

Senier, Siobhan, ed. *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 716pp.

<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/Dawnland-Voices.675948.aspx>

In what is surely among the most self-consciously edited anthologies ever published, Siobhan Senier enlists the help of eleven Indigenous community members—from ten tribal nations—to generate a snapshot of “Native people’s continuous presence” in northeastern North America. The result of this editorial collaboration is more than just an exciting new collection of Indigenous voices—though it is certainly that. This is a volume that grapples earnestly and productively with prevalent notions of what literary anthologies—and their editors—are capable of.

As a non-Native scholar of Indigenous literatures, Senier’s editorial self-consciousness is both refreshing and, one could easily argue, vital to her task. In fact, the scholarly values outlined in her introduction—the enthusiastic spirit of collaboration, the relative lack of academic ego, the unconditional willingness to learn, and the steadfast commitment to a model of editorial control that listens more than it speaks—reflect precisely what has made Senier such a trusted and respected figure in northeastern Native studies today. It would be misguided, she compellingly argues here, for a non-Native editor to act as an intellectual invader of Indigenous cultural territory—to perpetuate an academic doctrine of discovery in which Indigenous writers, however well known among Native peoples or within tribal communities, are supposedly “found” by outside scholars and then counted for “credit” within Western institutional value structures. From Senier’s perspective, this conventional model of editorial practice would threaten to sever Native writers from their distinct community contexts, disrupting and distracting from the important ways in which “tribal literature connects people to homeland, kin, and neighbors, to tribal language, histories, and traditions.” Instead of acting as a compiler seeking to capture and contain her subject, then, Senier acts as a conduit—or as a facilitator alongside whom eleven impassioned community editors speak and exhibit the works of their nations on their own terms.

These community editors provide brief but dynamic introductions before each of the volume’s ten sections, which Senier organizes first by tribal nation and then from north to south. Jaime Battiste invokes the late Rita Joe in his introduction, appropriately stressing the importance that Mi’kmaq peoples actively “create writing, instead of just being written about.” Juana Perley reflects on the frustrations that Maliseet peoples on both sides of what is now the Canada/U.S. border have faced when dealing with powerful settler governments who are simultaneously meddlesome and unresponsive. And after describing the natural beauty and power of traditional Passamaquoddy territory, Donald Soctomah pays homage to an equally mighty people who “bravely have been battling against assimilation into the European civilization” for centuries—a nation in which youth leaders of late have been working hard to revive the old ways. Carol Dana describes a thriving Penobscot literary tradition that “has been passed down to us by our elders mostly, but also in written records”—through stories, petroglyphs, etchings, birch bark maps, rock markings, and mnemonic devices. And Lisa Brooks eloquently explains how Kwinitekw, or the Connecticut River, functions as the “central character” throughout the selected Abenaki writings, connecting “the people and places of the Abenaki ‘home country’” across time and distance.

Next, Cheryl Watching Crow Stedtler describes and justifies her “addiction” to Nipmuc country, inviting the readers of these selections to “journey with us and walk our path.” Joan Tavares Avant (Granny Squannit) introduces writings by the Mashpee Wampanoag and the Wampanoag of Gay Head, providing brief histories for each tribe before emphasizing the crucial role that writing can play in communicating the oft-neglected perspectives of tribal peoples. Introducing the Narragansett writings, Dawn Dove urges readers to “hear the historical grief in our voice”—and she speaks powerfully of the challenges her people have always faced when attempting to communicate with Euroamerican populations who would rather believe their own lies than listen. Stephanie M. Fielding introduces writings connected by “a love for Mohegan” and “a compassionate eye for the land and its inhabitants.” And finally, Trudie Lamb Richmond and Ruth Garby Torres introduce key writings from the three major families of the Schaghticoke tribe—Harris, Cogswell, and Kilson.

Each of the ten sections ends with a list of recommendations for further reading, and while the selections that are presented here span centuries—from shortly after the arrival of Europeans in the northeast to the present day—each chapter inevitably contains “large historical gaps” that Senier hopes readers will take as invitations to dig deeper. She also notes that a number of northeastern nations are absent from the volume entirely. Hopefully, these invitations will lead readers to the anthology’s sister website, *Writing of Indigenous New England* ([indigenousnewengland.com](http://indigenousnewengland.com)), an initiative that grew out of the editors’ understandably difficult decisions about what to include in the pages of *Dawnland Voices* and what to set aside. This exciting ongoing process of what Senier calls “web-based anthologizing” involves many of the same editors mentioned above, along with other northeastern Native writers, historians, and community members, who together are working to upload, annotate, and share cultural materials for public view.

This online initiative represents what is perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of Senier’s approach as editor, and in her introduction, she urges her “colleagues at other universities” to likewise “partner with tribal historians, authors, museums, and other entities to produce new knowledge about regional indigenous literary traditions.” She asks the readers of *Dawnland Voices* to imagine the volume as a hub, out from which come multiple “spokes”—the collaborative bibliography at the end of each chapter, the online exhibit space, and the associative activity taking place on various social networking sites. Again, Senier reminds us that this is not a book that tries to contain its topic; rather, it makes connections outwards into the universe. It speaks to its readers, and it invites those readers to speak back—to engage, to invest, to fill in the silences, to actively contribute.

It is curious that Senier uses the term “New England” in her title to refer to the northeast in its entirety—an area that includes territory that has never been part of what is usually referred to as New England. As an inhabitant of what is now known as Atlantic Canada, I would be interested to hear Senier’s explanation for this usage. In the end, this is a very minor criticism. *Dawnland Voices* is the product the many years Senier has spent working tirelessly to build partnerships between Native communities and the classroom, and the significance of her efforts in this regard is reflected by the beauty of her achievement. Whether she would accept such “credit” for this volume is immaterial: we will give it to her anyway.

*Rachel Bryant, University of New Brunswick*