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Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000 (2003). xiii + 207 pp. ISBN: 1-55849-264-X (hbk.); 1-55849-412-X (pbk.).

This book tackles a highly significant task with substantial corollaries: a careful rereading and contextualization of a selection of texts written by (and about) Christian Native Americans in the northeastern United States. In a clearly written and concise book, Wyss limits her analysis to 'five specific situations that range from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries' (14): discourses by or about Christian natives in King Philip's War; the conversion of the Wampanoag in Martha's Vineyard as recounted in Experience Mayhew's 1727 account; narratives about native conversions and Christian lifestyles in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and Brotherton, New York; and: William Apess' autobiographical writings. As a whole, this work depicts and interrogates the manifold cultural sequels of the appropriation of European literacy practices and Protestant moral discourse by various native communities and influential native historical actors, returning at strategic points to broader analytical preoccupations— such as the issue of what may be termed a 'native' voice, the often unpredictable results of transculturating projects among natives, and the cultural repertoire of Native Christianity— which could be easily referred to in the plural, given Wyss' convincing depiction of diversity among native communities of believers. To highlight the contribution that this book makes to the study of writings by indigenous peoples within colonial social worlds, one could seize upon two piercing characterizations at the beginning and the end of this work.

For this reviewer— who has examined a similar set of issues in New Spain through the lens of colonial Spanish American historiography and the comparative sociology of reading— Wyss builds a convincing and at times richly detailed case for one of her most pointed assertions: that Native Christianity stands out as an uneasy, troubled, but rather pliable cultural experiment 'defined by the constant deferral of home, or the constant movement, both geographical and cultural, of a fragmented people' (165). This contention does seem to tie together the disparate scriptural and social worlds of the Algonquian authors of diplomatic entreaties during King Philip's War, the humility of visionary Wampanoag Christians in Martha's Vineyard, the depiction of indigenous neophytes as prone to drinking and relapsing in Stockbridge, the attempts to create a unified community of Native Christians at Brotherton in the early years of the American republic, and Apess' denunciation of Presbyterian prayer as an enticing but ultimately segregating moral practice. However, this assertion does not easily coexist with one of the author's earlier contentions: that by reading texts by Christianized natives, 'one does not get access to the ideas and values of indigenous peoples— or what Gayatri Spivak may call "the subaltern"...' (10). Nevertheless, if the fractured and segregated native Christian communities cannot be regarded as bona fide indigenous— if 'nativeness' lies elsewhere— just what kind of cultural entities are they?

In spite of this latter assertion— which appears to be a cautious but somewhat inconsistent circling around the epistemic wagon of identity by assuming an exclusionary opposition between Christianization and indigenous identities, however defined— Wyss does embrace a complex analytical position that avoids a monolithic depiction of authentic native voices. The author carefully maps out the implicit acts of translation that underlie the moral dialogue in which some eloquent native converts, such as Mayhew, Aupaumut, Johnson, and Apess, engaged European interlocutors, pointing out in the process some of the inherent contradictions that inhabit indigenous Christian social and devotional practices. One theoretical support is provided by James Clifford's and Werner Sollors' appeals to questioning the systematicity of ethnic boundaries; another by Mary Louise Pratt's notion of 'autoethnography' as a vehicle through which colonized subjects represent themselves through the dynamics of dominant rhetorical practices. Even if some of the native authors seem more markedly 'autoethnographic' than others in intent and delivery— Apess appears to be far more mordant, detached, and reflective than James Printer or Experience Mayhew— this solution suggests a response to the quandary about how 'native' these Christians were. As was the case for some native authors in Spanish America, they could be regarded as the inhabitants of a social world in flux, where hybrid cultural forms presented various intellectual and social adaptations to colonial Christianity that could not (and, perhaps, would not) displace or erase forms of social organization, devotional practices, and cosmological beliefs with deep historical roots in the pre-contact past. Wyss' work suggests that, rather than weighing the relative autochthony of such responses, the historian's challenge resides in conveying the complexity and multiplicity of native discursive and social engagements with Christianity.

While this book systematically engages with the work of major exponents of the 'New Indian history', the possibilities for a comparative engagement could have been extended further. A brief comparative glance at the study of native responses to colonial rule in Spanish America or reading practices in early modern Europe would have provided the author with some suggestive points of contact. She shares her perspective on literacy as a multifaceted phenomenon not only with Deborah Keller-Cohen, but also with Joanne Rappaport,

Tom Cummins, and Walter Mignolo; her emphasis on marginalia and on native uses of devotional texts echoes Roger Chartier's treatment of literacy as a socially diverse phenomenon among 'communities of readers' in early modern Europe; her account of native rhetorical forms underlying English-language texts makes a contribution to our understanding of native rhetorical engagements with colonial authorities, a topic that has been advanced in Spanish America historiography through the study of works by Nahua, Maya, and Andean authors. Moreover, some of the tropes and characterization Wyss' work carefully records in North America—the rhetorical link between natives and drunkenness or 'paganism' and suffering in this world, the social value invested in legal documents written using an alphabetic transcriptions of native languages, the drive to create accounts of exemplary native Christians for European consumption— have striking parallels in colonial Spanish America, in spite of crucial differences in the dynamics of colonial rule and colonial law in the various European possessions in the Americas. In this work, Wyss succeeds in illustrating, by means of compelling examples and a sophisticated reading of crucial passages, the multiple deferrals and denials that indigenous North American Christianity entailed both as discourse and in practice. Such a result presents an analytically important contrast to the widespread social, cultural, and rhetorical viability of a staggeringly heterogeneous array of native Christian devotions in Spanish America.

In closing, it must be stressed that *Writing Indians* provides a fluid introduction to the study of native literacy and native Christian discourses in colonial North America that is appropriate for both advanced courses in early North American history and literature, and for comparative survey courses. Furthermore, through its insistence on the diversity of native rhetorical strategies, this work invites a reexamination of the intellectual dynamics of colonial Christianity— a multidisciplinary dialogue that demands an increase in the interaction of regional historiographies across European colonial domains throughout the Atlantic and the Pacific basins.

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