

## “Publica(c)tion”: E. Pauline Johnson’s Publishing Venues and their Contemporary Significance

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Résumé de l'article

By combining Aboriginal storytelling, European performance entertainment, and the printed word, E. Pauline Johnson's practice of publica(c)tion challenged and still challenges the prevalent Eurocentric notion of Canadian literature as a literature that is created, published, and consumed in print. She could not be stopped in her career as a storyteller-writer-performer when she encountered the financial and material obstacles of print publication, which she circumvented by reverting to alternative modes. In the stage performance of her Victorian Romantic poetry, the dramatization of her short stories, and the wearing of costumes that catered to both elite and popular tastes, she crossed the boundaries of "high" and "low" literature, written and oral communication.

# “Publica(c)tion”: E. Pauline Johnson’s Publishing Venues and their Contemporary Significance

SABINE MILZ

**B**ORN IN 1861 as the daughter of the Englishwoman Emily Howells and the Mohawk chief and government interpreter George Johnson of the Six Nations Reserve, Emily Pauline Johnson was to become one of Canada’s most popular and successful poets and platform entertainers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, many Aboriginal writers honour her as the first Aboriginal woman to write in English about Aboriginal issues in poetry and fiction. According to the Mohawk writer Beth Brant, “Pauline Johnson began a movement that has proved unstoppable in its momentum — the movement of First Nations women to write down our stories of history, of revolution, of sorrow, of love” (5). Brant sees Johnson as “a spiritual grandmother to ... women writers of the First Nations” (7). In their recent study of Johnson’s life story and career, *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)*, Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson point out that “as a part-Native woman developing an independent career in a socio-political world dominated by powerful White men” (112), Johnson could be ambivalent and self-contradicting, “encompass[ing] the Native storyteller and the European artist, the middle-class lady and the bohemian spirit” (180). Similarly, Janice Fiamengo describes her in “Reconsidering Pauline” as an “ambiguous, boundary-blurring double persona” (175), trying to negotiate between the dual imperialist and Aboriginal affiliations of her background and upbringing. It appears that though critics have recently shown an increased interest in Johnson, however, they have not given much attention to the practical-material necessities she had to deal with as an unmarried woman who was trying to make a living with her writing. Since neither Johnson nor her sister Evelyn ever married, they needed to earn a living to support themselves and their mother after the death of their father when Pauline was twenty-three.

This paper, then, will focus on these material pressures, and more specifically, on whether and how they intensified Johnson's personal and literary ambivalences. It will do so by exploring the social, economic, racial, and gender dimensions of her "publica(c)tion," a term I have coined to emphasize her active involvement in making her work "public" through the use of performative and print media, oral and written communication, Aboriginal and European methods. This approach emphasizes that orality and performance served Johnson not only as vehicles of Aboriginal cultural expression but especially as methods for profitably publishing her writing, whose print publication may have been critically but not economically rewarding. I will argue that by bringing together Aboriginal storytelling, popular European performance entertainment, and the printed word, her practice of publica(c)tion challenged and still challenges the prevalent Eurocentric notion of Canadian literature as a literature that is created, published, and consumed in print. In the following, I will trace the publishing history of Johnson's writing in order to understand, firstly, what she could and could not achieve in print in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; secondly, what it meant for her to be a "publica(c)tive" woman and to be received as such; and thirdly, how her publica(c)tion figures in contemporary discussions and practices of Aboriginal publishing and writing. I will address the following questions: Did Johnson's financial needs conflict with her Aboriginal convictions and make her comply with European expectations? Could her entanglements within the prejudices of her time allow her to exist without conflict between these stark contradictions? In which ways did her choice of career dare the European notions of the poet(ess), the "Indian," and of middle-class popular entertainment?

As several critics (e.g. van Steen, Strong-Boag and Gerson, Gray, Keller) have indicated, Johnson could barely make a living from the print publication of her poetry and short stories. While her first poetry collection *The White Wampum* was a critical success, it did not earn her much money or lead to lucrative publishing contracts for future work. The correspondences between her co-performer and manager Walter McRaye and the Musson Book Company, Saturday Sunset Presses, and the Methodist Book and Publishing House (then under book steward William Briggs) give evidence that Johnson had to pay in advance for the publication of her poetry and short story collections. They were her own financial risk.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, she and McRaye largely distributed and marketed her books themselves, a fact which becomes apparent from the many book orders and payments addressed to them by private households, public

libraries, government agencies, bookstores, companies, and businesses. Responding to a request concerning the distribution of either *The Shaggonappi* or *The Moccasin Maker*, Johnson's two short story collections which were both published by Briggs in 1913, the latter wrote (in a letter dated 15 January 1913) that "being a book of short stories it would probably be hard to place with booksellers as books of short stories are not looked upon by the trade with great favor.... Canadians do not seem to buy books of short stories to any great extent." Even though Johnson's frequent contributions to the then-popular American magazines *Boys' World*, *The Mother's Magazine*, *The American Boy*, and *Outing* and to the Toronto-based journals *The Week* and *Saturday Night* were more lucrative, they still did not pay enough to make an independent living. Paycheques show that she received fifty-seven dollars and four cents for publishing three stories with *Boys' World*, sixteen dollars and seventy-four cents for one story contribution to *The Mother's Magazine*, and fifty cents per hundred words for a contribution to *The American Boy*. A letter from a *Saturday Night* editor indicates that the newspaper paid four dollars for a wide column (The Pauline Johnson Archive, Series 4, Box 1).<sup>2</sup>

George Parker's comprehensive work *The Beginning of the Book Trade in Canada* emphasizes that "Canada's unique nineteenth-century situation, first as a group of separate colonies and then as an underpopulated, rather poor, and economically dependent Dominion in the last third of the century" (ix) made the development of a prosperous domestic book industry, writers' community, and national literature extremely difficult. Reflecting Canada's overall economic tendency to export raw materials and import manufactured goods, the book trade was organized to import books and periodicals and to export pulp, paper, and literary talent (13). The exploitative nature of imperial copyright law was a major cause of the exodus of many Canadian writers and the poor state of Canada's publishing industry.<sup>3</sup> Until the 1960s and 1970s, most of Canada's trade publishing industry relied on agency publishing (a form of contract by which a Canadian publisher became the exclusive source or agency in Canada for the titles published by a British or American press) for income to publish Canadian titles. Under these conditions, it was hard for any writer, but especially for an Aboriginal or "mixed-blood" woman writer, to find profitable publishing venues. Charlotte Gray notes in *Flint & Feather: The Life and Times of E. Pauline Johnson, Tekahionwake* that the financial security Johnson eventually achieved through print publication at the end of her life was largely due to the Vancouver women's organizations that publicized both her work and her plight as a terminally

ill woman (384). With their help, *Legends of Vancouver*, *The Shagganappi*, and *The Moccasin Maker* were published and reached high sales within less than two years (between 1911 and 1913).

Seen from the dominant, European print-based perspective, Johnson undoubtedly had a hard time getting published and making a living from her writing. Seen from an alternative, non-print-based perspective, however, she marketed and published herself extremely successfully. Admittedly, sales of her print-published poetry, stories, and journal contributions did not pay much. Yet, she made an independent living from her performative way of publishing, that is, from her stage recitals. In order to support herself as a writer, Johnson, for the most part of her life, toured across Canada, the United States, and England performing her poetry and stories in drawing-rooms, theatres, roadhouses, and church halls.<sup>4</sup> Her performances paid the print publication costs of the poetry collections *The White Wampum* (1895) and *Canadian Born* (1903). It should also be noted that in subsidizing her career as a poet, Johnson did nothing exceptional. This practice was common even among her more privileged male fellow poets. Duncan Campbell Scott and Archibald Lampman, for instance, worked as civil servants in Ottawa and Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman went to the U.S., “where they depended on various editorial positions, personal patrons, and, in Roberts’s case, a substantial output of saleable fiction” (Strong-Boag and Gerson 138). Johnson did not have the privilege of these options, but, as Brant says, she knew how to tell a good story (15) and capitalized on that by taking her work to the public and performing it. What is significant, though, is that she made popular use of Aboriginal storytelling without trying to authenticate it. Johnson was an Aboriginal-English hybrid and a woman born in an age of modernity, and so her oral publishing venues were also hybrid and modern.

This becomes especially evident when we consider Johnson’s stage persona and, in particular, the elaborate buckskin dress in which she presented her dramatic poems and stories about Aboriginal subjects (see picture below). For the first half of a performance, Johnson usually wore her Aboriginal dress and presented from her Aboriginal repertoire, whereas in the second half, she reappeared in a Victorian-style evening gown and recited patriotic poems, such as “The Song My Paddle Sings.” The fact that she had her Aboriginal dress made specifically for the purpose of performance suggests that she did not already possess a Mohawk garment or did not want to wear it for that occasion.<sup>5</sup> It suggests that she was not intending to represent some kind of Mohawk or, for that matter, Aboriginal “authenticity” but preferred to mix and match according to what would suit the

liking of her Canadian, English, and American audiences, that is, the popular European stereotype of the “Indian Princess.” Johnson got the inspiration for her costume from an illustration of the fictional “Indian Maiden” Minnehaha featured in Longfellow’s poem “Hiawatha.” Gray notes that the material for the dress came from a variety of sources: William Lighthall sent her accessories from “Indian Stores” in Montreal and Charles Mair from Prince Albert; the Hudson’s Bay Company in Winnipeg provided the dress and moccasins; and Johnson herself made several alterations and decorated the outfit with her grandmother’s silver trade brooches, her father’s hunting knife, a Huron scalp from her grandfather, and a scarlet blanket on which the Duke of Connaught had stood on his visit to the Six Nations Reserve (157-59). The outfit was “an entirely synthetic creation” (159).



Pauline Johnson Archive, McMaster University, Box 6, File 6

Rick Monture argues in “Beneath the British Flag’: Iroquois and Canadian Nationalism in the Work of Pauline Johnson and Duncan Campbell Scott” that Johnson’s choice and succession of costumes was meant to “symbolize the process of Native assimilation into Canadian mainstream society” (123). It “somehow negat[ed] the reality of Native oppression and subjugation, as if all was forgotten and forgiven. Her performances could also have been interpreted as implying that all Native people would simply be better off if they would adapt to Euro-Canadian ways like the poet” (129). Strong-Boag and Gerson as well as Fiamengo agree that Johnson’s investment in the Eurocentric romantic distortions and stereotyped expectations of “Nativeness” played into the interests of dominant EuroCanadian nationalism and (unwittingly) entangled her in the dissemination of prejudices against her father’s people. However, when talking about Johnson’s choice of costumes, and in particular about her choice of Aboriginal costume, one also needs to take into consideration that in her eclectic assemblage of Aboriginal attire she was playing with Europeans’s expectations of “Indians” and with her own hybrid heritage in order to create a unique stage persona. Johnson’s appearance was, in particular, challenging popular White<sup>6</sup> writers’ depictions and audiences’s expectations of Aboriginal women as subservient, lovelorn, and suicidal “squaws” addicted to White men. In “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction,” which was originally published in *The Toronto Globe* in 1892, she alludes to the writers Charles Mair and Helen Hunt Jackson in her attack on this stereotyped misrepresentation of Aboriginal women. While her critique of Jackson is scathing, she notes rather sadly that even her friend and Aboriginal advocate Mair reverts to the stereotype of the “Indian squaw” in the conclusion to his play *Tecumseh*. Not only was her Aboriginal dress *consciously* “inauthentic,” but it was worn by a part-Aboriginal woman who mastered both the English language and the art of poetry and fiction better than many of her White contemporaries. Moreover, in her time, several Aboriginal performers, lecturers, and activists made use of this precarious, double-edged combination of Aboriginal costume and English word/performance platform to fight for Aboriginal rights and to define their cultures to White audiences. Among them were such diverse characters as Buffalo Bill Cody whose Wild West Show had international success, the Métis leader Gabriel Dumont who performed with Buffalo Bill Cody, the Mohawk writer and actor John Ojiatekha Brant-Sero, the prominent writer and lecturer George Copway, and the female reformers and activists Catherine Soneegoh Sutton, Sarah Winne-mucca, Susette La Flesche, and Zitkala-Ša.

When talking about Johnson's particular choice of costumes, we should furthermore keep in mind that, as Gray points out, her "evening gown was as much a theatrical costume as the native outfit" (160). Johnson used the elegant, demure Victorian costume to counter the stigma of "moral laxity" attributed to the profession of acting, especially when exercised by a woman whose social role was still largely confined to the private, domestic sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Blending literary and acting talents, she occupied the boundaries of a profession that was firmly grounded in the male-dominated public sphere and considered morally taboo for women. As Marcus van Steen notes in *Pauline Johnson: Her Life and Work*, while even world-famous male writers such as Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and Sir Harry Lauder toured North America with readings from their works in the early and mid-nineteenth century, it was practically unheard of for a woman writer to do so (18). Hence, even without reference to her Aboriginal background, Johnson was unique among women writers of her time in her decision to perform on stage. Seen from this perspective, her decision to appear in a Victorian gown for the second half of her performances was as much conditioned by her containment in the gender roles and expectations of her time as it was by her ambivalent cultural-racial affiliations. Promoters and reviewers of her work conspicuously refrained from linking her with both the profession of acting and Aboriginal women activists (e.g. Winnemucca, La Flesche, Zitkala-Ša) who toured major American cities advocating Aboriginal rights by means of performance. They rather emphasized her status as one of North America's leading poets, thus situating her in the relatively more private literary realm and outside the public realms of the theatre and Aboriginal politics.

However, as already highlighted, Johnson's literary persona is irreducible to the designation of woman poet/writer. She was a poet-performer-reformer who blurred traditional Aboriginal storytelling, popular European performance, "serious" poetry/fiction, and advocacy of woman's and Aboriginal rights. Her performative persona signifies a clear challenge to binarist evaluations of her work, such as van Steen's observation that "her tours were a handicap to the development of her genius" (25). Van Steen sides with many critics of Johnson's day when he argues that "apart from the deadening of the creative spirit in the tiring pressures and confusion of constant travelling, her platform appearances encouraged Pauline to write a great deal of shallow verse on contemporary topics ... far from being the stuff out of which lasting literature is made" (25). Johnson's second book of poetry, *Canadian Born*, was harshly criticized



for abandoning the exclusive domain of elite literary sophistication; it contained both “highbrow” verse and “lowbrow” stage recitations. Like many literary critics of his own and Johnson’s time, van Steen asserts that Johnson could have made a more significant contribution to Canadian literature had she not toured, because then she could have developed her creative literary genius. His assessment firmly subscribes to the Eurocentric, elitist norm of what constitutes “good” Canadian literature, of how that literature is created (namely sitting, alone, with pen and paper), published (namely in print), and consumed (namely in solitude, reading from the printed page). It displays the modernist notion of the individualistic, solitary author-genius who alone can write “great,” “lasting” literature, which is captured in the “lasting” form of print.

Consequently, van Steen does not consider Johnson’s oral performance of her writing a contribution to Canadian literature but “mere” popular entertainment. His views reflect the values of a privileged man who, unlike Johnson, had the choice to move solely in elite intellectual circles. Another such man whom Johnson confronted directly was her friend, the barrister and editor Harry O’Brien. Responding to O’Brien’s criticism of the lack of poetic sophistication in *Canadian Born*, she wrote in a letter dated 4 February 1894: “the public ... will in fact not have me as an entertainer if I give them nothing but rhythm, cadence, beauty, thought. You will not like your friend ... to bend to public favour ... and yet you know that thanks to your guiding star and saint you have never experienced my reason for this vulgar ‘catering’ to an applauding crowd” (qtd. in Petrone 82). Counter to van Steen’s assessment, this quotation stresses that Johnson was a woman writer who succeeded in the male-dominated, Eurocentric world of “literature” by being both lyrical and colloquial, performative and print-based, sentimental and political. It is in this very “otherness” that her work makes a significant contribution to Canadian literature and to what we consider to be literary publication. In her day, Johnson performed alongside some of Canada’s leading literary figures (e.g. with Lampman, Scott, Lighthall, and Agnes Maule Machar in “An Evening with Canadian Poets”) and was considered a member of the group of what is now termed “Confederation poets.” Six decades later, Malcolm Ross’s work *Poets of the Confederation* reduced early Canadian lyric poetry to the four White men Roberts, Carman, Lampman, and Scott. Strong-Boag and Gerson consider *Poets of the Confederation* to be “the single most powerful contribution to the erasure of women poets like Johnson from Canada’s literary canon” (123). Published at the height of elitist literary modernism and academic high modernism in Canada,

Ross's book is representative of a time that indiscriminately dismissed the literary significance of popular women writers (such as Johnson, Nellie McClung, L.M. Montgomery, Marshall Saunders, and Marjorie Pickthall) and Aboriginal people, which were downgraded to remnants of a prehistoric past.

Strong-Boag and Gerson aptly state that by "simultaneously reinforcing and disturbing colonial authority" (185), Johnson "became expert in invoking the unsettling potential of simultaneity" (180) as Aboriginal and European poet-entertainer, as Aboriginal woman and White colonial, as promoter of the imperial connection and angry critic of the British and North American domination of Aboriginal peoples. This simultaneity could mean, for instance, that she vehemently condemned stereotypes that categorized and diminished Aboriginal people in the poems "A Cry from an Indian Wife," "As Red Men Die," "The Cattle Thief," and "The Corn Husker," while she performed in stereotyped Aboriginal attire and dedicated her poetry collection *Flint and Feather: The Complete Poems of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)* to the Duke of Connaught (Queen Victoria's son Arthur). As Fiamengo notes, her "entanglements in the prejudices of her age" (175) were always entwined with her significant challenge to the colonization of Aboriginal people and to gender injustices. Faced with the Dominion's small markets and colonial attitudes as well as with her own financial instability and ambivalent positioning in Canadian society, Johnson developed performance strategies that complied with "the practical realities of someone trying to make a living as a Canadian writer" (Strong-Boag and Gerson 200). Though she wrote strong criticism of the European treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, she finessed it in a heroic, poetic form that was familiar and not insulting to her predominantly White audiences. As A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff's comparison of the fictional writings of Johnson, S. Alice Callahan, and Zitkala-Ša points out,<sup>7</sup> this way of communication was not uncommon among early Aboriginal women authors writing in English. They wrote within the tradition of sentimental fiction, while using it as a platform for Aboriginal and women's rights (Ruoff 92). Blurring domestic romance and political protest, they caught the critical attention and favor of their audiences and reviewers alike. In Johnson's case, it also won her important connections with powerful, moneyed men such as the editor of *Saturday Night* Hector Charlesworth, Deputy Lord Chamberlain of London, the novelist Charles Hamilton Aidé, and Canadian High Commissioner Lord Strathcona.

By the time Johnson made a reputation as one of North America's

finest entertainers and performers, she was already well known in the general press and in literary circles as a poet and writer. A contemporary and friend from their Brantford school-days, journalist and writer Sara Jeannette Duncan, already remarked in an 1886 article in *The Toronto Globe* that “Miss Johnson’s literary work is familiar to all readers of *The Week* in Canada, and to no small public on ‘the other side.’” In 1895, Charlesworth noted that “for the past five years Miss Pauline Johnson has been the most popular figure in Canadian literature, and in many respects the most prominent one” (*Canadian Magazine*). *The Magnet Magazine* stated in an 1897 editorial that “her name is already known all over Canada and the States.... She is, perhaps, distinguished as the most unique figure in the literary world of today” (qtd. in Sheila Johnston 143). Johnson had many prominent supporters of her work, including Duncan, suffragist and writer Nellie McClung, Canada’s first women’s-page editor Kit Coleman, naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton, poet Charles G.D. Roberts, her uncle and famous American author William Dean Howells, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, and Premier Sir Charles Tupper. In Canada, she contributed to the anthologies *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889, edited by Lighthall) and *Later Canadian Poems* (1893, edited by J.E. Wetherell). In 1918, she appeared in the first US anthology of North American Aboriginal verse, *The Path on the Rainbow*.<sup>8</sup> Her numerous publications in *The Mother’s Magazine*, *Boys’ World*, *The American Boy*, and *Outing* made her one of the most widely-read Aboriginal writers in the US, which provided a crucial market not only for Johnson but for Canadian writers more generally. Throughout the US, Canada, and England, she was acknowledged as one of the first (and few) Aboriginal writers in North America who wrote in English about Aboriginal issues in poetry and fiction. Albeit situated within the sentimental tradition, her poetry/writing became a principal medium for demonstrating the intellectual and creative abilities of Aboriginal people and unmasking White injustices and images of the “dying race.”

It is crucial to acknowledge that Johnson’s practical-economic necessities had a considerable influence on this seemingly paradoxical function of her writing. English and North American reviewers and audiences of her work encouraged and expected a romanticized, heroic depiction of her Aboriginal heritage, which allowed them to indulge sentiment for the “Indian race” (after having subjugated it) and nostalgia about a lost, pre-industrial past. As Strong-Boag and Gerson note, “The imperial metropolis’s fascination with the relatively exotic aspects of the former colony would contribute substantially to Johnson’s ... self-dramatization for her

British audiences" (102). A poetess as long as print remained her primary medium, Johnson acquired the name "The Mohawk Princess" when she turned to the stage (Johnson herself adopted the Aboriginal name of her grandfather, Tekahionwake, who was known as a great storyteller and orator among his people). The degree of her dependence on British approval becomes especially clear when one considers that she eventually was unable to settle down in London as a full-time writer when her health was failing, because "English magazines did not take any of her work during a second tour she made there" (McMaster University, "E. Pauline Johnson's Career"; also Gray 337).

Johnson's correspondence with magazines and newspapers makes it clear that not only audiences and reviewers but also editors in her day had specific, stereotyped expectations of "Native life" and "Canada," which they expected of her as conditions for being considered for publication.<sup>9</sup> For example, Elizabeth Ansley, associate editor of the American magazines *Boys' World* and *The Mother's Magazine* to which Johnson was a regular contributor, noted in a business letter that "we might also be able to use one or two short stories . . . weaving in some of the beautiful Indian legends, so interesting and inspiring to boy readers" (letter dated 15 October 1905). In another letter (dated 8 November 1905) she wrote that "what we are in need of are good Canadian stories. We have experienced considerable difficulty in producing Canadian stories with the real patriotic ring — stories where the loyalty does not seem forced." I found similar stereotyped requests for Aboriginal, patriotic, nature, outdoors, and travel stories from the editors of the London-based journal *Black & White* and the American paper *The Buffalo Morning Express*. McMaster's archival material further reveals that she published these kinds of stories in *Saturday Night* (Canadian) and *Harper's Weekly* (American). Commenting on the relationship between Johnson and her audiences in *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, Daniel Francis notes that "celebrity Indians were chosen by Whites" (142). Brought up in an Aboriginal-English family with "the appropriate manners for genteel socializing" (119) and a loyalist political attitude, Johnson presented an Aboriginal persona that appealed to late nineteenth-century Euro-Canadian and English society. Clearly, the expectations brought to her by White editors, reviewers, audiences, and peers had a considerable influence on her literary creativity and voice.

Most likely, they also influenced her vision or at least the expression of her vision of Canada. As Monture points out, Johnson rose to prominence as a poet and writer when Canada had just become a Dominion

and was attempting to create its own national literature and identity, an endeavour to which the theme of EuroCanadian-Aboriginal encounter became immensely important. According to Monture, “Johnson must have appeared in many ways to be the ideal, assimilated Native person due to her mixed-blood ancestry, education, and embracing of a Canadian identity” (125). Her vision of Canadian-Aboriginal relations embraced the integrative agenda of the newly-formed Department of Indian Affairs, led by Duncan Campbell Scott. Echoing her father’s political standing as loyalist Mohawk chief and government interpreter, her writing aimed at joining Six Nations and Canadian interests under the banner of a shared Loyalist history. Johnson’s loyalty to the British Crown and optimistic view of empire “reflected her hope for a multinational state united by a common allegiance to a set of ethical principles embodied in the monarchy and its institutions . . . a nationality which would embrace the difference of the First Nations” (Strong-Boag and Gerson 10-11). Complex and contradictory, loyal to the Crown and to her Aboriginal heritage, Johnson’s writing challenged European stereotypes of and racism against Aboriginal peoples by echoing a language familiar to her readers — the language of British social and political values. It is in this respect that she resembles Native American women activists and journalists of her time — such as Angel De Cora, Zitkala-Ša, Laura Cornelius Kellog, and Louise Johnson Bear. In “‘Overcoming all Obstacles’: The Assimilation Debate in Native American Women’s Journalism of the Dawes Era,” Carol Batker demonstrates that the latter were similarly ambivalent and contradictory, arguing for both tribal rights and many of the assimilationist policies of the Dawes era in their attempts “to represent Native culture as adaptive and relevant to American society” (201).

In “Aboriginal Peoples’ Estrangement: Marginalization in the Publishing Industry,” Greg Young-Ing points out that Johnson

holds the distinction of being the Aboriginal author who gained the highest level and notoriety in the literary world and sold the most books in Canada. However, the ‘Pauline Johnson phenomenon’ was not to be a catalyst that would open up the Canadian publishing industry to Aboriginal literature. In hindsight, her success must be viewed as an aberration. After Pauline Johnson’s untimely death in 1913, almost six decades were to pass before another Aboriginal author would be published in Canada. (182)

Young-Ing is the managing editor of Theytus Books in Penticton, BC, one of Canada’s few publishers under full Aboriginal ownership and con-

trol. I fully agree with him that Aboriginal literature has for the longest time been blocked out of Canadian publishing and that it took until the “Red Power” movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Ward Churchill and Howard Adams) for Aboriginal writers to re-enter the world of Canadian print and to be recognized on their own right. The same situation applies to the United States. While Maria Campbell’s autobiography *Half-breed*, which was published by McClelland and Stewart in 1973, broke ground in Canada, Navarro Scott Momaday’s novel *House Made of Dawn* did so in the US just a couple of years earlier, in 1968, when it was published by Harper and Row. So while Johnson may not have been a catalyst that opened up the Canadian and American publishing industries to Aboriginal literature, her boundary-blurring approaches to publishing indeed seem to have anticipated the work of contemporary Aboriginal editors and presses such as Young-Ing and Theytus Books. Like Johnson’s practice of publica(c)tion, the latter make use of both Ab-original and European methods, editorial principles, and literary traditions.<sup>10</sup> In other words, as an Aboriginal publisher Theytus Books does not discount the conventions and routines of European print publishing *per se* but uses them where applicable in the Aboriginal context, thus resituating Aboriginal stories, languages, images, texts, and publishing processes within Aboriginal control.

Considering that Aboriginal print publishing was nonexistent at the time Johnson wrote, her approach can be regarded as truly forward-looking and alternative. She could not be stopped in her career as a storyteller-writer-performer when she encountered the financial, material obstacles of print publication, which were European-made obstacles she circumvented by reverting to alternative methods of publication. It is in this sense that her practice of publica(c)tion anticipates the publishing venues of many contemporary Aboriginal women writers/poets (e.g., Lee Maracle, Beth Brant, Beth Cuthand, Joy Harjo), publishers (e.g., Theytus Books, Pemmican Publications, Kegedonce Press), and playwrights. Like Johnson, Aboriginal playwrights seem to work within the parameters of European cultural expression — theatre and performance art — constantly manoeuvring between containment and deviation/alternative. In “Hybridity and Mimicry in the Plays of Drew Hayden Taylor,” Robert Nunn describes this mode of Aboriginal performativity in terms of “walking a ... risky line between borrowing from mainstream popular culture in order to make it speak to the condition of Native peoples, and producing work that mainstream white audiences can enjoy” (105). Playwrights such as Tomson Highway, Drew Hayden Taylor, Daniel David Moses,

Monique Mojica, and Ian Ross share with Johnson a literary approach that blends Eurocentric notions of “high”/elite and “low”/popular cultural expression. In *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, for example, Highway “combines mystic juke boxes, country-and-western hit songs, and an amateur hockey league with evocations of Greek drama and Shakespearean comedy” (Nunn 103). In Johnson’s case, “high” and “low” combined in the stage performance of her Victorian romantic poetry, the dramatization of her short stories, and the wearing of costumes that catered to both popular and elite tastes. However, unlike contemporary Aboriginal playwrights and writers-performers, Johnson did not have the mixed (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) audiences that would have rendered her performative manifestations “inevitably political” (Nunn 116) and created opportunities of non-Eurocentric reception. Being assessed on the mere basis of Eurocentric literary tastes and norms (by her English, EuroCanadian, and EuroAmerican audiences, critics, and editors), the disruptive potential of her publica(c)tion was often lost on her contemporaries.

In the introduction to their essay collection *Talking on the Page: Editing Aboriginal Oral Texts*, Laura Murray and Keren Rice note that “many Native people fear the loss of control that comes with the reproduction of their words, on tape or on paper, because they have seen the dire legal effects of having their words misconstrued (or at least reconstrued with other people’s interests in mind) in treaties and court decisions, and the crippling cultural effects of having their songs and histories reduced to quaint fairy tales or parables” (xiii). At the same time, many Aboriginal people also recognize that “words not made public cannot serve to combat misunderstandings and ignorance in the general population; nor can they inform and encourage Native people” (xiv). Commenting on the founding reason for the En’owkin International School of Writing<sup>11</sup> in an interview conversation with Hartmut Lutz, the School’s director Jeannette Armstrong maintains that for Aboriginal people living in Canada’s literate, print-based society, where the written word is a key source of authority and power, reading, writing, editing, and publishing are indispensable skills (Lutz 27-28). They are prerequisites for and agents of Aboriginal self-determination. It is through the written word that Aboriginal people gain access to and participate in Canada’s public spheres of opinion- and decision-making. Armstrong argues for the critical acquisition and use of literacy — that is, for a form of learning, teaching, writing, and reading

that challenges the dominant Eurocentric dimensions of literary practice and creates decolonized alternatives. For Armstrong and many other Aboriginal writers, teachers, and critics, it is a matter of negotiating against the authority of the written tradition while being engaged in it, of creating new literary practices by struggling against and within their established structures and images.<sup>12</sup> Their contemporary literary struggles resemble Johnson's in many ways: her boundary-blurring publica(c)tion, her challenge to European norms of what constitutes "good" or "real" literature, and, not least, her choice of the print medium as an avenue to cultural and political agency. In conversation with Lutz, Young-Ing declares that "we [Aboriginal writers, students, teachers, critics, and publishers] can learn a lot from her [Johnson's] dichotomy of world views, the confusion that she was going through. That is what our people were going through at that time, and still are to a lesser degree" (Lutz 119).

Non-Aboriginal literary scholars can also learn a lot from Johnson's boundary-blurring, ambivalent literary persona. This paper has demonstrated that her crossing of the print boundaries and binaries of "high" and "low" literature of her time was and still is deeply unsettling to the dominant Eurocentric notions of Canadian literature and how that literature should be written, published, consumed, defined, and studied. In "Socially Responsible Criticism: Aboriginal Literature, Ideology, and the Literary Canon," Jo-Ann Episkew maintains that it is crucial for Canadian literary critics of Aboriginal texts to take into account that the latter's supposed lack of elitism and sophistication in the Western sense reflects the economic, social, and political realities of colonization. Episkew draws attention to the fact that most early Aboriginal writers (including Johnson) "were not well-educated and could not be expected to be familiar with the language of academia" (53). Johnson's "education" consisted of two years at the reserve school and another two at Brantford Collegiate. It was her mother who introduced her to the Victorian romantic and sentimental poetry of such renowned men as Robert Browning, John Keats, and Lord Tennyson, after whom she fashioned her own poetic mode. The contemporary playwright Drew Hayden Taylor notes in "Storytelling to Stage: The Growth of Native Theatre in Canada" that one of the reasons he became a playwright was that he was never given the opportunity to develop his literary skills in the course of the "spotty education that has been granted to Native people by the government and various religious institutions ... I write the way people talk, and the way people talk is not always grammatically correct, therefore I can get away with it" (140).<sup>13</sup>



One might argue, then, that the choice of genre, literary technique, transmission, and audience of both contemporary and past Aboriginal writers brings to the fore the material inequalities that underlie the dominant Eurocentric notions of “high” vs. “low” literature, oral vs. written communication, and Western vs. non-Western cultural expression. It is these material inequalities Johnson had to juggle as an unmarried, “mixed-blood” woman who was trying to make an independent living as a writer in a society dominated by White men. This paper’s focus on Johnson’s publishing venues has brought to the fore some of these material contexts, as well as their influence on her ambivalent Aboriginal, national, and imperial affiliations and literary persona. I would agree with Strong-Boag and Gerson that “however flawed, deferential, and incomplete her formulation, Johnson challenged a prevailing view of Canada, which, like that of the other dominions, granted superior privileges to European settlers” (184). Taking into account her popularity in the US, this statement can be said to apply to both North American settler states. Furthermore, I would add that however flawed, deferential, and incomplete, Johnson’s presence as a publica(c)tive and self-sufficient woman also challenged the dominant European notions of the “serious” writer/poet, the domestic woman, and the equation of literature and print. Like the advocates of both women’s and Aboriginal rights of her time (e.g. McClung, Duncan, Callahan, Zitkala-Ša, La Flesche, Sutton, Winnemucca), Johnson recorded and publicly questioned existing gender and racial prejudices and oppressions. Her uniqueness and significance lies in the way her persona blurred these complex positions: the turn-of-the-century independent woman, the “serious” poet, the popular female performer, the Aboriginal advocate of “mixed blood,” and the loyalist Canadian subject. As shown in this paper, her practice of publica(c)tion constitutes an important and hitherto neglected instance of this blurring of the Aboriginal and European, popular and elite, as well as material and symbolic dimensions of her identity.

#### AUTHOR’S NOTE

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This practice of self-financed publishing was nothing exceptional in the late nineteenth century. For instance, in a letter to Johnson dated 8 January 1913, Briggs points out to McRaye that Nellie McClung had been offered the same conditions Johnson had been when publishing a collection of short stories with the Methodist Book and Publishing House. This and all the following letters quoted are from the Pauline Johnson Archive at McMaster University, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Gray notes that magazine commissions in Canada and the US were relatively well paid but, unlike in England, still not well enough for most writers to make an independent living from them (334-35).

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Karr's study of the popular Canadian writers L.M. Montgomery, Nellie McClung, Ralph Connor, Robert Stead, and Arthur Stringer in *Authors and Audiences* provides a detailed analysis of the unsettled nature of Canadian copyright legislation and publishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson gave her first poetry recitals in 1892 ("An Evening with Canadian Poets") and her touring career lasted for 15 years. Without motion pictures, television, and radio, performance-entertainment was extremely popular.

<sup>5</sup> Gray notes that Johnson came from the "most Europeanized Indian reserve in Canada" (161) where by the late nineteenth century "almost all the women ... preferred full-skirted European skirts and gowns" (157).

<sup>6</sup> By capitalizing the adjectives White and Aboriginal, I want to stress that their usage does not serve as a "racial" marker or distinguisher but rather relates to the wider socio-cultural and historic-political contexts, conflicts, and asymmetries that are implied in such a designation and distinction.

<sup>7</sup> Ruoff notes that Callahan's *Wynema* (1891) "is probably the first novel by a woman author of American Indian descent" (90). Apart from being a prominent activist and president of the National Congress of American Indians, Zitkala-Ša also published autobiographical articles and fiction (e.g., in *Harper's Magazine*, Ruoff 99, 103).

<sup>8</sup> This dual designation as both a Canadian and a U.S. poet/writer has survived until today. For instance, Johnson can be found in *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (Atwood) and *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States* (Davidson et al.), in *Native Literature in Canada* (Petrone), and *Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature, 1900-1970* (Allen).

<sup>9</sup> As Harold Innis points out in *The Strategy of Culture*, poetry, short stories, and even fiction were then still largely published in periodicals and magazines, which were dictated to a large extent by advertising demands.

<sup>10</sup> Theytus makes popular use of traditional Aboriginal storytelling, however, without trying to make it "authentic." The press frames storytelling as a blend of contemporary and traditional-oral literary techniques. For a more detailed account of the publishing practices and principles that constitute Theytus Books' operations, see Young-Ing's "Aboriginal Text."

<sup>11</sup> The En'owkin International School of Writing is part of the En'owkin Center in Penticton, which houses the Okanagan Learning Institute, Theytus, and its Aboriginal wholesale and distribution company Access Distribution.

<sup>12</sup> The increase in critical attention to Aboriginal and postcolonial literary activity since the 1980s has initiated a dynamic debate on the relationship between speech/oral performance and writing. In the context of Aboriginal writing, Julie Cruikshank, Emma LaRoque,

Gloria Anzaldúa, Gerald Vizenor, Arnold Krupat, and Brian Swann have contributed significantly to this discussion in North America. In the context of postcolonial literature, the issue has been shaped by the pioneering work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, E.K. Braithwaite, and Chinua Achebe as well as by the work of contemporary critics such as Ismail Talib and Patsy Daniels.

<sup>13</sup> Today, one can find Aboriginal performance groups all across Canada, including the renowned theater company Native Earth Performing Arts Co. and the Centre for Indigenous Theatre in Toronto.

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