
MEDIA REVIEWS

Virtual Tribal Voices: Native American Literary Resources on the Web

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As the Web increasingly becomes the tool of first choice for researchers, so too do analyses of web sites become pivotal in determining what online materials are currently available and how they can be used. In using web resources for conducting research, one must keep in mind how electronic sources differ from print ones. Researchers must understand the transitory quality of web sites: the information as well as graphic interface of a source may change for a variety of reasons such as author preference, timeliness of information, even administrative changes. Also, while the lack of “officers” on the information highway suggests a freedom from virtual hegemony through an anonymous leveling of power, the absence of any kind of peer review invites a kind of “buyers beware” approach to materials found on the Web. Keeping all of this in mind, I review two web sites significantly contributing to the online study of Native American literature. In narrowing the scope of this review to two sites, I am not suggesting that Native American literature is poorly represented on the Web. Indeed, there are many electronic sources on NA fiction, many of them commercial as well as non-commercial sites. The two sources I index here serve as fairly comprehensive, for the most part non-commercial sites for the study of Native American literary texts on the Web.

Storytellers Native American Authors Online

<http://hanksville.phast.umass.edu/poems/poets/index.cgi>

Karen Strom constructs and maintains this site which is still very much in process, although conspicuously (to my relief) without the “Under Construction” signs. Even with a two-week span between my initial perusal of the site and when I first began to write this part of the review, Strom had added two more author pages. As architect of this site, Strom cites her aim as wanting to “make the writing of modern Native American authors, particularly the poets, both more visible and more widely available.” Listed on the main page by name, most of the writ-

ers' pages have been constructed with their cooperation and through collaboration with Strom. She notes that the authors approve the sites before they go public, edit their pages, contribute material, etc. An example of a collaborative effort between Strom and a Native American author is Luci Tapahonso's page listing her personal as well as academic biography, her writing available online, writing featured in print sources and in translation, as well as interviews/papers/media presentations on her work. Most pages also include a photo of the highlighted writer or examples of her/his artwork as well as external links to Amazon.com so that researchers can order the writer's work. (A small percentage of the sale reverts back to the author if books are purchased this way.)

When possible, Strom provides outside links to author-maintained web sites or 'admirer' pages about authors, sites she deems 'unofficial' because they were not constructed with the writer's input. Such pages Strom indexes only if they contain substantial information and they are not, for the most part, as extensive in scope as the collaborative efforts between Strom and the writer; some of the links even failed to work. While each author page Strom has constructed so far is, indeed, fairly comprehensive, I emailed her to ask why some Native American writers are conspicuously missing from her site. She responded, indicating that she is still in the process of making contact with writers as well as working collaboratively to construct new sites. She points out that "it takes much longer to develop a site and obtain approval when the person is not online and doesn't feel the project is important."

Strom also provides an internal link to a calendar detailing readings and appearances of the authors indexed at her site. Some of her external links connect to book reviews, early 20th-century Native American authors (etexts from a University of Virginia site and the Internet Public Library), traditional storytelling (which she notes does not translate well online) and related sites. That her collection of author pages is not as comprehensive as, say, the Internet Public Library's collection would be the only warning I have for potential researchers. For now, Strom's site manages to provide a wealth of information on, perhaps, a select group of Native American writers, but as she continues to build the site the seemingly limited collection will no doubt grow.

Native American Authors

<http://www.ipl.org/ref/native/>

Developed through a course at the University of Michigan, this collection is a part of the Internet Public Library (IPL) and is the largest collection of Native American authors online. Five graduate students researched approximately 400 authors, 700 books, and 200 URLs, contacting nearly 100 Native American authors and other members of the Native American community for guidance. In determining whom to include, researchers limited their scope to the Indians of North America, those working with the written word, and who are “native by bloodlines rather than federal tribal recognition.”

Literary researchers can look up an author at this site by name, title of a work, or tribe—all of which function as internal links in a seemingly vast maze of information. For example, say I go to the author index and look up Sherman Alexie. His page features a paragraph of personal information, awards/honors he has achieved, external links by or about him complete with URL and description of the site, as well as books he has published. The internal links about his tribal affiliation connect me to links for other writers from the same tribes. The book listings include comprehensive publication information, including a brief description and ISBN, and if the book title acts as a link, it directs you to external online sources about that particular work.

Unlike Strom’s site, the biographical information on each writer is rather brief. This site, however, makes up in volume what it lacks in detail. A list, complete with descriptions, of other Native American literary sites is also available so researchers starting with this site can link to other relevant online sources. Because the IPL site is so large, researchers are likely to come across “extinct” external links in their navigating and should, when possible, notify the webmaster when links no longer function. The vastness of this site attests to the literary presence of Native authors and suggests volumes about the richness of their work.

OTHER LINKS:

Indigenous Peoples’ Literature

<http://www.indians.org/natlit.htm>

This site used to be part of the NativeWeb project but has since become its own entity. Organized by site map, it proves difficult to maneuver. There are few resources about contemporary Native American writers and more on traditional practices of indigenous world citizens. I was also bothered by the feel-good rheto-

ric at this site (e.g., “For as different as we all may seem, When details are compared, We are all one, and the same”).

The North American Native Authors Catalog

<http://nativeauthors.com/>

While the goals of this site seem lofty (the promotion of Native American literature as well as raising general awareness about Indian issues), the sponsor of this site, Greenfield Review Press, has managed to make it purely commercial. Supplementary material is provided at this site only to help sell books. It is a good site for ordering NA resources.

NativeLit-L Homepage

<http://www.uwm.edu/~mwilson//lit.htm>

I've seen more than one site for the NativeLit list, one at UWM and one at Cornell. In following the subscription directions at the NativeLit-L Homepage, I was unable to subscribe to the discussion list on Native American literature, even though the FAQ says it is unmoderated and no approval is necessary to subscribe. I've also emailed Michael Wilson, owner of the homepage and the list, twice for assistance and received no reply. The list would be a valuable resource if scholars are somehow able to subscribe to it. For now, this link provides faulty directions on how to subscribe to the list as well as a FAQ on the list.

The two sites extensively reviewed here serve as the strongest online resources for the researcher interested in the literatures of Native America. While I couldn't also favorably review the other sites listed here, their very presence on the Web attests to the visibility and cogency of American Indian arts. In tandem, all of these sites do indeed provide forums for Native American tribal voices. The researcher just needs to make sure she is listening. ✨