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# Pictographs as Autobiography: Plains Indian Sketchbooks of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

*Hertha D. Wong*

## 1

When scholars talk about Native American autobiography the assumption is that they mean the ethnographer-collected life histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Because autobiography has been considered a distinctly Western impulse emphasizing individuality and has been defined as the story of one's life written by oneself, precontact personal narratives spoken, performed, and painted by more communally oriented indigenous peoples have generally been overlooked. Thoughtful critics like Arnold Krupat insist that "Indian autobiography has no prior model in the collective practice of tribal cultures" (31). But long before Anglo ethnographers came along, Native Americans were telling, performing, and painting their personal histories. One potential preliterate model of autobiography, at least among Plains Indian males, is the pictographic personal narrative. The symbolic language of pictographs allowed preliterate Plains Indians to "read" about each other from painted robes, tipis, and shields. According to Helen H. Blish, pictographic hides were a "widely practiced" form of artistic personal history. Such "personal records" were "quite common . . . among the Plains Indians," and, says Blish, "these are the most frequently found pictographic records" (21).<sup>1</sup>

By the late nineteenth century such Plains Indian traditions of personal history began to intersect with Euro-American autobiography. When Native Americans began to communicate to others outside of their cultures, such individual self-expression encountered new challenges. Often their personal narratives were solicited by an ethnologist, historian, or other "friend of the Indian." Always they had to negotiate the difficult terrain

of translation—from a native language to English, from an oral or pictographic to a written form, from a Native American culture to a Euro-American culture.

The resulting “bicultural composite composition,” noted by some critics to be “the principle constituting the Indian autobiography as a genre” (Krupat 31) or as its “most distinctive characteristic” (Sands 57) holds true for nineteenth-century pictographic personal narratives as well as for as-told-to life histories. These “bi-cultural documents” (Brumble 2–3) reveal the artistic and literary traditions of two distinct cultures. Even though the final shape and content of the life histories were determined by white editors, Indian narrators seem to have told their life stories in their native narrative forms—forms which were shaped originally by the cultural patterns of the tribe, but which then were modified according to the needs of a new audience, purpose, and setting.

When examining this bicultural transformation, we must consider not only the narrator and his or her editor, but also the constraints of language on the process of self-expression. Literary theory that suggests how language is on the border between self and other enables us to see how language is engaged in a power struggle between these two opposing forces (Bakhtin 293–94). If the power struggle between self and other is evident within the language use of one individual, it is intensified four-fold when individuals seek to express themselves with the assistance of other persons. When two individuals come from different cultures and speak different languages, the situation is compounded again. There is an interaction not merely of two individuals with their respective senses of self and other, but there is also an interplay of two linguistic communities with their differing assumptions, preconceptions, denotations, and connotations. How, then, does a Native American express a genuine sense of self when that self is mediated not only by one’s own language, but by the language of another? How does one define a self in a hostile world? Is the act of expressing one’s self in the language and forms of the “enemy” an attempt at communication, an indication of negotiation, or an act of capitulation?

Precontact forms of personal narrative often focused on a self constructed through communal identity. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century solicited autobiographies, however, are not only concerned with a cohesive tribal identity, but with that identity in conflict with Euro-American culture. With this in mind, the anthropological theory of acculturation offers an apt model by which to consider these transitional texts. Rather

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than a one-way process—a minority group adapting to the white mainstream society—acculturation is a dual process with both groups interacting with and learning from each other. Certainly acculturation involves two distinct cultures, but the point of contact between the two results in a third culture, what Robert F. Murphy calls “a boundary culture” (262). We can think of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Native American autobiography as a type of literary “boundary culture” where two cultures influence one another simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> Although this paper is about how this border encounter changes Native American forms of pictographic personal narrative, it is vital to remember that Euro-American notions of narrative were also challenged in their turn.

These Native American collaborative autobiographies can be thought of as cultural border skirmishes and as miniatures of those treaty conferences which, according to A. M. Drummond and Richard Moody, were “our first American drama” (15). The resulting collaborative “bi-cultural document” might be seen as a personal treaty—an attempt to negotiate between one’s individual or tribal identity and a new dominant culture. Native American autobiographies are interesting, then, not merely because of what they tell us of the cultural, religious, and historical aspects of an individual and the tribe, but for the dramatic way in which they record the human encounter with change, with new and threatening circumstances. If we accept the assumption that we can shape and recreate ourselves through language, we can examine the development of some patterns of Native American autobiography in which we see individuals who attempted to recreate themselves in language and who tried to refashion themselves in a foreign language for an alien audience.

## 2

Precontact Plains Indian males did not simply *tell* the stories of their personal exploits in hunts and battles, they *portrayed* them in various artistic forms.<sup>3</sup> Pictographs were often painted on tipis, shields, cloth, or hides. As Helen H. Blish notes, nineteenth-century ethnographer Garrick Mallery called such personal records “bragging biographies” and “partisan histories” since they are individual records of one person’s exploits (21). Such “picture-writing” was meant to record and to communicate rather than to please aesthetically. Before 1830 these pictographic narratives were a type of shorthand. In fact, ac-

cording to art historian Karen Daniels Petersen, the “characteristic features of this art style” included “little interest in anatomical details,” “relative scale,” or “perspective” (*Howling Wolf* 7–8). One well-known example is the pictographic robe of Mah-to-toh-pa (The Four Bears), a Mandan chief. In 1832 George Catlin visited the Mandans and reported that Mah-to-toh-pa wore a robe with “the history of all his battles on it, which would fill a book . . . if they were properly enlarged and translated.” This robe with “all the battles of [Mah-to-toh-pa’s] life emblazoned on it by his own hand” was “the chart of his military life” (I: 145, 147–48).<sup>4</sup> Mah-to-toh-pa’s pictographic robe, then, tells the story of his heroic exploits. Following the traditional pattern of coup tales (tales of a warrior’s brave deeds), he identifies the hero (often by portraying a characteristic symbol of himself such as his lance adorned with eagle feathers), the strategic position (the warrior’s relation to his enemy), the weapons used by both the warrior and the enemy, and the number of opponents (often represented by their tracks, arrows, or bullets rather than their bodies). The result is a visual narrative of Mah-to-toh-pa’s accomplishments, much like John Sturrock’s description of the product of “the new model autobiographer” who, in the process of creating associative autobiography, presents a spatial “diagram of the autobiographer” rather than a linear narrative description (61). This pictographic narrative came to life as speech and performance when Mah-to-toh-pa, sitting upon his robe and pointing to his paintings, would brandish his knife and reenact the battles. Such a dramatic rendering of the episodes is more impressive than merely looking at the pictures which serve as a mnemonic device for the teller, as a personal and historical record for the individual and the tribe, and as a monument to individual bravery and achievement. Although a few Indians learned of Euro-American artistic techniques earlier, according to Petersen, it was not until “the decade of the 1830s that a few Indians began to draw and paint in the white man’s medium of pencil and watercolors on paper for whites” (*Howling Wolf* 9). Learning from the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer about “realistic portraiture,” Mah-to-toh-pa drew in pencil and then painted with watercolor a more realistic, detailed version of one of his triumphs in battle (9).

As well as painting pictographic hides, the “prominent tribal leaders” of the Kiowa and Kiowa-Apache painted their tipis (Ewers 8). From 1891 to 1904, James Mooney, the ethnologist for the Smithsonian Institution, collected “small-scale models of painted tipis” described by the oldest Kiowa and Kiowa-Apaches who remembered and owned these tipis and

painted by Kiowa artists—Paul Zotom, Charley Ohettoint, and Silverhorn (Ewers 10). Before 1870 such ornamented tipis were used to signify the elevated status of an individual within the tribe. These “earliest mural artists in North America” obtained designs and colors for their art work through personal visions, brave war deeds, inheritance, or marriage (Ewers 8). Designs were often handed down from one generation to the next so that a tipi design was closely associated with the individual owner and his family, in much the same way as a European family crest symbolizes a collective heritage. Some owners even “came to be known by the names of their tipis” (Ewers 8). Both the design and the colors are personal expressions rendered in a set of conventional symbols, what James Mooney referred to as “Kiowa heraldry” (Ewers 10). Although the tipi usually had an individual owner, several men generally worked together to create this artistic autobiographical narrative, an intratribal collaboration soon to be supplemented with bicultural collaboration.

### 3

By 1870 Euro-Americans had virtually exterminated the buffalo and, along with these sacred animals, the physical and spiritual sustenance of the indigenous peoples of the Plains. Hostilities between Plains Indians and Anglos, as we know, often flared into warfare. According to Indian art historian Dorothy Dunn, “painting and drawing now became an urgent personal record of dying days” rather than the earlier heraldic expressions of self. Plains Indian men continued to paint pictographic personal narratives, but now the materials, the occasion, and the audience had been altered abruptly. It is not surprising that “much of the new art emerged in army prisons—Fort Robinson, Fort Omaha, Fort Sill, Fort Marion, and others in which the Indians had been confined” for protecting their own homelands (7), including “847 extant pieces of art done by twenty-six Plains Indian warriors” who had been imprisoned in Fort Marion (Petersen, *Plains Indian Art* ix).

Two such examples are found in the 1877 *Sketch Books* of Zo-Tom, a Kiowa, and Howling Wolf, a Cheyenne, who were held prisoners in Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. Like many Indian prisoners, Zo-Tom and Howling Wolf sketched and painted on whatever material was available to them. After seeing their drawings, Eva S. Fenyés (then Eva Scott), an artist herself, ordered art pads for them and asked them “to fill the



Figure 1. "Howling Wolf in Indian Costume."  
(Courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.)

two sketchbooks with colored drawings" (Dunn 11). It was not until 1969 that Fenyes's daughter, Leonora Scott Muse Curtin, published reproductions of these drawings because they "provide a rare and fascinating opportunity of seeing the Indians as they saw themselves in bygone times" (Dunn 12).

Of the two artists, Howling Wolf is the less explicitly autobiographical. Although he begins his sketchbook with depictions of his personal activities, he shifts his focus to portrayals of tribal life.<sup>5</sup> Plate 1 (Figure 1) is a drawing of Howling Wolf in full Cheyenne warrior regalia.<sup>6</sup> He wears a long warbonnet, breechcloth, breastplate, silver hair-plates, and a bird war charm tied in his hair. He carries his personal shield, sword, coup sticks, and ironically (to a contemporary eye), a pendant US flag. In addition to these innovative details of costume, he reverses the traditional flow of action. Instead of the narrative action moving right to left, as it does in the conventions of earlier hide paintings, we read this picture from left to right. Rather than the conventional Plains Indian autograph—in this instance, a shorthand sketch of a howling wolf above or below Howling Wolf with a line connecting the pictographic autograph to the person—Howling Wolf includes a somewhat realistic drawing of *honennisto*, or a howling wolf, without the connecting line. Petersen notes that at least "within Fort Marion, the name-symbol device became obsolescent"; it was used in less than 20 out of 460 drawings (*Plains Indian Art* 53). Howling Wolf uses it, but with innovations. In Plate 2 he presents a picture of himself as a small boy with his father and mother—all dressed in traditional Cheyenne clothing. After this brief

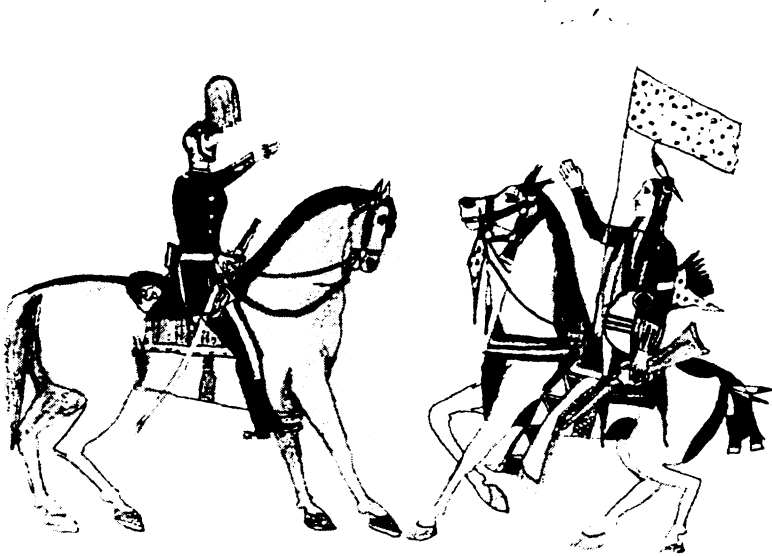


Figure 2. "Zo-Tom Coming to Capt. Pratt with flag of truce in '71." (Courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.)

presentation of his parents, Howling Wolf's personal account turns into an artistic tribal documentary as he depicts people in ceremonial garb—chiefs, warriors, medicine men, and brides and grooms; and tribal activities—hunting, fishing, singing, dancing, drumming, riding, fighting, and counseling. It is important to remember, however, that in precontact times one's individual identity was linked so intimately to one's tribal identity that personal and tribal history were often one and the same.

Zo-Tom's drawings, on the other hand, are more consistently autobiographical since he focuses more persistently on his personal narrative. Read from start to finish his pictographs reveal some of the changes he underwent in this transitional period. Although the drawings are not strictly chronological, they do tell a story of change over time. On one narrative level, the drawings depict his journey from the freedom of the plains to his imprisonment at Fort Marion in Florida. On another level, they reveal his journey from the old Kiowa ways of life (represented by scenes of hunting, fighting, moving, trading, gambling, and celebrating) to his new Euro-American way of life (in this case, represented by a drawing of Zo-Tom studying English).

Zo-Tom's first drawing depicts a Kiowa camp with nine men and women pursuing assorted activities amongst the painted tipis. Plate 2, entitled by the editor, "Chief Receiving a Stranger of Importance," shows the respectful Kiowa reception of a white military officer. After this initial intercultural en-



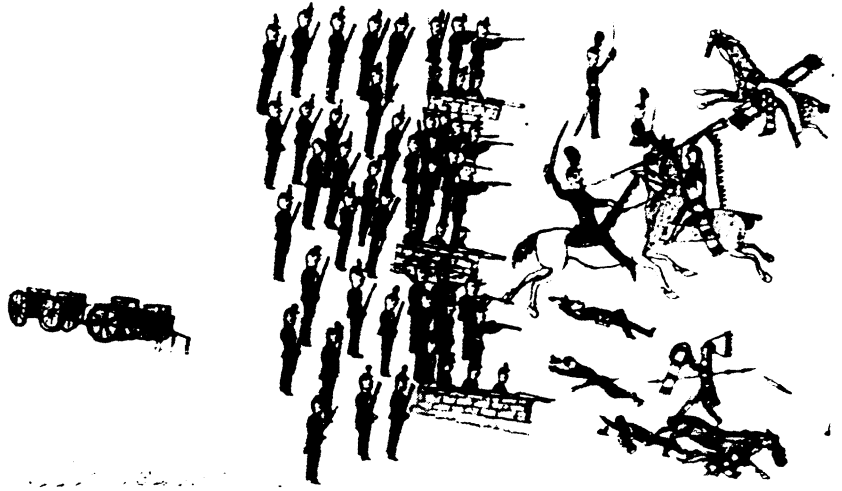


Figure 3. "A Great Battle." (Courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles; 2 Parts.)

counter, there is no more mention of Indian-white interaction until Plate 18 in which the Kiowa prepare to surrender to Captain Pratt. Plates 3 to 17, like Howling Wolf's, deal with Plains Indian daily activities—dancing, chasing Navajo, gambling, trading, sleeping, celebrating, cooking, eating, marrying, burying, moving, hunting, and fighting other tribes. After Plate 18, "Surrender at Mt. Scott," Zo-Tom depicts the journey to Fort Sill in Oklahoma and from Fort Sill to Fort Marion in Florida, with a few flashbacks depicting the old days. In Plate 23 (Figure 2) Zo-Tom presents himself as the warrior carrying the flag of truce to Captain Pratt in 1871. Like Howling Wolf, Zo-Tom ignores the traditional right to left movement of hide paintings. Captain Pratt and Zo-Tom meet face to face in the center of the page. Both extend their right arms in a peaceful greeting. In his left hand, Pratt grips a sword, while Zo-Tom holds a rifle and carries a quiver of arrows. Traditionally, a mid-nineteenth-century pictographic painter would depict details of the enemy's costume, enough at least to identify tribal affiliation and rank. Accordingly, Zo-Tom provides numerous details of Captain Pratt's military uniform, including buttons, stripes, boots, and spurs. In addition, he provides comparable details of his own outfit—what looks like an army jacket adorned with Kiowa designs, leggings, moccasins, breastplate, and shield. This extended treatment of his own costume may result from using Euro-American art materials (paper and pens rather than hide and bone) that allowed for more detailed treatment of subjects.



As a result, notes Petersen, the “name-symbol device” was replaced by “a costume-symbol” (*Plains Indian Art* 54). The horses, too, are rendered in detail. Pratt’s horse is large and brown with horseshoes, while Zo-Tom’s is small, black, and unshod. Also, Zo-Tom’s horse has been adorned with feathers (signifying brave escapades) and has had his tail tied (perhaps indicating recent participation in battle). One final innovation to the conventions of pictographic painting is even more remarkable. To be certain the viewer knows that *he* is the one dealing with Pratt, Zo-Tom adds one thing. He (or perhaps the editor) writes his name in English above the picture.

In Figure 3, “A Great Battle” (Plate 26), Zo-Tom provides a detailed pictographic narrative of Kiowa warriors and the US Army engaged in battle. This pictograph “in basic respects, in scheme of composition and style of life figures, corresponds to mid-nineteenth century hide paintings” (Dunn 17). He uses the main conventions of hide and tipi painting—front view of torso with the rest of the body seen from the side; detailed ornamentation of the enemy; wounds depicted as dark spots with blood streaming from them; and movement depicted from right to left. He also uses some of the basic formats of the coup narrative: he indicates the affiliation and status of warriors and soldiers by providing details of costume and horses, and he presents the strategic positions of both sides. Note how the US soldiers are barricaded together on the left, while the Indian warriors are attacking from the right. Zo-Tom, however, does

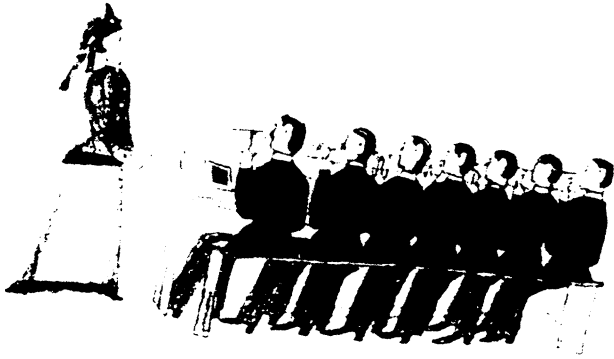


Figure 4. "A Class of Indians in Fort Marion, with their teacher (Mrs. Gibbs)." (Courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.)

not rely entirely on such conventions; he also "extends precedents developed in hide painting" (Dunn 19–20). His new additions include his treatment of the military barricades and wagons and the fact that the drawing is "more representational" than the older hide paintings (Dunn 17).

From this battle, Zo-Tom proceeds to draw the dreary exterior and interior of Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, in the penultimate two plates. His final drawing, "A Class of Indians in Fort Marion, with Their Teacher (Mrs. Gibbs)" (Figure 4), completes his account of his personal journey and serves as the climax to his cultural conversion narrative. Instead of the long-haired, brilliantly attired and ornamented Kiowa warriors of his earlier drawings, he draws seven clean-cut Indian students in blue pants and snug black coats who sit, lining a long school bench, at a long desk. Mrs. Gibbs, the teacher, stands, prim and pleasant, to the left. Dutifully, the Indian students read names from flashcards. Zo-Tom has written his name above one student and Making Medicine's above another. Each name, written in English, is connected by a line to its owner (in a modification of a traditional Plains Indian autograph). Zo-Tom's name appears again, more discreetly, on the flashcard held by the student next to him. Thus Zo-Tom has become a new person and a new subject—literally. In this new life, he is a subject of study both for Fenyes and for himself.

To a certain degree Zo-Tom and Howling Wolf use mid-nineteenth-century Plains Indian artistic principles and conventions in their personal narratives, yet they also introduce



Figure 5. Fenyés's title page for *Zo-Tom*. (Courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.)

new elements such as an occasional written word to aid in explanation, more realistic depictions of animals and people, and frequent drawings of landscape. The original purpose—to describe one's personal heroics—is still accomplished, but in forms modified to be comprehensible to a white audience. Furthermore, a new purpose—to translate one's culture—has been added. The collaborative nature of these drawings continues from preliterate Native American collaborations in painting tipis and hides, but now there is only one collaborator—a white sponsor. Fenyés did not sit with Zo-Tom and Howling Wolf advising them about how to draw, nor did she edit their final pictures. She did, however, add two major contributions.

Fenyés added the descriptive titles for each drawing and the general titles for each sketchbook. Her selection of titles for these sketchbooks is revealing: "The Life of the Red-Man, Illustrated by a Kiowa Brave" (Figure 5) and "Scenes from Indian Life, Drawn by Howling Wolf" (Figure 6). Such titles disclose her interest in depicting a generalized presentation of Indians, rather than the personal artistic interpretations of individuals. This approach was shared by many ethnographers who were interested in presenting a picture of "some representative . . . individual," rather than in describing the personality of a "definite personage" (Radin 2). Along with inventing the titles, Fenyés did the calligraphy and design for the title pages, leaving a space in the center of each for a picture of the Indian artist.

By providing the sketchbooks, Fenyés helped to shape the pictures produced. It is no accident that Zo-Tom and Howling Wolf each have twenty-nine pages of drawings (although Zo-



Figure 6. Fenyes's title page for *Howling Wolf*. (Courtesy of Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.)

Tom uses the back of one page to make a two-page drawing of "A Great Battle," and Howling Wolf occasionally draws two related pictures on one page, thus modifying the available space). The very size, shape, and texture of the medium influence how the artist will proceed. Thus the European artistic sensibilities of their sponsor determined, in part, the artists' output. Such a seemingly casual collaboration is far less intrusive than the more active involvement of many ethnographer-editors who often rearranged their Indian informants' recorded oral narratives, imposing a strict chronology and excising "tedious" repetitions. Without such direct interference, the traditional Plains Indian pictographic modes of personal narrative continued with only a few modifications made in order to enhance their accessibility to a white audience in this "evolving bi-cultural expression" (Dunn 25).<sup>7</sup> Petersen points out that Indian adaptation of European materials did not begin in prison. In fact, "blank or partly used ledgers, army rosters, daybooks, memorandum books, and sheaves of paper often found their way into Indian hands through gift, trade or capture" (*Plains Indian Art* 25). Even before the buffalo were exterminated, many "warriors adopted the white man's materials for recording the pictographic history of their brave deeds" (25).

## 4

A more conspicuously modified pictographic personal narrative was composed over fifty years later by White Bull (*Pte San Hunka*), a Teton Dakota chief who, like Zo-Tom and

Howling Wolf, fought whites in the 1870s and claimed to have killed General George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. White Bull's 1931 written and pictographic personal narrative is clearly influenced by the request and expectations of his solicitor-editor. Chief White Bull's narrative was commissioned by Usher L. Burdick of North Dakota who paid him fifty dollars for a "Sioux History Book." White Bull wrote part of his account in Dakota and drew part of it in traditional pictographs in a business ledger, using "a combination of ink, lead pencil, and colored crayon" (Howard vii). Editor James H. Howard begins White Bull's personal narrative with a letter (from White Bull to Burdick) which reiterates the arrangements made with Burdick, at the same time encouraging a more generous payment. White Bull writes: "Friend, you have asked me to send [return] something and I have done as you wished. What you say is so, but I would like to say this. My war record, as I have written it, is accurate and I have written it for you. You said you would give me fifty dollars for it and that is all right, but I would like to earn more, and as you see I have written much more" (Howard 1-2). This letter makes it clear that White Bull is not writing for his own edification, but for a monetary compensation. His "personal narrative," then, was not merely solicited; it was purchased. Such considerations may help explain, in part, what White Bull includes in his narrative.

After the letter of explanation, White Bull begins his personal narrative with a brief account of several buffalo hunting expeditions. After the traditional hunting stories, White Bull presents his genealogy. Following this brief personal reckoning (1-3), White Bull devotes pages 4 through 8 to his winter count (which he purchased from Hairy-Hand)—a pictographic Dakota history covering the years 1764/65 to 1816/17 and 1835/36 to 1930/31.<sup>8</sup> White Bull, however, recorded events in writing, not in pictographs, even transferring Hairy-Hand's pictographic versions of events painted on hide to his own written versions on paper.

From tribal history, he returns to his personal history, which focuses upon hunting and warring. After another set of hunting stories, this time for buffalo and bear, and a political genealogy, White Bull's personal narrative indeed becomes a "war record." He devotes pages 11 through 46 to his war honors, arranging them by type—counting coup in battle (11-32) (Figure 7), rescuing fallen comrades (33-38) (Figure 8), and stealing enemy horses (39-46) (Figure 9). For these he includes traditional Dakota pictographs, but adds to them copious labels and expla-

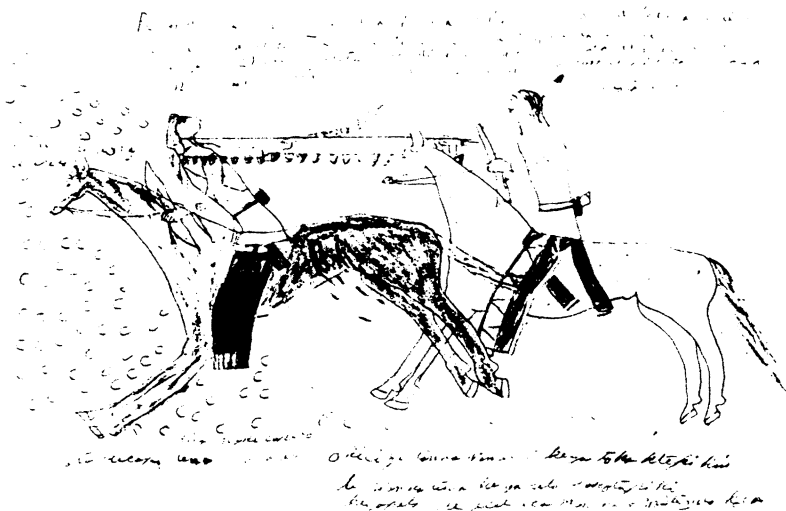


Figure 7. "White Bull Counts Coup on a Flathead." (Courtesy of Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota and University of Nebraska Press.)

nations written in Dakota. In Figure 7 (Plate 8) White Bull, on the right, chases down and counts coup on a Flathead who fires a gun at him (note the curlicue lines coming from the gun indicating gunsmoke). Traditional nineteenth-century hide-painting conventions include flow of movement from right to left, hoofprints to indicate number and direction of warriors, small heads and elongated bodies of horses, and wound marks (note the two dark spots dripping blood on the enemy's horse's side). White Bull's "feathered banner," notes Howard, was "commonly associated with the Strong-heart and Crow-owners warrior societies" (42). According to Howard, the text above the Flathead's horse's head may be translated as "They were charging me from this direction" (42). This is obvious to a reader of picture-writing because of the hoof marks leading in that direction. The Dakota text at the bottom right reiterates the basic information: "There was a big fight and this was the first man killed. Because of it I was highly praised by the Lakotas. It was a glorious fight, my friend" (42).

In Figure 8 (Plate 27) White Bull, wearing a full warbonnet, rescues a wounded Cheyenne. (That the wounded man is Cheyenne is indicated by the salamander war charm tied in his hair. Note also the wound in his side.) This is an especially brave deed since you can see the hoofprints, gunsmoke, and flying bullets (indicated by short lines). In a kind of pictographic synecdoche, one gun, on the left, represents a full collection of warriors. The Dakota writing above identifies White Bull and his Cheyenne friend, Sunrise, and describes the action, the en-

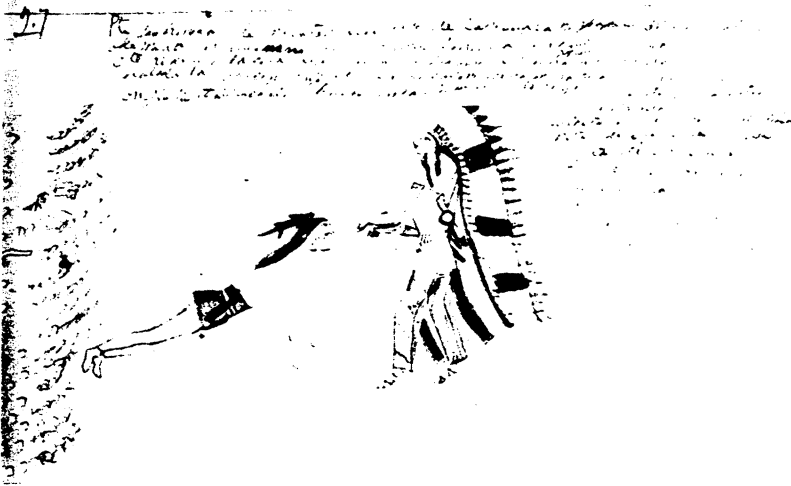


Figure 8. "White Bull Rescues a Wounded Cheyenne." (Courtesy of Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota and University of Nebraska Press.)

emy, the witnesses, and the battle location (66–67). In Figure 9 (Plate 29) White Bull is shown stealing nine horses from a Crow camp. The camp, on the right, is depicted as a circle of thirteen tipis. In the middle of the circle is the Dakota label Howard translates as: "This is the Crow camp" (69). Hoofprints within and around camp indicate the original position of the horses. The squiggly line above camp denotes a stream. The writing above provides basic information about the exploit, while the brief labels near each horse describe their worth. "Four of the adult horses are labeled '*le waste*' ('this was a good one')," explains Howard, "and the two colts are labeled '*cincala*,' meaning 'young ones'" (69). Just as Zo-Tom's pictographic narrative is clarified by the addition of an occasional word, White Bull's drawn personal history is enlivened, at least for a white audience, by the additional detail provided in his written narrative.

In contrast to his numerous drawn and written depictions of his early life, White Bull includes only two written accounts (conspicuously lacking pictographs) of his later life at the agency. In these accounts he catalogs his titles and achievements obtained in his new life. He served as an Indian policeman, a tribal judge, a chairman of the tribal council, a catechist, and so forth. Finally, White Bull ends his personal narrative with three of his updated pictographs (pictographs which include written commentary) in which rather than focusing upon the present, he returns to his depictions of the past.

White Bull's narrative movement, which fluctuates between personal and tribal foci, may highlight his traditional





Figure 9. "White Bull Steals Crow Horses." (Courtesy of Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota and University of Nebraska Press.)

sense of tribal identity. On the other hand, his inclusion of tribal history (especially the winter count) may arise from Burdick's desire for a "Sioux History Book" or White Bull's own desire for a longer account which might mean a more financially profitable endeavor. If White Bull's narrative moves liberally between personal and tribal history, it also roams freely between past and present, dwelling heavily upon the past. Clearly, the expectations of his Euro-American editor shape White Bull's personal account. Even though White Bull's narrative is organized, in traditional Plains Indian fashion, according to his brave deeds and war honors, it follows a general chronological progression. With such a pattern one might expect his personal narrative to end with his later life at the agency, but White Bull defies such a Euro-American expectation in three ways.

First, he devotes only two pages to this part of his life. Even though he had held many honorable positions and had achieved a respected status in both the Dakota and white communities, and even though he had lived this "later life" for more than fifty years, he does not elaborate upon his experiences. Such a contracted treatment of so many years filled with so much activity suggests a distinct selection principle on White Bull's part. White Bull's minimal description of this part of his life reflects the reluctance of a great many Indian people to talk about their reservation experiences. Zo-Tom and Howling Wolf, remember, devote most of their attention to their prereservation days of freedom. The Crow chief, Plenty-coups, will say only this: "when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell

to the ground, and they could not be lifted up again. After this nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere" (311).<sup>9</sup>

Second, unlike his depictions of the honors obtained in his earlier life, White Bull draws no pictographs for his later life. Instead, he catalogs his achievements in writing. Perhaps a traditional Plains Indian pictographic mode simply was not suitable to depict his nontraditional actions as a policeman or a tribal chairman or a church catechist. Although his ceremonial dancing or his Custer battle reenactments or his apprehension of "antagonistic" Utes for the US government seem to lend themselves to pictographic expression, he does not give them such artistic treatment. Perhaps the detail he bestowed upon the pictographs of his hunting and war deeds of the distant past and the sparse catalog he wrote of his recent past indicate the relative importance he placed upon these two sets of events. It is as if his real life ended fifty years before, at the age of thirty-one, when, as he says, he "followed the ways of the whites, as the President instructed" (Howard 76).

If White Bull were to end his personal narrative with his brief written list of achievements since living "the ways of the whites," we might conclude that he diminished his treatment of his later life because he gloried in his adventurous past or that he yearned for his lost youth or that he simply ran out of time because of a deadline and so brought it to a hurried conclusion (also explaining the lack of pictographs for this stage of his life). White Bull, however, does not end his personal narrative with his reservation life. He includes three final pages, each with a pictograph accompanied by a written explanation. What is striking here is that these pages focus once again upon the distant past, a third way White Bull confounds a sense of chronology. In Plate 37 White Bull draws a picture of his tipi. On the next page (in Plate 38), he draws "The Ceremonial Camp of the Circle of the Miniconjou," labeling several items and explaining about life "a long time ago" (Howard 80).

The final Plate (39) (Figure 10) shows White Bull in "the full ceremonial costume of a Teton chief" (Howard 81). This is not, however, a depiction of White Bull as a young warrior. Rather, it is a picture of the contemporary White Bull (the eighty-one year-old autobiographer) in the costume he wore "on festive occasions," "at the gatherings of the Lakotas," or "riding in parades" (Howard 81). Thus, the two penultimate pages of White Bull's personal narrative return to "a long time ago" when he lived in a tipi and the Miniconjous came together for ceremonials. His final pictograph, however, unites (for the first time in his account) the distant past with the present. The

Figure 10. "White Bull in Full Dress." (Courtesy of Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota and University of Nebraska Press.)



present-day White Bull is shown in his “long ago” ceremonial clothing in which he reenacted and/or recalled historical deeds for a contemporary audience.

White Bull’s narrative is a fascinating example of transitional Plains Indian autobiography in that his personal narrative was solicited and purchased by a white history buff. It was both drawn and written, thus combining Native American and Euro-American autobiographical forms. White Bull’s written explanations and labels themselves suggest a white audience (a Plains Indian audience would need no explanation) and thus reveal an attempt at a type of translation from one cultural code to another. White Bull’s personal narrative was also translated, edited, and published by James H. Howard, a Euro-American scholar. Chief White Bull’s narrative, then, has been triply mediated by Euro-American society: Burdick’s request and expectations, White Bull’s modification of traditional pictographic forms, and Howard’s translation. Yet a sense of White Bull—courageous, proud, and deeply attached to his tribal past—emerges from his hybrid autobiography which mixes past and present, Miniconjou and white, and pictograph and writing, all of which are representative of the boundary culture in which he lived.<sup>10</sup>

Zo-Tom’s and Howling Wolf’s pictographic sketchbooks from the late nineteenth century and White Bull’s pictographic

and written Dakota ledger book from the early twentieth century provide insights into one of the precontact Plains Indian male traditions of personal narrative and its subsequent adaptation for a white audience. Relying on earlier artistic conventions of Plains Indian hide and tipi painting, these three artist-autobiographers use new materials and modify pictographic conventions for a white audience. These men were not sellouts. Each of them fought against the encroaching Euro-Americans. Zo-Tom was “in the last group of Kiowa warriors to surrender, February 18, 1875” (Petersen, *Plains Indian Art* 173), and two months later, Howling Wolf was arrested at the Cheyenne Agency for being a “ringleader” (*Plains Indian Art* 221). A year or so later, White Bull fought at the Battle of Little Big Horn (1876). Only when they had no alternative did they agree to translate their personal exploits and tribal experiences into pictographic narratives modified for a white audience. Certainly all were motivated by economic factors. The work of Zo-Tom and Howling Wolf was in great demand by wealthy, curious, or sympathetic whites. The going price for a Fort Marion Indian sketchbook was \$2.00 (*Plains Indian Art* 64) and White Bull, remember, earned \$50.00 for his “Sioux History Book.” Each of them was willing, under pressure, to examine the white way of life. Years after converting to Christianity, however, all three men returned to tribal ways. After serving as a deacon of the Episcopal Church, Zo-Tom became a Baptist and finally a member of the Native American Church which blends Christian and tribal beliefs and ceremonies with the use of peyote. Howling Wolf and White Bull also gave up “the Jesus road” and, by the end of their lives, joined the Native American Church. Under the harshest conditions, these pictographic autobiographers attempted to communicate in modified Plains Indian forms to their white audience. They provided ethnographic details of tribal costume and custom and personal details of individual accomplishments. These pictographic sketchbooks, then, provide an insight into a distinctly traditional Plains Indian form of autobiography as it was being adapted to colonialism.<sup>11</sup>

Traditional Plains Indian pictographic personal history continued to be evident in the transitional autobiographies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Often these forms were modified to make them comprehensible to a white audience. Such Plains Indian personal narratives were supplemented by commentary from ethnographers and editors who were often responsible for the final shape of the autobiography

as well as its original solicitation. Thus, as Native Americans and Euro-Americans clashed and negotiated historically, representatives of these two distinct cultures interacted textually within the pages of transitional autobiography. As Anglo editors attempted to translate Native American languages, cultures, and personalities into their own language and cultural framework, one result was a blend of traditional Native American pictographic forms of personal history and Euro-American written modes of autobiography. Such a life story, "a self-contained fiction" (Titon 276), is an attempt to refashion one's self. If autobiography is an act of self-creation, Native American transitional autobiography is an act of self re-creation in which a Native American conceives of himself or herself anew as a result of this boundary culture encounter.

Acknowledging Plains Indian pictographic paintings as one distinctly native form of autobiographical activity is not only important in piecing together a uniquely Native American tradition of autobiography. Such pictographic narratives have consequences for literary discourse in general, and for autobiography theory in particular. Pictographic narratives challenge the Eurocentrism of our American literary canon, they dispute the ethnocentric definition of self assumed by many theorists of autobiography, and they defy the primacy of the written word. American literature does not begin with Captain John Smith's 1620 account of New England; it does not even begin with explorer narratives. It begins in pre-Columbian oral and artistic traditions of indigenous peoples. Similarly, Native American autobiography does not begin with Western imposition of European forms on native peoples. Rather, what we can at least call autobiographical activity emerges on its own terms from preliterate native peoples. By the late nineteenth century, oral and pictographic forms of personal narrative intersect with Western autobiographical forms, continuing a long tradition of adaptation and development.

### Notes

1. See also Lynne Woods O'Brien and H. David Brumble III's latest book.
2. In *For Those Who Come After*, Arnold Krupat refers to such transitional autobiographies as "the textual equivalent of the frontier" (33).
3. As well as the hide and tipi paintings mentioned below, Plains Indian males narrated their stories in their personal adornment. In *Indian Art in*

*America*, Frederick J. Dockstader notes how Plains Indian face painting, hair designs, and clothing expressed a “concept of self” (46).

4. This robe was not the only part of Mah-to-toh-pa’s outfit that was decorated with pictographs of his achievements. For Catlin’s description of Mah-to-toh-pa’s mountain-sheep shirt, leggings, etc., see 146–47.

5. The Howling Wolf and Zo-Tom sketchbooks I describe were recently donated to the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles by Curtin’s daughter. Another Howling Wolf sketchbook is owned by A. H. (Anna Bourke) Richardson’s family and is housed in the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. According to Petersen, the Field Museum, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and Yale University have other Howling Wolf drawings, while Hampton Institute, the Museum of the American Indian, Yale University, and Boles and Jolly have Zo-Tom drawings.

6. Throughout this paper, Plate will refer to the original sketchbook and Figure will refer to the illustration accompanying this text.

7. A similar artistic autobiography is that painted in watercolor by Running-Antelope, a chief of the Hunkpapa Dakotas, for Dr. W. J. Hoffman in 1873. This “continuous record of events” includes “the most important events in the life of Running-Antelope as a warrior” between 1853 and 1863. Each of the eleven watercolors is a detailed coup account with Running-Antelope’s name depicted pictographically in each. Along with the drawings, Running-Antelope provided an oral interpretation. See Mallery, II: 571–75.

8. These page numbers refer to White Bull’s original ledger book housed in the Special Collections Department of the Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, not to Howard’s edition.

9. In addition, Brumble notes that “the reluctance of early Indian ‘informants’ to open up ‘their souls in the inwardness of true autobiography’ is widely remarked upon” (3).

10. It is interesting to note that another artistic form of personal expression, blanket weaving, went through a similar change, but with different results. Anthony Berland and Mary Hunt Kahlenberg trace the design changes of Navajo blankets from prehistoric times to the twentieth century (3). In the late nineteenth century most of these changes were due to the demands and desires of the market (the wealthy Euro-American purchasers from the East coast) which insisted upon borders, subtle colors, “suitably ‘barbaric’ designs,” and wool rugs rather than cotton blankets (142–45). Some Navajo women, “weaving for trade rather than for the tribe” (141), gave up one means of traditional self-expression in return for economic improvement.

11. According to Petersen, the Fort Marion sketchbooks “may prove to be the Rosetta Stone of Plains Indian pictorial representation” (*Plains Indian Art* x).

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