

# Sharing Cultures. Sharing Stories. Sharing Lives. Sharing Respect: An Examination of the Gift Cycle in *Fools Crow*

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## Dedicated to S-

All of our eyes focused on him as he silently walked towards us tightly clutching six sticks against his chest, cradling them like an infant, making his way down the isle. Our conversations came to an abrupt standstill. As he approached us, time slowed down, each moment beating in rhythm with our hearts' drumming, quickening in pace as our anticipation grew.

With each beat his foot hit the ground.  
With each beat he captured more of our attention.  
With each beat our confusion mounted.  
With each beat we felt more unified.

We clumsily stood up from our seats, struggling to maintain some form of decorum in the church that we had been preparing to rest in for the night. Some of us were already in our pajamas, some had their sleeping bags strewn across the pews, and some were brushing their teeth in the bathroom, but all of us showed respect by standing in his presence. When he stopped before us, the beating paused; he lifted his eyes from the sticks that seemed to beckon such concentration, allowing us to motion for the rest of the group to gather around him. Intimately, we huddled together in absolute silence waiting for S- to explain his unexpected visit. He spoke no unnecessary words, but delicately extended his arms, carefully moving as though protecting the sticks from touching the ground. The sticks called for our gaze again; transfixed by such unexpected generosity

we just stood there.

His arms remained outstretched, leaving the sticks vulnerable.

We just stood there.

Everyone's stare now turned from him to me, expecting me, as their leader, to accept his offer of friendship, but I hesitated; I knew that asking to buy a set of sticks was inappropriate for a woman because only men played with sticks, but I wasn't sure if accepting the sticks would offend him.

We just stood there.  
I just stood there.

"Take them. They are yours. Take them."

As a girl from the group began to reach for them, I put my arms out, palms facing upward, ready to receive the sticks. He passed them off to both of us, and we stood there as he looked down at his feet.

"Just promise that you will pass them on to someone who cares; pass on the tradition of the game to someone who appreciates it, understands it."

I looked down at the sticks which now rested in my arms; unable to even utter a generic "thank you," this exchange left us sincerely unable to articulate our overwhelming emotions. In an attempt to explicate our unfathomable gratitude, I raised my head and had to clear my throat before I could mumble, "We are speechless, we don't even know how to respond to such generosity. Thank you. We are completely speechless." I choked back tears, simultaneously noticing that the boy across from me was similarly looking

down to hide his glossed eyes, but his hard swallowing betrayed his effort. Everyone had a similar humbling reaction and proceeded to thank S-, shake his hand, and even exchange hugs.

Sharing cultures.

Sharing stories.

Sharing lives.

Sharing respect.

Sitting in the van for twelve hours gave us plenty of time to dread the workload awaiting us on our return to campus, classes, life. Even those of us nerdy enough to bring work on our spring break realized how small a dent we put in our academic studies over the course of the week. For me specifically, thesis research loomed over my head and weighed down my duffle bag, still unread. Our excuse: we were immersed in life. Who could blame us? It was a once in a lifetime experience, and our gift of Fish sticks became our living proof. With plenty of time to recount the events surrounding the gift exchange, we tried to figure out why he chose us and what the gift meant. The deeper we delved, the more questions we uncovered. Fascinated by this unexpected gift from S-, who belongs to a culture that is distrustful of whites, I realized I needed to research gift economies in American Indian culture and tradition to grasp a better understanding of his generous gift.

In this paper I focus on the functioning of gift economies in American Indian culture according to Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift, involving the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate, as well as Marshall Sahlins's account of each party's responsibility while involved within the gift cycle. More specifically, I expand upon Lewis Hyde's notion of the artist's gift by examining the importance of American Indian story gifts in protecting one's reputation, maintaining one's power, and strengthening one's bonds as portrayed in James Welch's novel *Fools Crow*. I will first summarize Marcel Mauss, Marshall Sahlins, and Lewis Hyde's accounts on gift giving. Then I will show that, second, within the Blackfeet tribe Welch depicts, a man named Fools Crow gets rewarded for adhering to the social laws of gift giving, while his peer Fast Horse fails to reciprocate, breaks the gift cycle, and suffers from the consequences. Third, Welch depicts how narratives within American Indian culture function: boosting the status of the storyteller, increasing self-confidence in the audience, providing explanations for their misfortune, and preserving the tradition of their culture. And fourth, *Fools Crow* demonstrates how stories themselves can function as gifts that adhere to the cycle of giving, receiving, and reciprocating; Welch emphasizes the necessity of passing on the American Indian narrative in the survival of native history and culture. In short, Welch's novel portrays the gift cycle in its entirety, including appropriate examples of obligated giving, accepting, and reciprocating, the exceptions to these obligations, and the consequences that result from failing to adhere to the social laws of gift giving. The narrative *Fools Crow* provides examples of successful and unsuccessful gift exchanges, while simultaneously revealing how the character's narratives themselves function within the gift economy of American Indian culture.

## Part I: The Gift Cycle

Ethnologist Marcel Mauss laid the foundation for theory on gift economies by examining historical examples of gift giving and the rise of reciprocal exchange. After recognizing the pattern of giving, he began to analyze the relationship between the giver and gift; his goal was to discover why the recipient pays back the gift. Mauss specifically examined the gift exchanges in Maori culture by listening to Maori informants such as Tamati Ranaipiri, who revealed the secrets of the "theological and juridicial spirit" to him:

Now, this *taonga* that he gives me is the spirit (*hau*) of the *taonga* that I had received from you and that I had given to him. The *taonga* that I received for these *taonga* (which came from you) must be returned to you. It would not be fair (*tika*) on my part to keep these *taonga* for myself, whether they were desirable (*rawe*) or undesirable (*kino*). I must give them to you because they are a (*hau*) of the *taonga* that you gave me. If I kept this other *taonga* for myself, serious harm might befall me, even death. This is the nature of the (*hau*), the (*hau*), of personal property, the

(*hau* of the *taonga*, the (*hau* of the forest. (Mauss 11)

In short, Mauss concluded that the giver personally and spiritually (*hau*) invests himself in the gift (*taonga*), giving away a part of himself in the act. Therefore, the act of giving establishes a social bond between the giver and recipient, in which the recipient becomes obligated to reciprocate in order to demonstrate his own honor, power, and wealth. If the recipient fails to present a return gift after a reasonable amount of time, he becomes vulnerable to punishment. More generally, Mauss suggests that three related obligations comprise gift economies: the obligation to give (to create and maintain social relationships), the obligation to receive (to accept the social bond), and the obligation to reciprocate (to show respect and to exhibit power).

Using the Maussian triad theory of gifts as his basis, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins delves deeper into the exploration of how the spirit of the gift in the physical object perpetuates the cycle of giving. He also examines how the rules of both parties, the original giver and recipient, should interact within the social confines of a gift economy by examining critiques of Mauss. He cites Claude Levi-Strauss's argument on the validity of the Maori's rationalization, believing that "the *hau* is not the reason for exchange, only what one people happen to believe is the reason, the way they represent to themselves an unconscious necessity whose reason lies elsewhere" (Sahlins 154). Sahlins then shifts the dispute and finds fault with Mauss's interpretation of the Maori view of *hau*. To support this theory, he quotes ethnologist Raymond Firth, who states, "Mauss confused types of *hau* that in the Maori view are quite distinct – the *hau* of persons, that of lands and forests, and that of *taonga* – and on the strength of this confusion he formulated a serious error . . . the *hau* of persons was never at issue" (Sahlins 154). After thoroughly examining these conflicting positions on the spirit of the gift, the *hau*, Sahlins concludes that the *hau* refers to a return or product which should be given to the original donor (157). While Sahlins acknowledges the power of *hau* involved in compelling the recipient to reciprocate, he also mentions specific forms of self interest that motivate and perpetuate the cycle of giving. Self-interest provokes people to exchange gifts because they know that a person adhering to the social laws of gift giving will receive some form of reward, or at least avoid the punishment that accompanies the breaking of the gift cycle. Giving maintains and improves the reputation, status, and power of the giver, while avoiding psychological burden, fragmentation, loss of authority, and/or physical harm. Giving ultimately benefits the giver even if he acts out of obligation.

Building upon Mauss and Sahlins, who mainly discuss concrete gifts, scholar Lewis Hyde focuses on the inner gifts of creativity and art that, he argues, follow the same communal laws as external gifts. Therefore, non-tangible inner gifts also follow the cycle of obligatory giving, receiving, and reciprocating: "a gift [inner or outer] that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift. The spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation" (Hyde xix). According to Hyde, an artist's talent functions as a gift that increases as it passes through the self because "the artist makes something higher than what he has been given, and this, the finished work, is the third gift, the one offered to the world in general or directed back specifically to the 'clan and homeland' of an earlier gift" (248). The artist acts as the recipient who becomes obligated to reciprocate, which in this case means that he must pass his gift to others through creation. His inner gift, talent, transforms into an external gift, product. Despite their variations in their understanding of the gift cycle, Hyde, Sahlins, and Mauss agree that a seemingly simple gift carries obligations and restrictions; if the giver and recipient adhere to the social laws of gift giving they will find reward, but if they fail to follow these principles severe consequences will ensue.

## Part II: The Gift Cycle in *Fools Crow*

In the American Indian novel *Fools Crow*, James Welch examines the difficulty of an American Indian boy who finds himself trapped in the liminal space between native tradition and mainstream white society while transitioning into manhood. Although initially portrayed as unskilled and unpopular among the tribe, Fools Crow matures into a respected leader. His maturation begins when he enters that cycle of giving by accepting the gift of his vision. Fools Crow's responsibility increases as he becomes included in what Mauss refers to as

"a system of reciprocity in which the honour of the giver and recipient are engaged," where he will then be expected to present a return gift of greater value (viii). Even though he generally follows the rules of giving and acts as an example of a person acting appropriately within the gift cycle, the reader sees Fools Crow neglect his obligation to reciprocate after receiving one of his first gifts through a dream. He receives a foreboding vision about young white girls emerging from sleeping robes, all naked and looking at him with desire in their eyes. Although he believes his dream was "a sign" given to him, his uncertainty and fear prevent him from sharing his vision and passing on the warning gift to the other members of his tribe (Welch 17-18). As a result, another Blackfoot, Yellow Kidney, fornicates with a white girl (that Fools Crow saw in his vision), gets caught while in the tent of a neighboring tribe, and suffers physical mutilation by losing all of his fingers. Fools Crow's failure to immediately pass the gift of his vision on to the tribe exemplifies Hyde's notion of an internalized gift that "becomes a heavy burden, even sometimes a kind of poison" (189). Welch depicts the danger of not sharing gifts through Fools Crow's guilt of Yellow Kidney's misfortune. Even though this psychological burden appears as mild punishment when considering the suffering that Yellow Kidney experiences, the exposure to less serious consequences allows Fools Crow to experience the discomfort and harm that accompanies inappropriate action in the gift cycle. His taste of suffering, the guilt that weighs him down until he takes responsibility by sharing his dream gift with Mik-api the tribal healer, discourages him from breaking the social laws of gift giving in the future. Fear of personal harm or inflicting pain on others coupled with the desire to feel unified with the rest of the tribe motivates Fools Crow to reciprocate appropriately. In an effort to atone for what appears to be an inappropriate response to his gift, he increases the value of the reciprocal gift by undergoing a cleansing prayer ceremony and becoming the provider for Yellow Kidney's family because Yellow Kidney can no longer hunt for them. Since "food is life-giving, urgent, [and] ordinarily symbolic of hearth and home" (Sahlins 215), giving food to Yellow Kidney's family establishes a familial bond. Fools Crow's act of sharing food forces him to interact with the family on a regular, intimate basis while simultaneously placing him in a position of power, in which they depend upon him for sustenance, survival. Although Fools Crow appears to break the social law of gift giving by not sharing his haunting vision, he merely delays his reciprocity; eventually he explains his dream to Mik-api and increases the extent of his giving by praying to the gods and providing food for Yellow Kidney's family. Fools Crow's ability to adhere to the social laws of gift giving leads to the rewards discussed by Mauss, Sahlins, and Hyde. He elevates his status and cultivates relationships, which ultimately help him survive within both cultures and prosper into a leader of his own tribe.

Fools Crow successfully abides by the rule of obligatory reciprocity, and, as a result, his storytelling alleviates his guilty conscience, his prayers cleanse his spirit, and his hunting for Yellow Kidney's family places him in a position of power within the family and tribe. But when Boss Ribs subtly offers him the Beaver Medicine Bundle, Fools Crow refuses the gift. According to the laws of gift giving, "the obligation to accept is no less constraining [than the obligation to reciprocate]. One has no right to refuse a gift. . . . To act in this way is to show that one is afraid of having to reciprocate, to fear being 'flattened' [i.e. losing one's name] until one has reciprocated" (Mauss 41). Therefore, Fools Crow breaks the gift cycle by refusing to accept Boss Rib's implied gift of the Beaver Medicine Bundle. If this is the case, that Fools Crow has "reject[ed] the bond of alliance and commonality" (Mauss 13), then why does Boss Ribs remain his close friend? How does Fool's Crow command authority and keep his reputation as a brave, powerful leader in the Blackfeet tribe? Fools Crow's friendship with Boss Ribs remains intact and his reputation, as a leader within his tribe, does not diminish because Fools Crow adheres to the gift cycle as it functions specifically within his tribe's tradition and culture. Traditionally, medicine bundles originated from men who experienced visions or dreams that they used to help their tribe, but as these men grew older they passed their pipes and bundles down through their family or sometimes sold it to another member of their tribe: "If a man wished to become a bundle owner, he went to someone who had such a bundle, offered to smoke with him, and announced that he wanted it" (Dempsey 413). The owner was then required to set a price for the medicine bundle and transfer the ownership through a ceremony, since he could not refuse an offer for it. In *Fools Crow*, Boss Ribs notices Fool's Crow's interest in the medicine bundle and invites him to smoke, which is the first step in preparing to pass off ownership of the medicine bundle. Fools Crow recognizes the significance of Boss Rib's invitation to smoke

with him by becoming noticeably uncomfortable when the women and children leave the men alone to talk. They sit and smoke in awkward silence until Boss Ribs tells Fools Crow the story of the Beaver Medicine, which is the second step in transferring ownership of the bundle. At this point, both men seemingly prepare to assume the role of giver and receiver, but in keeping with the tradition surrounding the ownership of the medicine bundle, Boss Ribs cannot give Fools Crow the bundle outright. Instead, Boss Ribs' draws out the conversation with perpetual pauses, giving Fools Crow ample opportunity to ask for the bundle which Boss Ribs would then be obligated to sell to him. During the silence Fools Crow asks Boss Ribs twice what he wants of him, but Boss Ribs hesitates, waiting for a response from Fools Crow. When Fools Crow does not ask for the bundle, Boss Ribs rubs his eyes and dejectedly sighs (Welch 187-201). Fools Crow does not acknowledge or reply to Boss Ribs' subtle offering of the bundle because traditionally the medicine man pass the bundle through the family, so in Fools Crow's tribe, Fast Horse would inherit the bundle. Therefore, Fools Crow does not fail to abide by the rules of gift giving by not accepting the bundle, but adheres to the gift cycle as delineated within his tribe's tradition. Not only does Fools Crow's tribal code act as an exemption from obligated reciprocity but, under the circumstances, his rejection of the gift remains consistent with Hyde's notion of appropriate action for the recipient. The gift of the medicine bundle would have changed Fools Crow, giving him more authority in the tribe by providing him with the power to heal. When dealing with a gift that contains the power to change the recipient, a person cannot receive the gift until he "can meet it as an equal" (Hyde 65). Fools Crow and the gift lay on unequal levels not because he lacks the power or tribal prestige of a medicine man, but because Boss Ribs' son Fast Horse is still alive and the rightful inheritor of the bundle.

Just as Fools Crow functions as an example of someone who appropriately conducts himself through gift giving, Fast Horse serves as his opposite, someone who fails to adhere to the social rules of the gift cycle. As a young man, Fast Horse enters into an exchange that does not fit Mauss, Sahllins, or Hyde's criteria as strictly a gift or commodity. The interaction begins when Cold Maker visits Fast Horse in his sleep to ask if he would like to know how to make his horse raid successful; in return, Fast Horse must move a rock that blocks a spring (Welch 14). His conversation with Fast Horse takes the form of a proposition for a commodity exchange because he coerces Fast Horse through his use of strong, commanding language. Malinowski states clearly that any form of coercion violates the concept of a gift on the grounds that "the equivalence of the counter-gift is left to the giver" (Hyde 19). Cold Maker further distinguishes his proposal from a gift exchange by specifically stating what each party will receive from one another, when the giver involved in the gift cycle must refrain from raising the topic of the return gift (Hyde 18). But despite the strong correlation between Cold Maker's dialogue with Fast Horse and a commodity exchange, Mauss recognizes the coercion apparent in the obligation to receive gifts. Therefore, Fast Horse had no choice but to accept Cold Maker's offer because to refuse the gift, according to Mauss, would sever his bond with the god and lead to the suffering of his tribe and himself. Another way to examine the contract between Cold Maker and Fast Horse as a gift exchange depends upon the definition of what constitutes a true gift. Sahllins describes the real gift as "an offering for which nothing is given in return" (193), implying that the recipient defines the purity of the gift through his response to the giver's generosity. In this case, the giver's intention and/or actions lack the power of delineating the status of the gift, negating the significance of whether he mentions a return gift or not. Therefore, Cold Maker extends a "request" to Fast Horse to enter into the gift cycle when he approaches him with the offer in his dream, but Fast Horse fully commits himself after accepting the gift of knowledge (Mauss 31).

After providing Fast Horse with the details of how to ensure a successful raid of the Crow horses, Cold Maker expects him to reciprocate with the counter-gift by dislodging the rock from the spring. The recipient must perpetuate the cycle through some form of reciprocity; "it is obligatory; it is expected, and it must be equivalent to the first gift," but Fast Horse fails to provide the god with any return gift, leaving him vulnerable to "resentment," "insult," and/or "revenge" (Mauss 26). Even though Fast Horse fails to uphold his end of the gift contract, Cold Maker gives him a chance to redeem himself. Again, Cold Maker visits Fast Horse in a dream and uses intimidation to receive his counter-gift, but Mauss claims that return gifts can occasionally "be

seized by force or surprise" (26); this situation allows Cold Maker's persuasion to function as appropriate action within the gift cycle, which he tries to make Fast Horse uphold. Cold Maker then shows Fast Horse the suffering that his lack of reciprocity caused his daughters and offers to spare him from the consequences of his failure to reciprocate, if he brings Cold Maker's daughters "two prime robes" and "red coals for their eyes" (Welch 38). Once again Fast Horse accepts Cold Maker's offer, and, as before, he fails to present the promised gift even though his tribe continually reminds him of his contract and the possible consequences. Adhering to the rules of the gift cycle would have established and strengthened his bonds with Cold Maker and his people, which would increase his power and authority within the tribe, but his inappropriate actions lead to Cold Maker's declaration of war on him, the tribe's suffering from war and illness, the ruination of his reputation, and his banishment from the Blackfeet. Ultimately, Fast Horse's disregard, for the social laws of gift giving, results in physical and psychological harm. The protagonist, Fools Crow, acts as an exemplar of appropriate interaction in a gift cycle as a recipient, when he refuses to meet a gift that he could not meet on equal grounds, and as a giver, when he returns the gift of his vision even though he initially hesitates. His antagonist, Fast Horse, enters into a gift relationship with the god Cold Maker but fails to reciprocate as he promised and breaks the cycle of giving. As a result, Fast Horse loses his authority, ruins his tribal relationships, becomes weighed down with grief, and watches the Blackfeet die.

Welch's characters, Fools Crow and Fast Horse, do not merely exemplify appropriate and inappropriate action within the gift cycle but emphasize the importance of the role that gift giving plays in their maturation. As they "come of age" within their Blackfeet culture, tribal members show them more respect and, consequently, give them more responsibility. For instance, both Fools Crow and Fast Horse enter into the gift cycle when they receive their visions (respect), but then they must adhere to the social laws of gift giving (responsibility). Fools Crow becomes responsible for forewarning his tribe by sharing his dream with others, while Fast Horse must move a boulder that blocks a spring. Neither responds properly. It seems as though Fools Crow's fear prevents him from initially relaying his dream to his tribe and Fast Horse's selfishness inhibits him from seeking out the boulder. Despite their failure to follow the laws of gift giving, Fools Crow and Fast Horse avoid the serious consequences that typically precede such cultural infractions and even receive a chance to redeem themselves. Why do they escape the severe punishment that Mauss, Sahlins, and Hyde claim result from failing to reciprocate? And, more importantly, how do their actions in the gift cycle fit into a coming of age story about American Indians caught between mainstream white culture and traditional customs?

First, although Fools Crow and Fast Horse break the rules of the gift cycle, Welch portrays them as neither understanding the seriousness of the contract they have entered nor knowing how to respond to their gifts. Since they must learn the social laws surrounding gifts, their inappropriate action, due to their ignorance of gift giving, gets forgiven by the tribe. Their actions do not pass by unnoticed, though. Fools Crow and Fast Horse experience the psychological burden of guilt, but Fools Crow's remorse brings him closer to the tribe while Fast Horse's shame distances him from the Blackfeet. For instance, Fools Crow does not know how to act after receiving his vision, so he seeks help by confiding in an older man in the community, Mik-api. Mik-api explains why Fools Crow must share his story, the spirit within him has become poisonous, and how he can atone for his unsuitable response to his dream, honor the gods through a healing ceremony and help Yellow Kidney's family. Like Fools Crow, Fast Horse's inexperience with the gift cycle leads to his failure in understanding the implications of neglecting reciprocity. He boasts and laughs about his interaction with Cold Maker while the older, wiser Yellow Kidney worries about fulfilling the obligation to the god. In both instances, the young men's inexperience of the social structure of gift giving hinders them from responding appropriately, but the older tribal members recognize the danger of not returning a gift and act as a resource by explaining proper responses and teaching methods for atonement when asked. The young men's mistakes become a chance for them to interact with older members of the tribe, learn about their cultural laws of the gift cycle, and maintain a sense of tradition through the older tribal members' teachings. To summarize, Fools Crow and Fast Horse respond inappropriately because they lack the experiential knowledge of gift giving and must turn to the older members for guidance. By forcing the youth to rely on the older members of the tribe to learn the culturally accepted rules of the gift cycle, Welch sheds a more positive light on what Mauss refers to

as "obligated reciprocity." Instead of forcing the gift's recipient to provide an exchange gift solely out of selfishness, out of fear for the negative consequences of their actions, Welch portrays the American Indians as people who generally care about the well-being of other tribal members. They seek unity and use the gift cycle as a social method of interaction to show acceptance and respect.

Second, since *Fools Crow* commonly gets referred to as a "coming of age" novel, it is important to examine if and how their maturation within American Indian culture is impacted by gift giving. Fools Crow and Fast Horse's acceptance into the tribal gift cycle signifies the beginning of their initiation into adulthood within the Blackfeet tribe, where their response to receiving gifts functions as a social determinant of their identity. In *Rites of Institution*, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that social rituals divide society into those who experience the rite and those who do not experience the rite. Only a select few in the tribe get personally invited into the gift cycle with the gods and even less experience the powerful vision gifts given to Fools Crow and Fast Horse. Due to their native lineages, the men from their tribe include Fools Crow and Fast Horse in their hunts, horse thievery, ceremonies, and gift cycle, while other boys remain left behind. Including them in these cultural practices places a great deal of pressure on Fools Crow and Fast Horse to live up to the standards of respected, powerful hunters and medicine men within their society. Mirroring Bourdieu's claim that rites of institution "transform the representations others have of him and above all the behaviour they adopt towards him" (119), Fast Horse's failure to adhere to the social laws of gift giving and inability to achieve full acceptance into the tribe changes the tribe's perception of him. Although the Blackfeet initially honor Fast Horse for his looks, strength, and lineage, his negligence for the rules of gift giving overshadows these positive attributes and ruins his reputation. Others view him as disrespectful, selfish, foolish, and a poor leader, while their behavior toward him reflects their changed perception. Instead of treating him as a leader by flocking to his stories and looking to him for guidance, the tribe completely separates itself from him through his banishment. Similarly, Fools Crow's inclusion in these tribal rites and successful completion of these rites also impose an identity on him, allowing him to become included in more tribal events and ultimately earning him the respect needed to choose his wife, smoke with the elders, and receive ceremonial gifts from tribal members.

Bourdieu's rites of institution not only recognize and emphasize the differences between members of these groups but legitimize the differences by transforming other's views and treatment of him, while simultaneously shaping his own representation of himself "and the behaviour he feels obliged to adopt in order to conform to that representation" (119). In short, identities impose boundaries on the individual because that person must act in accordance with his identity and will be judged and treated according to this representation. This distinctive treatment encourages him to realize his essence and conform to living in accordance with his assigned identity. While Fools Crow's identity impacts other's behavior and actions towards him, his own actions also adhere to Bourdieu's theory, which states that a person conforms to society's representation of him because he feels obligated to act within the confines of the identity given to him. For instance, Fools Crow feels obligated to atone for tribal infractions of the gift cycle, and as a leader, the tribe expects him to play an integral role in the ceremony. He endures torture during the Sun Dance Festival to help heal and protect his people from the consequences of Fast Horse's failure to reciprocate. Before the festival he prepares by fasting, but when the day arrives, elders pierce the flesh of his chest with spears while he dances to the beat of the drum. They apply weight to the sticks until the skewers break free from his body, tearing his flesh and leaving a permanent reminder of his offering for his tribe, his gift to the Sun god, and his new-found leadership role within his tribe. The violence associated with this pivotal ceremony shows Fools Crow's strength, increasing his power and influence in his community while psychologically making it harder for him to distance himself from social expectations and rites. Bourdieu explains this heightened cultural entrapment, claiming that "people's adherence to an institution is directly proportional to the severity and painfulness of the rites of initiation" (123).

Although Bourdieu cites exceptions to conforming and remaining within identity's restraints, such as the "nobleman who demeans himself" and the "priest who abandons his calling" (122), the boundary of the identity remains clear, intact, and still functions to permanently discourage people from crossing the boundary

through punishment. Therefore, the reality that he achieves is not based upon his own personal conviction but dependent upon the institution's collective belief reinforced and made prevalent through symbols, qualifications, and other attributes. In *Fools Crow*, tribal members show respect for one another by following the social laws of gift giving or they can dishonor the tribe and cause suffering by disrupting the gift cycle. For instance, when Fast Horse fails to adhere to the social laws of gift giving, the tribe no longer considers him one of its members and physically separates itself from Fast Horse by banishing him. Fast Horse acts as an example of punishment used to dissuade inappropriate behavior in the gift cycle because he gets stripped of his tribal identity or any features that would delineate him as part of the Blackfeet. Soon after his exile, Fast Horse joins a rebel group known for their theft, torture, and murder of others. He spirals down a dangerous path and finds himself trapped in the identity of an outlaw. After joining this new group Fast Horse must act within the confines of his new identity even when he acknowledges the immorality of his actions and feels opposed to carrying out his part. On the other spectrum, Fools Crow values gift giving and learns how to respond properly when presented with a gift. He gives, accepts, and reciprocates appropriately, solidifying his identity as a respected, powerful man in the tribe.

The Blackfeet culture finds itself rapidly changing and being divided into groups of people who favor mainstream culture and those who follow traditional ways. By applying Bourdieu's theory to this American Indian culture in *Fools Crow*, it becomes apparent that native people further divide themselves according to their adherence of the gift cycle, which determines whether they can be respected and trusted as leaders or even participate in the traditional culture. Specifically, Welch shows how an American Indian's heritage plays a role in his acceptance and exemplifies Bourdieu's theory through Fools Crow's socially ascribed identity. As Fools Crow builds a reputation for adhering to the social laws of gift giving, he builds relationships with the elders and the tribal members treat him with a greater respect. This admiration makes him feel obligated to live up their expectations as a leader by partaking in the excruciatingly painful Sun Dance ceremony to atone for his tribe's failure to reciprocate. Meanwhile, Fast Horse's continual failure to reciprocate to Cold Maker dishonors the god and the tribe, destroying his reputation, leading to his exile, and forcing him to adopt the life of an outlaw.

### **Part III: The Function of Stories within American Indian Culture**

In *Fools Crow*, stories often function as gifts and play an integral role in the identity development of the American Indians. Stories do not only help construct or solidify the identities of individual tribal members but impact the tribe as a whole. Welch emphasizes the importance of storytelling in the American Indian culture by showing how stories maintain and/or increase the status of the storyteller, bolster the self-confidence of the audience, and, most importantly, provide explanations for the tribe's misfortune which helps to insure the survival and preservation of their tradition and culture.

Welch depicts how storytelling can restore confidence through the misfortune of the young boy, One Spot, who gets attacked by a wolf and suffers severe physical injuries, leaving him unable to sleep due to his nightmares. To comfort the boy, Fools Crow tells him the story of Poia, Scarface: "he came from Sun Chief and instructed our people in the Sun Dance. Afterward, Sun Chief made him a star in the sky, just like his father, Morning Star. But before that he was a boy just like you, with a scar on his face" (Welch 262). The boy still lacks confidence, revealing his own fear of public mockery when he mentions how people laughed and scorned Poia. In response to the boy's uncertainty, Fools Crow reminds the boy of the tribe's respect and honor of Poia. Hearing the story of Poia and his honor fills the once deflated, scared boy with immense confidence, which he displays physically and vocally; he narrows his eyes and stares upward in an almost cliché display of self-assurance, claiming that he took pity on his brother the wolf but would have killed him if he had his weapons.

Although Fools Crow uses the story of Poia to instill confidence in his audience, its initial appearance in the novel *Fools Crow* occurs when the Ambush Chief tells the story of Star Boy (taunted as Poia or Scar Face by



children) and Morning Star (Sun Chief's son) to explain the creation of the moon and the Sun Ceremony. Poia angers Sun Chief by entering his home while away, but Night Red Light intercedes on Poia's behalf and saves him from death. Later on, during a hunt with Morning Star, Poia kills seven large birds planning to attack Morning Star. Morning Star tells his father about Poia's braveness, to which Sun Chief rewards Poia by removing the scar from his face, promising to heal the sick of his tribe and ensuring abundant growth in their sustenance if they pray to him, and placing him in the sky as a star (Welch 112). This trickster story explains the creation of the moon (Poia in the sky) and the origination of the Sun Ceremony while instilling the hope that an average or fallen tribal member can still rise to a position of honor.

Stories also act as an explanation for tribal healing power and traditional inheritance of medicinal powers; Boss Ribs tells Fools Crow the trickster story of Akaiyan, whose brother stranded him on an island where the beavers cared for him and accepted him into their family. The little beaver gave Akaiyan a sacred pipe for his bundle, which he told the boy to use in order to keep others in good health; other beavers emulated the little beaver by making offerings to Akaiyan to build his bundle (Welch 198). Akaiyan's encounter with the beavers describes the origination of the Beaver Medicine Bundle and its power; the beavers adopted a boy as one of their own and proceeded to give him the power to help others as they helped him. The story also emphasizes the importance of tradition and brotherhood involved with passing the bundle's sacred objects and their healing power onto others who will appropriately use it for the benefit of the tribe; the beavers accept Akaiyan as a member of their family by bringing him into their lodge and teaching him the "songs, dances, and prayers of the beaver family" (198). Acting as their son, Akaiyan inherits their healing power of the bundle, just as the Blackfeet traditionally pass the Beaver Medicine Bundle onto their children, establishing a lineage to continue their medicinal practices.

Although the Blackfeet tribe desperately tries to appease the gods and atone for any possible wrongs through prayers, offerings, and the Sun Dance Ceremony, they still suffer from hunger, disease, and war. Stories act as a method used to rationalize the unexplainable by placing blame on a trickster or god while simultaneously comforting the audience by eliminating them from responsibility and guilt. An example of such a narrative arises during Fools Crow's journey as a beggar where he encounters Sun Chief's wife and Poia's mother, Feather Woman, mourning the loss of her husband and son whom she cannot join in the Sand Hills (afterlife). She tells Fools Crow her story; her mother-in-law told her not to dig the big turnip in the middle of the field, the sacred turnip, but as she digs closer and closer to the sacred turnip, her fear compels her to it. After a great deal of effort and a little help from ravens, she manages to pull the turnip from the ground, exposing a hole in the sky. When she looks into the hole, she sees her family and becomes overcome with grief, which worsens when the Sun becomes aware of her sin. He tells her that she not only caused her own misery but brought suffering on her people; she acknowledges her wrong and accepts responsibility by claiming "and it is true. Now you see sickness and hunger, Napikwans and war" (Welch 352). Feather Woman's story of displeasing the Sun serves as a warning to the punishment of angered gods and provides Fools Crow with a reason as to why the tribe suffers despite their prayers and offerings.

Storytelling plays a crucial role in the survival of the American Indian culture because stories empower the tribe by providing explanations for their misfortune and eliminating them from responsibility by placing blame on trickster characters. But stories function as more than just coping mechanisms that displace blame and provide comfort. Stories create. Stories define. Stories ascribe identities. Similar to the way in which Fools Crow and Fast Horse's adherence to or insubordination of the gift cycle define their identity and role in the tribe, storytelling further develops and reveals their identity. Stories greatly influence Fools Crow's identity; he earns his first name from his fascination with storytelling and his second name from the stories that other tribal members tell about him. Names distinguish people from others, but the Blackfeet culture views American Indians' names as more than just an "individual designation by which a particular person or thing is known, referred to, or addressed" (OED). Instead, a Blackfoot American Indian gets named by other tribe members according to his qualities, experiences, or some other form of individual description. Fools Crow first gets named according to his interest in stories and his response to that interest. As a child, Fools Crow loved listening to stories and followed the tribal storyteller around as though he were a loyal dog. His passion for

hearing stories lead to his adolescent name, White Man's Dog. The tribe referred to Fools Crow by the name of White Man's Dog until he began transitioning into adulthood and became the subject of stories. Fools Crow, no longer a passive listener who depends on others to tell him stories, becomes a part of the story itself. After the raid of Crow horses, tribal members begin to drop Fools Crow's name in conversation, but soon after his accomplishments spread throughout the tribe, men eagerly gather around the storytellers to continually hear about Fools Crow's bravery, skill, and honor. In each telling the danger grows, Fools Crow's actions become more fantastic, and he earns more respect. As the story evolves so does Fools Crow's identity, which gets reflected in his name change from White Man's Dog to Fools Crow. With his new name Fools Crow grows into his newly ascribed identity as a courageous, powerful leader in the Blackfeet tribe.

After he gains his independence and status in the tribe, Fools Crow takes on the most active role in storytelling, empowering others through his stories. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, Fools Crow tells One Spot, the little boy attacked by the wolf, the story of Poia in an effort to comfort and rebuild his self-confidence. Stories now become a tool which Fools Crow uses to help shape and define others. In short, Welch shows how stories play an integral role in the identity formation of American Indians through the character Fools Crow. Fools Crow begins as a listener of stories and gradually progresses in his involvement of the storytelling process by inspiring stories with his accomplishments and eventually becoming the storyteller who helps define others. His growth from listening to telling stories corresponds to his maturation and identity development similar to the way in which his actions within the gift cycle determine his identity. Although Welch emphasizes the importance of these cultural practices in the Blackfeet tribe by showing numerous examples of stories being told and gifts being given, how can both of these social customs simultaneously define an individual? In what ways do telling stories and giving gifts overlap, contradict, or reinforce identity development in Welch's depiction of an American Indian tribe? How does a story function as a gift? What does it mean when an individual needs to give a part of oneself to fully realize their identity and place in their culture?

#### **Part IV: Stories as Gifts**

While Welch portrays storytelling as a gift and social determinant, sharing stories functions as more than just a form of giving gifts or method used to ascribe identities to members of the tribe. Stories, or any form of art, contain a deeper personal investment than already existing tangible gifts. While Mauss and Sahlins's theories on the gift cycle correspond to the vision gifts and responses of Fools Crow and Fast Horse, the author Lewis Hyde specifically focuses on gifts of art. He uses the theories of Mauss and Sahlins as a foundation to draw correlations between the creation and distribution, acceptance, and continuation of stories to the gift cycle's process of giving, receiving, and reciprocating.

The cycle of giving must start with an initial gift and in the case of an artist's gift; the gift originates internally as a creative spirit. Due to the nature of the gift, the gift of the creative spirit, the artist can not simply pass the internal gift to others nor is he exempt from obligated reciprocity. Instead, the artist must labor over his internal gift until he creates a work of art, which he can give to others, and distributes it, which can be accepted by others. Once people accept the gift of art -- in this case, hear the story -- they must reciprocate even if that means simply passing the story onto others. While the general cycle of giving stories mirrors Mauss and Sahlins's model of the gift cycle, the initial step of creation makes the process of sharing stories intimate and in some instances more valuable. Hyde refers to this process of transforming an internal gift into an external gift as "creation" and believes that the artist's imagination acts as the instrument that "brings the work to life" (199). The creation of art occurs while transforming the inner gift and object of the artist's labor into an outer gift, which Hyde refers to as "a vehicle of culture" (xxiii). Hyde's use of the word "vehicle" implies that the artist acts as a medium through which the internal gift gets transmitted, while the artist's gift becomes a means of expression and communication with others. Realizing his gift and creating artwork provides the artist with a method for sharing his gift with others, but since his life and surroundings influence his gift, he cannot avoid sharing his culture and himself with his audience. The work of art still possesses part

of him even after the gift leaves his possession because "the legal tie, a tie occurring through things, is one between souls, because the thing itself possesses a soul and is of the soul. Hence it follows that to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself" (Mauss 12), and through his gift he gives a voice to his talent, culture, and himself. This interpretation of the artist's gift reinforces Hyde's belief that "these creations are not 'merely' symbolic, they do not 'stand for' the larger self; they are its necessary embodiment, a language without which it would have no life at all" (199). When applied to the stories of American Indians, these creations literally keep alive the identity, traditions, and culture of Native Peoples despite the death of certain ceremonies, languages, lineages, and customs.

Storytelling allows them to interact with tribal members, reminisce about their past, share their history, teach their culture, and maintain their American Indian identity. In *Genocide of the Mind*, American Indians, who find themselves trapped between mainstream culture and their traditional culture similar to the characters in *Fools Crow*, emphasize the importance that storytelling plays in establishing and strengthening their identities. Kathryn Lucci-Cooper refers to her Cherokee heritage as "mixed," because her family incorporates more traditional ancestral beliefs along with more mainstream Christian practices. After trying to discover herself at an American university, she came to the conclusion that "those of us who are Indian understand that it is the telling of stories, our very breath, that brings forth tribal identity and defines purpose. Our oral tradition, which is both ceremonially sacred and ritualized through the use of language, is also living thought" (8). She describes stories as a living entity which helps American Indians retain their past culture in a present day setting. Similarly, Lee Francis believes that the identities of American Indians are "inextricable interwoven in the stories they were told. For Native People, story was and continues to be essential to an individual's identity construction and development" (77).

American Indians can literally reclaim their identity through storytelling. Contrary to Lucci-Cooper and Francis, another American Indian author Gerald Vizenor does not believe stories merely define a person, but that "the real world exists in stories" and that the act of storytelling liberates the mind through these language games (Gerald Vizenor). Stories not only define American Indians by the role they play in the storytelling process -- as shown through *Fools Crow*'s maturation and name changing -- but stories actually create a world where American Indians can experience their traditions and connect with other tribal members or people outside of their tribe. *Fools Crow* bonds with his tribe over stories because he becomes acquainted with older tribal members by hearing stories and eventually telling stories to the youth in hopes of inspiring them. Despite the copious examples of storytelling between tribal members, the characters within Welch's story do not generally tell their stories to people outside of the tribe. Instead, Welch himself acts as the character who shares a part of himself and his culture with his readers by introducing his audience to the life of a Blackfeet in 1870. Since the majority of his audience probably identifies themselves with mainstream culture, Welch shares the past of his people, the Blackfeet, with outsiders. He provides his readers with a detailed description of ceremonial events like the Sun Dance, incorporates elements of trickster discourse through *Fools Crow*'s interaction with Raven, and examines the painful history of the Blackfeet characterized by war, disease, and infractions within the tribe. More specifically, Welch bases the ending of *Fools Crow* on the historical event of the Marias River massacre in the winter of 1870; a small group of renegades targeted women and children, killing 173 Blackfeet total in hopes of halting the white settler's raiding. He heard about this tragic event through the stories of tribal members, but, on a more personal level, he learned about the massacre from his father whose mother survived the massacre and told her son about it (Gish 352). These stories about his tribe's history were verbally passed down through his family, and he shares these personal, meaningful stories with his audience through the characters and events in *Fools Crow*. By presenting society with his story of *Fools Crow*, Welch gives his readers a part of himself through the creative spirit in his writing of the story, but, more importantly, his gift invites his readers to experience the personal, heart wrenching past of his tribe which lives in his story.

## Conclusion

In *Fools Crow*, Welch depicts the importance of adhering to the social laws of gift giving. The protagonist Fools Crow acts in accordance with the gift cycle, while the antagonist Fast Horse fails to abide by the rule of reciprocity. Despite their contradictory responses to being included in the gift cycle, Fools Crow and Fast Horse's actions impact their perceptions and roles in the tribe. Fools Crow earns respect, becomes included in more tribal activities, and gains power, whereas Fast Horse ruins his reputation, gets banished from the tribe, and loses his authority. While their American Indian society ascribes identities to Fools Crow and Fast Horse according to the appropriateness of their actions in the gift cycle, their identities become solidified and apparent through the act of storytelling. Fools Crow loves to listen to stories as a boy so he follows a storyteller around which gains him the name of White Man's Dog, but as he matures and becomes the subject of horse raiding stories his name changes to Fools Crow. As he matures, he reveals his status and authority by enrapturing others with his own storytelling and providing hope for the youth. Meanwhile, Fast Horse loses his audience of eager listeners and ability to tell stories as his status and prospects diminish. Although Welch uses Fools Crow and Fast Horse to depict how actions within the gift cycle and telling stories simultaneously construct and strengthen the American Indian identity, the story gift embodies the personal investment, emotions, and history of the storytelling, enabling the culture to survive and flourish by passing on their traditions and culture through the medium of telling stories. Welch not only examines the cultural dynamics of gift giving, storytelling, and giving stories in his American Indian narrative *Fools Crow*, he personally shares himself by describing the history, customs, beliefs, and practices of his tribe.

Looking back on the gift of Fish sticks, I still struggle to understand S's gift, but I do realize that the tangible gift of sticks pales in comparison to his gift of stories involving the sticks and the cultural practices surrounding the Fish games. S- accepted us into his culture, even if it was just for that night, but now we must reciprocate. We must pass his story, our new story onto others, we must continue the tradition.

*we came as just a group of college white kids who hid from one another on campus, nearly touching shoulders as we passed by, too busy texting on our cell phones and listening to our iPods. always looking down as we pass, avoiding conversation, interaction. adopting avoidance out of fear of our differences, even though we all look and act the same. cultured to rush, to ignore.*

*we left as just some white kids. the same white kids, yet transformed by friendship. we try to understand, are learning to understand our story, and how our story intertwines with others. others who trust us, open their arms, open their culture. we accept hesitantly. in sincerest awkwardness, we honor them, him. the drumming begins again, not calling us home. we are not indian. we are just white kids drumming out the rhythm of our steps, hoping to share our story, give you our story. this was our story.*

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