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Review of *In Defense of Loose Translations: An Indian Life in an Academic World* by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

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Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. *In Defense of Loose Translations: An Indian Life in an Academic World*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. 240 pp. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn lifts the façade of the idealized glamorous life in academe in her book *In Defense of Loose Translations: An Indian Life in an Academic World*. Her narrative is as comfortable as a conversation with a life-long friend. She reflects on the hurdles, achievements, the centrality of home, and personal relationships which have influenced her career. Cook-Lynn poses the question, "Is this a memoir?" in the prologue seeking inspiration from her political and intellectual priorities in her search for an answer (2). Throughout, she tells her story – how the land she is from and the lands where she lived influenced her life, writing, and career – one centered on identity.

Unabashedly guiding readers through her life, Cook-Lynn turns her critical eye on herself. She deploys language with precision and purpose in an analysis of events throughout her academic life. Grappling with imposter syndrome, subjected to misogynistic and racist perceptions from colleagues, and driven by purpose, her life as a writer, scholar, educator, and a student is told in elegant words. Her successes and setbacks in academia are mirrored in her personal life, framed to show that life within the academy is no different from the day-to-day banality that every person experiences. Her focus is not constrained to her actions; her thoughts on the state of people, politics, academe, and history are intimately connected to the scenes that came together in a portrait of her life.

Cook-Lynn's desire to write outweighed her need for a doctorate resulting in terminal ABD status. She expresses admiration for obtaining advanced degrees while simultaneously pointedly sharing her skepticism of the narrow mindedness of some who earned their terminal degree. Pointing out that expertise in a narrow subject matter is not proficiency in all matters of

the world, "I began to fear that one of the decisive factors in obtaining a Ph.D. was to lead the charge in stupidity" (28). Not to be held back in her pursuits, she used language to advance native causes, put into print native history, and challenge settler-colonial narratives. The desire to write was not subdued by the obstacles she overcame to publish.

Her candor about copyeditors and co-authors provide a glimpse of the trial that is publishing, along with a respite of humor for veterans of the agonizing process. Reminiscing on the writing *The Politics of Hallowed Ground: Wounded Knee and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty*, she shares an exchange that she had with a copyeditor in which she said, "the only function of a copyeditor is to make sure that if the car is blue on page 12, it is still blue on page 98!" (26). She represents herself as she is, nothing more. She does not shy away from critically analyzing herself. Dissecting her life, not for self-aggrandizement; instead, crushing the pillar of adulation, senior scholars are hoisted upon by early-career academics.

Words are the epitaph and legacy of a writer, the evidence of their life by which they are judged. *In Defense of Loose Translation* is eyewitness testimony of what native academics lived through as they infiltrated settler-colonial institutions of higher education. Purposefully and diligently working to advance the inclusion of native history, literature, politics, and environmental management into western-based Euro-American pedagogy. Unmasking pretenders who played Indian to advance themselves and jeopardize fledgling native programs and scholars as they pursued their self-interests. Cook-Lynn and other native academics' efforts pushed the academy's doors open to successive generations of native scholars who face old and new obstacles in the pursuit of advancing native studies.

The work to make a place in the academe for native studies came with a price. Cook-Lynn does not avoid addressing the ramifications her writing has had on her life and personal

relationships. With words of contrition, she mourns the loss of her friendship with Dr. Beatrice Medicine due to her poisoned pen critique of a book written by Dr. Medicine's adoptive son. Driven by her insistence that she had a responsibility to point out the errors and omissions, she weaponized words and language, resulting in an unbreachable schism. While regretful of losing the close friendship, her words do not portray regret for what she felt she was compelled to write. Permitting scholarship that fell short of rigor to stand without challenge would provide an opportunity for criticism and attack from non-native scholars and risk the credibility of native studies.

In Defense of Loose Translations: An Indian Life in an Academic World is a memoir, presented as a conversation with a friend that has been absent for an extended time. Within its pages are memories that bring comfort, those that teach lessons, and ones that leave a void. Cook-Lynn's memoir lends itself for use by faculty, undergraduates, graduate students, and others who desire to pursue a life in academia with a native academic's experiences in prose that lay bare the academy. For writers and those who ache to write, Cook-Lynn's self-analysis of how she used words and language as a precision weapon offers lessons in the need to write to hone and continually strengthen their use of language. Her work is a reminder that there have always been struggles for native scholars that determination and strong will can not detour.

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