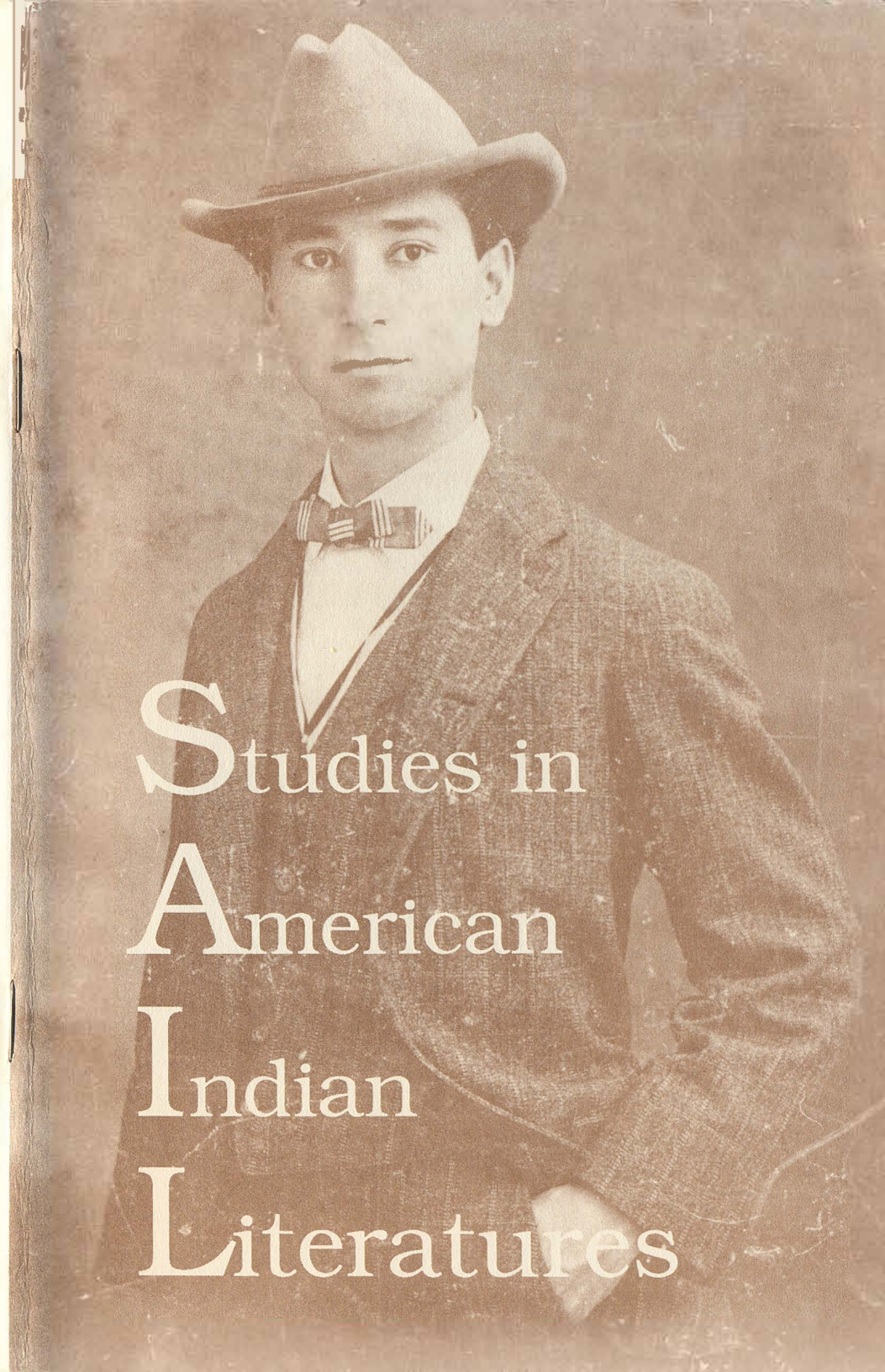




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ESTOY-EH-MUUT AND THE MORPHOLOGISTS

By T.C.S. Langen

The more we look at "story" (a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence), says E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, and

the more we disentangle it from the finer growths it supports, the less we shall find to admire It is immensely old — goes back to neolithic times, perhaps to paleolithic. Neanderthal man listened to stories, if one may judge by the shape of his skull. The primitive audience was an audience of shock-heads, gaping round the campfire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or the woolly rhinoceros, and only kept awake by suspense (45-46).

This campfire burns on into the present day, but its flames now illuminate the faces of a group of scholars of folktale, among whom we recognize Vladimir Propp and Alan Dundes. Why, we wonder, have they chosen to limit their interest in narrative to a description of "story"?

In part it may be because in order to amass the data they need to cover their vast field of inquiry, they have had to work mainly with printed sources, rather than with the actual objects of their study — i.e., performances. At any rate, as data they cite transcriptions of the words of performances, literary recastings of remembered content, and even summaries of content (see, e.g., the texts from which Dundes is willing to attempt a description of North American Indian folktale in Dundes 1964). Any student of oral tradition forced to work exclusively with written-down stories may profitably keep in mind Leslie Silko's description of how her Aunt Susie used to tell the story about the little girl who ran away:

Aunt Susie always spoke the words of the mother
to her daughter
with great tenderness, with great feeling
as if Aunt Susie herself were the mother
. . . I remember there was something mournful
in her voice too as she repeated the words of the
old man
something in her voice that implied the tragedy to
come.

But when Aunt Susie came to the place
where the little girl's clothes turned into
butterflies
then her voice would change and I could hear the
excitement and wonder
and the story wasn't sad any longer. (15)

It is clear that vital aspects of characterization, point of view, foreshadowing and theme are carried in the sound of Aunt Susie's voice and would none of them find their way onto a printed page. Perhaps because these aspects of tale-telling have been conveyed by ephemeral media such as sound and gesture, students of tale-transmission have tended to assume that while the individual narrator might add colorful effects ("humor," "mimicry," "owl-eyes"), the event-sequence of a tale is not so subject to manipulation.

Most of the commentators on folktale who, like Propp, Dundes (1964) and Greimas, have employed linguistic models have been searching for invariant elements, the "recurrent constants" (Propp 20) without whose identification it seems to them impossible to make a scientifically valid comparison of tales (Dundes 1962:96-97). To them, the event-sequence, perceived rightly or wrongly as less controlled by individual storytellers, must have seemed a truer touchstone of story than any other component. But what is constant, i.e., the basis on which a comparison is made, is a matter of the choice of the person making the comparison. It is quite possible to compare a group of stories that share the same shape — that are, for example, made up of three groups of pattern-episodes, each group joined to the next by a concentric figure (a chiasmic arrangement of elements) that overlaps the end of the first group and the beginning of the next: in this case, the constant would be shape, while event-sequence would be the variable.

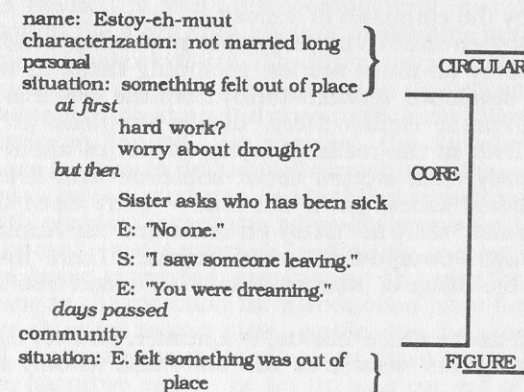
In part, too, the concentration of Propp and Dundes on event-sequence is a laudable response to an earlier layer of critical opinion that held folktale plots to be made up of free-floating elements thrown together haphazardly. Propp defines as the goal of his activities the construction of a morphology of tales, a "description of the tale [and by "tale," he means only the specific type that he calls the "wondertale," corresponding to Aarne-index numbers 300-749] according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole" (18). Dundes also calls his structural study (1964) a "Morphology," though he extends Propp's analytic method to all North American Indian tales, evidently willing to assume that they are all wondertales.

Both Propp and Dundes define as "component parts" only event-sequence elements, which Propp calls "functions" ("acts of a character, defined from the point of view of . . . significance for the course of the action" [21]) and Dundes, "motifemes" (1962: 101); both define "relationship" only as location in an event-sequence. Propp identifies 31 functions, not all of which need be present in any one tale but those that are present occurring in a fixed order and some invariably occurring as pairs (22, 64). The existence of such pairs leads Propp to comment, "It is always

possible to define a function according to its consequences" (67) and so to raise the level of his discussion from what Forster terms "story" (event-sequence) to what he terms "plot" (event-sequence plus causality [130]). Dundes conducts his discussion in terms of a small number of nuclear motifeme-sequences (61-78). Both of these strategies are successful in refuting the accusations of haphazardness made against folk stories, but there are some internal problems arising out of the definition of function and motifeme.

What these problems are becomes clearer when we turn our attention to the introductory sections of stories, parts of narrative that lie outside of the sequence of functions. The introduction to a story introduces characters and/or names them and/or tells when and where they live and/or sketches in the initial situation. "Although this situation is not a function," says Propp, "it is nevertheless an important morphological element" (25). A catalogue of functions, then, is an incomplete description of a folktale, and the morphologist's hopes of completing a description whose units of comparison would be all of one kind (Dundes 1962:96) go unrealized. In addition to "initial situations," Propp identifies another element as extra-functional: "connectives" — bridging devices, which may include dialogue, motifs or actions involving travel or transportation (155). Additional confusion arises when some items, such as "Lack," are considered at times as the subcategory of a function, and at other times as part of the initial situation and not a function.

Sometimes it is difficult to tell where "situation" (or summary) ends and "action" (or scene) begins. But if we are dealing with a well-told tale, the identification of the formal arrangement of its beginning may help us to perceive what is meant to be introductory. Here is an outline of the beginning of "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs" (Silko 140-154), a retelling by Leslie Marmon Silko of the story as she heard it as a child:



(dizzy, weak, no dreams)
corn plants shriveling
worms devour bean plants

CAP

The label "circular figure" in the margin of the outline refers to a structure of verbal repetition whose elements surround a core. In this case, the "circumference" of the figure consists of repeated statements that Estoy-eh-muut felt that something was out of place. The "core" of a circular figure adds information that makes the second circumferential element more or differently significant than the first. In this case, the core has been analyzed as consisting of a statement about Estoy-eh-muut's understanding of the situation and an illustration of his sister's suspicions, the two elements framed and bound together by references to time. The figure closes with a "cap," a restatement of some item in the core. In this case, by reiterating the connection between Estoy-eh-muut's personal malaise and the suffering of the crops, the cap accomplishes a tacit rejection of the sister's interpretation of events as only intramarital in significance. Because the introduction, both in its figuration and in its content, shows a progress from setting to theme as Estoy-eh-muut identifies his personal situation with the plight of his crops, we may say that the task of the introduction is that of characterization.

Each time it occurs, the statement that Estoy-eh-muut felt something was out of place is followed by details about his private symptoms of unease and a reference to the state of his crops: thus, one might consider this reiteration at the conceptual level to be part of the circumference of the circular figure, along with the verbal repetition. In this analysis, the core would be seen as consisting only of the exchange between Estoy-eh-muut and his sister. Because of what "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs" seems to be saying about the figure of the farmer, however, we have preferred to consider the core as presenting Estoy-eh-muut and his sister in a dialectical relationship that is commented on by the emphasis of the cap.¹

The name Estoy-eh-muut connects this particular rendition with all other Estoy-eh-muut stories, including those in which his character is developed very differently from the way it is here (cf. "Cottonwood Part 2: Buffalo Story," also in *Storyteller* [67 ff.]). Estoy-eh-muut lives in the realm of myth, so stories about him resound differently from stories about someone who lives, or lived in remembered times, down the road -- even when those stories are the "same" story as "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs," as is the Hopi "Powaq-wuuti," which begins, "There lived a long time ago in the village of Keuchaptuvela . . . a man who was a good farmer."

Estoy-eh-muut, as his name tells us, is a hunter, and yet the beginning of the *Storyteller* version of this story tells us only about

the farmer sees all his rabbits roasted and dried, hung up in a room in his house, and begins to wonder why he never gets any for dinner. Most versions that use the "he-brought-game-but-his-wife-gave-him-only-mush" beginning identify the Estoy-eh-muut character as a hunter and do not mention his farming. (In one version from Cochiti [Cochiti 90-91], the game animals advise and protect the husband, the meeting in a cave in this story being a meeting between animals and hunter, and the witch-meeting being only alluded to.) "Powaq-wuuti" and the other stories with similar introductions are stories of intramarital revenge (cf. the versions by San Juan storytellers 1 and 2 and Santa Clara storyteller 3 in Tewa 1926: 61-69).

In 1920, there was transcribed a version (Keres part 1: 130-140) told by Ko't , a storyteller from Laguna, that begins this way: "Long ago -- (audience replies "Eh") -- Acoma. Long ago lived Arrow-Youth. The Chief's daughter was his wife. His wife was a witch. All night she did not lie down for a long time. Then Arrow-Youth said, 'I wonder why does not Yellow-Woman lie down here at night . . .'" In the introduction to Ko't's story, Estoy-eh-muut is neither a hunter nor a farmer, but a mere mortal husband matching wits with a ruthless witch-wife.² In stories that begin like this, setting up a contest, the husband often discovers that his wife is a witch by disobeying her instructions and thus seeing something he should not (usually a baby boiling in a stew pot). He knows what his wife is before he ever follows her to the witch-meeting: the wife is from the first instant defined as the enemy, and the husband's personality is developed only by this contrast, at least in the introduction (cf. -- with caution because of extensive undocumented adaptation -- Lummis 194-202 and Gunn 195-203).

Although the Ko't , Hopi and *Storyteller* versions reflect each other motivationally and even verbally, they are very different. The bitterness of the intramarital conflict in "Powaq-wuuti" restricts its resonance (for an opposing view, see Jaskoski 18), even though the story does attempt to examine some deeply held Hopi values (Jaskoski 2-10). The Ko't story, with its emphasis on the husband's cunning and courage in dealing with his enemies, remains a witch story and does not attempt "Powaq-wuuti" 's meditation on context. By contrast, the *Storyteller* version goes to great lengths to delineate Estoy-eh-muut's essential wholeness: he is a nurturer, so identified with growth that he presents with physical symptoms when his crops are in trouble; he is an innocent, newly married, continuing to trust his wife even after his sister expresses suspicions. In order for this story to keep going in the direction its introduction plots for it (in order for Estoy-eh-muut to carry the significance the storyteller means him to), the truth about his wife must dawn on the husband slowly, so the narrative cannot be set up as a contest of wits; and he must

remain a good person even if he has to kill his wife, so the story cannot be a tale of intramarital revenge.

In most versions of the story, the first scene (i.e., dramatization of events involving direct speech) occurs between husband and wife and involves either accusation (San Juan storyteller¹) or deception ("Powaq-wuuti," Ko-T¹²). It is this scene that leads directly to the husband's deciding to pretend to be asleep. In the *Storyteller* version, this first scene with dialogue takes place between Estoy-eh-muut and his sister and serves the principal purpose of the introduction, which is characterization, not "function"-management. The deceitful conversation between husband and wife takes place just after the close of the circular figure and is reported in summary narration. The result of the conversation is Estoy-eh-muut's decision to go to Grandmother Spider for advice and not directly a decision to pretend to be asleep. His blameless character, to whose establishment the entire introduction — longer than the introductions of all the other versions that start by telling about the husband and wife — is devoted, is the conduit via which the storyteller expands the significance of the story into a meditation on individual and community.

Propp is right: initial situations do have morphological significance. Like functions, they do entail consequences. It is not just the way the initial situations are presented that controls what comes next: the choices made among certain available elements in the "version stock" (in the story we are considering here, for example, the selection among "husband," "farmer," and "hunter") seem to bring along with them certain kinds of developments.

In terms of a morphology, the bivalence of an item like Lack, which can be either a function or a situation, is a weakness; but such multivalence is a basic characteristic of the very "folktale" that the morphology has been constructed to describe. This consideration brings us to confront a weakness in our own position: we have been using the words "story" and "folktale" alternately about specific renditions and about the collection of renditions that constitutes the stock from which all versions derive. Let us now take care to call the collection "the collection." Each version is a realization of possibilities provided by the collection; any version may add to the collection; no one version is an isolate, either for the storyteller or the audience, but resounds against the knowledge of the collection held by each person present at the performance; no storyteller ever tells the whole collection or ever knows the whole collection, but she always knows more than she tells in any one performance or perhaps in all the performances she ever gives; no person's knowledge of the collection is the same as any other person's. The collection, then, is protean in the ways in which it is apprehended.

It is also protean by constituency. It includes incidents, themes, plots, event-sequences, motifs, characters, locations,

It is also protean by constituency. It includes incidents, themes, plots, event-sequences, motifs, characters, locations, names — all different kinds of things. And the constituents themselves are constantly switching categories: what is a motif with thematic freight in one version — say, a skeleton — may be part of the setting in another. It may be objected at this point that we are confusing components with component-management. This is the point: if we want to talk meaningfully about narrative, we must not omit the art.

There are, in fact, traditions of narrative that have foregrounded the concept of component-management's preeminence over component-catalogue. The Mende of West Africa have a genre of competitively told tale, the object being to make each realization of a particular collection as different from its predecessor as possible. The moral conveyed in one performance is controverted in the next; the hero of one is the villain of the next; the house in which the turning point of one narrative is enacted is something passed by on a journey in the next — and so on (Cosentino).

Like a catalogue of functions, the collection includes constituents in multiples, pairs and isolates. Some constellations are associated structurally (in the Lévi-Strauss sense), manifesting the directions of complication and resolution, and they are mostly pairs — owl eyes and human eyes; wilted corn plants and pinon trees that grow in four days; sunny fields and dark caves; underground meetingplaces and ledges high on a cliff; we see both constituents of these pairs in single versions.

Some pairs present thematic alternatives — e.g., skeletons and ears of corn — and we see only one of the pair in any single version. And some constellations seem to consist only of multiples that may have no other relation than that of duplicating each other — owls and cats; animal skins, discs, bows, bowls of water — and we see sometimes one, sometimes several of these, in any single version.

This category of multiples and duplicates is especially interesting, for when only one of the constellation appears in a version, it may or may not be thematically charged; and when more than one appears in a story, it may be that one is charged and one is not.

The constellation discs, skins, bows, bowls of water is made up of items used by witches to turn themselves into whatever they want to be. Sometimes they go under a bow to achieve transformation. Sometimes that bow is a rainbow (e.g., with caution, Lummis; Gunn), which opens up the possibility of distinguishing it from the hunter's bow or of identifying it as a sacred item being profaned, not unlike the ear of corn. In "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs" it is a cottonwood bow, which relates it not only to the "Cottonwood" stories about Estoy-eh-muut and Kochininako earlier in *Storyteller* (63-76), but also, via the themes of hunting

and adultery dealt with there, to Magpie, the patron of hunters, who lives in a cottonwood tree (see "Magpie and the Corn Mothers" [Taos 18-20], and for a direct tie-in with the collection we are discussing here, the witch story involving Magpie and incorporating material from "Magpie and the Corn Mothers" [Taos 36-39]).

A pair of constituents from this constellation occurs in the version by Santa Clara storyteller 3 (Tewa 66-69): The witches first put on an animal skin and then jump over a bowl of water in which is the heart of someone a would-be witch has loved. This pair is a mere duplicate, since its constituents only repeat and do not enrich each other; but it shows how one motif (the hearts of loved ones) may be used for two purposes (task of the witch-initiate, means of every witch's transformation) and illustrates the possibility that duplication is one step in the process of "loading" a thematically charged motif. "Powaq-wuuti" also has a duplicate pair here: people jump over an altar in order to achieve transformation; the hearts of loved ones are brought, and the bowls of water are there, but the hearts are not put into the bowls. Instead, the bowls are used for washing hair: the kind of power one desires determines the bowl one chooses to wash in. The duplicate pair is altar and bowls; although the hearts usually associated with the bowls at this point in the story are present in the scene, that association is not pursued by the storyteller, who instead borrows from outside the collection (as far as we know) the significance that bowls and head-washing have in Hopi custom. The existence of multiples, like the existence of duplicates, may be evidence of the process by which the collection is enriched by the loading of items already present in it and by the accepting of new items as duplicates of old.

The constellation of thematic alternates also provides a way of understanding more about collection-dynamics. The witch wife puts into her husband's bed a surrogate, either a skeleton or an ear of corn (or two) to keep him from noticing her absence. We associate skeletons with death and corn with life, and it is true that no version among those consulted for this paper uses both skeletons and corn. Thus, we may be tempted to associate skeletons with hunters and corn with the Corn Mother and her daughter kochininako, so that in versions that identify the husband as a hunter we might expect to see the wife putting a skeleton in the bed, while in versions that identify him as a farmer we might expect to see the wife using corn. While this kind of consistency is found in "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs" and in the version told by San Juan storyteller 1 (Tewa 61-64), it is not demonstrated in all of the versions consulted (e.g., San Juan storyteller 2, who learned her version from her uncle, San Juan storyteller 1, and who has the wife of a hunter put corn in the bed [Tewa 64-66]). Thus, we wonder whether we can adduce as evidence that

the Hopi storyteller of "Powaq-wuuti" really considers the husband a hunter, not a farmer, the fact that the wife in the story puts a skeleton in the bed.

The influence of the skeleton may extend forward through the story, not just reflect back toward the beginning. In the version of San Juan storyteller 1, what the witches do is to kill people and then bring them back to life. The skeleton in this version offers to help the husband if the husband agrees to come back and bury it. The husband then goes to the witch-meeting, rescues the brought-to-life victim, and returns to bury the skeleton, in each action neatly reversing the witches' wrongful deeds. In "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs," what the witches do (i.e., blight crops) is also, but more abstractly, related to what is put into the husband's bed (perverted corn).

Some versions seem to be permeated by the hunter/farmer contrast, while in others it is just an unrealized possibility. It needs to be said, however, that in pueblo ceremonial life and literary tradition the hunter/farmer distinction is not a dichotomy and that contrast, therefore, is not only the only possible conceptualization of this relationship. Ko-t^{us}, the storyteller from Laguna, tells us that in the fields before planting an offering is made not only of seeds and bread, but also of meat; and that corn meal is offered by hunters to the game they hunt (Keres pt. 1:204-205). Kochininako, who in one way of thinking is yellow corn, is a hunter in some stories (cf. Silko 82-85). Lastly, anyone who is thinking about corn and game needs to keep in mind the "Cottonwood" stories (Silko 63-76), in which the concepts are fused.

The presence in consciousness of the collection means not only that storytellers are free to reduplicate and to add things, but also that they may leave things out or reduce their inclusion to an allusion. In the version by Santa Clara storyteller 3 (Tewa 66-69), Olivella Flower boy brings his wife a deer every day, but gets only mush to eat. The implication is that she is taking the deer to her witch friends. The witches, deciding to kill Olivella Flower boy, come after him in the guise of a mountain lion and two eagles, but he kills them instead. He takes their carcasses to the witch-kiva and throws them inside, saying "I have brought a deer." This speech may be understood as a reference to his deer misappropriated for witch-use earlier, but if that is all it is, it does not make the best of sense, or it does not make sense in the best way. Perhaps something else is going on here as well. In a version from Tesuque (Tewa 70), the witches say about Olivella Flower (he is having his head washed by his wife at the time), "This is our deer. We will eat him up." A witch comes after him in the shape of a deer. Olivella Flower kills the deer and takes it to the witch-kiva, saying "There is your deer." In a version from Taos (Taos 36-39), the dead person brought to life by the witches

becomes a deer, who is then killed and eaten. The statement "I have brought a deer" in the Santa Clara version is only partially intelligible without reference to versions that deal with the deer-victim.

It is the collection, then, that any description of the genus "folktale" needs to be able to deal with. And yet we may wonder whether the collection is limited, like the "folktale," to versions and analogues. If we find owl-eyes in a story, but without husband and wife, without a witch-meeting, without any skeletons or ears of corn, is that story part of the collection? If we find in yesterday's newspaper an account of a landlady who stashes her eyes in a saucer and flies off (cf. Simmons 54-68), is that part of the collection? What about the story of a woman whose children all die because her husband is a witch and goes out at night, leaving a Corn Mother in the bed (Cochiti 92-95)? Are we less likely to accept that story as part of the collection when we learn that the witch story is only its first episode? Are we more likely to accept it when we learn that this woman's surviving son is Arrowboy (Estoy-eh-muut)? And what about a story called "Arrowboy and the Eagle Girls" or any story about Arrowboy? What about "Magpie and the Corn Mothers," from which a journey itinerary is borrowed into Magpie's witch-wife version?

What does it mean that in posing these questions, we call some items "versions" and some, "stories"? And why is it so difficult to come up with a name for the collection we have been discussing? Let us bring these struggles to an end for the time being by taking rest in expert opinion:

I know Aunt Susie and Aunt Alice would tell me stories they had told me before but with changes in details or descriptions. The story was the important thing and little changes here and there were really part of the story. There were even stories about the different versions of stories and how they imagined these differing versions came to be.

I've heard tellers begin "The way I heard it was" and then proceed with another story purportedly a version of a story just told but the story they would tell was a wholly separate story, a new story with an integrity of its own, an off-spring, a part of the continuing which storytelling must be (Silko 227).

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NOTE

1. The terms "circular figure," "core" and "cap" were developed to describe features of Lushootseed (Puget Salish) oral narrative (see, e.g., Langen 1988a and 1988b), and it is interesting to find such features in a narrative that is in some part a literary production.

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WE ARE THE INBETWEENS

An Interview with Mary Tallmountain

by Joseph W. Bruchac III

The interview with Mary Tallmountain took place in the house she shared with several other women in the Mission District of San Francisco. The house was small, plainly furnished, and we sat at a kitchen table, just off a hall where photos of her Koyukon relatives taken decades ago hung on the walls. Born in 1918, she only came to writing in her later years, thanks in part to encouragement by Paula Gunn Allen, Wendy Rose, and other American Indian women who formed a sort of informal support group in the Bay area. Though her ancestry is a mix of Scots, Irish, Russian and Koyukon, Mary Tallmountain's face, framed by thick black hair cut short, is most like that of the Koyukon relatives who look out from the pictures in her hallway.

JB: "The Figure in Clay" is not only the first poem in your collection, *There is no Word for Goodbye*, it's also the subject of the cover illustration. What does the poem say for you? What is so significant about it?

Tallmountain: I wrote it when I was on my first trip back to Nulato, my birthplace and the home of the Koyukon people in Alaska. It was a breakthrough to begin searching for my inner self. I had been sort of in a doldrum most of my life from childhood traumas, and there was quite a long period where I did nothing creatively. I went through a sort of dark night, you might say. Then I went to Alaska and found my people. This poem has nothing to do with what I found out about them; it is more what I found out about myself. I had thought for many years that if I got to my people everything was going to be fine. And when I did get there I discovered that I could go on and find out who I was. Really.

JB: You had been adopted into a white family?

Tallmountain: Yes. I was adopted by the doctor who was treating my mother, who was a tubercular person. She was going to die with TB. She did die of it, afterward. So, I was adopted by the doctor and his wife and left the village when I was six. I came outside and was unable to relate to kids of my age. I was rebellious and had lots of trouble. So they took me back up to Alaska and my adoptive father got another post as a doctor on the Aleutians. We stayed in Alaska until I was twelve and then we came

out. By that time I was able to relate a little better.

JB: When did you get back to Alaska again?

Tallmountain: Fifty years later. (laughs)

JB: What were you writing in those years before you went back to Alaska?

Tallmountain: Very little. I began to publish poems when I was about fifty-five in a little press here in San Francisco called The Friars Press, but that was all that I did. I was very busy in a career as a public steno, for one thing. I had my own business as a public steno for some time and then worked in the law field as a secretary. I was awfully busy all that time. I was pushing away my roots. I wasn't *going* to find out what was happening there and what it had to do with me. It was Paula Gunn Allen who helped me discover what I really wanted to do. That was in '77.

JB: Your story seems to me to be the story of a number of people of the generation before mine. They were cut off from their Indian roots creatively and spiritually. Yet, somehow, they have managed to survive and remake that connection later in life. What was it that you kept in yourself which made that possible?

Tallmountain: There was a terrific nostalgia for my brothers and my mother and my father. There was a terrific anger with my father. But my mother — I was so hurt to think that she could do that, that she could allow me to go. A child is hurt very easily in that respect, I guess. Although I knew I was adopted, nothing could ever take the place of my own brothers and my own parents. So, everything I wrote in the stumbling way that I had in that time was either about my brothers or my mother or the village, Nulato.

JB: What things do you remember from that childhood?

Tallmountain: Oh, I remember the landscape almost to a stick and stone. I have one particularly vivid memory of a masculine person holding me and seeing two eyes that were blue and feeling rough cloth against my face and a curtain blowing inward. I found out, after I found my father, that it was he. He told me this without my bringing it on or triggering it in any way. He told me that my mother had put me in his arms a few days after I was born and that this had just happened exactly as I remembered.

JB: I noticed a photograph in the hallway. It shows your mother and your grandmother, your two aunts and your brother. Those

images of family have a special meaning, don't they?

Tallmountain: They do. Very much. There is a deep sorrow about those people because they lived in such a terrible time with the changing of cultures. Now, this is what I've put together in my own mind since I've grown up and become more philosophical about my mother's TB, her having to die, about her having to work so hard that they worked in old parkas. They had maybe one new parka put aside for stick dances and things like that. Sometimes the food was very hard to come by because they lived in a sub-arctic community and they didn't have anything. They were probably the poorest of all the indigenous peoples in this country.

JB: That makes me think of the first poem of yours I ever saw, "Good Grease."

Tallmountain: Oh, yes! That was a sort of celebration time when they had food. They went out and got the caribou. Yes, grease is one of the paramount things in my life as far as food is concerned. I feel all of the Northern-ness in me when I sit down to a big roast that has grease on it. It goes right back to the bottom of my skull.

JB: Some people might be repelled by the image in that poem of wild meat and grease. Were you conscious of that when you wrote it?

Tallmountain: Oh, of course I was! I can see the brown hands covered with grease and I've never been repelled. I'm not repelled by anything that has to do with the Indian person.

JB: Another of your poems is called "Indian Blood." In it you describe being on a stage dressed in traditional garb while you are surrounded by children pointing at you and asking questions. How did that poem come about?

Tallmountain: I was thinking about my introduction to the kids who were my same age group in the grammar school I was put into when we came down for that brief time before we went back to Alaska. I really was placed on the stage and recall being terribly hurt and almost stricken dumb by seeing all those white faces out there and knowing that I was an *object* to them. I had been a person before that. I had been sort of a dancing, laughing child and a great deal of fear and anger started then. It's taken years to heal.

JB: In the poem you use a number of words, "beendaaga" for mo-

cassins, "goh" for rabbit, "daghoodda-aak" for caribou parka. What led you to use those words as opposed to English?

Tallmountain: I'm half Anglo. Probably three-fourths Anglo if you count the Russian. Grandpa was Russian and my grandma was Indian. That leaves me with a quarter of each and it doesn't seem strange to me to mix the two things. And I like the look of the words. I go to a great deal of trouble getting them. I have a linguist friend at the University of Alaska who translates the Koyukon dialect, Eliza Jones. She helps me with those things.

JB: As a person of mixed ancestry, how do you balance those parts in your writing?

Tallmountain: As a writer? I don't know. You have to ask my "manager." (gestures over her shoulder towards the blank wall) He's back there or she's back there. They're back there. I've got those people. I see them out of the corner of my eye now and then. I don't quite know what to say to them, nor what language to say it in. But I think that the way I've been doing it, writing poems with Athabascan/Koyukon words in them, I think for me that's effective, for now. It satisfies something I'm doing, something that I have here and my other life, that life that is not "writer" altogether, though "writer" is probably paramount here. Everything is scenario to me, everything is impression, everything is radar. It's just getting the whole scene, getting everything and that other part of life. I realize I'm part Indian and look more Indian than anything else, though I'm not so horribly proud of it that I'm going to stick my nose up at people. I'm not ashamed of it at all, either. And I don't get really angry anymore. I suppose that was all spent when I was young. So, when people ask me to talk about Indian things — last night I went to a dinner over at Berkeley and some people wanted me to talk about Indian art and so forth — I enjoy that. I never feel that it doesn't belong in these parts of my life. It belongs everywhere. It's me. Just like the Scots. I write things about my Scottish grandmother, about my Daddy.

JB: What did you see when you went back to Alaska for the first time in 1976?

Tallmountain: I went directly to Anchorage from here. My first cousin was with me and he was able to tell me things. We then went to Galena, a little town up the river from Nulato. We took a bush plane down the river and I got to see that Yukon. That Yukon is — words fail me. I just can't talk about it at all, right now. I'm sure that to my people it was the source of a spirit mother, a great religious thing to them. I seem to deal with it in that way,

too, with utmost respect for its beauty and its starkness. I just feel very humble toward the river. That was the first thing I saw that really affected me so. It's the most important thing I always remember — that river, being on that river. It has tremendous power.

JB: What else affected you?

Tallmountain: A graveyard where all the elders were buried. That's a big thing with the people, too. Up and down the river, they're famous for the decoration of graveyards. In the spring time they paint everything, paint the picket fences and the crosses. They go make a regular feast day out of it when they go out and take care of the graveyards. They are close to them. Death and life together — that's how they live.

JB: The attitude towards death and life in your writing and in that of most American Indian writers seems quite different from what you find in the majority culture. What is that difference and why is it there?

Tallmountain: Well, it's hard for me to say since I wasn't raised with my people. I can only say that it comes down through the genes. That's part of that mystery I spoke of. I really don't know how it got to me, but I'm sure that I feel about death and life entirely differently than other people. Death doesn't repel me as it does a lot of people, lots of Anglos that I know. I took care of my father after I found him. He had cancer and I took care of him right up to his very death. In fact, he and I went to see the mortician about the arrangements. Actually, these things surprise me no end when I look back on what I did. I sewed a shroud for him and I made an Indian bundle of things and put them in the pocket of the shroud. I also put an Anglo rosary in there with him and I washed his body and prepared him after his death. The mortician had become a very close friend of ours by the time that Dad died. Dad was just as dear to me always, whether he was sick or dying or dead — whatever. And he's as close to me now as he ever was in those couple of years that I had him.

JB: I find in contemporary American writing a tendency to turn inward, away from the landscape around us. Yet American Indian authors tend to turn to the natural world.

Tallmountain: I think so, yes. I think Indian people have to be with the land. You *must* be with the land. I have to go out there on that porch all the time and see what's happening in the sky and see what it feels like where the moisture is and everything about that. Then, when I'm writing, I think there is very little that

I write about which doesn't have something in it about nature. Because it is part of us. It's just part of us, that's all. I was born with the most beautiful land in the world. It's really stern and harsh, yes, but something else, a terrifically spiritual land, to me. I have a lot of spirituality in my nature and that was always nourished, I think, by that land. Even just knowing it was there in the distance, somewhere. To me, the universe is not so terribly large, anyhow. You can almost reach out and touch Alaska.

JB: Even here in San Francisco? There's no paradox about being Indian and living in the city?

Tallmountain: No, not at all. I think you could be that wherever you were. If you were on the moon you would still be what you were here. At least, I would be. Now I can't say for my neighbors what they would be. But the reason commercial writers write the way they do is because they have always lived in a commercial situation. There, the norm is material. With us, probably, the more important norm is the spiritual. All the Indians I know are terrifically spiritual. We understand each other when we speak of the spirits or we speak of something other-worldly happening. Nobody is excited, nobody gets teed off about anything like that, because it's true. I'm not surprised.

JB: There are a number of books now by non-Indian or questionably Indian writers about supposedly spiritual matters relating to American Indians, yet those books do not ring true to me. Why is there this sort of fascination and lack of understanding at the same time?

Tallmountain: I just don't know. I think some writers get some stereotypical things in their minds when they go to write or when they fancy they're going to do a piece of writing. I can't say I've had the most tremendous literary training in the world, but I have taste and I know what is good and what's junk. I mean, really, some people!

JB: Many people have been taken with the Carlos Castaneda books. Some medicine people tell me that the things described are not necessarily untrue, but they are simply things you really don't have to think that much about. You take it for granted. That sort of spiritual world is part of everyday life.

Tallmountain: Yes, that world. Of course all the writers who discuss that world state that all the aboriginal peoples have it because they don't have any interference. There is no static. They are able to keep their sights on this bright world. That seems to be magic, but I can understand why nobody is sur-

prised among Indians when you say that someone went under the river. Yes, if he was of the medicine men he could go under the river and live. The Eskimo have their shamans and shamanesses. Not so many shamanesses as shamans, but the patterns are the same throughout. Even from us in Alaska down to Tierra del Fuego the medicine men go through the same rituals and so they're all connected.

This is from an Eskimo legend. This Eskimo father was out in a rowboat with his daughter one day and he pushed her over the side. The daughter clung to the side of the boat and the father cut the fingers off. They became seals and the daughter flew down to the bottom of the ocean where she became Sea Mother. So this little poem, these few lines, are from that legend.

Old Man of all oceans
Loved Nuliajuk
Dragged her under the sea
Wrapped himself in her storm-black hair
Named her Sea Mother

JB: What's the importance of that legend for you?

Tallmountain: For me, it has meaning as far as the beliefs in shamanism and medicine men. I've written a chapter in my novel-in-progress called "The Medicine Man — Niguudzaagha." I tell how he was initiated into shamanhood. He was one of the shamans who was not born one but became one as time went on. There are lots of legends similar to this one about the woman under the sea and the woman who, in many beliefs, is called The Goddess. The legend of Nuliajuk is just one of the manifestations, I think.

JB: Women are very central, aren't they?

Tallmountain: I think that the Koyukon women and most Athabaskan women, in most Athabaskan tribes or bands, manage things behind the scenes. I think they operate everything and the men are really the figureheads. When I visit the people up there, I see that the power is usually held in the hands of a very few strong women. In my village particularly.

JB: Do you feel your work is saying something to Alaskan native people?

Tallmountain: Oh, Yes! I'd say that I'm telling them that they can also write. That they have this marvellous land. They can go out in this land and talk about it, let people know. This is what I've been doing ever since I could talk — telling people what Alaska is like and trying to destroy the stereotypes. Whenever I go up

there I tell them they can write, too.

JB: Your poem "The Last Wolf" is about the consequences of not hearing the lessons, isn't it?

Tallmountain: That poem was really a spiritual experience I had when I was in the hospital at one time. I just received that in the night and wrote it in the dark. When I was wakened in the morning it was there and it's been published everywhere just as it is. I never wrote it, really. It was written by some spirit person. Well, yes, it's mine, too. It's what I think. It's about the destruction of the civilization we know and possibly the rebuilding in a better way. That is one possibility. Then there is the loss of my people because of the loss of their language, that's another part.

JB: Paula Gunn Allen told me she was proud of her gray hairs. She feels good about having passed into a period of her life which might be regarded as rather unhappy by non-Indian women. There's a difference there, too, isn't there, in attitudes towards aging?

Tallmountain: There sure is. I'm not surprised Paula has that feeling about her gray hair because I had the same thing. It was fairly early, but I didn't go getting all excited like Anglo women do about how I look. I don't think I'm very handsome or very pretty, but I have got something that people like, you know.

JB: What do you see when you think of your grandmother?

Tallmountain: Have you ever seen an Indian woman sit on the earth? She just seems to grow out of it. She's growing right out of the earth. Some of the men do, too, but a woman somehow, with her curves, she epitomizes the earth. The earth is curves. That's how it is, soft and curves. Then she comes up, she's just growing out of that. That was grandmother for me. Although in her physical way I think she was rather bony and angular and very bossy. She was really a martinet with her daughters. She told them off, ran the thing and ran grandfather. Grandfather was a Russian and she just ran the heck out of him.

JB: Which writers were the most important for you when you first started writing?

Tallmountain: I've been reading since I was three years old and reading literature since I was about ten, Dickens when I was eight. It's an accumulated thing. In poetry, of course, the Transcendentalists were always the ones who affected me. I used to commit to memory certain things of Wordsworth. In Alaska, my

second mother — the doctor's wife — brought me up on poetry. She was quite poetic and we'd quote Wordsworth to each other.

JB: And when you began to write again in the 70's?

Tallmountain: I'd never have started writing a novel if it hadn't been for Scott Momaday. And James Welch and his terrible sadness. I think he led me into enjoying the surrealists. And, of course, Wendy Rose is one of my most favorite poets in the whole world. She soars, her work soars. She knows how to say things in different ways nobody else knows how to do. Then, of course, I relate to her poignancy about her father and her Hopi connections. She wants to be a Hopi woman and she isn't. She's not a Hopi woman any more than I'm an Athabascan. We're breeds. We're people who are a different connection. We're a connection between two different cultures and that's what we're going to be. We better be!

JB: That's an important role?

Tallmountain: Oh, yes, it's so important. If we don't do it justice now, the time will pass and we will not have done it. That would be tragic. I've wasted a lot of time, but I'm going to work on my work now. It's just got to be done because I'm beginning to feel the pressure of time. I've led kind of a careless life about my health. As a result I've got a heart problem — angina. So I know that I have to take care of myself and I have to handle this thing. Nobody else is going to come along and be Inbetweens. We are the Inbetweens.

COMMENTARY

From the Editors

With this issue *Studies in American Indian Literatures* resumes publication as an independent journal. Thanks and acknowledgments are due to many people. We must begin with Karl Kroeber, *Sail's* founder, who is responsible for making the journal indispensable; Jarold Ramsey speaks for all of us in noting the highlights of its brief history and the high standards set for us all.

Special appreciation and thanks go to our contributors in this re-inaugural issue. Working without any backlog of previous submissions, review copies or other material, we have been constrained to ask for material by early deadlines in order to make up a first issue in a timely manner. The response has been very generous. We are pleased to offer here the kind of work that *SAIL* has become noted for: careful scholarly studies, interviews with authors, reviews of current (and reprinted) work, information about resources in our field, and editorial opinion and commentary. We are actively seeking more quality work. We hope especially to encourage studies of traditional texts in translation, including first printings of new or newly discovered transcriptions. In addition, in response to your requests, we will be experimenting with publication of contemporary original work, and there are plans for a special issue featuring new creative work; submissions of original poetry and fiction should go to Joe Bruchac (address on page ii).

Thanks are due as well to people who have supported the day-to-day work at California State University Fullerton and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Don Schweitzer, CSUF Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, contributed the money for the first mailing to the ASAIL mailing list, which in turn opened up subscription support. Personal thanks go to Jackie Budd, M.A., and Sharon Dilloway, M.A., both at CSUF, for providing volunteer editorial assistance without which the project would have rapidly died.

John Purdy provided the ASAIL mailing list to supplement the nucleus of names gathered at the MLA meeting in New Orleans. (That meeting, heavily attended by participants and listeners at the many excellent sessions on American Indian literatures, should be noted for historical purposes as the beginning of the revival of *SAIL*.) Unfortunately, the ASAIL list is not exactly identical with the old *SAIL* subscription list. When *SAIL* was merged with Columbia's *Dispatch* the mailing list was also merged out of existence, and thus far has not been recovered. This means that not all of our old subscribers have been notified of our revival; libraries and other institutional subscribers in particular may

have been overlooked. At this point the only recourse we have to reach these hidden patrons is to ask our members to contact people (and libraries or programs) that might have subscribed to *SAIL* to notify them of the new series now going into publication. Your help is not only welcome, but necessary, if we are to reach the readers who want to hear from us.

Finally, we will note that we are now officially *SAIL, Series 2*. Our numbering begins again with this issue: Volume 1, Number 1. Although it is a little cumbersome, it seems the best means to an orderly transition after the "merged" period; further, we have no facilities for providing any back issues, and so starting fresh seems the right thing to do. For the present, *Sail* will be published twice yearly. This decision is the inevitable result of the amount of time, money and material we presently have to work with. The future, we trust, as we continue to expand and improve, will bring more of all of these things.

The Editors
Helen Jaskoski
Daniel F. Littlefield Jr.
James W. Parins

For Karl Kroeber

As *Studies in American Indian Literatures* moves onward under new auspices, it's good to salute this journal's founder and editor over its first twelve years, Karl Kroeber. Where would the field of Native American literary studies have gotten to by now, without its journal, and where would both be without Karl's good offices and example?

Like all consequential beginnings, the creation of *SAIL* (originally the *ASAIL Newsletter*) seems a little mist-shrouded, even mythic. Some old-timers recall that it was preceded by a little news-sheet compiled by Randall Ackley; according to others, the idea of a regular periodical emerged from meetings at the 1976 MLA convention in New York. But whatever the attending circumstances and convergences, it was undeniably Karl Kroeber who brought the new publication to light, with Volume 1, Numbers 1 and 2 in Spring and Fall 1977.

The format of those early issues was, well, informal, sort of utility-grade mimeograph-and-staple; but what counted was that we had a serviceable journal when we needed it, published out of Franz Boas's Columbia University (602 Philosophy Hall to be exact), and edited by a prolific and distinguished scholar of Romantic literature and art whose academic reputation brought credibility to a new field that needed it.

With Volume 4, Number 1 (Winter 1980) came a confident name-change, from "Newsletter" to *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, and with the new banner came a brief editorial dec-

laration that sums up Karl's open and constructive style as Editor:

As the many plurals in our masthead indicate, we hope to serve all interested (in whatever fashion) in American Indian literatures of the past and of the present. We shall continue to emphasize reviews (both of current literary works and critical scholarship) and bibliographical information We are poor but independent; independence enables us to treat fairly and equally all regions, tribes, groups, and programs. The only ax we grind is for the diversity of Native American literary accomplishments.

With an editorial board consisting of Paula Gunn Allen, Gretchen Bataille, Joe Bruchac, Larry Evers, Vine Deloria, Dell Hymes, Maurice Kenny, and Robert Sayre, and with LaVonne Ruoff as Bibliographer, *SAIL* sailed intrepidly and indispensably through the eighties, the editorial flagship, so to speak, of an Association embarked on a voyage of professional definition and discovery. Ruoff's bibliographies showed us something of the expanding breadth and depth of our field; reviews by writers like William Bright, Ken Lincoln, Vine Deloria, Dee Brown, Carol Hunter, Michael Dorris, Louise Erdrich, Kenneth Roemer, Paul Zolbrod, Ursula LeGuin, and even the Editor himself tested the quality of the new Indian writing, and of the criticism and scholarship beginning to attend to it and to the traditional Native literature.

Controversies — over James Welch's *The Death of Jim Loney* and over Ruth Beebe Hill's *Hanta Yo!*, to name just two — were usefully exhibited in *SAIL*; and in some of the journal's richest issues, individual writers were held up symposium-wise for scrutiny and celebration — Volume 9, Number 2 (Spring 1985), for example, offered what was probably the fullest critical notice of Gerald Vizenor up to that time.

Such is the Karl Kroeber legacy to *SAIL* and its Association: "Happily on a trail of pollen may he walk."

Jarold Ramsey
University of Rochester

The Native American Authors Distribution Project

The Native American Authors Distribution Project was begun as a result of my doing a poetry reading at the Roberson Museum in Binghamton as part of an American Indian program which included Indian storytelling and two fancy dancers. After the program, I sold quite a few copies of my own books, and I was surprised at the number of people (Native Americans included) who had not previously thought of "Indians" as writers. When I was asked to do the same program a year later, I brought along

not only my own books, but a selection of books by other Native American writers. They sold quickly. That was a decade ago and that was the beginning of it all. Before long, we were attending a series of Pow Wows in the northeast, renting space next to crafts-people and fry bread sellers. Our customers were almost equally divided between natives and non-natives, our list of titles kept growing as we purchased books for resale from other publishers, and our book list gradually expanded into the 12-page catalogue it is today. We applied for and received some modest grant support from the National Endowment for the Arts Literature Program, in 1985 receiving a \$7,000 grant which enabled us to pay a part-time salary to Cherokee-Conoy poet Ron Welburn to show and sell our books at an additional 10 Pow Wows each year. Since then we have received smaller grants from the NEA's Audience Development category (for some reason, they say we are not distributors), and from the New York State Council on the Arts.

The philosophy which underlies the project is simple. It is clear that Native American people and their many cultures have been portrayed in American literature and in the annals of anthropology for more than three centuries. More often than not, those portrayals have been inaccurate and even blatantly racist. Few have realized that Native Americans themselves have been making significant contributions to American writing for about that same length of time. Pequot writer William Apes and his *Son of the Forest* in 1831 is only one early example. Our aim, therefore, was to make more available — and visible — books written by native people themselves. At present we have in stock more than 200 different titles from 61 different publishers. The publications range from novels and books of poetry to children's literature, history, newspapers and literary journals, and even a few works of anthropology — all by authors of Native American ancestry. Two years ago we added audio cassettes of American Indian storytellers to our list. We have tried, with our book lists, always to identify the tribal affiliation of the authors whose books we sell. We've used Geary Hobson's method of determining whether a writer is actually "Indian" by taking into account such factors as recognition by a Native community, as well as tribal enrollment. If there are significant doubts about an author's "Indian identity" — as in the case of Jamake Highwater — we just choose not to sell their books.

Our list is constantly growing as new books are published and out of print titles become available again. Because of that, we update our catalogue four or more times each year. Mail order has become increasingly important and we have begun receiving orders from libraries which see our list as a quick way to enlarge their collections. In the last few years, we've been receiving orders from other countries as well. Since we do not operate on

consignment, but pay on receipt for our books without asking for the usual large discount which distributors receive (in most cases, we get a 40% discount off the cover price from the publishers) we do not wholesale to bookstores and we also refer orders of multiple copies (more than 2 or 3 of a title) directly to the original publishers.

The books which we sell are kept on display in The Greenfield Review Literary Center, the former gas station and general store which my Abenaki grandfather ran next to our house here in Greenfield Center. Two of the walls of the small building are now covered by our titles and we expect the collection to keep growing. If anyone wants a copy of our book list, they have only to send us a stamped and self-addressed envelope. If anyone wants to suggest any titles which should be part of our list, we are always open to such suggestions. We have had some problems in obtaining Canadian publications, but we now have a regular account with Theytus Books, one of Canada's leading Native publishers (Native and Native-run!) and hope to represent more Native American writers from the north in the future.

The Native American Authors Distribution Project
The Greenfield Review Literary Center
2 Middle Grove Road
Greenfield Center, NY 12833

From the ASAIL President

It seems appropriate as current President of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures, that I make a few comments on ASAIL and its two publications, *ASAIL Notes* and *SAIL*, now that it looks as if *SAIL* is back in production.

The Association has always been a loose affiliation of scholars, writers, and teachers (often in the same body) who wanted to pursue and encourage the literary study of American Indian Literatures. While our numbers and approaches are continually enriched by the influence of other disciplines, our focus has always been on literary appreciations of Native cultural expression. Our sole yearly meeting has been at the Modern Language Association convention where ASAIL holds Affiliate Organization status. While we have a very general charter, we have not incorporated in any state. I think that the time is right for us to make that step. Of course one of our strengths has been that as an organization we have been much more deeply concerned with keeping the lines of communication open between all of us than with organization structure.

Unfortunately for the years that we had dues which went toward the publication of *SAIL*, the task of collecting dues fell upon the editor in the form of subscription fees. The strength of our or-

ganization has been in the informal network of contacts we have built throughout the years, yet the time is ripe for a more concerted effort to develop our organization itself.

I think there may be significant tasks and opportunities ahead of us. Publications, grants, and the possibility of conferences of our own will require incorporation, and a dues structure. Perhaps we could set up a committee to look into this. Also we should think about establishing positions for new officers, such as membership secretary and treasurer. Furthermore, I suggest that we consider extending the term of the President from one year to two. I can tell you from experience that it is difficult to accomplish anything in one year. While the President was only concerned with setting up our sessions at MLA, a one year term was sufficient, but not if we are to become active with other projects such as influencing NEH policy or publication programs.

I would like to place these items on the agenda for our business meeting this year at MLA (it says in the MLA convention program that the business meeting is closed, but it isn't; we had to do it that way to get 2 sessions).

As an organization we owe a debt of gratitude to Karl Kroeber for the many years he single-handedly published our journal, *SAIL*. No thanks we can offer will ever be enough. At present we have temporary commitments from Dan Littlefield and Jim Parrins to publish and from Helen Jaskoski to edit the journal. We will need to establish a subscription rate for the journal and *ASAIL Notes*; perhaps it could be part of the membership dues. The present intention is that *SAIL* will continue to publish as an organ of the association with the expressed goal of providing a scholarly forum for timely discussion and research into Native American Literatures, a publishing avenue for scholars new to our field, and a place to publish work of interest to those only in our field, such as the *SAIL* bibliography series. We are still looking for a permanent institutional home, and I assume we will be flexible about the amount of institutional support to be required.

ASAIL Notes is in the firm hands of John Purdy at Oregon Central Community College. When Andy Wiget started it a number of years ago, his intent was to provide news and information that was very current. He reasoned that if we knew which writers were doing readings or residencies then we might be able to take advantage of proximity, or if we heard of the most current editions, it might make our textbook selection better. John Purdy seems dedicated to keeping that flow of timely information coming our way, but of course, he needs all our help to make *ASAIL Notes* the clearinghouse it should be.

I hope you are able to attend the MLA this year and our business meeting in particular, but if not, I hope that *SAIL* will also

be able to serve as a forum for discussion of the goals of the organization itself.

James Ruppert
University of Alaska - Fairbanks

REVIEWS

Lakota Storytelling: Black Elk, Ella Deloria, and Frank Fools Crow. Julian Rice. New York: Peter Lang, 1989.

Julian Rice's contribution to Peter Lang's Regional Studies series focuses on a particular place — South Dakota — and a particular people — the Lakota, American Indians who live there. Rice draws on the research and translations which have been done by others to discuss autobiography, oral narrative and oratory, with a critical literary perspective. The book focuses on two written texts, *Black Elk Speaks* and *Dakota Texts*, and a recording made by Frank Fools Crow. All three texts include traditional Lakota stories and ceremonies, and all three have gone through various translations to reach contemporary scholars. The stories related in *Black Elk Speaks* (1931) and *Dakota Texts* (1932) are compared to those recorded by Frank Fools Crow in 1977. Although Fools Crow's stories were recorded much later than the others, his narratives relate experiences of the 1930s and the stories are even older. Overall this is a study of interpretation — how does a contemporary literary critic interpret and finally understand these stories of a half century ago?

To discuss *Black Elk Speaks* Rice uses the texts of the 1931 and 1944 interviews which were published as *The Sixth Grandfather*. His intent is not to replicate or "correct" DeMallie's work, but rather to focus on themes and stories as they related to Lakota life. For this reason, a comparison with the other texts is appropriate. The power of the story and the storyteller is emphasized in the detailed study of specific stories included in *Black Elk's* recorded autobiography, and Rice shows that the experiences are those of the collective "I" rather than an egocentric storyteller. All that *Black Elk* knows belongs to the people; he relates the voice and vision of a community rather than an individual.

The stories from *Dakota Texts* demonstrate the same emphasis on the group. Stories are told to teach living; lessons are to be passed on through stories. Rice emphasizes that the stories are not isolated narratives, but they are part of a tradition which included ceremonies and arts. He describes briefly those ceremonies which accompany the stories — the sun dance, vision seeking, sweats, and flesh offerings. He also refers to tanning hides and quill plaiting, both of which are important within the cultural context which produces the stories. The process of storytelling is similar to the steps one takes to effect a successful hunting trip or conduct appropriate social behavior.

Several stories are explicated in detail: "Double-Face Steals a Virgin," "Iktomi Takes his Mother-in-law on the Warpath," "Blood Clot Boy," "The Man Who Married a Buffalo Woman," "Boy-Beloved's Blanket," "Incest," "The Lovers," "She-Who-Dwells-in-the-Rocks," and "The Wicked Sister-in-Law." In all these stories

there are lessons to be learned, and Rice sets about explaining the lessons, the importance of the stories to establishing kinship and roles within a tribe, and the relationship of humans to animals.

Thomas Mails has given us the narratives of Frank Fools Crow just as John Neihardt made Black Elk a well-known Holy Man. Rice focuses on the Tatanka recording, *Fools Crow*. Again the same stories appear, but here Rice provides both the Lakota and English translations. Fools Crow tells the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman and remembers the Horse Dance. In his address to President Carter, Fools Crow calls him "grandfather," recalling the form of address used in so many treaty speeches. For those who know Lakota, the new translations should be welcome. Agnes Picotte (Director of the Ella C. Deloria Research Project) and Norbert Picotte provided the translations of Lakota for some materials which had previously been translated by perhaps less able translators.

Rice has provided a useful appendix of oral narratives published and recorded in both Lakota and English. He demonstrates the integration of various forms of scholarship using the tapes and transcripts of the American Indian Research Project in the South Dakota Oral History Center at Vermillion and by using native speakers as translators, and demonstrates the necessity of interdisciplinary study of these texts. The book is a specialized study which should be welcomed by scholars who have sought additional materials to understand the works of Lakota storytellers. Rice joins Raymond DeMallie, Elaine Jahner, Michael Castro, Thomas Mails and others who have pursued the origins and various versions of traditional Lakota stories.

Gretchen M. Bataille
Arizona State University

Simon Ortiz. Andrew Wiget. Western Writers Series, Number 74. Boise: Boise State University, 1986.

In 1986, of the 103 issues in the Boise State University Western Writers Series listed as being either published or in preparation, just seven were devoted to American Indian writers. Andrew Wiget's essay on Simon Ortiz, Acoma poet, short story writer and essayist, is the fifth of these. As Joseph Bruchac has noted of Ortiz, "it would be hard to find a poet better known by other American Indian people," and so this pamphlet is a welcome addition to a series designed to be "useful to the general reader as well as to teachers and students."

True to the format of the series, Wiget's essay is a "brief but authoritative introduction" to Ortiz' work. Wiget begins by chal-

lenging the category of "Western American literature" as a proper context for evaluating Ortiz' work, arguing that the category is itself "alien and antagonistic to the many distinctive cultural and mythic perspectives unique to Native America." Wiget's analysis of Ortiz' poetry and prose shows Ortiz as a writer struggling to preserve a personal and cultural identity. In this section as throughout the book, Wiget does a fine job of showing how Ortiz' creative vision tests itself repeatedly against mainstream cultural assumptions and stereotypes, and there is also plenty in the essay to suggest how Ortiz' own vision in much of the poetry and prose derives from some other "distinctive cultural and mythic perspective" to which Ortiz has access — though it will not always be clear to the general reader that Ortiz is often confirming, specifically, Acoma ways in these works.

Following the standard format, Wiget gives us a short (two-page) biographical sketch, followed by a delineation of three "concepts fundamental to understanding Ortiz' work and his sense of himself as a writer." The first of these is Ortiz' responsibility, especially in his poetry, to the Acoma oral tradition, a tradition of storytelling that continues to shape Ortiz' identity as a writer and that accounts largely for the quality of "immediacy" in the language of his work. The second important concept that Wiget points to is Ortiz' identity with the particular landscape of Acu (Acoma Pueblo and its surroundings) — an element which, I think, shapes Ortiz' writings even more pervasively than Wiget's analysis lets on, if only because this particular place gives rise not only to Ortiz as an individual but also to the broader Acoma verbal community with which he also identifies. The final element of Ortiz' art Wiget draws our attention to is the overtly political tone in much of his work, which, Wiget rightly argues, needs to be understood as an inevitable component of a creative vision committed to recovering and preserving an Indian identity independent of an Anglo political system too often bent on cultural genocide.

There follows a survey of individual works — fiction first, then poetry. Here, Wiget's essay begins to seem a little rushed, cramped no doubt by the series format. Also included is a "Selected Bibliography," which in places may be a little too brief for some of us (the bibliography lists only four of Ortiz' essays where the 1985 SAIL bibliographical supplement lists ten; the "Criticism" section of the selected bibliography is short, listing only six items in addition to the 1984 special issue of SAIL).

Judging from the titles in the Western Writers Series, almost anybody who has written anything "Western" has been or is scheduled to be included in the series. It comes as a relief, therefore, to know that Simon Ortiz has finally been recognized by inclusion in this Who's Who in Western American Literature, and it is Simon Ortiz' good fortune to have been represented by a critic

as talented and sensitive as Wiget.

Robert M. Nelson
University of Richmond

Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday. Charles L. Woodard. Lincoln: U Nebraska Press, 1989.

The Delicacy and Strength of Lace. Letters. Leslie Marmon Silko & James Wright. Ed. Anne Wright. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1986.

Both these books are examples of dialogue. The dialogue in each case is a dynamic between two sets of interactive agents: the individuals exchanging, modifying and contributing their personal perspective to the mutual creation, and secondly, the whole background and cultural resonance that each brings to bear on the conversation. The dialogue extends across cultural as well as personal uniquenesses.

Woodard reaches into the tradition of imagined dialogue for his literary forebears in outlining the motive and inspiration for these conversations with Momaday. However, unlike the dialogues of Plato, which were imaginary constructs in which the game was fixed to prove a point, Woodard's conversations with Momaday are the transcripts of actual conversations between two people. (It should be said as well that Woodard is scrupulous in clarifying when and where the conversations took place, and how much and where any editing of the transcripts occurred.) Nevertheless, this book is very much a "project": Woodard has an agenda and a set of questions, and they are designed, like the imaginary dialogues of classical rhetoric, to make a point. The point is of course to enrich our understanding of Momaday, with more emphasis on the visual nature of his work than is often explored; Momaday the artist, whether in words, pictures or reminiscences is to be presented here (the text is enriched with reproductions of over twenty of Momaday's drawings and graphic works). There is exploration of Momaday's youth, much emphasis on being Indian and what it means, and elaboration on themes in Momaday's published works.

The letters between Leslie Silko and James Wright, on the other hand, belong to a later tradition of dialogue: epistolary correspondence. They are not shaped by a premeditated project and not discernibly by any thought of a larger audience; this is rather a correspondence between two artists both contending with their craft, their stubborn medium, as they work out with each other whether and how their relationship will grow and what shape it will take. There is more give and take here, not a probing (however enlightening and valuable) of one mind by another, but an exchange that is itself almost eighteenth-century in the correspondents' emphasis on decorum, on tact, a care to remain

non-intrusive, open and candid with good grace. The exchanges are mutually enriching: she writes of roosters, past and present, and their wonderful personalities, of stories and storytelling, of life in Laguna. He writes about Camus in Paris, the fishermen he sees in Italy, D'Annunzio at Lago di Garda. Personal anguish is touched on, carefully, sensitively; the book's title is borne out in the combination of tact and delicacy on the one hand, and on the other the strong engagement of the two writers whose correspondence persists over travels, missed addresses and, eventually, illness and debility.

The paradox of course is that the written correspondence between Leslie Silko and James Wright, two people who had not spoken together (though both had met briefly earlier, they had not spoken, and the correspondence began when Wright sent her a letter responding to *Ceremony* after he first read it), is much more intimate than the transcript of a number of face-to-face conversations between two other people, Momaday and Woodard, who are clearly comfortable with each other and who have spent much time together, traveling as well as talking. My perception is that the originating motivation shows through here: the reader is always implicitly present as the invisible third in the Woodard/Momaday conversations, the unseen but always felt presence for whose benefit all this talk is taking place and all these footnotes have been added. Leslie Silko and James Wright meant only to speak to each other, and their written dialogue proceeds with the intensity of a conversation urgently carried on in the faith that no eavesdroppers are around.

Both books are characterized by ruminative views, the working out of thought that takes place in (written or oral) conversations. There is talk of influences, providing rich fodder for scholars: Silko reads Hume, is absorbed in John Cage. Emily Dickinson and Isak Dinesen, of course, figure in Momaday's reflections, as well as Billy the Kid and folk songs; Shakespeare comes up, as well as Faulkner. Both books also exhibit the inevitable annoyances of works that are "got up" from some other form. In the Silko/Wright correspondence there is a certain amount of dross in discussions of missed letters and what address(es) to write to next — information we all write down and then forget to free our minds for other things. In the Woodard/Momaday conversations there is overmuch interrogator for some tastes, as in the following:

CLW: Hers is a mythic landscape, isn't it?

Momaday: Yes. Very definitely.

CLW: And it's also fair to say that of the landscape in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*?

Momaday: Yes.

CLW: Driving up to Rainy Mountain, and saying that it's not really a mountain, but a knoll or a hill, misses the point, doesn't it?

Momaday: Exactly.

The reader hoping to engage Momaday's thought will find too much of this, though it may have the salutary side effect of making one appreciate more fully the condensation and lucidity of Momaday's own writing. And, as Woodard points out, the important features of conversation, like gesture, expression, pitch and laughter can only be hinted. Again, the letter writer is at an advantage in being the shaper of the written version of her words, in wrestling directly with the problem of transferring sense as precisely and as completely as possible onto paper.

These books are important for students of Momaday and Silko and their works; they enrich our understanding in subtle ways, notwithstanding the difficulties their forms may present. Above all, they enhance appreciation of the two authors' artistry in their more formal, public works.

Helen Jaskoski
California State University Fullerton

Honour the Sun. Ruby Slipperjack. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1987.

Ruby Slipperjack wrote this novel while she was a university student working on a B.Ed. and B.A. She is an Ojibway from northern Ontario, an area of small, isolated Native communities scattered along the Canadian National Railway. For this book, she has created a fictional community where events are told as recorded in the diary of a young girl from 1962-1968.

Though the book is a novel, it reads more like autobiography. There is little plot per se, but the child, nicknamed "The Owl," records exciting, frightening, joyful, and horrifying occurrences with painstaking detail and great authenticity. What little plot there is involves the changes in Owl's perceptions of events as she matures. The book registers her awareness of the painful realities around her, but her love for her home and family remains constant.

Though plot does not hold the book together, the maturation of the young girl does, as does the intimate portrayal of Ojibway culture. Slipperjack's writing shows great integrity as she portrays all aspects of Owl's experiences.

Introspection becomes more sophisticated as the book progresses. The carefree or frightened child becomes the ambivalent, frustrated, cautious, despairing teenager who finally decides to leave the community.

Slipperjack's style is lean and sparse. With great economy of words she manages to convey the picture of a small cabin, full to bursting with permanent occupants as well as relatives who come and go. There are seven in the family, but some have left

home; some marry, have children and return; some are foster children. To keep track of the relationships could be bewildering were it not for the fact that they soon realize that actual numbers are unimportant: the relationships are what make life joyful and exciting.

The first part of the book reveals a child who is loved by, and loves all around her, though teasing relatives are a source of embarrassment or physical pain if the teasing goes too far. But her greatest love is reserved for her mother. Her mother is the focus of Owl's life, the centre of her being. "My heart fills with love as I watch my mother, there by the fire, swatting flies away from food" (p. 57). Her mother is one of the few characters Slipperjack describes in detail:

She's a tall woman, very solid and big. She must weigh a couple of hundred pounds . . . her hair lights up like a halo in a fine spray of light brown . . . At every step, her cotton print dress clings to her thick, stockinged legs. Her brown eyes look down her sharp, thin nose . . . (p. 11).

There is little room in her mother's life for open display of affection as she cooks huge meals, fishes, gathers, cuts and hauls firewood, carries water, makes fishnets, hauls furs to the store to trade, picks blueberries, nurses the sick and consoles the grieving. Her mother never fails to read from a Cree Bible and an Ojibway prayerbook at bedtime, after which the light is put out and she tells legends until the family falls asleep.

Violence lurks under the surface in the community. The men become the enemy when they are drinking; they smash doors, rape women and kill wantonly. The women and children have learned to protect themselves by planning escape procedures and hiding.

What Owl cannot cope with is her mother's despair and turning to alcohol as a way of getting through her difficult existence. Owl is thirteen, the oldest child then at home. Again and again she rescues her mother from drinking parties, dragging her home in spite of their great difference in size. The little girl who could not be made to cry becomes a teenager with tears streaming down her face as she promises, ". . . Mom, I love you . . . I'll get you home every time. Don't worry . . ." (p. 190).

Slipperjack's writing is at its best when she describes the natural world of northern Ontario and combines her descriptions with the flights of a ten-year-old's imagination. At night, in the security of the cabin Owl recalls,

I feel very light and content . . . Smiling I sigh and imagine being a blackbird, feeling the warm air gently lift my breast, filling me, through me,

and I become one with the night, only to emerge again as Me, to honour the sun, in the early morning light (p. 42).

This is a moving book. Slipperjack writes "from the heart," as the Ojibway say, and captures the joys and sorrows of what it is to be an Indian in this century. She does not sentimentalize, nor does she excuse or blame. She records Owl's perceptions and interpretations. Owl is a cherished child—by her mother, her extended family and her community. So Owl grows up to be a strong young woman capable of determining the direction her future would take.

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*Cover: Alexander L. Posey (Creek)
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