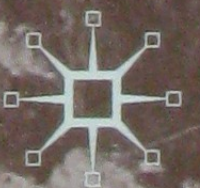


INDIGENOUS DIPLOMACIES

*Edited by
J. Marshall Beier*



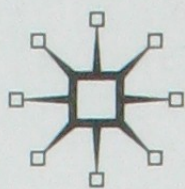
Indigenous Diplomacies

Edited by J. Marshall Beier



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Aboriginal Diplomacy

The Queen Comes to Canada and Coyote Goes to London

Keith Thor Carlson

The post-War of 1812 relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian state has been examined primarily through the prism of domestic federal government policy initiatives, and within this paradigm Native people have been seen principally as reacting to agendas set in Ottawa (see, for example, Dickason 1992; Miller 1989; Ray 1999). In western Canada, where British sovereignty was proclaimed much later than it was in the central and eastern regions of what has become the Canadian Dominion (and where First Nations never played the role of military ally in North American skirmishes between European powers) Native-newcomer relations have seldom been approached within the context of diplomacy. And yet, diplomacy is precisely the paradigm that many Indigenous people themselves use when discussing Indigenous-Crown relations. Indeed, there exist among the Salish people of Coast and interior British Columbia several stories of one-on-one diplomatic negotiations between nineteenth- and early-twentieth century Aboriginal leaders and reigning British kings and queens. The conundrum for historians has been that there are no archival documents to corroborate the oral canon; as such, the Indigenous histories have alternatively been ignored or dismissed as either “myth” or “fantasy.” Despite their singular status, these narratives reveal much about the way Native people not only understand their relationship with the non-Native world, but also the role of newcomers within Aboriginal history. As such, they are portals through which we can begin to see and appreciate diplomacy on terms

that go beyond the Western tradition of *realpolitik* and the assumption of the security dilemma. They suggest a diplomatic alternative where difference is not necessarily regarded as inherently threatening. When engaged on their own terms these narratives are every bit as valid as Western ones. Failing to appreciate the sincerity and veracity of this discourse is to close a door on another way of knowing, and to perpetuate a colonialist mindset that inevitably marginalizes Indigenous voices.

Not all Salish stories of diplomacy with the Crown are identical, and it is clear that not all the stories are meant to refer to the same encounter or encounters. Elizabeth Edwards of the Douglas Lake community near Merritt (aged ninety-four in 2004), for example, related an account of Chief Skakahtun's mid-nineteenth century negotiations with Queen Victoria—negotiations that took place on a ship anchored in British Columbia waters. According to Ms. Edwards, the queen of England traveled to British Columbia after learning of the shiny colored rocks of gold that could be found along the Fraser River. When her ship arrived she was eager to come ashore and “walk on the land,” but Skakahtun (who was so highly respected that his people never allowed his feet to touch the earth when he attended high level meetings) intercepted the queen's longboat and told Her Majesty, “No! Not this time. Maybe another time. [Instead] we are going to talk.” And talk they apparently did. As Ms. Edwards explained, the queen and Skakahtun acknowledged that the world would soon be changing, and that neither of them would live forever. They and their people, therefore, needed a long-lasting system of governance and finance that would accommodate the future needs of both the Natives and the newcomers. Seeing Skakahtun's sacks of colored rocks, the queen proposed that she would look after the gold in exchange for ensuring the future welfare of both the Native and non-Native people; they would be able to “live off the wealth.” Ms. Edwards interpreted this to mean that the Crown had committed to providing social assistance or “welfare” to all those First Nations people who were truly “needy.”¹

Though remarkable, Ms. Edward's narrative is not exceptional. In a park in Lytton, BC, overlooking the junction of the Fraser and Thompson rivers stands a vandalized marble memorial, erected in 1927, commemorating Chief David Spintlum (1812–87). Historical documents held in American and British repositories describe Spintlum as a powerful and pragmatic leader who, in 1858, negotiated peace treaties with renegade outfits of American militia bent on waging a war of racial extermination within the British Crown colony to rid the region of Indigenous people and open the gold fields to capitalist development. Within the historiography, Spintlum's actions are described as having

been unappreciated by the British Colonial and Imperial authorities who, ironically, quickly moved to take advantage of the peace Spintlum had created to assert their own more subtle system of alienating Native land and resources. But in the local Nlakapamux oral tradition, as captured in the text chiseled into the marble memorial, a different history is told—one where the queen herself acknowledges Spintlum's contributions to the Empire and recognizes his right to govern his people within their traditional territory:

When the white men . . . [first arrived in British Colum?] . . . bia the Indians were using the land and this caused bloodshed. David Spintlum did not want this loss of life and succeeded in stopping the war. He saw Queen Victoria who was visiting Canada and reported to her what he had done. Her Majesty was glad to hear this and said "there shall be no more war in Canada." She presented him with a flag and a hunting knife and told him he should be chief for ever. David Spintlum made his posts at Spuzzum at Lilloet at Stathshone and at Sheneodos and those four posts are the limits of the Thompson tribal territory.

Two decades later, in 1946, in an appearance before a Special Joint Committee of Parliament, the highly literate and articulate Squamish Native rights advocate Andrew Paull (president of the North American Indian Brotherhood), referred to the agreement between Spintlum and Queen Victoria as an "unwritten treaty." He added that Queen Victoria had subsequently "sent the Marquis of Lorne to Chief Spintlum with a flag and a bible and a sword . . . to ratify this early treaty."² Governor General Lorne is known to have met with British Columbia's Aboriginal people during his 1882 Pacific visit, but no written records exist to suggest his having ratified earlier agreements or treaties with Aboriginal people.

But the Nlakapamux accounts of Spintlum's relations with the monarchy are not the only ones to cite agreements entered into with the Marquis of Lorne. Chief George of Chehalis, from a settlement on the Harrison River (a tributary of the Fraser roughly one hundred kilometers upstream from the Harrison's mouth) was, in the words of the famous anthropologist Franz Boas, a "prize." So great was George's historical knowledge that Boas used him as his primary authority in two separate publications (Boas 1894, 1895). But while Boas reveled in what Chief George could tell him about Aboriginal myths, legends, and the traditional cultural expressions of his tribal community, he was less than impressed with the chief's interpretation of the history of recent Native-newcomer relations.

In a letter to his wife in 1890 describing his research with Chief George, Boas wrote that “at least once a day I have to listen to a speech about how great he is . . . The main topic of his conversation is the fact that his wife once gave Princess Louise, [the daughter of Queen Victoria and] the wife of the former Governor [General] of Canada [the Marquis of Lorne], five cows which she did not even acknowledge, thus proving herself most unworthy” (Rohner 1969, 127).

If Boas failed to take Chief George and his wife’s complaints about the Governor General and Queen Victoria’s daughter seriously, the Canadian government failed to recognize their significance. An article in the November 21, 1883, edition of *The British Columbian*, titled “Gross Neglect,” noted that Aboriginal leaders were “very much disappointed and dissatisfied” that more than a year had passed since the Royal visit with the Marquis’s “voluntary promise” of gifts yet to be fulfilled. Over the subsequent months a flurry of letters between Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, I. W. Powell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for British Columbia, and the Auditor General, determined that no one in the Indian Affairs Branch or Prime Ministers office had been apprised of any such promise by the Governor General’s staff. Confused as to what the promise might have been, and unsure of its import within Aboriginal society, Ottawa officials eventually determined, four months later, to forward sixty photographs of the marquis and princess to British Columbia with instructions that they were to be “distributed among the Chiefs to whom the presents were promised.”³ Given that seven years later Chief George Chehalis and his wife still considered their gift of cattle not only unreciprocated but a matter of weighty importance, we can conclude that the photos did not meet Aboriginal expectations.

Along similar lines, many contemporary Stó:lō elders from the lower Fraser River carry oral histories of a promise that was made to them following negotiations between their leaders and the Crown’s representative at a large public gathering in New Westminster in the mid-1860s. According to these intergenerational memories, the Crown committed to providing the Stó:lō people with one third (some versions say one quarter) of all royalties generated from alienated lands and resources within their territory. To express their frustration at the government’s unwillingness to acknowledge the promise, let alone live up to it, the Stó:lō leaders staged a large reenactment ceremony in New Westminster on the queen’s Birthday in 2006. There, after ceremoniously receiving canoes that brought Aboriginal delegates to the former colonial capital as had occurred on May 24, 1864, volunteer actors dressed in period costumes repeated the words that Stó:lō oral history states were spoken by the Crown Colony’s governor.

As noted, narratives such as these sit awkwardly against the historical records preserved in archival documents and interpreted through scholarly histories. According to Western sources, Queen Victoria never visited British Columbia, no commitments were ever made to exchange gold for welfare, Spintlum was never appointed chief for life, the Marquis of Lorne never affirmed the queen's earlier treaty with Spintlum's people, Queen Victoria's daughter never accepted a gift of cattle from George Chehalis's wife, and the Stó:lō were never promised anything for their land and resources. And because such stories are incongruous with the documentary-based historical record, they inevitably fail to resonate with non-Native audiences. As such, in terms of their historical validity, they are marginalized. Because they do not correspond to notions of acceptable evidence as measured in Western culture, they are inevitably rejected as inaccurate, and the events they describe as having never happened. And yet to dismiss such stories is to close the door on another way of knowing—and to the possibility of building future respectful relations built upon the foundations of past ones.

Other ways of knowing reveal themselves through diverse, and sometimes unexpected sources. The September 1904 edition of the *Kamloops Wawa*, the self-proclaimed "Queerest Newspaper in the World," includes the daily travelogue of two sojourning Salish chiefs and an Oblate priest from the interior of British Columbia as they journeyed to Liege Belgium to attend a global gathering of Oblate priests discussing their missionary work, and then to the Vatican where they met the pope. The text of the published journal is difficult to penetrate for it is an obscure form of shorthand taught to expectant priests in mid-nineteenth century French seminaries. In addition to being in shorthand, the language itself, Chinook Jargon, is also obscure. Chinook Jargon is a trade language with a vocabulary of less than one thousand words. It is an amalgam of Chinook proper, Nuuchahnulth, several Salish languages, French, and English, and a sprinkling of Chinese and Polynesian. As such, it was never anyone's first language, but rather a language in the middle that allowed people to communicate across cultural divides. And though widespread a century ago, it is now, for all intents and purposes, a dead language. Scholars have essentially ignored the journal.⁴

On the *Wawa's* pages we read that on the way to Europe, the three stopped in Britain and took in the tourist sites, including the famous London Zoo. There, among the exotic rhinoceroses, platypuses, and elephants, was a Canadian coyote. For Chief Celestin Chilihitz and Chief Louis, this was a striking moment. One of their own (the central figure in interior Salish creation and transformation stories) had

preceded them to Europe.⁵ Inspired by the account of the European journey presented in the *Kamloops Wawa*, Salish leaders with a much more political agenda organized a second trip to Europe two years later. Originally meant to include one or both of the original chiefs who visited Coyote in London and the pope in Rome, the four members of this second delegation bypassed politicians in Ottawa (they stopped merely to inform Canadian officials of their mission but would not reveal their goals) then secured an audience with King Edward VII in Buckingham Palace. A little over a month later, they returned home with accounts of high-level diplomacy and Royal promises—promises denied by the Canadian government.⁶

More than seventy years later, in 1980, the anthropologist Wendy Wickwire interviewed an eighty-year-old interior Salish Elder named Harry Robinson, who told her a remarkable historical narrative of Coyote's journey to London and his negotiation with, and ultimate betrayal by, the king of England. Long ago, Robinson explained, near the dawn of time, Coyote's twin brother stole the knowledge of literacy and took it with him to distant England where he became the founder of Britain and father of the British people. Later, after English settlers and laws had begun to over-run interior Salish lands, Coyote was directed by an angel to seek redress by traveling to London to confront the king. Coyote did this, and ultimately secured promises from the king that Native lands and rights would be protected. The king promised Coyote that he would write all this in the "Black and White"—a book that would codify Native-newcomer relations. Through subterfuge, Robinson explains, the promise was never properly fulfilled. However, the balance of his narrative explains in great detail the important events in Native newcomer relations that resulted ostensibly from the historic diplomatic negotiations between Coyote and British Monarch.⁷

Myth and history: both terms convey something about the past, but in the mind of contemporary Westerners, or at least in the minds of most contemporary Westerners, the two are distinct narrative forms. The conveyor of one is seldom associated with the practitioner of the other, just as the reality of one is seldom considered with the truthfulness of the other; and as such, both are poorly understood. This is especially the case when the terms are applied to forms of narratives pertaining to the past as understood and used by people from cultures and languages who have not inherited the Western tradition, let alone participated in its creation and evolution.

Whereas most Western newcomers to North America associate myths with premodern fictional understandings of temporal dimensions, no

such distinction exists within the minds of many North American Indigenous people. As such, the term "myth" sits rather uncomfortably as the title of a genre of Indigenous narratives about the distant past. "Oral traditions," and "oral history," (terms often used to describe the unwritten historical narratives of Aboriginal people) are, therefore, English glosses that obscure as much as they reveal. The former tend to be associated with myth-like or myth-age stories, the latter with more "real" and more recent (that is, "historical") happenings. If descriptive words are thought of as metaphors that can help bridge cultural gulfs of understanding, then perhaps the terms oral tradition and oral history might best be regarded as preliminary allegories whose greatest strengths are to serve as starting points for the creation of ever more sophisticated metaphors.⁸

Harry Robinson's narrative of Coyote's trip to London and "The Black and White" does not fit neatly into either of the two standard identified genres of Aboriginal historical narratives. As Jan Vansina (1985) has documented, Indigenous oral histories are richest in their descriptions of what has been interpreted as the ancient past (the period when supernatural beings mingled with human characters at or near the beginning of time), and the relatively recent past during the lives of living individuals and their immediate antecedents. In the interior Salish language spoken by Harry Robinson, stories of the first type are known as *Spakwelh*, and those of the second *Spilaxem*. While interior Salish people considered both equally true and real, outsiders have tended to classify the former as myth and the latter as history, the first as fiction and the second as potentially true.

Metaphysics and politics mingle in Harry Robinson's story. So too do history and legend. In Robinson's narrative, Coyote, the Okanagan Salish "Trickster figure" who Robinson describes as being half-man and half-animal, receives a message from an angel of God directing him to London to confront the king of England about the abuse Indigenous people are suffering at the hands of the king's English children and to "make the law between the white people and the Indian."

Coyote accepts God's will and travels to England. Once there, however, Coyote cannot gain access to the monarch as he is protected by soldiers and will see no one save the Head of State. Undeterred, Coyote goes to the king's kitchen door and speaks with the cook, who is frightened by Coyote's less than fully human form. Coyote tells the cook not to be afraid. Through this lowly servant Coyote's message is delivered and the British monarch learns that Coyote, too, is a king. He is then admitted to the palace, walks up to the king of England and says,

“I am another King. I come to see you . . . You and I, we can talk the business, then we’re gonna make a law, because you King and I am King.” He says to the King, “All of your children, they come and they went from here, and then they did cross into my place, into my country. Then from there they go east and they go west . . . and they went about half-ways already and they don’t do good to my children. So that’s how I come here to see you. So we can make a law and show our children they can be good. Not to be in trouble, not to be bad to one another. That’s what I want.”

The English king, however, requires further convincing. He asks what it is, exactly, that his children have done to Coyote’s people. Was it serious? Did they try to kill Coyote’s people? Coyote is quick to answer; his people’s grievances are clear: “They just don’t care for it . . . they just go and they trade the land and they just do what they like. If my children tell them . . . ‘here, this is mine’ . . . they will kill them. So it shouldn’t be that way. Should be good to one another, and that’s what I come here for.”

The way it should be, of course, is peaceful—and the Coyote king understands that the English king’s people will only be peaceful if their behavior with Coyote’s children is regulated by a predictable rule of law. Coyote wants a codified relationship written in “Black and White” that will clarify Native-newcomer relationships principally by defining their rights and obligations toward one another. But the English king is not eager to embrace this. Assuming the superiority of his Western technology and demographics, he suggests that armed conflict would be a quicker and more effective way of resolving the tensions: “Your word is not right. Your word it sounds like war . . . If you are King and I am King we should fight. We’ll have a war.”

Coyote, however, is prepared for this diversionary tactic. Before agreeing to a fight he instructs the king to look out the window, explaining that he is confident that the English king’s attitude will change once he has seen what awaits him through the portal. Summoning the power given to him by God, Coyote makes it so the king “could see plain.” Before him were “all kinds of Indians, just as thick as could be; nothing but Indians . . . They all had a feather on their head, and they all had a spear . . . with a sharp end.” Coyote clarifies for the king that if there is a war, his feathered soldiers would be sure to “kill you first before the children here.” Frightened at the Indigenous resolve, the king in Robinson’s narrative sits back down, contemplates his options for a few minutes, and says “I think we not going to have a war because you was ready. Your soldiers are all there . . . But I’m not ready.”

There is no honor reflected in the English king's thoughts or words. Given the opportunity, it is clear he would have preferred to simply take Coyote's people's lands. Though he has aged, and supposedly matured, the king is as greedy and conniving as he was when he first stole literacy from his twin at the dawn of time. Indeed, Coyote reminds him that this is the second time the English king has promised before God that he would treat Coyote fairly and not fight—the first being when the king was young and Coyote was still a pup. As such, Coyote needs more than a verbal promise and demands that an agreement be written and signed that will forever define the relationship between Natives and newcomers and ensure everlasting peace “till the end of the world.” This “law” would specifically articulate the king's commitment to protect Aboriginal lands. Faced with Aboriginal strength and acumen, the English king acquiesces.

Prior to signing the papers, Coyote makes an additional, and seemingly unusual demand of the king—one associated with historical preservation of another kind: “‘Before we can talk the business . . . Before we can sign the paper . . . get your camera . . . King, get up and get your camera.’ He took pictures of Coyote sitting or standing or walking . . . [The English king] takes pictures.” These pictures would later prove fortuitous, for as Robinson explains, the king subsequently welches on his promise to write the “Black and White.” All Coyote's people have, in the end, to prove Coyote had indeed met the king and secured the guarantees, is the photo of Coyote in Buckingham Palace.

The photographs having been taken, Coyote and the king enter into full diplomatic negotiations over what should be included in the “Black and White.” But time is precious and Coyote must return to his land. Rather than a full treaty, they have time merely to create a “point” form list. Within this inventory is a clear commitment that the Indian people would be able to identify for themselves what lands they wanted as reserves; that such lands would be forever protected from encroachments by the king's children; and that in exchange, the white people “can use the rest.” Before departing, Coyote instructs the king to “take your time and do the rest [i.e., write the document] . . . when I leave.” As Robinson explains, it was not really necessary for Coyote to take the finished written document with him at that time because his people were still nonliterate. As such, in the end, Coyote leaves England with only the king's verbal promise that he would compose the written text and provide BC Aboriginal people with a written document in due course. What Coyote failed to anticipate was the extent of the king's mendacious character. Without Coyote there to monitor him, the king was in no rush to fulfill his promise.

The tendency for scholars engaging narratives like Robinson's has been to either employ strict synchronic methods—where the words are engaged as though their meaning is best appreciated in totally self-referential terms that are particular to the speaker's time and worldview—or to approach them through a diachronic prism where their principal value is seen as a product of their ability to contribute to what we already know about the past through alternative (archival) texts. Either approach used in isolation denies the insights of the other. But more to the point, in isolation such approaches fail to capture and reflect the story of cultural hybridity that inevitably shapes the way the Aboriginal speakers think about and understand their own past. For European ideas and beliefs often mixed in Indigenous minds and traditions in a manner that simple notions of syncretism struggles to accommodate—and which were not necessarily always exploitative and destructive.

Robinson does not date the visit to the king. Nor does he make any explicit reference to either the 1904 or 1906 Salish delegations to Europe. His description of what Coyote secured in the way of a Royal promise, and his account of the long delay in having the promises committed to paper and recognized by non-Native government and society can, however, be read against the accounts of these earlier actions to reveal striking parallels (Carlson 2005). Speaking before the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in the Province of British Columbia in the spring of 1913, for instance, Cowichan delegate Charlie Isipaymilt described the 1906 delegation, of which he was a part, by declaring

I went to the King a few years ago to try to get some settlement from the King, and when I got there, the King gave me this photograph. His Majesty promised to do something for us, and said he would send somebody out to look into the matter. The King told me that I need not feel very sorry about these things, as if there was anything he could do[,] anything for me, he would do it. His Majesty promised to give each male Indian on the reserve, 160 acres of land, as this land belongs to us Indians.⁹

Three years earlier, the 1906 delegation's frustrated leader, Chief Joe Capilano, told a reporter from *The Province* newspaper: "They [non-Native detractors] say here that I never saw the Great White Chief in London. They say I make too much of that affair and that I am full of untruth. The men who say such things are little men, the men who have no honour and think all others have no honour also. The big men, the men who deal with real men, know that I speak the truth about all these things. They know that when one chief meets another great chief he not go about

telling all the world what they speak . . . Great men are silent and honourable." Capilano continued, "The Crown is above all and when I go London I speak with the Crown, with the Great White Chief . . . We talk with the King and at the end he shake my right hand hard and with his left hand pat my left shoulder three times . . . and say Chief we see this matter righted but it may take a long time, five years perhaps."¹⁰

The 1906 delegation is not the only event recorded in Western archival documents that echoes features of Robinson's narrative as related above. Parallels are also found with the earlier 1879 efforts of both Interior and Coast Salish communities to negotiate and codify a self-governance system with Indian Reserve Commissioner Gilbert Malcolm Sproat.¹¹ There too, hybridity was at work. In 1879, the aspirations of the interior Nlakapamux and coastal Stó:lō leaders revolved around securing land and resources from non-Native settlers, and in enabling Salish people to retain and standardize mechanisms for self-governance within the constitutional framework of the Canadian dominion.

Seeking to explain the significance of Coyote's early departure from the king, Robinson's narrative goes on to discuss the ramifications of the king's failure to put his verbal promise onto paper. For, from Robinson's perspective, the king was reneging on his promise to put pen to paper and encode a law for the Aboriginal people. Indeed, Robinson explains that the point-form paper negotiated between Coyote and the king sat in the palace and was ignored by no less than four successive English kings. Only after the ascension to the throne of a queen (the original king's great-great-granddaughter) was the promise belatedly honored; and even then, improperly: four copies of the text were prepared, three of which were sent immediately to Canada. The first went to Ottawa, the second to Winnipeg, and the third, the one that was supposed to go to Coyote's people, was instead spirited away to the British Columbia provincial capital of Victoria where nefarious provincial politicians concealed it from the Indian people.

The Okanagan Salish, however, knew it had arrived because one of their members, a man Robinson identifies as "Toma" (i.e., Thomas), was known to have acted as a guide to the government agent transporting the "Black and White" over the mountains between Kamloops and the Pacific Coast. Toma, according to Robinson, had been shown the photo of Coyote taken by the king of England and included in the Black and White's pages.

In trying to link his narrative to a chronology that the anthropologist Wendy Wickwire would recognize, Harry Robinson calculates that the delivery of the "Black and White" to Canada must have occurred at least

one hundred years after the original promise was made. He also hazards the guess that the date of the book's arrival must have been "somewhere around eighteen hundred and fifty, somewhere around that time . . . I couldn't be sure . . . I'd liked to find that out some of these days." Helping to anchor the narrative and the chronology, Robinson also relates how he had seen and met Toma personally: "And I seen him in 1917 and I was seventeen at that time, and I seen him and he was kind of way older than me now. See I'm eighty years old now [in 1980] . . . but the time when I seen him in 1917, he was more than eighty . . . Pretty old. I seen him in Penticton [BC], I seen him twice."

The balance of Robinson's remarkable narrative describes how the interior Salish people eventually, through the initiatives of one of their community's first literate members, a man named Edward Brent, were able to go to Victoria and successfully demand a copy of the great "Black and White." Robinson estimated that he and Brent were born about the same time, but that Brent had died many years earlier. Brent brought his "700 page" copy of the "Black and White" back to his people and organized a series of roughly bimonthly regular gatherings of Salish people from the different language groups living in the region. At each session, he is said to have read three or so pages from the Black and White. Representatives of the various language speakers then translated the English words Brent read into their own language so they could take the information home with them. In this way, Robinson explained, over the course of many months, the people from all around became familiar with the great book and its laws.

Throughout Robinson's discussion, diplomacy and communication are shown to have played a central role in the history of Native-newcomer encounters and relations. Coyotes' desire to encode, standardize, and make predictable the relations between newcomers and Natives through the repatriation of literacy and the "Black and White" illustrate that Indigenous people see differences between themselves and the strangers who came from afar to their lands, but that they anticipate means of peaceful and prosperous relations. Indeed, as twins they share a history of creation. In discussing the "Black and White" Robinson explained, "Now, they had them all finished . . . that's the Indian Law. That's where the Indian's Law is, in that book. Nothing but the Indian Law and that's what they call the 'Black and White,' because whoever made that law, one he was black and the other was white. See that's the key . . . that he was white. And Coyote was black: that was Indian. Black and white. He made that law. That the reason why they called that book 'Black and White.' The law . . . they called the law 'Black and White.'"

The underlying historical truth and reality of Canada's Pacific Coast Native-newcomer diplomacy and relations are conveyed through both Aboriginal and scholarly histories, even though the players are not necessarily the same, or the chronologies exactly compatible. History as portrayed through the scholarly prose of Robin Fisher, Paul Tennant, Hamar Foster, Cole Harris, John Lutz, and a growing list of other academics essentially parallels and corroborates the basic elements of Robinson's narrative: Native people were entitled to certain protections from the Crown, and were led to believe that such protections were forthcoming. These protections never materialized. Non-Native settlers, through the complicity of the provincial government and the indifference of the federal government, abused Aboriginal people and land rights. Out of frustration, and increasingly desperation, the Aboriginal people sought to have their rights acknowledged and codified. The British Columbia government, however, consistently thwarted Aboriginal efforts to have their lands protected and rights recognized. Literacy was a major barrier to Aboriginal people in their dealings with a text based newcomer society. Certain newcomers, such as Indian Reserve Commissioner Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, who represented the government and traveled by horseback between the interior and the coast, were sympathetic and nominally helpful to Indigenous people, if only in encouraging them to continue to try and have their rights clarified and protected. The British Columbia government did effectively, and for many years, hide a book that outlined the improper way in which Aboriginal lands had been alienated: the *Papers Connected with the Indian Land Question* (British Columbia 1975). As well, they reneged on Sproat's 1879 assurance that Nlakapamux and Stó:lō proposals for self-governance within a British system would be favorably received. A delegation of people associated with Coyote did meet with the king of England (in 1906) and upon their return claimed to have secured certain promises that they understood would be codified and acted upon by the Crown. It was a queen (Elizabeth II, in 1982) who, though not the great-great-granddaughter of King Edward, was in fact the fourth to wear the crown after him, who repatriated the Constitution that included for the first time a reference to Aboriginal rights.¹²

The congruencies between Robinson's narrative and the general account of the fight for, and recognition of, Aboriginal rights in British Columbia as revealed through archival documents is suggestive of the power that Indigenous voices have to supplement and enrich what we know about the complicated history of relations between Natives and newcomers. But their value does not end there. Beyond being seen as

new evidence to be fit into established chronologies to enrich existing Western historical narratives, Aboriginal oral traditions open windows that can form the basis of new paradigms where entirely separate chronologies and narrative forms exist into which European archival-based evidence and interpretation can be fit. Certainly, this is the way that many Indigenous people approach the history of Native-newcomer relations.

This should not imply that established academic interpretations should be thrown out, or that lineal chronology should be replaced by an elliptical nonsequential ordering of events. Indeed, little I have encountered in Coast Salish epistemology and historical consciousness suggests the sort of irreconcilable worldviews Donald Fixico (2003) posits.¹³ Rather, beyond efforts to integrate one voice into another's story, there is potentially something very worthwhile to be learned from an examination of the structure of the other's story itself—through a cultural reading of the text.

To the extent that Indigenous people continue to see the world differently, the onus should be on newcomers, like myself, to try to figure out what those differences are, and what they mean. Newcomers are, after all, the ones who entered Aboriginal lands uninvited; and in most cases, what Aboriginal spokespersons have advocated is not that newcomers live according to Native laws and protocols, but that they live up to their own laws and political rhetoric—those that speak of specific protections and recognitions of Aboriginal rights. To accomplish this, non-Aboriginal people might want to consider inverting the intellectual exercise; to try to discern how Indigenous people understand history, and where we, as outsiders, fit into Indigenous history. Accounts like those shared by Ms. Edwards, Chief Chehalis, Chief Spintlum, and Harry Robinson not only offer insights into Salish understandings of their historical relations with the Canadian and British state, but portals through which non-Natives can catch glimpses of themselves through the rippling surface waters of the deep pools of Indigenous culture. Beyond this, the extent to which these oral histories are regarded by Indigenous people as true and accurate representations of aspects of their community history helps explain Aboriginal actions and inactions of various kinds over the past decades. Simply put, people's behavior reflects their perceptions of history and current realities. To the extent that oral histories signal a reality that is unappreciated by non-Natives, we should not be surprised to learn Aboriginal political actions do not always correspond with what outsiders have paternalistically believed is in Aboriginal people's best interests.

The fact that many Indigenous historians like those discussed above have only recently begun to share with non-Natives the metaphysical-bound

stories of Native-newcomer relations is indicative of the emerging confidence Indigenous people feel about their cultural traditions *vis-à-vis* those of newcomer society. Our responses, as outsiders, to these overtures will no doubt determine if the Aboriginal generosity continues.

Oral histories of high-level diplomacy with the Crown suggest an earlier time when Natives and newcomers could speak to one another and genuinely understand one another. That they reveal this through a historical narrative that only occasionally interpenetrates and corresponds with the non-Native historiography is doubly ironic given the inability to communicate effectively now. In wrestling with these issues in her discussions of the Indigenous people of Oceania, Aletta Biersack (1990, 12) argued that to the degree that Aboriginal societies are not static, analysis of tensions and conflict within and between Native groups (and between these same communities and European colonizers) provides rich opportunities for understanding how communities change or remain the same. Along similar lines, cross-cultural analysis of the tensions and conflicts within historical understandings may provide the keys to opening deeper, more meaningful, cross cultural communication and understanding. As such, rather than looking exclusively for moments of congruence, value can be had by engaging the points of narrative departure and the moments of epistemological contention. The differences reveal that doing history involves more than simply embracing the best among competing narratives—for definitions of what constitutes best are inevitably premised upon certain culturally specific evaluations. It also involves more than creating a coherent synthesis from narrative fragments—for coherence is likewise culturally prescribed. The goal is to engage the cacophony and seek new patterns of harmony where previously only discord was apparent. To do so is less an engagement in cultural relativism than a recognition of the relevance of culture.

Notes

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1. Interview with Elizabeth Edwards, Merritt, BC, June 24, 2004.
2. Canada. Parliament. SJC (1946). Minutes. No. 9. 423; I am grateful to Brendan Edwards for drawing my attention to this document.
3. Correspondence to I. W. Powell, March 1, 1884, RG 10, Reel C, 10117, Vol. 3666, File 10147; L. Vankoughnet to John A. Macdonald, December 11, 1883, RG 10, Reel T 16114, Vol. 11303, File 208/1-2.

4. It was ignored by historians and anthropologists, but at least a few linguists have found value in the Kamloop Wawa's text. The most thoroughly versed in the Wawa's contents is David Robertson, PhD candidate at the University of Victoria. I am indebted to him for translating the sections pertaining to the 1904 voyage to Europe—a task made possible through my SSHRC funding.
5. "London," *Kamloops Wawa*, Number 211, 13:2 (September 1904), p. 32.
6. I discuss this delegation in detail in Carlson (2005).
7. I am indebted to Wendy Wickwire for providing me with a tape of her interview with Harry Robinson, and to Harry Robinson for having seen fit to share his knowledge and wisdom with others.
8. I am thinking here principally of Clifford Geertz's (1973) discussion of ethnographic language as metaphor. He challenges scholars to continually be dissatisfied with our metaphors and continually seek newer more refined ones that bring us closer to a genuine Indigenous understanding of a term or concept. See, in particular, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," pp. 3–30.
9. Charlie Isipaymilt, testimony before the *Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in the Province of British Columbia*, May 27, 1913.
10. *The Province*, Magazine Section, March 26, 1910, quoted in Morton (1970), pp. 32, 34. In similar detail, four years earlier, while still in London, *Lloyd's Weekly News* quoted Capilano stating that the Monarch had promised to look into the issue of fishing and hunting rights, although he cautioned that it might take as long as five years to sort out. *Lloyd's Weekly News*, quoted in Gray (2002), p. 326. *Lloyd's* also reported that the delegates received gold medallions from the king and queen on which were the monarch's images. These medallions, worn like medals, are visible on Capilano's and Isipaymilt's chests in the photo taken of them in Vancouver on their return from London.
11. See Gilbert Sproat to Superintendent General, July 29, 1879, RG 10, Reel C-10, 117, Vol. 3669, File 10,691. The Nlakapamux and Stó:lō discussions with Sproat are discussed in detail in Harris (1995–96) and in Carlson (2003, 291–327).
12. These are all matters over which an academic consensus exists. See, for example, Fisher (1977); Tennant (1990); Foster (1995); Harris (1997; 2002).
13. For a general critique of Fixico's conclusions, see Krech (2006).