

“Holo what?” or, The Exceptional Business of Naming: A Dialogue

Mareike Neuhaus

NORTH AMERICAN INDIGENOUS LITERATURES in English use what I call relational word bundles, a rhetorical structure that is exceptional both in form and origin. A relational word bundle effectively is a figure with significant narrative function that is combined with other such figures to form a text's narrative grid, thus functioning as synecdoche writ large. Given the relational word bundles' origin in a significant Indigenous language structure—the holophrase (one-word sentence)—a rhetorical analysis of relational word bundles from the perspective of a non-Indigenous scholar (that is, myself) is equally exceptional.

This essay explores the rhetoric of relational word bundles from the perspective of both Indigenous rhetorics and classical rhetoric, focusing particularly on Canadian contexts. In the spirit of the exceptionality of relational word bundles, the essay takes the form of a dialogue between two scholars. Their conversation points to relational word bundles as the rhetorical expression of Indigenous notions of community and storytelling. Tracing the story of the relational word bundle's evolution, this dialogue also explores the ethics of reading, foregrounding questions all too often lingering in the background: What do critics do, how, and why do they do it, and what are the implications of their work?

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Finally, it deserves mentioning that of the two characters featured in the dialogue one is a fictional version of myself, while the other functions as a kind of epitome of the various friends and colleagues—both Native and non-Native—with whom over the years I have had the pleasure to share my work. Why fictionalize myself, and why make this epitome an Oscar Wilde specialist? As Oscar Wilde once noted, “One should always be a little improbable” (“Phrases and Philosophies” 177).

IT’S A SUNNY AFTERNOON, sometime in July. People are sitting on the porch in front of a café somewhere in North America. Among them are Oscar, a writer and Oscar Wilde expert, and Kate, a scholar of Indigenous literatures; the two have known each other for a good number of years. Birds sitting on a nearby tree are chirping. Cars are passing by. Music can be heard playing from inside the café.

OSCAR. So, how’s your summer going?

KATE. The usual. I’m getting all too fond of not having to teach.

(Both laughing.)

KATE, *more seriously*. ’N how about you? *(takes a sip from her coffee)*

OSCAR. Oh, I’ve been working on this and that. Nothing spectacular. That is, I did start a new project.

KATE, *raises her eyebrows*. What’s that?

OSCAR, *chuckling*. You might enjoy this. The title I’m using is “Oscar Wilde’s Influence on Shakespeare’s Sonnets.”

KATE. Sounds better than “A Wildean reading of Shakespeare.”

OSCAR. You betcha. *(lights his pipe)*

KATE. But you’re not planning to prove the existence of Willie Hughes, are you?¹

OSCAR. No, no, no, far from it. My point is that Willie Hughes, or whoever stands behind the letters W.H., is a mere fiction.

KATE. A mere fiction?

OSCAR. Yes, I want to suggest a reading of Shakespeare’s life as imitating his sonnets; the sonnets expressed Shakespeare’s deepest desires, desires he didn’t even know he had. Desires that had to be fulfilled eventually.

KATE. Erotic desires, I assume?

1 In Oscar Wilde’s short story “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.,” Cyril Graham commits suicide over the attempt to prove the existence of Willie Hughes, the alleged dedicatee of Shakespeare’s sonnets.

OSCAR, *smirking*. Of course, for fulfilled they were “between the sheets,” so to speak, with all those real W.H.s Timothy Findley hints at in his play *Elizabeth Rex*.²

KATE. I get it, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” (Wilde, “The Decay of Lying” 40).

OSCAR. Exactly.

KATE. Just let me know once you’re done so I can prevent you from committing suicide.

OSCAR, *puts out his pipe*. I’ll probably die of this (*waves his pipe*) before I’m even close to finishing. (*Both laughing*.) Your turn, Kate. What is it that you’re so fond of this summer?

KATE. Nothing really original; I’m revisiting my work on the paraholophrase³—

OSCAR. Para what?

KATE, *slightly perturbed*. Para-holo-phrased.

OSCAR, *mocking her*. A hollow paraphrase?

KATE. Not quite.

OSCAR. Or a paraphrase with a hole in it?

KATE, *suddenly bemused*. Come on, Oscar. You know exactly what I’m talking about ...

OSCAR. Do I? (*Kate gives him one of her serious looks*.) Okay, I do, but you know what? I deserve another explication, if you don’t mind. Help out an old friend?

KATE, *smiling*. Always a pleasure. The term’s derived from holophrase—

OSCAR. A hollow phrase?

KATE. No, without the “w”

OSCAR, *sounding out the syllables*. H-o-l-o.

KATE. Yes, holo. Holophrases are one-word sentences, words that express a complete sentence or clause.

OSCAR. An example, please?

KATE. Let’s see ...

OSCAR. How about ... How about “coffee”?

² In a conversation with Timothy Findley’s Ned Lowenscroft in *Elizabeth Rex*, Will Shakespeare seems to imply that there might have been more lovers than Henry Wriothesley, who is identified by some as the “Fair Youth” of Shakespeare’s sonnets (Findley 56–58; also see 44–45). The words “between the sheets” are spoken to Queen Elizabeth by Ned Lowenscroft in his attempt to help Elizabeth find the woman in herself by recalling her intimacy with the Earl of Essex on the eve of the Earl’s execution (Findley 69).

³ See Neuhaus, “*That’s Raven Talk*.”

KATE. If you take this to mean, “Let’s have more coffee,” then this would be like a holophrase.

OSCAR, *to the waitress walking by*. Could you get us two more coffees, please? And some chocolate, too? Thanks. (*turning to Kate*.) But you’re working on Native literatures, right? And Native holophrases are probably very different?

KATE. Yes, holophrases in Indigenous languages are much more complex than your coffee example. Take “*kiwâpamew*,” for instance. That’s Cree for “he or she saw him or her.”

OSCAR. A complete sentence expressed in a single word?

KATE. Yes, and a rather simple sentence, too. Cree sentences can be a whole lot longer than those few letters.

OSCAR. So my coffee example only pretends to be a complete sentence, whereas holophrases actually *are* complete sentences. But what does all this have to do with that paraphrase of yours?

KATE. You mean, paraholophrase.

OSCAR. Whatever.

KATE. Now, there *is* a difference.

OSCAR. Relax, relax. I’m just mocking you.

KATE. The point is that paraholophrases are the functional equivalents of Aboriginal holophrases.

OSCAR. So they serve the same or similar functions as holophrases, only in a different language. But which functions specifically?

KATE. Holophrases are the building blocks of Indigenous discourse; they create narrative.

OSCAR. How so?

KATE. Let’s assume you’re looking at a story in Mohawk. You identify all the one-word sentences in it and then delete everything else. You’d still be left with a summary of the story. Because holophrases are capable of expressing both the event and everyone and everything involved in it.

OSCAR. That’s ... that’s beautiful.

KATE. It is, indeed. Strictly speaking, then, holophrases aren’t just about morphology, about how words are put together. They also concern discourse as a whole, and the same applies to paraholophrases.

OSCAR. Gotcha. Paraholophrases become the building blocks of Aboriginal narrative in *English*?

KATE. Exactly. Take Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water*—

OSCAR. Love the book!

KATE. Great. Remember its water imagery?

OSCAR, *as if quoting*. “But there is water everywhere” (King 3, 431).

KATE. Yes, Coyote's right: the novel's full of water imagery—
OSCAR. And water, particularly at the end, when the dam breaks.
KATE. That, too. But so is the story. Everything is fluid and in motion. The
three narrative strands eventually float into each other—
OSCAR. Coyote and the Four Old Indians move back and forth between
strands—
KATE. Not to mention the abundance of intertextual references.
OSCAR. Okay, okay. And your point is?
KATE. Something has to hold all this play together. Otherwise there'd be
no text—
OSCAR. The marriage of form and content—
KATE. And ironically, it's all the water imagery and the intertexts that do
just that. Holding things together, I mean, by establishing links between
different parts in the novel—
OSCAR. And there are a lot of those in *Green Grass*.
KATE. Yes, there are. And then there are links beyond the novel, in the
form of intertexts. To Indigenous origin stories, Anglo-American texts,
the Bible, King's own work—
OSCAR. Fine. I get it. But how does this relate to your work?
KATE. Well, what you are looking at in the water imagery and intertexts in
Green Grass are structures that have a surplus of meaning. They carry
additional baggage, if you will, something that goes beyond the obvious,
something that readers have to uncover for themselves.
OSCAR. Such as the respective outside text or a gap between sign and
meaning in the case of figures?⁴
KATE. Yes, but paraholophrases do more than engage readers in the text.
Because by forming a grid for the novel, these structures also have
narrative function. Take the dialogue between Coyote and the "master"
narrator at the beginning of the novel.
OSCAR. The one about there being so much water?
KATE. Yes, that one. It's repeated at the end of the novel—not fully ver-
batim, but some key phrases are "quoted" directly. So, in the end, that
conversation frames the novel as a lesson in storytelling, if you will.
OSCAR. And it gives the novel its cyclical structure because Coyote screws
up his turn in telling the story that the master narrator has been teach-
ing him all along. Correct?

4 Gérard Genette describes figures of speech as "a gap between sign and meaning," whose "value [...] is not given in the words that make it up, since it depends on the gap between these words and those that the reader perceives, mentally, beyond them" (49, 54).

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KATE. Correct.

OSCAR. Great, I got it, then. This is what happens: in the move from Native languages to English, holophrases become paraholophrases.

KATE. See, holophrases and English grammar don't get along. So, as a structure, holophrases can only be translated on the level of function. And the end result of this translation is the paraholophrase—

OSCAR. A structure that is no longer a one-word sentence but that in its surplus of meaning and its narrative function comes pretty close to what holophrases do in Aboriginal languages. Right?

KATE, *smiling*. Well practised, Oscar. There's one important difference between holophrases and paraholophrases, though.

OSCAR. I'm all ears.

KATE. The holophrase marks a linguistic category, but the paraholophrase belongs to literary criticism. It's similar to the holophrase, yet different; hence the prefix.

OSCAR. So you're saying, the paraholophrase does on a rhetorical level what the holophrase does on a linguistic level in Aboriginal languages.

KATE. Yes. Linguistics becomes rhetoric.

oscar. That makes the paraholophrase quite exceptional, but it also turns it into a pesky little critter—

KATE, *looking puzzled*. Why's that?

OSCAR. Well, because I'm smelling (*seeing the waitress bringing the coffee*) ... coffee ... (*to the waitress*) Thank you. (*to Kate*) Well, rhetoric is what I'm smelling.

KATE. But that's exactly why the paraholophrase is so exceptional, because of its form and origin. In fact, that's also the premise of my current research, that the paraholophrase concerns rhetoric.

OSCAR. Boy, oh boy ...

KATE. See, in my previous work, I have framed the paraholophrase as a reading strategy for orality in Indigenous writing—

OSCAR. Because paraholophrases essentially let readers participate in the creation of story? Just as they have to put together the different layers of meaning in *Green Grass*?

KATE. Yes, but there's more to the paraholophrase than reader engagement. One, reader engagement and author involvement go hand in hand.

OSCAR. Kinda like there is no figure without readers noticing the gap between sign and meaning, but, then again, there'd be no figure at all without an author inventing it in the first place?

KATE. You betcha. Two, paraholophrases often also provide much of a text's interpretative and other contexts—that's also a feature often associated with oral discourse, that it is largely context-based. And three—and that's the part that interests me now—this interaction between author-text-reader points us to rhetoric.

OSCAR, *looking confused*. If that's the case, why don't you change your term accordingly?

KATE. Huh?!

OSCAR. Well, there's no inherent reference to rhetoric in paraholophrase.

What about—holoscheme.... I'd like that much better.

KATE. Of course you would. But there's only (*counting in her head*) ... three syllables and ... ten letters in "holoscheme."

OSCAR. Will you stop counting syllables? Please. The term is artificial enough. Why make it even more unbearable?

KATE, *deep in thought*. Maybe holoscheme is not so bad a term after all.

OSCAR, *grinning*. It's brilliant, of course. But why the sudden insight?

KATE. Well, it's a figure, that's why.

OSCAR. Who's a figure?

KATE. The paraholophrase is. I mean, the holoscheme is.

OSCAR. How's that possible?

KATE. See, all the holoschemes I've come across involved some figurative use of language. In fact, you may think of holoschemes as series of figures used as significant narrative units to form a text's narrative grid, thus functioning as large-scale synecdoche ... And—

OSCAR, *relights his pipe*. Hold it right there! Let's unpack that: *holoschemes* behaving like *large-scale synecdoche*—you gotta like that. Sort of like Tzvetan Todorov's *sentence* is a figure of the *novel*, right? Except that the *sentence* is replaced by the Aboriginal *holophrase*, extended to the English language, and the *novel* by—

KATE. Yes, *pars pro toto*—

OSCAR. Okay, okay—but what's this *series of figures* that forms the *large-scale synecdoche*—isn't that getting a bit circular?

KATE. Let's look at the matter more closely then, shall we? (*Oscar nods his head.*) There are really two kinds of figures involved here—

OSCAR. There are?

KATE. A given set of holoschemes behaves like *one* large-scale synecdoche, a mega-synecdoche, if you like. One holoscheme alone in a given text is doomed to be but a figure.

OSCAR. So you *are* refining Todorov's idea of the sentence as a figure of the novel? You're making synecdoche the figure of the narrative structure of—

KATE. Exactly! Think of a text. Within this text there are a number of figures—

OSCAR. What kind?

KATE. Doesn't matter. Metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, symbol, you name it. Some of these figures, but not all, are significant narrative units—

OSCAR. Roland Barthes's cardinal functions?⁵

KATE. Kinda. Now, take these figures with significant narrative function and what do you get?

OSCAR. The text's narrative grid.

KATE. Exactly! Narrative grid *pro* narrative.

OSCAR. *Pars pro toto*.

KATE. So, you see, holoschemes only come into being when one narratively significant figure relates to another which relates to another ...

OSCAR. A whole web of figures related to one another—very Indigenous, that one!

KATE. Of course, it is. This figure is modeled on the holophrase, after all.

OSCAR. But it's also very Aristotelian.⁶ Invention played out on a large scale becomes arrangement—

KATE. Large scale?

OSCAR. You start with a topos, which you turn into a figure by way of the enthymeme.⁷ That's still invention.

KATE. Right.

OSCAR. But then you multiply this process by n, thus producing a structure derived from orchestrating your set of figures using the topos of division, to arrive at synecdoche writ large. So what's your definition of the holoscheme again?

KATE. Wait a sec, let me rephrase this a little: A holoscheme is a figure with significant narrative function that, combined with other such figures, forms the narrative grid of a given text, thus resulting in synecdoche.

5 Roland Barthes classifies narrative units based on the specific functions they serve in narrative: all narrative units are functional but some units—what he calls cardinal functions, or nuclei, because they serve as the narrative's framework—are more important than all others (246–51).

6 These lines and those that follow are informed by the scheme of rhetoric put down by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, included in volume 2 of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*.

7 Thus Ted Dyck argues in "Topos in Rhetorical Argumentation."

OSCAR. So your new project discusses the rhetoric of holoschemes. Fine.

But what's the point?

KATE. Now, there's a very good reason for doing so. Rhetorical sovereignty—the right to determine one's own discursive modes and needs.⁸

OSCAR. Sure, but why all the technical analysis? What difference does it make if the holoscheme constitutes a web of figures or functions as synecdoche? It's a construct. Period.

KATE. But rhetorical sovereignty isn't. Besides, all names beg to be challenged. Take your Wildean Shakespeare, for example. Willie Hughes is a name—

OSCAR. A proper name, that is.

KATE. That doesn't make much of a difference; the only difference between Willie Hughes and the holoscheme is that just because I refer to something as a holoscheme doesn't make the holoscheme any real, whereas Willie Hughes is a proper name and so the person it refers to is real—

OSCAR, *looking increasing alarmed as he listens to Kate*. That's what people have assumed, that Willie Hughes was real. I don't think Willie Hughes has ever existed, unless you understand this name to be a symbol of all the real men Shakespeare has ever loved—

KATE. So it's a *fictional* proper name. Fine with me. What I'm trying to get at is this: we assign names to things, and the definitions we provide for them are usually arbitrary and can be contested. That's how language works.

OSCAR. Yes, but that's basic structuralism.

KATE. It's also basic poststructuralism.

OSCAR, *puts out his pipe*. And poststructuralism and Native literatures don't really get along, do they?

KATE. Depends on who you ask. How did we get here, anyway?

OSCAR. Names.

KATE. Yeah, right. I just wanted to say that we ... I mean literary critics ... we use language to discuss language, and any use of language, whether literary or critical, is based on definitions that are random—

OSCAR. We invent big terms and pretend to fill them with meaning.

8 Scott Richard Lyons (Anishinaabe/Mdewakanton Dakota) defines rhetorical sovereignty as the “inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit [of sovereignty], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (449–50).

Then again, it's
nationalism and
at the same time
it's not.

KATE, *nodding*. But things are worse, really. There's a whole tradition of terms we use on a daily basis; and yes, we excel at explaining them to our students, but we often don't go beyond repeating these definitions.

OSCAR. Well, there are different notions of intertextuality, depending on whether you ask Kristeva, Genette, or Hutcheon—

KATE. These are variations on a theme. That you just mentioned these three names in one breath is a case in point.

OSCAR. So you're suggesting we need to rethink our use of terminology? Sure you don't want us all to invent our own individual terminology?

KATE. True, there has to be some form of agreement. A metalanguage. But literary traditions and literary criticism have come a long way, and things have changed a lot in the last twenty years. Think of New Historicism, postcolonialism, all the different kinds of Anglophone writings, Indigenous literary nationalism—

OSCAR. Hold it right there! "Indigenous literary nationalism"?

KATE. The term's not as straightforward as it may seem. It's about centring one's reading of Indigenous literatures into the respective nation-specific traditions, but the approach also has a political mandate, of course. Hence nationalism. Then again, it's nationalism and at the same time it's not.

OSCAR, *looking confused*. What's that supposed to mean?

KATE. Well, it means it's not nation-state nationalism as we have come to know it in Euro-Western contexts, particularly in the past century. It's a different *kind* of nationalism, one based in relational values and interactions, at least in its best form.⁹

OSCAR. Sounds awfully complex, if you ask me.

KATE. Far from it, it's really about practising Indigenous peoplehood. Do you know *Our Fire Survives the Storm* by Daniel Justice?

OSCAR. He's Cherokee, right? I may have read some of his fiction, but that title doesn't sound familiar.

KATE. What he does in this book is apply approaches that have grown out of Cherokee social history to readings of Cherokee literature. See, that's Indigenous literary nationalism, a grounding in specific Indigenous intellectual traditions, in this case, Cherokee.

OSCAR. Alright. So you were saying?

KATE. There are now more non-American and non-British lit courses offered to undergrads than ever before in North America.

OSCAR. Fortunately, yes.

9 For a critical introduction to Indigenous literary nationalism in Canadian contexts, see Fagan et al.

KATE. So we take this monster of a metalanguage that is literary terminology and apply it to verbal traditions that have grown and flourished outside Euro-Western contexts. We apply the ordinary in order to read the exceptional, and, worse even, we don't even notice the irony—don't you find that at least a little odd?

OSCAR. Of course, I do. Your holoscheme is a case in point, though.
(*relights his pipe*)

KATE. It is, and it is not. It does mark a way of looking at Indigenous literatures from within Indigenous languages. But, of course, I'm using linguistics in order to do so, and I'm just beginning to study the holoscheme in nation-specific contexts. And, I admit, the name couldn't be more Eurocentric. Whether paraholophrase or holoscheme, either one is based on Greek in one way or another. A hundred percent Old World.

OSCAR. And very artificial at that, too. Ever thought of using an entirely different name? Something more appropriate, something that matches the exceptionality of what you're looking at?

KATE. Well—

OSCAR. Some term whose signifier mirrors its signified. Something more persuasive. How about a word derived from a Native language, for example?

KATE. I've thought about it.

OSCAR. So there you go.

KATE, *hugs her coffee mug*. Then again, what difference does it make? This figure is still going to be a figure whether or not I call it paraholophrase, holoscheme, or something else.

OSCAR. Maybe, but what's the one thing you always preach to your students? Form and content go hand in hand. So have your figure's name reflect its origins.

KATE. Well, strictly speaking the term does reflect this figure's origins, at least, from the point of view of discipline.

OSCAR, *staring at her*. Huh?

KATE. Figures are an integral part of?

OSCAR. Invention and style?

KATE. And what are invention and style part of?

OSCAR. Rhetoric.

KATE. And who was the first to schematize rhetoric?

OSCAR. Good ol' Aristotle ...

KATE. Who was ...

OSCAR. Greek.

KATE. So you see, holoscheme is entirely Greek in origin.

OSCAR. So if rhetoric is the whitest of all disciplines, colonialism in persona—

KATE. Some argue, yes.

OSCAR. Well, if that's the case, isn't the whole idea of doing a project on the rhetoric of the paraphrase—(*Kate gives him a disapproving look.*)—sorry, holoscheme. Is not your whole project utterly flawed? And take linguistics. That, too, is an entirely Western-informed discipline.

KATE. Even worse so. Euro-Western studies of Native languages played a very crucial role in establishing linguistics as a distinct discipline. But literary criticism doesn't fare any better. Then again, most contemporary North American universities are based on traditions that derive from Euro-Western thought.

OSCAR, *somewhat ironically*. Now, don't you use that as an excuse.

KATE. An excuse for what?

OSCAR. Not to reflect on the implications of what you're doing.

KATE. Well, what *am* I doing?

OSCAR. Well, it seems to me, your figure may not be a figure at all. For a critic trained in Euro-Western literatures and rhetoric maybe. As you say, that you refer to something as a holoscheme doesn't make it real.

KATE. But the same applies to pretty much all criticism. See, the point is not just terminology, or what signifier to use.

OSCAR. Maybe, but I do think working from within Aboriginal languages would be great idea. There are enough terms on the maps of North America that are Native through and through, but no one ever notices.

KATE. Canada. Ottawa. Mississippi—

OSCAR. Saskatchewan.

KATE. Fair enough. But just to give you some counter examples. There are a lot of terms being used by Indigenous critics that grow out of Indigenous intellectual traditions but don't borrow from an Indigenous language at all.

OSCAR. Examples, please.

KATE. For one, there's a term LeAnne Howe uses to describe the creation of America. She calls it tribalogy.

OSCAR. So that's a Native term—tribalogy?

KATE. Yes, proposed by a Choctaw writer and critic—but why?

OSCAR. Because the second part of this word is also Greek. "Graphia" is Greek for writing.

KATE. So its signifier is Greek, but its signified is Native.

OSCAR. Huh?

KATE. Howe argues that Native stories, regardless of their form, always involve a weaving and connecting of things—of past, present, future—even of peoples (“The Story of America” 42).

OSCAR. Is that right?

KATE. Yes, kind of like a spider web. That’s how Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko would likely describe it. In her first novel, *Shell Shaker*, Howe weaves various generations of Choctaw people into a coherent plotline that fuses past, present, and future and shows the vibrancy of her people.

OSCAR. Sounds very life-affirming.

KATE. You asked me for examples—here’s another one used by Maria Campbell who, you know, is Métis. She talks about word bundles.

OSCAR. Sounds like medicine bundles.

KATE. True, evoking Cree sacred bundles, the term also has significant spiritual implications. Campbell describes the word bundle as that “big huge bundle” of meaning that a word may carry (quoted in Gingell 200). Kinda like the holoscheme, but not quite.

OSCAR. Not quite?

KATE. Not quite because the holoscheme isn’t just a figure; it’s also synecdoche writ large. And I’m not sure how Campbell’s word bundle relates to other word bundles and the text as a whole.

OSCAR. Hmm. Seems to me your problem is not with signifiers, then, but with signifieds also.

KATE. Very well observed. (*Kate looks at him in contemplation but remains silent.*)

OSCAR. What?

KATE. I was just thinking about that space between signifier and signified. Giving an Aboriginal name to what I have described as a series of figures resulting in synecdoche doesn’t make any sense. Neither does applying the words paraholophrase or holoscheme to Campbell’s notion of the word bundle.

OSCAR. Makes sense to me. Your notion of holoscheme is entirely based on classical rhetoric, while Campbell’s word bundle is based in ...

KATE. Métis traditions. See, here’s what bothers me. All you and I’ve been talking about are figures, topoi, enthymemes, arrangement.

OSCAR. Nothing wrong with that—

Don’t get me wrong. All these concepts are helping make sense of the holoscheme from a purely rhetorical perspective.

KATE. Don't get me wrong. All these concepts *are* helping make sense of the holoscheme from a purely rhetorical perspective. Regardless of what signifier you assign to it, though, it's impossible to grasp its meaning and function unless you *frame* it from the point of view of Indigenous intellectual traditions—

OSCAR. Now you're talking.

KATE. Cause all the holoscheme really is is a relational word bundle in a tribalogy.

OSCAR. Not a figure after all.

KATE. I'd put it a little differently: for some, its significance may lie elsewhere. The point, though, is: the relational word bundle still concerns rhetoric, whether or not you imagine it as a figure or something else. (*Kate gets up as if leaving the café.*)

OSCAR. Hey, where are you going? The washroom?

KATE. No, getting us one last espresso. (*Kate disappears into the café. Oscar continues smoking his pipe, obviously deep in thought. After a few minutes Kate returns with two espressos.*)

OSCAR. Thanks. (*once Kate has taken her seat*) I've been wondering... If the relational word bundle is not so much imagined as a rhetorical figure? Where else would its significance lie, rhetorically speaking?

KATE. Good question. I guess my point was that there's classical rhetoric and then there's Indigenous rhetorics—

OSCAR. And both count as rhetoric, but they're different *kinds* of rhetoric—that's what you're suggesting?

KATE. Exactly. It starts with the very notion of what constitutes narrative. The classical notion of *narratio* is far removed from how Indigenous peoples imagine narrative.

OSCAR. Please, enlighten me.

KATE. "Narrative" is derived from *gnārus*, a Latin word that can be traced back to *gnosis*, Greek for knowledge. And *narratio*—in classical rhetoric, that is—is all about being straightforward and precise.

OSCAR. So?

KATE. Bruce Dadey has compared Indigenous rhetorics and classical rhetoric based on how different notions of narrative and the relationship between speaker and audience influence rhetorical practices. Now, there may be other ways of comparing these rhetorical traditions, but his choice makes sense—

OSCAR. Because he is able to cover the rhetorical triangle in its entirety—

KATE. Yes, in part, but mostly because of the central role narrative and kinship play among Indigenous peoples. Anyhow, so in classical rhetoric, *narratio* refers to that part of an oration where the events of a case are summarized; so it is supposed to be clear, undistorted—those are some of the words Cicero uses to describe *narratio* (*De Inventione* 1.19–21).

OSCAR. The pure facts, so to speak.

KATE. Yes, straightforward and without embellishments. Now, in Indigenous contexts, narrative persuades by being indirect.

OSCAR. I have to object here. All narrative argues, or has the potential to do so, regardless of whether it's Native or not, indirect or not.

KATE. That's true, but you'll agree that narrative can hardly be said to be the most preferable mode for argument making in Western contexts?

OSCAR, *nods his head*. Agreed.

KATE. There's a critic Dadey refers to a lot. Kimberly Roppolo, a Cherokee/Choctaw/Creek scholar, posits that Indigenous ways of making an argument involve the telling of stories. And that these stories are deliberately open, indirect, non-explicit, allegorical— (268–71)

OSCAR, *suddenly very excited*. Kinda like all those double entendres and subversions of heterosexual into homosexual desire in *The Importance of Being Earnest*!?

KATE. Well—

OSCAR, *even more excited*. And just think about the role names play in this play—

KATE. Ernest, Bunbury—yes, here's a play rich in play.

OSCAR. All this “jubilant celebration of male homosexual desire,” and yet there is not “the slightest breach in heterosexual decorum” (Craft 23).

KATE. It's fine, Oscar. No need to persuade me of Wilde's wit.

OSCAR. True, *you* were going to persuade *me* of something.

KATE. Yes, I was going to tell you that, following Roppolo, narrative is the Indigenous form of making an argument, that Indigenous persuasion is deliberately indirect, non-explicit—and not just occasionally, such as when in late Victorian society all forms of expressing homosexual desire are prohibited and—

OSCAR. You're saying all Indigenous discourse is indirect?

KATE. Maybe not *all* discourse, but Indigenous rhetorics are largely informed by a non-explicitness of discourse, yes.

OSCAR, *grinning*. So our conversation should really be a story.

KATE. Come on, Oscar, we're just meeting for coffee on a beautiful summer afternoon. (*giving him a smile that looks just slightly ironic*)

OSCAR. All right, all right. Go ahead.

But aren't
frames a
universal feature
of language use?

KATE. Narrative is central to Indigenous intellectual traditions. Of course, there's a lot of Indigenous knowledge that doesn't come in the form of narrative, but narrative is key, nonetheless.¹⁰ As Lee Maracle argues—she's Stó:lō—storytelling is a legitimate, in fact, a natural form of presenting theory (*Oratory* 7–9).

OSCAR. That makes Native literatures both literature and criticism.

KATE. Yes, that's the idea.¹¹ And some of the criticism is actually contained in narrative frames.

OSCAR, *looking curious*. Narrative frames?

KATE. Yes, frames frames—according to Richard Bauman, one mode of defining a text's interpretative contexts for the audience (9).

OSCAR. Could you give me an example?

KATE. Let's see ... There's this retelling of "Puss in Boots" by Harry Robinson— (282–315)

OSCAR. He's Okanagan, right? I've read some of his stories. Not this one, though.

KATE. It's the closing story in his first collection, *Write It on Your Heart*. And he includes his own interpretation of the story in a narrative frame. And I don't mean the story's moral. I'm thinking also of genre. Robinson calls the story one of the "first stories" (282).

OSCAR. First stories as in creation stories?

KATE. Yep, and this remark is his first clue to the audience that, although the story he tells is set and originates in Europe, it's also an Okanagan narrative.¹²

OSCAR. But aren't frames a universal feature of language use?

KATE. Yes, frames are universal, and so is storytelling. But the example of Robinson is more complex really.

OSCAR, *cleans his pipe*. Go ahead.

10 Indigenous oratures are not restricted to narrative alone but also include other fields of knowledge, such as "history, sociology, political science, medical knowledge, aquaculture and horticulture, law, science, as well as stories." Thus, Lee Maracle argues, "We need to understand both the separation of oratory as knowledge and its relation to oratory as story" ("Toward a National Literature" 82).

11 The idea of Indigenous literatures containing their own criticism is discussed by Kimberly M. Blaeser in her seminal essay "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre."

12 For a discussion of Harry Robinson's "Puss in Boots" as both Okanagan story and retelling of a European story, see Neuhaus, "The Rhetoric of Harry Robinson's 'Cat With the Boots On.'"

KATE. Robinson's stories were recorded by Wendy Wickwire, a white ethnographer. When the two first started working together in the late 1970s, Robinson began by telling Wickwire two origin stories that essentially make sense of Native-Euro-Western relations from an Okanagan perspective.¹³ They explain Euro-Western obsessions for everything written and mark them as being prone to telling lies (Wickwire 462–63).

OSCAR. Makes sense to me. The Bible, broken treaties—

KATE. Now, looking back at her collaboration with Robinson, Wickwire says, she feels Robinson told her these stories for a reason, that they “were, in fact, central to the larger project” (455). In some ways, one could say, these two stories may have set the stage, a context so to speak, for all the other stories he told her over the years.

OSCAR. And you're thinking the same applies to that other story you mentioned? That Robinson's version of “Puss in Boots” provided a context, or a commentary, on his stories or their work together?

KATE. This may be reading too much into the story, but in some way Robinson's retelling of “Puss in Boots” may have been just as central to their collaboration, yes. Because, on some level, his version of this European folktale imagines a future for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, a future that is relational rather than antagonistic.

OSCAR. That's interesting, but it also sounds very constructed, don't you think?

KATE. I'm not saying this is how things must be; it's one way of making sense of the story. There are many more, of course. But that's exactly my point—

OSCAR. That argument based on non-explicitness produces multiple readings?

KATE. Yes, and what's interesting about Roppolo's work is the way she contextualizes the notion of Indigenous rhetorics as based on indirect discourse—

OSCAR. Poststructuralism, or reader response theory, would have been an obvious choice.¹⁴

KATE. For a Euro-Western critic, maybe; not for her, though. Roppolo links Indigenous rhetorical practices to concepts of how the individual relates to society as a whole.

13 The stories include “Twins” (Robinson 40–52) and “Prophecy at Lytton” (Robinson 168–97).

14 For a poststructuralist reading of Indigenous literatures, for example, see Arnold Krupat's “Post-Structuralism and Oral Literature.”

OSCAR. And so notions of community become the foundation of Indigenous rhetorics?

KATE. According to Roppolo, storytelling as indirect argument honours “the rights of the individual to make his or her own decisions”—and this right is just as valued among Indigenous peoples as is community. “The idea is,” she argues, “that the only way to really learn something is to learn it for yourself” (270).

OSCAR. Kinda like making a character make mistakes in narrative and thus warning the audience against making the same mistake in real life.

KATE. Yes, that’s a good example. Trickster narratives work like this.¹⁵ Speaking of which, the term is another one of those misnomers we talked about earlier.

OSCAR. Well, tricksters use trickery and deception, don’t they?

KATE. They do, but they also do a whole lot of other things.

OSCAR. Sure ...

KATE. Trickster is really a misconstrued example of synecdoche, part of the whole discourse of colonization.

OSCAR. Synecdoche as part of the discourse of colonization?

KATE. What Euro-Western scholars call tricksters are really culture heroes. They help shape the world as it’s known today—

OSCAR. That’s why culture heroes are sacred, and calling them tricksters ... that’s as though one were to refer to Moses or Mohammed as pranksters or buffoons—

KATE. Like I said, it’s all part of a discourse of colonization. That’s why Cree poet Neal McLeod proposes to use a different terminology, one based in the people’s tradition. So *wisahkêcâhk*—the Cree “trickster”—becomes *kistêsinaw*, the word for elder brother in Cree (McLeod 97). And the example of the elder brother brings us back to Roppolo.

OSCAR. How so?

KATE. Because Indigenous stories, traditional or contemporary, they are, as Dadey concludes his comparison, often not so much about getting a message across than about enacting relationships, whether social, political, what have you (16).

OSCAR. Like building community—

15 The “myth as social charter,” as Barbara Babcock has called this function of trickster narratives (182), helps to strengthen a nation’s laws, customs, and traditions (Blaeser, “Trickster” 55).

KATE. You betcha. Narrative is a celebration of kinship. What could be more life-affirming than storytelling? (*Oscar shrugs his shoulders.*) And the holoscheme—I mean, the relational word bundle—this word bundle is the rhetorical embodiment of Indigenous perceptions of the world.

OSCAR. Huh?

KATE, *notably excited.* Word bundles express relationships on a textual level, and it's the rhetorical spider web these word bundles produce that creates story which, in turn, creates peoples.¹⁶

OSCAR. Now you're talking.

KATE. Or to use an argument Cherokee critic Jace Weaver has made about Native notions of society: relational word bundles are just as synecdochic as Indigenous notions of community, which centre around the individual *in* rather than the individual *and* society.¹⁷

OSCAR. Ever deep, that one ... (*Oscar and Kate nod their heads in unison. Oscar looks at his pocket watch.*) I'm afraid we gotta to leave it at this, though. For now, that is. Wilde's calling me.

KATE. And who could resist this call? (*Both laughing.*)

THE END

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16 As LeAnne Howe writes, "Native stories are power. They create people" ("The Story of America" 29).

17 Jace Weaver has described Indigenous notions of the relation between individual and community as "synecdochic (part-to-whole), while the more Western conception is metonymic (part-to-part)." Indigenous peoples, he explains, "tend to see themselves in terms of 'self in society' rather than 'self and society'" (39).

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