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Chinnubbie and the Owl: Muscogee (Creek) Stories, Orations and Traditions.

By Alexander Posey. Edited by Matthew Wynn Sivils. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 128 pages. \$21.95 cloth.

Matthew Wynn Sivils should be widely commended for his new scholarly collection of rare texts penned by Alexander Posey (1873–1908), the famous Creek writer. Posey aspired to produce an anthology of Creek writing and a history of his people, as Daniel F. Littlefield notes, and he claimed to have “enough material for a thousand pages” (13). However, Posey published only a small number of prose texts, which he wrote between 1892 and 1907. In *Chinnubbie and the Owl*, Sivils collects the “nine stories, five orations, and nine works of Muscogee oral tradition” that constitute the entire archive of published prose by Posey besides the material in Carol A. Petty Hunter and Daniel F. Littlefield Jr.’s *The Fus Fixico Letters: A Creek Humorist in Early Oklahoma* (1993). Sivils writes that part of the impetus for publishing these pieces was preservation, since many of the texts were published only in the “long defunct Indian Territory newspapers” and are now “yellowed, fragile clippings” in decay (1). These writings are a whisper away from extinction. I, too, have been in some of these archives and have commiserated with the heroic librarians in Oklahoma who struggle daily with limited archival budgets to preserve crucial Native texts against Oklahoma humidity and historical neglect. Miserly budgets threaten the rich historical and cultural archive that is Indian territorial writing.

Posey’s work is the tip of the iceberg for writings in English by Native Americans in Indian Territory, which are a sizable percentage of all writing by Native writers before the 1920s and 1930s, when government reforms, United States citizenship, and wider access for Native people to education and the press brought forth a much larger collection of voices. Scholars who wish to understand the concerns and artistry of Native people before the 1920s—to the degree that archives in English allow—are well served then by familiarizing themselves with Indian Territory tribal voices, which have been made relatively accessible through the inestimable advocacy, impeccable scholarship, and archival vision of Littlefield and his American Native Press Archive at Little Rock and in collections such as this one.

In the tradition of Littlefield’s scholarship and style, Sivils merits praise for the well-crafted and precise writing that he contributes to the collection. He provides an introduction to the book as well as to each section—the stories, the orations, and the treatments of traditional Creek materials. Throughout the material he provides ample context, footnotes, and bibliographic information that is by itself worth the price of the book. Of course, the materials in this collection are of secondary scholarly and aesthetic importance to *The Fus Fixico Letters*, a crucial text not only for scholars of Indian Territory but for scholars of regionalist and Native American literature in general. However, Sivils’s collection is important and enjoyable to read. It thus joins other mandatory texts for understanding the tribal literature of Indian Territory in the early twentieth century, which are also in many ways centered around Posey. There is much essential new scholarship on this topic, as noted in Sivils’s bibliography, but the most important

is that of Littlefield. Joining this work is the scholarship of Craig Womack, particularly his study of Creek writing, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999), which grounds the Creek literary tradition jointly in Posey's *Fus Fixico Letters* and the Creek oral tradition. Posey is one of the most important Native voices of that time; in many ways Posey's image of Fus Fixico and his friends sitting around drinking Creek home-brewed sour sofky while discussing tribal and national affairs and culture has become the archetypal metaphor of both Creek literary expression and Native literature overall, thanks largely to Womack's influence.

Posey's *Fus Fixico* letters were written in response to the attempted dissolution of tribal sovereignty by the federal government through the Dawes and Curtis acts and the extinguishment of the tribal governments of Indian Territory, and thus they are wrapped up in the arcana of turn-of-the-century eastern Oklahoma. His folktales and other prose pieces, collected here, are more approachable for readers whose interests lay outside the Indian Territory context, and they are also, perhaps, more timeless—and timely. Creating a coherent communal discourse out of hybridized parts is a central concern in Native studies, and it is something that the Creek confederacy has excelled at for hundreds of years. Sivils rightly points out that Posey is a good example of this Creek (and Native) capacity to rejuvenate traditions by incorporating disparate sources, whether they be Romantic poets, American grafters, Creek Miccos, or Afro-Creeks.

Posey was a writer at ease with the Creek oral tradition. In contrast to other writers, both Native and non-Native, who tried to fix the stories in an archaic or “authentic” mode, Posey adapted them to his own idiom. His “A Creek Fable” places an older Creek story in the context of Indian Territory days, thus dramatizing the tensions of his own time through the deployment of an ancient vehicle. Posey's speeches, with their stylistic indebtedness to Alexander Paine and Robert G. Ingersoll and their praise of heroes as disparate as Sequoyah and Daniel Webster, capture the range and depth of cultural literacy in the Indian Territory among many of its Native people.

Sivils's collection is exciting as well because it attends to Posey's “darky” tales and his racism toward Afro-Americans and Afro-Creeks. These stories, Sivils writes, “despite their racist presentation of freedmen, are ripe with political and social commentary and serve as precursors for his more focused *Fus Fixico* letters” (16). They represent Afro-Creek freedmen whose dialect was infused “with a Muscogee accent” and prefigured his traditionalist Creeks in the *Fus Fixico* letters, with their Muscogee-infused English (14). Such stories are important, and not just as a signifier of racism; they are testimonies, in their own way, to the less-than-ideal multicultural reality of the Indian Territory, as well as to the complex cross-pollination of stories and identities between Native and black people.

Posey represents a crucial multiculturalist link to regionalist writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but certainly not an unproblematic one, and the greater availability of these stories should deepen the already vibrant scholarly attention now attuned to the interplay of Natives and other minorities. There are no simple binaries or relations

in the primary documents of this literature, as Sivils suggests in his chosen name for the collection, *Chinnubbie and the Owl*. Posey frequently deployed a figure of his own invention named Chinnubbie Harjo, who was a great orator but also a trickster hero, with all of the ambiguity that the term carries in the Native American canon. In the story from which this collection draws its title, Chinnubbie wins a costly bow-and-arrows set in a storytelling contest. He does so partially by conflating himself with the Creek medicine men and prophets, the *hillis haya*, who, as a badge of their expertise, often wore owl's feathers or carried stuffed owls (30–31). In the story, Chinnubbie Harjo deploys an owl to attest to the verisimilitude of his tale (31). Sivils writes that “Posey’s prophets are also tricksters,” and indeed it is an interesting contribution of Posey’s work that tricksters and wise men are so often conflated (31). Like Chinnubbie Harjo, the trickster whose name became Posey’s own pseudonym, and the Creek wisdom signified by the owl, Posey and his work are richly enigmatic and serve both cultural and critical desires (11). This collection thus enriches and complicates our understanding of the late Indian Territory milieu of which Posey was a vibrant node. Surely now, with this collection and the works of Littlefield and Womack, we can all recognize his central importance in Native literary studies.

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Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World: The Clash of Cultures in the Colonial Southeast. By Michelene E. Pesantubbee. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. 240 pages. \$39.95 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

Choctaw Women in a Chaotic World addresses an important lacuna in much Native American historiography by examining the lives of women of one southeastern North American nation, the Choctaws. As is the case with most histories of Native America, women have been almost completely neglected by historians of the Choctaws, whose major sources, the writings and testimonies of male European explorers, conquerors, and settlers, have consistently overlooked or misunderstood the activities of Native women, including those they enslaved, used for their sexual gratification, married, or lived with in stable unions. With this work, Michelene Pesantubbee contributes to the project already undertaken by several other historians (including Patricia Galloway, Theda Perdue, and Karin Anderson): writing women back into their own histories and the histories of their nations. In addition to adopting many of the now time-honored techniques of women’s history (for example, reexamining familiar primary sources in order to find and articulate the presences of women, asking both fairly simple questions—“Where were the women?”—and more complex ones—“How was this event/catastrophe/transformation understood by women?”), Pesantubbee rejects the deference that afflicts many indigenous historians, who are so anxious to meet “professional standards” that they ignore the information carried in their own stories and