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Mary Brave Bird Speaks: A Brief Interview

Christopher Wise and R. Todd Wise

In the Spring of 1998, I taught a seminar in “Native American Testimonial Literature” at Western Washington University. Among the texts studied were Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray’s I, Rigoberta Menchú as well as Georg M. Gugelberger’s recent The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse in Latin America. In the second half of this seminar, Mary Crow Dog’s Lakota Woman and her later narrative Ohitika Woman (published under the name of Mary Brave Bird) became our primary focus.

Those familiar with scholarship on I, Rigoberta Menchú will be aware of how intensely the relationship between Menchú and Burgos-Debray has been scrutinized. Literary critics and theorists from a broad international spectrum have tirelessly debated the many problems and possibilities implied by the “speaking subaltern” imbedded in Menchú’s text. These debates are mirrored by recent controversies surrounding the relationship between John Neihardt and Black Elk, leading to the publication of Black Elk Speaks.¹

In light of recent “testimonial” criticism, my students and I sought to unpack the complexities of Brave Bird’s narratives, but we repeatedly found ourselves frustrated by the dearth of information concerning her working relationship with Richard Erdoes. We had many questions for Brave Bird, which we hoped to ask her in late May 1998 when she was scheduled to give the keynote address at the “Sisters of Color” Conference, held at Western Washington University. However, the afternoon of her address, we were disappointed to learn that Brave Bird would not be coming. It seemed our questions would go unanswered.

Not long afterwards, I phoned my brother, R. Todd Wise, who lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and who had recently conducted an interview with Hilda Neihardt for The Black Elk Reader. Todd teaches Native American Studies at the University of Sioux Falls, and he had worked in the past with Charlotte Black Elk and other Lakota at Pine Ridge. In fact, it was Todd who had first brought Lakota Woman to my attention. We both agreed that more information about the Brave Bird-Erdoes relation would be helpful, so we decided to try to find Brave Bird at her home near Rosebud, South Dakota. I phoned Mary's mother, who seemed to think Mary would go along with the interview. However, Mary did not have a phone, so there was no way to confirm with her directly. On the morning of June 19, 1998, Todd and I drove the five hours or so from Sioux Falls to Rosebud, planning to ask around until we found Mary's place. Mary and her two young children, Summer Rose and Rudi, immediately welcomed us.

What follows is the portion of our interview that focuses on the Erdoes-Brave Bird relationship. A second interview with Brave Bird, more overtly political in content, will be published in Roseanne Kanhai's forthcoming Sisters Uprising (the Sisters of Color conference proceedings).

—Christopher Wise

Christopher and R. Todd Wise (**W**): We noticed in both of your books [*Lakota Woman* and *Ohitika Woman*] that there seemed to be a consistent theme: In traditional Lakota culture, stories have been transmitted orally, from one generation to another. When you look at an important Lakota text like *Black Elk Speaks*, He doesn't write, he *speaks*. We'd like to know more about your relationship with Richard Erdoes, how your books came into being.

Mary Brave Bird (**BB**): I record and say a lot, and we work through the tapes. We work together pretty good, but sometimes he'll put in stuff I didn't want anyone to know. In the original transcript, the publisher will want something in there. You may want a certain picture, but the publisher might want something else. Sometimes he [Erdoes] will quote some stuff. That is the problem with having a ghost writer. Because they will allow certain things for the audience, to try and capture them.

W: There were some editorial disagreements?

BB: Yes. There was some stuff that happened, there was some fighting over stuff, but it turned out okay afterwards.

W: Do you have any specific examples?

BB: I didn't want anything in the second book about Henry Crow Dog's death because I thought that was too personal. I knew what it meant to the Crow Dog family. In the end, they [Erdoes and the publisher] won out. All I could do was argue with them because that was getting too personal. I told them I live here. I am the one that has to live here. I am the one that has to live with the people. I am the one that has to live here, and if they don't accept my word themselves, then I have to live with it. I had a problem with that, but, all in all, it was all right. There could have been more damage, I guess. It's done.

W: You're working with him on your third book?

BB: Yeah. He just finished up one with Dennis Banks. He is pretty busy.

W: It seems like he never stops.

BB: He's 85. He's like my father, in a way. His wife passed away a couple of years ago. He is all alone now.

W: If something were to happen to him, what would you do?

BB: Well, I'm not sure. I don't think anything will happen to him. He jogs three miles a day, even with pins in his ankles. He is old, but I think his mind is real sharp. I don't know. They sign the contracts, and I don't know if they will give it to me, just by myself, you know.

W: It seems hard to imagine that a publisher would not go with you on a third book. In the university anyway, there seems to be a ground swell of interest in your work.

BB: Yeah, well, they want more books, and they are going to call it *Lakota Women Speak*. It is going to be about what a woman represents, and it is not about me but about different women, different tribal

women, some Lakota, some from different tribes. We haven't started working on it, but we will. I will try and go down to Santa Fe and work with some tribes down there, and after there I will come up here and work with some women up here. I am trying to get some of the elders and some of their stories, some successful women from different professions.

W: Are you meeting with any resistance?

BB: No.

W: Were you surprised when Leonard Crow Dog, given his "anti-book" stance, came out with his own book?

BB: No, I think they were working on the book way back in the sixties. But, maybe the contract fell through, as usual. We have a literary agent. He is the one that goes out and gets contracts for us. Mine goes out to Germany, France, Holland, to Italy ...

W: You know, if you sit down and read both books at the same time [*Lakota Woman* and *Ohitika Woman*], there is a significant difference between the two. It's the same story told twice, but in very different ways.

BB: One reason for that is Leonard. That was probably the big reason. We weren't together anymore. I remarried and divorced. That was taking place. I got some beautiful kids out of it. My life changed.

W: There is twenty years difference. But was there a deliberate attempt to undo some of the things that were done in the first book? To present a different picture? In some ways, it seems like the second book is a critique of the first.

BB: Well, I guess so. Like I said, at some points I argued for how it was pictured. "I want it this way," [I'd say.] "I don't want it that way." In some parts I tried to make up for some of the things in the first book. Most of it was just after [my divorce]. There was things in my life at that time, and I wasn't really focused on everything that was happening. After the first one, everything started happening, especially in my relationships and everything. I was in a different place.

W: Gail Tremblay read from your first book in Bellingham [at the 1998 Sisters of Color Conference], the chapter about Annie Mae Aquash. Before that I [Christopher Wise] had been reading your book as silent words. I had never sat down and heard them read out loud. When they were read out loud, it just struck me—and I heard several students say this afterwards—there is a real quality that comes out when your book is spoken. It seems that it has a kind of connection to the spoken word.

BB: Some of it came back, from way back, from New York City. It was a different time. Everything was fresh and from the heart. I mean it is all right there, the way I feel it, the way everything happened.

W: How long of a period of time did it take to do that first book?

BB: Over two years. It was when I lived in New York with the Erdoes family, for about a year and a half, off and on. At the same time I was running a defense committee for Leonard when he was in prison. That took a lot of time because the main thing was trying to get him out of prison. It was a lot of work. So between trying to work on a defense committee, I didn't really think there would be a book. I thought I'll just tape and tape in case something happens to me. In case I get killed or died. I thought that at least the kids will have something.

W: Erdoes was with you during the taping of the sessions, and he encouraged you to answer questions?

BB: Yes, he was there, in the studio of his apartment.

W: So he asked you questions and you would answer?

BB: Yes.

W: But that wasn't the case with the second book?

BB: Yes it was. I went down to Santa Fe at that time, but, like I said, I had things going on in my life, and it was really difficult. It was really difficult then, and I told him I didn't want to do it. But, I had already signed the contract.

W: Are you familiar with Rigoberta Menchú? Charlotte Black Elk mentioned [to R. Todd Wise] that she stayed with her for a while here [at Pine Ridge]. In that book [*I, Rigoberta Menchú*], Menchú formed this relationship with Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. They took one week, and they got up in the morning and worked for seven days solid, with just her talking, and Burgos-Debray later went back and listened to the tapes, transcribed and edited them. But it was done over a concentrated period.

BB: Well, that's what we did. We would start early in the morning, and we sometimes worked through lunch, but sometimes all day. Early in the morning you're more fresh.

W: You put in four or five hours a day?

BB: More like seven.

W: Over a period of weeks?

BB: It took about three weeks, even on weekends.

W: Did you play the tapes back and listen to them?

BB: Oh, I hate listening to myself [laughs]. I don't even play interviews back that are on video.

W: Then you just gave him the tapes, and he gave you the transcriptions?

BB: Yes, then we would go over them. If we couldn't agree on something, we would just throw it out. But in the end, I would win. Some stuff that was put in there I didn't want. But that's all right. But, the third book is going to be different. I think it's going to be a better book, now that I know what I'm doing, after the first two books. I didn't know what I was doing then.

W: So, if you're collecting the voices of other women, you will be like a narrator taking the reader through these different stories?

BB: Yes.

W: Do you think it is important that it be spoken?

BB: Yes, there is a lot of things to be said out there.

W: But do you think it is important to actually speak the words? Let us say you sat down at a table with a computer and wrote them down. Is it essential to your creative process, the way you put it together, to actually speak the words out loud?

BB: Yes. Like some of the stuff, he [Erdoes] would reword it. I would say, "Gee whiz, I don't talk like this." And he would say, "Nobody will know, nobody will pay attention." He broke it off and left it at that. Like I said, it's all right, just as long as it gets read. There is a copy-right. But, people will look at it in another way. People will use it in a different way than you used it.

W: Do you look at your books like marketable commodities? Or, is it simply a question of getting your message in a tangible form, to speak to a broad audience?

BB: Well, he wanted to put as much as he could into it, and a lot of stuff he couldn't put in there.

W: He seems like a remarkable guy.

BB: He has got a lot of heart. He's just got a lot of heart, and he has worked with Indian people. He has been a strong supporter for many years. So he is a radical from the turn of the century almost. But I have been meeting with different women and hearing their ideas, talking with them. Just to see what they think, what they feel. A lot of women have important stories out there. In the end, at the end of it, I just want to make sure it was the way *they* said it, and the way *they* told it. Women are like that. [Laughter].

NOTE

¹See, for instance, Julian Rice's *Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing Its Lakota Purpose* (1991) and Michael Steltenkamp's *Black Elk: Holy Man of the Oglala* (1993). R. Todd Wise summarizes and comments upon this debate in his "Native American Testimonio: The Shared Vision of Black Elk and Rigoberta Menchú."

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Contemporary Two-Spirit Identity in the Fiction of Paula Gunn Allen and Beth Brant

Tara Prince-Hughes

A central concern in contemporary Native American fiction is that of identity. According to Louis Owens, in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, common to many writers is a “consciousness” of the “individual attempting to reimagine an identity, to articulate a self within a Native American context” (22). This struggle for identity has required writers to engage actively and dispute dominant Western fictions of “Indianness” and to express the fragmentation experienced by people of mixed ancestry. Their sense of alienation, Owens claims, differs from that of postmodern European-American thinkers; unlike their European-descent contemporaries, who emphasize the instability of identity, Native American writers seek to recover an underlying sense of stability based on spiritual and cultural continuity and interconnection with the wider natural world (20). Even in the case of the “radically deracinated mixedblood of much Indian fiction,” who “find themselves between realities and wondering which world and which life might be theirs,” identity is real, inherent, and recoverable (Owens 19). For Native protagonists, “the self from which they are alienated is, in fact, shown to be potentially coherent and dependent upon a continuing and coherent cultural identity” (19).

This idea of identity coherence is particularly pressing for gay Native American writers, for their work reflects the complications not only of ethnicity and mixed heritage but of gender and sexuality as well. At a time when many European-American queer theorists are celebrating the instability of identity and the performativity of gender,¹ gay American Indians are revitalizing traditional Native cultural roles

for two-spirit people, people who manifest both male and female traits and who were thus accorded unique responsibilities and status in many traditional American Indian societies.² Such traditions offer a stable, coherent pathway for the development of identities which include homosexuality as part of their characteristics but which in their defining traits—spiritual calling, childhood and adult propensities for the play, work, dress, and behavior of the other sex, mediative and healing work, and a sense of community responsibility—are primarily social. Although individual tribal groups have developed their own variations on the roles, two-spirit traditions are remarkably similar in their core features, allowing for the development of a pan-Indian awareness of the two-spirit as an alternative to Western concepts of gayness that are grounded primarily in sexuality and removed from any broader cultural context.³ As Randy Burns, co-founder of Gay American Indians, has noted, the cross-cultural figure of the two-spirit provides a model for gay American Indians regardless of their specific cultural heritage: “the message of the berdache [is] important no matter what tribal background a person comes from” (Williams 211).

In work by lesbian writers Paula Gunn Allen and Beth Brant, identity, and in particular two-spirit identity, are central issues. In Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, the alienation of the protagonist, Ephanie, occurs around her own internal split between cultural outlooks; her fundamental identity is that of a cultural mediator and healer, but she can recover this role only by recovering her identity as a two-spirit, an identity she lost in early adolescence. Beth Brant’s stories in *Mohawk Trail* and *Food & Spirits* also focus on two-spirit identities and themes. Although her protagonists come from European- and African-American as well as Native cultural positions, their alternative gender behavior and roles as healers and mediators signify their common two-spirit traits. In the work of both authors, issues of gender and cultural identity are closely related; alternative genders and sexualities cross cultural boundaries, and characters help repair fragmentation by forging connections between as well as within cultures. In their insistence on social responsibilities for two-spirit characters, and in their exploration of complex manifestations of gender identity, Allen and Brant suggest definitions of gayness that are not reducible to Western definitions based on sexual object choice; rather, gay and alternative gender people participate in the work, behavior, and spiritual roles that were once accepted by many American Indian societies.

A number of literary critics have noted the importance of lesbianism to Allen's and Brant's fiction, but the equal importance of two-spirit models has not been sufficiently explored. Vanessa Holford, for example, notes in reference to Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* that lesbianism is "vitaly important because it is representative of woman's self-love" (105). Likewise, Renae Bredin, in her exploration of the constructionist versus essentialist debate regarding racial identity, discusses the figure of Double Woman as the prototype that offers Allen's protagonist a "culturally specific practice" in which to name her lesbianism: "It is precisely within the constitution of a lesbian identity that Ephanie is able to find balance and harmony" (47). Bonnie Zimmerman discusses Allen's novel in relation to twentieth-century lesbian fiction. Thus, she reads Ephanie's childhood relationship with Elena primarily in terms of sisterhood (88-89), a reading in keeping with lesbian feminist thought. At the end of the novel, Zimmerman suggests, Ephanie "enters into the song of the Doublewomen, the women who defy men and love women, who hold and use female power" (196).⁴

While lesbian-focused readings of the novel are in accord with Allen's own writings on women's same-sex relations in *The Sacred Hoop*, a reading that places Ephanie's journey in the context of two-spirit traditions resonates with Allen's concept of the "dyke" or "ceremonial lesbian" who possesses spiritual and social power (*Sacred Hoop* 257). Such a reading focuses on the ways in which Ephanie's experience parallels social patterns that are Native rather than European American. Using the Iroquois story of Sky Woman as a structuring metaphor, Allen's novel depicts Ephanie's recovery of her own power as a two-spirit mediator and storyteller.⁵

An interpretation of Ephanie's two-spirit identity seems especially appropriate given the prevalence of two-spirit people among Pueblo peoples, including Laguna. Barbara Cameron, co-founder of Gay American Indians, notes that:

Probably the most together tribe [sic] in the country, the ones who have best retained the old ways and traditions, are the Pueblos. Gay people are still accorded positions of respect in the tribe. Some are healers, medicine people. (Gengle 334)

Walter Williams cites the Keres Pueblo belief in female completeness as one of the reasons for the high status of male two-spirits in Pueblo culture:

masculine qualities are [believed to be] only half of ordinary humanness. But feminine qualities are seen as automatically encompassing the masculine as well as many other characteristics that go beyond the limits of masculinity. (66)

Allen herself has commented on the social importance of two-spirit people as mediators and preservers of social order:

If you make people hate berdaches, ... they will lose their Indianness. The connection to the spirit world, and the connection between the world of women and men, is destroyed when the berdache tradition declines ... We must recolonize ourselves. The issue of self-determination for Indian people means acceptance of lesbians and gays is central to accepting ourselves as Indian. (Williams 228)

As for many Native American writers, identity for Allen is something stable and reclaimable, something that can be destroyed or revived. Her association of the survival of two-spirit traditions with the survival of cultural identity is born out in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.

Ephanie's childhood and early adolescent behavior manifests the alternative-gender inclinations that signal a developing two-spirit in many tribal cultures. Ephanie's childhood exploration with her friend Elena involves play that is normally expected only of boys; they pretend to be ranchers, trick riders, and stunt men, all specifically male roles (21).⁶ Ephanie is repeatedly warned by her Catholic community that "a twelve year old girl shouldn't be acting that way. That she might get hurt, she might fall and break something" (197). Like Sky Woman, however, Ephanie has physical power and endurance; like many two-spirit females, she rejects girls' clothing and activities for male play.

While her budding sexual relationship with Elena ends suddenly, Ephanie's sense of self depends far more on her gender expression than on her homosexuality. Her alternative gender behavior continues up until the day when, shaken by a dangerous fall from a rope jump, she abandons her sense of her identity. Just as Sky Woman is pushed into the abyss by her jealous husband, who feels threatened by her power,

Ephanie is dared by her timid cousin Stephen to leap from a rope jump he has constructed in an old apple tree, one planted by Ephanie's white grandfather and symbolic throughout the novel of Ephanie's mixed-blood heritage. Sure of her own strength and agility, Ephanie takes the dare, thinking, "If he can do it, I can" (201). When the limb breaks beneath her and she falls, suffering broken ribs and a punctured lung, Ephanie gives in to community pressure and blames her masculine behavior for the accident. For Ephanie, as for Allen's *Sky Woman*, the fall precipitates a long period of forgetfulness.

When she is released from the hospital, Ephanie's behavior, speech, and appearance are restricted, signifying the loss of her alternative gender identity:

The old ease with her body was gone. The careless spinning of cowboy dreams.... Instead highheels and lip-stick.... Instead full skirted dresses that she'd scorned only weeks before. Instead sitting demure on a chair, voice quiet, head down.... Curling endlessly her stubborn hair. To train it. To tame it. Her. Voice, hands, hair, trained and tamed and safe. (202-03)

Ephanie begins to mimic other girls, adopting feminine attire and behavior and restricting her movements to keep them within Catholic ideals for female gender behavior. It is her "feminine" behavior, not her alternative gender, that is constructed or performed.

Ephanie's attempts to take on a female gender identity do not succeed, however, for although she marries a man and bears two children, she grows progressively more depressed. When her husband abandons her, she is unable to care for herself or her children. In her self-alienation, which is where we find her when the novel opens, she is incapacitated, dependent now on the assistance of Stephen for day to day survival.

Like *Sky Woman* awakening on Turtle's back, however, Ephanie begins a process of exploration, discovery, and ultimately creation. Unlike *Sky Woman*, Ephanie must endure a series of rebirths before she can undertake her creative work. Her awakening begins when, after a failed sexual encounter with Stephen, she realizes that she must change her own life; she must find a community in which to explore herself and contribute to a wider social group. Acting on intuition, she departs for San Francisco determined to "learn something about how the other half lives" (57). Like other contemporary two-spirits, she

wants to find some social relevance for herself, a mediative position between the two worlds that make up her mixed-blood heritage.

In the city, Ephanie meets Teresa, a white wiccan healer who communicates with spirits. Ephanie is immediately and instinctively drawn to Teresa; like Sky Woman and First Woman, the two explore magic and ritual together, but Ephanie is not yet ready to undertake the spiritual and curative roles that typify two-spirit social positions. Instead, she shirks her power by marrying Thomas, a Japanese-American man whose pain from his family's internment in World War II camps parallels Ephanie's own dislocation and loss of cultural traditions. As with her former marriage, the union proves unfulfilling; she bears twin sons, one of whom dies in infancy, and she fails to rescue Thomas from his own self-absorption.⁷

It takes a near-death experience, the first of two in the novel, for Ephanie to recover the courage she needs to claim her two-spirit identity. Soon after the death of her son, she, Thomas, and Teresa make an excursion to the beach, where a longing for death entices her to swim so far out that she cannot return. When she begins to weaken, she is seized by a desire to live and looks for help, only to see Thomas running in the opposite direction on the shore. In his place Teresa comes to her aid:

Teresa, not much taller than Ephanie, had swum out into the pounding surf and pulled her out of the deeper water to where she could stand again on her own brown feet, walk out, lie on the sand, shivering, spent, mute. "I saw that you couldn't get your feet on the ground," she had said. (107)

Teresa's strength and calm-headedness stand out against Thomas's ineffectualness, and the incident jogs Ephanie's memory of her former strength. The rescue itself recalls that of the waterfowl who break Sky Woman's fall and plant her on the earth. Ephanie begins to recollect her two-spirit identity, first recalling her childhood adventures with Elena and the sense of self-awareness she possessed:

Ephanie remembered something, about Elena. A hand out to help her across a long jump on the mesas. She knew something then. Something she did not say aloud.... And talking with Teresa through long days after

Thomas went back to the city she could see how it might be. (108)

Impelled by this new understanding of what “might be,” Ephanie divorces Thomas and takes Teresa on a trip home to Guadalupe in an attempt to reconcile herself with the past and understand the relationship of that past to her adult self.

Before she can become fully creative, however, she must face the racism and homophobia of white society. On her trip, Ephanie begins to confront the rage, grief, and muteness she has suffered but never expressed. She meets Teresa’s liberal feminist friends and confronts their romanticism of Indians as noble, spiritual victims by telling stories of her experience among her own people, “[w]ho never look like pathetic oppressed victims to me” (145). Split by two conflicting cultural traditions, Ephanie longs to mediate between them and facilitate understanding; she asks Teresa, “What do you do when you love everybody on every side of the war?” (146). Her desire to serve as an intermediary, to communicate the realities of her Indian people’s experience to the whites with whom she also shares a history, marks another step in her recovery. In order to fulfill her responsibility, however, she must recognize two additional components of her two-spirit identity: her lesbianism and, more importantly, her gift as a cultural preserver and a teller of stories.

Imbedded in her memories of her warm tribal traditions and the cold hardness of Catholicism is the memory of two lesbian nuns, Sister Mary Grace and Sister Clair, who provided the only love and joy in her otherwise stark school experience. The love between the two nuns is brief, cut short when Sister Clair is sent away, but Ephanie and her friends realize that “they must have been in love” (156). “No one said anything about it being wrong,” Ephanie recalls, and the restored memory fills her with a sense of joy and purpose:

She was elated. She knew she had uncovered something very important ... somehow it gave back to her, whole and entire, the memory of racing with the sky, the clouds, a piece of ripe juicy fruit.... Alive at last for that moment within that blessing so long craved. (156)

Through the rediscovery of the lesbian nuns, Ephanie begins to understand the damage that they, and she, have sustained at the hands of Catholicism.

Her new perspective allows her to reread not only the suppression of gay people by Christianity but the relationship between her two cultures. She sees for the first time the “hopeless fear,” “unowned rage,” and “unfelt grief” of the Christians, who project their pain onto Indians and then try to destroy them (158). In discovering this dynamic, she starts to differentiate her own experience of her people’s resourcefulness and creativity from white stereotypes and to assert her own worldview. She tells Teresa that Native people, far from being mere victims, are “co-creators” of the current state of the world (159).

Although at this point in her recovery Ephanie is actively seeking answers and confronting oppression against Indians and gays, she must also fight her own self-hatred. She experiences this hatred as an “alien, monstrous, other than her, in her, that wanted her dead” (132), which she can only exorcise by a second attempted suicide. After she fails to make Teresa understand the agency of Indian people in their own lives, an agency that she has not yet accomplished, she constructs a noose in her closet, overwhelmed by feelings of dirtiness and a determination not to “pollute anyone, anything,” including her own children (161). As she finishes the noose, she mockingly chants to herself, “I’m gonna get me an Indian” (163), giving voice to hundreds of years of racial hatred her white ancestors had for her Native people. Once she hangs herself, however, her self-preservation reasserts itself, and she frantically holds the rope with one hand while groping for her knife with the other: at last she has become capable of rescuing herself. As she weeps with relief on the floor, her rebirth is symbolized by her immediate interaction with a spider, the Laguna creator and a symbol of female power and creativity. She tells the spider, “Thanks Grandmother. I think I’m going to be all right” (164).

Having restored herself to her Indian heritage and destroyed her internalized racism and homophobia, Ephanie begins to research the horror and violence that she knows pervade the colonized world. As she reads, she begins to understand her role as a cultural go-between. She realizes that “[i]nside and outside must meet”: “she was the place where the inside and the outside came together. An open doorway” (174). She is able to recognize and accept her two-spirit inclinations; through her research and writing, she commits herself to her role as a mediator and translator between cultural perspectives and between the worlds of spirits and humans.

She also remembers Sky Woman’s story, the story that she has been unconsciously re-enacting; the recollection brings her awakening

to completion. For the first time since her childhood fall, she sleeps peacefully, feeling her body's power and strength, at peace with her identity (206). In her sleep she is visited by a spirit woman, who explains in Pueblo terms the significance of the twinning that has been so important to Ephanie's life:

It is the sign and the order of the power that informs this life and leads back to Shipap. Two face outward, two inward, the sign of doubling, of order and balance, of the two, the twins, the doubleminded world in which you have lived. (207)

The image of doubleness also reflects the gender doubleness of the two-spirit, who dwells between worlds and embodies two in one. As the one called by the spirits to return balance and continue the stories, Ephanie receives the dream-vision that will inform her life. The spirit woman tells Ephanie that a change is occurring, that just as the people emerged from the fourth to the fifth world in Pueblo creation stories, another emergence is at hand, one that will take the people into the sixth world. Ephanie's role will be to guide in the people's journey by passing on the stories:

[a] door is closing upon a world, the world we knew ... We go on to another place, the sixth world ... [t]he work that is left is to pass on what we know to those who come after us. It is an old story. One that is often repeated. One that is true. (209)⁸

As has been the case with many two-spirits since Native/European contact, Ephanie undertakes to communicate her dual perspective, acting as a sort of cultural interpreter. The woman tells Ephanie to give the story "to your sister, Teresa. The one who waits. She is ready to know" (210). Teresa will become Ephanie's co-creator, and like Sky Woman and her daughter, the two will create a new world.

In accordance with traditional Native perspectives, Ephanie's role is never expressed solely in terms of sexuality. While she is clearly attracted to women, and while the novel aligns her with the female creativity of Sky Woman and Grandmother Spider, Ephanie's identity is finally based not on homosexuality but on the mediative and preservative work undertaken by many two-spirit people in the face of cultural change. A reading of Allen's novel within a two-spirit rather than a lesbian framework brings into focus Ephanie's spiritual and so-

cial propensities, gifts that the Western concept of homosexuality does not account for.

Like *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, Beth Brant's short fiction explores the place of two-spirit people in contemporary America. As Linda L. Danielson observes, survival amid difficulty and oppression is one of the central themes of Brant's work; her characters "are clinging with more or less courage to a place in a society that doesn't see or attend to their needs and that feels free to define them out of existence" (104). For her gay and two-spirit characters, the adversity is compounded by homophobic violence. Brant, like Allen, explores issues of gender identity and female creativity through Sky Woman's story, and her revisioning of Coyote gives a comic twist to gender and cross dressing. In addition, her work depicts the lives of working-class gay people whose gender behavior, healing work, mediative abilities, and community focus parallel those of traditional two-spirit people.

While Mohawk traditions have not been as thoroughly documented and preserved as those of Pueblo peoples, two-spirit men were described with horror by early explorers among the Iroquois nations, which include the Mohawk. In 1721, Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix, a Jesuit explorer, wrote of the Southern Iroquois:

It must be confessed that effeminacy and lewdness were carried to the greatest excess in those parts; men were seen to wear the dress of women without a blush, and to debase themselves so as to perform those occupations which are most peculiar to the sex, from whence followed a corruption of morals past all expression; it was pretended that this custom came from I know not what principle of religion. (290)

Despite the tone of the commentary, it seems clear that the men Charlevoix saw undertook the work and dress of women and felt their behavior was guided by spiritual directive. Because the Mohawk and Iroquois were among the first peoples to experience European persecution and homophobia, their two-spirit traditions have not enjoyed the continuity that they have in the Southwest; Gay American Indians, for example, have found no Mohawk or Iroquois words for two-spirits, although they have documented such terms in 133 other tribal groups (*Living the Spirit* 217-22). Even so, contemporary Mohawk writers

such as Brant and Maurice Kenny find meaning in the two-spirit traditions.⁹

Noteworthy in Brant's collections is her retelling of Sky Woman's story in "This Is History," a retelling that focuses on the relationship and love between Sky Woman and her daughter First Woman. Just as Allen uses Sky Woman as a structuring metaphor for Ephanie's recovery in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, Brant, in retelling the story, establishes cultural precedents for alternative gender behavior and creativity.

In the story, Sky Woman is marked from the beginning as different from other people in her sky world because of her "queer" curiosity: "The others were tired of her peculiar trait and called her an aberration, a queer woman who asked questions, a woman who wasn't satisfied with what she had" (19). Like that of other two-spirit people, Sky Woman's behavior doesn't match the gender expectations for her sex; she desires knowledge of and connection with the world beyond her community, and her boldness matches that of the warrior women and negotiators documented in historical accounts.¹⁰ Brant's Sky Woman actively chooses to jump through the hole under the tree of light, fighting off people who attempt to stop her, and her response to her fall is not forgetfulness but joy. She is quickly scooped up by Eagle, who lays her on Turtle's back where a world is already growing. Turtle charges Sky Woman with the duty of watching over her creation; as the woman sleeps, Turtle's back becomes full of creatures and Sky Woman becomes pregnant. Sky Woman learns how to live from the animals and eventually gives birth to First Woman, who becomes her companion and her lover; together they create songs and prayers, name things, make medicine, and create sexuality: "[t]hey touched each other and in the touching made a new word: love. They touched each other and made a language of touching: passion" (24). From Sky Woman's initial refusal of female gender behavior comes lesbian sexual desire. In contrast to more traditional versions of the story, Brant does not focus on the birth of the male twins. In her story, Sky Woman ages and dies before the twins are born; First Woman follows her instructions and creates corn, beans, and squash from her heart and the stars and moon from pieces of her body (25-26).

Complementing Brant's telling of Sky Woman's story is her revision of the trickster figure in "Coyote Learns a New Trick." Here again, Brant plays with traditional material, transforming Coyote's gender play and extravagant sexuality into domestic responsibility and

lesbian passion.¹¹ In this story, Coyote, a female with a litter of puppies at home, decides to cross-dress as a dapper “traveling man” (33) in order to play a joke on the other animals. Her domestic stability (she has had other litters before this) and her disguise as a wanderer reverse the traditional plot in which wandering Coyote disguises himself as female in order to infiltrate a household or achieve a sexual conquest.¹² Much like a butch lesbian, Coyote binds her breasts, dons a sweaty undershirt, white dress shirt, pegged slacks, and tie. She even stuffs her underwear with diapers “so it looked like she had a swell inside. A big swell” (32). While the traditional Coyote sometimes has a penis so big he has to carry it, Brant’s character creates hers out of a symbol of her motherhood. Thus, her cross-dressing signals the presence of both male and female impulses, of play coupled with an underlying connection to family.

Once outside, Coyote struts vainly, causing Turtle to declare that she is “too weird to *even* bother with” (32). She hits on Fox, who is equally proud of her wits, as the target of her joke. Fox proves to be the ultimate femme, with a thick coat of red fur, batting eyelashes, and a gift for cooking. Her flirting disconcerts Coyote:

“Food is one of the more sensual pleasures in life, don’t you think?” she said, pouring Coyote a glass of red wine. “But I can think of several things that are equally as pleasurable, can’t you?” And she winked her red eye. Coyote almost choked on her wine. She realized that she had to get this joke back into her own paws. (33)

Unlike the traditional Coyote, who does the conning and the manipulating until he is discovered or meets disaster, Brant’s Coyote is undone from the beginning, the happy victim of a femme seduction.

After more flirting and wine, Coyote tries to gain control by suggesting they have “a roll in the hay” (34), but the scene quickly gets away from her again. As with many butch/femme couples, the femme determines the course of the encounter, and Coyote’s pretenses to machismo are undercut. Coyote enjoys the foreplay so much that she delays revealing her sex until Fox finally unzips her fly and demands that she “take that ridiculous stuffing out of your pants” (34). Coyote’s identity isn’t truly male any more than it is purely female, and Fox has her unbind her breasts and remove her clothes “so we can get down to *serious* business” (34). While the narrator states at the beginning of the adventure that “Coyote knows truth is only what she makes it” (31), by

the end of the story, it is clear that Coyote has been duped. Truth has instead been a joint project, created by their mutual efforts. Unfazed and delighted with the turn of events, Coyote declares, "This is the best trick I ever heard of. Why didn't I think of it?" (35). As in Allen's novel, where Ephanie's collaboration with Teresa holds creative power that crosses cultural lines, Coyote's mating with Fox suggests the potential pleasures of intercultural coupling. Brant's Coyote links contemporary butch/femme relations with traditional narrative forms, remembering yet transforming.

While "Coyote Learns a New Trick" and "This Is History" retell traditional materials with an emphasis on women's gender nonconformity, several other stories explore the lives of two-spirit people in contemporary cities and reservations. Like Ephanie, Brant's characters are homosexual, but their sexual behavior is not the foundational component of their identities. Instead, their identities are manifested through their work, mannerisms, dress, aesthetic tastes, and spiritual propensities. In addition, Brant's characters show strong inclinations toward community responsibility and participation. Like many alternative gender people, Brant's characters live in contexts where their abilities are ignored or condemned. Even so, they manage to find ways of healing and mediating for the people around them.

Brant's short piece, "Danny," reflects this focus on two-spirit traits. Danny, a young working-class drag queen who has been murdered by gay bashers, tells his story from the spirit world. Like many two-spirit boys, Danny's early behavior and self-definition were feminine; he describes himself as "a pretty kid. Wanted to be like my ma. Wanted to be a girl" (57). Although he knows from a young age that his family and society condemn alternative gender behavior, as a child he "liked to dress in Ma's clothes ... I wanted to be pretty and dressing up made me feel pretty" (58). He is beaten by his father for his cross dressing, and even his first boyfriend finds his dresses disturbing. Despite social disapproval and his own judgment that he is perverted, however, Danny cannot help but follow his nature: "it's like I *had* to do it, you know?" (59). Like many two-spirits, Danny feels his gender orientation is innate, and he is compelled to act on his inclinations despite the danger they expose him to. Far from being theatrical play, as many postmodern theorists would have it, his drag signifies an act of courage and honesty in a culture that denies his existence. His cross-dressing is reminiscent of traditional two-spirit men who adopted the dress and mannerisms of women.

In addition to his gender orientation, Danny's career as a nurse marks his proclivities for female work and healing arts. His nurturing tendencies lead him to a job at a children's hospital emergency room, where he repairs children molested and beaten by men. Horrified by the pain they suffer, he counters male violence by trying to "take the hurt away" (59), thinking "God, I hated being a man, if that's what men were!" (59). To cope with his world, he dulls his grief and rage with Valium and parades in drag on Friday nights. Like many contemporary gay people, he has no meaningful social avenues for his alternative gender expression, and without any awareness of older traditions that render his proclivities socially useful, he is alienated from himself and from his family and culture.

Danny shares with two-spirits the gift of vision; he is able to predict the future and move between worlds. He realizes that enacting his alternative gender identity will mean his own early death: "I could see myself as an old man doing this, and it scared the shit out of me. That's when I started thinking I wouldn't live to be thirty. I couldn't see any other kind of life for me" (59). In another cultural context, Danny's alternative gender might have been seen as a gift; as it is, he follows his nature and is gunned down in the street. He ironically concludes, "So, there's one less queer on the streets, and I guess that means that respectable people are resting easier in their lives" (60). Readers are left to wonder who will now heal the children to whom he has devoted his life. While Linda L. Danielson, one of the few commentators on Brant's work, criticizes Danny's posthumous narrative as a "bit of melodrama" (106), the blurring of the dichotomy of living and dead is common to much fiction by Native writers as well as to traditional stories; Danny's ability to cross the boundary between human and spirit worlds testifies to his skills as a transformer and mediator.

Brant creates another two-spirit healer in "Turtle Gal." This time, the character is James William, an eighty-year-old African-American blues singer who lives across the hall from a Native woman, Dolores, and her daughter Sue Linn in a dingy urban apartment building somewhere in an unnamed city. James William takes in the nine-year-old girl when her mother, exhausted from years of welfare and alcoholism, gives up and dies. Sue Linn is, in Van Dyke's words, "one of the society's throw-a-way children, but she is safe within the shelter that the gay man provides for her—both society's discards" (109). James William's adoption of the girl testifies to his sense of community responsibility. Like Danny, James William has a love of children and a desire to

heal them; he is adept at spiritual boundary crossing, and he guides Sue Linn through her grief assisted by his dead lover, Big Bill.

James William's apartment immediately marks him as different, for his domestic skills have transformed it into a warm, colorful haven. African violets, symbolic of his cultural past and associated with his gayness, grow in the windowsill, "queer, exotic plants in the middle of a tired, dirty street" (102). His kitchen is small and neat with plenty of food, and the place is accentuated by his "favorite chair, a gold brocade throne with arms that curved into high, wide wings" (102). He sings and cooks for Sue Linn, telling her, "You gonna be my little gal. We be mama and little gal. We be a family" (106). As is consistent with his alternative gender identity, James William identifies as female, acting as Sue Linn's foster mother rather than father. His feminine identification and his proclivities for domestic work and family resonate with the traits of traditional Native two-spirit people.¹³

Like many two-spirits, James William is also adept at mediating between worlds, reconciling Sue Linn with the past and with death, and preparing her for the transition into a new existence. He convinces Sue Linn to sing the blues with him, and they sing for Dolores, for James William's long-dead lover, Big Bill, and for their longings for a home where "[y]our name was real, and the people knew your name and called you by that name" (107). Under the pretext of thinking "on things what ails us" (108), James William rocks Sue Linn in his chair until she sobs, and he assures her that despite Christian condemnation of her mother's actions, Dolores will be content being with the land again (109).

Exhausted from memories, Sue Linn finally falls asleep. James William puts her to bed and then sits awake talking with Big Bill, who is still part of his family: "This here baby need me. Yes, ma'am.... It be a fix we in ... I needs a little a that talk you always so ready with ... I sittin' here waitin' on you, honey. Sweet William, he waitin' on you" (115-16). James William's immediate connection with Big Bill's spirit testifies to his ability to mediate between the human and spirit worlds. After a night of "conversation and song" with his lover (116), James William gets the answer he has needed. He looks at the sleeping girl and tells her, "Child, sleep on and dream. Sweet William, he here. Me and Big Bill take care of our baby, turtle gal. You be alright" (116). His naming of the girl resonates not only with traditional two-spirit naming customs, in which two-spirits give children secret sacred names, but with the story of Sky Woman, who is placed on Turtle's back at the

beginning of creation; the implication is of a new beginning and a new world.¹⁴ In creating his family, James William calls equally on the worlds of the living and the dead, establishing ties not only cross culturally but across spiritual realms as well. Like Allen's Ephanie, he serves as a doorway, remembering his own songs and stories and ushering Sue Linn into her new existence. Like Danny's, his gift is for healing children from the ravages of social violence. While he remains isolated from a larger community, his inclinations toward social responsibility move him to create his own community with the orphaned girl and his lover in the spirit world.

"This Place," Brant's story of a Mohawk man returning to his reservation to die of AIDS, explores similar issues of homophobia, social violence, and alternative gender power. Here, the violence takes place both on the reservation and in the city. As a young man, David chose to leave the reservation because his "people don't want queers, faggots living among them" (63). Faced with Native homophobia, David feels he "had to make a choice, be gay or be an Indian" (63), a choice which has allowed him to explore his sexual identity among other gay people, but which has cost him his ties with his homeland and with his mother.

Afraid of death and of being alone, David finds an ally in Joseph, the medicine man who comes to help him die. When Joseph arrives, David notices the man's unusual appearance, his bird-like face, which is "lean and unlined," as well as the "long, beaded earrings that draped across the front of his shirt.... His fingers were covered with silver-and-garnet-studded rings, his hands delicate but used" (58). It is not until dinner, however, when Joseph presents David and his mother, Grace, with homemade butter tarts, that David catches the significance of Joseph's feminine traits: "As David bit into the sweetness of the tart, he looked at Joseph, his earrings swinging against his shoulders, his hands making patterns in the air as he described the making of the tarts, and David thought, *He acts like a queen*" (61). Joseph's shamanic role, jewelry, gestures, and domestic work—here, cooking—mark him as a two-spirit. David laughs out loud at the recognition, and Joseph reads his mind, saying, "Catchin' on my young friend?" (61). Joseph has accommodated the homophobia of his community by wearing only token pieces of women's attire (earrings) and limiting his alternative gender behavior to hand gestures and cooking arts. David's identification of Joseph as a queen, a contemporary Western shadow of the two-spirit, reflects his absorption into mainstream gay culture.

Joseph's role as medicine man, an undertaking of significant spiritual responsibility, goes far beyond the definition of "queen," however, for it requires healing skills and an ability to mediate between humans and the spirit world.¹⁵ The role also emphasizes Joseph's community commitment; despite Native homophobia, he has stayed on the reservation and performed traditional two-spirit work. Joseph tells David, "I stayed because I was supposed to. I fought it, but I had to stay. It was my job" (67). As the community's medicine person, Joseph has found an avenue for contributing his gifts to his people, an avenue that David has lacked.

With his talk, interspersed with Patsy Cline and Hank Williams songs, Joseph reconciles David to his dead father and to his life away from home, repairing the fragmentation David has undergone in his life. He gives David a special tea that sends him into an alternative consciousness, then performs a ceremony using traditional medicines and instruments that further reconnect David to his ancestors. Like Allen's Ephanie, David is conscious of how his people have been disparaged and violated by white domination; Joseph helps him face the hateful voices he has internalized, telling him that worse than death are division and fragmentation:

They turned us into missing parts. Until we find those missing parts we kill ourselves with shame, with fear, with hate. All those parts just waitin' to be gathered together to make us. Us. A whole people. The biggest missing piece is love. (75)

Joseph's abiding concern is with building identity based on community connection, culture continuity, and spirit, and his mediation between David and his past and the spirits is a role for which his alternative gender identity makes him especially well suited. Under the effects of the tea, David experiences himself falling into Turtle's mouth and meeting his ancestors, who ask him "are you ready?" (76). When Joseph leaves, he gives David a snakeskin and a swan feather, symbolic of his transformation, and David tells his mother goodbye. As a two-spirit medicine person, Joseph is able to pull David's shattered self into wholeness and ease him through the door into the spirit world. More than the rest of Brant's characters, Joseph is able to find a community role and perform the mediative and healing work so central to two-spirit traditions.

In the fiction of Paula Gunn Allen and Beth Brant, two-spirit people come from mixed and varied ancestries, and although they live in a world without sanctioned alternative gender roles, a world that is hostile to their identities, they still persist in carrying out their spiritual directives and healing work in whatever way they can. The presence of two-spirits in fiction by Allen and Brant suggests that, within the fictional worlds they inhabit, there is still the possibility of enduring, of reestablishing continuity with the past and of healing division within individuals and communities and across cultural boundaries. Their persistence in recovering and maintaining their roles is consistent with the journeys of self-recovery undertaken by the protagonists of most fiction by American Indian writers, from D'Arcy McNickle's Archilde in *The Surrounded* to Leslie Marmon Silko's Tayo in *Ceremony*. Two-spirit survival testifies to Native beliefs in the stability and rootedness of identity, not only cultural and racial identity, but gender identity as well.

NOTES

¹Judith Butler's work on performativity exemplifies this approach, particularly her influential *Gender Trouble*, which argues for the illusionary quality of gender and, indeed, any sense of identity. She uses the example of cross dressing (drag) as a structuring metaphor. On the dangers of constructionist theories that figure gender identity as performance, see Jay Prosser's discussion of transgender identity in "No Place Like Home."

²For the purposes of this discussion, I will use "gay" as a general term encompassing the range of alternative gender and sexual expressions, including gay men, lesbians, and transgender people. I will use "homosexual" to indicate sexual orientation alone, without any gender implications. Although many contemporary Indian people refer to themselves as "gay" or "lesbian," it is important to remember that those terms derive from a radically different cultural context than does "two-spirit"; because of this difference, two-spirit identity should not be confused with identities based only on homosexuality. For a discussion of the differences between two-spirits, lesbians, and gay men see Lester B. Brown, "Women and Men, Not-Men and Not-Women, Lesbians and Gays: American Indian Gender Style Alternatives"; Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, *Two-Spirit People*; and Walter William's *The Spirit and the Flesh*. Since many American Indian people have rejected the term "berdache," the term commonly used in anthropological literature, as inaccur-

rate and offensive, I have chosen to use “two-spirit,” the English language phrase that seems to best communicate the meaning of Native alternative gender identities.

³Since there has recently been a fair amount of work that provides extensive definitions and interpretations of two-spirit (or “berdache”) roles, I will avoid repeating it here. For discussions of two-spirit people, both contemporary and historical, see Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*; Julie Barak, “Blurs, Blends, Berdaches”; Evelyn Blackwood, “Sexuality and Gender in Certain Native American Tribes”; Lester B. Brown, ed., *Two Spirit People*; Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems, “The North American Berdache”; Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue*; David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*; Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, eds., *Two-Spirit People*; Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History*; Maurice Kenny, “Tinselled Bucks”; Beatrice Medicine, ““Warrior Women””; Midnight Sun, “Sex/Gender Systems in Native North America”; M. Owlfeather, “Children of Grandmother Moon”; Will Roscoe, coord. editor, *Living the Spirit* (compiled by Gay American Indians); Will Roscoe, “Strange Country This” and *The Zuni Man-Woman*; Mark Thompson, *Gay Soul*; Ruth Underhill, *Papago Woman*; Harriet Whitehead, “The Bow and the Burden Strap”; and Walter Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh*.

⁴The lesbian feminist stance of separatism attributed to Allen by Zimmerman is antithetical to Pueblo cultural practices that emphasize balance between male and female powers. As Allen has argued in *The Sacred Hoop*, heterosexism and misogyny have resulted from the colonization of Native cultures by Europeans. Since women at Laguna hold significant power in terms of property and lineage, separatism seems like an unnecessary strategy.

⁵While oral traditions vary and stories change from storyteller to storyteller, the basic outline of Sky Woman’s story is as follows. Sky Woman is instructed by the spirit of her dead father to travel to a distant village to the man who will be her husband. Upon arrival, she fulfills strenuous tasks that he assigns her. Her husband becomes jealous of her power, however, and plots to kill her, either with the help of a dream or with the aid of his counselors. He coerces her to look through a hole under the tree of life, and when she does so, he pushes her through into the abyss below. Birds collaborate to break her fall, and animals dive below the endless expanse of water to bring up some earth to lay on Turtle’s back to provide Sky Woman with ground to lie on. She becomes pregnant and bears a daughter, and although explanations of the daughter’s paternity vary, the two women work together to create the earth. Finally, the daughter becomes pregnant and bears twin sons, one of whom is evil and tears open his mother’s side in order to birth himself, thus killing her. The evil twin lies about which has caused their mother’s death, and the good twin, who is outcast by Sky Woman, goes on to create more good things for the people, teaching them to fend for themselves and designating the clans. The evil

brother leads Sky Woman in undoing the good twin's work but is finally defeated. (For a more complete account, see Daniel K. Richter's composite in *The Ordeal of the Longhouse*, 8-11, and Joseph Bruchac's telling of the story in *Iroquois Stories: Heroes and Heroines, Monsters and Magic*.) Allen and Brant both attribute far more agency to Sky Woman than the above summary allows. They also focus on the creative work of the mother and daughter rather than on the twin sons.

⁶Given that Ephanie attends a Catholic school and grows up in a community heavily influenced by media and mainstream Anglo culture, it is not surprising she expresses her two-spirit identity through the behaviors and imaginative play common to European-American boys. While the details of alternative gender expression vary from culture to culture, though, the underlying sense of being neither male nor female, or a combination of both, is constant.

⁷There are, of course, parallels between the birth and fate of Ephanie's twins and those of First Woman's twins in the Sky Woman story which deserve further exploration.

⁸Leslie Marmon Silko, another Laguna writer, uses a similar concept of stories in *Ceremony* and *Almanac of the Dead*. Stories in Silko's work are alive, actively shaping the course of human lives. As a storyteller, Ephanie is a conduit of the stories, which have their source in Grandmother Spider, and her role makes her an active participant in her people's future.

⁹See, for example, Kenny's poems "United" and "Winkte" and his historical essay "Tinselled Bucks."

¹⁰See Will Roscoe's essay "Strange Country This" in *Living the Spirit*, Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang's *Two-Spirit People*, Jonathan Katz's *Gay American History*, and Beatrice Medicine's "'Warrior Women'" for discussions and historical accounts of two-spirit women. See also Evelyn Blackwood's "Sexuality and Gender in Certain Native American Tribes" and Harriet Whitehead's "The Bow and the Burden Strap."

¹¹Julie Barak, in "Blurs, Blends, Berdaches: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich," argues that trickster figures and two-spirits in Erdrich's work support constructionist claims by revealing the instability of gender. I would suggest, however, that Brant's trickster cross dresses not to suggest the performativity of identity, but rather to emphasize by contrast her "true" or underlying identity, which is not male or purely female. Such a claim would be consistent with those made by "butch" women, whose identities hinge on a combination of male and female but which is equivalent to neither. See Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy's and Madeline Davis' study, "'They Was No One To Mess With': The Construction of the Butch Role in the Lesbian Community of the 1940s and 1950s."

¹²See, for example, "Coyote and Fox Marry Husbands," "Seal and Younger Brother," and "The Revenge Against the Sky People" in Jarold Ramsey's *Coyote Was Going There*. In *Reading the Fire*, Ramsey interprets the trickster as a mediative figure who is both a source of amusement and a "mythic transformer of reality" (27). Rather than demonstrating the illusionary nature of human identity and roles, Ramsey's reading suggests, Coyote transforms by "creating possibility" and by "setting human limits" (27), reinforcing social limits and values by hyperbolically defying them.

¹³Although the English language assigns gender pronouns on the basis of anatomical sex, many Native Americans refer instead to internal gender identity when describing two-spirit people. James Williams' use of feminine language to refer to himself and to Big Bill is therefore consistent with American Indian usage. See, for example, early ethnographic accounts of We'Wha in Roscoe's *The Zuni Man-Woman* and the description of Shining Evening in Underhill's *Papago Woman*.

¹⁴I'm grateful to Jarold Ramsey for calling this parallel to my attention, and for his criticism of an earlier draft of this essay.

¹⁵Brant's depiction of a two-spirit medicine man suggests that two-spirit identities among the Mohawk people survive despite Native internalization of European homophobia. Given the subtlety of Joseph's cross dressing and David's decision to leave his home for the urban gay scene, it is clear that the Mohawk community is comfortable with neither two-spirits nor homosexuality. That Joseph continues to enact a two-spirit identity in such a context makes the continuity of the traditions and the stability of the identity seem even more striking.

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***The Only Real Indian is a Dead Indian:
The Desire for Authenticity in James Welch's
The Death of Jim Loney***

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Questions and claims about “authentic” Native American identity can range from the arid and esoteric in literary criticism to the urgent and “real” in courts of law. Yet despite the apparent differences between law and literature, both legal and literary concerns intersect via their engagements with acts of interpretation. And while the legal acts of interpretation, for instance in cases deciding the federal recognition of tribes whose “official” existences are in question, result in more immediate consequence than interpretations of poems, plays, and stories, it is in the pages of contemporary Native American literature that the complexities of contemporary American Indian identity find their most poignant and complex representations. Responding to the aftermath of policies designed to “assimilate” Indians coupled with a history of representations of “Indians,” Native American writers have made questions of identity a central concern. As critic and novelist Louis Owens asserts, “American Indian novelists confront, inevitably and absorbingly, this question of identity” (5).

One of the most powerful explorations of the challenges to contemporary Native American identity takes place in James Welch’s *The Death of Jim Loney*. In his second novel, Welch casts a grim shadow across the representational space of contemporary American Indian fiction. Unlike his three other novels—*Winter in the Blood*, *Fools Crow*, and *The Indian Lawyer*—*The Death of Jim Loney* refuses to provide the ultimately affirmative vision of Native American cultural survival that many readers have come to associate with contemporary American Indian fiction. For instance, in his first novel, *Winter in the*

Blood, the critical consensus is that by the story's end the nameless narrator finally achieves access to a place in a larger Blackfeet cultural history, an access which will help him to develop a more meaningful, less alienated life. With his third novel, *Fools Crow*, Welch spins a historical fiction of the Blackfeet people before subjugation to white authority. Densely layered with ethnographic detail, *Fools Crow* portrays a rich and dynamic culture. Although this work ends with a chilling account of the brutal Marias River massacre, the novel's overall narrative celebrates Blackfeet history and tradition in what critic Owens calls a "full act of cultural recovery" (156). And in his most recent novel, *The Indian Lawyer*, Welch provides a protagonist, Sylvester Yellow Calf, who, after nearly succumbing to the Faustian temptation of power in the inauthentic white world, is "found" at the end of the story dedicatedly working to protect Indian water rights.

Unlike these three novels, the tragic plot of *The Death of Jim Loney* celebrates very little. This bleak novel not only offers cold comfort for anyone seeking to celebrate Indian cultural survival, it additionally frustrates a critical desire for explicit signifiers of "authentic Indianness." By this, I mean that the novel contains little or no representation of what the popular or ethnographic imagination associates with "traditional" Indians. As Kathleen Mullen Sands observes, in this novel Welch "appears uninterested in ethnographic accuracy" (131). Loney himself is a figure of ethnic indeterminacy, a "half-breed" living on the edge of the reservation. In the world Jim Loney inhabits, we encounter none of the repositories of Indian wisdom often found in other works of Native American fictions, figures such as *Ceremony's* Betonie, *The Surrounded's* Modeste, or *Tracks's* Nanapush. Loney even asserts that "He never felt Indian" (102). Indeed, it would seem that Welch intends to forestall any desire for positive identification.

This absence of explicit signifiers of "Indianness" can be vexing for critics of Native American literature. For instance, Sands titles her article "*The Death of Jim Loney: Indian or Not?*" "Indian or not?"—a provocative question. Yet despite the novel's internal ambivalence on the question of Loney's authentic Indian identity, a number of critics, including Sands, have affirmed its essential Indianness. The critical confirmation of the novel's Indianness has in large part been determined through textual evidence of its "ethnographic authenticity" (Sands 20), such as its structural progress as a "vision ritual" (Allen 93), or the implied presence of the Gros Ventre spirit being, Bha'a

(Purdy 69), and its use of a Native American “homing plot” (Bevis, “Native American Novels: Homing In”).

In resolving this question of the novel’s Indianness through reference to archival ethnographic authority and supposedly authentic Native American narrative structures, these critics have achieved at least two ends. The first, and most likely the intended aim, is to establish *The Death of Jim Loney* along a Native American literary continuum, one with the oral tradition as a point of origin and the novel as its contemporary avatar. The second achievement is to articulate the terms of difference between Welch’s work as authentically Native American and those less than authentic works about Indians. In other words, readers can differentiate Welch’s novel from such less authentic works as, say, Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* or Castaneda’s *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. Where these other works misrepresent Native American realities, a novel like *The Death of Jim Loney* will more correctly or authentically represent Native American traditions and experiences. Welch even hints at this intention in an interview with Laura Coltelli when he says of both *Winter in the Blood* and *The Death of Jim Loney*, “I was trying to tell a story of certain people on or near the reservations, the kind of problems they encounter” (186). In this comment, Welch indicates a desire to represent the experiences of real people. Critic William Bevis, in an examination of the novels of McNickle, Momaday, Silko, and Welch, extends the implications of Welch’s intentions: “These novels are important ... because they suggest ... a tribal rather than an individual definition of ‘being’” (585). Presumably, readers of these novels can gain access to an understanding of these tribal definitions of being. That is, the novels will tell us something of the ways of “being” of real people.

In evaluating Welch’s novel in terms of Indian authenticity, and by producing the criteria by which such authentic difference can be measured, critics, and I include myself in this category, participate in and contribute to a historical discourse of Indianness. By the discourse of Indianness, I refer to discursive efforts to define the essential features constitutive of “Native American” as a distinct cultural category. For literary critics, this effort is localized within the realm of literary texts as we seek to answer Bevis’s question: “How Native American is the Native American novel?” (580). Within the pages of *The Death of Jim Loney*, this critical concern with authenticity is mirrored by Loney’s own pursuit of an authentic sense of identity.

The claim that critics participate in the discourse of Indianness is not meant as an accusation. In terms of understanding these works, identifying culturally specific elements of the texts makes perfect sense. However, problems emerge when these critical concerns result in designating some works of literature written by Native Americans as “not Indian.” At this point, I would suggest that it is beyond the purview of literary critics to define the limits of “Indianness.” And to Bevis’ credit, he does assert that his own essay “is neither proscriptive nor exhaustive. Native American novels *need* not have the characteristics I am proposing” (581). Yet at a recent meeting of the Western Literature Association, Jan Roush was not so circumspect, concluding her presentation on Native American detective fiction, “Whose Genre is This Anyway?”, with the assertion that Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer* is not Indian.

Roush’s claim implies a clearly defined boundary between Indian and non-Indian aesthetics. Such a critical boundary can threaten to become authoritative, confining Native American writers to stock forms and representations. Recalling Edward Said’s study *Orientalism* causes me to hesitate in efforts to delimit the terms of Indianness. Said indicates how any effort to represent “the Orient” or “the Oriental” reflects the projections of those doing the representing as much as or more than it reveals the truth about the “object” under scrutiny. My effort here is not to resolve the problem of writing about “others”; clearly, writing this essay implicates me in this very activity. Ultimately, we cannot get outside of representations, and the discourse of Indianness remains a contested terrain that engages the participation of Native Americans, including writers such as Welch, who both contribute to and challenge its previous conventions. However, my purpose in this paper is to illustrate the powerful ways in which *The Death of Jim Loney* reveals how the idea and desire for the closure of authenticity can become an unbearable burden.

While the critical identification of elements of Indian difference have helped solidify *The Death of Jim Loney* as part of an emergent Native American literary canon, what has been neglected is the novel’s own engagement with the discourse of Indianness. That is, what ideas, definitions, and representations of the category “Indian” does the novel offer? For instance, the critical desire to locate the signs of authentic “Indianness” in the figure of Loney seems rather ironic, given his own declaration that “[h]e never felt Indian.” And the irony grows acutely painful if we equate Loney’s actions at the novel’s end with authentic

Indianness. Such an equation—Loney's suicide equals Indian authenticity—becomes an equation of Indian authenticity with death.

To a large extent the problem of authenticity is one of reading and interpretation, both within the novel and by readers of the novel. Consider how Loney's own assertion that he never felt Indian comes in response to the way his body is read by the world at large: "he was considered an Indian" (102). Given the proximity to several Indian reservations and Loney's dark skin, his body signifies Indian. Yet there is a split between Loney's self-identification and the definition of identity imposed upon him from without. In this gap between a representational schema which identifies him as Indian and his own imaginative or readerly conception of "Indianness," the novel illuminates the problem of late twentieth-century postmodern authenticity. For readers of the text, moved by a desire to find the features that assign it to the category Indian literature, the novel provides a variety of obstacles and, as I shall argue, leaves unresolved the question of "what is an Indian?"

The question of "what is an Indian?" is not a question to be taken lightly. With the rise of Indian casinos has come an increase in the numbers of people claiming Indian identity. Recently congress passed a law requiring Native American artists to certify their Indian identity, and any federally unrecognized tribe seeking recognition status must traverse a bureaucratic labyrinth to establish authentic Indianness. In Welch's novel, this question becomes a matter of life or death. Loney's troubled and uncertain self-identification highlights the painful torsion between an imposed construction of Indianness and the desire for an authentic sense of personal identity.

The plot of the novel, in brief, unfolds as follows: set in northern Montana, just off the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in the town of Harlem, the novel traces the downward spiral of its "half-breed" protagonist, Jim Loney. Raised without his mother, and then later without his father or sister, Loney seeks desperately to understand the forces that have shaped his personal history. We learn that Loney, with his sister Kate, is the product of a broken marriage between an Indian mother and a white father. Lacking both parents, Loney spends his childhood and adolescence in a variety of homes. Yet for a brief period he transcends this bleak beginning as one of the stars on the state championship basketball team. But after high school, with no sense of real direction, he enrolls in the army. Afterwards, he returns to Harlem to spend his days working for the local ranchers and his evenings in the bars. When the novel begins, Loney is in his mid-thirties and dissipat-

ing from drink and a sense of aimlessness. He is described as someone who “felt like an amnesiac searching for the one event, the one person or moment, that would bring everything back and he would see the order in his life” (20). He even describes himself as a “nothing” (37).

His abject condition evokes the salvific efforts of both his white lover, Rhea, and his sister Kate. Each woman seeks to take Loney away from Montana. Rhea, a rich-girl-turned-school-teacher, wants to start a new life with him in Seattle, what her friend Colleen ironically terms “the American Dream moves west” (127). Kate, like her brother, an Indian of mixed heritage, wants to return with him to Washington DC, where she has made a life for herself working for the B.I.A.

Loney, however, refuses these offers, choosing to remain and die in the landscape he calls home. It is this choice—in fact more than a choice, a willed arrangement of his own death at the hands of reservation police officer Quinton Doore—that critics have referred to as dying “like a warrior” (Allen 93) and, according to William Bevis, it is a choice exemplary of “proud Native American resistance to assimilation” (“James Welch” 44). Again, the implications of these interpretations are troubling: Loney’s suicidal solution to what Rhea calls his “crisis of spirit” signifies his authentic Indian identity. Framed this way, Loney’s choice and the critical authentication of this choice affirm the terms of the nineteenth-century response to the so-called “Indian problem”: “assimilation or extinction.” In other words, Loney has no choice but to either surrender his Indian identity or die. The authentic Indian is the vanishing Indian. The interpretation is even more disturbing in terms of the light it casts upon the other Indian characters in the novel. What this interpretation suggests is that any Indian, such as Loney’s sister Kate, who opts to leave the reservation is surrendering to assimilation.

The final image of Loney, standing at the cliff’s edge, arms outspread awaiting the bullet that will end his life, brings to mind the more recent image of Nector Kashpaw posed for the painting “The Plunge of the Brave” in Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*. However, in *Love Medicine*, Nector realizes the irony of the pose and asserts that he would survive the plunge. But outside of Louis Owens, who writes, “Loney has adopted the Euramerican idea of the Indian as figure of the ... past,” most critics have failed to see Loney’s death in ironic terms (155). These attempts to redeem Loney’s death seem symptomatic of a readerly desire to identify tropes of authentic Indianness in works by Native American writers and to equate Loney’s death with authentic

Indianness. For example, John Purdy writes, “one may also see in it [Loney’s death] an affirmation of the traditional relationship between a landscape and a people” (71). And Paula Gunn Allen claims that Loney’s story “is based on vision ritual” and that Loney “dies like a warrior” (93).

The problem, as I see it, is not with Allen’s or Purdy’s location of elements of the Gros Ventre oral tradition in *The Death of Jim Loney*. In fact, both their readings contribute significantly to an appreciation of the novel’s narrative depth. Rather, the problem arises with the assignation of authentic Indianness to the figure of Loney. With Loney at the center of the novel, seemingly any actions he commits must reflect authentic Indian traditions. This assignation reveals a critical paradox: Loney, who declares he does not feel Indian and who spends much of the novel seeking a sense of authenticity, is read as the novel’s representation of authentic Indian identity. Thus his death at the novel’s end represents the fulfillment of his quest for authenticity, thereby equating authenticity with death—“dying like a warrior.”

However, the novel provides several reasons to question this interpretation. The narrative’s representations and explicit discussions of Indianness contain contradictions and paradoxes that thwart easy classification. Perhaps the most obvious example of such a paradox is Loney’s own mixed Indian and white heritage. Unlike his white girlfriend, Rhea, who blithely suggests that he is “so lucky to have two sets of ancestors ... you can be Indian one day and white the next,” Loney concludes, “it would be nicer to be one or the other.... Indian or white” (14). While Rhea articulates a postmodern sense of identity as apparel, to be altered when it “suits you,” Loney takes a much harder line: one is either Indian or white, no middle ground. Yet at both the level of genetics and at the broader level of cultural interaction, Loney can be either purely Indian or white, if to be one is to be the defining opposite of the other. Critic Jana Sequoya-Magdalenos indicates how complex the formation of Indian identity is: “While identification as Indian is more or less a function of indigenous descent, it is an effect, in turn, of a series of historical relationships to westward expansion and of the ideological and legal ramifications of that event” (89).

Sequoya-Magdalenos’s comments illustrate the uneasy and blurry relationship between “Indian” as a category which real people identify with and Indian as a discursive formation used to define and position people within the United States. One way in which this dynamic unfolds in Welch’s novel is heard in Loney’s desire to be “one or the

other.” Loney’s response to Rhea reflects an imperative of purity that is part of a process of “othering” which has no room for overlap or admixture. Loney’s desire to be wholly Indian or wholly white is not a natural response to a genetic condition but is an internalization of a powerful cultural logic. The formation of this imperative can be heard in the barroom conversation between Loney’s father and the Indian-identified character Willard:

[H]e turned to the young Indian beside him. “You’re a good man Willard. I knew your father, and his father, and his father’s father. You’re the last of a long line of good men.”

[Willard responds,] “What do you mean ‘last’?”

“Hell, you know as well as I do you’re going to marry one of these goddamn white women and that’ll be the last of that pure strain. You’re as good as a white man already. Or as bad.” (100)

Loney’s father expresses the idealization of a racial essence jeopardized by the process of interracial marriage. Of course, it is this same logic that has produced the concept of “blood quantum” as the ground for authentic identification as Indian. The consequence of a cultural logic that defines Indian identity in terms of a quantifiable essence for someone of mixed heritage, like Loney, is a double marginalization; he is less Indian than a “fullblood,” like Willard, and yet he is not and never can be white.

While this logic appears to be an obvious imposition from the dominant white culture upon Indians, it has also been adopted and enforced by a number of Native American nations. Thus, on a microcosmic level, we see in *Loney* how this logic of purity can be powerfully internalized. In its exploration of the contradictory realm betwixt and between Rhea’s conception of identity as a matter of simple choice and Loney’s sense of identity as an absolute essence, the novel produces a multitude of definitions of “Indian” while never arriving at the closure implied in such labels as authentic or inauthentic.

To trace the novel’s production of the tension generated by the dialectic between the term “Indian” as an ideological product of European colonization of the Americas and as a term that connotes inclusion within a community requires a careful examination of the novel’s use of the word “Indian” itself. To begin with, the novel’s identification of Loney as an Indian occurs obliquely, through a series of en-

coded interactions. The novel starts with Loney as a spectator at a high school football game, watching the final futile minutes of a comeback effort by the local team. After watching this losing effort, Loney wanders over to one of the local bars. Tending bar is “a lanky Indian named Russell” (4). In identifying Russell as an Indian, Welch apparently tells us something about this character. But what exactly are we told? The answer, quite frankly, is that we are told very little. Each reader must supply a meaning to Russell’s identification via recourse to his or her understanding of what “Indian” means. Between readers who identify as Indian and readers who do not, there will likely be both difference and overlap in the interpretation of what is meant in identifying Russell as Indian.

Welch complicates this seemingly open-ended use of Indian a few pages later. Up to this point, no mention has been made of Loney’s ethnic identity. Russell is the only determinably Indian figure. However, as Russell and Loney discuss the football game, Russell declares that the home team’s loss was “a moral victory.” In response, Loney says, “Skin you.” And Russell replies, “Skin you too.” And then “[t]hey both laughed.” At this point, the narrator intervenes to explain that the cryptic “skin you” “was an Indian joke” (6). In this brief exchange, Welch represents Loney and Russell engaging in a signifying practice that is marked as Indian and solidifies a sense of common identity as Indians. On the social function of humor and jokes among the Western Apache, Keith Basso writes, “Apaches assert that joking is one means for ‘stretching’ ... social relationships, a playful device for testing and affirming solidarity” (69). This description seems especially appropriate for Russell and Loney’s dialogue as Russell earlier had indicated, “He didn’t like Loney” (5). But after the joking exchange, “Russell laughed too. He could buy him a drink now. We’re neither of us bad guys; just adversaries, that’s all” (7).

There is also the sense in which certain readers, particularly Indian readers “in the know,” are invited to identify with Loney and Russell as Indians. That is, some readers will recognize the “Indian joke,” while for other, less informed readers, this joke functions as a barrier, marking them as outsiders. While the narrator’s ethnographic intervention alerts us to the Indianness of this interaction, it stops short of translating it, leaving it to stand as a marker of difference, of insiders and outsiders.

In addition, the Indian joke highlights a specific linguistic appropriation. What we hear Loney and Russell repeat is “skin you.” The

reference, on one hand, gestures to an ethnic solidarity linked to skin color. Yet this is not a naturalized solidarity; the term "skin" is a contraction of the racist signifier "redskin." When Loney and Russell share the Indian joke they demonstrate a cultural appropriation of a formerly racist and derogatory term. A term used by the dominant culture to reduce and exclude has now been made to serve as a marker of inclusion and solidarity.

At this textual level, Loney and Russell's culturally private joke suggests a layer of linguistic and performative practices constituent of Indianness. Yet unlike a formal ethnography, the novel's use of the "Indian joke" remains an allusion to an unrepresented narrative depth. That is, readers are alerted to the existence of an alternative linguistic "joking" tradition beyond the scope of our readerly gaze, a complex "authentically" Indian system of recognition and acknowledgment. In fact, the narrator's explanation that "it was an Indian joke," rather than illuminating the joke's meaning, actually emphasizes the joke's excluding function to those who "don't get it." Furthermore, the sharing of the joke between Russell and Loney alerts readers to Loney's Indian identity. This identification of Loney is especially significant in that it problematizes Loney's later assertion that he never felt Indian. Although his self-image may not align with his internalized definition of Indianness, at a performative level that extends beyond the semiotics of physiognomy he is recognized as an Indian and is able to participate in a ritual of Indian identification.

While Russell and Loney's joking interaction serves to signify a performative Indian difference, Loney's white girlfriend, Rhea, enacts another reading of Loney, a reading of physiognomy, a reading that resonates with the dominant culture's discursive production of Indianness. In the novel's first scene with the two together, Rhea gazes fondly at Loney and remarks, "I love your dark skin and your dark hair, your noble dark profile" (12). When Rhea regards Loney, she sees an Indian in terms of exotic dark difference. Like the Indian joke, Rhea's commentary alludes to another narrative depth located within the discourse of Indianness: the enduring "Noble Savage" stereotype epitomized in the works of such writers as Rousseau and Cooper. Rhea's identification of Loney, through the terms of a discourse that predates them both, suggests how powerful, perhaps even unavoidable, the influence of the discourse of Indianness is in shaping individual perceptions. That is, even in a relationship that Welch represents as being sincerely loving, there is no getting outside of ideology. Read as Indian by Rhea, Loney

occupies, at an unconscious level, the slot of exotic and erotic other, a romantic difference from the Texas men Rhea had known in the past.

Throughout the novel, Welch emphasizes Loney's dark, markedly Indian appearance. For Rhea, Loney's dark features add to his allure. However, the very features Rhea finds so attractive also position Loney outside the national narrative with its sense, as Toni Morrison puts it, that "American means white" (Morrison 47). Thus, Loney's appearance is read by some members of the white community in negative terms. For instance, we hear the thoughts of a young college student who is "putting the moves on" Rhea. When the student sees Willard eyeing Rhea, he thinks, "Fucking Indian" (100). And a bit later, after Loney has accidentally shot and killed his boyhood friend Myron Pretty Weasel, Harlem Police Chief Hanson looks at the reservation police officer Quinton Doore and thinks, "He had never much liked Indians" (162). Both the college student and Chief Hanson articulate a negative definition of Indianness as an other to be feared and even hated. Loney, marked by his appearance as Indian, is displaced from the community of whites such as Hanson and the college student.

By highlighting the gaps between the cultural performance of Indianness represented by the Indian joke and the imposition of a discursive Indianness reflected in both Rhea's idealization of Loney and the anti-Indian hostility expressed by Chief Hanson and the college student, Welch calls attention to the textualization of identity. *The Death of Jim Loney* makes clear that Loney's crisis of identity is linked to larger cultural narratives. At the very beginning of the novel, Loney recalls a biblical passage from Isaiah: "Turn away from the man in whose nostrils is breath, for what account is he?" (1). This warning of God's imminent wrath from the second chapter of Isaiah forms one half of what Loney calls a puzzle. The other half of the puzzle is the image of the bird that haunts his sleepless nights. Loney explains the bird as possibly a "vision sent by my [Indian] mother's people" (105). Both the bird and the biblical fragments are parts of distinct cultural narrative structures. Loney explains that the bird "is a vision sent by my mother's people. I must interpret it, but I don't know how" (105). Loney's need to interpret the bird's appearance underscores the hermeneutical nature of his crisis. This point is made even clearer when he tells Rhea, "I want to make a little sense out of my life and all I get are crazy visions and Bible phrases. They're like puzzles" (105). In a very real sense, Loney, like the critics of the novel, seeks textual authenticity to resolve his own narrative conflict.

The charge for Loney is to reconcile an indeterminate subjectivity with seemingly incommensurate cultural narratives. Welch provides a powerful illustration of the conflict between discursive definitions of “Indian” through the story of Loney’s childhood friend Myron Pretty Weasel. Fifteen years earlier both Loney and Pretty Weasel played on the same 1958 championship high school basketball team. After high school, Pretty Weasel accepted a basketball scholarship to attend a college in Wyoming. Two years later he quit college and basketball to return home and run his father’s ranch. When Loney asks him why he left school, Pretty Weasel replies, “I’ll tell you why I came back—because I couldn’t stand those people down there. You know why? Because they put the pressure on me, all this Indian bullshit. You know what they called me in the newspaper? Super Chief” (101). What Pretty Weasel calls “this Indian bullshit” is his nomenclature for a particular version of the discourse of Indianness. Pretty Weasel’s frustration expresses a particular crisis of representation. The newspaper, as a symbol of authoritative discourse, in its representation of Pretty Weasel the basketball star, slots him in the category “Indian.” Drawing from a version of the discourse of Indianness, wherein all male Indians become “chief,” Pretty Weasel becomes Super Chief, and his body becomes the site upon which definitions of Indianness, drawn from the discourse of Indianness, are projected by the primarily white spectators who come to see him play. He comes to embody their fantasy of Indianness.

Pretty Weasel’s incredulous disgust at the newspaper’s appellation “Super Chief” reflects his anger at the newspaper’s inscription of his identity in what has been a stereotypical designation for all male Native Americans: “Chief.” Pretty Weasel’s disgust serves to indict the term “Super Chief” as a false inscription of identity, a false production of “Indian bullshit.” Loney, however, complicates Pretty Weasel’s complaint by reminding him, “That’s what we used to call you [Super Chief]” (101). By way of response, Pretty Weasel illustrates how the meaning of a particular utterance is unstable, shifting and transforming in relation to speaker, audience, and context: “That was different. Up here it didn’t mean anything” (101). Loney pursues the matter, asking, “What did it mean down there?” (101). Pretty Weasel’s response indicates how among his teammates, many of whom were also Native Americans, the term Chief did not function as a racially charged signifier to mark Pretty Weasel off as a different race from his peers. But as “the Indian” on his college team, the utterance Chief bears a greater burden of signification. It carries with it a dense representational his-

tory of Indians defined as other. Pretty Weasel explains to Loney this other meaning of "Super Chief": "Indian play basketball good, Indian friend of the white man. I don't mean maybe, either" (101). In this explanation, Pretty Weasel mimics the stereotypical, stilted, and monosyllabic dialogue of cinematic Native Americans from numerous Westerns. Pretty Weasel's ability to mimic this discourse indicates his own familiarity with it. Just as Rhea's internalization of residues from the discourse of the "Noble Savage" suggests an ideological barrier to an intimate loving relationship with Loney, Pretty Weasel's frustration with all the "Indian bullshit" suggests the power of the discourse of Indianness to erect a screen that isolates Pretty Weasel the basketball player.

Pretty Weasel's elaboration on the meaning of "Indian" indicates a particular struggle of language and definitions of identity circulating within the novel. The term Indian, in the years since Columbus' initial navigational error, has become a feature of what Mikhail Bakhtin labels "authoritative discourse" (342). That is the term that has been legitimated through regular sanctioned historic use, even while its meaning has shifted over time and context. Thus, Pretty Weasel's observation on the difference between the meanings of "Super Chief" at home and at college points to a particular indeterminacy of the word Indian as a sign pointing to a specific meaning. Pretty Weasel, Loney, Russell, and many Native Americans have appropriated terms such as "Indian," "skin," and "chief" as terms of identity that are not in complete accord with their more authoritative use. The term "Indian" becomes a way of acknowledging a shared sense of community forged in the context of conflicts with "whites." What Pretty Weasel describes as the "pressure on me" can be read as the pressure generated in the conflict between his "internally persuasive" sense of his identity in terms of what it means to be Native American against the "authoritative discourse" articulated by the newspaper. At home on the reservation and among other Indians, where there is more support for the internally persuasive version, he does not experience the pressure felt in a locale where the authoritative discourse isolates him as the embodiment of "Indianness." The difference is not simply one of semantics but of how meaning shifts dramatically through communal contexts.

With Pretty Weasel's explanation of the meaning of "Indian," the novel returns again to its exploration of the contextual and performative nature of cultural identity. Yet as Loney's own crisis and ultimate death indicate, these linguistic and performative representations of

identity are in fact the stuff of which life is made. Put simply, the novel reminds us that representations do matter; in fact there is no stepping outside representations. Pretty Weasel's mimicry of the cinematic stereotype draws attention to the power of such representations to influence the perception of individual Indians by non-Indians and the painful consequences of such perceptions. And beyond the level of personal discomfort, the crisis of representation extends outward as a cultural force.

A poignant example of the cultural force carried by representations occurs in the third section of this three-part novel. Harlem police officer Painter Barthelme is introduced breaking up a barroom fight between Indians. As Barthelme interrupts the fight, he asks one of the Indians, Waker, what started it: "We were just talking about our careers," (61) Waker replies. Waker's partner, "the big Indian," adds, "That's right.... We've been thinking of starting up our own bowling alley. We'd just got to the part about the cocktail lounge ... and this damn Pepion [the third Indian] goes berserk" (61). When Barthelme asks Waker what set Pepion off, Waker replies, "We was just saying that we didn't think we should allow Indians in. High-class you see" (61). To this "the big Indian" adds, "It's not that we're prejudiced" (61).

In this scenario, Welch depicts the characters, Waker and "the big Indian," engaging in a performative mimicry of racist attitudes likely to be encountered in the Harlem area. Anthropologist Keith Basso has termed similar caricatures of white behavior performed among the Western Apache, "portraits of 'The Whiteman.'" Basso argues that for the Western Apache "these performances are little morality plays in which Western Apaches affirm what is 'right' and proper by dramatizing ... what is 'wrong' and inappropriate" (76). According to Basso, these comic performances are "a playful device for testing and affirming solidarity by ostensibly denying it" (69). But Basso also notes that such joking imitations of white attitudes contain an element of danger when stretched too far.

Pepion's outraged attack suggests that this is an example of the performance going too far. The mocking dialogue between Waker and "the big Indian" highlights the racism that continues to exist in Loney's Harlem. For Waker and "the big Indian," the performance dramatizes "what is 'wrong' and inappropriate," with the racism directed against Native Americans. But Pepion, caught up in the lived realities of such racist attitudes, misreads their performance, which exacerbates his al-

ready frayed sense of not belonging. The parodic performance of the two Indians plays on the social attitudes of the region, but for Pepion the parody is too successful, too close to the truth and sends him into a violent frenzy.

The performance of Waker and “the big Indian,” like the earlier Indian joke, illustrates a significantly “authentic” Native American cultural practice, but it is “authentic” as a Native American performance which has developed as a mechanism for coping with the problems generated by white conquest and assumptions of authority. The scene culminates with a reminder of the overriding power dynamics in operation. It is the police officer, Barthelme, symbolic of the hegemonic power structure, who has the definitive word. After separating the fighters and hearing their account of events, he tells “the big Indian,” “Now get the hell out of here.... Take that other ignorant bastard with you” (61). To Waker’s protest that it is a free country, Barthelme replies, “Not for you it isn’t. Now go on.... Goddamn your hides” (61). In this reply Barthelme explicitly states that for these two Native Americans it is not a free country. And his final excoriation, his damning their hides, not so subtly suggests that it is their very skin which excludes them from the freedoms supposedly guaranteed to all Americans.

The dialogue between Waker and “the big Indian” indicates how “Indian” does mean something in Jim Loney’s Harlem. Harlem is a town where Native Americans interact regularly with white Americans, but where signs of difference exert a powerful force. The Indian joke, the appropriation of terms such as “skin,” and “chief,” and the mocking performances of “portraits of the white man,” all serve as metonymic markers of an authenticity that is not a simple repetition of ancient traditions but is an ongoing process; as James Clifford expresses it, “authenticity, both personal and cultural is ... something constructed vis-à-vis others” (274).

Yet recognizing that authenticity is a continually negotiated and constructed process does not negate the power of the desire for authenticity. Loney is driven by a desire for an authenticity that he locates outside himself:

He never felt Indian. Indians were people like the Cross Guns, the Old Chiefs—Amos After Buffalo.... When Loney thought of Indians, he thought of the reservation families ... the old ones passing down the wisdom of

their years, of their family's years, of the tribe's years and the young ones soaking up their history, their places in their history, with a wisdom that went beyond age. (102)

In Loney's understanding, there are real Indians, "like the Cross Guns, the Old Chiefs—Amos After Buffalo" whom he imagines as possessing a pure and unaltered link to ancestral traditions, and then there are people like himself, neither "Indian or white" (102). The problem for Loney is not simply, as Louis Owens argues, that "Loney is a victim of discourse that has turned 'real' Indians into artifacts" (152). Rather, Loney recognizes the existence of contemporary Native American communities at Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy that continue to engage in cultural performances which provide them with a sense of connection to a shared ancestry.¹ The problem is that the authenticity he attributes to these "real" Indians eclipses the authenticity of his own identity (152). He remains unable to see that he is and continues to be "authenticated" within a local Indian community that includes figures such as the bartender Russell, Myron Pretty Weasel, Waker, the big Indian, Pepion, and even his sister Kate.

Nevertheless, Loney's crisis points to an experience of disconnection from and longing for ancient culture. Loney looks to figures such as Emil Cross Guns, the Old Chiefs, and Amos After Buffalo for signs of this connection. An example of his own cultural reading occurs while at the airport, waiting for his sister Kate to arrive. He notices an old Indian woman: "She wore an old cloth coat and a black silk scarf and moccasins and leggings. Loney guessed she is from Rocky Boy [an Indian Reservation], because the old women still dressed that way out there" (55). The woman's attire signifies in ways that allow Loney to interpret where she is from, what Native American community she belongs to. But Loney does not belong to this community. A moment later this point is emphasized when her companion "said something in Cree to the old woman" (57). Loney recognizes the language as Cree, which indicates a specific Native American community continuing to assert its linguistic specificity. This is similar to Loney's childhood memory of Emil Cross Guns "saying something in Gros Ventre" (102). Loney recognizes in both instances the specific languages as markers of authentic Cree and Gros Ventre identity, but the languages function as a cultural barrier: all he hears is "something in Cree," and "something in Gros Ventre." In both instances he hears a vague "something," not anything he can actually understand. While Loney may be "In-

dian,” there are limits to his performative identity. He does not speak Cree or Gros Ventre, and he is not a member of the Rocky Boy community nor the Fort Belknap community.

These cultural gaps beg the question: does Loney’s inability to speak Cree or Gros Ventre, or his displacement from a reservation community, make him less authentic? The response offered by the novel suggests the power of the desire for connections to the past, while refusing to posit that a recuperation of a stable and coherent past is actually possible. In the novel’s tracing of a nostalgic longing for a recuperated identity, emphasized in scenes such as the old Cree woman’s reflection upon her grandson recently returned home from military service—“she knew what he had gained would never make up for what he had lost”—it never represents Indian identity as something fully recoupable (58). Instead, the desire for a sense of authenticity and its frustration surface and resurface as an acute source of tension. Loney’s individual case serves as a microcosm of how contemporary circumstances and historical realities result in contexts of identity not fully within an individual’s control.

Does this make the novel a fatalistic vision of hopelessness? Perhaps, but in the figure of Loney’s sister Kate, who works in Washington DC on behalf of Indian rights, the novel suggests that the feeling of displacement and isolation Loney experiences need not be terminal. While Owens reads Kate’s departure from the reservation as a sign of her inauthenticity, she has made a role for herself as an Indian activist. In a sense she comes to represent those more authentic Indians as a voice within the dominant power structure. She has found a purpose in striving to provide a sense of belonging that has been denied both her and Loney. A description of her Washington DC residence illustrates this point: on one wall she has a painting of a powwow dancer “walking along a road ... lonely and tired.... She felt that her purpose was to create something for him [the dancer] to go home to” (164-65).

For Kate, there is no home in Montana, and for Jim Loney, it is a home in which he remains homeless. Loney responds to this experience of homelessness by returning to the heart of what he associates with authenticity: the location on the reservation where in days of old “Indians ... had used the canyon, the hunting parties, the warriors, [and] the women had picked chokecherries” (168). At this site, Loney will make his final stand. Here he will be shot by the reservation police officer Quinton Doore.

While several critics have seen this as dying in an Indian fashion, none to my knowledge have noted that Loney's death occurs on or very near Christmas day. As he makes his way toward his final destination he recalls his meeting with Amos After Buffalo: "That had been on Thanksgiving Day, almost a month ago" (166). Just as Loney has been attempting to sort out the meaning of the biblical passages and the bird vision he associates with his mother's Gros Ventre people, his final stand resonates with Christ's sacrifice. Even his death reflects both sides of his cultural heritage. As a Christ-like martyr, Loney's death can be seen as a sacrifice for all Indians like Amos After Buffalo who "will discover that Thanksgiving is not meant for him" (166).

In contrast to her brother's sacrificial gesture, Kate Loney, like Sylvester Yellow Calf in *The Indian Lawyer*, has chosen a path within the structures of control instituted by the U.S. government to regulate American Indians. Yet rather than reading this as a move away from authenticity, Kate's path indicates her commitment to those Indian people whose realities are influenced by the dominant power structures. In this sense she has found a location as a "representative" of Indian people and their rights. She has embraced this position in both senses of the word represent: to speak for and to speak as an American Indian. The legacy of oppression has provided Kate with an object against which to define herself.

While descriptions of Kate's life affirm that she has managed to articulate a speaking position from what historical circumstances and the current political economy offer, the novel undermines the naturalness of this position in its description of her arrival at the airport in Montana:

Her black hair was ... clasped with a beaded roach. Her necklace was squash blossom, turquoise and silver.... She had been a little deliberate about each piece of clothing ... the squash blossom was authentic, right from the heart of Navaho country. She had bought it directly from the woman who made it ... in the Canyon de Chelly area.... Kate felt righteous about that one. (63)

Like her brother, Kate lacks a sense of belonging to a specific tribal community, and this lack reflects in her purchase of accessories deliberately composed to convey "Indianness."

The relationship between conceptions of "Indian" identity and attire gains further emphasis if we compare Kate with the description of

the old Cree woman mentioned earlier: "the old woman wore an old cloth coat and a black silk scarf and moccasins and leggings. Loney guessed she was from Rocky Boy [Reservation], because the old women still dressed that way out there" (55). The woman's attire signifies a specific Indian community in Loney's mind, unlike Kate's attire, which gestures to an assembled pan-Indian identity. Clearly, Kate's squash blossom necklace no more makes her a Navajo than it would any other non-Navajo. Louis Owens has gone so far to argue that her outfit registers Kate's embrace of "the privileged white culture's surface significations of Indianness ... in place of a personal sense of authenticity" (152). Yet Owens' dismissal of Kate's "Indianness" for its inauthenticity overlooks how she has taken the signifiers of identity assigned her by birth and circumstance to forge a personal commitment to a "pan-Indian" identity that has come into being as a result of colonization. Owens' argument also neglects to consider how identity consists of ongoing, shifting performative practices including attire, and is not a solid core radiating outward. Against Owens' view, I would argue that the difference between Kate's attire and the old Cree woman's is less one of kind, authentic versus inauthentic, than of degree. Clearly Kate knows that she is not a Navajo and that she and her brother are "two half-breed kids" (90).

The very term "half-breed" or "mixed-blood" as an identity shares a function with the identity "Indian" to mark off a subject that is not white. "Half-breed" is not a natural category, any more than any racial or cultural category is "natural," but is instead a classification developed within a social system anxious to establish and maintain boundaries between racial and cultural groups. For Kate and Jim Loney, the term defines their particular diasporic condition. Throughout this novel, Welch has denaturalized notions of cultural identity. Even the old Cree woman's attire is as much artifice as Kate's adornments. And yet they both signify "difference." Kate's dark skin combined with the necklace and beaded broach gesture to "Indianness" in a way that can be read by members of the mainstream culture as indicating difference, Indian/non-white "other." But on another level, her attire does not signify attachment to any specific American Indian community, unlike the Cree woman's attire, which signifies her connection to a narrative of belonging shared by other members of her generation of Cree women living on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation.

What Kate lacks in her invented "Indian" identity is a connection between personal history and community history. Jim Loney raises this

point when he reflects how he "had always admired Kate's ability to live in the present, but he had also wondered at her lack of need to understand her past" (88). Yet what goes unspoken is how Kate has forged a functioning identity as an "Indian" that is an authentic response to her own past and to the collective history of many American Indians who have been severed from connections to ancestral traditions.

The vexing question of authenticity, "Indian or not," is never fully resolved in this novel. What the novel reveals instead is the inadequacy, not only inadequacy but the actual danger, of a social structure that defines identity in absolute terms, like a light switch that is either on or off. For Loney, the unbearable weight of this structure leads to his death. For his sister Kate, it leads to a struggle to define her identity through service to "her people."

NOTE

¹Of particular interest is Loretta Fowler's study of Gros Ventre culture at Fort Belknap: *Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings: Gros Ventre Culture and History, 1778-1984*. Fowler examines how members of the Gros Ventre tribe and members of the Assiniboine tribe maintain distinct concepts of tribal identity, even while assuming at specific moments a shared Fort Belknap Indian identity.

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Morality Destabilised: Reading Emma Lee Warrior's "Compatriots"

Ann McKinnon

It is most alien and embarrassing to the present taste in the severity of its principle that one has duties only to one's peers; that against beings of a lower rank, against everything alien, one may behave as one pleases or "as the heart desires," and in any case "beyond good and evil"—here pity and like feelings may find their place.

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals

All the good intentions in the world do not take away the sting and do not take away the pain.

Patricia A. Monture, Ka-Nin-Geh-Heh-Gah-E-Sa-Nonh-Yah-Gah

I participated in a seminar on Native literature a few years ago, and was distressed that we distanced ourselves from scenes of violence, alcoholism, and economic deprivation depicted in some texts written by First Nations writers. Often this distance expressed itself as pity for the lives represented and ultimately for the lived reality of First Nations peoples in Canadian cities and reserves. It struck me that this sort of reading response is conditioned by privilege. In our seminar, pity seemed to be on the flip side of a troubling moral position which, left unexamined, would generate further entrenchment of a kind of conventional morality when regarding the real economic, legal and social conditions of First Nations Peoples.

The notion that pity derives from conventional morality is Nietzschean. It is our reason that enables us to apprehend reality, and yet it is also our reason that ensures that we do so only in a shrewd and self-serving manner, whether known or unknown to ourselves. Knowl-

edge, for Nietzsche, works as a tool of power; it is not a tool of truth (*The Will to Power*, Book III). Pity, Nietzsche reminds us, has not been highly estimated among philosophers: he names Plato, Spinoza, La Rochefoucauld and Kant, “four spirits as different from one another as possible, but united in one thing: in their low estimation of pity” (*Genealogy* 19). Nietzsche marks the difference between the “value” of pity and the “morality” of pity, and by making this distinction, he realizes—with “vertigo”—that when one asks exactly what the differences are, one begins to see that all notions of morality falter:

Let us articulate this new demand: we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed ... a knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been desired. (20)

Nietzsche distinguishes between morality that originates in ruling classes from the morality originating among the oppressed. His genealogical inquiry has, at first glance, nothing to say about the potential for a “true” value of pity—for any new definition will also be used ideologically—but nevertheless, for Nietzsche there is so much value in pity, that he questions what conditions its elision. By its very omission in European philosophy, pity takes on a negative value, and as such, must be ferreted out into the light, so we can assess to what degree the value of pity has been distanced, displaced and almost buried in triumphant philosophic affirmations of what become, by forgetting the origins of pity, grounds for moral constructions of sovereign, noble—true and right—identity.

Nietzsche calls this displacement a “pathos of distance” that is, that the noble class claims the right to “create values and to coin names for values” in the name of their own utility and he says that this very distance creates a “pathos of nobility”(26). Nietzsche’s use of pity is performative. According to J. L. Austin, performatives are utterances that are governed by rules, are conventional. The person who makes performative utterances, for example “I find the accused guilty,” must have authority to do so, and such an utterance acts on the world (Austin 12). Nietzschean pity in this instance is on the side of authority, and the pity of the victor is always experienced at a distance from the very real suffering of the vanquished.

Nietzsche's "new demand" can help us answer the question: why do we as readers often maintain a kind of reflexive status quo when reading what upsets or terrifies us? In our seminar, in one instance of reading, we displaced pity onto the ground of our own self-affirmation, for we were faced with that which we did not understand. Could it be that at that moment of reading, we did not have compassion for the disenfranchised, but rather, our very distance from suffering could only allow us to pity in the gap between reading and the "Other" of the text, that not only cannot be bridged by pity, but is itself transformed by pity?

It is one thing to rationalize reading strategies, quite another to assess our understanding of pathos, of effects. What began as a cogent "new demand" from Nietzsche has been taken to the limit in postmodernity. Nietzsche warns that "There is no present without forgetfulness" (*Genealogy* 58). Frederic Jameson takes this idea further. For Jameson, not only does postmodernism do away with time and history, its illusion of eternal present-mindedness creates a damaging, "waning of effect" in culture:

The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that "emotion" is then projected out and externalised, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatisation of inward feeling. (Jameson 11-12)

This separation between the inside and the outside is treated with great suspicion in postmodernity. Jameson reminds us that the waning of effect as a symptom of post-modern culture has serious effects, for depthlessness is not merely metaphorical. Representation and its effects are matters of political and social emancipation and cultural health. How, then, can we productively destabilise (our) power and what it means to have and to have not when reading First Nation's writing?

In order to investigate how and why students in our seminar adopted as an all too human—what I name via Nietzsche—moral position when reading Native literature, I have chosen to examine the Southern Alberta writer Emma Lee Warrior's short story "Compatriots," for it depicts some stereotypes of appropriation and notions of what it means to be advantaged in First Nations and non-Native cul-

tures. What I mean by “to have and to have not” is not the very real economic and social disparity between Natives on reserves and in urban centers and most of the students that were in our seminar. Rather, what is at stake when reading and teaching First Nations writing is an epistemological question about not only how we produce knowledge, but also how we inadvertently re-produce the structures of power/knowledge in our reading and teaching strategies.

One of the key theoretical debates in postcolonial studies is the problem of the long reach of postmodernism which appropriates the reading of world literatures back onto Eurocentric ground. Postcolonial theory, informed by postmodernism, risks staking imperialist positions when reading Native and postcolonial texts. Modernism and postmodernism certainly need to be criticised, deconstructed and sometimes thrown aside so that the important aims of postcolonial strategies, one of which is ultimately the emancipation of people from economic, social, and cultural disenfranchisement, may be negotiated.

Another key theoretical difference between postmodern and postcolonial literatures is that while postmodernism is said to eschew realism, material reality and questions of identity have played a major role in postcolonial literatures for compelling ideological reasons, such as interrogating the relationship of place and identity. Warrior’s story can be described as realistic, and Helmut and Hilda, the German “Compatriots,” are certainly informed by Enlightenment humanism. The philosophies of romanticism and idealism help to illustrate how pedagogically useful the tools of the master are when turned against him to illuminate biases that inform reading.

How, on the other hand, did the Jews feel about the Romans?

Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals

In “Compatriots,” Hilda Afflerbach has come to Alberta from Germany because she wants to learn the traditional ways of the Plains Indians. What she knows about the Plains Indians comes from the writings of her compatriot, Helmut Walking Eagle, who is famous in Germany for his books on Native medicine, spirituality and ceremony. Helmut Walking Eagle represents the cliché of the white man who has “gone Indian,” and as such feels he has *carte blanche* in the Native community.¹ In Warrior’s story, the people tolerate Helmut, and some even enthusiastically embrace him. But the tone of the story makes clear that they are mostly amused at what he believes to be his intel-

lectual and sensitive understanding of all things Native. Helmut is secure as an “expert” on their ground, both physical and spiritual, and as a result of his own investment in his knowledge, Helmut eventually believes himself to be an “Indian.” And Hilda, who is seeking her identity by journeying to the plains, is a voyeuristic tourist who seeks something different and exotic so she can fill a lack or need in herself.

Hilda and Helmut are figures of parody: their European Enlightenment ethics and conceits inform their quest for subjective identity. This inevitably results in their objectification of the natural, human world of the Plains Indians. Above all, their quest has utility, which, according to Hegel, is the ethic of the Enlightenment (Hegel 594-98). Enlightenment logic declares any object—human life and nature—as a possible focus of study, and is ultimately explainable by objective and universal scientific knowledge. However, many objects and effects represented in Warrior’s story—the violence and deprivation that we avoided in our seminar discussions—cannot be contained within the universalizing recipe of Helmut and Hilda’s understanding of the Plains Indians.

As readers, we need to recognise that there can be nothing left outside the compatriots’ totalizing logic. The very idea of being outside is, on the one hand, the source of the fear that could either move us to understand, and on the other could generate pity, thereby forestalling any chance of a full acknowledgement of others. According to Nietzsche, ruling class or “noble” morality develops out of a “triumphant affirmation” of itself, while on the other hand the morality of the disenfranchised, or “slave” morality, needs a hostile external world in order to exist. In other words, those of the ruling class only need the “lower class” in order to validate and affirm their already triumphant morality, and they in turn despise the utilitarian other for not sharing their noble morality (*Genealogy* 36).

This “morality,” this ideology, maintains an essentialist exchange between the two groups. The ruling class that affirms the subaltern Other as disadvantaged does so by its own necessity. And, the marginality that is generated by this noble morality is further instituted by such oppressive forces as imperialism and capitalism made manifest in the economic and social reality of the disenfranchised. The economic, historic, cultural and political—that is to say, ideological—factors continue to affirm the superior position of the ruling class.

The maintenance of the status quo, then, depends upon the advantage of a kind of Nietzschean noble morality, and therefore generates a

system of advantage in both theoretical discourse and in the economic, lived reality of late capitalism. According to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Nietzsche's "malicious celebration of the powerful and their cruelty" at least has honesty to recommend it (*Dialectic* 97). Adorno and Horkheimer posit that Nietzsche quite rightly saw the course of the Enlightenment as nihilistic, because any claim to authenticity or validity is grounded in want or need; Nietzsche declared that "it is our needs that interpret the world" (*Will to Power* 267).²

The perpetuation of self-affirmation—the "triumphant affirmation"—of the dominant discourse can only continue to oppress the disenfranchised. Further, the "rhetorical violence of the dominant discourse," Barbara Goddard claims, "denies the legitimacy of the minority by conflating relations of ideological domination with those of exploitation" (192). And, although it may be somewhat obvious that the ruling group or the dominant discourse would prefer to remain in the position of advantage, the group or discourse also remains advantaged in part because those in power do not understand those they overpower, and their very distance from the "Other" further falsifies that which is unknown to them. Nietzsche claims that this instituted distance "falsifies that which it despises" (*Genealogy* 36); thus, it is all too easy for the class in power to despise something that it has always defined as disadvantaged. And the flip side of this despising is the pity of the victor.

In "Compatriots," Hilda admires Helmut because he seems to have been accepted into the "religious society" of the Native community. However, to Lucy, the Native protagonist of the story, Helmut is only a German guy who "dresses up like an Indian" (Warrior 50). What Hilda chooses to ignore—the realities of Native life on the reserve—is disturbingly less real to her than what she desires to see: Native spiritual traditions exemplified by Helmut Walking Eagle.

The narrative begins with Lucy in the outhouse, afraid to come out because she hears Hilda's car approaching and she does not want to be publicly embarrassed (48). Later, Lucy's aunt Flora apologises to Hilda for all the "junk" that surrounds her house, assuming that relative to Hilda's European home, hers would be considered squalid (54). These instances contrast with Helmut Walking Eagle's home, his tepee:

The inside of the tepee was stunning. It was roomy, and the floor was covered with buffalo hides. Backrests, wall hangings, parfleche bags and numerous artefacts were

magnificently displayed. Helmut Walking Eagle sat resplendent amidst his wealth. The women were dazzled. Lucy felt herself gaping and had to shush her children from asking questions. (57)

Hilda erases Lucy's Indian lived identity by not acknowledging Lucy's drunken husband Bunky and sobering-up uncle Sonny, or the man who begs for money to buy "sikaohki" or vanilla extract, or a house full of junk, without running water. When Hilda is talking to her new Native friend Lucy about Indian culture, she uses the pronoun "they," thereby excluding Lucy from Hilda's idea of "Indianness," for Hilda is interested in a mythical or ideal Indian who in no way resembles the pregnant Lucy, a contemporary Native living on a reserve.

The third person omniscient narrative allows the character Lucy to avoid overtly judging Helmut's appropriation—and Hilda's erasure—of what she understands to be her Native identity. Her opinion of Helmut is much more ambivalent than her uncle Sonny, who makes fun of Helmut's transformation into an "Indian":

"Shit, that guy's just a phoney. How could anybody turn into something else? Huh? I don't think I could turn into a white man if I tried all my life. They wouldn't let me, so how does that German think he can be an Indian. White people think they can do anything—turn into a Chinese or Indian—they're crazy!" (53)

Lucy is embarrassed because, as she admits, Hilda is nice: she made friends with Lucy's children, ate her food and complimented her for it. Lucy appreciates Hilda's eagerness and does not want Hilda to be implicated in what her uncle Sonny calls "white craziness." However, as she says, Native life had suddenly become somewhat "trendy" (53), and yet the reality of that life in the community itself is not in the various expert books on Indian culture written by Helmut Walking Eagle.

And yet, Lucy's notion of her "Indianness" shifts as well. Ironically, not only Hilda but also other members of the reserve begin to identify Helmut as an "authentic" Indian, for he is responsible for bringing ceremony and tradition, such as the Sundance, back to the area (50). Helmut Walking Eagle mediates and translates Indian experience for other communities, and under the sign of anthropological authority, for the Native community itself.

Hilda's strongest desire is to participate with "real" Indians in "real" religious ceremonies, such as a Sundance and a sweat. Hilda is

astonished when Lucy tells her that she has never been to a Sundance: "But why? Don't you believe in it? It's your culture!" Lucy explains that Sundances are merely a reclamation project, a hybrid mixture and that the so-called authentic Sundance no longer exists, at least in her area:

No, I don't care to go. It's mostly those mixed up people who are in it. You see, Indian religion just came back here on the reserve a little while ago, and there are different groups who all quarrel over which way to practice it. Some use Sioux ways, and others use Cree. It's just a big mess. (51)

Lucy notices that this is something that Hilda does not want to hear. And, even though Helmut is in part responsible for a renewed interest in Native ceremony, she does not tell Hilda that many Indians wished that Helmut "would disappear" (50). Lucy's aunt Flora articulates the problem with notions of authentic and imposed culture: "This is my first time, but I know all about this from books.... Helmut Walking Eagle wrote a book about it, too. I could try to get you one. He sells them cheaper to Indians." (56)

Flora speaks as a contemporary Native woman, whose identity is in part created, and paradoxically dismantled, by late technocapitalism. Helmut's anthropological Other is sophisticated and hybrid. The easy access to "others" via media, plane travel etc. means that there is more and more to explain and it is less and less clear how to interpret cultural identities without seeming hegemonic, dogmatic or prejudiced. Flora would very much like to know more about her culture—buried by European colonialism—even if that means Helmut is the authoritative source of her education.

Nevertheless, in Helmut's vast array and ownership of cultural and spiritual ideals and artifacts, only those ideas and artifacts that have utility according to his world view are significant. Spirituality is reduced to empty ceremony, void of any understanding of either the contemporary Native, or the problem of people abstracted from the natural world. Helmut uses what he assumes to be an advantageous position in relation to the Native: he assumes that he can and will understand them, perhaps better than they understand themselves. Equipped with all the tools of Enlightenment exegesis—a will to power in Nietzsche's language—Helmut lays what he wants to see in Native life out on an operating table, and from that, sorts out the things he

wants, dismisses the things he can't use, confuses what he has chosen to focus on in Native life by virtue of his own biases, and as such, may in his interpretation blaspheme a spirituality and muddle a tradition he may or may not understand, and at any rate, was not invited to do so.

Our desire in the seminar seemed to lead us to identify ourselves as advantaged. As "acculturated" readers—a highly normative notion—we critique texts with sharp exegetical tools whetted at the university. And the text became a psychoanalytic Other in which we saw all that we were lacking, perhaps a certain connectedness to an identifiable community, perhaps a certain spirituality. Are we, like Hilda, literary tourists who seek something different, render it exotic so we can fill a lack in ourselves, and then take it out of its environment and context by bringing it "home?"

My identification with white society as an educated woman, like Hilda, gives me some power. And yet, the irony of "Compatriots" is that there is no cultural Other, at least in the sense that Hilda and Helmut understand. And, Warrior's story also troubles some postcolonial theories that articulate a double relation to a place—as a source of authentic identity—and an other place, as a source of imposed culture. The ambivalent figure Lucy upsets such postcolonial essentialisms. Lucy's confusion, when ranged against Helmut's certainty, represents how commonality between people is always articulated at the expense of deferring a consideration of difference.

But why do the members of Lucy's reserve so easily admit to their own ignorance of their culture, and why does Helmut have such a hard time acknowledging his debt to his own, German, heritage? Helmut has what Jacques Derrida calls the metaphysician's allergy to "perhaps," to ambivalence or uncertainty (Derrida 37). What Helmut and Hilda choose to forget or ignore helps them to transform the world according to what they desire. Helmut needs to be "Native," or he does not exist.

For Nietzsche, the mind in an accommodating, negative dialectic moment of forgetfulness passes over into meaning. History is in part created out of this act of forgetfulness that limits one's horizon, and like a "doorkeeper," closes off memory and, in so doing, cordons off normative notions of history, thereby excluding and later forgetting what is too disturbing. Thus, the "sovereign" individual is in part created by this "memory of the will" (*Genealogy* 58).³ In effect, this desire and willful forgetting "ordains the future in advance" and "makes men to a certain degree necessary, uniform, like among like, regular and consequently calculable" (59). The created sovereign being is answer-

able only to himself, and because he is like among like, others whom he is like trust him; for example, Hilda only trusts Helmut's authoritative version of the Native, not Lucy's experience. This dominating instinct for self-affirmation, this "memory of the will" which is comprised of forgetfulness, is, in Nietzschean terms, Helmut Walking Eagle's "conscience" (60).

Helmut has a recreational Winnebago (with a toilet, no doubt) parked next to his tepee. This is one of many examples of the selectivity of the non-Native mind that delimits and reifies what it wants from Native experience—in the case of "Compatriots," a fun tent—while rejecting, and finally forgetting and replacing, that which it does not want: Lucy's outhouse. Helmut's tepee represents authentic Indianness for Hilda who, at the end of the narrative, realises her dream to be invited to a sweat (59). The compatriots both "willfully" forget and choose the elements which constitute their world. And in part, what the compatriots erase, Lucy embraces as her Indian identity.

Readers may feel advantaged in comparison to what is depicted in Native writing, thereby reflexively and defensively staking a moral reading position. Nietzsche declares:

... we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we have to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law, "each is farthest from himself" applies to all eternity—we are not "men of knowledge" with respect to ourselves. (15)

And yet, as readers, to ignore Lucy's drunken husband and the junk in her yard in favour of Native "spirituality" (sweats, Sundances, and tepees) would mean that we have taken up the position of Hilda, who does not see herself being seen, and her desire for identity does not allow her to see Lucy, either.

Although Lucy may feel embarrassed about having an outhouse instead of a toilet, her position in the third person narrative has the effect of flouting her marginalization. Lucy is a satirical persona for Warrior, who ironically plays the ambivalent Lucy against Helmut's representations of the Indian. Lucy speaks from the margins of both white society and Helmut's romantic construction of the Indian; hence, she also rejects her marginality, for it is constructed and preserved by an advantaged, "triumphant," dominant morality. The overall effect is that the narrative destabilises pity for the "disadvantaged" Native community by parodying Helmut's authority, thus rendering the notions of to

have and to have not ambiguous. After all, who is searching for what in this narrative? Hilda's Other is Lucy. Lucy receives strength from her own community; in this sense, Lucy is advantaged over the lost, questing Hilda.

At the end of the story, when Hilda is finally introduced to the elusive Helmut, he will not shake his compatriot's hand, and he disavows that he is from Germany:

"She says she's from Germany," was all Elsie said, before making a quick move toward the door.

"Wait!" he barked in Blackfoot, and Elsie stopped where she was.

"I only wanted to know if you're familiar with my home town of Weisbaden?" said Hilda.

"Do you know what she's talking about?" Helmut asked Elsie in Blackfoot. Elsie shook her head in a shamed manner.

"Why don't you ask her about Germany?" He hurled the words at Hilda, then looking meanly at his wife, he added, "She's been there." (58)

The transformation of Helmut Walking Eagle into an "Indian" seems to be complete. Helmut has successfully put his knowledge of his own culture behind him, selectively choosing what will affirm his identity and forgetting what transgresses his created "consciousness" of what he wills to be his uniform identity. When his wife refuses to remain uniform in her designated (by him) "Indianness," it is perceived as insubordination. Her presence destabilises his authority over his newly created self. In an ironic reversal, the trust of "like among like" that Hilda thought she shared with Helmut has also been undermined: "I'm sorry I upset her husband. I didn't mean to," said Hilda. "I thought he would be willing to teach me something, because we're both German" (58). Helmut's display of rude arrogance has effectively cut Hilda off from her primary source. As a suggestion to fill the gap, Lucy helpfully suggests that perhaps Hilda could buy his book.

The legitimate question, "Who wrote the books" is answered by Lucy's aunt, Flora: "He's the brains, she's the source." Flora has not necessarily deferred to Helmut's authority; rather, she points out that the one who assimilates information is not necessarily the owner/author of the material. But the unanswerable question of cultural authenticity in the story is articulated in Lucy's ambivalent identity. In Daniel W. Conway's reading of Nietzsche, "irony becomes political only when it

consumes even the original authority of the ironist" (76). Warrior's representation of Lucy is not the ultimate political gesture of obliterating Nietzschean irony—she ultimately does not have authority to obliterate—but nevertheless, her identity both disappears in the performance of the text, and is at once re-inscribed. Lucy's presence is marked by her own, sometimes embarrassed, sometimes tired, and sometimes funny, body in the text. The physical space she occupies—sitting in the outhouse, for example—is a ludic space outside Helmut's Enlightenment logic. Her embarrassed and laughing body breaks the grip of Helmut and Hilda's definitions, making their essentialist claims of what is and is not an Indian ironic. The political gesture of the text is to be found in Warrior's representation of Lucy's personal, contradictory and bodily experience—her lived reality—and it is in danger of being ignored when one stands on high moral ground and pities the disenfranchised community in the text.

If we are compassionate readers, we must heed the First Nations writer Patricia Monture, who warns that all the good intentions in the world do not take away pain. And worse—to make an unlikely coupling of Monture's warning with Nietzsche's polemic—our "good intentions" put us in the dangerous space that enables pity. Morality, according to Nietzsche, operates: "as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as misunderstanding, but also morality as cause, as remedy, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison as comedy!" (*Genealogy* 26). Derrida reminds us that for Nietzsche only a fool can tell this story, "only he can know how to submit reason to reason, how reason becomes what it should have been, finally brought to its senses" (51).

A literary trickster, Warrior's ironic comedy of "Compatriots" shows us that morality comprises each of these things: morality is both the cause and consequence of justifying imperialism in all its forms, as well as a symptom of willful forgetting. Morality's selective memory is morality's mask. It is an illness and a misunderstanding that arises out of lack, and Hilda and Helmut's attempts to retrieve an identity when faced with lack of one ultimately becomes a comedy.

In Nietzsche's text, the terms of morality are co-implicated. I am a teacher, and my reading is always informed by Western European discourse. And although I am concerned about my own position of authority in the classroom, by reading, by listening to Natives and their texts, I can laugh at the folly of a world constructed by morally sanctioned, reasoned privilege. Or, its flip side, liberal guilt. Nietzsche's

notion that understanding stops action helps us read Helmut's authority—the one who is presumed to know—and recognize ourselves when we see that Hilda is blind. We can then destabilise what it means to have and to have not. For it would be a pity to displace compassion, once again, when reading Warrior's story.

NOTES

¹Helmut Walking Eagle is a parody of Grey Owl, or Archie Belaney, the English trapper, hunter and later conservationist who came to Canada at the turn of the century. He was named WA-SHA-QUON-ASIN or Grey Owl by the Ojibway. For more on Grey Owl, see his autobiography, *Pilgrims of the Wild* (Toronto: MacMillan Company, 1968).

²In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno further Hegel's notion of the relationship between the ethic of utility and terror in Enlightenment thought with their tracing of the relationship between scientific consciousness, pragmatism and ethical decisionism, and barbarism. For more on this, see David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*.

³For more on Nietzsche's notion of memory, see the "First Essay: Good and Evil, Good and Bad" in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

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REVIEW ESSAY

Linda Hogan's Two Worlds

Amy Greenwood Baria

The epigraph to Linda Hogan's latest novel, *Power*, reads, "Mystery is a form of power." A gifted storyteller, Hogan sets the stage for a tale of mystery, power, and corruption with her trademark suspense operating from her very first words. Because Hogan's writing becomes more overtly political with each novel she produces—gone is the special brand of humor that characterizes *Mean Spirit*—*Power* is a fitting title. But beyond the title, this novel encompasses many faces of power: the power of nature, the power of endurance, the power of song, the power of physical strength, the power of knowledge, the power of the spirit world, the power of law, the power of language, and the power of death all coexist within the novel. And these facets of power focus the reader's attention on a distinct duality: the Native American cultures versus dominant culture. Thus, the novel itself occupies two worlds: "Two worlds exist. Maybe it's always been this way, but I enter them both like I am two people. Above and below. Land and water. Now and then" (97).

Through the voice of Omishto, the sixteen-year-old narrator, the Native and non-Native worlds come alive for the reader as the young protagonist makes difficult choices about which world will be her own. Adept at female coming-of-age fiction, Hogan goes a step beyond her

second novel, *Solar Storms*, to make *Power* a statement about the loss of Native Americans as a people.

One of thirty surviving Taiga Indians of Florida, Omishto tells her story to the outside world, one very different from her own. With her recognition of the two worlds mentioned above, she also recognizes a division within herself. As an Indian living among the white middle class, Omishto mediates between these cultures by excelling in school and spending time alone near the woods and water of southern Florida. The two worlds Omishto finds are her vanishing, Native world subsumed by the larger world of white culture. But what separates this conflict in *Power* from others of its ilk is Hogan's ability to match diminishing people, animals, and ways of life against the threat of destruction, bringing an immediacy to their diminishing through comparison. By likening the plight of the Taiga to that of the endangered Florida panther, Hogan creates an urgency powerful enough to reawaken dominant culture to its destruction of yet another natural resource—its ever-dwindling Native population. This aspect alone makes *Power* a unique contribution to the Native American canon.

The novel opens with Omishto lying in her boat, the scene ethereal, heavenly: "This is the place where clouds are born and I am floating" (1). This near suspension of reality prefigures the alternative world that Omishto, and her mentor Ama Eaton, will share after the devastation of the hurricane that rips through the novel's opening chapters. The storm severs contact with civilization, blocking roads and disabling power lines. Omishto's isolation with Ama in the woods sets up the conflict of the novel by emphasizing its duality: the older, natural world and the outside, civilized world. And, although Omishto initially dismisses the idea of magic—"most of the time I don't think there's such a thing as magic" (5)—her post-hurricane experience with Ama and the Florida panther will alter the way she evaluates reality, allowing her the freedom to accept the magical as part of her Native culture.

Omishto's recognition of two worlds (as quoted in the opening of this essay) results from her ongoing relationship with Ama, heightened by their post-hurricane killing of one of the few remaining Florida panthers, the animal most sacred to the Taiga. Before the storm, Omishto only senses a difference between Indian ways and those of dominant culture: "Ama said the old ways are not enough to get us through this time and she was called to something else. To living half-way between the modern world and the ancient one" (22-23). When

Ama shares this idea with Omishto, the message of her words is hidden; Omishto is not privy to the enforced mediation Ama is bound to live by. But after Ama kills one of the endangered panthers, Omishto can experience the opposition between the modern and ancient worlds firsthand, not just through Ama's counsel. Through the murder of the animal and the subsequent trial, Omishto makes the crucial shift from pupil to teacher. She states: "Believing and knowing are two lands distant from each other" (40). The entire experience of tracking and killing the sacred animal forces Omishto to recognize the urgency underlying Ama's question to her: "What do you know and what do you just believe?" (67). In response, Omishto makes the leap into adulthood as a condition of believing in Ama, even before the young girl fully understands her mentor's motivation for the murder.¹

Before the killing, Omishto's world is that outside of the traditional Taiga. She is the stereotypical contemporary Indian (like Momaday's Abel of *House Made of Dawn*, Erdrich's Lipsha Morrissey of the *Love Medicine* series, Allen's Ephanie of *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, and Silko's Tayo of *Ceremony*), disconnected from much of her tribe's customs and beliefs. Her reality consists of dominant culture tinged with invitation into Ama's world of what feels like the past, like old ways. Indeed, as Omishto follows Ama through the woods, she remarks on her fledgling understanding of the natural world: "I think it is the past we travel" (54). Ama's supersensory adaptation to nature amazes Omishto: "I wonder how, always, she puts this world away as if it never happened and how she hears the little feet of the deer" (54). And, the longer Omishto spends with Ama, the more her discovery of the natural world takes shape. So it is not long before Omishto suspects other worlds at work around her: "We are surrounded by matter, but time disappears from us. Or maybe, as Ama says, there are other worlds beside us all the time and every now and then we cross over and enter one, and every so often, too, one passes over and enters ours" (55).² The tracking and killing of the endangered panther certainly exemplifies one of these crossings. Time and knowing lose their rigidity as Omishto loses her affinity for the modern world of school, home, and her abusive stepfather Herman, replacing them with the larger, more magical world of Taiga beliefs. The forces that have drawn Omishto back into her Taiga consciousness have a similar effect on the reader, allowing us to believe in concurrent realities.

In the woods following the panther, Omishto realizes the killing will happen, but she does not understand why. Although she has awak-

ened to the natural world, she is unable to comprehend Ama's act, all the while knowing it will happen: "And then I tell myself that she is not hunting the cat, she couldn't be; there are so few of them, as few as there are of us. Thirty of them left, maybe less" (58). But, even as Omishto realizes Ama's motivation for the murder, she draws her own, mature conclusions: "I think she doesn't want the outsiders to kill this cat. She doesn't want it to die by poison or be hit by a car like the others. In this, maybe she is right. But she is also wrong" (62). Omishto's judgment of Ama signals her awakening to the sanctity of the natural world, but it marks the end of her complacency with the plight of her people. When Omishto recognizes the tragedy of the great cat, so diminished in numbers, she sees the tragedy of the Taiga more clearly than ever before. The reader reaches the same poignant conclusion. Hogan is at her best here; the young girl's dilemma finds magnification in the panther's, bringing new power to this protagonist's coming-of-age tale. And, the thoughtful and wrenching comparison between human and animal has extraordinary effects; it elevates animal and human simultaneously. This subtle juxtaposition reminds the reader of the relationships humans and animals once shared in Native culture and sets *Power* apart from Hogan's previous work as well as from other Native American fiction.

After the panther is slain, Omishto falls headlong into the natural world the Taiga share with the panther, and she dismisses the outside world from her needs. This break allows Omishto freedom from her stepfather Herman, from her mother's blindness to his abuse, and from white skepticism about Taiga ways. Omishto's break also takes sides; she chooses to assign value to those Taiga beliefs and customs that will lead to the survival of her people.³

As Omishto begins to comprehend the murder, she comes to identify with the tragic experience of Ama, the cat, and the land. She describes the first moments after the killing:

Ama cries just to look at it. I know why she cries. Because once they were beautiful and large and powerful. Now it is just like her, like the woman who wears boy's old shoes because she's poor and they are cheaper, and it is also like me trying so hard to stay out of Herman's way, trying to think what kind of life I'll ever have, and it is like the cut-up land, too, and I see that this is what

has become of us, of all three of us here. We are diminished and endangered. (69)

This identification leads Omishto to make the promise Ama asks of her, sacrificing Ama's guiding presence in her life for the surviving hope of the Taiga elders. Ama asks that Omishto tell the truth about the panther-killing, "'all except for one thing.' And again she makes me promise not to say what the cat looked like, that it was sick and starving" (75). Only later does Omishto completely realize the consequences this promise will have. While telling her version of the murder to the Taiga elders, Omishto reaches an epiphany:

But suddenly I know why she didn't take them the panther, at least I think I do, and why she made me promise not to tell.... It would cut their world in half. It would break their hearts and lives. It would take away everything that they have left in this world, it was so poor. If she gave it to them it would have been like giving them sickness and death.... If they saw the face of it, that skinny cat dead on the black grasses, they would no longer believe or have hope. (166-67)

Hope is vital to survival, and Omishto is the best hope the Taiga have left. Although Ama's killing the panther ends the relationship that has helped Omishto reach maturity (the tribe banishes Ama), her actions facilitate the reemergence of hope: her own youth and courage.

The realization of Ama's reason behind keeping the secret, combined with Omishto's identification with Ama, the panther, and the earth, all serve to reinforce Omishto's perception of two separate worlds operating at once. When roads are cleared and power restored after the hurricane (and after the death of the panther), Omishto experiences culture shock: "I am thrown back into the world too fast and I reel from it" (90). And later that night, the sensation of difference is no less: "My bed is more narrow that I remember, the house more small, as if I've outgrown it"—which she has (94). Omishto's alienation from dominant culture continues as she attempts a return to school: "I glance around, knowing I am not one of these people, either, not these people who are like vines grown over this land, smothering it" (106). And, although Omishto now discounts the modern world, she concedes that she was once very much a part of it:

I've been good at this world, the one that hits you when you are born and makes you cry right from the start, so

that crying is your first language. I've learned what I was supposed to learn, but now it comes to me that in doing so I've unlearned other things. I've lost my sense; I cannot sense things. (107)

The sense that Omishto has lost will return slowly; the reader's own may take even longer. Hogan reminds us all to recover our sense, to relearn that which connects us to the land we inhabit.

Yet, realizing why the panther died is only part of Omishto's maturation; she comes to realize why she lives. She acknowledges her position as the Taiga hope: "I'm both a Taiga, a person from this downtrodden place, and I am the smart daughter, the one they think will show all the others how we can make it" (100-01). But "making it" as a Taiga means surviving much more than a hurricane. When Ama is tried for the murder of the panther, Omishto looks out at the non-Native faces in the courtroom, knowing they couldn't handle the fate that is hers: "If there were thirty of them in this world, they would fall down in despair and hit themselves. They'd wish for life and death, both at the same time" (119). This is the difficult position that Omishto has assumed; for as much as Ama is the novel's acting savior, Omishto is the enduring one. And she must learn all over again about the world she will return to in order to save it. Her existence straddles both the modern and the ancient worlds, making her a powerful but uneasy savior indeed. While visiting the Taiga elders, Omishto notes the duality of her own position: "I am both at home and a foreigner here in their presence ... because I understand almost nothing that is said in the old Taiga language. I am inept and hardly know our ways" (161). But this handicap is something Omishto is now equipped to overcome, driven by the greater needs of her people: "I know our survival depends on who I am and who I will become" (161).

With her decision made, Omishto feels the comfort of wisdom. The novel's wrenching events—a hurricane, a panther's murder, society's misunderstanding of Native ways, the separation of friends—bring Omishto to a moment of quiet contemplation, much like her floating reverie, which opened the novel. Omishto shares this moment with her mother: "I sit on the step above her and watch the heat lightning in the distance and I have wings and I know I will fly and I understand something Mama does not" (223). But even if Omishto's mother cannot understand what her daughter has experienced, she, and the reader, understand Omishto's difficult choice to work for the survival of the Taiga. As Omishto steps quietly into the woods,

following the Taiga path, we all know that returning to this nearly vanished world is not easy. Omishto confirms our belief: "And this act, this leaving, takes all my courage, all my strength" (232). Opting for the ancient world tests Omishto's strength. Believing in her success tests our faith.

NOTES

¹The relationship between Omishto and Ama calls to mind the relationship between Angel and Bush in *Solar Storms*, Hogan's second novel; *Power* and *Solar Storms* have several similarities, this not least among them.

²Hogan's protagonists are familiar with this kind of time travel. Angel of *Solar Storms* makes a similar comparison as she journeys deeper into the natural world: "As we traveled, we entered time and began to trouble it, to pester it apart or into some kind of change" (168).

³It is interesting to note here that Omishto's break from dominant culture effectively halts her mediation between dominant and Native cultures. This is also a significant departure from Hogan's earlier work. For example, while the conclusion of *Mean Spirit* offers haven for Natives and those who share their beliefs, such as the Hog Priest and Martha Billy, the conclusion of *Power* seems to have little room for non-Natives.

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REVIEWS

a snake in her mouth. nila northSun. Albuquerque: West End Press, 1997. 96 pp.

A Native American woman who lives on a reservation and works as a teen crisis counselor, nila northSun is in the important position of being a participant observer in her own community. Her poetry fleshes out the way U.S. government Indian policy plays out in the lives of individuals on the res. northSun situates the Native American realities of her life within the modern American trappings of low income living.

One of the strengths of this book is the range of emotions, circumstances and reflections that it contains. Many poets have addressed the life of Native Americans on a personal level, as northSun does here. But she goes beyond that. *a snake in her mouth* combines northSun's experience with the experiences of those who have come to her teen crisis clinic, those who stay on the res, and those who leave. By writing about the details of their daily lives, northSun reveals common struggles that Stillwater Reservation men and women must face, and the strength they find to survive those struggles.

A sense of despair hangs in the air on the res, and not succumbing to this is one the biggest struggles these men and women face. For instance, in her poem "hunter" northSun writes that the hunter is proud of his trade, and eats whatever he shoots. However, "he'll eat anything." In this eight line poem northSun shares the hunter's pride in his ability to support himself with his trade, but she also reveals the difficulty for a hunter to survive where development supplants wilderness. To support himself, he must "eat anything."

In keeping with her past work, there is a noticeable lack of punctuation and capitalization in this latest book. Punctuation has been a very Western, patriarchal way to control poetry and literature. It has traditionally been a gatekeeper, keeping out works that don't conform to established rules of punctuation, effectively controlling meaning. As a modern American woman poet, and a Native American, northSun rejects standard punctuation, as Brenda Hillman and Jorie Graham have. In fact, in 96 pages of poetry, *a snake in her mouth* contains only six commas, all in conversation, except the one in "written dec. 25, 1984 remembering back 11 years before," which marks the date. Only six poems contain periods. A number of question marks and one exclamation point are nearly all the remaining punctuation in the book. northSun also doesn't capitalize her name, the title of the book, or any of the names of the poems. First person "i" always appears in lower case. With these variations on standard punctuation and capitalization, northSun lets the reader sense her voice as a medium through which we may experience life on the res.

northSun also uses space on the page to make meaning, but not in the traditional sense. In "sister in law," northSun uses white space to separate her gory description of the slaughter of a sheep for a traditional dinner, from the poem's closure: "that night she dreamed/ of McDonalds." Like the final couplet in a traditional Shakespeare or Donne poem, the last two lines provide the poem's denouement, and northSun's style makes them even more profound.

a snake in her mouth brings abstract stereotypes about Indians, including the unemployed Indian, into sharp focus on a personal level in "up and out." Moving from the reservation to the city, the speaker discovers that while "there were no jobs" on the reservation, somehow she "felt poorer" in the city, where wages couldn't meet expenses. On the reservation, "we only got one t.v. channel, but/ we visited with relatives more" and "we got government commodities that/ tasted like dog food but/ it was free" northSun presents the hard choices between unemployed poverty on the reservation and working poverty in the city.

Equally significant is the story northSun tells about herself. A mixture of oral traditions and alcoholism, spouse abuse and respect for the sweat lodge, *a snake in her mouth* gives the reader many poems from many directions, making us conscious that the life of an individual is complex and multifaceted, despite the regular use of stereotypes and generalizations to discuss Native Americans in the past, and the present. northSun reminds us that living is in the details, and her poetry

provides those details that reveal the humanity in her life and her community.

In Part 1, “moving camp too far,” a series of poems captures the sense of confusion and sadness in a community where many have forgotten the traditional ways. Eagles appear only on “slurpee plastic cups” (“moving camp too far”), and those who remember the old ways are dying (“the 1st one I ever saw dead”). Part 1 ends with a weaving of the creation story of Spider Woman and the modern poverty of living with bugs in the house. northSun uses a new lens (or an old lens) to re-view the reality, the immediacy of bug life. Viewing reality through the lens of Native American tradition seems to be a way to bring hope and perspective to this life of poverty, alcoholism, unemployment and violence. northSun draws on tradition in “be careful” and “ha boy,” which have the markings of older stories, told to entertain and to instruct.

Part 2, “the way and the way things are,” lays out the hard reality, exposing the reader with no filter for the horror, of death and the ugliness of violence. In this same section, northSun includes the most tender feelings of love for children and shows that even babe, the violent “protector,” could show loyalty and vulnerability in “little red riding hood.” Part 2 ends with the realization that those who left the reservation in pursuit of “nice houses, fancy cars pretty clothes” don’t know the traditional ways, and for many of them, those ways seem useless for survival in mainstream U.S.A. (“the way and the way things are”).

Part 3, “silos and sieves,” portrays the impoverished lives of those who left the res for something better, revealing the irony of their search in “the way and the way things are.” Although northSun doesn’t neglect the good parts of life, including the beauty of lovers in a hotel room in the desert, this book resonates with the pain of frustration and despair. In “silos and sieves” a farmer and his wife are stuck in a situation that’s tragic because it’s lifeless, so hopeless. This is not to suggest northSun paints Native Americans as simply victims. Part 4, “99 things to do before you die,” is a testimony to survival, with a spirit intact. Living on government commodity food, with domestic abuse as regular fare, there is still togetherness, community, moments of joy and hope. northSun wields her anger as her strength to survive the harsh realities in “frickin pissed.” From this poem to the end, the book concentrates on perspective: how to concentrate hard on the things that make life seem good, or at least livable.

a snake in her mouth ends with the title piece that began on page one. It's a traditional tale that entertains and instructs. A woman, mistreated and disrespected, turns her power on the community, revealing everyone's secrets and lies. The community fears and dislikes her, precisely because she tells the truth. She keeps people accountable. In a sense, she is the guardian of the community. A man kills this woman, "resolving to silence the old witch forever/she who caused his lifetime of troubles." Of course he has caused his own troubles, but he cannot see this; instead, he kills the woman. northSun seems to suggest that we are responsible for carving out our own lives from the circumstances we encounter. She gives depth and detail to reservation life, revealing the strength it takes to carve out a life on a government lot.

Lisa Bernhagen

The Lesser Blessed. Richard Van Camp. Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

In virtually every generation, in the realm of literary activity, there comes along a book that, by the very nature of its subject matter and place and the sheer exuberance of its utterances reverberant of the place and people depicted, introduces not only a little-known terra firma and people, but sometimes becomes the definer of that era in which it is produced. Not surprisingly, these books are usually the products of younger writers. Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, Jane Austin's novels, the work of the Brontes, Stephen Crane's stories, Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* ushering in the Lost Generation, Kerouac's Beat Generation introduced in *On The Road*, Salinger's Holden Caulfield wandering through *Catcher in the Rye*, the jaded "me"-obsessed teens in Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*, Native American sensibilities in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, and a generation later, Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*—all these books and writers burst forth in such dynamic ways that not only defined their respective eras, shook the accepted literary standards of their day, but expanded and extended the English lan-

guage, while at the same time occasioning the debut of sometimes extraordinary new literary talents.

In my view, Richard Van Camp, a Dogrib Nation writer born in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, Canada, in 1971, is accomplishing virtually the same thing in his first novel, *The Lesser Blessed*, as Hemingway, Kerouac, et al. did in their times. Given the smaller spectrum of Native American literature within (or without, as many Native writers would have it) the larger context of American, British, and Canadian literatures, Van Camp's novel introduces a new terrain and language that nonetheless has roots in the fiction of Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and James Welch, while simultaneously exploring the same subject matter as the contemporary stories of Sherman Alexie, Adrian Louis, and Lorne Simon.

In *The Lesser Blessed*, a Dogrib Indian teenager named Larry Sole narrates his story and thus invites the reader into the little-examined world of contemporary Dogrib (a part of the Dene, or Athabaskan-based, tribal people of the Northwest Territories of Canada). More specifically, Larry embodies a modern Indian teenager's view of his particular tribal culture and of the Indian world in general, acknowledging them and appreciating them along with his fondness for Iron Maiden, Bruce Springsteen, Ozzy Osbourne, occasional pot-smoking, getting "hamburgered" ("Raven" talk—Larry's own take on his tribe's trickster figure's language for "drunk," Larry tells us), and trying to get closer to his own particular Juliet (and, incidentally, the girl's actual name in the novel) whom Larry remembers as "the first girl in grade school to swear at a teacher." A *North of 60* Romeo, Larry is in love with Juliet while she throws her sexual favors to Johnny Beck, Larry's best friend, who is scornfully casual to her attentions.

Van Camp's method of characterization is strikingly vivid. At seventeen, and tall and skinny, Larry describes himself as having "spaghetti arms and daddy longlegs," and at one point he visualizes himself as a Dogrib hunter of an earlier time as he watches Juliet, "seen in his sights as a white caribou, pure, but (whom) he let go out of respect and awe." Larry and his mother, a night school student at Arctic College, live in Fort Simmer, a north-of-the-60th parallel town near the border of Alberta. Jed, his mother's on-again, off-again boy friend, is a traditional Slavey Indian trapper whom Larry identifies as a father-figure, and who promises to take Larry out "on the land" for a season of trapping. Larry is amenable to this, but he is still comfortable in his high-school world of hanging out with Johnny, lusting after Juliet from afar,

trying his best to avoid the numerous school-ground fist-fights, and playing his tape deck “cranked up” with AC/DC, Judas priest, and Iron Maiden.

Slowly, through a number of finely crafted, fragmented flashbacks, the reader learns of Larry’s past, in which his biological father physically and sexually abused him and later died in a cabin fire that Larry himself may have started. Like Welch’s emotionally frozen nameless narrator of *Winter in the Blood*, Larry gradually awakens to love and affection—after he surprisingly (to himself most of all) consummates his sexual desire for Juliet in a brief relationship—and learns to retrust his mother and to give himself fully in a father-son relationship with Jed. *The Lesser Blessed*, incredibly funny and wise-cracking in many places, is nonetheless filled with the genuine ingredients of a well-wrought tragi-comedy.

The Lesser Blessed is also the harbinger of a sophisticated Arctic literature, and of a bold new direction for contemporary Native literature. And while it is perhaps not the first novel to come out of the Canadian Northwest Territories, it is certainly the first work of fiction by a Native writer from that vast region. By all accounts, it is a masterful achievement.

Geary Hobson

Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality. Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, Eds. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1997.

Two-Spirit People represents the joint effort of Native and non-Native scholars and anthropologists to begin a shared discussion of Native gender traditions, both among themselves and with contemporary two-spirit people. According to co-editor Sue-Ellen Jacobs, the book originated in the 1993 conference “Revisiting the ‘North American Berdache’ Empirically and Theoretically,” funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and held in conjunction

with the American Anthropological Association conference in Washington DC. The collection aims to challenge anthropologists' misreadings of Native lives and traditions, reexamine the language surrounding two-spirit identity, retire the erroneous term "berdache" from the literature on two-spirit people, and acknowledge the lives, experiences, and self-definitions of contemporary two-spirit people. The book also differentiates two-spirit identity, which is primarily spiritual and gender-based, from homosexuality and confronts the problems facing two-spirit people now: Native homophobia, the silencing of cultural traditions, and the "whiteness" of gay communities. The writers included, however, do not express a unified voice on the subject; not all, in fact, accept the term "two spirit." This acknowledgement of difference is one of the book's most valuable contributions to studies of Native American gender systems. The overall effect of the collection is that of a conversation which not only challenges previous scholarship but also reflects the diversity found within the two-spirit community.

In the first section of the book, "Rebuilding Anthropological Narratives Concerning Two-Spirit People," anthropologists reexamine the representation of two-spirit people in Western anthropological and popular imaginations. Sue-Ellen Jacobs provides an overview of current issues in the field, including the suppression of traditional two-spirit roles, white domination of the discourse, the exclusion and mislabelling of female two-spirits, Western confusion of gender variety with homosexuality, and the romanticization of historical two-spirits. Jean-Guy A. Goulet follows with an examination of anthropologists' misrepresentations of an account of Northern Athapaskan gender beliefs, while Arnold R. Pilling uses census information to reconstruct the lives and family contexts of two-spirit people in several cultures, as well as their relationships to shamanism. Sabine Lang emphasizes the differences between "same-sex" and "same-gender" relationships as well as the spiritual and occupational aspects of two-spirit identities (104-05), suggesting that the homophobia of white/Christian culture has led to the conflation of two-spirits with homosexuals among Native peoples. Finally, Jason Cromwell examines the "phallogocentric, androcentric, and heterosexually oriented" nature of the literature on two-spirit roles (126), claiming that the figure of the two-spirit has little meaning for female-to-male transgendered people.

The second section of *Two-Spirit People*, "Questions of Terminology," explores the importance of language to two-spirit studies, including the politics of naming and the complications of translating Na-

tive and English terms. Beatrice Medicine (Standing Rock Lakota) cautions against misrepresenting Native language terms and against translating the English term “two-spirit” into Native languages. Wesley Thomas, a Navajo anthropologist, offers an intricate analysis of the terminology, gender system, and sexual relationship structures surrounding *nadleeh* lives and identities. His work is followed by Carolyn Eppler’s examination of the difficulty of defining *nadleehi* in Western terms and the importance of seeing them first as human beings living in the context of “interconnection” (184). Terry Tafoya (Taos/Warm Springs) discusses the power of language for suppression and self-empowerment, arguing that attempts to define cultural patterns necessarily require that the context of those patterns be overlooked.

Perhaps the most unique contributions of the collection, however, are made in the third and fifth sections of the book, where two-spirit-identified people reflect on their experiences and express their concerns and desires; in this way, the book offers a much-needed followup to *Living the Spirit*, the Gay American Indians anthology published in 1988. In Part Three, “Two-Spirit as a Lived Experience: Life Stories,” Beverly Little Thunder (Standing Rock Lakota) discusses the importance of children to two-spirits, homophobia among the Lakota community, the non-Native gay community’s tendency to romanticize two spirits, and the need for two-spirit people to create their own language. Michael Red Earth (Sisseton Dakota), Anguksuar [Richard LaFortune] (Yup’ik), Carrie H. House (Navajo/Oneida), and Doyle V. Robertson (Sisseton/Wahpeton Dakota) write of both the challenges and joys of being different: the rejection and acceptance they have encountered within their Native communities, their development and self-acceptance as two spirits, their attempts to bridge their Native and non-Native heritages, and their desires to be heard as unique voices. Based on her own experience, for example, Little Thunder rejects claims by “white male academics” that “modern *winkte* still [have] status in our communities” (209). Red Earth, writing as a contemporary *winkte*, claims that the fact that “my family treated me with respect and expected excellence was not an accident or an isolated phenomenon,” but rather a continuation of older cultural traditions surrounding two-spirit people (215). Contributions to this section do not describe any common two-spirit experience; nor do they always agree with each other or with other views expressed in the book. This emphasis on the diversity of experience shatters the romantic idea of the two-spirit held by many

non-Native people and initiates a discussion of the concerns of two-spirits today.

Following Part Four, in which scholars and two-spirits further examine issues raised in earlier sections, Part Five, “Dealing with Homophobia,” provides a transcript of a talking circle held at the end of a second conference on two-spirits in Chicago in 1994. Participants discuss their strategies for fighting homophobia, heterosexism, and racism, both within and outside of Native communities. Issues include benefits for same-sex partners, transgenderphobia, internalized gender assumptions, education, stereotypes, being out, family relations, and political activism. The talking circle shifts the book’s focus from scholarly debate to the decisions and choices two spirits make, and will continue to make, in their daily lives. It is, finally, this combination of personal and academic, analysis and testimonial, theory and lived experience that gives *Two-Spirit People* its multidimensional coverage and depth. The book should be a tremendous resource for two-spirit people and their colleagues, friends, and supporters.

Tara Prince-Hughes

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