

**STRONG MOHAWK WOMAN:  
PAULINE JOHNSON'S  
LITERARY LEGACY**

**BY**

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B.A.**

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## ABSTRACT

To celebrate Pauline Johnson and the literary legacy she has left for contemporary Native authors is the primary aim of my thesis. Though breast cancer took her life in 1913, she nevertheless remains a living legend through biographies, scholarly writings, and words of fiction. My thesis pivots on two main questions: how do Native readers interpret Johnson's texts, and what is her continuing legacy for Native women?

The trend in Western scholarship has been to interpret the various ways in which Pauline Johnson "conformed" to the stereotypes which sought to confine Native womanhood during her lifetime. My method, however, seeks Pauline Johnson's power as an *agent*. Pauline Johnson did not conform to stereotypes; she struggled to reconfigure the racist categories which reduced Native womanhood to various "squaw" or "princess" types. Through Johnson's strategic cultural negotiations, she rehabilitated the term "squaw," and transformed the view of the passive-princess image into one of activity. In doing so, Johnson celebrated multiple **stages** of Native womanhood and the natural progression from youth to old age; therefore, my thesis is written in a manner which reflects this process.

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*In Loving Memory of*

Bunny Brant-Corneau  
1936-1993

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## INTRODUCTION

### PAULINE JOHNSON: RECLAIMING THE DRUM

So long, the Woman's Drum  
has been quiet  
while Women looked to Men  
for the Teachings.  
Now, the realization comes  
to seek Women  
for the Sacred Teachings  
of the Creation. ...

So long, the Woman's Drum  
has been alone  
kept in the back of minds  
silent in the Spirit.  
Now, comes the time  
to pick up the Drum  
to sing the Healing Songs  
of the Women's Way. ...

- Skyblue Mary Morin  
"The Woman's Drum"  
(excerpts)

E. Pauline Johnson (1861-1913) continues to be a legend. In his recent novel Green Grass, Running Water (1994), Thomas King has included a comic version of the immortal Mohawk poet. The four icons

of Canadian literary history--Susanna Moodie, John Richardson, Grey Owl and Pauline Johnson, (sporting the name tag "Polly")--exit a bus and arrive at the Dead Dog Café on a Blackfoot Reservation.<sup>1</sup> The Pauline Johnson character has few lines, yet these are significant. Complaining that her books are no longer being read, along with the tip, she leaves a copy of The Shagganappi<sup>2</sup> (155-9).

How do we interpret this incident? This question is pressing for me as a young Mohawk and French woman. Thomas King is clearly prompting us to read Johnson's writings.<sup>3</sup> Nor is King the only Native writer to evoke the cultural legacy of Pauline Johnson, or as she was also known, Tekahionwake. (The Mohawk prefix "teka" means "double," and thus implies Johnson's double nature. Tekahionwake means Double Wampum, and was adopted from her great grandfather)<sup>4</sup>. During the flourishing of Native literature over the past

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<sup>1</sup> Richardson's Wacousta, Moodie's Roughing it in the Bush, and Grey Owl's Tales of an Empty Cabin are among the most popular works of the Canadian canon.

<sup>2</sup> The Shagganappi was published in 1913, and was her final publication, and is the least circulated of her texts.

<sup>3</sup> Jace Weaver agrees with my interpretation, as he interprets this act as Johnson's attempt to "induce someone to read the largely forgotten volumes" (81).

<sup>4</sup> It played another important role as well, as Strong-Boag and Gerson proclaim that, "In the practice of New Woman journalism in Canada and the United States, such pseudonyms were not taken in order to disguise the author, but rather to provide her with a professional identity" (116).

twenty-five years, a number of writers have stressed the importance of Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake's inspiration for their work.<sup>5</sup> In Writing As Witness: essay and talk, Tyendinaga author Beth Brant credits Johnson with beginning "a movement that has proven unstoppable in its momentum –the movement of First Nations women to write down our stories of history, of revolution, of sorrow, of love" (5). Award winning author Lenore Keeshig-Tobias credits Pauline Johnson with giving her the courage to write<sup>6</sup>. Daniel David Moses, a Delaware who was raised on the Six Nations Reserve, translated a children's book on Johnson, La fleur des bois, by Gisele Laliberte Bezenar, into the English version, Wildflower<sup>7</sup>, suggesting that he placed importance on children learning about her life and literary contributions. While relevant to all Native women, Johnson's legacy is most direct for Mohawk women. In a video aired on Aboriginal Peoples' Television Network, Paula Whitlow, the curator at Chiefswood, Pauline's ancestral home on the Six Nations Reserve, states that "Pauline is a part of us, ... she is a role-model." My special responsibility then, and the work of this thesis, is two-fold: first,

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<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that Native visual artists such as Raymond Skye are also keeping Johnson's reputation alive. In fact, I was recently at a gala at Six Nations Polytechnic, and one of the auction items was a new portrait of Pauline Johnson!

<sup>6</sup> Beth Brant, ed. *Sweetgrass Grows All Around Her*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Woodland Cultural Centre Archives.

how do Native readers interpret Johnson's texts, and second, what is her continuing legacy for Native women?

### **1. Defining My Responsibility**

It is up to First Nations and Metis readers to interpret Johnson's body of writings from our own perspectives. It should be noted, however, that certain Canadian scholars and biographers are sharing in the responsibility of keeping Johnson's memory alive.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, with their team of meticulous investigators, B.C. scholars Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson have published the best literary history on Pauline Johnson to date. These two authors have combined their complementary talents as literary critic and historian in the creation of Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake, a study of Johnson's numerous contributions to Canadian literature in its infancy. Strong-Boag and Gerson have invested considerable effort in recovering the substantial historical content upon which the legend of Pauline Johnson is founded. Paddling Her Own Canoe includes a detailed account of the

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<sup>8</sup> Several biographies have been published, including Walter McRaye's Pauline Johnson and Her Friends (1947), Marcus Van Steen's Pauline Johnson: Her Life and Work (1965), Betty Keller's Pauline: A Biography of Pauline Johnson (1981), and Sheila Johnston's Buckskin and Broadcloth (1997), to name a few.

relationship between the two significant places of her early life: Six Nations Reserve where Pauline was raised, and Brantford, where she, her sister Evelyn and their British mother lived after the 1885 death of her father, Chief George Henry Martin Johnson. Indeed, Strong-Boag and Gerson's scholarly collection and reinterpretation of Johnson's once dispersed body of writings is an outstanding contribution towards creating new and future readers. Strong-Boag and Gerson have concluded that "the likelihood that much more may be found is rather slim" (Strong-Boag and Gerson 6). As a mixed-blood Mohawk and French woman, I am grateful that these texts are being made available to me<sup>9</sup>. We can now recognize and pay tribute to the sheer vastness of Johnson's writings, as she spanned multiple genres throughout her long, creative and productive life of writing.

As a Mohawk reader, however, I must take issue with one aspect of Strong-Boag and Gerson's study. Their main objective is to place Pauline Johnson's life and texts within the historical emergence of the "New Woman" in Canadian public life. This is indicated right from the beginning with the title, Paddling Her Own Canoe, which reminds me of the respectful comment made by Canadian author Ethel Wilson, that

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<sup>9</sup> I wish also to acknowledge my debt to Jace Weaver and Daniel Francis for their interpretive studies of Pauline Johnson.

Pauline Johnson “pursued a path of her own making ... with integrity until the last day of her life” (60). Yet, like so many other feminist titles, it also evokes Virginia Woolf’s classic feminist title, A Room of One’s Own. Throughout the text, Strong-Boag and Gerson constantly highlight Johnson’s friendships with White women, claiming that “friendships with other White women grew naturally from Pauline’s social and cultural interests” (63). As a result, she became “firmly integrated into a Euro-Canadian world-view that conveniently interpreted the noble Indian as a figment of the national past” (67). This prescriptive analysis removes Johnson from the very tradition in which I locate her.

I am going to argue in this thesis that Pauline Johnson’s text can be read from a Mohawk perspective. I consider Pauline Johnson as my ancestor, who holds vital and influential teachings to share. As Haudenosaune<sup>10</sup> people, we hold that it is a fundamental foundation for our culture, and our direct *responsibility* to consider how our actions will impact seven generations into the future. George Beaver, a Six Nations writer, explains that

in Iroquoian culture, one of the primary ideas is consideration for ‘coming faces,’ the future generations. When we die our bodies

turn back to dust and we return to Mother Earth. Therefore, according to Iroquoian imagery, the unborn future generations are 'the faces coming from the ground' or simply 'the coming faces.' We who are of the present generation are supposed to look ahead seven generations into the future and ensure that our own short span here on this planet in some way benefits those future 'coming faces' (10).

Today, many my age are the seventh generation to follow Pauline Johnson, and, if we consider Beaver's quotation seriously, as I do, then Johnson was both figuratively and literally writing for my generation. Pauline, my ancestor, was writing *for me*. We are always mindful, as Beth Brant reminds us, of the spirits of our ancestors, and it is with this in mind, as well as the "coming faces," that this work is undertaken. I wish to leave a small token of gratitude to Pauline, and to the coming generations. With this in mind, my primary aim as a mixed-blood intellectual is to demonstrate that an Indigenous reader may have authoritative yet alternate readings from mainstream scholars, as we continue to produce literary theories and critical modes of reading that are uniquely our own. To quote Maori intellectual Kathie Irwin, "the

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<sup>10</sup> As the Six Nations, this is our name for ourselves.

power lies with those who create the tools. We can and will do this.

The power is ours” (qtd in Smith 75).

## **2. Towards A Mixed-Blood Critical Practice**

In my intellectual work I am being called to read Johnson’s literature carefully and to interpret her for the present generation. My reading is influenced by my ancestors, by our “legacy in the blood” and our connection to ancestral “spirit lines<sup>11</sup>.” It is this legacy, manifested within instinctual communal bonds, which Beth Brant refers to when she elegantly articulates the major difference between Native women’s writing and what she titles “European based ‘literature’:

We do not write as individuals communing with a muse. We write as members of an ancient, cultural consciousness. Our ‘muse’ is *us*. Our ‘muse’ is our ancestors. Our “muse’ is our children, our grandchildren, our partners, our lovers. Our ‘muse’ is Earth and the stories She holds in the rocks, the trees, the birds, the fish, the animals, the waters. Our words come from the very place of all life, the spirits who swirl around us, teaching us, cajoling us, chastising us, loving us (10).

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<sup>11</sup> Joan Miller. Guest lecture in Indigenous Women’s Issues, July 1998.



My critical method has at least two facets: I read Johnson from a perspective of a relative, but also as an academic. The dilemma that she faced on a daily basis as a mixed-blood woman forced to negotiate two cultures is in many ways the same dilemma faced by mixed-bloods today. As my thesis will reveal, the question of what it means to be an “Indian,” and who is entitled to use this term, began before the turn of the century<sup>12</sup>. The continuing necessity to negotiate two worlds, two cultural arenas, is described by prominent Laguna Pueblo/Sioux scholar, Paula Gunn Allen:

So you see, my method is somewhat western and somewhat Indian. I draw from each, and in the end I often wind up with a reasonably accurate picture of truth. And in that context I would caution readers and students of American Indian life and culture to remember that Indian America does not in any sense function in the same ways or from the same assumptions that western systems do. Unless and until that fact is clearly acknowledged, it is virtually impossible to make much sense out of the voluminous materials available concerning American Indians (7).

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<sup>12</sup> As a mixed-blood woman, Johnson’s assumption of the role of a spokesperson for the Mohawk people is regarded favorably by all, as mixed-race elitism caused segregation. Also, for more information see Fenton and Tooker.

Allen's quotation reflects on and speaks of the balancing act that we are forced to perform in our dual role. This balancing act is reflected through the writing of Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake, and in her own regretful acknowledgment that she "could give them [her audience] so much more, if only they would let me" (qtd Weaver 83). Johnson's writing reflects her struggle to articulate and project her voice as a mixed-race woman, in order to resist and challenge the dominant discourses concerning Native women.

My critical method has also required a lot of soul-searching, as it was necessary to weigh carefully and respectfully the work that has already been done on Pauline Johnson, as well as Johnson's own words. Paula Gunn Allen is another Native academic who has written about the difficulties and the joys of such a position:

Whatever I read about Indians I check out with my inner self.

Most of what I have read –and some things I have said based on that reading- is upside down and backward. But my inner self, the self who knows what is true of American Indians because it is one, always warns me when something deceptive is going on.

And with that warning, I am moved to do a great deal of reflecting, some more reading, and a lot of questioning and observing of real live human beings who are Indian in order to

discover the source of my unease. Sometimes that confirmation comes about in miraculous ways; that's when I know guidance from the nonphysicals and the supernaturals, and that the Grandmothers have taken pity on me in my dilemma (6-7).

Basically, whatever was "at stake" for Pauline Johnson is also "at stake" for me, forcing me to examine her legacy. Does she, for instance, belong with the three icons of Canadian literature in Thomas King's novel? My aim is to participate in the movement to re-introduce her to her own people, as she herself asks when she leaves at the Dead Dog Café a copy of The Shagganappi.

One aspect of Strong-Boag and Gerson's argumentation regarding Johnson's "love affair with Canada" serves to capture her for first-wave Canadian feminists. This aim is achieved through their usurping and categorizing Johnson as a "New Woman." Specifically, they state that, "in Johnson's hands, one more New Woman had arrived, friendly and familiar enough to reassure all but the most strident of critics" (75). This assumption is based on the following passage by Johnson, which the pair also cite as proof of their claim that Johnson distanced herself from her Aboriginal persona:

For the last three years we have been owned by a big Lyceum Bureau, that trots us about the country together all winter and

half the summer, giving us fairly good salaries to amuse the public, which pays fifty cents per head nightly to hear my cousin perpetrate musical skit work, and to watch me prance about in an uncouth costume while I recite my poems (Strong-Boag and Gerson 75; *The Rudder*, 1896).

My counter-reading resists Strong-Boag and Gerson's reading of assimilation, as I locate myself in the problem. I find it difficult to believe that this passage indicates Johnson distancing herself from her "Aboriginal persona," and suggest instead that such a claim is indicative of a partial reading of Johnson's words. For instance, the term "persona" suggests that Johnson was simply performing, using her "persona" as a mask. This argument suggests that Johnson was simply masquerading as an "Indian." If we borrow Gerald Vizenor's argument that "the presence of the Indian is the absence of the Native,"<sup>13</sup> then Strong-Boag and Gerson's claim that she was distancing herself from her "Aboriginal persona" suggests in turn that she not much more than an empty husk. This aspect will be discussed in further detail in my analysis of Johnson's "The Corn Husker." If she was merely performing exoticism, and thus involved only in commodification of culture, then she is rendered dis-empowered. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses in

Decolonizing Methodologies, the stories that Indigenous peoples have to share counter those popularized by the colonizers. “These counter stories are powerful forms of resistance,” she argues (2).

In my reading of Johnson’s lengthy passage just quoted, she draws explicit attention to her internalized problems with performing “in an uncouth costume” for an audience that is, in turn, uncouth to want to watch her “prance about” wearing it. Furthermore, the “uncouth costume” referred to must be inferred as the buckskin costume of her own design that was created *not* of her own accord, but on the suggestion of Frank Yeigh, Pauline’s manager from 1892 until 1900, when he was succeeded by Charles Wurz (Keller 152). In the quoted passage, Johnson also laments the fact that, for the last three years, she has been “owned,” which may be a veiled reference to Yeigh’s claim of having “discovered” her, in turn suggesting the way that already inhabited Indigenous lands were “discovered” by Westerners, occupied, and controlled. In the words of Beth Brant,

Pauline Johnson was a Nationalist. Canada may attempt to claim her as theirs, but Johnson belonged to only one Nation, the Mohawk Nation. She wrote at great length in her poems, stories and articles about this kind of Nationalism. She had a great love

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<sup>13</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, ?.

for Canada, the Canada of oceans, mountains, pine trees, lakes, animals and birds, not the Canada of politicians and racism that attempted to regulate her people's lives" (7).

There is much more to discuss with regards to Johnson's popular stage attire, the creation and implications of this "uncouth costume," and it is indeed a major focus of this thesis<sup>14</sup>.

Aside from connections to legends which kept Johnson's mind geared towards Native issues, during Johnson's lifetime there were numerous battles between Natives and Whites which kept Indigenous issues at the forefront of her mind. The Riel Rebellion of 1885, resulting in the hanging of Louis Riel, inspired her to write "Cry From An Indian Wife." America's war with the Plains Indians and eventual surrender of Sioux Chief Crazy Horse in 1887, and Sioux Chief Sitting Bull's corresponding arrival as a fugitive in Canada were also important events. Clifford Sifton's employment in 1896 as superintendent of Indian Affairs led to unjust policies affecting "halfbreeds." Johnson was not unaware of her Mohawk blood, or of a correlated bond she felt among all Native nations. For this fact, she is not just like her contemporary white women writers. As she grew older, it seems that

her desire to record Indigenous culture grew also. Her desire was so strong, in fact, that she devoted a period of her life to recording legends dictated to her by Squamish Chief Joe Capilano, beginning in 1908, and she dictated them to Lionel Makovski, editor of the *Vancouver Province*, while dying painfully with breast cancer (Keller 160). Her choice of title was *Legends of the Squamish* in order to emphasize the Native rather than the Canadian content. It is also said that Johnson spoke fluent Mohawk and was booed off stage when she tried to recite a poem in Mohawk. “Keeping her dignity,” Beth Brant reports, “[Johnson] reminded members of the audience that she had had to learn their language, wouldn’t it be polite to hear hers? Needless to say, impoliteness won the day” (14). Such instances, which reveal that Johnson was not fully accepted by Canada, suggest that she never forgot her Indigenous heritage.

However, Johnson certainly recognized her own unique status among Indigenous crossbloods who, to quote Alanis Obomsawin, “know I’m a bridge between two worlds,<sup>15</sup>” as evidenced by Johnson’s desire for the two cultures to co-exist peacefully, and for a greater

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<sup>14</sup> However, in case my argument does not suffice, I fall back on the words of my ancestor, who once stated, “my aim, my pride and my joy is to sing the glories of my own people,” not the glories of the New Woman!

<sup>15</sup> Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada, Preface xiii.

understanding of distinct Indigenous cultures on the part of non-Native Canadians.

As Indigenous writers, academics, poets and orators, we are telling an alternate story, one that counters the dominant, largely negative images of Johnson presented by non-Native researchers. Loretta Todd, for instance, was commissioned by the History Channel to make a documentary about Johnson's life. However, this project never came to be, at least not as Todd had envisioned it, as "network hotshots involved in the project, including former CBC chairman Patrick Watson, demanded her film be revised to show a less positive portrait of Johnson. Todd was so angry that she demanded her name to be removed from the credits<sup>16</sup>." Furthermore, Todd goes on to state that, "what's remarkable about Pauline is that she'll outlast us all." The reason that Johnson will outlast us all is precisely because artists are working to immortalize her.

Today, the literature produced by Indigenous women stands as a testament to the creativity, imagination, and influence of our cultures. While Gertrude Bonnin/Zitkala-Sa (1876-1938) and Christine Quintasket/Mourning Dove (1888-1936) were active in United States

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<sup>16</sup> Edmonton Journal, "Rediscovering Pauline," Sunday, September 24, 2000, E-12.



politics and publishing, Pauline Johnson was Canada's first Indigenous woman to pick up the literary drum in order to "sing the glories of my people." This she did, as evidenced by Wilma Green's proclamation that "through her words, Pauline told the stories of her people and their struggles for existence, once reduced to the status of second class citizens in their own land" (Flint and Feather, 1). Indeed, the skillful use of literature and oratory enabled Pauline Johnson to participate in an elite literary domain dominated by White men (Strong-Boag and Gerson 14).

Resulting from the urges of respected community leaders, the number of Indigenous authors is continuously growing. At a 1992 conference of the Native American Journalists Association, Eddie Benton, an Ojibwe member of the Midewiwin, expressed the desire for those who can write to "begin telling *our* story instead of *history*" (Green 3). Pauline Johnson began writing our story by challenging non-Native conceptions of Mohawk womanhood. As an author, her agency enabled her to reconfigure the borders seeking to entrench Mohawk womanhood in Western modes of representation. As Metis architect Douglas Cardinal eloquently states,

We have been programmed for self-destruction. We must understand that a programmed inferiority complex means that

someone else has written the script. We must understand that as Native people we have one hundred percent responsibility for our lives. ... We write the script continuously (20).

Johnson recognized this fact, and demanded input into the writing of her script. To quote Paula Gunn Allen, "Native authors write out of tribal traditions, and *into them*<sup>17</sup>" (emphasis mine). What are some of the strategies in Johnson's literature that highlights her re-writing of **prescripted** roles of Mohawk womanhood, and thus negate Western images and shrewdly comment on her audiences? Aside from an examination of her script, my efforts are primarily directed towards considering *how* Johnson's script will be read, decoded, and presented to the future generations that will be left, in their own turn, to pick up the literary drum.

Along with Thomas King, playwright Monique Mojica has picked up this drum in order to keep Johnson's legacy alive. In *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, Mojica satirizes the legend of Pocahontas. In this play, Pocahontas can be found "waiting by the river for a white man to save," fawning over Captain John Smith, and "cartwheeling with the boys though she be naked underneath" (30).

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<sup>17</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, Spider Woman's Granddaughters, 5.

Mohica highlights the image of the princess as a sexualized temptress with this portrayal, in contrast to her Contemporary Women characters. With humor, Mojica teaches us to laugh at the stereotypes in order to free ourselves from the insult, and in doing so, she and Thomas King have taught me more than Strong-Boag and Gerson's account.

Johnson herself also used humor, and an example of this is the fact that, for a short time during her career, she had scalps dangling from the waist of her costume! In arguing for multiple subjectivities of Native women, Johnson challenged the representations of Native women in Western literature, and her words teach me how to read and interpret Native women's literature. In an article titled "A Strong Race Opinion on the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction," Johnson condemns Canadian authors for their pathetic, inauthentic and sloppy portraits of Indigenous women and girls. She states:

The term "Indian" signifies about as much as the term "European" but I cannot recall ever having read a story where the heroine was described as "a European." The Indian girl we meet in cold type, however, is rarely distressed by having to belong to any tribe, or to reflect any tribal characteristics. She is merely a wholesale sort of admixture of any band existing between the MicMacs of Gaspé and the Kwaw-Kwliths of British

Columbia, yet, strange to say, that notwithstanding the numerous tribes with their aggregate numbers reaching more than 122, 000 souls in Canada alone, our Canadian authors can cull from this huge revenue of character, but one Indian girl and stranger still that this lonely little heroine never had a prototype in breathing flesh and blood existence! (Qtd in Johnston 110).

Not only was Johnson critical of pan-Indianism; more directly, she resists the idea of a single category of Native womanhood. My thesis examines Johnson's careful manipulation of two specific stereotypes which seek to entrench Native womanhood, the "princess" and the "squaw," and reveals her celebration of the multiple stages of womanhood. Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong has been my guide for this undertaking:

In the Okanagan, as in many Native tribes, the order of life learning is that you are born without a sex and as a child, through learning, you move toward full capacity as either male or female. ... Finally as an elder you emerge as both male and female, a complete human, with all skills and capacities complete" (102).

In contrast to our society, where there is only one age (the reproductive age) celebrated and commodified, Armstrong presents a view that is

common to most Native philosophies; the wisdom and wholeness of the Elder. The order of human development follows a circular path, a journey of learning around the medicine wheel, and Johnson's positive representations celebrate this journey. Thus, my thesis is shaped by this path; we will first examine the "girl" figure of the "Indian Princess," then the image of the old woman "squaw," and finally, we will conclude with an analysis of "The Corn Husker."

## CHAPTER ONE:

### PAULINE JOHNSON AS STRATEGIST

**Malinche:**

They call me "Princess."  
I am a gift, claimed as value by this man in metal.  
I can change the words. I have power.  
Now I ride at the side of Cortez, the lady of the  
conquistador.  
Smart woman. I am a strategist.

- Monique Mojica  
*Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*

#### **I. The "Indian Princess" (with the low-cut dress)**

The fact that two distinct cultures claim Pauline Johnson as their own stands as a testament to her skillful cultural negotiations. During her cross-Canada tours as a poet and performer during the late 1800-early 1900s, Pauline Johnson created an image through her strategic manipulation of the "Indian Princess" trope which allowed her to be accepted by non-Native audiences as an identifiable representation of Native womanhood. Emphasizing her status as a sensual, desirable

woman, the buckskin costume of her own design was significant in promoting her career and celebrity status. While her hair was worn loose, she also utilized accessories such as feathers and necklaces to enhance her appearance, and her desirability, through her exotic stage presence. While the details of the costume creation will be analyzed in the following chapter, it must be noted here that critic George Lyon states with humor that it contained “a neckline one would not expect to see in an anthropological collection” (139). It was on the suggestion of her first manager, Frank Yeigh, that she began dressing in this “Indian costume;” Yeigh was also the one responsible for billing her as the “Mohawk Princess,” a strategic move which biographer Betty Keller refers to as “a stroke of pure genius!” (20). As a strategy for drawing crowds to her performances, it was a success, and earned Pauline Johnson a celebrity status in the literary world that was seldom attained by women, and never before by a Native author in Canada. While Johnson’s outrageous costume served to connect her to the Western notion of an “Indian” as a static type, she also exploited and reconfigured the type, thus revealing that all categories are insufficient, and constantly “under construction.”

Critics such as Daniel Francis have drawn attention to the ways in which Johnson performed the stereotype of the “Indian Princess” that

thrived during her lifetime. He claims that, “in her own life, Pauline Johnson conformed to the princess stereotype. She gave great dignity to the Native characters in her poems and stories. They appear as honourable, proud people with strong family ties and long traditions” (122). However, while she may have allowed herself to be billed as a princess, a study and analysis of her poetry will reveal that she did not “conform” to this stereotype. Rather, Johnson reconfigured the category of “Indian Princess” by revealing that the dominant categories which sought to entrench Native womanhood (namely princess and squaw) bleed together; the princess is also a warrior. If she was, as Francis claims, “pushed to the margins of society,” then she filled in the margins with her own inscriptions, her own meanings, by resisting the notions of what an Indian Princess was *supposed* to be.

The model of the Indian Princess, which “goes back to Pocahontas in Virginia and Malinche in Mexico” (Lyon 140), reveals the characteristics of Native womanhood that appealed to non-Native observers. The princess was, for the most part, supposed to be the “anti-squaw” (Francis 122). Daniel Francis records the legend of Pocahontas, the most famous case of the “princess” type, and relates the legend to Pauline Johnson:



Pauline Johnson represented a shining example of Indian womanhood for her non-Native audiences, who saw in her the personification of Pocahontas, the Indian princess. According to legend, Pocahontas saved the life of Captain John Smith, a leader of the Virginia colony, when he was threatened by her people, the Powhatan. A paragon of virtue, Pocahontas later converted to Christianity. Her marriage to John Rolfe, a White settler, helped to forge an alliance between Powhatan and the colonists. The romantic story of Pocahontas inspired countless works of art, both low and high, idealizing the image of the Indian woman. She was painted often in European dress, much as Pauline Johnson appeared on stage wearing a formal gown: the Indian turned gentlewoman. The original Miss America, Pocahontas came to represent the beautiful, exotic New World itself. Her story provided a model for the ideal merger of Native and newcomer (120-1).

This lengthy quotation is necessary as it reveals the dominant and popular characteristics of the princess trope, such as beauty, youth, nobility, and loyalty to European settlers rather than to her own people. She had European features, was gentle as opposed to “savage,” and was generally the female version of the “noble savage.” She was also docile, and, if like

the New World, then she provided an invitation to “be discovered.” The sexiness of Johnson’s buckskin costume connected her to this popular legend by emphasizing her “beautiful” and “exotic” stage presence, with just a hint of savagery, and she thus became a recognizable representation of Native womanhood by manipulating the popular images of Pocahontas.

Johnson shaped the idea of the princess in new and startling ways. For example, in Johnson’s portrayals, the princess negates her conventional role as a passively desirable object, or “temptress,” as critic Terry Goldie states. Rather, she functions as an active, desiring subject who expresses frank and open sexual desire towards her objects of interest. She becomes the spectator and thus asserts her authority. Johnson also manipulates the class coding that accompanies the notion of a princess in order to simultaneously provoke sexual desire while warding off male aggression and the abuse to which lower classes were subject. This coy action of using the privilege of class is a testament to the strategy of Johnson as princess, as will be seen in my analysis of her canoe poetry.

Pauline Johnson’s strengths as an a-typical woman are revealed in an article from the *Brantford Courier*, which boasts of Johnson’s celebrity

status in a discussion of her proposed marriage to Mr. Charles Drayton. The article states that “Mr. Drayton is the one to be pitied in this respect. He will go through life as the husband of Pauline Johnson, the Indian poetess” (Keller 61). Implicitly, this article actually reveals Johnson’s success at deflating the image of the princess, as she would be the dominant partner in the relationship. While the princess is supposed to be weaker, Johnson would instead make Drayton appear so, resulting in his need to be “pitied.” Despite Johnson’s ability to perform the “princess,” she could never completely become it due to her Native identity. It was, in fact, objections from Drayton’s family which prevented the engagement from coming to fruition.

Anti-Indigenous media propaganda during Pauline’s lifetime which supported the government’s desire to assimilate Native peoples into Canadian society contributed to an overall suspicion of any mixed-race individual. Those of a hybrid descent such as Johnson received mixed reception, sometimes accepted and sometimes not accepted as “authentic Indians” at all. In an 1885 Toronto News article, a correspondent wrote that people of mixed-race who were

reared in the ways of civilized life who gain their living by trade or in the professions, and have only the very slightest physical traces of

other than Caucasian origin, are simply masquerading when for political or self-interested purposes they write to the newspaper over barbarous polysyllabic signatures, and call themselves “Indians” (qtd Strong-Boag and Gerson 26).

Despite this angry and dismissive correspondent, Johnson’s act of adopting her great-grandfather’s name connected her to her Native heritage. Her abilities to negotiate a racist society indicate Johnson’s skill as a strategist, as she was able to play to both sides of her ancestry. The idea of what an Indian was supposed to look like is an example of the racism which Johnson was forced to contend with constantly. Biographer Betty Keller records the well-known incident in which Pauline, on board a ship home from England, has an encounter with an American tourist. Reportedly, the tourist complained that “when I asked for ice water, they looked at me as if I was some North American savage!” Pauline replied, “you know, that’s just the way they looked at me,” and proceeded to explain her status as one of those “savages,” to which the stranger responded, “why, excuse me dear, but you don’t look a bit like that!” (38-9). Whenever Johnson needed to be “rescued,” she was automatically labeled as “white.”

Nevertheless, reviewers often concentrated upon her appearance. By many accounts Johnson was incredibly beautiful, witty, humorous and charming, as her journalist friend Sara Jeanette Duncan stressed in an 1886 *Globe* article from McMaster's Archives:

She is tall and slender and dark, with grey eyes, beautifully clean cut features, black hair, a very sweet smile, and a clear, musical pleasant voice. I have always thought her beautiful and many agree with me. She has certainly that highest attribute of beauty, the rare, fine gift of expression. She is charmingly bright in conversation, and has a vivacity of tone and gesture that is almost French.

This perception of an Indian as a timeless and non-adaptable entity still survives, as evidenced by Cheryl MacDonald's article in *The Times*, published Wednesday, September 20, 1989. She writes that Johnson was "neither Indian nor a princess, to begin with, but five-eighths white, daughter of an Englishwoman and an Indian chief."

The definition of a princess stems from European views on a linear, hierarchical evolution of status, and relates to my discussion of Johnson's exotic presence. In contrast, the Iroquois Confederacy is based on the Gayaneshakgowa (Guy-on-a-la-go-wah), or the Great Law of Peace,

which was brought to the original five Nations by the Peacemaker. In 1991, it was written that “it is impossible to overstate the power of thought that came from the study of these laws. It is unparalleled by any document of political will before or since. Its underlying principle is that since vertical hierarchy breeds conflict, the Iroquois must organize their multi-complex society in a way that prevents the internal rise of hierarchy” (McNeil 79). As well, Tom Porter records the difference in the word chief from a Native versus a Western understanding:

According to our constitution, we have a chief. But the chief is not like a chief executive or commander-in-chief, as non-Indians seem to think of a chief. He does not have power or high status, like a king or a dictator. This is not the way it is with our leaders. Our term for leader comes from a root word that means nice or good, and that is what we call our leaders (qtd in McNeil 81).

The chiefs are chosen by the Clan Mothers after extensive research; the chief must, for example, have a good mind and a good spirit, and thus live in a balanced, healthy way. Johnson exploited the privileges which were associated with a princess, and yet, due to her Native heritage, was never

able to fully appreciate the benefits due to the erotic associations of the prefix, "Indian."

Although the definition of a princess was not part of her cultural legacy, Johnson complicates the class status associated with it, in order to exploit her desirability as "exotic royalty." Strong-Boag and Gerson assert that "class was an essential part of the performer's repertoire. By clinging to its privileges, she could hope to counteract other disadvantages" (70).

By 1893 Pauline Johnson had wedded her new employment as a public performer to her long-standing enthusiasm for the paddle. Respectably accompanied by her mother, 'a dear old English lady who mourns her dead Indian husband as deeply as any woman ever mourned man,' the newly minted 'Indian Princess in full costume,' as she was tagged by an American admirer, was applauded as 'very well educated and highly cultured.' Still better, she combined reminiscence of ancient origins with the right-up-to-date provocation of the New Woman in her sporting guise (Strong-Boag and Gerson 81).

This quotation reveals Johnson's carefully crafted double image; she was at once a proper "lady," with a chaperone, and yet she could also handle a canoe and demonstrated her "love for the paddle."

Another aspect that added to Johnson's persona as a princess was her adoption of her great-grandfather's Mohawk name, Tekahionwake, or "Double Wampum." As Strong-Boag and Gerson claim, the adoption of this title "gave her a professional identity." It also, however, asserted her Mohawk heritage and served to lend another spark of exotic flair to her presentation. Seeking patronage, Johnson traveled in 1894 to London, England, to be introduced to its "elegant people." Keller states that

because she is introduced to them as Tekahionwake, the Mohawk Princess, they regard her as exotic royalty. Almost immediately she is in demand for evening recitals in the private homes of duchesses and countesses. They are even more impressed when she performs wearing her buckskin costume" (32-3).

The most interesting aspect of this quotation to me is that Johnson was not received as royalty, but specifically as exotic royalty, marking her as sexualized, objectified and, above all, *rare*. Keller's analysis fails to recognize Johnson's role as dually exotic *and erotic*.

## **II. Girl In Canoe: Diversifying the Icon**

I almost titled this second section "The Princess and the Canoe," in order to purposely recall a fairy tale. Just as traditional Western fairy tales



contain a princess awaiting rescue from a noble man, so the most obvious image of a Native woman in a canoe is as a passive princess. As a strategist, Pauline Johnson was aware of this, and was also sensitive to the disadvantages and denigration of playing to the stereotype. Although Pauline Johnson utilized the Indian Princess trope at the suggestion of her manager, she expressed her dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed on her by her shrewd audience in a letter to her publisher. Specifically, she wrote that,

more than all things I hate and despise brain debasement, literary 'potboiling' and yet I have done, will do these things, though I sneer at my own littleness in so doing. ... The reason of my actions in this matter? Well, the reason is that the public will not listen to lyrics, will not appreciate real poetry, in fact have me as an entertainer if I give them nothing but rhythm, cadence, beauty, thought (qtd in Weaver 83).

This quotation reveals Johnson's recognition of her actions, and demonstrates her role as a strategist. She knew that in order to attract audiences she had to give them what they expected to see. Literary critic Terry Goldie holds the following view of the Princess, one which I resist:

[The Princess] represents the attractions of the land but in a form which seems to request domination, unlike her violent male counterpart who resists it. The image of the female as the receiver of male power provides an explicit opportunity for the white patriarchy to enter the land. If ... the sexual relationship is repressed or even denied she becomes still more explicitly object, as the domination is not through sexual interaction but through the spectator-owner (65-6).

This quotation raises the issue of spectator ownership, and suggests the very stereotype that Pauline Johnson fought to contest. The relationship between a male spectator who becomes the owner of a passively receptive female denies Johnson's agency, as my reading of her poems will reveal.

In the words of George Lyon, readers of Johnson's canoe poetry must wonder if Johnson "did not project the sort of vulnerability that made Marilyn Monroe seem as accessible as she was attractive. Such would have constituted a clear invitation to enter, inhabit, nourish, ... and dominate the land" (151). This comparison to the Marilyn Monroe icon is apt, I think, because it signals an ability on the part of these two women to negotiate the societies in which they lived, and to read their audiences.

The Western romantic tradition, however, which admires Monroe's poses atop a heating vent, is much different from Pauline Johnson's romantic image.

Upon a first reading, it might appear that the protagonist of "The Song My Paddle Sings" (Flint and Feather 31-3) plays to the gaze of admirers. "The Song My Paddle Sings" is undoubtedly the most famous of Pauline Johnson's poems (Strong-Boag and Gerson 8), and she has been widely recognized for her major role in making the canoe synonymous with the Canadian wilderness, as well as with women's health. In her article titled *Outdoor Pastimes for Women*, Johnson stated the splendor of canoeing for "that glorious after-glow that never fails to thrill her." It has been said that "admirers saw her [Pauline Johnson] handle 'a canoe like one of her red brethren' and also, albeit not at the same time, recline 'on a cushion,' 'letting some amiable American paddle her canoe in the shade of overhanging trees along shore" (qtd Strong-Boag and Gerson 81). This quotation is especially important because it reveals the way that Pauline Johnson was able to have the best of both worlds. She was capable of steering "a canoe like one of her red brethren." She could be seen as a lady reclining on a cushion, playing to

the gaze, letting an “amiable American” paddle her around. It is exactly this representation, however, that Johnson complicates and contests.

In her article, “Canoe and Canvas,” published in *Saturday Night* on September 2, 1893, she states, “the canoeist does not ask for much when he takes an outing. A stretch of wild, pure water, a bit of canvas between him and the far silent starts, a pair of paddles, and that best of all friends, a light cedar cruiser, are about all young Canada demands for a *princely* holiday” (emphasis mine). Johnson sings the praises of the canoe as a sturdy and superior mode of transportation, and raises the fact that Canadians are usurping this Native invention. Obviously, Johnson chose to gender this article with a masculine canoeist. Of course, the popular princess is gentle, serene and modest –she does not negotiate “wild water!” However, in “The Song My Paddle Sings,” the reader meets a strong, independent and healthy woman, not a docile one. Despite the obstacles Nature presents, such as swirling rapids and a lack of wind, the woman is determined to meet the challenge with courage and dignity. The speeches she gives to her “craft” are important for herself as well, as she and her craft become one:

Be strong, O paddle! be brave, canoe!

The restless waves you must plunge into.

Reel, reel.

On your trembling keel,

But never a fear my craft will feel.

Her skill as a canoeist is indicated by the “restless waves” that she is forced to negotiate. She presents an image of youth and strength, as she does not wait for someone to come to her aid. Rather, her own agency is what is highlighted:

I stow the sail, unship the mast:

I wooed you long but my wooing's past;

My paddle will lull you into rest.

O! drowsy wind of the drowsy west,

Sleep, sleep,

By your mountain steep,

Or down where the prairie grasses sweep!

Now fold in slumber your laggard wings,

For soft is the song my paddle sings. ...

The river rolls in its rocky bed;

My paddle is plying its way ahead;

Dip, dip,

While the waters flip

In foam as over their breast we slip. ...

She is at home in the scene, and at the end, the whole of Nature becomes an extension of her craft, and of herself:

And up on the hills against the sky,  
 A fir tree rocking its lullaby,  
 Swings, swings,  
 Its emerald wings,  
 Swelling the song that my paddle sings.

While Johnson is most popularly known for “The Song My Paddle Sings,” she is less well known for writing immensely erotic love poetry that comments on her canoeing partners. Johnson’s canoeists are powerful women who are not ashamed to admit their sexual desires. Widely considered autobiographical fragments, verses such as these two from “The Idlers” (Flint and Feather 62) have curious critics pondering the extent of Johnson’s canoeing escapades:

Against the thwart, near by,  
 Inactively you lie,  
 And all too near my arm your temple bends. ...  
 Your costume, loose and light,  
 Leaves unconcealed your might

Of muscle, half suspected, half denied;  
 And falling well aside,  
 Your vesture opens wide,  
 Above your splendid sunburnt throat that pulses un-  
     confined.  
 Your arm superb is lying, brown and bare;  
 Your hand just touches mine  
 With import firm and fine,  
 (I kiss the very wind that blows about your tumbled  
 hair.)

"The Idlers" opens with the scene of a canoe under "the sun's red pulses beat," already an indicator of an advance of something sensual. The poem then continues on to present a princess figure who is completely and unabashedly aware of her partner as a sexual being, a sexual *body*. The gaze that is typically directed towards the temptress/princess is here redirected, as the princess is obviously the desiring subject who, moreover, expresses no shame or unease about revealing her passions. As well, it is interesting that the canoeing partner remains unnamed, and described as having a "sunburnt throat." This description raises interesting questions concerning the man's identity that are left to the

reader's imagination. Was he a Native man? If so, then we do not have Goldie's invitation for the "white patriarchy to enter the land." Furthermore, she is not "owned" by the gaze, for while she is being gazed upon, she gazes back brazenly, and openly reveals the physical effects that her partner's presence has upon her own body:

Ah! Dear, I am unwise  
 In echoing your eyes  
 Whene're they leave their far-off gaze, and turn  
 To melt and blur my sight;  
 For every other light  
 Is servile to your cloud-grey eyes, wherein cloud shadows  
       burn.

This poem contains several references to burning and heat, and the "blur[red] sight" indicates a shutting down of her senses to all but her partner. The real, raw emotional attachment makes her so much more than a mere temptress.

Though the image of the "sunburnt throat" may be read as a race designation, it may also be read in terms of class designation as well. During Johnson's lifetime, the adjective "sunburnt" was often reserved for those of the working classes. In Roughing it in the Bush (1852) for



instance, Susanna Moodie describes her reaction to Irish emigrants in the following manner: "I shrank, with feelings almost akin to fear, from the hard-featured, sun-burnt harpies" (29). While the princess is usually able to attract a gaze and unwilling to return the affections, Johnson again reverses this typical representation in order to offer a situation in which the princess becomes the undesired. In contrast to "The Idlers," most of Johnson's poems that discuss the subject of love on the river express a tone of lamentation, such as "Re-voyage" (66):

Oh! Well I know that you  
Would toss the world away to be but lying  
Again in my canoe,  
In listless indolence entranced and lost,  
Wave-rocked, and passion tossed.  
Ah me! My paddle failed me in the steering  
Across love's shoreless seas;  
All reckless, I had ne'er a thought of fearing  
Such dreary days as these,  
When through the self-same rapids we dash by,  
My lone canoe and I.

Here, her attempts to find love have failed, but not because her feelings are not reciprocated. Rather, the protagonist knows with certainty that her lover would “toss the world away” to be with her once more, but the social conventions during her lifetime were enough to prevent this union.<sup>1</sup> As the title “Re-voyage” suggests, she has both the memory of the original voyage, and she relives it alone.

In “Wave-won” (66), Johnson again laments the passing of love:

Your splendid eyes aflame  
 Put heaven’s stars to shame,  
 Your god-like head so near my lap was laid –  
 My hand is burning where  
 It touched your wind-blown hair,  
 As sweeping to the rapids verge, I changed my paddle  
 blade. ...  
 Tonight, again dream you  
 Our spirit-winged canoe  
 Is listening to the rapids purling past?  
 Where, in delirium reeled

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<sup>1</sup> This poem may refer to Johnson’s relationship with Charles Drayton. The two were engaged, but he called off their engagement when they met with resistance from his family.

Our maddened hearts that kneeled

To idolize the perfect world, to taste of love at last.

In this poem, it is the woman who has the power and control; it is she who changes the paddle blade, who steers the course of the canoe, and who ultimately controls the course of the relationship. “The erotic value of the canoe remained high, of course, throughout the Twenties, and there were likely more people than Johnson and Crawford who saw paddles as suggestive instruments. Furthermore, we ought to consider our more recent understanding of the canoe, as a signifier of prowess” (Lyon 152). Indeed, Johnson’s canoeists are all strong, intelligent and independent women, who, like Johnson herself, are capable of skillful negotiations.

### **III. Smart Woman Strategist: How Native Women Read “the Princess”**

Humor is a fundamental aspect of Native cultures, partly because it functions as a teaching tool. Thomas King’s Green Grass, Running Water and Monique Mojica’s Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots are two examples of humorous invocations of Pauline Johnson’s legacy. Mojica’s character, appropriately named Princess-Buttered-On-Both-Sides<sup>2</sup>, prepares to participate in a beauty pageant, and she has brought along a

short buckskin costume to wear. As she pulls it out of her bag, she asks, “Isn’t this a devastating gown? I designed it myself” (49). Princess-Buttered-On-Both-Sides recalls Johnson’s own strategy for manipulating a crowd that wanted an exotic performance, and Johnson delivered as a beautiful and desirable woman. Like the Pocahontas of legends, Pauline was beautiful, elegant, and well trained in aspects of “civility.” And yet Johnson was offended when she was likened to a White woman, as a piece of personal correspondence in the archival collections at McMaster University reveals: “Never let anyone call me a white woman. There are those who think they pay me a compliment in saying that I am just like a white woman. My aim, my joy, my pride is to sing the glories of my own people” (correspondence in McMaster Archival materials). The legacy that Johnson created continues to challenge and negate the oppressive desires of mainstream society. She herself knew the humor of her situation, and for a short time during her career wore scalps dangling from her waist! It is thus appropriate that Native authors continue to use satire and humor to re-deliver Johnson to her own people.

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<sup>2</sup> This name also recalls the fact that, as a woman of mixed-heritage, Pauline Johnson was able to play to both sides.

Nevertheless, racism and issues of authenticity that plagued Johnson throughout her own cultural negotiations still haunt Indigenous writers today, as Beth Brant explains:

The few women of colour who have broken through this racist system are held up as the spokesperson for our races. It is implied that these women are the only ones good enough to “make it.” These women are marketed as exotic oddities. (After all, we know that women of colour can’t write or read, eh?) Pauline Johnson faced this racism constantly. The “Mohawk Princess” was considered an anomaly, and I can’t say things have changed that much” (9).

Along with the idea that “women of colour can’t write or read” is the idea that they cannot, to refer back to Douglas Cardinal, write their own scripts. That is to say that they cannot have agency over their lives, and that their work, their cultural productions, are void of meaning if they do not conform to Western values, if they cannot be measured in Western scales. Surely this is not the case, as Johnson explicitly argued in “A Strong Race Opinion on the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction.”

In this article, published in *The Dominion Illustrated Magazine* in 1893, Pauline Johnson argued for multiple representations of Native womanhood:

...there are many girls who have placed dainty red feet figuratively upon the white man's neck...Let us not only hear, but read something of the North American Indian "besting" some one at least once in a decade, and above all things let the Indian girl in fiction develop from the "dog-like," "fawn-like," "deer-footed," "fire-eyed," "crouching," "submissive" book heroine into something of the quiet, sweet womanly woman she is if wild, or the everyday, natural, laughing girl she is if cultivated and educated; let her be natural even if the author is not competent to give her tribal characteristics.

Johnson opposed a single, pan-Indian perspective, and demanded recognition of the distinctions between Native cultures. She also requested an evolution of the "submissive" Native woman in fiction into more realistic representations. Contemporary Native authors continue to heed Johnson's wishes, and to portray assertive female characters that take control over their own lives and define their own boundaries. In the words of Monique Mojica's *Contemporary Woman #1*, "I am not your Princess. ... I am only willing to tell you how to make fry bread" (21).

## CHAPTER TWO:

### **OTSISKWAH: MOHAWK WOMAN AS SUBJECT**

*They call me – the Squaw Woman  
Wife of – “The Far-off Dawn.”  
They do not know. They do not know  
How deep, how broad my heritage.  
-Dawendine/Bernice Loft Winslow*

#### **I. “Squaw” As Keyword**

The term “squaw” has so many connotations that it can never be used innocently; it acts as a register of the degree of esteem (or lack thereof) in which Native women are held. Although in a neutral form it denotes a Native American woman, it is most widely known as a weapon of verbal insult and denigration towards Native women. However, *squaw* is a fascinating word that has an origin in numerous Indigenous tongues across Turtle Island. Linguistic origins for the term *squaw* include, but are not limited to, Mohawk, Cree, and Ojibwe. As this chapter will demonstrate, these root words primarily display honour and respect for the status of women within Native communities, for the role of these

women in ceremonies, as well as for the unique ability of women to give birth and to create life. In this chapter, I will explore various meanings for the term *squaw*, both Native and non-Native, and then relate them to Pauline Johnson's performance and poetry. It is my aim to read her poetry and performance as a rehabilitation of the original meaning of the word "squaw." Rather than delete this Indigenous root word from our vocabulary altogether, Johnson returns to the primary essence of the word, and thus offers a powerful counter discourse to Western imaginings of Indigenous women as sexually insatiable, corrupt, and subjugated by men. In doing so, she reverses the idea of Native women as "the bit of brown" described by the fur trade governor (Francis 122) into a powerful representational discourse which captivates Western audiences, as well as reconfigures the categories which seek to confine Native womanhood.

Strictly speaking, the term *squaw* denotes a Native woman, but right from the beginning of contact with Europeans, it took on derogatory connotations. In 1504, Amerigo Vespucci, after whom the Americas were named, described Native women as "lustful and promiscuous" (qtd Jaimes 226).<sup>1</sup> Of course, no one reaction, either hostile or warm, is

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Jemison presents a counter-image in Women's Indian Captivity Narratives. Jemison chose to become a Seneca and was adopted into the Nation,



universal, and the term squaw subsequently underwent a series of appropriations and extracted various reactions from both Europeans and Natives alike. For instance, it was applied to White women, it was used as an adjective for something female, and it referred to an effeminate or weak person. In approximately 1838 it was applied to a type of sea duck, which earned the nickname "old squaw." As a plant, the squaw-root was highly esteemed for its medicinal purposes, and this name implies a recognition of skill on the part of women. The neutral usage, as applied to all women, is even apparent in Susanna Moodie's Roughing it in the Bush, where she refers to her "Indian friends" as "squaws," and she herself is titled "Moodie's squaw" (253). Today, squaw is defined as "a North American Indian Woman or Wife" (New Webster's English Dictionary). However, since its original corruption in approximately 1634 (AOL Dictionary), the derogatory meaning has survived alongside more neutral terms. Lewis and Clark, the famous explorers led by Sacajawea from the Missouri River to the Pacific Coast beginning in 1805, professed

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and she describes the treatment she received: "Having made fast to the shore, the Squaws left me in the canoe while they went to their wigwam or house in the town, and returned with a suit of Indian clothing, all new, and very clean and nice. My clothes, though whole and good when I was taken, were now torn in pieces, so that I was almost naked. They first undressed me and threw my rags in the river; then washed me clean and dressed me in the new suit they had just brought, in complete Indian style; then led me home and seated me in the center of their wigwam" (141-2).

that “Indian women were treated as property and ... sometimes only had their own bodies as assets” (qtd by Karttunen). Due to the influence of the term on the national consciousness, the squaw still holds a place in contemporary writing by both Natives and non-Natives.

Francis describes another aspect of the squaw type, one which further explicates negative characteristics:

Opposed to the princess there was the squaw, a derogatory epithet widely applied to Native women by non-Natives. In all ways the squaw was the opposite of the princess, an anti-Pocahontas. Where the princess was beautiful, the squaw was debased, immoral, a sexual convenience. Where the princess was proud, the squaw lived a squalid life of servile toil, mistreated by her men. Non-Native writers described Indian women hanging around the margins of White settlement, drinking and prostituting themselves. This stereotype of the Indian woman as a low, sexual commodity – a “bit of brown” as the fur trade governor George Simpson put it – became increasingly common as Native people were pushed to the fringes of White settlement, neglected and powerless” (122).

The ongoing struggle of Native peoples to achieve equality in language is addressed by Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, who writes of the term

“squaw” that “the implicit and subtle dehumanization of its usage was a fact of our lives” (xxv). Contemporary Native authors are using humor to combat the negative connotations, as they teach us to laugh at the stereotypes to free ourselves from the insults. Monique Mohica’s play, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, for example, contains a character referred to as the “Cigar Store Squaw,” whose buckskin dress is only good “for the talent segment” of a beauty pageant, not the “evening gown competition” (49). She concentrates on the importance of “the right look,” and cites super-models as having it.

While the princess is a “romantic” figure, possessing a timeless essence of beauty and youth, the squaw is an older, unattractive and even deformed woman in Western imaginings. In *Black Eyes all of the Time*, McGillivray and Comaskey argue for a duality which constructs an essential Indian womanhood, which stems from the noble and the ignoble savage. In Western eyes,

‘the she-Indian’ was a squaw – an early corruption of the Cree *isquao*, ‘woman’ – slovenly and immoral, or, alternately, a workhorse and drudge exploited by her lazy husband (McGillivray and Comaskey 30-1).

The “squaw” was considered the female version of the “ignoble savage,” an image which Johnson herself contested. In an article, Johnson states,

In the Canadian North-West I have seen Russian women, flaxen haired, creamy skinned, hitched to a plough in bands, like horses while the lordly husband, father or relation drove them –a pitiful sight blotting the freedom of God’s virgin prairies. And some of these Russian women were mothers! No Indian man ever permitted his womankind to do such toil. He is exempt from the vice that prevails amongst the lower order of white men in the old world cities, who from unbridled temper or mere brutality beat their wives if immediate submission is not given them. An Indian man strikes a woman only when the white man’s intoxicants have stolen his self-respect and enfeebled or enraged his brain (in Johnston 196).

Johnson illustrates in this quotation that images projected onto Indigenous cultures are readily transposable onto White culture as well, if not more appropriately so in her romanticized ideal of Native men who never hit women unless drunk. If Native women toil, so do White women. Thus, Johnson proclaims that if Native women are squaws, they are no more so than poor white women.

Through her representations of sexualized Mohawk women, Johnson raises issues of sex and sexuality in a deliberate transgression of societal expectations. As French theorist Michel Foucault (1926-1984) argues,

If sex is repressed, that is, confined to prohibition, non-existence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such a language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power, he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom (295).

Johnson's "transgression" is a deliberate and functional technique which situates her outside of the nucleus of Western society, and thus outside of Western power and authority.

Johnson's positive representations of Mohawk womanhood functioned to counter the popular views of her fellow Confederation poets. According to Johnson's one time touring partner, possible lover, and finally biographer, Walter McRaye, Johnson "belongs with the 'Group of '61' which includes Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, Duncan Campbell Scott, Bliss Carman, William Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman and Frederick George Scott" (ix). One of these notorious figures, Duncan Campbell Scott, held a career with the Department of

Indian Affairs which spanned 1879-1932. In his popular poem, which is actually at the centre of Canadian literature, "The Onondaga Madonna," Scott uses the woman in order to represent a tragic and bleak future for the First Nations of Canada:

She stands full-throated and with careless pose,  
This woman of a weird and waning race,  
The tragic savage lurking in her face,  
Where all her pagan passion burns and glows;  
Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes,  
And thrills with war and wildness in her veins;  
Her rebel lips are dappled with the stains  
Of feuds and forays and her father's woes.  
And closer in the shawl about her breast,  
The latest promise of her nation's doom,  
Paler than she her baby clings and lies,  
The primal warrior gleaming from his eyes;  
He sulks, and burdened with his infant gloom,  
He draws his heavy brows and will not rest.

By naming the Onondaga, Scott presents a bleak future for the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, as the Onondaga are one of the five

original nations in the Great League of Peace (along with the Mohawk, Cayuga, Seneca, Oneida, and later the Tuscarora in the 1700s<sup>2</sup>). In Scott's portrayal, the Madonna is a sexualized Native woman, who has definitely not been blessed with a pure virgin birth. Rather, she stands a "full-throated savage," whose "pagan passion burns and glows." The idea of timelessness is encapsulated in the lines, "her rebel lips are dappled with the stains/ Of feuds and forays and her father's woes," as her inability to forget the past is mirrored by her insinuated inability to adapt nor to change. She is presented as wild, savage and inhuman, as she "thrills with war and wildness" which is innately "in her veins," and therefore inescapable. The "waning race" suggests that the race is dying, and each generation of mixed race is seen as a "promise of her nation's doom," which would have been welcome to Scott as his famous 1920 proclamation reveals: "I want to get rid of the Indian problem. ... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian Department..." (Titley 5). According to Scott's racist policies, the more White blood, then the more "civilized" the person. In his poem, the baby

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy or the founding of the League of Peace, see Paul Wallace's The Iroquois Book of Life: White Roots of Peace.

is “paler than she [his mother],” signaling the offspring of a mixed-race union. This state is already troubling to the infant, who “sulks [in] infant gloom ... and will not rest.” Scott’s image of an innately sexual, fierce, and primitive Onondaga Madonna presents an image of the squaw as a monstrous and unnatural mother with nothing to offer her child but heartache.

The fact that the West held derogatory views towards the *squaw* is evidenced in the critic George W. Lyon’s fairly recent comments that “audiences paid, after all, to see the Indian Princess, not the squaw” (147). This comment was made regarding the potential damage that could occur to Pauline Johnson’s touring popularity as a result of her aging. Johnson was, after all, forced to retire from stage life in her forties, due to health problems which wore down her stamina, as well as her looks.

### **I. Constructing Mohawk Womanhood**

Perhaps the most famous of Pauline Johnson’s photographs are those in which she poses in her buckskin costume. When Johnson’s stage career began in 1892, her platform attire consisted of pretty, although not very elaborate, ball gowns. It was in late 1892 or early 1893, with Frank Yeigh functioning as her manager, that she began



performing in what became her most notorious outfit, a buckskin costume (Johnston 99). Johnson's so called "squaw poses" are quite erotic, with arms held up and positioned behind her head, one arm bare, having been permitted to escape from her form enhancing buckskin outfit. Pauline's sister Evelyn describes the manufacturing of this famous costume in a diary entry which reveals the skill and the strategy decided upon by the two sisters:

I was going upstairs one day when Pauline called me into her room. She was working on an Indian costume in which she afterwards frequently appeared on the platform. "I don't like this, Ev," she said. "Neither do I," I replied. She held out both her arms to show me the buckskin strips about two inches in width, which were to serve as a covering for her arms. These were embroidered from shoulder to wrist. On either side of the strip was buckskin fringe about five inches long. This part of the garment she had sent to the North-West for. The rest of her Indian costume and silver brooches were copied from a picture which we had of Minnehaha. The short skirt was cut at the bottom into a fringe about four inches long. After contemplating the dress for a few minutes I said to Pauline, "Why not leave one sleeve the way it is and make the other of the wild beast skins you have?"

Pauline thought a moment then said, "That is exactly what I shall do (Woodland Cultural Centre Library).

This quotation is revealing on multiple levels. Implicitly, the two sisters share an understanding of how to thrill, captivate and entertain a Western audience. Their ability to read their target audience is indicated in the basic and necessary question of what form the costume should take, and they decide to leave one arm nearly bare, scantily covered by some "wild beast skins." While this decision is outrageous, even comical, it reveals the knowledge of how to strategically manipulate the target Western audience, however dissatisfied they may be at the methods. In fact, elsewhere Johnson commented on her dissatisfaction at the constraints of her image in a letter to her publisher, where she laments the fact that she could "give so much more, if only they [the audience] would let me" (qtd Weaver 83). Furthermore, in the long passage just quoted, Evelyn directly stresses the artificiality of the ensemble; not only does she self-consciously refer to it as a *costume*, she also stresses their methodology as *copying* elements from pictures. The fact that the fringe for the garment was something Pauline had "sent to the North-West for" raises notions of authenticity, as the fringe is not of any identifiable Haudenosaune style nor even from the Six Nations territory. Here, we see the two women acting as agents who understand

how to negotiate a non-Native audience, and who regret the fact that the generic Indian costume they have created erases Mohawk distinctiveness, but will successfully draw crowds.

The costume was deliberately unconventional, meaning atypical of both a proper lady's fashion etiquette, as well as that of Native women. The neckline was low in comparison to the Victorian style of high collars, one arm was bare, ankles uncovered, and Pauline wore her hair loose in a dark cascade of curls. All of these elements serve to highlight Johnson's presence as a sensual and sexual woman. Specifically, the costume presented her explicitly as a sexual Native woman, and audience members did not realize that it was also atypical of Native dress. In "Iroquois Women," an article written for the *Brantford Expositor*, Johnson herself commented that "Miss Iroquois," referring to her own generation of contemporary Mohawk women, "has most likely arrayed herself in a very becoming stiff gown made in modern style. She wears gloves, and a straw hat, decorated with bright ribbon and pretty flowers. She is altogether like the daughter of one of Ontario's prosperous farmers..." (McMaster Archives). Though a misleading, even humorous comparison, Johnson's agenda is clear: to illustrate the fact that "modern" Native women dress as neither Indian Princesses nor squaws. Women are thus presented not as static objects, but as

changing subjects. The costume Johnson created was a creative mingling of fact and fiction designed to manipulate and thrill her non-Native audiences during her cross-Canada tours, and perhaps most significantly, it was successful at drawing crowds interested in seeing an attractive and “authentic” Indian poetess. This costume was strategically sensational, used successfully by Johnson in order to enact her messages of Native-White equality in hostile environments, where questions of her authenticity were repeatedly asked.

While in contemporary Mohawk language usage the popular term for woman is *iakon:kwe*, another possibility is *otsiskwah*. Although English has appropriated this word, transforming it into a bastardized and derogatory term, the original word is charged with respect for the reproductive capabilities of women, and there are signs that Native women want the word restored to its original dignity. Katsi Cook, Mohawk educator, describes her encounter with the term *otsiskwah* and its meanings:

One word which has been used since colonial times to denigrate Indian women is the word “squaw.” It wasn’t until I was having children myself and began practicing midwifery that I began to ask the old people about Mohawk words used to describe female anatomy and physiology. It was then that I learned that the word

“squaw” comes from the Mohawk word *otsiskwah* (oh-gee-squaw), which means “it’s slippery,” describing the vagina. Being called a squaw is like being called a cunt. However, *otsiskwah* is an excellent and empowering word used to describe the clear, abundant, thready mucus the cervix produces when a woman is fertile! (Cook 279).

This quotation contests the Western usage of the term squaw as sexually derogatory. On my home reserve, Tyendinaga, I have often heard that “squaw” refers to Native women who sleep around with White men. As fluent Native language speakers continue to pass away, the fact remains that many words are being forgotten, and only partial, even Western, meanings remain. However, Cook expresses a positive view of the original term, as it refers to a fertile woman, or a woman as a sexual being, a powerful woman with the ability to give birth, and thus to create life. Manifested in this quotation is a fundamental philosophy regarding sexuality, one which differs between Western and Native ideologies, which relates to Pauline Johnson’s attempts to negotiate her way as a Mohawk woman using the sexualized princess/squaw tropes.

In our Western society, there is only one significant age, that of reproduction. Old people are just that: old, used up people who are not

recognized for their wisdom. However, Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong contests this view, and explains a different ideology:

In the Okanagan, as in many Native tribes, the order of life learning is that you are born without a sex and as a child, through learning, you move toward full capacity as either male or female. ... Finally as an elder you emerge as both male and female, a complete human, with all skills and capacities complete" (102).

This is an incredibly powerful quotation, which relates to my analysis of the squaw image. Since it is the elders of the community who "emerge as both male and female, a complete human," then the squaw, as an old woman, is exactly this. Metis author Lee Maracle articulates this ideological difference when she states that

people are extremely disinclined towards celibacy. "The spirit is strong, but the flesh is weak" – so says Jesus. In contrast, we believe that the human spirit and the body agree: to be passionate is to be alive. ... At times people can harness their passionate energy and transform it, putting it to work at endeavors other than sexual expression. But to delete passion from our lives leads to a weird kind of sociopathy – a heartlessness (70).

From an Indigenous perspective, passion and sexuality are necessary to achieve balance and well being. Johnson's stage presence, as well as

her poetry, represents an incredibly powerful counter discourse which pivots on the original meaning of the term squaw in her Mohawk language as a strong woman and a sexual being.

### **III. Squaw As Warrior Woman**

Johnson's poem, "Ojistoh" provides one example of a potential squaw-type figure. This poem tells the story of a Mohawk woman kidnapped by a "Huron brave" in order to punish her husband, a "great Mohawk" who had "crushed [the Huron] underneath his heel." When Ojistoh refuses to turn against her husband in exchange for bribes ("to take of wealth? be queen of all her tribe?") her ankles and wrists are bound and she is taken on horseback by "the one I hated most." The journey to the Huron camp is described in a language that could be construed as a rape sequence: "And we two rode, rode as a sea wind-chased,/ I, bound with buckskin to his hated waist,/ He, sneering, laughing, jeering, while he lashed/ The horse to foam." However, we are reminded often of Ojistoh's subjectivity, through her repeated proclamations, "I AM". In the first stanza alone, she states, "I am Ojistoh," "I am she," and "I am," stressing her own subjectivity.

Ojistoh's skill as a strategist becomes apparent when, despite the abuse Ojistoh has suffered, she pretends that her loyalties have been swayed:

I smiled, and laid my cheek against his back:  
 'Loose thou my hands,' I said. 'This pace let slack.  
 Forget we now that you and I are foes.  
 I like thee well, and wish to clasp thee close;  
 I like the courage of thine eye and brow;  
*I like thee better than my Mohawk now.*

Again, in the repetitions of "I like," Ojistoh is asserting control over the situation and displaying her subjectivity. While she appears to be immoral, about to permit her body to be further abused by her Huron enemy, she is actually redeemed, as indicated in the concluding line of the following stanza:

He cut the cords; we ceased our maddened haste  
 I wound my arms about his tawny waist;  
 My hand crept up the buckskin of his belt;  
 His knife hilt in my burning palm I felt;  
 One hand caressed his cheek, the other drew  
 The weapon softly – "I love you, love you,"  
 I whispered, "love you as my life."



And – buried in his back his scalping knife.

The poem ends with Ojistoh back with her Mohawk husband, remaining his “pure white star.” George Lyons has stated that “Johnson’s description of Ojistoh’s caresses is given so lovingly that it is as difficult not to assume an erotic agenda on her part as it is not to find Ojistoh’s duplicity disturbing” (141). Furthermore, he claims that “‘Ojistoh’ is the most extreme expression of an intense passion that cannot be forgotten, cannot be tamed, and cannot be trusted” (141). In my reading, what is unforgettable is Ojistoh’s victory, as she rides for freedom, proud of the blood on her hands. Her method is one of coyness, and Lyon’s comment that Ojistoh is “disturbing” reveals that she cannot be read and understood through European codes. In the scenario, we are given a Mohawk princess figure, pure and moral, seemingly about to fall to the status of an immoral squaw, who is then redeemed when the poem reaches its climax, as she opts to kill her Huron captor and return to her Mohawk husband. The representation of the princess has been used as a method of protection against this fall to immorality; Ojistoh neither submits sexually to her captor nor remains his captive.

“Cry From An Indian Wife” (Flint and Feather 17) is arguably the most obvious and provocative illustration of Pauline Johnson’s dilemma as a woman of dual English and Mohawk heritage. Taking the form of a

personal debate, the speaker demands attention and respect as she weighs the idea of war. She mourns not only the potential loss of her own loved ones, (unlike the Whites in “The Cattle Thief” who desire the body to be thrown to and devoured by wolves) but also the “white-faced warriors” who are “all young and beautiful and good.” She is a peacemaker, and, although described as demanding honour from her brave husband, this poem also reveals the mixed-blood dilemma. She realizes the injustice, the racism, and the unequal distribution of power in Canada, asking:

What white-robed priest prays for your safety here,  
 As prayer is said for every volunteer  
 That swells the ranks that Canada sends out?  
 Who prays for vict'ry for the Indian scout?  
 Who prays for our poor nation lying low?  
 None – therefore take your tomahawk and go.

Implicit in these lines is Canada's lack of sympathy regarding the plight of its Indigenous inhabitants. However, the Indian wife gives the Canadian government the allowance that

Their new rule and council is well meant.  
 They but forget we Indians owned the land  
 From ocean unto ocean; that they stand

Upon a soil that centuries ago  
 Was our sole kingdom and our right alone.

This poem is remarkable because it shows an author who is freely offering a frank and uncensored look at the suffering and pain under the oppression that accompanied colonialism. The speaker is torn between seeing further pain brought about by war, and the desire to avenge, “giving what they gave us –but wars and graves.” This woman is a warrior woman.

“The Cattle Thief” presents another strong female voice, this time the bold, outspoken daughter of a Cree Chief who appears after her father is viciously murdered by Whites. These hunters, with “their British blood aflame,” refer to the Chief, the Cattle Thief, as “the game they had coveted,” indicating that they view the Native man not as human, but as a wild beast to be shot down. Unlike the reasoning voice of the wife in “Cry From An Indian Wife,” who carefully considers the circumstances of her nation, the angry Whites do not offer the Cree Elder any attention before deciding to “cut the fiend up into inches, throw his carcass on the plain; Let the wolves eat the cursed Indian.”

A dozen hands responded, a dozen knives gleamed high,  
 But the first stroke was arrested by a woman's strange,  
 wild cry.

And out into the open, with a courage past belief,  
She dashed, and spread her blanket o'er the corpse of  
    The Cattle Thief;  
And the words outleapt from her shrunken lips in the  
    language of the Cree,  
"If you mean to touch that body, you must cut your  
    way through me."

It is clear in these lines that the woman's "wildness" stems from grief, sorrow, and anger over the senseless murder of her father, not from an innate savageness. The notion of Indigenous women as docile and subservient is destroyed by Johnson's statement, "an Indian woman roused, was a woman to let alone." This knowledge compels the settlers to re-think their decision to dismember and mutilate the body of the murdered chief, and they instead stand back and listen to the woman as she points out their hypocrisy:

You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though  
    you robbed him first of bread –  
Robbed him and robbed my people –look there, at that shrunken  
    face,  
Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your  
    race.

What have you left to us of land, what have you left  
of game,

What have you brought but evil, and curses since you  
came?

How have you paid us for  
our land?

By a *book*, to save our souls from the sins *you* brought  
in your other hand.

Go back with your new religion, we never have under-  
stood

Your robbing an Indian's body, and mocking his soul  
with food.

Go back with your new religion, and find –if find  
you can –

The honest man you have ever made from out a starving  
man.

Not only does this poem emphasize the hypocrisy of the Christian religion, it also presents the racist view that Native peoples are essentially “bad,” as the Westerners curse the “cattle thief.” During an interview for the *Boston Herald*, Johnson further commented on her opinions regarding the way that Americans view Native peoples, and

discusses negative reception when the reporter apparently looked at her with skepticism. "Ah, I understand that look!" she tells him. You're going to say I'm not like other Indians, that I'm not representative. That's not strange. Cultivate an Indian, let him show his aptness and you Americans say he is an exception. Let a bad quality crop out and you stamp him as an Indian immediately" (Keller 116).

As a frequent contributor to *Mother's Magazine*, Johnson's main focus concerned the traditional role of women in Iroquoian societies. Another aspect of the racist image of the squaw was laziness, as evidenced by an 1880 article printed in the *Toronto Daily Mail* that claimed that "the squaws prefer tents to houses as they save work. The interior of a house has to be cleaned; but when the tent floor gets dirty it is only necessary to move to a clean spot, and a shaking of the blanket cleans the walls" (13). Rather than seeing the Native women as living lightly on the land, the reporters focused on their supposed laziness. In contrast, Johnson stated her opinion that "the women of this Iroquois race are superior in many ways to their less fortunate sisters throughout Canada," and that Iroquois women "are not the women to sit with idle hands and brains" (Iroquois Women of Canada, 1895 –McMaster Archives). Rather, in "Mothers of A Great Red Race," an article published in *Mother's Magazine* in 1908, Johnson claims that "there

exists today no more splendid specimens of vigorous womanhood than those found among the mothers of the great Iroquois Indian Nation of Canada" (5). She celebrated Native mothers, in the "fruitful" time of their lives blessed with reproductive capabilities, and yet, as the conclusion will reveal, she also celebrated the life cycle in its completeness, praising the "squaw" figure as an Elder, with important wisdom to share, and carrier of the culture.

## CONCLUSION

### **In The Name of the Grandmother: The Legacy of Pauline Johnson**

In "The Corn Husker," Johnson merely presents another "squaw" image, if read through Western codes. Here, an old Native woman "comes to labour" in a field, with "age in her fingers, hunger in her face,/ Her shoulders stooped with weight of work and years." At first glance, we seem to have a tragic scene, with the squaw in this case being a tired and deformed "workhorse" toiling out in the field. She is past her prime as a desirable sexual partner. However, we learn that this woman holds the memories of her people, as "all her thoughts are with the days gone by,/ Ere might's injustice banished from their lands/ Her people," revealing her knowledge of history, and the personal struggles which result from the processes of colonization. She is a figure of endurance, strength, and resilience in spite of oppression. Rather, she is working for the future of her people, and to ensure survival. This woman's voice is one of compassion, reason, and sorrow at injustices perpetrated on her people, and through her practice of her people's ways, husking corn, she



ensures survival. Her strength and dignity asserts the fact that the sexualized stereotype of Native women denigrates and makes invisible their actual labour and societal contributions. This protagonist is an icon of wisdom and the complete woman of Jeannette Armstrong's quotation, who has reached her full capacity as a human being. Cree medicine woman Rose Auger also comments on the necessity of gender balance in society, a theme that has become a common theme in Native writing. As Auger reminds us,

Indian people must wake up! They are asleep! ... Part of this waking up means replacing women to their rightful place in society. It's been less than one hundred years that men lost touch with reality. There's no power or medicine that has all force unless it's balanced. The woman must be there also, but she has been left out! When we still had our culture, we had the balance. The woman made ceremonies, and she was recognized as being united with the moon, the earth, and all the forces on it. Men have taken over. Most feel threatened by holy women. They must stop and remember, remember the loving power of their grandmothers and mothers! (25).

Of all of Johnson's poetry, "The Corn Husker" tends to be the one that Haudenosaune readers esteem highly.

As Armstrong's quotation reveals, dying, a natural part of our life cycle as human beings, and aging and the elderly are viewed with respect. At the end of "The Corn Husker," it seems the reader encounters tragedy as the old woman's people are likened to "the dead husks that rustle through her hands." This poignant image of the dead husks may relate to the role of women, or to the fact that the old culture carriers were dying. This may have been a call to the adults who have healing work of their own to do, a fact which Pauline's sister Evelyn addressed with the Confederacy Council by arguing for the inclusion of women's input in the decision making process. The absence of children in much of Johnson's verse may imply that the leaders and other adults must heal before children may be properly attended to. While the image of the "dead husks" may imply that the race is vanishing to those who believe in this theory, I find it a compelling strategy that "The Corn Husker" is situated beside Johnson's poem titled "Lullaby of the Iroquois," which, I have been told by a relation, is a loose translation from a Mohawk song. Here, a portrait is painted of a "little brown baby" strapped in a cradle board, with mother close by coaxing the little one to sleep. Obviously, when children are highlighted, even if infrequently, the

race is neither dead nor vanishing, a supposedly unstoppable fate lamented by Johnson's contemporaries.

Thus, we have come full circle, and from dying, we enter into re-birth. In her poem, "Lullaby of the Iroquois," Johnson gives us a wonderful gift: the preservation of the Haudenosaune memory in English verse.

"Lullaby of the Iroquois"

Little brown baby-bird, lapped in your nest,  
Wrapped in your nest,  
Strapped in your nest,  
Your straight little cradle-board rocks you to rest;  
Its hands are your nest;  
Its bands are your nest;  
It swings from the down-bending branch of the oak;  
You watch the camp flame, and the curling grey smoke;  
But, oh, for your pretty black eyes sleep is best,-  
Little brown baby of mine, go to rest.

Little brown baby-bird swinging to sleep,  
Winging to sleep,  
Singing to sleep,

Your wonder-black eyes that so wide-open keep,  
Shielding their sleep,  
Unyielding to sleep,  
The heron is homing, the plover is still,  
The night-owl calls from his haunt on the hill,  
Afar the fox barks, afar the stars peep,-  
Little brown baby of mine, go to sleep.

*Nia:wen.*

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