressmaker who has been commissioned to sew the dresses for Hera's wedding:

Jane said, "That's Alan. He's been down the road getting the Maoris for scrub cutting."

. . . .

"Don't they have names?"

"What. Who?" Jane was surprised and her face was getting pink.

"The people from down the road whom your husband is employing to cut scrub." Rose the stink thing, she was talking all Pakehafied (1975:3).

In this passage standard English discourse is revealed to be just that—a discourse into which anyone, with the proper training, can become initiated.<sup>10</sup> Because of her university education, Rose is able to mimic the "literate" dialect of the White majority. To this end, she even does her

interlocutor one better: her use of the pronoun "whom" contrasts sharply with Jane's haphazard "who." Once again, however, it is Hera's non-verbalized, tacked-on assessment of her sister's speech that provides readers with an important auditory clue, encouraging us to listen to the hollowness of Rose's words, especially in light of the richly textured rhythms of Nanny's more colloquial "way of talking."

Rose proves to be adept at iterative or discursive mimicry. Responding to Hera's anger and embarrassment over what transpired at Mrs. Frazer's, she adopts the speech patterns of the White urban racist, at once reversing the standard inflection of the words, and highlighting the learned discourses of hatred and oppression: "Don't worry Honey she's got a thick hide" (1975:4). A little later on, as the sisters near home, Rose breaks into the patronizing tones of Jane Frazer herself: "I have friends who are Maoris. They're lovely people. The eldest girl was married recently and I did the frocks. The other girl is at varsity. They're all so *friendly* and so *natural* and their house is absolutely spotless" (1975:5). Yet again the effect of Rose's words on Hera is telling: in the first instance she is left feeling sad and ashamed, both at her own inarticulateness and at Rose's enforced fluency; in the second she wants to giggle at the hypocrisy of Jane's "patron discourse." In both cases Hera recognizes that what Rose is saying is "not our way of talking" (1975:4).

Back at home, Rose soon re-immerses herself in familiar/familial oral speech patterns, joking with her father and brother about her mother's freshly baked bread: "The bread's terrible. You men better go down to the shop and get you a shop bread" (1975:6). The narrator soon joins in the conversation, forgetting about the previous exchanges between Rose and Jane, and demonstrating that she too, despite her protestations to the contrary, is a member of this discourse community. In this regard, it is important to note that *A Way of Talking* is focalized completely through the point of view of Hera. Pearson has commented on the frequency with which Grace adopts the mode of first-person narration in her stories (1982:176). In an interview with Thomas E. Tausky, Grace explains that this is her way of finding the "right" person to do the "telling" (Tausky, 1991:99). In the context of *A Way of Talking*, Hera's apparent difficulty in telling her story, her "conflict with words," reflects her bifurcated location *between* two different-although not mutually exclusive-discourse communities: one "oral-literate" and one "literate-oral."<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by troping on this circuit of communication, Grace demonstrates that she "is in search of a listener as much as a reader, someone who by hearing can turn an utterance into a shared exchange" (New, 1987:227).

At first glance, Sally Morgan's bestselling 1987 autobiography, *My Place*, would seem to resist classification as "oral literature." This has as much to do with the text's generic qualities as it does with the author's "highly literate" grasp of the English language. As Murray remarks

The concept of an individual life as an unfolding story which can be isolated, recalled and retold, made into a product for contemplation, is not one necessarily shared by other cultures, and in particular not by oral cultures (1991:65).

And yet Morgan is not simply recounting her own individual life history; she is also documenting "the interconnections and disjunctions of Aboriginal oral history" (Trees, 1992:55). To this end, Morgan embeds within her own first-person (written) narrative the first-person (spoken) narratives of three members of her family: her great-uncle, Arthur Corunna, her mother, Gladys Corunna, and her grandmother, Daisy Corunna. Morgan explains the process to Arthur as follows:

I want to write the history of my own family...there's almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it was like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything. There's a lot of history we can't even get at...I just want to try to tell a little bit of the other side of the story (1987:163-64).

Unlike Gladys and Daisy, who are initially unwilling to tell their stories, Arthur concurs with Morgan on the issue of unspoken/unwritten history. Indeed, the closing lines of his tape-recorded (transcribed and edited by Morgan for the text) story encapsulate the historical paradox of situating Aboriginal oral traditions within a text produced by/in a dominant White literate culture: "I'm part of history, that's how I look on it. Some people read history, don't they?" (1987:213).<sup>12</sup>

Morgan's use of embedded stories/narratives thus produces an essentially hybrid text. As Mudrooroo Narogin points out, *My Place* is written in Standard English as this is [Morgan's] everyday discourse, but when she uses the methods of oral history to tape-record the voices of three members of her family, and introduce them into her text, the English blackens (1990:162).

According to Stephen Muecke, this results in the creation of a uniquely Aboriginal storytelling event:

Because she is creating the context for further stories to be told, those of Arthur, Gladys and Daisy Corunna, [Morgan] is making the book into a collective storytelling occasion for those who have the right to the story, the correct custodians if you like. Her story creates the conditions for the other stories to appear in the appropriate sequence down a line which represents in a crucial way the *deferment of (narrative) authority*. According to traditional custom..., narrators are only ever the partial holders of traditions and are required to defer to the others who hold the

rest of the sequence if they are available. In this way Morgan's book becomes multivalent and polyphonic and while she is the principle narrator she resists the impulse to enclose the others' narratives within her own (1988:415).

Consequently, it becomes the task of the sensitive reader to listen carefully to the complex interplay of voices in *My Place*. In this regard, the initial reluctance of Gladys and Daisy to share their stories (which, to her credit, Morgan does not shy away from recording), and the subsequent breaking of their respective silences, are important auditory moments within the text. In describing her eventual "coming to voice," Gladys encourages the reader/listener to *place* her personal suffering within the larger context of collective (Aboriginal) redress:

It hasn't been an easy task, baring my soul. I'd rather have kept hidden things which have now seen the light of day. But, like everything else in my life, I knew I had to do it. I find I'm embarrassed sometimes by what I have told, but I know I cannot retract what has been written, it's no longer mine (1987:306).

For her part, when Daisy finally decides to speak, she chooses to address the White audience directly. In so doing, her words become ironically double-voiced:

Aah, you see, that's the trouble with us blackfellas, we don't know who we belong to, no one'll own up. I got to be careful what I say. You can't put no lies in a book (1987:325).

Robertson contends that the multiple histories (both written and oral) embedded within *My Place* force White critics "to 'confess' their own personal positions." "The result," according to Robertson, "is therefore a dialogue between the text and the critic" (1992:48). I agree with Robertson's assessment of Morgan's text, and would only hasten to add that this dialogue should ideally be a negotiation of sorts, between Aboriginal and White definitions of autobiography, and between oral and literate definitions of history.

So far, in my analysis of the use of Indigenous oral traditions by Maori and Aboriginal writers like Patricia Grace and Sally Morgan, I have employed the term "storytelling" rather indiscriminately. In turning to discuss the work of Anishinabe-Canadian poet Marie Annharte Baker, however, I feel the need to supply a bit more cultural context. As Emberley notes, the application of the term "storytelling" to an Indigenous text (in Emberley's case Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash*) in order to distinguish between oral and graphic modes of writing requires a "negotiation of meaning across cultural boundaries":

In Cree, for example, there are two types of 'stories': those that belong to sacred ceremonies and those that belong to the

'everyday,' including anecdotes, historical accounts, allegories, and fictional tales (Emberley, 1993:142;180n).

For Annharte Baker, who is certainly familiar with the Cree language, if not their storytelling traditions, these designations are necessarily reflected in her 1990 collection of poems *Being on the Moon*. As she herself puts it, the text is made up of

the smallest stories; stories in our everyday conversations (wrongfully dismissed as gossip), stories of how we survived and resisted (cheeky stories), and, of course, the "lost stories" (stories of men, women, and children who are lost or outcast to their own people, the ones who have "no voice" but speak to us in dreams or haunt our every waking moment with their shocking statistics) (Baker, 1992:368).

These stories, I would argue, are actually arranged into various "storytelling cycles." That is, each successive cluster of five poems corresponds with thirteen different (although related) phases/faces of the moon. Indeed, each of these clusters is arranged around a specifically designated "moon poem. As Annharte Baker writes in *Banana Moon* (1990:64)

Every Indian has a moon he or she  
I still have mine tho it's not marked.

Thus, the fifth cycle (made up of the poems *Hooker Moon*, *A Woman's Fish-Hook Story*, *Hudson Bay Bill*, *Exchange Cafe*, and *Darklove*) seems to revolve around stories of Indigenous women's sexual relations with men; the seventh cycle (consisting of *Mayan Moon*, *Pretty Tough Skin Woman*, *Trapper Mother*, *Everything Else is on Hold*, and *Down South*) tells of Indigenous women's connections with other women, whether they be the spiritual links with ancient Aztec princesses, the blood ties with respected Elders, or the dividing lines among White social workers; and the tenth cycle (which includes *Scribble Moon*, *Upbraid*, *Raced Out to Write This Up*, *Truck and Teapot*, and *A Pagan Performs*) deals more explicitly with issues of racism and appropriation.

In her essay *Transmitting our Identity as Indian Writers*, Beth Cuthand writes:

We come from a tradition of storytelling, and as storytellers we have a responsibility to be honest, to transmit our understanding of the world to other people....In this process, there is something more than information being transmitted: there's energy, there's strength being transmitted *from the storyteller to the listener* and that is what's important in teaching young people about their identity. What we're doing as Indian writers is taking that tradition and putting it physically onto paper and getting a broader

distribution of those stories, because it's really important for us, in terms of our continuing existence, that we transmit our identity and strength from one generation to another (1985:54; my emphasis).

Cuthand's words would certainly seem to apply to Annharte Baker, a poet for whom

Writing is  
oral tradition.

As she states in the last stanza of the same poem (the final poem in the collection), *One Way to Keep Track of Who is Talking*,

Frozen Indians and frozen conversations predominate...  
We talk to keep our  
conversations from getting too dead" (Baker, 1990:78).

The conversations echoing throughout *Being on the Moon* are necessarily hybrid, reflecting the uneasy entry of Indigenous oral storytelling traditions into print culture over the past one hundred years or so. Indeed, within the liminal textual space between the spoken word and the page, Annharte Baker articulates the inherent linguistic paradox/paradigm of the *Martyr Tongue*:

Our English is good enough to wipe out traces of their expression from our mouths (1990:72).

Or, as she puts it in *One Way to Keep Track of Who is Talking*,

Language finds a tongue.  
Maybe it will be an Indian accent (1990:78).

Annharte Baker would undoubtedly agree with Cuthand about the importance of fostering a sense of identity within an Indigenous readership; and yet I do not believe that the "conversations" in *Being on the Moon* are unidirectional, if only because

You never do  
know if you are talking to an Indian (1990:78).

Thus, while the text is peppered with Saulteaux and Cree words, a glossary is also provided at the back for non-Native speakers.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in addition to the traces of traditional ghost songs and ceremonial chants among its pages, the text also includes "sermons" and "savage gossip" aimed explicitly at a White audience, poems such as *Martyr Tongue* (1990:72). As Finnegan so astutely points out, one can never generalize about the *absolute* function of oral poetry; one can only enquire into its uses in specific contexts:

According to the context in which it is delivered (and the prime elements in this are the performer and the audience) oral poetry can be used to reconcile, divide, maintain established authority or undermine it, propagandise, innovate, conserve, cajole, entrance, scandalise, attack, soothe-or a hundred other things (1977:243).

In transcribing her stories onto the page, something of Annharte Baker's "oral" performance is necessarily altered, reconfigured with/in dominant notions of cultural "literacy." Nevertheless, if the reader listens carefully to the voices occupying her text, s/he will hear and experience all of the sentiments outlined by Finnegan-and more. "But," as Annharte Baker asks in *Squaw Beat*, "who will listen to this sob story?" (1990:26).

Of course, just as Grace, Morgan, and Annharte Baker are redefining traditional notions of orality and literacy in their respective texts, so in turn are they re-inventing traditional genre designations (something which has already been briefly alluded to in connection with Morgan). The question of genre, according to Jacques Derrida, brings with it the question of law since it is most often figured

as an instance of the interdictory limit, of the binding obligation, as the negativity of a boundary not to be crossed (1992:247).

Hence the opening declaration of his essay "The Law of Genre" that "genres are not to be mixed" (*Ibid.*:221). And yet for Indigenous writers such as Grace, Morgan, and Annharte Baker, for whom the question of genre, like the question of literacy, has long been that of an absence speaking silence, their texts at once "participate" in a given genre (short story, autobiography, poetry) and exceed the boundaries of any fixed and stable system of categorization or "belonging" (what Derrida calls "the law of the law of genre"). This relates once again to orality, for it is precisely the presence of oral features such as dialogue/dialect, embedded narratives, and storytelling within the hybridized and mixed texts of Grace, Morgan, and Annharte Baker which makes them resistant to easy aesthetic or formalist treatment.

But, to paraphrase Emberley,

What are the implications of a critical morphology that uses terms such as "hybridity," "bastardization," and "mixed gen(r)es" for a discussion of [three] texts which narrate the lives of [three indigenous] women?" (1993:164).

As Emberley goes on to remark,

This question marks the contradiction of reading literary criticism which uses Derridean post-structuralist theory, for example, in order to abstract indigenous knowledges of interpretation into a First Worldist discursive consumption. There is an implied narrative in which "marginal" experience becomes abstracted

into a critical theory, in which the spectacle of marginality gains a certain currency in commodity exchange and is then returned to the Native, the marginal, the ethnic, as a legitimation of value: you are valuable precisely because of your labour as a sign. Human "value" has been surpassed by abstracted commodity value (1993:164).

In this sense, not only am I in danger of commodifying orality as the privileged site for the production of "authentic" Indigenous narratives,<sup>14</sup> but also of fetishizing the very bodies which have engendered these narratives. For Derrida's schema of "invagination" insists that the law of genre is written "in the feminine" (1992:247). Gene, genus, genre, gender: there is no neutered/neutral genre/gender. "[T]hrough the feminization of critical theory," according to Emberley, "the body of ab/original women functions as a silent, hyphenated figure of mediation" (1993:165).

Conceiving of language as performance, however, potentially offers us a way out of this apparent double bind of (re)producing imperialist, patriarchal discourse. In *Gender Trouble*, for example, Judith Butler sees performativity (articulated through speech act theory) as a way of destabilizing the biological fixity of gender roles. And, in *Voicing Difference: The Literary Production of Native Women*, Barbara Godard develops "[a]n approach to oral literature that conceives it as performance" in order to undermine the ideological fixity of formalist genre typologies:

If we conceive performance as a way of speaking, we need no longer define a text as artful on "independent formal grounds." Rather "performance becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art as spoken communication." Such a shift in definition also offers a way out of the high/low-culture impasse in which oral literature and women's writing have found themselves. (1986:92)<sup>15</sup>

But still the question remains: can performance ever free itself from generic/gender fixity? And can the Indigenous woman's voice *afford* to remain within performative *enonciation* if there is to be action/activism? Godard's own stress is on the "co-operative" element in the oral performative event/context, in which the listener/audience necessarily plays a part.<sup>16</sup> And in this I tend to agree with her. For, as Roman states

The question for scholars...who now confront the crisis of representation, is not whether the subaltern can speak. Instead it is whether privileged white groups are willing to listen when the subaltern speaks and how whites can know the difference between occasions for responsive listening and listening as an excuse for silent collusion with the status quo of racial and neocolonial inequalities (1993:76).

Within the context of postcolonial studies, in general, and this paper, in particular, the call for "responsive listening" requires White critics like myself to shift the ontology of meaning in literary criticism from its location in a fixed written text to a larger social space that includes the text but also the discursive context. In the case of Patricia Grace, Sally Morgan, and Annharte Baker, such a context not only forces me to acknowledge orality within their writing but also to incorporate auralty within my reading. As Jordan Wheeler succinctly puts it,

The right to speak must be fought for. The right to be heard relies on people who want to listen (1992:40).

### Notes

Thanks are due to Margery Fee for her comments on the original draft of this paper, and to Richard Cavell for his continued support.

1. For a summary of the debate see Gee, 1990:49-68; in addition, see Calinescu (1993) from whom I have appropriated the first half of my title. For an analysis of how orality and literacy impact upon contemporary postcolonial theory, especially with respect to hybridized and syncretic models of cross-cultural textual analysis, see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989:33-37, 133-45.
2. Writing twenty years before Ong, McLuhan offered a "reverse perspective of the literate Western world" in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, arguing that "[e]mpathic identification with all the oral modes is not difficult in our century" (1962:2).
3. See Finnegan (1988) and Street (1984).
4. For example, their research on Northern Athabaskan oral traditions has led Ron and Suzanne Scollon to reject the traditional division between literacy and nonliteracy in favour of a more productive distinction between "focused" and "nonfocused" interaction:

With the identification of increasing numbers of literacies and nonliteracies that are distinctively different in internal discourse patterns, in teaching and learning patterns, and possibly in cognitive implications, we wonder if the literate/oral distinction is really the issue. We propose that thinking in terms of *focus* might be of use in sorting things out (1984:182).

5. My use and understanding of the terms "discourse" and "discursive formation" come from Michel Foucault. See, in particular, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1972) and *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977). For a discussion of "Discourse" (with an upper-case "D") as it relates more directly to notions of literacy see Gee (1990:137-163).
6. Mattina (1987) discusses his "Red English" translations/transcriptions of traditional Native American oral narratives, which attempt to capture non-standard English dialects in print form. Although Mattina forthrightly acknowledges the limitations of his methodology, he nevertheless believes that "Red English, with various dialects of course, is a pan-Indian phenomenon, roughly analogous to Black English" (*Ibid.*:139). The free verse translations of Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock, while differing in approach to those of Mattina, likewise conceive of Native American discourse as based on an "oral poetics." See Hymes (1981) and Tedlock (1983). For an overview of the relation between Native American theories of "orality" and poststructuralist theories of "textuality" see Krupat (1987).
7. Calinescu notes that "[c]entral to Ong's study is the question of (cultural) memory and the various forms it takes in societies before and after the introduction of writing" (1993:175). Indeed, as Ong himself argues, "In a primary oral culture [i.e. one to which writing/literacy has not been introduced], to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready recurrence" (1982:34). In contrast to Ong, I suggest that the incorporation of oral/aural speech patterns in contemporary Maori, Aboriginal and First Nations texts produced in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada constitutes a conscious attempt on the part of Indigenous writers working in these countries to recuperate stories and methods of storytelling hitherto devalued as backward or unsophisticated by dominant White culture. Moreover, I suggest that memory in this context can also be future oriented, calling upon the cross-cultural (predominantly White) reader/listener to engage in a reciprocity of perspectives/positions, to negotiate with the writer/speaker by providing "new information" to the story, matching the "background material" with "foregrounded material" (Scollon and Scollon, 1984:181).
8. Of course, I would be remiss if I did not introduce the concept of "power" into this equation. In this regard, the "rich transference of knowledge" that I am positing between Indigenous/minority writers and White/majority readers will occur only if the latter group *allows* it

to occur. As Van Toorn states

The dominant audience exerts its power through the agency of the texts and the systems of non-verbal signification that may be gathered together under the catch-all label "patron discourse." The speech, writing and other cultural practices of minority groups are only liberated into the public domain to the extent that patron discourses succeed in trapping them in the categories which the dominant audience has available to contain them (1990:103).

9. As two anonymous readers for *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* both commented in their reports, Calinescu somewhat overstates his point in claiming that "there is *no gap* between orality and literacy" (1993:187; my emphasis). And yet, as with Stewart (1990), I think this is also partly his intention, affirming that the *perceived gap* between orality and literacy is not in fact an *unbridgeable divide*.
10. Once again, however, I am eliding issues of power here. As Gee notes

Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society...There is no doubt that many minority and lower socioeconomic students have great difficulty accommodating to certain "mainstream" Discourses, in particular, many school-based Discourses. These Discourses often conflict seriously (in values, attitudes, ways of acting, thinking, talking) with their own home and community-based Discourses (1990:144;148).

11. In the same interview with Tausky, Grace admits that within the oral storytelling traditions of the Maori community "conflict with words-that's what everyone enjoys" (1975:99).
12. Morgan acknowledges Arthur's intuitive sense of history in an interview with Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell: "He had quite a vision of what he thought history was about and of the future; and so he could see that what I was trying to do was important. He had a sense of history which a lot of people don't have" (1992:3).
13. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that all three Indigenous writers under consideration in this essay choose to gloss the non-English-

language words in their respective texts. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that "the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status" (1989:66). However, rather than viewing the glossing in the texts of Grace, Morgan, and Annharte Baker as emphasizing the unbridgeable gap between Indigenous/minority and White/majority cultures, or as re-inscribing the imperial hegemony of the English language, I prefer to see them as examples of strategic locutionary positioning, each of them demanding a negotiated mapping of the interpretative territory in which the "Other" (as writer/speaker, or as reader/listener) stands.

14. Indeed Goldie counts "orality" as one of the five "standard commodities" "in the 'economy' created by the semiotic field of the Indigene in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand literatures" (1993:15). See, in particular, Chapter 6, 1993:107-126.
15. Wiget offers a similar assessment of oral narrative in relation to performance, form, and genre:

Where written literature provides us with a tradition of texts, oral literature offers a tradition of performances. In both cases, however, the art lies not in the modality but in the effective use of its possibilities within culturally defined aesthetic norms (1985:2).

16. Again I cite the Scollons on Northern Athabaskan storytelling: "This oral tradition, as represented here by narrative performance, is neither the bard-and-formula oral tradition we have come to expect from the literature on oral traditions nor is it the absence of that tradition and literacy. It is a third possibility, an oral tradition of a sort that is based on a lifetime of learning and face-to-face interaction. Its key is the mutual respect between storyteller and listener in a one-to-one situation, the mutual negotiation of position that never assumes that one side should be allowed to make its own sense of the situation 'stick'" (1984:179).

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