***Reading the Wampum: Essays on Hodinöhsö:ni' Visual Code and Epistemological Recovery.* Penelope Myrtle Kelsey. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. 152 pp. 978-0-8156-3366-2.**

http://www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu/fall-2014/reading-the-wampum.html

In the summer of 2013, the Hodinöhsö:ni' Confederacy celebrated the 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum, the first treaty belt marking a precedent-setting agreement between the Iroquois and the Dutch. Many subsequent treaties cite that foundational wampum belt as it provides legally binding terms for the relationship between the Confederacy and settlers along with a process for future negotiations.

Travelling by canoe from Albany to New York City, descendants came together in 2013 as part of the Two Row Wampum Campaign to reaffirm the historial, political, cultural, and philosophical importance of the Two Row. The significance of this particular belt cannot be overstated. Like the Magna Carta it is "a great humanitarian document because it recognizes equality in spite of the small size of the White colony and insures safety, peace, and friendship forever, and sets up the process for all of our ensuing treaties up to this moment" (3). Yet few political scientists and legal scholars have ever heard of the Two Row and other wampum belts, literary scholars remain largely ignorant about wampum literacy, and post-colonialist are mostly unaware of the relevance and resurgence of wampum theory.

Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's new book *Reading the Wampum: Essays on Hodinöhsö:ni' Visual Code and Epistemological Recovery* could be a game changer. Kelsey's groundbreaking book answers the call of scholars like Craig Womack to center tribal literatures, languages, stories, and theories in Native American studies. Despite her Seneca descent, Kelsey explicitly locates herself outside the Longhouse, noting that she stands "outside this circle of tribal sovereignty, as a non-Hodinöhsö:ni' citizen" (xxvi). Her methodology is informed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith's influential treatise *Decolonizing Methodologies* which calls for scholarship that is useful and accountable to indigenous communities. For non-native scholars who stand at a far greater distance in these concentric circles, Kelsey's words evoke the possibility of a ripple effect. Her innovative analysis demonstrates how scholars can engage the relationship between alphabetism, new media, visual culture, and indigenous literacies like wampum, pictography, and quipus in order to understand the transformative potential of these indigenous bodies of knowledge.

Focusing on four contemporary Iroquois intellectuals, James Thomas Stevens, Eric Gansworth, Shelley Niro, and Tracey Deer, *Reading the Wampum* is the first book-length study of Hodinöhsö:ni' visual, material, print, and multimedia culture through the lens of wampum imagery and narrative. It begins by grounding readers in the literary and political history of wampum and then explicating six classic and influential belts. The two Row Wampum, the Canandaigua Treaty Belt, and the Wolf Belt record political agreements while the Three Sisters Belt, the Everlasting Tree Belt, and the Adoption Belt transmit cultural knowledge. In the chapters that follow, Kelsey offers innovative critical readings of the ways in which these belts inform contemporary literature, film, and visual art and in the process "extends the rafters in our epistemological practices to bring forth the coming generations of Hodinöhsö:ni' citizens and descendants" and, possibly, their allies (xii).

The introduction usefully situates the project in relation to Kelsey's first book, *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature,* as another sustained inquiry into "wampum's centrality in Hodinöhsö:ni' intellectual practices" (105). While her first book offers a comparative study of Dakota and Hodinöhsö:ni' writing, *Reading the Wampum* offers the "first study of Hodinöhsö:ni' visuality, aesthetics, material culture, and print culture to focus on these subjects through the lens of wampum imagery in the literary and creative works of four contemporary Iroqois intellectuals" (xviii). While investigating the relationship between wampum and Hodinöhsö:ni' epistemology, narrative, political history, aesthetics, philosophy, and of course treaty rights, Kelsey notes that Hodinöhsö:ni' visual code is part of a larger literacy repertoire that includes traditional and new media such as beadwork, pottery, sculpture, film, photography.

Leaving aside the spiritual properties of wampum as the domain of properly appointed Faithkeepers, Kelsey offers a secular analysis of wampum teachings in classic belts and contemporary narrative, nothing that "wampum belts are fundamentally related to other records of Iroquois visual code, and they have an intrinsically politically-charged content, as wampum belts were the method that Hodinöhsö:ni' chiefs and clan mothers used to record international diplomacy and treaty agreements initially with tribal nations and thereafter with settler governments as well" (xiii).

Aimed first and foremost at the Hodinöhsö:ni' themselves, Kelsey's book assumes some knowledge from her readers, yet offers an accessible grounding in Hodinöhsö:ni' wampum culture, history, and philosophy along with a brief history of the destruction and theft of wampum by settler-colonists. *Reading the Wampum* appropriately locates this history in the context of Spanish destruction of indigenous literacies in Mexico, Central America, and the Andes during the early colonial era and also in the context of cultural genocide targeting languages, knowledges, and literacies with the aim of destroying indigenous intellectual traditions and their transmission. Museums and archives, residential and boarding schools in the US and Canada have played a historic role in this epistemic warfare and Kelsey makes a vital argument for the importance of rematriation of wampum belts and other cultural patrimony, seeing "the engagement of wampum imagery and narrative by contemporary Hodinöhsö:ni' authors" as part of the movement to repatriate "their wisdom and their epistemic record" (xvii).

The first chapter of *Reading the Wampum* focuses on the Two Row belt, or *Gaswënta',* the first treaty belt recording a groundbreaking and precedent-setting agreement between the Iroquois and the Dutch in 1613. As Kelsey notes, "nearly every treaty proceeding from the seventeenth century until the late nineteentch century begins with the European and Six Nations delegates reciting the principles of the Two Row" (4). The Two Row carries not only legally binding international agreements, but also the knowledge, the epistemology, the history, the philosophy, and the literary theory of the Hodinöhsö:ni' into the present. Despite sustained campaigns of destruction, theft, and repression, wampum and other indigenous literary forms remain and persist. As Kelsey demonstrates convincingly, Hodinöhsö:ni' intellectuals continue to explore and revitalize this tradition and the work of contemporary artists and activists become her methodological entry point enabling scholars outside the Longhouse to engage this important, centuries-old, medium collaboratively and respectfully.

Kelsey opens with an explication of the Two Row by Leroy (Jock) Hill, Cayuga Nation Sub-Chief of the Bear Clan. The chapter then analyses the intertextual relationship between the Two Row and the poetry of James Thomas Stevens (Akwesasne Mohawk) in two collections: *A Bridge Dead in the Water* and *Tokinish.* Kelsey approaches Stevens as a poet-intellectual who effectively (dis)Orients readers from Western episteme and then (re)Orients them towards Hodinöhsö:ni' "political thought and wampum teachings" (7).

Of particular interest to Kelsey is Stevens' use of a "LGBTQ2 lens to lay bare the colonial epistemic impulses that contest Hodinöhsö:ni' peoples' ability to enforce this treaty" (8). She argues that Stevens explorations of sexuality and ethnicity instantiate a Two Row episteme that can explore sameness, difference, and equality in contemporary lived experience and thus speak to decolonization movements more broadly, despite its insider address to a Mohawk audience. Kelsey's readings of Stevens' stunning poetic intertwining of English and Mohawk language, words, records, and concepts as a violation of the principles of side-by-side existence embodied in the Two Row convinces this reader that not only Kelsey, but also Stevens deserves a broad and global audience.

Kelsey's second chapter, "The Covenant Chain in Eric Gansworth's Fiction, Poetry, Memoir, and Paintings: The Canandaigua Treaty Belt as Critical Indigenous Economic Critique" explores the 1794 treaty in relationship to Gansworth's poetry, prose, and visual artwork. Here, as in other chapters, Kelsey offers clues to the ways in which wampum iconography operates so that readers gain a real sense of the ways in which this medium records and signifies, without losing sight of its unique nature. The Canandaigua Treaty, like other wampum belts, "participates as a living entity and agent in an ongoing process of Indigenous-settler alliance and diplomacy" but "unlike alphabetic writing, wampum belts do not reproduce speech, rather they signal a different set of communicative values rooted in community. For the message of a wampum belt to continue, that message must be remembered in living, human community" (33). Kelsey's readings of Gansworth's use of wampum imagery (in artwork that accompanies his written alphabetic words) reveal a stunning, intriguing, and vital system of signification across media, substantiating her early claim that wampum is part of a Hodinöhsö:ni' visual code that links and traverses wampum belts, literature, painting, beadwork, sculpture, pottery, photography, multimedia works, film and more. She argues convincingly that "Gansworth's renditions of the Canandaigua Treaty Belt provide a map for navigating this new ecogeospatial relationship between settler and Indigene" by offering a transformative "cartography in which a Hodinöhsö:ni' worldview is still normative" (63).

Following these queer and political economy analyses of alphabetic texts and visual art, Kelsey moves to consider tribal feminism in contemporary film. Her third chapter focuses on Shelley Niro's work in multiple media including photography, film, beadwork, painting, sculpture, and storytelling" with an emphasis on Niro's film *Kissed by Lightning* from 1992. This chapter explores the ways in which the Three Sisters Belt informs Niro's work and returns to the healing capacities of wampum for those who are griving and for a world that needs to recover the balanced embodied by the Three Sisters Corn, Squash, and Beans which balance the nitrogen count of the soil when planted together. Central to the chapter is the Women's Nomination Belt, which "records the clanmothers' authority to select, install, and dehorn chiefs" (71). The colonial clash between native and settler populations targeted not only indigenous literacies and

knowledges, but also the authority of women which is central to Hodinöhsö:ni' political culture. Women owned the land and women appointed the chiefs. According to Kelsey, there is "little one could say to overestimate the importance of clan-mothers in Hodinöhsö:ni' society" (69). Her beautiful reading of Niro's contemporary retelling of the establishment of the Great Peace and her reaffirmation of the role of clanmothers and the women's council sets the stage for the final chapter on "Kahnawake's Reclamation of Adoption Practices in Tracey Deer's Documentary and Fiction Films: Reading the Adoption Belt in a Post-Indian Act Era."

The final chapter in this eminently readably study focuses on the fraught issue of identity in Kahnawake, offering the Adoption Belt as a foundational text that can supersede colonizing and heteropatriarchal legislation like the Indian Act. Enacted in 1876, this law revoked legal status from women who married non-Mohawk men and conferred legal status on white women who married Mohawk men. Like other colonial measures of native identity such as blood quantum, this law has caused internal conflict and displaced indigenous ways of understanding identity with devastating consequences for women in particular.

Chapter four explores how award-winning filmmaker Tracey Deer's 2008 film, *Club Native,* confronts this legacy and its contemporary complications. According to Kelsey, the film instantiates a decolonizing collective reading of the Adoption Belt as "a record of the process by which Hodinöhsö:ni' people determine what constitutes individual community membership and national identity" in contrast to the "Euro-Canadian principles of separation and exclusion as embodied in the Indian Act, which first worked to detribalize First Nations women on patriarchal grounds, and the Kahnawake Membership Law, which as rearticulated some of those same philosophies" (83-4).

At this point, the reader has benefitted from successive readings of belts, texts, images, and film, along with a well-paced historical and philosophical explication of wampum and Hodinöhsö:ni' history and political structures. Although each chapter stands alone and can be read and assigned as such, the sum is vastly greater than the parts because it allows Kelsey to chart a vibrant field of wampum knowledge and theory. Kelsey's also makes a powerful, if subtle, case for the urgency of "rematriation," a term she uses alternately with "repatriation" to refer to the return of all wampum belts to Hodinöhsö:ni' communities and those properly trained to read and care for the belts.

Despite the alluring title, *Reading the Wampum* will not teach readers how to "read wampum" although it explores the iconography and visual code of wampum at length. What Audra Simpson has called "ethnographic refusal" here functions to block colonial appropriation, even as Kelsey offers her readers a sophisticated understanding of "the ways in which wampum teachings are still relevant to the challenges faced by Hodinöhsö:ni' peoples in the present" and to "larger decolonization movements" (106). Indeed, *Reading the Wampum*, and the work of Stevens, Gansworth, Niro and Deer, deserves the careful attention of literary, media, rhetoric, post-colonial and theory scholars around the world.

Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Binghampton University