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Review of Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography

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ography is Western by relating how Native Americans have traditionally told their personal narratives through "stories, pictographs, and performances." The purpose of the book is to utilize contemporary autobiographical theory to trace the changes in Native American autobiography from pre-contact forms to contemporary styles. Wong is interested in enlarging the field of autobiographical studies to include non-written forms of narrative as well as non-Western conceptions of self.

The book is organized into four sections. The first presents Wong's theoretical framework and explains Native American conceptions of self, life, and language. The other divisions are organized historically, beginning with oral and pictographic narratives from the pre-contact period. The next segment deals with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century transitional period. The third section, the contemporary period, peruses both oral narratives and written autobiographies.

Throughout the book, Wong applies autobiographical theory to non-written forms of personal narrative. Wong argues that the exclusion of oral and pictographic expressions as legitimate forms of autobiography is an ethnocentric bias of Euro-American culture. Wong's discussion of pictographs and other visual arts as a component of native self-expression is engrossing. She traces the continuation of pictographic forms from early painted buffalo hide tepees, through the sketch books of imprisoned Indian men during the 1870s, to the contemporary work of N. Scott Momaday who modifies traditional modes of personal narrative, including pictographic sketches in his book *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Wong demonstrates that non-written sources of personal narrative survive as important means of communication to Native American people and that this pictography can be considered a type of literacy "if we acknowledge indigenous sign systems and do not insist, like some scholars, on the superiority of alphabetic literacy" (p. 87).

Wong also asserts that literary studies of autobiographies must include non-western

Sending My Heart Back Across the Years: Tradition and Innovation in Native American Autobiography. By Hertha Wong. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. x + 246 pp. \$35.00.

In *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years*, Hertha Wong, an assistant professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, expands the definition of autobiography to include non-Western self-expressions. The author lays to rest the assumption that autobi-

conceptions of self. Euro-American autobiography treats the autonomous individual, but Native American autobiographies emphasize the communal and the stories are organized as a series of anecdotal moments rather than a chronological sketch of one's life. Self to Native Americans is defined by community and landscape. A person is first and foremost a member of a family and a community. There is always an emphasis on participation within the tribe. There is also an intimate connection to the landscape or homeland. To be a complete person, one can not separate him or herself from the landscape; the landscape determines the sense of identity as strongly as the community.

Euro-Americans and Native Americans also perceive language differently. Language is divine in the minds of Native Americans.

"To speak is not a casual affair, but a holy action . . ."

Overall this is an exceptional book, beautifully written, well researched, and a pleasure to read.

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