

Staging Anna: Public Memory and Pageantry in Russian Alaska

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Abstract

This article examines *Cry of the Wild Ram*, an outdoor historical pageant drama written by playwright Frank Brink and staged at Kodiak Archipelago's Monashka Bay for decades beginning in 1966. Brink set out to perform Kodiak's colonial history through community participation, recreating the community's identity right after the disastrous 1964 earthquake and at the time of the centennial of the Alaska Purchase. The pageant excludes Russian colonial violence, frames the Kodiak Alutiit as people who only belonged in the past, and supported Cold War ideologies that opposed Russian aristocracy and validated American democracy. It does not reveal the true history of Kodiak or of individuals like Anna, Alexander Baranov's Indigenous wife. Sophie Frets, an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq woman who played Anna in 1992, returns Anna's agency and reveals what her truth might have been.

Staging Anna: Public Memory and Pageantry in Russian Alaska

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In the Summer of 1967, tourists and locals gathered at an outdoor amphitheater overlooking Monashka Bay to watch the historical pageant drama *The Cry of the Wild Ram*. As the sun set behind the mountains, the performance space came into view: a beach to one side, a forest of Sitka spruces to the other, and at center stage stood three cabins representing an early Russian Alaskan settlement. The audience watched as the story of Alexander Baranov, the first governor of Russian America, unfolded on stage. Halfway through the pageant, Baranov accepts an offer from a Yaghenenht'ana chief to marry his daughter, whom Baranov renames Anna.¹ Their wedding ceremony is followed by a dance performance in which Anna participates. She wears a traditional gut-skinned parka with fur trim and beadwork, and her long hair is braided with a blue ribbon. This staged moment is supposed to be entertaining and consumable. Although it also makes a spectacle of colonial history and invites the audience to participate, as public memory is redefined.

Pageants, like *Cry of the Wild Ram*, are both theater productions and sites of public memory-making. Performance scholars argue that events such as historical outdoor pageant dramas depend just as much on the script as on the performance itself. As Diana Taylor writes, performances “function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity.”² Elements such as the pageants' outdoor setting, costumes, and ceremonial scenes all contribute to the overall performance and how the audience interprets the past. The audience plays a significant role in forming public memory and giving meaning to the historical narrative. Together they watch the performance, react emotionally, and experience the story in an immersive setting.

1. Yaghenenht'ana, “The Good Land People,” is the self-designator of the Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina. The name derives from Yaghenen (“the good land”), the Dena'ina name for the peninsula. “Kenaitze” is an anglicization of the Russian *kenaitzy*, the term used by Russian colonizers for Dena'ina living along Cook Inlet. The Russians also adopted this word from the Alutiiq word for people of the Kenai River, *kenaiyut*. See Alan S. Boraas and Donita Peter, “The True Believer Among the Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina,” in *Adventures Through Time: Readings in the Anthropology of Cook Inlet, Alaska*, ed. Nancy Yaw Davis and William E. Davis (Anchorage: Cook Inlet Historical Society, 1996).

2. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.

Playwright Frank Brink, a major figure in mid-twentieth-century Alaskan community theater and author of the play, viewed pageant drama as an event that could raise civic engagement and foster a sense of historical belonging. He argued that pageant theater should involve the entire community's participation and help it to understand its own history.³ He viewed theater as a tool rather than a form of entertainment. His philosophy frames *Cry of the Wild Ram* as a collective history of Kodiak that could create unity on the island. At the same time, his own positionality is as a white American writing about Russian colonialism in a Native Alaskan community, which he is not a part of, during the peak years of the Cold War and the centennial of the Alaska Purchase. His intentions remain ambiguous, but what he stages is not. The story he tells is one of the Russians' adventures on the frontier with Indigenous peoples as background characters, all leading to American democracy. The narrative replicates familiar colonial myths of conquest and progress. The pageant fits into a broader pattern of Cold War cultural dynamics that promoted unity, belonging, and frontier/settlement narratives.⁴

This paper argues that *Cry of the Wild Ram* reconstructs the legacy of Russian colonialism into a civic heritage narrative. It is expressed through the use of the natural landscape, community participation, and the heroic portrayal of Alexander Baranov. Rather than analyzing the Russian Empire as a structure that caused the extraction of natural resources and Indigenous dispossession, the pageant presents Russian colonization as a system that created a harmonious frontier. At the same time, the symbolic role of Anna, a Yaghenenht'ana bride, softens the reality of colonial violence. Later reinterpretations by Alutiiq actress Sophie Frets show how Indigenous interiority can deepen and reclaim a character originally written from a colonial perspective.⁵

Anna's presence in the pageant brings balance to the narrative, which conveys the message that the relationship between the Alutiiq people and the Russians is peaceful and harmonious. Yet Brink's version of Anna is changed by Alutiiq/Sugpiaq actress Sophie Frets, who brought emotional depth and cultural connection to the role, describing it as a way for her to connect with her own

3. Frank Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram: A Pageant Drama* (master's thesis, Montana State University, 1956), iii.

4. Examples of frontier settlement narratives include other pageant dramas like Paul Green's *The Lost Colony* (1937) and *Texas* (1966). Further examples include Western films like *How the West Was Won*, television's *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*, and even Disney's theme park Frontierland and hero Davy Crockett. See Bob Thompson, *Born on a Mountaintop: On the Road with Davy Crockett and the Ghosts of the Wild Frontier* (New York: Crown, 2013).

5. The Indigenous peoples of Kodiak are referred to in historical and contemporary sources in several different ways. *Sugpiaq* — a term meaning 'real people' — was the precolonial self-designation Indigenous people on Kodiak used, while *Alutiiq* is an indigenized version of the term 'Aleut,' which Russian colonizers broadly applied to refer to all Indigenous peoples of Southwest Alaska. Both Alutiiq and Sugpiaq are popular self-designators on Kodiak today; Amy F. Steffian, "Alutiit Quliyangua'it Patuirluki: Uncovering Alutiiq/Sugpiaq History," in *Imaken Ima'ut—From the Future to the Present: Seventy-Five Hundred Years of Kodiak Alutiiq/Sugpiaq History*, ed. Amy F. Steffian (Kodiak, AK: Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, 2024), 2.

heritage. Her participation in the pageant drama demonstrates how performance can expand and reshape the author's original intentions for a role beyond its intended purpose.

The Historical Pageant Tradition

The development of the historical pageant began in the early twentieth century. Historian David Glassberg explains that historical pageants expanded during the Progressive Era because of reform educators who linked education and civic duty to public performance.⁶ Fear that industrialization and urban life were damaging morality and social life led reformers to organize activities with the purpose of turning people into better citizens. Glassberg notes that Progressive reformers, including figures influenced by John Dewey's philosophy, believed that people learned best through action, which made the pageant an ideal opportunity to teach history through performance rather than through a textbook or lecture.⁷

Historical pageants staged scenes from local or national history, using community members, music, dance, costumes, and sets; it became a blend of theater, spectacle, and ceremony in a single event. The stage was often a natural landscape that visually supported the historical narrative. *Cry of the Wild Ram* is an example of this. The natural environment became the stage; trees cleared during the construction of the stage were even replanted.⁸ The 1967 program celebrated the authenticity of the pageant site, observing that the area was "much the same as the site of the play," making it seem more believable that "most of the events portrayed in the play actually happened" there.⁹ A log fort was built into the stage, which overlooked the bay, and a cannon was used, which, when fired, caused echoes across the valley.¹⁰ Ten pounds of TNT were used at each show, helping ensure that the natural landscape became part of the story of the Alaskan frontier.

Pageants were also intentionally designed to be emotionally compelling. Both the audience and the performers were encouraged to relate to the historical retelling and their broader community and nation. As a result, pageant productions often focused more on being emotionally impactful than on strict historical accuracy.¹¹ Glassberg quotes pageant producer William Chauncey Langdon, who described pageants as events which "bring people together and kindle the spirit of enthusiastic unanimity."¹² Pageants were understood to foster a "collective

6. David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 54-55.

7. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 57-58.

8. Kodiak Baranoff Productions Incorporated, "Description of *The Cry of the Wild Ram*," audio recording, 1966-1973, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, local identifier 1250-s6-b374-fq, <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/37106>.

9. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranof Productions, Inc., 1967).

10. Kodiak Baranoff Productions, "Description of *The Cry of the Wild Ram*."

11. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 148.

12. *Ibid*, 78.

identity” that generated unity and loyalty.¹³ *Cry of the Wild Ram* reflected this structure; it depended on volunteers ranging from directors, crew, actors, Navy personnel, high school students, seamstresses working all year on costumes, and a cast that ranged from toddlers to senior citizens.¹⁴ Pageantry here is both entertainment and a tool for shaping history and identity.

Pageants often staged origin stories and pivotal moments of a community’s transition.¹⁵ Tales of the American frontier fit this framework especially well because they supported stories of futurity and expansion. Within this structure, colonial violence was often omitted or minimized, and Indigenous peoples were positioned as belonging to the past.¹⁶ Glassberg notes that pageants portrayed settler colonialism as the natural historical progression, where Indigenous presence was frequently absent, passive, or at best, symbolic.¹⁷ This style of temporality is explicit in *Cry of the Wild Ram*. Before the pageant officially begins and the audience is still finding its seats, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq village life serves as a prologue.¹⁸ The scene depicts a seasonal Alutiiq/Sugpiaq hunting camp with huts, skins hanging to dry, and Alutiiq/Sugpiaq community members participating in everyday activities. The timing of this scene follows this narrative progression: Indigenous life first, then Baranov, then the Russian colony. It positions Indigenous life in the past and as a precursor to the colonization that followed.

Historical pageants align closely with Diana Taylor’s theory of performance and memory. Taylor’s framework helps make the case that *Cry of the Wild Ram*’s script must be studied alongside the performance. She argues that performance is equivalent to written records in how it shares information. Taylor distinguishes between two categories of cultural memory: archive, which consists of documents, texts, and physical objects, and the repertoire, which consists of embodied practices such as performance, ritual, dance, spoken word, and ceremony.¹⁹ Taylor believes that Western knowledge systems have always valued the archive over repertoire, thereby granting it greater authority and power. By contrast, the repertoire operates through repetition, presence, and participation. As Taylor writes, it “both keeps and transforms choreographical meaning.”²⁰ The script of *The Cry of the Wild Ram* belongs to the archive, and its performance belongs to the repertoire; the messages they share are different.

One of Taylor’s tools to analyze performance is the scenario. She defines this as the repeatable performance which becomes recognizable through similar settings, roles, gestures, narration, and expected dialogue.²¹ Scenarios do not occur in a singular way but follow a pattern that can occur across different historical

13. Ibid, 62.

14. Kodiak Baranoff Productions, “Description of *The Cry of the Wild Ram*.”

15. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 62.

16. Ibid, 83.

17. Ibid, 83-84.

18. Kodiak Baranoff Productions, “Description of *The Cry of the Wild Ram*.”

19. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

20. Ibid, 20.

21. Ibid, 27-28.

contexts. This influences how encounters are staged and interpreted before a written text is read. Taylor describes discovery and conquest as the most common and repeated scenarios in the Americas across the centuries. These scenarios rely on familiar character types: the discoverer, the conqueror, the native princess, the “savage,” and the civilizer.²² These figures and their relationships are already familiar to the audience. The audience has preexisting notions about the dynamics between these characters before the action begins, which normalizes whatever relations they have. These scenarios present colonial domination as a recurring, recognizable pattern rather than an irregular disruption.

Historical pageants are full of colonial scenarios, especially in frontier and settlement narratives. Scenes of encounters, marriages, alliances, and symbolic reconciliation are common in the pageant structure because they depict the harmony and peace that come after colonial conflict.²³ The Baranov-Anna wedding scene in *Cry of the Wild Ram* fits into this colonial reconciliation framework. Reading this moment as a scenario rather than simply another scene reveals how performance can create historical meaning rather than merely reproduce the written archive.

Brink's Civic Vision

Frank Brink is often called the “father” of Anchorage theater. He received an undergraduate degree in theater from Maryville College in Tennessee and continued his studies in playwriting as a Rockefeller Fellow at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1942. Brink and his wife arrived in Anchorage in 1945, where he worked in radio and television. In his time in Anchorage, he also founded the Anchorage Community Theatre in 1953 and taught at Alaska Methodist University from 1960 to 1975. Brink was a former naval officer and, during the Korean War, was recommissioned and stationed on Kodiak Island, where he staged a touring production of *South Pacific*. He received a master's degree in communications from the University of Montana in 1956, where he wrote *Cry of the Wild Ram*. The play premiered in Anchorage in 1960, and thereafter Brink “gave *Cry of the Wild Ram* to the city of Kodiak,” where it was staged for decades every summer.²⁴

Even though Frank Brink was active in the Alaskan theater community in the mid-twentieth century, he still followed in the tradition of the earlier twentieth-century historical pageant drama. Brink viewed pageant drama as a civic instrument, not as an art form. He insists in the introduction of *Cry of the Wild Ram* that “every community has a story” and asserts that “participation by as many members of the community as possible is vital to the fulfillment of the pageant-drama's purpose.”²⁵ The community is therefore the audience, the subject, and the producer of the pageant. Brink further writes that audience members are not

22. Ibid, 27-28.

23. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 83-86, 148-149.

24. Catherine J. Stadem, *The History of Theatre in Anchorage, Alaska 1915–2005: From a Wilderness Tent to a Multi-Million Dollar Stage* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 13-28.

25. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, ii.

spectators but are participants “judging their own history.”²⁶ In the 1967 program of the pageant, the purpose of the pageant is described similarly; spectators “lose the sense that they are merely members of an audience,” and they feel that they have been “timed-machined...into the past.”²⁷ The audience is “ennobled by the struggle of the brave men and women who have moved back into the wilderness for civilization.”²⁸

For Brink, pageantry is a democratic act in which historical meaning is collectively created rather than privately consumed.

This vision closely aligns with Progressive-era pageant ideology. Historical pageantry in the early twentieth century promoted civic duty, participation, and immersion, believed to make better citizens of everyday people. From the beginning, the community was embedded in the production of *Cry of the Wild Ram*. Planning and organization began with the Anchorage Women’s Civic Club and other civic organizations, including eventually Kodiak Baranov Productions Incorporated, situating the pageant within a network of civic engagement.²⁹ Brink hoped that “artists, performers, musicians, historians, educators, business promoters, and laborers” would collaborate to ensure the success of the pageant.³⁰ The production aspired to reach as large an audience as possible, so they distributed flyers for the pageant on the Alaska Marine Highway, a ferry system connecting communities along the coasts of southcentral and southwestern Alaska.³¹ This extended the community invited to participate in the pageant beyond Kodiak. Brink imagined the pageant as a site that would travel far and “combine the cultures of Native Alaska, Russia, and America on a common ground of understanding.”³² Brink argues that a pageant drama professor, known as Professor Hansen, explains that the pageant drama has an “integrating effect upon people of different races and religions” because “as they work together they begin to feel that their common project is more important than their prejudices” and “begin to accept each other for what they are and look upon their differences with interest and tolerance.”³³ Brink, in citing a pageant-drama historian, gives his claim greater authority and situates the pageant within a broader discourse on civic engagement.

In the 1960 premiere of the play, Brink acknowledged having taken “a number of liberties with the technical facts of history” to better dramatize Baranov’s character. He expressed hope that even if “the play is not lost in limbo,” the experience of “community-wide playmaking” and “belief in the dramatic value of Alaska’s history” made the effort put into the pageant worth it.³⁴ Participation had

26. Ibid, ii.

27. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranov Productions, Inc., 1967).

28. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranov Productions, Inc., 1967).

29. Ibid, v.

30. Ibid, v.

31. Kodiak Baranoff Productions, “Description of *The Cry of the Wild Ram*.”

32. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, v.

33. Ibid, iv.

34. Stadem, *The History of Theatre in Anchorage*, 21.

healing value to Brink; he writes, “the participation experienced by both performers and audience demonstrates the therapeutic value of community pageant-drama... influencing the attitudes that preserve our democratic traditions.”³⁵ In one of his more direct claims, he declares, “The story of the human struggle to build the educational, cultural, social, and historical institutions which we have inherited and by which we direct our lives is the story of American democracy.”³⁶ Brink understands democracy as more than a system of governance and conceptualizes it as a collective emotional experience derived from a shared narrative. Harmony, in this case associated with democracy, is brought to the community through participation in the historical pageant.

Applying Taylor here, the pageant’s participatory factor fits into the category of memory transmission of the repertoire.³⁷ The community involvement from the marine highway flyers, to the volunteer cast, and civic club organization indicates that, even before the pageant was staged, its democratic message was being shared. The pageant was not just about the few hours it was performed each night; it was about how the community production of the pageant itself was an important part of Brink’s messaging.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States was struggling to define itself among the fractured legacy of the Civil War, rapid industrialization, and increased immigration. In this moment, America continually turned to the past as a resource to stabilize its identity. Michael Kammen describes this phenomenon as the “land of the past,” in which a culture creates historical memory to help cultivate a communal identity.³⁸ A pattern emerged where Americans began to construct tradition rather than inherit it. The periods following World War I and World War II intensified this movement, as war created rupture and uncertainty, heightening demands for unity and continuity.

Lisa Yoneyama’s concept of the “dialectics of memory” sheds light on this postwar dynamic. She argues Hiroshima symbolized a level of violence that destabilized national identity, causing a rupture in public memory that could not be ignored.³⁹ Loss and destruction were acknowledged and made into lessons, which helped the nation move on. In the United States, the years following World War II saw an expansion in the number of museums, monuments, historical reenactments, and preservation movements.⁴⁰ Brink’s pageant fits into this broader postwar expansion of public memory efforts.

The 1964 earthquake on Kodiak created a similar rupture at a local level. Homes, businesses, the harbor, and the landscape were devastated, disrupting

35. Ibid, iv.

36. Ibid, iii.

37. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.

38. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, Vintage Books), 3-13.

39. Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1-15.

40. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 531-536.

everyday life and community stability.⁴¹ This is an example of how space is important in the creation of public memory. Yoneyama emphasizes that memory is spatial and that landscape serves as the stage for historical memory.⁴² In Kodiak, the damaged landscape of Monashka Bay became this stage. The pageant site also was where an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq seasonal hunting camp had been located, emphasized in the 1967 program as having existed “long ago.”⁴³ Performing the *Cry of the Wild Ram* in this natural landscape, Brink alters the damaged coastline into a site of historical narration. The performance reconceptualized this event as a journey from loss to survival.⁴⁴ Confronting colonial history against the damaged landscape shifted the community’s focus toward the future rather than the destruction of the recent past. Participation in the pageant transitioned from a civic duty to a form of communal healing, restoring a sense of shared identity.

Cry of the Wild Ram premiered as a pilot production on Kodiak in 1966. The pilot production was “accepted and acclaimed” and brought back for the next year “by the enthusiasm of the entire community in its” support for the centennial year of the Alaska Purchase, when the United States bought Alaska from Russia in 1867.⁴⁵ The pageant was not the only post-earthquake commemorative effort. This period also witnessed a broader resurgence in memorializing Russia’s history on Kodiak. The old Russian *magazin*, the building which was Alexander Baranov’s home and warehouse during his time on Kodiak, was renovated, preserved and repurposed into the Baranov Museum.⁴⁶ This effort represented a physical ruin of the empire being turned into a tourist attraction. Many streets of downtown Kodiak were also renamed to honor Baranov and other Russian colonial figures.⁴⁷ Place-based naming holds deep significance in many Indigenous cultures. The addition of Russian colonial names to the landscape makes this part of the past part of everyday geography and also distances Kodiak from Indigenous understandings of place and relationality. These practices reflect Glassberg’s understanding of the pageant as one that creates tradition rather than inheriting it. The centennial and the earthquake came together as two events that propelled the pageant’s production, while the Cold War influenced the framework in which the pageant belongs.

41. April Isiik Laktonen Counciller, “MiRikaan’saat: Americans,” in *Imaken Ima’ut—From the Future to the Present: Seventy-Five Hundred Years of Kodiak Alutiiq/Sugpiaq History*, ed. Amy F. Steffian (Kodiak, AK: Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, 2024), 139-145; Tobin Jerel Shorey, *Navigating the “Drunken Republic”: The Juno and the Russian American Frontier, 1799–1811* (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2014), 21.

42. Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*.

43. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranof Productions, Inc., 1967).

44. Stadem, *The History of Theatre in Anchorage*, 22-23.

45. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranof Productions, Inc., 1967).x

46. Kaitlin Jade Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus: Sophie Frets on *The Cry of the Wild Ram*,” *The Alaskan Myth*, podcast, December 6, 2023, Spotify.

47. Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus.”

Brink's rhetoric not only fits within a local framework; his ideology also parallels broader mid-century American political discourse. The expansion of this structure situates Kodiak's local pageant within Cold War debates over democracy. Following World War II, the United States increasingly sought to define its democracy in opposition to Soviet authoritarianism. Postwar memory practices in America aimed to create a shared past that would serve as a foundation for national identity after the traumas of war. Museums, monuments, etc., grew during the postwar years, attempting to share American history as continuous and unified. By emphasizing unity and continuity, these practices contributed to a feeling of being part of a nation with a stable past and present.⁴⁸ Brink's language aligns directly with this phenomenon. He writes, "In Alaska, the Russian Imperial colony has given way to an American democratic civilization motivated by principles completely counter to the autocracy of Tsarist Russia."⁴⁹ In the 1967 program, Brink takes this further, writing that the blood of "these early pioneers flows in the veins of thousands of our people," is "stronger than political or geographical ties," and "is a part of our American heritage."⁵⁰ Russian colonists are retrospectively turned into American pioneers.

Brink casts Russian autocracy as part of the historical past and American democracy as its inevitable successor. The pageant narrates Alaska's story as one that naturally progresses toward democracy. The museum, the renamed street, and the flyers on the marine highway all participate in this path towards democracy as everyday markers of Russia's past. The main plot line of the pageant is one of colonial encounters, where empire becomes democracy, conflict becomes harmony, and the wild frontier becomes a settled community. This narrative was conveyed not only through the pageant but also through the museum, the renamed streets, and the flyers. The repertoire is extended beyond the outdoor amphitheater to the entire city of Kodiak.

John Bodnar distinguishes between official memory and vernacular memory and further clarifies the pageant's framework. Official memory advances state-centered perspective narratives, while vernacular memory emerges from local community narratives.⁵¹ *Cry of the Wild Ram* appears to fit only into vernacular memory because of its local landscape setting, community participation, and organization by civic clubs. However, it also reproduces an ideology that fits into Cold War discourse, emphasizing the contrast between Russian autocracy and American freedom. The pageant, the museum, and the renamed streets together form a memory that Bodnar would identify as simultaneously vernacular and official. The community initiated and drove these efforts, but the 1967 program provides evidence that the Centennial Commission of the State of Alaska partially

48. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 572-573.

49. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, iv.

50. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranof Productions, Inc., 1967).

51. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-15.

funded the production of the pageant.⁵² The pageant then is vernacular in origin and participation, but official in funding and message.

Warren Susman enhances this analysis by arguing that “cultures can actually be arguments or debates themselves.”⁵³ Culture helps construct political meaning; parades, museums, films, and pageants contribute to shaping what democracy looks like and how it should be understood. This is where Brink’s pageant becomes political as it promotes democracy. Cultural authority comes from the success of utilizing “a set of images, symbols, and myths that have the most meaning for the bulk of the American people.”⁵⁴ Brink’s pageant employed recognizable democratic symbols and myths for the citizens of Kodiak, including: the myth of the frontier, the path towards progress, community participation, and resolution after conflict. These images carry emotional power and embody democratic values naturally.

Susman also cautions that a shared cultural identity will expand conformity and lower diversity within a community. When a community is organized around balance and unity, conflict is forgotten because it cannot be assimilated into the harmonious narrative. In *Cry of the Wild Ram*, Russian colonial violence becomes just another stage for a society advancing towards its inevitable fate, a pattern which Glassberg observes. Indigenous dispossession fades into the background as democracy arises as the light at the end of the tunnel. The emphasis on unity and harmony changes the pageant from a history of colonial destruction into a story of a community coming together. This also applies to the museum and the renamed streets; they honor the colonial past without acknowledging its downfalls. These become the catalysts that subsume colonial violence into heritage.

Further, Alaska’s geography reinforces this narrative. Formerly a Russian colony and admitted as the forty-ninth state in 1959, Alaska bordered the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War. The centennial of the Alaska Purchase also gave the United States an opportunity to narrate Alaska’s Russian origin story as an imperial failure that ended in American democracy. Brink’s framing of Alaska creates a narrative of Alaska as a democratic frontier. Within this narrative, American democracy triumphs over autocracy. Alaska becomes a stage for competing ideologies. One of the figures on this stage is Anna. Through a closer analysis of her character, Brink’s arguments about empire and democracy are seen in a personal, individual context.

The Figure of Anna

To understand how Anna’s narrative operates within larger frameworks, it is important to situate it within the discussion of Orientalism. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* argues that Western European powers produced representations of

52. *Cry of the Wild Ram*, souvenir program (Kodiak, AK: Kodiak-Baranof Productions, Inc., 1967).

53. Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984), 288.

54. Susman, *Culture as History*, 179.

“the East” that cast these cultures as stereotypically uncivilized, timeless, and inferior, and the cultural products, including art, literature, and theater, became political as they reproduced ideas of imperial hierarchy.⁵⁵ Russia complicates this model. It was the West and the East; it was “the self and the other” at the same time.⁵⁶ Historian David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye describes how Russian Orientalism differs from that of other Western countries because it is impossible to treat all Russians as a “single archetype.”⁵⁷ Some Russians, like Dostoevsky, aligned with most Europeans and saw Asia as backward, while others saw Asia in a “more favorable light.”⁵⁸ Russian Orientalism did not have a single, coherent message.

When this discussion is extended to Russian Alaska, the ambiguities around it expand. Many Russian colonizers “constructed Alaska Native peoples’ ancestry as, to use the parlance of the time, ‘Asiatic,’ ‘Mongolian,’ or ‘Oriental,’” similar to how they viewed other Indigenous peoples who lived within the Russian Empire.⁵⁹ Such interpretations were not neutral and served to further the Russian imperial project. Yet Russian Alaska also diverges from earlier Russian colonial patterns. As Ilya Vinkovetsky argues, Russia’s only overseas colony unexpectedly needed new administrative, labor, and security management. Russian Alaska became a “hybrid form of colonialism,” shaped by Siberian fur trader practices yet also intermixed with other Western European colonial traits and challenges from maritime life.⁶⁰ The colonial imagination surrounding Alaska was reflected in this hybridity: it was foreign yet familiar, Asian yet American.

The *Cry of the Wild Ram* follows Alexander Baranov as he becomes the first governor of Russia’s Alaskan colony. Throughout the first acts, we see Baranov struggle with the colony’s inhospitable conditions and efforts to stabilize them by expanding shipbuilding and the fur trade. He also moved the settlement on Kodiak Island from Three Saints Bay to a new settlement called St. Paul Village on Resurrection Bay in 1792, choosing this bay for its greater shelter from tsunamis. Before the establishment of a royally chartered fur trading company, Baranov had to contend with rival traders and was responsible for resolving conflicts with other Indigenous tribes. To address tensions in Cook Inlet between his men and

55. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

56. Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Ewa M. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Maria Taroutina and Allison Leigh, eds., *Russian Orientalism in a Global Context: Hybridity, Encounter, and Representation, 1740–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023).

57. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 8-9.

58. Ibid.

59. Juliana Hu Pegues, *Space-Time Colonialism: Alaska’s Indigenous and Asian Entanglements* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 39-41.

60. Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 187.

a Yaghenenht'ana community, Baranov met with Chief Raskashilov. He came to Kodiak and offered Baranov an alliance to be solidified through marriage to his daughter. Even though Baranov had a wife and children at home, he decided to accept Chief Raskashilov's offer to bring peace to the colony.

This action is significant from an Indigenous feminist perspective. D. Meme Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson discuss how Indigenous mothers "historically had responsibility for the life they created and, by extension, for the whole family and the entire community."⁶¹ In giving his daughter to Baranov, Raskashilov was not simply offering a bride, but also the possibility of community continuity. His daughter carries matrilineal authority within her community. The alliance with Baranov, however, reduces this to a transaction and her body to a diplomatic object.

Immediately upon Anna's introduction, she appears to exemplify the "long tradition of 'keeping up appearances' as a strategic form of resistance."⁶² She approaches Baranov with her "eyes lowered" and stands silently in front of him.⁶³ The reading is straightforward: she is submissive and obedient. But it can also be read as a strategic decision to perform acceptance to avoid attention. She is only referred to as an Indian princess or Raskashilov's daughter; her Yaghenenht'ana name is never given. This absence immediately cuts Anna off from her community and ancestors. Mary Macdonald notes how Stó:lō mothers believe an Indian name "was more significant than the given name because of the cultural significance that it held."⁶⁴ Indigenous names are earned, shared between generations, and hold place-based meaning. When Baranov declares, "I will call you Anna!" he replaces her old Indigenous name, which connected her to her community, family, and land, with a Russian Orthodox one that does not. This aligns with the colonial goal of erasing the Indigenous past, so there is nothing to return to. As Robin Gray argues, rematriation is "an embodied praxis of recovery and return," but recovery and return are impossible when the Indigenous name was never recorded to begin with.⁶⁵

The exchange between Alexander and Anna also reflects the binaries of colonial relationships: he is active and speaking while she is passive and silent. They exchange vows and gifts; he gives her gold and jade earrings, which she accepts with "a faint smile that touches her lips."⁶⁶ The image places refined European jewelry on an "uncivilized" body—another colonial binary. A wedding

61. D. Meme Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson, "Introduction: Indigenous Mothering Perspectives," in *Mothers of the Nations: Indigenous Mothering as Global Resistance, Reclaiming and Recovery*, ed. D. Meme Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2014), 2.

62. Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson, "Introduction: Indigenous Mothering Perspectives," 3.

63. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 100.

64. Margaret MacDonald, "Maternal Identity in Family and Community: Mothers of the Stó:lō First Nation," in *Indigenous Experiences of Pregnancy and Birth*, ed. Hannah Tait Neufeld and Jaime Cidro (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2017), 5.

65. Robin R. R. Gray, "Rematriation: Ts'msyen Law, Rights of Relationality, and Protocols of Return," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 3.

66. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 100.

celebration follows, during which Anna performs a dance for Baranov. The dance is described as “slow and flowing at first, then it becomes fast and almost savage, building to a sharp, almost violent climax.”⁶⁷ Using Taylor’s conceptual repertoire, we can read Anna’s dance as a performance of her culture, in which she communicates through her movement what language cannot. In the pageant, however, her dance is viewed entirely through a colonial lens, marked as a spectacle to consume. The description of her dance as “savage” with a “violent climax” fits the stereotypical representation of the Indigenous other as uncivilized and in need of control.⁶⁸

This parallels the broader colonial treatment of land as feminine. The feminization of the land is not new; it appears consistently across imperial contexts. Environmental historian Carolyn Merchant discusses how Enlightenment-era thinkers made colonization and subjugation contingent on imagining the land as female so that it could be seen as both exploitable and penetrable.⁶⁹ Under imperialism, the land and a female’s body became symbolically equivalent. Breanna Theobald, in her work on indigenous reproduction in the American West, discusses how the treatment of the land and women as subjects to be violated and conquered creates gendered violence that is inseparable from colonial discourse.⁷⁰ Jodi Byrd’s *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* extends this critique, analyzing how colonial thought is not only applied to objects, for example, women, but is also reproduced culturally to continue justifying colonization.⁷¹

Years later, Alexander and Anna are living together in St. Paul village. They have one child, Antipatr, who is about ten years old. By this point, the Russian Orthodox Church has arrived in Kodiak as an adversary to the Baranov administration, opposing his men’s gambling, drinking, extramarital relations, and their treatment of the Alutiit. The Church also used baptism as a recruitment tool, offering Alutiit Russian citizenship—and with it a legal protection from enslavement—and in return they converted.

This is the backdrop for a scene in which several priests interrogate Anna about her child and her relationship with Baranov. Three of the Fathers are together discussing Anna, whom they believe to be pregnant again. Their exchange is an example of what Yeğenoğlu describes as discourse that “constitutes not only the object but also the subjects who are investigated.”⁷² This means that the priests are

67. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 99.

68. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 99.

69. Carolyn Merchant, *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, (New York: Haper Collins, 1980).

70. Brianna Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

71. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

72. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

not simply observing Anna as the Indigenous other, but attempting to reimagine her as a legible colonial subject redeemable under God. Anna walks past with her son beside her and a water bucket in her hands, “sedate and beautiful with her head bowed, clutching a head shawl at her throat.”⁷³ The shawl fits into Yeğenoğlu’s concept of the veil in Orientalism: it represents both opacity and desire, the Oriental woman as mystery, the male subject driven to uncover her secrets and define himself through his attempt.⁷⁴ The priests grow anxious and press her if she is pregnant—their attempt to uncover the veil. They also emphasize that she is living in sin while Alexander has another wife, and encourage her to leave him. This is an example of what Jaime Cidro and Hannah Tait Neufeld describe as colonial authorities seeing “traditional Indigenous gender roles as an impediment to successful colonization” and seeking to control women’s reproductive bodies in order to “remove women from places of power.”⁷⁵ Anna’s response—“I not know!”—is not ignorance.⁷⁶ In Audra Simpson’s framework, it is a refusal; she declines to participate in a Christian moral system in which the priests’ questions make sense.⁷⁷ Her community holds different values around pregnancy and relationships. Even Alexander later acknowledges in their reconciliation scene, telling Anna that she cannot be held responsible for “our sin” as she does not know “our guilt.”⁷⁸ Her own colonial patriarch defends her against the church.

Anna seeks refuge in the woods after the priests call Antipatr “a child of sin” and declare that her new child “will be born in sin.”⁷⁹ Antipatr is later recovered at the bottom of a cliff, unconscious and soaked in seawater. One of the fur trade employees also recovered one of Anna’s earrings. The implication is that Anna, under extreme pressure from the Church, committed or nearly committed infanticide. When Brink wrote this pageant in the 1950s, the available ethnographic discourse on the topic was shaped by texts such as Clark Garber’s 1947 article, “Eskimo Infanticide.” Garber calls mothers who commit this “diabolical” “primitive practice” “mentally deficient.”⁸⁰ Yet, even within this early discourse existed a counterexample: anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička noted that there was no documentary evidence recording actual observations of infanticide.⁸¹ Therefore, Garber’s account depends more on assumption rather than on ethnographic record. Brink, in dialogue with this discourse, could not allow Anna to be figure Garber imagines; it would go against the colonial fantasy in which she is integrated into

73. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 105.

74. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, 26.

75. Jaime Cidro and Hannah Tait Neufeld, “Introduction: Pregnancy and Birthing: The Essence of Indigeneity,” in *Indigenous Experiences of Pregnancy and Birth*, ed. Hannah Tait Neufeld and Jaime Cidro (Toronto: Demeter Press, 2017), 1.

76. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 107.

77. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

78. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 126.

79. Ibid, 105.

80. Clark M. Garber, “Eskimo Infanticide,” *The Scientific Monthly* 64, no. 2 (1947): 98.

81. Aleš Hrdlička, *The Anthropology of Kodiak Island* (Philadelphia: The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, 1944), 80.

Russian culture. Instead, he blames the Church for imposing a concept on Anna that was not part of her epistemology. This preserves Anna's maternal virtue and Baranov as the good colonizer fighting against Russian autocratic religion. Both of these versions—Garber's unfit mother and Brink's distraught victim of religious harassment—take away Anna's agency. In neither of them is the focus on her decision-making.

An important dimension here is that Anna has been severed from her community. Indigenous pregnancy and birth, as Cidro and Tait Neufeld describe, is grounded in support from the community and the spiritual realm.⁸² The setting of this scene at the cliff is intentionally outside of a colonial space, like the village or the church. It is a space where Anna is alone and is not entirely confined. Anna's perspective on what happened and why is not given, leaving the audience to make their own narrative for her. What is clear in this situation is that Anna should not have had to face it alone, but should have had access to the support of her family and community.

Further adopting the "good colonizer" position, Baranov later defends her reproductive body explicitly: "To the Aleut woman, it is not a sin to have a child. It is a fulfillment of the purpose for which she was born. And the child belongs to her."⁸³ Yet he immediately refuses to allow Anna to leave, which captures the paradoxes of the world in which Anna lives. She has a child and partner, but no kin or community. This situation was the "forced rearrangement of gender roles" that Cidro and Tait Neufeld describe as having "disrupted family structures" and removed women like Anna from their sources of power—her position in her father's community, her kin, her language, and her reproductive autonomy.⁸⁴ Her near-infanticide is not an abandonment of maternal responsibility. It is a decision that should have been made with community support, made instead by a woman alone and terrified on the edge of a cliff because of what colonization has taken from her.

When Anna returns to Baranov, she is on her knees, illustrating her vulnerability. She is returning not to freedom but to a colonial system that is less oppressive than the Orthodox one. Baranov pulls out the earring recovered from the cliff and returns it to her; they embrace. He explains the conflict with the Church in a way he believes Anna will understand, framing it as his guilt, not hers. The gesture seems supportive, but it is also an assertion of his colonial, paternalistic authority over her, since he narrates her own actions back to her in a way she can "understand." The lost earring had represented a rupture in their relationship and a moment when Anna did not comply with the colonial expectations placed upon her; its return represents healing and a return to compliance for Anna. Her acceptance is her adaptation to survival in this colony. When Baranov asks, "Are you happy?" Anna responds, "I happy!"⁸⁵ This is another act of her quiet performance. She is giving the required response after a traumatic event, while

82. Jaime Cidro and Hannah Tait Neufeld, "Introduction."

83. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 68.

84. Jaime Cidro and Hannah Tait Neufeld, "Introduction," 1.

85. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 128.

also maintaining access to her children. This again refers to what Lavell-Harvard and Anderson call “the importance of deception.”⁸⁶

After a difficult period during which Baranov struggled to establish Sitka as the new capital of Russian Alaska, we find Baranov and Anna years later in a large western-style home overlooking Sitka, with their son, Antipatr, and their daughter, Irina. Anna comes down the stairs in a head shawl, “wearing a flowered skirt and a solid color buttoned blouse,” appearing perceptibly older, and somewhat stooped.⁸⁷ She appears assimilated into colonial domesticity, yet the shawl remains. She insisted on protecting herself with her shawl from the colonial gaze. In this scene, Irina is at the piano receiving lessons from her German governess. Anna interrupts to call her daughter to pick berries, and when Irina ignores her, Anna yells, “You learn to be a lady after you learn work!”⁸⁸ This is one of the clearest examples of what Gina Starblanket calls the “everyday” acts of resurgence.⁸⁹ Anna asserts her values and passes that knowledge to her daughter, outside of the colonial structure. She is ensuring that her values are shared, whether from her community or not, and that she passes them down to her daughter. At the same time, the scene stages a disconnect between the mother and daughter. Picking berries is a traditional subsistence practice, while piano lessons are a cultural colonial accomplishment. The second generation is fully disconnected from Anna’s heritage. Irina has no Indigenous name and will never have one, being permanently disconnected from her mother’s kinship network.

In the pageant’s final act, this disconnect is complete. Irina is seventeen years old and the product of successful Russian cultural assimilation: she speaks Europeans languages, plays the piano well, curtsies properly, engages with colonial politics, and is about to marry a Christian naval officer. She is everything Anna was supposed to be but could not fully be. The pageant presents this as the natural progression of colonization.

The most structurally revealing moment comes when Baranov gives Irina the necklace that Chief Raskashikov originally gave to Anna. Irina places it on her fiancé Yanovsky’s neck, mirroring the gesture of Anna placing the necklace on Baranov’s neck. Except now, this Indigenous diplomatic gesture is being performed by a girl with no Indigenous name, no kin network, and no relationship to her community. Baranov then says, “Your mother danced for me when she gave me that. I think it is only appropriate that you should play a piece for Simeon.”⁹⁰ Instead of Anna’s “savage” dance, Irina plays a Wagner piece, demonstrating that she is mature and civilized. This moment is one of the pageant’s most transparent scenes, where the colonial project’s goals have been met.

In their final years, Anna returns to Kodiak to be with her church community and is officially recognized as Baranov’s wife after his Russian wife died. Her

86. Lavell-Harvard and Kim Anderson, “Introduction,” 3.

87. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 154.

88. Ibid.

89. Gina Starblanket, “Being Indigenous Feminists: Resurgences Against Contemporary Patriarchy,” in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, 2nd ed., ed. Joyce Green (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017), 24–25.

90. Brink, *Cry of the Wild Ram*, 175.

absence from the pageant finale is partly a product of colonial erasure and partly an example of Audra Simpson's refusal. The play no longer needs her as a symbol once Irina has taken her place. However, with Simpson's concept of refusal, it can be seen as her asserting agency. Anna chooses where she wants to be. Even if the community she came from is not the one she chose, it is a decision she made for herself.

How historically accurate Brink was is worth examining because Anna was a real person. The historical record first encounters her through a letter Baranov writes to Grigorii Shelikhov, the company's owner, in which he states, "For a long time now I have been keeping a girl."⁹¹ The verb choice here is already revealing, framing Anna as a possession rather than a person. He describes her as the daughter of an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq village leader. According to historians Kenneth N. Owens and Alexander Yu. Petrov, local tradition holds that she is from the village of Karluk on Kodiak Island and that she is the daughter of Grigorii Raskashchikov, who worked closely with Baranov on expeditions.⁹² This immediately contradicts the pageant, which identifies Anna as Yaghenenht'ana rather than Alutiiq/Sugpiaq—this was not accidental. Brink strategically probably chose to distance Anna from the colonial history of Kodiak, where Alutiiq/Sugpiaq were treated brutally by Russian colonizers. In the same letter, Baranov also notes that Anna has learned to sew, manages household affairs competently, and can handle business matters. The substantial age gap between them was also striking: she was approximately thirty years younger than Baranov; she was likely in her late teens, while he was in his mid-fifties. The couple had two children: Antipatr, born in 1797, and Irina, born in 1804.

Baranov had an ongoing rivalry with the Russian Orthodox Priests on the island, and at different times, newly arrived priests disapproved of his Indigenous wife and his children, who, to them, were illegitimate. To appease Father Herman, Baranov lived separately from Anna at one point. The sources describe the couple maintained what can be interpreted as "domestic harmony," and Baranov's "evident pride" in their children appears to have softened some of the clerics' attitudes over time.⁹³ However, it is important to mention that these comments are coming from colonial observers who strive to normalize the relationship between Anna and Baranov, not from Anna herself, which exposes the coercive conditions where the relationship began. In 1805 or 1806, Baranov received word that his wife had died, and then he "wed Anna Grigor'evna soon after he received this news."⁹⁴ Many official visitors to Kodiak and later Sitka recorded the "settled domesticity of the Baranov home and the tidy arrangements they found there under the management."⁹⁵ This scene reflects the pageant's scenes in the Baranov home in Sitka, where Anna plays the role of household manager.

91. Kenneth N. Owens with Alexander Yu. Petrov, *Empire Maker: Aleksandr Baranov and Russian Colonial Expansion into Alaska and Northern California* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 110.

92. Owens with Petrov, *Empire Maker*, 111.

93. Ibid, 135.

94. Ibid, 172.

95. Ibid, 172.

Antipatr and Irina were educated at the Russian Orthodox mission school and assimilated into Russian colonial life. Antipatr eventually earned “an appointment to the Russian naval cadet corps in Kronstadt.”⁹⁶ Irina learned to read and write, a very uncommon accomplishment for any Russian girl of her generation, and married navy lieutenant Simeon Ianovskii. Where she lived for the rest of her life is not recorded. Anna spent her remaining years with Father Herman in a “virtual hermitage that he called New Valaam” on Spruce Island, where she served him as a devout spiritual assistant. She is also buried there.⁹⁷

Sophie Frets and Anna’s Interiority

What the archive gives us is not Anna but Anna as Baranov described her to his employer and Anna as recorded by official visitors to her household. We encounter Anna for the first time as a fictional character, written by a white playwright for a majority-white settler audience. We thus see what the archive has recorded and what it has presented to readers through a settler lens, once again in a book focused on sharing the life of Baranov. The theoretical frameworks introduced throughout the section on Anna illuminate how she navigates the colonial constraints imposed upon her, but they do not restore her interiority. Gayatri Spivak’s question of whether the subaltern can speak vividly exposes this problem for us. Every version of Anna we have analyzed is mediated through a colonial representation of her. Her own voice and self-understanding cannot reach us, as they are circumscribed in the archive. Anna, the character or Anna in the archive, cannot speak for herself. But Sophie Frets, an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq woman who played Anna in the summer 1992 productions of *Cry of the Wild Ram*, creates a sense of interiority in Anna that Brink could never bring to the role.

Frets grew up on Kodiak Island, hearing about the production but never seeing it because it was far out of town. She did not attend the performance until she was nineteen or twenty, when her sister played Anna. By her own account, she had not connected with her Alutiq culture at that point. Growing up, she recalls that it was “not cool to be indigenous” and that “when people found out [that you were indigenous] you carried the shame of it.”⁹⁸ Her immediate response to viewing the performance was pride in her sister’s performance, who was “the most beautiful... and so lovely.”⁹⁹ But also immediately noticed that when the play ended, everyone from the audience approached Baranov to honor him in some way. Anna was all alone; Frets found herself questioning this moment as well as the whole pageant. She wanted to know how true it was or what the pageant was actually trying to show.

When Frets played the role herself in 1992, the experience was unexpected for her. She describes being “shocked how easy it was to relate to Anna” and how

96. Ibid, 262.

97. Ibid, 266.

98. Kaitlin Jade Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus: Sophie Frets on *The Cry of the Wild Ram*,” *The Alaskan Myth*, podcast, December 6, 2023, Spotify.

99. Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus.”

easy “it was to jump into that role.”¹⁰⁰ She identifies this as her first experience “seeing that there was something different about her being Indigenous. [She understood that she could] create different things inside her, [and] see things differently because she is Indigenous.”¹⁰¹ These are not the feelings Brink intended this pageant to evoke. Frets was able to recognize in Anna a role written without the interiority of an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq woman’s mind, a reflection of her own experiences. Taylor’s theory of performance as a transmission of knowledge, identity, and memory can be used here.¹⁰² Brink’s colonial fantasy is not transferred through Frets’s performance of Anna. Instead, what is transferred is the memories and identity of an autonomous Alutiiq/Sugpiaq woman. Frets describes Anna as a “very touching role,” one that allowed her to portray what Anna went through and to “feel the tears of Anna flow down her cheeks.”¹⁰³ Frets embodies the repertoire as she is able to expose Anna’s interiority in a way that the archive cannot.

When asked whether the pageant accurately represents Anna’s motivations, she answers without hesitation, “No, [the pageant] did not touch on an ounce of her potential.”¹⁰⁴ The pageant glamorized Anna and omitted most of her truth. The most accurate elements, Frets suggests, were simply that an Indigenous woman could be given away, and that the priests could harass her. What is missing is the enslavement of the Alutit and the full treatment of what women endured. Her reflection on Anna’s dance is particularly illuminating: “[it’s so] bizarre when I think about it now... I know it played out wrong... it would be really interesting to see it played out today.”¹⁰⁵ The dance in the pageant makes the Indigenous body into a spectacle; it resembles a scenario in which the Native princess is forced to perform her otherness for the settler audience. Frets herself is able to call out the wrongness she felt during the dance. What Frets describes as reducing and giving justice to this scene cannot fit into the colonial scenario because it gives agency to the dance, which revokes it being cast as a spectacle.¹⁰⁶

Frets does not dismiss the pageant entirely. She believed it brought the community together and acknowledged that even though most people knew the pageant misrepresented history, it still provided a venue for local talent and fostered community collaboration. But the director she worked with in 1992 wanted to rewrite the pageant, only to meet resistance. The community preferred the familiar, inaccurate version; it was harder to acknowledge that the pageant’s history was wrong than to continue performing it.¹⁰⁷ The community’s ambivalence towards this exposes what the pageant set out to do: bring the community together at the cost of historical suppression. The pageant has fostered harmony in the community, and questioning its content would threaten that harmony.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid.

102. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 1-3.

103. Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus.”

104. Ibid.

105. Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus.”

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

Frets discusses this historical period through an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq concept that she explains carefully. There is a word for the colonial period that conveys how that “time is too sad to ever speak of again.”¹⁰⁸ The word illustrates that her people must do the best they can and keep moving forward. She is clear that this does not mean ignoring the past. She emphasizes that you have to hear sad stories, even if it’s uncomfortable, and listen and let it break our hearts and cry with them — that is your job as a human.¹⁰⁹ She believes that the play has the potential to be rewritten to educate people and offer a “fuller spectrum” of what we could be, meaning cohabitation across cultures where no one’s history is ignored.¹¹⁰

It was not until the revival of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq culture in the 1980s that she returned to her community, received her tribal card, and “jumped right in.”¹¹¹ What she found was not necessarily a thriving culture ready to be claimed, but one that had survived, waiting to be rebuilt. “So much of it was lost,” she reflects, “I had not realized it was missing.”¹¹² This sentence is a sharp contrast with one of the pageant’s last scenes: the scene with Irina playing Wagner on the piano and accepting her mother’s pendant to give to her betrothed. Taylor calls this a repeated framework that shapes the scene around it. It is a familiar colonial scenario that recurs throughout the pageant. The scene reveals the reconciliation after imperialism and its legacy, done so well that the loss of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq culture is barely recognized. The loss was so intense that the absence went unnoticed. The pageant exposed what colonialism made, and Frets showed what it took.

Conclusion

In a Facebook group for Kodiak residents, the pageant lives on. When the local Salvation Army recently posted a 1980 program from *Cry of the Wild Ram*, residents gathered in the comments to reminisce. One resident recalled that “it was a great show” and that “people flew over to Kodiak annually to view the production.”¹¹³ They also commented that they had just told a neighbor, “It was sad the *Cry of the Wild Ram* is no more.” Their last comment is the most telling of the pageant’s legacy: “I learned so much... the history of the people coming to the land.”¹¹⁴ The commenter is fond of Brink’s history of “the people coming to the land,” but not of the people already on it. This invokes Taylor’s framework: the program at the Salvation Army as the archive and the repertoire being it when posted on Facebook. The nostalgia of the pageant serves as a form of historical education, even though it is incorrect. The emotions and affection are genuine

108. Ibid.

109. Armstrong, “Episode 2 Bonus.”

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Comment on Salvation Army Thrift Store Kodiak, “1980s Kodiak cry of the Wild Ram play,” Open Friends of Kodiak Facebook group, January 21, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FriendsofKodiak/permalink/2777505879258630/>.

114. Comment on Salvation Army Thrift Store Kodiak, “1980s Kodiak cry of the Wild Ram play,” Open Friends of Kodiak Facebook group, January 21, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FriendsofKodiak/permalink/2777505879258630/>.

for the event and the community, which cannot be separated from what the event suppressed.

The persistence of the nostalgia of the *Cry of the Wild Ram* raises questions that go beyond Kodiak. What happens when a community's beloved collective memory is also its most misrepresentative history? How could a community correct one without affecting the other? Perhaps a rewritten version of the pageant could offer a more comprehensive, authentic narrative. However, the community's resistance shows they would rather defend a false narrative than face the discomfort of a true story. The conflict then becomes who has the authority to change the story: those who were erased from it, or the community that created an identity around it? The answer must be the Alutiit who were erased from this history and also lived it. Sophie Frets shows how this is possible; the very same stage where the colonial fantasy takes place also gives her the tools she needed to unmask it.

Russian Alaska's hybridity further complicates these questions. The pageant built a story on an empire which was itself ambiguous, as both Western and Eastern. Then it proceeded to show how Russian colonialism was a precursor to their own democracy. *Cry of the Wild Ram* is mediated through so many layers: Alutiiq/Sugpiaq history through the Russian colonial archive, retold by an American playwright, performed by a predominantly settler community, and then rehashed in a Facebook comment section under a Salvation Army post. Each layer of mediation tries to shed new light on the subject, but it really just adds another filter that distorts it further. The pageant then leaves us with questions beyond the Baranovs' true history. How can a community share its own history without silencing someone's individual story? Using Frets' words, what would it take for us to hear the sad stories and let them break our hearts, but listen anyway?

About the Author

Laurel Thorne is a PhD Student in the Slavic Studies Department at Brown University. She holds a bachelor's degree in history from Mississippi State University, where she concentrated on women and gender in the Russian Empire. She received her M.A. in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where her master's thesis examined the role of women in the colonization of Russian Alaska. At Brown, Laurel's research explores Indigeneity, gender, and empire, with a particular focus on the history of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq women of Kodiak, Alaska, from the Russian colonial period to the current day. She draws on Indigenous feminist theory and rematriation methodologies to challenge settler-colonial frameworks and foreground Indigenous perspectives, both historically and contemporarily.

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