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Traditional Narrative: Contemporary Uses, Historical Perspectives

Elaine A. Jahner

No story or song will translate the full impact of falling or the inverse power of rising up.

Joy Harjo, "A Postcolonial Tale"

Karl Kroeber's new book *Artistry in Native American Myths* reminds us that the study and teaching of traditional oral narratives represent what is possibly the most complex and yet the most promising aspect of American Indian Studies. The complexities derive from two primary issues. First, traditional status generally implies performance restrictions related to patterns of communal authority and these sometimes prohibit presentation to a general audience. Secondly, even for those texts deemed appropriate for audiences outside the community of origin, we have so little reliable interpretive material that discussion of a narrative's significance easily strays into formalistic rigidities, bland generalities or private appreciation, although books like Kroeber's have been of significant help in countering these tendencies. As we expand the body of commentary on oral literary texts, we inevitably question the history of our discipline and the history of the texts we study, with the latter being by far the more difficult to address. Even some of the simplest narratives show such intriguing traces of ancient sources that anyone sensitive to the compulsions of the past gets drawn into speculations about historical understandings of a text. Yet the move from present observation of a narrative's status to historical reconstruction of its past significance is one that the intellectually cautious recognize as a perilous exercise even though the exigencies of cur-

rent politics add their considerable weight to sheer historical curiosity and imaginative delight as arguments for facing up to the task.

Educators at all levels seem to be in agreement over the need for more consistently organized ongoing collective efforts that would help us use the important specialized work of the last two decades, such as that of Dell Hymes, Dennis Tedlock, Karl Kroeber, Donald Bahr, Paul Zolbrod, Barre Toelken, William Bright, Julian Rice and Julie Cruikshank, most of whom quite sensibly base most of their analyses on texts that they themselves have collected and have seen performed. Christopher Vecsey in his book *Imagining Ourselves Richly* competently surveys the many academic approaches to the study of oral literatures and he illustrates the first stages of comparative historical analysis that ethnologists and linguists made possible earlier this century through their extensive recording of texts from all over the continent. If we engage in some sheer wishful thinking, freed just for the moment from our usual concerns about practical difficulties, we can take our cue from the title of Vecsey's book and imagine our subdiscipline richly, with different communities (academic or political) implementing the best that can be learned from each of the scholars mentioned above and also from the less well-known ones not listed in my abbreviated disciplinary roster, who have certainly done their own important ground-breaking work. As long as we are just imagining, we can plan to use all this impressive scholarly detail with the pedagogical awareness and immediacy that Greg Sarris talks about in his final chapters of *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*. And we should definitely imagine tapping into the power that characterizes the writings of poets and novelists so that critical discussions can become explicit demonstrations of attitudes toward language that we have learned from them. Finally, we need to link up with the developing intellectual debates led by people like Robert Warrior and Jace Weaver.

Such unbridled imagination in relation to research and pedagogy has a definite, practical purpose because only idealistically bold envisaging of what might be possible will keep alive our vision of collective opportunities. But sooner rather than later, we have to return to the practical matters we had briefly set aside in favor of letting a vision of possibilities emerge. What follows here is one kind of mapping within a general framework that could allow us to situate the more specialized endeavors in reference to each other and in relation to extra-literary issues as part of an effort to open the critical discussion to a broader range of voices and positions. I am also setting up some tentative but precisely informed moves into historical analysis in the second part of this article where I illustrate how

elements of one tale represent links in the associative networks of meaning, inferential presuppositions and artistic strategies that we still call “culture” even as we question virtually all the term has meant in the past.

Generalities are easy enough to come by. It is more difficult to justify them within the cross-currents of debates about the aims of cultural analysis and the appropriate authority of any given analyst. That is why my initial general proposals and the subsequent detailed illustration occur within my own adaptations of the framework set forth by Brian Stock in his 1990 book *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past*.¹ Stock’s work is well-known in the field of Medieval Studies. My reasons for bringing it into American Indian narrative studies are primarily strategic. The last fifty years have resulted in so much theorizing about textuality and culture in so many disciplines that situating oneself within the general field requires some careful mapping, hence my use of Stock’s work as a practical strategy for keeping my own theoretical digressions to an absolute minimum while recognizing that theoretically informed alertness to abstract disciplinary formations is an indispensable back-drop to our work. Stock’s initial observations sum up the current situation in American Indian Studies as effectively as they characterize other contexts. “The oralities and literacies of the past,” he says, “are regularly made the subject of inquiries by linguists, philosophers, theologians, anthropologists and historians. But there is no common methodology, and the methods developed in one discipline are not always recognized in others” (141).

Stock may be underestimating the cross-disciplinary utility of developments in discourse analysis which address cognitive process in relation to narrative structure, but that does not take away from the value of his strategies for studying the historical development of textual communities.² For all its apparent simplicity, his approach to textual communities involves a focus on the local community within a general perspective that accommodates well-articulated, slight shifts in the positions of several of the century’s leading thinkers, while remaining quickly recognizable in terms of what we are already doing in relation to American Indian narratives. A textual community is “a group in which there is both a script and a spoken enactment and in which social cohesion and meaning result from the interaction of the two” (100). The “script” is the problematic notion here, not because of the oral/written dichotomy but because of what it implies about a community’s uses of texts to constitute communal identity and because of the difficulties in understanding the history of that usage. What I propose here is necessarily and definitely a departure from what medievalists do and from what most folklorists and anthropologists have

been doing with archived texts, although Dennis Tedlock pointed the way with his first published work on Zuni dynamics of textual interpretation.³ I propose an approach to cultural thinking that allows us to work with a generically diverse body of narratives in relation to other cultural artifacts from a definite historical period. Transcriptions of texts will necessarily have varying degrees of validity as a consequence of collection procedures. Nevertheless, we can compensate to some extent through the manner in which we use a range of different narratives and other cultural artifacts so that they become commentaries on each other and thereby reveal some verifiable elements of a historical interpretive dynamic.

What makes this general approach so useful is the explicit focus on social cohesion and meaning as deriving from a continuing interactional dynamic. Therefore, our critical concern is with that dynamic. Without getting too far sidetracked by all that is implied by a philosophically overdetermined term like “meaning,” I want to quote Stock’s carefully reasoned position, one to which I will return when I begin to address the place of custom in relation to our commentary on definite texts and their history within communities. Stock addresses the interpenetration of text and behavior:

Meaning comes first. A text, proposed by one member of a group, is understood by others in a similar way . . . one text has given rise to another, the second being a combination of the original and an interpretation. It is the second that influences behavior We understand ourselves, Ricoeur correctly notes, “by the long detour of signs of humanity deposited in cultural works.” Yet there are still longer detours: for example, the manner in which our preexisting values, sense of meaning, and education are shaped by experience, or the manner in which memory, reminiscence, and the unconscious play out roles in our everyday lives, compelling us, as Freud stresses, to enact dramas whose ultimate meaning may be hidden from us. (109)

The assumption that narrative works to generate social cohesion by enacting the cognitive principles that grant coherence to relations among changing variables is one of those givens of social theory that only becomes useful through tracing the concrete effects of its development. In an American Indian context, the politics of dependent sovereignty give a definite pragmatic edge to the need to develop methods of historically precise documentation for a process of maintaining distinctive textual communities.⁴ And, as we all know only too well, precise documentation

is considerably complicated by the nature of the historical records. Therefore, we can start (have, in fact, already started) by asking a series of elementary questions, documenting our answers and going from there to other kinds of studies. What kinds of texts currently function in this manner? How do different textual communities achieve overlapping boundaries so that individuals can claim membership in more than one? What kinds of communal agreements create the pragmatic conditions that enable a group to function as a narrating community? That last question points to the originary authority of local communities and the processes of self-reflection that sustain communities. We always have to go back to that local base. Stock himself notes:

A natural process of education takes place within the group, and, if the force of the word is strong enough, it can supersede the differing economic and social backgrounds of the participants, welding them, for a time at least into a unit The members may disperse, but they can also institutionalize their new relations An aspect of the social lives of the group's members will from that moment be determined by the rules of membership in the community. (150)

Legal questions of sovereignty are all, to some degree, questions about the boundaries of communities that maintain distinctive identities by way of reference to distinctive origins. Here I am not necessarily referring only, or even primarily, to historical or geographical origins. I am using the concept of origins in its philosophical and in its legal sense to refer to a specific symbolic economy with verifiable social consequences. Such usage allows us to connect many different kinds of analysis back to the political context of debates over sovereignty and a community's own means of determining the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. And I turn to a legal scholar to make the necessary connections between narrative analysis, communal boundaries and legal studies. His observations are so staggering in their implications that they more than make the case for any abstract claims that I, using various scholars, may be advancing about the utility of working with the idea of textual communities.

Milner S. Ball, a professor of American constitutional law, has analyzed the American constitution, the origin narrative for American civil rights, from the perspective of Indian land claims and his astonishingly honest conclusion is a call to interpretive legal action, a fact he clearly recognizes. "The American story of origins fundamentally excludes tribes and denies them voice I hope I am wrong" (2300).⁵ His response is

radical indeed. He argues for revisions of American constitutional law that would allow for inclusion of "multiple concepts of origin in legal paradigms." Undoubtedly, experts in constitutional law can and would find many ways to challenge this idealistic proposal. But whether or not any such fundamental change in constitutional interpretation ever occurs, the fact that he has articulated his arguments opens the way for lesser claims that can turn on a court's understanding of what the term "origins" signifies. Therefore, a constitutional lawyer's choice of how to demonstrate origins turns out to have considerable practical interest for all of us in American Indian Studies. Since Ball is using an Iroquois example, we might expect him to refer to an Iroquois creation story as evidence of origins. But that is not what he does. Instead, he chooses an example of material culture, an Iroquois wampum belt, and he analyzes it in a manner that reveals it to be a "record" of a symbolic economy. That economy is what serves as evidence of a coherent way of life retaining discernible cognitive features which determine elements of social life even as culture changes. The cognitive economy is read as strong evidence of a distinctive origin that determines social action and communal identity. This point cannot be overemphasized. Ball's analysis clearly makes an artifact "readable" in social scientific terms. His argument is that the terms of such readings should also have legal force because what he finds there sums up the principles which distinguish a community from others even as it describes terms of coexistence with those others. He treats the wampum belt as a text that does not refer to the particular details of origins, only to the principles that derive therefrom and that orchestrate the determined and determining historical significance of cultural details.

If Ball's initial political observations are bleak, his conclusions exhibit an extraordinary utopian optimism. According to him such "texts" present "the point of departure for a fresh experiment in human relationships, one in the acceptance of which rests the only real hope of fulfilling the promise of secular life" (2318). The implied conjunction between legal analysis of narrative and ethnographic studies gives a definite, pragmatic focus to studies of textual communities, using the term "pragmatic" in its narrow linguistic as well as its broader philosophical senses, with the narrow linguistic focus referring to the verifiable features of meaning controlling a context of interpretation. Whether we start with an example of traditional art or a tale, we have to demonstrate how that example reflects both symbolic foundations and a history of changing interpretations. Whatever example of expressive culture is designated as "originary" in a legal sense must be one that also exists as evidence of a contemporary textual commu-

nity. Therefore, the authority of the local community is the deciding factor in making that selection from among the material or verbal artifacts of history. The selection process, itself, becomes an exercise in sovereignty and it implies an educational process whereby the local community achieves its own critical understanding of what can be accomplished through the self-reflexive activity that is the concomitant of critical thought.

With all these possibilities in mind, we can return to Stock's characterizations of the dynamic involving texts and the historical consequences of that process which distinguishes one community from another. "The normal hermeneutic activity is the experience of the text along with individual interpretations. In the textual community . . . there is a similar process at work, but here the interpretive variants are derived from thought and life, the forms of life having the same spontaneity as verbal glosses on a written text. Each community creates its culture, subjectively perceiving and objectively constructing new texts" (111-112).

Documenting various facets of this process is a task for which we, as a subdiscipline, have already developed rigorous and appropriate techniques. The task is well begun, but now we need to recruit more members if we are to study not just a text in context, but multiple texts interacting in the same context, all of them adding a dimension of significance to the others, each dimension attesting to the historical status of ideas at work in a particular place. How we might achieve an agreed-upon division of organized labors is a discussion that goes well beyond my purposes in this article, but my proposal here is that one currently neglected facet of the task involves the study of archived texts, most of them collected at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Flawed though these texts may be, separated from most of the necessary contextual data, they nevertheless represent a window to the past, and in conjunction with currently vital texts that are their own kind of commentary on the older versions, these remnants are crucial elements of intellectual traditions.

With that observation I move from general schemes to the concrete detailing of a process whereby texts and "forms of life" comment on each other, generating new texts and keeping ancient texts in living relation to historical destinies. For illustrative purposes I am using a Lakota text, namely the Stone Boy story, which I have studied, translated, taught, and just plain puzzled over for more than thirty years now, and to which I keep returning out of a genuine sense of responsibility to the extraordinary range and evocative power of this tale.⁶ But my reasons for coming back to the tale go well beyond the subjective facts of long familiarity and

interest in it. The most convincing reason for using this particular text is that some of its episodes have an unbroken history of performance in Lakota communities.⁷ Therefore, we have transcriptions that allow us to compare texts recorded in different Sioux communities. Also, the plot type has wide intertribal distribution so we can also engage in more broadly based comparisons as we try to discern which elements indicate a specifically Lakota symbolic economy.⁸ The way this tale sums up features of belief proves it to be an origin tale in every sense of that term. It exhibits the generative cognitive principles that lie at the origins of the symbolic system and its event structure prefigures the articulation of these same principles in the social system and in ceremonial act, so we have a good body of concrete evidence about the way received narrative forms were used and adapted historically. When Lakota people claim this tale as evidence of the connection between their way of life and their landscape, they are making a claim that narrative analysis supports as historically legitimate. What I illustrate here is only one facet of the text's significance, only one set of conjunctions between narrative action and social understanding; therefore, a plot summary is enough to allow me to make my initial points even as I recognize how little such summary suggests about the nature of the text in question.

Four brothers live together. One day a woman comes to their tipi and just stands there. They discuss her presence, decide that she will be their elder sister and invite her in. She brings with her a large bag. They offer her food but she refuses to eat. All but the youngest brother go out for the day's work. Then the youngest turns into a bird in order to observe the woman. She opens her bag and takes out what is needed for her gruesome art of placing heads on a shield. He overhears her talk about how the brothers' hair will find their place in the design she is crafting, and he warns his brothers that their new elder sister is up to no good. They try to escape and one by one she kills all but the youngest who follows the advice of a bird about how to kill her. Then he brings his brothers back to life in a sweat lodge. They return home. Soon, another woman arrives. In spite of their nervousness about women who come from outside to stand at their doorway, they proceed just as they had done the first time. This woman eats when she is given food; she opens her bag and starts making moccasins for the brothers. She is the perfect elder sister. But she also adds new elements to the household requirements, and when the brothers go off to bring her what she needs, they do not return. The sister fears that they have been killed. As she sings a mourning dirge, she looks for something to suck on and finds a shiny white pebble that she puts in her

mouth and accidentally swallows. Stone Boy is born. When he grows up, he asks why she grieves and when he learns of his absent uncles, he sets out on an obstacle-ridden journey to find them and gain their release from his father. Grandmother figures give him the necessary powers. After struggling for the lives of his uncles (in one extraordinary version this struggle is with his father), he brings the brothers back to their sister, his mother. Then occurs the episode in which Stone Boy rides a sled downhill, placing himself behind four white buffalo girls. On the way down the hill, he crushes the girls, provoking their father the Crazy Buffalo to attack him. To ward off the attacking buffalo, Stone Boy builds four concentric palisades around the tipi. The buffalo break all but the last before admitting that Stone Boy's is the greater power and that the buffalo will subject themselves to it.

Most versions of the story end at this point, but one telling post-script given by Left Heron ends the episode with a commentary that gives us a rare and extraordinary historical commentary on how people understood the tale.

The woman who is not a wife, but is a mother, goes to the sky, not as a wife but as a sister. Jack Rabbit and Eagle came and said [to Stone Boy] "You are too powerful" and prayed for him to leave the earth. [Stone Boy] asked his relatives where they wanted to go. The six uncles became the seven sister star constellation; three were part of the head and one served as the tail. Then he asked his mother and she became the North Star, but [Stone Boy] decided to stay on earth to help. (McKeel)

As we work out connections between this narrative and the history of the Sioux on the Great Plains, we find a remarkable coincidence between narrative shifts and historical adaptation, a coincidence that I propose is radical in that it is bound to distinguishing historical features of Lakota life. And the episode that I want to use to illustrate this is, at first glance, the very one which would seem to negate all the claims that I have just made because it is a highly conventionalized episode that seems to refer only to the most ordinary and universal of human relationships about which one assumes little of interest can be said. I am referring to the opening motifs that precede Stone Boy's heroic action, the episode of the woman coming to that male household and her subsequent adoption as a sister. As we survey the available Sioux variations, we begin to see what features of the episode occurred with highest frequency among the west-

ern Sioux and that gives us the first clues that get us beyond “seems” into what proves to be a historical drama generating the social and narrative conventions, giving them a form that repetition sculpted into an elegant summation of a way of life.

For purposes of close analysis of this introductory event, we need more than mere summary and I quote the first few segments of my own translation of George Sword’s version, noting that the presentational units shown here were determined by pause markers in the original text. Part of what strikes me about Sword’s text is the way his shortest units seem to carry the most condensed social significance. Is this coincidence or is it evidence that Sword’s performance style accommodated an audience’s need for moments of reflection as convention opened ever outward toward expanding horizons of belief?

Four young men lived together,
One of them was called Hakela.
Suddenly, outside, they heard someone who came and stood,
so they told Hakela to look. He peeked out.

There was a young woman, a most beautiful young woman. The front part of her hair was bound and she had a great big bag. Like that she came and stood. Hakela saw her and he said, “Brothers, a young woman is there; she has arrived and she is standing; the front part of her hair is bound and she has a bag.” That’s what he said.

And the oldest brother, that very one, said this, they say,
“Invite her into the tipi. We have no woman who can be a sister, so she can be our elder sister,” he said.

So Hakela peeked out and said, “Sister, come in. Our oldest brother says we have no elder sister so you can be our sister.” So the woman said, “yes” and she settled down in their home.

They gave her food but she didn’t eat. She just sat there. So they tell. (Walker, *Lakota Myth* 89-90)

Whatever variations we may find in the introductory motifs, all the rest of the action of the tale follows from the brothers carrying out their newly acquired roles as men who could become brothers-in-law if only they could survive the dangers posed by relatives they don’t even know, can’t possibly know in a world still coming into being. They get the help they need from their nephew, once he comes from the sky by way of the second adopted elder sister, the one whose actions (and art) open the

social unit outwards toward new possibilities, unlike the first one who turns it inward, refuses the intermediacies represented by art, and decorates her shield with the heads of the brothers. Without question, though, this is an episode about the role of a sister, usually an elder sister, and comparison of different Lakota versions suggests that while the mode of the woman's arrival is variable (Bad Wound's version has the younger brother stubbing his toe and the sister coming forth from that brotherly gestation, but this version, too, elaborates the brothers' determination to keep her as a sister), the consistent emphasis on this particular kinship role is a western Sioux development.

The evidence becomes even more compelling when the comparisons are extended to other tribes and we note that the plot type is predictably introduced with an episode that shows how a woman becomes the agent of localization in a world without spatial or temporal orientation. The woman, who is the feminine addition to the elementary and exemplary household, always acquires a relational designation as a preliminary condition of her founding action and that relational role is the clue we need if we are to follow features of gender categories through their narrative orchestration in different tribes. If we turn to the most famous and theoretically based comparatist of them all, Claude Levi-Strauss, we find that he zeroes in on the episode, labeling the role of the woman as "the invariant feature of the group."⁹ From his structuralist point of view, the woman's role is ambiguous and that ambiguity is seen as the potential for transformations allowing different cultures to realize the figure according to the terms of their own system. The woman could be a potential wife, an old stranger who assumes or otherwise acquires a grandmother role, a young stranger who is designated as an older or a younger sister, a sister who is a biological sibling, even a sister-in-law. But if the role is ambiguous from a structuralist perspective that seeks evidence of stable elements within a hemispheric system, it is anything but so from the perspective of the local community. The way a specific social group develops this variable element appears to be just the kind of strong evidence we look for as we try to understand how definite communities shaped a story's received or borrowed elements, giving them the fit required by the local belief system. Whatever role this woman plays in a community's narrative heritage, she prefigures the woman's place. Her work bag is one every woman will open.

Certainly in a Lakota context the fact that the woman is consistently an adopted sister, usually an elder sister, turns out to be the realization that says it all, that makes this relational term into the means whereby all

the basic principles of the symbolic order are given dynamic realization in different domains of expressive culture. If such commentary seems like typically overstated academic rage for order, we find it to be mere sober summary when we validate it with George Sword's statements of late nineteenth-century beliefs. In a text specifically intended to teach the fundamentals of Lakota belief, Sword clearly refers to the four brothers as the Four Winds, their tipi as the world, and the good elder sister as Wohpe, the woman from the sky whom Finger, another of Sword's contemporaries, identifies as the bringer of the White Buffalo Calf Pipe. (See Walker, *Belief* 103-104, 109-112 and *Myth* 58-89.) Once these connections are in place, anyone who has even the slightest familiarity with Lakota thought can recognize that the conventional nineteenth-century introduction to the Stone Boy story really does evoke the foundations of the entire belief system. And that gives considerable weight to the question about the woman's status as adopted elder sister rather than as wife. Calculating the social logic from the position of the elder sister shifts many received anthropological notions about Lakota social organization and gender roles, but it is a direction that promises a way out of the rigidity of previous impositions of external models of social structure on internal dynamics.¹⁰

Before going beyond the generic requirements of the narrative world, we do well to survey the western Sioux narrative tradition for more pervasive evidence of how the elder sister role operates within the narrative system. Survey proves the pivotal role of the adopted sister within the discursive world of the old ohunkakan, the Lakota category for ancient tales from an era before the current historical world. In those tales, the adopted sister, generally the elder sister, presents the brothers with a series of options about how to negotiate with the world outside the microcosm of their own social unit. These negotiations are the action that brings society into being. Lakota ohunkakan develop the consequences deriving from four of these options: 1) the sister is stolen and the sister as captive requires that the brothers negotiate relationships with the captors; 2) the brothers are captured in their quest to find what the sister needs, and the captive brothers establish sister's son and brother's captors in a relationship requiring negotiation (the Stone Boy plot option); 3) the sister's husband is captured and the captive brother-in-law establishes the brothers in opposition to sister's husband's captors; 4) an adopted brother tries to become a husband and the sister as captive within the family unit establishes brothers as enemies to each other. This last option is the Sioux mythic explanation for inclement weather. The North

Wind wants to rape the adopted sister; she hides under her robe to escape and has to remain there; her robe covers the earth and from beneath she sends up vegetation when the sun shines. The sister's progeny are plants. (See *Dakota Texts* and *Lakota Myth*.)

In all these narratives we see that the consequences of brother/sister relationships develop mythic categories, lining up the possibilities, not in terms of male and female oppositions but in terms of oppositions between categories represented by differently classified male figures who achieve their social position through their relationship with the sister, who consistently acts as a mediating agent. While the general pattern undoubtedly has validity for many Native American groups, the particularities point toward details of historical development.

How can we set up the move from narrative pattern to the actuality of social life, a move that allows for the possibility of using narrative evidence for historical purposes?¹¹ We should quickly note, as ethnographers consistently have, that even outside the symbolic constructs of the old ohunkakan, the Sioux gave primacy to brother/sister relationships. We also need to note that within the ceremonial system, two ceremonies are said to be the direct requirements of the White Buffalo Cow Woman; the first is the Hunka ceremony, normally performed for young girls, which altered the kinship system for one generation. Therefore, any woman, no matter the order of her birth, could be someone's elder sister. The second was the puberty ceremony for women, which enacted the fact that all women were younger sisters of White Buffalo Cow Woman. Simple acknowledgment, though, is just the first step in a process that expands into a social logic linking the symbolic realm with social organization to create an associational matrix that gives definite reference to abstractions like "symbolic economy." And if we are to get closer to historical detail, we need to turn to the ceremonial action that made young Lakota women into younger sisters of the White Buffalo Cow Woman.

Here again, for purposes of historical scholarship, I insist on a distinction between the ceremony itself and the texts that are evidence of how Lakotas chose to explain ceremonies at a particular historical moment. Texts that represent a tradition of commentary on ceremonial action are indispensable sources for evidence of cognitive features indicating a tradition of interpretation, or we might say, a tradition of internal criticism and philosophical reflection with its own local structure and rules. Thus, we are looking at a local educational system. We are looking at how a community created its texts about its own ceremonial identity. If we turn to the women's puberty ceremony, we find texts and some crucial cogni-

tive clues that give defining detail to the emerging picture of the adopted elder sister as figuring all that constituted Lakota gender categories. Turn-of-the-century texts reveal the detail and the dynamic by which all women become younger sisters of the White Buffalo Cow Woman, who aligns and assigns all relationships in Lakota culture. The Sioux taught that kinship itself was her gift to the people.¹² In other words, without the possibility of ceremonial recognition and reorganization, biological consanguinity is meaningless. We find all this ringingly endorsed when, at the end of the ceremony, the leader said to the young girl, "You are now a woman. The buffalo woman is your oldest sister. Go out of this lodge" (DeMallie 252).

The theme of newness in conjunction with that command to action "go out of this lodge," is one that can be brought back to the underlying structure of interpretation that links ceremonial and narrative understanding. The ceremony requires a new tipi, a new dress, a new breechclout, even a new ceremonial order since individual holy men presiding over it sought a vision to learn the exact order for each ceremony. The young woman was literally taken out of her tipi, her old dress, her former relationships. She was brought ceremonial step by ceremonial step to the center of a new tipi, where she was given a new dress, a new role, a new point of interiority from which to act. Then, she was taken outside again at the end of the ceremony after her father had thrown the new breechclout outside the ceremonial space. And that gesture announces the next stage of externalisation/internalisation for which she is now ready—namely marriage and motherhood (*Lakota Belief and Ritual* 251). Her relationship to her elder sister inaugurates a spiraling series of stepping across thresholds that choreograph woman's gender roles according to an underlying theme of location, transformation and translocation, a point to which I will return.

Once we recognize how the elder sister role operates as the pivotal point of contact between belief, ceremonial organization and social organization, we are in position to appreciate the fact that for the Lakotas the coming of the White Buffalo Cow Woman with the Sacred Pipe is a historical event. Lakota belief is definite on this point, just as the tradition is definite in its distinctions between a mythic temporality about which little is known and a historical one for which each group must account in terms that prove the group's continuing identity in relation to the facts of individual agency. The basic premise of Lakota identity is the historical fact of a way of life that began a specified number of generations ago with the gift of the Sacred Pipe that makes them who they are. The presence of the Pipe

is the fact that channels older mythic significance, like that found in the Stone Boy story, into the ordinary forms of life and historical action. The difference in discursive modality marks a crucial cognitive intentionality. One might argue that we are still within the realm of belief, not empirical historical fact, but there is absolutely no doubt that with this belief we have the cognitive basis for historical action on the part of Lakota people who perceive themselves as Lakotas because ceremonial action marks them as younger sisters and brothers of White Buffalo Cow Woman.

In switching from the content of a single event to local elaboration on the significance of the elder sister role, I may seem to have abandoned the artistry of the tale, indeed the very idea of a narrative construct, in order to insist on the condensed social significance of a few opening moves. And, to some extent, that effect may be an inevitable consequence of the argument on behalf of history which requires some straightforward justification. Nevertheless, I want to insist yet again on the important distinction between historical and/or sociological fact and the narratives that arise from the collective process of making the experience of that facticity operative and memorable, and I want to repeat that what I seek to illustrate is the range of texts that are indirect commentaries on each other because they arise from similar collective strategies for memorializing meaning. I can illustrate this interplay of texts and advance my commentary on the plot of my reference tale by picking up on the name of the hero with its many resonances in Lakota belief.

In keeping with my emphasis on textual dynamics, I want to address beliefs about stone by looking at the presentational structure as well as the content of a nineteenth-century Lakota text written by Thomas Tyon who was explaining why stone is perceived as sacred. He does not start, as he could have, with reference to beliefs or narratives about stone. Instead, he launches the presentation with an actual experience. Something happens—a man dreams of stone. We should not go too quickly past Tyon's concrete opening move. His structural point of departure is that event whereby belief enters history when it becomes a definite motive in the life of a known individual. Tyon then talks about the customary action that follows from the dream experience and he establishes the link between these dreams and the Yuwipi Society that brought together men with similar spiritual experiences. Concrete social organization follows from dream experience. Men act and their actions are the collective interpretation of the meaning of stone's sacredness within history.

Human action is, of course, the stuff of continuing narrative, and the fact that a man's narrative of his own deeds was an indispensable part of

his cultural authority is further evidence of continuing narrative genesis, with each new autobiographical tale serving as a commentary on every other tale about the same powers. After describing how dreams about stone lead to the formation of a society, Tyon proceeds to another ordinary event that would account for that society's performing its social role. At this stage, Tyon gets remarkably specific. "So it is that if someone loses a horse, he might make a feast for the Rock dreamer." The ensuing ceremony is performed for the purpose of finding what is lost and the detail of Tyon's text makes ordinary curiosity into commentary on the continuing action of an ancient text. "So the rocks tell about whoever stole the horse, even the name and the place. They come to report everything, they say" (Walter, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 154). We can here recall that Left Heron's gloss on the ending of the Stone Boy tale identifies the power of Stone Boy with that of the stone in the Yuwipi Ceremony. Stone locates what is lost. The elder sister locates stone within Lakota ceremonial life. Textual realizations of the process locate individual experience within the discursive space of a textual community. Or, to put it in more simple and direct terms, telling about Stone Boy keeps everything in place. And, as the tale tells us, his mother is the means by which it was possible to think about things having a place, and we come back to thinking about how gender works in the context we are explicating.

With this brief allusion to Stone Boy himself, the hero of our tale, I have also switched to a more direct emphasis on what is made and what is done as a consequence of the continuing action implied by the text. (It is not properly action of the text so much as it is action that arises out of the same structure of intentionality as the text.)¹³ If we return to those few opening motifs that have been the basis for the interplay of texts that I have been setting up, we have to note that most versions refer to the sisters as artists. As soon as they find their place within the brothers' household, each one sets to work on her characteristic designs. Once again we can turn to comparative analysis for some guidance on how far to go with this observation, and once again comparison suggests that we should recognize these motifs as bearing the signifying features of a pervasive cultural dynamic. Comparison shows that a tribe's understanding of the origins and purposes of women's art is regularly bound up with the way these opening motifs develop.¹⁴ As we set certain of these texts in interpretive relation to each other, we find that the juxtaposition lets us see how the vivid detail of ordinary life affirms the cognitive continuum between daily custom and artistically elaborated narrative.

Choosing one out of many possible examples, I pick a straightforward

descriptive late nineteenth-century text by No Ears. He starts his narrative by evoking the scene when men return to camp after the buffalo hunt, singing the buffalo song. Men have killed the buffalo. That act occasions a transfer of responsibility which is also a transfer from masculine to feminine cultural prerogatives, from direct action to artistic transformation. Custom dramatizes the transfer. The women went outside the boundaries of the camp and picked up the men's song as they began the process of dividing the body of the buffalo, transforming it so that each part conformed to cultural need. Each separation was prelude to others, so that as the buffalo was divided and subdivided according to social rules, the women mimed their own roles of reproducing cultural forms. As No Ears is careful to point out, the women "own" the forms that are their continuing transformations of what the buffalo has given with the notion of continuity being demonstrated as individual elements take on more and more "abstract" cultural form, with the most abstract being also the ceremonially designated sign of totality, namely the decorated white buffalo robe. The younger sisters of the buffalo woman work the border between outside and inside through their transformations and these transformations pattern the form of cultural life. All this is quite literal. The detail of the No Ears text deserves some direct quotation to show how the significance of one event transfers to others.

Then the women sang the song and hurried to the carcasses and skinned them. They skinned one half and cut the skin in two along the back. Then they turned the carcass over and skinned the other half. All the women went out to skin and cut up the carcasses, but the skin of the carcass belonged to the woman of the man who killed it. This could be known by the arrow. The meat was divided among all in the camp. . . . The women dried and tanned the skins and they belonged to them. They made tipis and robes of the skins and they made dresses and leggings and moccasins of the skins of the young animals. The women owned the tipis. They cut the poles and trimmed them. They put up and took down the tipis. (Walker, *Society* 40)

This ordinary drama of Great Plains life is an act of localization.¹⁵ Woman transforms and places, or it may be more accurate to say that she transforms and replaces. What comes from elsewhere is brought into her space and given agency therein. Stone Boy comes from the sky; the buffalo comes from afar; men arrive from another unrelated household. The man standing outside the woman's tipi (as occurred in courting prac-

tice) seems like the reversal of the initial situation found in our tale where the women arrive at the tipi of the four brothers. But that seeming takes no account of the way arrivals are the occasion of crossings and translocations, movement in and out of demarcated space, which transforms the significance of that space as women “turn” the forms they make. With this observation we can note again that the mythic women who arrive at the brothers’ tipi have their work bags with them. They arrive ready and willing to do their particular art and once they are inside the tipi, it is theirs. The life of the social unit flows from their achieving their art and that always involves a process of bringing inside what has been outside the social unit, the *tiyospaye*. The first sister, of course, reverses that process. She takes what is inside and places it on the other side of life; she stops action, immobilizes the brothers. The second one shows that woman’s transformative action, her art, localizes by centralizing. She knows that mediation is transformation that shifts life forms from sphere to sphere. Lakota life advances by a continuing process of interiorisation and exteriorisation in which men and women change their respective positions so that each turning makes or unmakes life. Detailing this summation would continue to expand the importance of that mythic sister who swallows a clear white stone as she mourns the adopted brothers who have gone off to get her what she needs. The stone comes from the sky to the human community and brings the brothers back home before he sends them, the buffalo daughters, and his mother back to the sky.

In the interests of an economy that is certainly not symbolic, namely the economy of a single article, we need to side-step commentary on other features of the tale and cut to the ending and the final role of the mythic elder sister. Left Heron’s coda to the story, quoted above, tells us that Stone Boy sends his mother to the sky where she is the North Star, the pivot around which all else is measured, just as the elder sister role is the pivotal one in the kinship structure. The North Star enables people to make those calculations that let them find their way in the geographical landscape, and the elder sister lets them find their way in the spiritual and relational landscape. At this point, I can end what is designed to suggest possibilities for using archived texts in relation to historical and cultural analysis by emphasizing again how a textual dynamic achieves consonance with a social one, not, I believe, because one is abstracted from the other but because each creates the other within that other dynamic which is history and which inevitably requires new referents, new agents by which to maintain meaning.

At various stages of this demonstration, I have clearly been in critical

territory previously explored by others in the field of American Indian narrative study. Just as I have been concerned to show an interplay of texts that sets up the terms of interpretation, each for the other, I am concerned to show how different critical projects open out, each upon the other. Dennis Tedlock was the first among us to draw attention to the hermeneutic process occurring through oral performance. His article "The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation in American Indian Religion" is certainly one of the essential articles for the field. In the preceding illustration, I have been demonstrating that we can expand the range of texts that we use to show how any community maintains its own tradition of interpretation. This argument for expansion of textual analysis in a given specific locale is one of the practical consequences of the emphasis on textual communities. The textual commentaries I use all come from responsible Lakota leaders at the same period of history; the historical mapping of authoritative transmission represents another neglected task. Transmission reveals the genealogy of authority. The historical reality of that transmission is every bit as essential to understanding a group as the propositional content of any narrative, historical or otherwise. The period of history on which this article concentrates is one of upheavals in this genealogy. The individuals quoted in this brief article—people like Sword, Left Heron, Tyon, Bad Wound and Finger—engaged in soul-searching about how knowledge should be preserved and transmitted, and that experience is now part of any interpretation of material they left us.¹⁶

At several points in the preceding analysis, but most especially in relation to translation methods, I am clearly indebted to Dell Hymes' many-faceted contributions which call for attention to event structure and presentational form as these can be inferred from precisely informed translation. While the linguistic analysis in this article is relegated to one footnote, I have done far more extensive and detailed studies of the relevant semantic fields. These, in turn, allow me to postulate how underlying cognitive themes shape event structure. This work links the ethnolinguistic theory of Madeline Mathiot with that of developments in discourse theory only to come back to some of Hymes' ideas about presentational units.¹⁷ These steps in place, I believe that we can assert sociological and historical significance for presentational units but that precise demonstration goes beyond the bounds of this article.

Motives for historical study are many, but political necessity certainly has priority. The body of critical analysis linking literature to law is, happily, growing. Julie Cruikshank's article "Negotiating with Narrative"

is another of those basic works that are creating the boundaries of a field of study that emphasizes the role of audience. She notes that the practice of allowing members of communities to introduce their own terms into land claims negotiations is definitely an advance. Yet, she says, "there are risks . . . even when they share terminology, indigenous people may understand these terms to have meanings very different from those attributed by government negotiators for whom such language has become routine." She goes on to ask "And what messages does the language of indigenous narrative carry to multicultural audiences?" (57-58). Her questions justify this entire exercise.¹⁸

I could go on with a process of demonstrating how people in our field are already doing the work that lets us map textual communities that have definite geographical locations. Beyond that place in space, they have definite epistemological boundaries that are rarely exclusive. Obviously, people normally belong to multiple textual communities, but some historical process, affecting several domains of expressive culture, has to be the generative source of performed enactments of belonging to these communities. My purpose, as stated at the beginning of this exercise, is to build more bridges between existing bodies of scholarship, so that our scholarship related to texts within communities can acquire some of the pragmatic edge that communities need to assure the future identities they choose, with the emphasis once again firmly on the choices of the communities. People in academic positions could work with definite communities to designate the body of texts that the community views as public evidence of communal identity. The process of developing an interpretation of that body of texts will involve scholars from various disciplines because interpretation is simply one more phase in adjusting meaning to different audiences and some audiences are defined by institutions with particular rhetorical requirements. Academic interpretations have no more or less authority than those occurring outside the academy. Their authority is simply different, adapted to particular strategic purposes.

My own work in cognitive style was originally motivated by an apparent gap between historical archived materials and contemporary performance. I believed that the right kind of look at what was happening with contemporary narrative would reveal a cognitive continuity that might not be immediately evident at the propositional level but which nevertheless represented a traditional communal process. The hypothesis certainly allowed me to find more artistry in the contemporary materials than would otherwise have been possible. Whether or not such work could reveal the operation of tradition at the level of style remains, in my opin-

ion, an idea worth pursuing. The indispensable first stage of such a demonstration requires historical analysis of the sort I begin here but have pursued in detail well beyond what is indicated here. The next stages would involve juxtaposing the patterns revealed by all that detail to what is found in contemporary materials. Clearly such tasks require considerable time and effort, and that is another argument for collaborative efforts. As a subdiscipline, we have made impressive advances in the last twenty-five years. The questions now are, “where can we go from here?” and “what kind of plurality is signified by ‘we’?”

NOTES

1. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1990.
2. The many works of Teun van Dijk and his associates have been developing models for scientific study of narrative pragmatics in relation to propositional structures. The models strategize notions of narrative competence in relation to performance. The research that is generally categorized as ethnography or sociology of communication has applied many theoretical principles of discourse analysis to American contexts, with Dell Hymes’ ground-breaking work making the connection with Native American narratives. See in particular “The Ethnography of Speaking” in T. Gladwin and W. C. Sturtevant, eds., *Anthropolgy and Human Behavior*, p 13-53. Washington DC: Anthropological Society of Washington.

An excellent introductory text in the field is Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Dionysis Goutsos’ *Discourse Analysis*. Their sketch of future agendas for the field includes the observation that each analytic method is but prelude to “a broad-based approach that applies to language any and all roads to understanding, including introspection, experimentation, theorizing, and above all careful observation of the myriad discourse practices within social and cultural practices (Chafe, 1990: 21). Discourse analysis needs to be able to combine the rigorous, disciplined and systematic investigation with the attention and sensitivity to the personal and the particular” (184).

3. “The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation” in Kroeber, *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian: Texts and Interpretations*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1981.
4. The connection between narrative analysis and claims of sovereign

status is recognized by a number of scholars in the field of international law. An especially helpful analysis is that given by Andrew Carty in *Was Ireland Conquered? International Law and the Irish Question*. "By way of introduction to the liberal critique, it is necessary to repeat the basic assumption of legal method in this study which rests not on the state as such but on a form of collective identity of peoples. It is only appropriate that a material rather than a formal definition of international personality should look to a hermeneutic and, where necessary, a deconstruction of the ideological structures which represent the typical modes of experience and practice of collective groups as such. These structures form an interrelated network, simply because they have a common historical root. It is vital to stress that the unspoken cultural assumptions and beliefs are not necessarily or simply reproduced by state action or even by elite manipulation. It is not even a matter of analysis at the level of observable political behavior and explicit political preference. Indeed individual and even party political beliefs may appear logically incoherent. Yet it is a matter of attempting to identify the sense of community of a group in terms which it can itself recognize. Such a perspective is an inevitable consequence of the assumption that the people are prior to the state and that the latter is, indeed, no more than a contingent administrative and institutional framework which the people give themselves" (123).

5. See Milner S. Ball, "Stories of Origen and Constitutional Possibilities," *Michigan Law Review* 87-8 (1981).
6. Karl Kroeber also discusses this text in *Artistry in Native American Myths*. He, too, sees the myth as important to understanding historical process. His discussion covers far more features of the tale than I do in this article.
7. See Martha Warren Beckwith, "Mythology of the Oglala Dakota"; Eugene Buechel et al., *Lakota Tales and Texts*; Deloria, *Dakota Texts*; Marie L. McLaughlin, *Myths and Legends of the Sioux*; Ronald Theisz, *Buckskin Tokens: Contemporary Oral Narratives of the Lakota*; Gilbert Walking Bull, *Ohu-ka-kan*; and Clark Wissler, "Some Dakota Myths."
8. The question of what constitutes a legitimate basis for comparison runs like a fault line through all my references to comparative research. In the interests of critical economy, I believe that we can start with the notions of tale type and motifs that allow us access to the bibliographical work of historic-geographic tradition. That basis for

comparison will not get us very far, though, in considering the cognitive themes that bind different genres. Claude Levi-Strauss, of course, recognized that inadequacy and aimed for a more abstract basis in systematic transformations. But his approach moves so quickly to high level abstractions that it bypasses the intermediate stages by which individuals and communities adjust received forms to their own uses, the very stages that interest me here. Still, all of these early efforts to find a basis for comparison provide indispensable tools for first-stage scanning. My own work with texts in the region convinces me that the Stone Boy tale is related to two normally separated groups of texts. First, the group of texts famously classified as the Star Husband complex. Among the Ojibwa this complex includes episodes of the Double Woman complex. Among the Sioux the Double Women acquire a younger, less dangerous sister whose form seems to coalesce into that of the younger sister of the Stone Boy story thereby linking the Star Husband complex to a body of hero tales which may or may not present the hero as the son of a celestial being. The incident of the two sisters seems to link these vast branches of North American mythology. The basis and importance of such speculation derives from the link between these two bodies of narrative and gender roles in conjunction with the origins of women's art which in turn sum up a basic series of localizing operations. I propose that cognitive complexes I would sum up under a rubric like "localizing operations" make a more telling basis for comparison than the old distinctions between plot types.

9. The entire chapter entitled "Three Adornments" in *The Origin of Table Manners* is devoted to this narrative complex. Levi-Strauss touches on Arapahoe, Crow, Gros Ventre and Omaha versions. He used Bad Wound's Sioux version which, according to Sioux terms, is exceptional. The woman is a sister but not necessarily an elder sister and she does not arrive at the tipi from the world beyond. Nevertheless, Levi-Strauss does pick up on the connections between the type and the significance of women's quill work, just as he perceives that issues of location and translocation are somehow involved. The details of these broad-based intercultural themes can only be worked out through close analysis of a single culture's expressive forms. Using the structuralist comparative data, though, supports my contention that the presentational units in Sword's version of the story represent highly compressed significance.
10. What I propose regarding kinship studies is radical but not entirely

without precedent. Differentiating between a social structural approach to kinship (genealogical, precisely integrated) and a cultural approach (broadly defined to include symbolic interpretations) Raymond DeMallie argues that each provides “entirely different kinds of understandings of kinship systems” (143) with the latter being more particularistic because it does not begin with the imposition of an outside framework. He notes that “for the Sioux, kinship is an active force, the act of relating. They understand their own kinship system to be in striking contrast to the static nature of American kinship . . . ” (132). Establishing a way to begin thinking about a Lakota cultural approach, he observes “By restricting kinship to genealogy, the social-structural approach fails to note that the Sioux define relationship in terms of a set of conceptual categories and the logical relationships among them based on proper ‘feeling’ and behavior, rather than on concrete links of marriage and birth. Although those biological factors are at the basis of Sioux kinship, they are in fact deemphasized by the system, both in terms of classification and behavior” that “like all other fundamentals of Sioux culture, kinship was the gift of wak’an tanka, the ‘great spirits’ brought by the White Buffalo Cow Woman, their messenger When the sacred woman arrived in the Sioux camp, she gave the people the sacred pipe and tobacco, with the instructions that they be used for prayer. In a linguistic sense, prayer invokes kinship. To pray and to address someone by a kin term are the same action (wacekiya)” (142).

11. The historiographer Hans Kellner has summarized some of the questions that historians now share with narratologists, questions which reveal some of the issues for which narrative analysis can yield information to the advantage of both historical and literary understanding. “If the processes of the historical imagination are specifically literary only in the final stages of creation, however, I have argued in this book that they are everywhere linguistic, shaped and constrained from the start by rhetorical considerations that are the ‘other’ sources of history. The immortality of facts is dependent upon the conventions of discourse governing the culture that accepts their authority, which is to say, the authority of the process by which they are constituted. This authority is an important form of the cultural power to be sure, and the basis of the human sciences, but it is a tenuous sort of immortality indeed. In the first place, facts themselves are invariably constituted by communities through defining, naming parts, sorting these designated objects, devising conceptions of the relations be-

tween them, distinguishing oppositions and contraries, selecting beginnings and endings, eliding gaps, evaluating relative importance among objects that will differ from existing objects in detail while resembling them in kind" (325-326).

12. See DeMallie, "Kinship and Biology in Sioux Culture," in *North American Indian Anthropology*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1997.
13. Establishing terminology for looking at the relationships between event structure and intentionality is one of the great merits of Stock's approach. He sees any text as an event. I would qualify his notion of complexity in relation to the text in order to draw attention to text as a macro-event organizing micro-events. That being said, I find his ideas of intentionality in relation to event of enormous practical significance for those of us interested in the historical study of American Indian texts. "To rephrase the two positions of which I speak above, an event can be understood as the product of something, or as the intention to be something. As a product it is the consequence of earlier, but not necessarily related events—such as, for example, the *consuetudo* that appears as 'law' in the medieval manor after emerging from a welter of customary practices. As intention it is related to thoughts and actions that will take place but have not yet done so, and it derives its meaning from someone's looking back from the vantage point of a later time—as, for example, when the same feudal *consuetudo* is considered a 'law' by medieval commentators or modern historians" (81).
14. For example, Clark Wissler's *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians* includes a text elaborating on events involving the two sisters, brothers, and the formation of Ursa Major. The older and dangerous sister is noted as "a powerful medicine-woman. She could tan hides in a new way" (69). Definite references like this point us toward less obvious but finally more important comparisons that let us set up a semantic field of relations between bear, stone, origins of women's art and constellations in the sky. These relations will vary from tribe to tribe, of course, but they always point toward features of gender categories as these features establish categories of time and space. An especially important text within this complex is "The Deserted Children" in Robert Lowie's "The Assiniboine." The brother/sister pair are deserted because young girls have angered bead (or shell) maker. To provide his sister with a proper lodge, the brother goes in search of "something half-stone, half-bear." The entire complex narrates how a group calibrates distances between a woman and the

sources of materials for her art. The distance itself sets up points that allow for the calculation of time. A woman's art includes the human form itself and reproduction, culturally understood, is, of course the basis for relational categories. The belief that the designs appropriate to women's art come from supernatural beings through dream experiences is a general belief that gives this important complex its particular force.

15. Some detailing of semantic fields emphasizes the significance of this comment. The term *tan* is a contraction of *tancan* or body. It is also a reference to the severed half of the buffalo hide. There is a metonymic transfer at work whereby a body exists as half of something. (Themes of twins take on particular significance in this context.) The potential for confusion between phonemics and morphemics is real. Nevertheless, at the risk of such confusion, I point out that the term for sister's husband is *tanhan* and the temptation to transliterate that as the body standing up continuously in a definite place is evident from the arguments of this paper. Marriage localizes the other half. People inclined to think in terms of dualisms are bound to appreciate this evidence of a body divided in half but brought together again in the individual household (itself literally half of the buffalo) by way of marriage. This is especially intriguing since there is so little evidence of dualism in Lakota sociology.
16. Some information about each of these leaders is included in *Lakota Myth* in relation to the presentation of their tales, including George Sword's life and texts.
17. Madeline Mathiot's theoretical assumptions also guide our first-stage textual analysis. "The hypothesis underlying the present approach is that the theme structure of a language is related to the theme structure of a culture. The degree to which the two structures are related constitutes the degree of integratedness of the language in the total culture . . . The assumption implicit in the usual interpretation of the Sapir Whorf hypothesis is that the cognitive domain of language is directly related to culture, thus influencing cultural behavior." In the present approach, this assumption is replaced by the postulation of two separate theme structures related to each other in varying degrees. Thus instead of direct correlations, an intermediate level is proposed. This means that language and culture relations are expected to emerge on a higher level of abstraction. This also means that no necessary determinism is postulated in the relation of language to culture.

18. See "Negotiating with Narrative: Establishing Cultural Identity at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival" in *American Anthropology* 99.1 1997.

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Paula Gunn Allen: An Annotated Bibliography of Secondary Sources

Cynthia McDaniel

This is not about race; this is about vision. The people who live on this continent are Indians, that is to say, they live on the Indian continent, and what we must do is teach them how to live here. We tried and they kept killing us. That was then; but now maybe there are people here, lots of them, who are ready. . . .

Paula Gunn Allen¹

In her 1992 preface to *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), Allen remarks that “something sacred indeed is going on,” because she recognizes a “truly Native American Renaissance” due to interest generated by recent movies such as *Dances With Wolves* and the emergence of successful Indian writers (xiv).² Allen explains that “worldwide interest in and attention to the wisdom of the ‘First Peoples’” continues to grow, and this wisdom arises from predominantly “woman-centered or gynocratic tribal societies” (264), with female traditions informing the work of many contemporary Native American writers. Additionally, a recurring theme in much American Indian literature is survival: not simply existence but the preservation of a collective heritage, an unwavering sense of spirituality and connectedness, and a capacity for hope. Allen writes that the “endurance of tribal beauty is our reason to sing, to greet the coming day and the restored life and hope it brings” (xi). Composed from an American Indian woman-centered perspective, Allen’s “songs” (poetry and prose) reflect a spirit of survival and hope.

A self-described “breed,” Paula Gunn Allen’s father is Lebanese-American and her mother, who was born on the Laguna Pueblo reservation, is Scotch-Laguna. Allen was raised in New Mexico in the Spanish land grant town of Cubero, about fifty miles west of Albuquerque. Sent to a Catholic boarding school at age six, Allen’s Christian upbringing influences her writing, especially in the semi-autobiographical novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. Allen’s perspective as a “mixed-blood” or “half-breed” dramatically informs her work, which is sometimes compared to Gloria Anzaldúa’s, with a common focus on writing from the margins or “borders.”

Allen is related to Laguna writers Leslie Marmon Silko (cousin) and Carol Lee Sanchez (sister). Native American author N. Scott Momaday and writers Gertrude Stein and Robert Creeley have been important influences for her. Feeling confined by conventional Western literary standards, Allen developed a writing style grounded in a Native American and woman-centered perspective.

Like Anzaldúa, Allen is associated with many separate identities but is never wholly incorporated into any particular group. While she describes her main affiliations as Native American, lesbian, and feminist, Allen remains an outsider straddling the various margins. Writing from multiple perspectives, she claims “literature that rides the borders of a variety of literary, cultural, and ideological realms, has not been adequately addressed by either mainstream feminist scholarship or the preponderance of ‘ethnic’ or ‘minority’ scholarship” (“Border” 305). In Allen’s view, literature must be placed in its proper context in order to be understood. Consequently, she believes it is imperative that readers familiarize themselves with Native American cultures to appreciate the significance of her writing, and she developed an excellent guidebook, *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs*, to facilitate the project of learning about American Indian traditions.

Constantly aware of her position as liaison between Native and white cultures, Allen “always shapes her aesthetic and critical work to mediate between Native American and white experience,” explains Elizabeth Hanson (40). Allen emphasizes the need to read literature in its proper context because she possesses an intense desire to convey realistic, thoughtful depictions of Native Americans through the various genres of essay, poetry, and novel. However, her work is occasionally criticized as having an uneven quality, and critics tend to examine Allen’s fiction and nonfiction simultaneously, often referring to statements in *The Sacred Hoop* while explicating her poetry or novel. Yet Allen has played an

extremely important role in the Native American “renaissance,” and American literatures in general, with her contributions to creative writing, literary criticism, and studies in feminist issues. Currently Professor of English at UCLA, Allen continues to teach, write, and enlighten others.

In addition to *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), Allen recently published a collection of essays, *Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-Busting, Border-Crossing, and Loose Canons* (1998). She has also edited two other books of criticism, *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Courses Designs* (1983) and *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women* (1989).³ In addition to a collection of stories and essays entitled *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook* (1991), Allen edited *From the Center: A Folio: Native American Art and Poetry* (1981), *Columbus and Beyond: Views from Native Americans* (1992), *Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature, 1900-1970* (1995), and *Song of the Turtle: American Indian Literature, 1974-1994* (1996). She designed a book called *Gossips, Gorgons and Crones: The Fates of the Earth* (1993, by Jane Caputi), and recently co-edited a book for children, *As Long As the Rivers Flow: The Stories of Nine Native Americans* (1996).⁴ Allen's fiction includes the novel, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983), and novels-in-progress entitled *Raven's Road* and *The Seven Generations*. She has written numerous books of poetry, the most notable of which is *Shadow Country* (1982).⁵ Often published by small presses, Allen's poetry is sometimes difficult to obtain, although many anthologies contain large portions of her books, and these are easily found in most libraries.⁶

The bibliographies I consulted for this study cite the majority of Allen's principal texts, yet none includes a comprehensive list of criticism about her. Therefore, I decided to concentrate my research on works containing criticism of Allen's writing (including dissertations and interviews, but excluding book reviews).⁷ The CD-ROM version of the *MLA International Bibliography* provided the basis for my research, from which I compiled an inventory of secondary works current to Fall 1997. I supplemented this information with reference sources obtained in the *Bibliographic Index*, such as *The Reader's Adviser* and *Native North American Literature*, using each bibliography I encountered as an additional checklist with which to compare my findings. The organization of entries is alphabetical by author or editor.

Aal, Katharyn Machan. Interview. "Writing As an Indian Woman: An Interview with Paula Gunn Allen." *North Dakota Quarterly* 57.2 (1989): 148-161.

Focuses on Allen's development as a poet, influences such as Robert Creeley and Allen Ginsberg, and the creation of poetry in the oral tradition, which she composes with attention to how the poem will sound in performance. While poetry readings early in her career were directed to audiences composed mainly of other poets, Allen articulates the different, more satisfying reactions she experiences when performing within the women's community. She points out the insignificant status of poets (especially oral performers) in America, but reveals the mutual pleasure enjoyed by both poet and audience during lively performances.

Ballinger, Franchot and Brian Swann. Interview. "A MELUS Interview: Paula Gunn Allen." *MELUS* 10.2 (1983): 3-25.

Interviewed in 1982, Allen states that the woman-centeredness of Laguna culture is important to her work. On the subject of language, she maintains that the perceptions of word associations and meanings for English-speaking Indians are often completely different from mainstream understandings. Allen denounces her uncle John Gunn's published Laguna stories as distortions, because he tried to make Lagunas "look like European people." She is concerned about the increasing violence against women, children, and old people on the reservation. Regarding feminism, Allen claims that white feminists fail to recognize cultural differences, wrongly assuming a common experience among all women regardless of ethnicity or class. She talks about the publishing opportunities available to Native American writers, stating that since people "learned about Indians from the media," the market demands texts about "not a human being, but a media Indian"—a "'sellable' Indian." Advocating for realistic portrayals, Allen is against the sentimentalization of Indians.

Bataille, Gretchen M. and Kathleen Mullen Sands. *American Indian Women: Telling Their Lives*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1984. 140-141. Describes autobiographical elements in Allen's "experimental novel" *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. The fictional main character, Ephanie, embodies real-life qualities of Allen, her mother, and her grandmother, yet Allen remains distanced from Ephanie through the use of the third person "she."

Boynton, Victoria. "Desire's Revision: Feminist Appropriation of Native American Traditional Sources." *Modern Language Studies* 26.2-3

(1996): 53-71.

Applies the reading perspective of “Barbie-Tonto,” (the “white doll woman of America” combined with “your Indian friend”) to focus on the protagonist of Silko’s *Yellow Woman* and Allen’s Kochinnenako in “Whirlwind Man Steals Yellow Woman” (from *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*). She cites Allen’s *Sacred Hoop* and briefly addresses the “problems inherent in contemporary white readings of English translations of traditional Native American tales.” However, Boynton is concerned with the appropriation and revision of traditional Native American stories involving kidnapping and rape of women, which she believes is questionable, disturbing, and potentially damaging.

Bredin, Renae. “‘Becoming Minor’: Reading *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 6.4 (1994): 36-50. Addresses the idea of the reader’s identity in relation to the text, questioning the position of the reader as an outsider—someone who is not self-described as Native American, lesbian, or feminine. Although Allen writes her novel in a genre rooted in “Anglo and Eurocentric traditions,” she uses a technique of “the narrative of the broken sentence” (in which the sentence is fragmented, and the gaps and silences are infused with meaning) to subvert the “sign system of the oppressor.” Allen creates an “essential Pan-Indian” through her retelling of Native American stories, which are Indian but not necessarily Keresan. Since Ephanie recounts several versions of the story of *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* throughout the novel, culminating in the realization (epiphany) that she is Sky Woman, the novel itself can be viewed as “another telling of the Sky Woman story.”

—. “Guerilla Ethnography.” Diss. U of Arizona, 1995. *DAI* 56 (1995): 1774.

The work of writers Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Elsie Clews Parsons shares common elements of place/location (Laguna Pueblo), discourses (fiction and ethnography), races (Laguna and White), and gender (female). Bredin investigates the interrelationship of domination and subordination, demonstrating how non-white writers reveal whiteness, which is a socially constructed category. The texts by these three Native American authors upset the “underlying assumption of whiteness as the given or natural center.”

Bruchac, Joseph. Interview. “I Climb the Mesas in My Dreams.” *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1987. 1-21.

In this 1983 interview, Allen speaks about growing up—the wisdom

she learned from her Laguna mother, her disillusionment with the lessons of the Church, and the value the Laguna place on learning. In high school, Gertrude Stein's work was a major influence, and later Robert Creeley's *For Love* inspired Allen to begin creative writing. Allen reveals that N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* "saved my life" because it provided reassurance and a sense of connection to her homeland. Concerning her own writing, Allen discusses the significance of shadows in *Shadow Country*, and the use of song structure in her poetry. On the topic of being a "mixedblood," she perceives "half-breed" authors as having a "mediational capacity that is not possessed by either of the sides." Despite feeling "essentially alienated," Allen notes that Indian writers are important for their "spiritual vision" and declares that "we can transform American culture."

Castro, Michael. *Interpreting the Indian*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1983. 33-36.

Uses Allen's essay, "The Sacred Hoop," which explains the main differences between Native American poetry and traditional Western poetry, to ground an assertion that "most Indian poetry" has "strong magical associations," especially through the use of repetition, brevity, and poetic language.

Champagne, Duane, ed. *The Native North American Almanac: A Reference Work on Native North Americans in the United States and Canada*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994.

Brief paragraph on page 759 mentions Allen's main works. Longer entry (pages 999-1000) provides biographical information, remarking on Allen's efforts to educate others about Native American literature as well as her commitment to feminism.

Coltelli, Laura. Interview. "Paula Gunn Allen." *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1990. 11-39.

This 1985 interview begins with Allen's thoughts on how acculturation has changed American Indian women's lifestyles, and how she interweaves feminist issues with Native American studies. Recognizing that tribes "have always been sex-segregated in certain ways," Allen explains differences between male and female writers, and she claims that the works of both tend to be spiritual, use natural imagery, and speak about Indians. Allen celebrates the increasing number of Native writers, most importantly because they are defining Indian images for themselves rather than being pigeonholed and labeled by others. Specific authors are cited, including Allen's uncle John Gunn,

who translated Native stories “not only into English but into Western thought.” Allen talks about the people who have influenced her, the writing process, and her works in progress, including *Raven’s Road* (a “medicine-dyke novel”), research on Maronite people, and a poetry manuscript called “Soundings.”

Dhairyam, Sagari. “‘A House of Difference’: Constructions of the Lesbian Poet in Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Paula Gunn Allen.” Diss. U of Illinois, 1993. *DAI* 54 (1993): 1802.

Considers the genre of poetry as an effective and appropriate “house for lesbian identity.” Contends that critical recognition of these poets’ work is judged by rigid conventional literary criteria rather than their activist agendas. Examining poetry by “a black Lorde, a white Rich, and a red Allen,” Dhairyam strives to “celebrate lesbian identity in the context of post-structuralist thought,” believing that there is reciprocal nurturance between the performative aspects of poetry and alternate identities.

Draper, James P. “Paula Gunn Allen.” *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Vol. 84. Detroit: Gale Research, 1995. 1-47.

A brief introduction summarizing the critical reception of Allen’s work states that her poetry is “recognized for its musical qualities” and her novel is “praised for its examination of racism and sexism.” Although her nonfiction is occasionally faulted for lack of documentation, Allen “attempts to preserve Native American culture for all individuals regardless of their ethnic heritage.” The remaining forty-six pages of criticism contain essays, two interviews⁸, and an excerpt from Elizabeth Hanson’s book (see entry below). The books reviewed are: *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, *Studies in American Indian Literature*, *The Sacred Hoop*, *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*, *Skins and Bones*, and *Grandmothers of the Light*.

Eysturoy, Annie O. Interview. “Paula Gunn Allen.” *This is About Vision: Interviews with Southwestern Writers*. Eds. William Balassi, John F. Crawford, and Annie O. Eysturoy. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1990. 95-107.

Conducted in 1987, the interview begins with Allen’s thoughts on the importance of the Southwestern landscape in her writing, and the idea that nature—potent, diverse, rugged and sublime—epitomizes her concept of femininity. She reveals her early desire to be an actress, which out of necessity evolved into a writing career, inspired by the work and teaching of Robert Creeley. She also speaks about the process of writing as a way to “find out who you are,” and the impor-

tance for all individuals to understand their heritage. Allen believes that "you must accept all your identities . . . the more cultures you have, the greater your range." She also advocates "gynocratic" or "gynocentric" communities in which "femaleness or femininity is the central cultural value" rather than "matriarchy," which connotes a woman-dominated society. Includes discussion of *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and Allen's new novel, *Raven's Road*, which explores a theme of the nuclear bomb as a way to cleanse the planet.

Ferrell, Tracy J. Prince. "Transformation, Myth, and Ritual in Paula Gunn Allen's *Grandmothers of the Light*." *North Dakota Quarterly*, 63.1 (1996): 77-88.

Emphasizes Allen's search for self-definition and her evolving ideology. Most of her work incorporates oral tradition, seems instructional, and encourages readers to open their minds and think differently. Specifically, *Grandmothers of the Light* is a guidebook for personal transformation and it "demands that America re-evaluate its concept of Native people and cultures." Ferrell claims that although Allen is "trying to unlearn 'western patriarchal' influences, she will never be able to escape them entirely and present a cleaned slate, reinscribed with an originary Native nature." However, Ferrell acknowledges the value of Allen's technique of integrating Native American myth with Western influences.

Hanson, Elizabeth. *Paula Gunn Allen*. Boise: Boise State UP, 1990.

This fifty page booklet begins with biographical information, stressing Allen's position as a "breed," because she identifies with two cultural communities but will always remain an outsider. The work of Leslie Marmon Silko, also a Keresan-speaking Laguna Pueblo, addresses similar themes concerning the "breed's" struggle for identity. The second section analyzes Allen's nonfiction, beginning with an examination of *Studies in American Indian Literature*, which is a teacher's guide that demonstrates the importance of reading Native American literature within the context of community and ceremony rather than interpreting it through the "white man's" perspective. *The Sacred Hoop* is criticized for departing from the premises of *Studies* to adopt a "woman-focused world view." The subsequent sections deal with the early poetry; the feminist poetry; *Shadow Country*; and *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, which is compared to Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. Concludes with a selected bibliography of works by and about Allen.

—. "Shadows in Paula Gunn Allen's *Shadow Country*." *ARIEL* 25.2 (1994):

49-55.

In her *Shadow Country* poems, Allen tries to “contain and reconcile the complexities of the white/Native American experience.” She establishes herself as a mediator or peacemaker through her mixedblood identity (“self divided against itself”), essentially uniting opposites. Allen evokes memories of Native American peacefulness as a model for individual harmony, hoping readers will be inspired to “transform their shared culture” away from discord to a “sacred terrain.”

Holford, Vanessa. “Re Membering Ephanie: A Woman’s Re-Creation of Self in Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 6.1 (1994): 99-113.

Through Allen’s presentation of Ephanie’s quest for self-discovery and self-preservation, her writing technique has the “potential for self-actualization” because Allen’s use of fragmented discourse (jumping “from thought to thought, scene to scene, without transition or explanation”) is a form of “feminine writing,” as delineated by the French feminist Hélène Cixous. In answer to some critics’ denunciation of lesbian relationships in the novel, Holford points out that Ephanie “seeks spiritual union with both men and women, but in her case it is Elena and later Teresa with whom she achieves the twinning she seeks to create her own identity.” Views Teresa as representing “both woman’s love for other women and the possibility of a feminine unity that transcends race.” Allen retells traditional Indian stories, incorporating Western influences, hoping to present a “unified world view which allows for differences instead of punishing them.”

Jahner, Elaine. “A Laddered, Rain-bearing Rug: Paula Gunn Allen’s Poetry.” Eds. Helen Winter Stauffer and Susan J. Rosowski. *Women and Western American Literature*. New York: Whitston, 1982. 311-26.

Explicates poetry from *Coyote’s Daylight Trip*, concentrating on the prevalence of traditional mythology, explaining that myth helps people to understand the world, seeing it in new ways, and teaches about the “creative powers of the universe.” Designates Allen as a “desert writer,” which is evident through her use of landscape-related terminology to describe emotional states. Additionally, Allen creates “‘mythic space’ where people can confront the truth of their own and others’ existence,” a place of refuge where one can experience personal growth and rebirth.

Jaskoski, Helen. “Allen’s Grandmother.” *Explicator* 50 (1992): 247-50. Analyzes the poem “Grandmother,” focusing on line 15: “the women and the men weave blankets into tales of life.” Argues that the speaker

(not to be confused with the poet) is “emphatically ungendered or androgynous.” Draws a parallel of the poet represented as spider in Walt Whitman’s “A Noiseless Patient Spider” and the blanket as a figure of androgyny in a Pueblo poem called “Song of the Sky Loom.” Considers knowledge of Laguna/Pueblo traditions an essential prerequisite to understanding Allen’s intended meaning.

Jenkins, Linda Walsh. “A Gynocratic Feminist Perspective and the Case of Kopit’s *Indians*.” *Theatre and Feminist Aesthetics*. Eds. Karen Laughlin and Catherine Schuler. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1995. 82-99.

Adopts Allen’s explication of “recovering the feminine in American Indian Traditions” from *The Sacred Hoop* to develop a “gynocratic” reading of Kopit’s 1968 play *Indians*. Viewing Native American belief systems as generally nonoppressive and life-affirming, Jenkins interprets Allen’s explanation of the gynocratic worldview as: balanced and unified with nature, with the earth itself being feminine; a spirit-centered universe; a collective and individual coexistence; and a natural, ceremonial concept of time. Applying this perspective to *Indians*, Jenkins argues that prevailing discourse continues to be male-dominated, oppressive, and destructive to spiritually-based gynocratic attitudes and practices.

Karrer, Wolfgang. “Nostalgia, Amnesia, and Grandmothers: The Uses of Memory in Albert Murray, Sabine Ulibarri, Paula Gunn Allen, and Alice Walker.” *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*. Eds. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert E. Hogan. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1994. 135-44.

Allen employs myth and ceremony in her novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* to achieve positive transformation of the protagonist, Ephanie, who “simultaneously recovers her individual and collective past as a Native American woman.” Effectively emulating Spider Grandmother through her “patient weaving of recurrent key words,” Allen invokes old sacred stories, demonstrating their value and healing power within contemporary society.

Keating, AnaLouise. “Back to the Mother? Paula Gunn Allen’s Origin Myths.” *Women Reading Women Writing: Self-Invention in Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1996. 93-117.

Points out the limited academic reception of Allen’s work, which seems to parallel the “extremity of her claims,” scant factual supporting evidence, as well as prevailing elitist standards of scholarship. Yet Allen’s

- use and retelling of woman-centered creation myths is valuable because origin stories help people to recognize their ties to the past and, consequently, they can have a better understanding of the present and future. Developing new ways of thinking, Allen avoids dualism as she intertwines the mind, body, and spirit, and departs from Western concepts of femininity and motherhood. Allen's writing affirms a "'feminine' mestizaje." (Feminine signifies "re-metaphorized images of Woman" and mestizaje is evident through "fluid, transformational, transcultural forms.") Believing literal interpretations are too limiting, Keating expands Allen's own reading of origin myths, asserting they should be read performatively as "transformational metaphors."
- Keating, AnnLouise. "Myth Smashers, Myth Makers: (Re)Visionary Techniques in the Works of Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde." *Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color*. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Haworth, 1993: 73-95.
- Examines these authors to reveal the way in which "they challenge the cultural stereotypes that silence women of color by denying their access to language." Keating discusses Allen's use of the Laguna Pueblo tradition's creatrix figure of Old Spider Woman/Thought Woman, which is a nonwestern allusion. Allen's process of "revisionist mythmaking" is a technique that provides "radical alternatives to the existing social structures." Old Spider Woman/Thought Woman embodies intellectual power and creativity, yet she creates through the process of thinking rather than giving birth (a typically western, patriarchal notion). "Allen's goal is transformation" because she "attempts to alter her readers' worldviews" through the creation of alternate myths.
- Lang, Nancy Helene. "Through Landscape Toward Story/Through Story Toward Landscape: A Study of Four Native American Women Poets." Diss. Indiana U of Pennsylvania, 1991. *DAI* 52 (1991): 918.
- Studies the poetry of Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, and Wendy Rose, claiming that the content and significance of each writer's work reflects her mixedblood identity and the "multi-voiced discourse of their poems resonate[s] with multi-layered meanings." Images of Native American traditions and cultural practices are juxtaposed with current urban social problems. Although necessarily written in English, which is the "'alien' language of the conqueror," the narrative combination of traditional and contemporary forms creates "powerful statements of place."
- Lincoln, Kenneth. "Now Day Indi'ns." *Native American Renaissance*.

Berkeley: U of California P, 1983. 214-21.

Allen's identity as "half breed" places her in "that marginal zone of interfusions, neither the shadower, nor the shadowed, both and neither, in liminal transition." Addresses the poetry of *Shadow Country*, consistently comparing Allen's life with her writing. Concentrating on her sense of isolation from both Native American and white cultures, Lincoln highlights the theme of alienation. Allen's poetry shatters "stereotypes of blood warriors and demure squaws" with "women foregrounded," but her feminism is "older" because it focuses on woman's work. Lincoln recognizes "echoes of Whitman" and other Romantic poets in Allen's writing.

Olendorf, Donna, ed. *Contemporary Authors*. Vol. 143. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994. 3-4.

Short entry includes Allen's published works, briefly mentioning the critical reception of *The Sacred Hoop*, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, and *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*.

Perry, Donna. Interview. *Backtalk: Women Writers Speak Out*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1993. 1-18.

Interviewed in June 1990, Allen talks about her diverse background and the influence of music (Indian, Arabic, Roman Catholic, and Mexican) on her writing. She attributes the increase in Native American literary studies to various factors, most importantly the work of writer N. Scott Momaday in the 1960s and the Modern Language Association's investigation into "discrete literatures" in 1970. Allen says her goal in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* was to "make Indian people real, not oddities, not curiosities." Gertrude Stein's writing had a major impact on Allen during high school, and she attributes the "rhythms" of her novel to Stein's influence. Allen's work deals with Indians' "contribution to feminism—the tradition of strong, autonomous, self-defining women." Lastly, she reveals her concern that all Native peoples (worldwide) are in danger. Allen hopes the next century will allow for "a real dialogue about what happened [to indigenous populations] and what is still happening. We need to make it stop."

Purdy, John. Interview. "'And Then, Twenty Years Later . . .': A Conversation with Paula Gunn Allen." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9.3 (1997). 5-16.

In this 1997 interview from *SAIL*'s "Twentieth-Anniversary Issue on the Flagstaff Conference on Native American Literatures," Allen is excited by the increased recognition of Native writers in the literary

field over the past twenty years. Remarking that Native American work should not be designated and studied as “minority” or “multicultural literature,” Allen believes it should be categorized as simply American literature. She explains that unlike other ethnic writing, most Native American work is “literature of the spirit or the literature of ritual” rather than writing focused mainly on oppression. Commenting that in the future she plans to divert her attention from strictly literary matters to concentrate on more spiritual issues, Allen reveals her current writing project, *The Seven Generations*, which is about Native spiritual systems.

Reuman, Ann E.⁹ “Paula Gunn Allen.” *Native American Writers of the United States*. Ed. Kenneth M. Roemer. Detroit: Gale Research, 1997. 11-20.

Lists primary works and biographical information, addressing Allen’s role as “mediator,” which is informed by her rich, diverse upbringing, and mentions her commitment to the Native American community. As a writer, Allen “struggles to negotiate multiple, often contentious, worldviews and urges white, Western, patriarchal culture to revalue and remember a Native American worldview from which it has become estranged and from which it has much to learn.” Reveals Allen’s literary influences, especially Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*; her education and teaching career; and the development of her complex, non-Western style and utilization of oral tradition. Detailed discussion of both the autobiographical novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and *The Sacred Hoop* (which Reuman believes can be read as companion to the novel), with brief comments about *Grandmothers of the Light*, *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*, *Voice of the Turtle* and *As Long as the Rivers Flow*.

Reuman, Ann Evalynn. “Shifting Grounds: Feminist Dialogism, Narrative Strategies, and Constructions of Self in Works by Four United States Women Writers (Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzálúa, Audre Lorde, Marilynne Robinson).” Diss. Tufts University, 1998. *DAI-A* 59/04 (1998): 1169.

Analyzes Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, Anzálúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, and Robinson’s *Housekeeping*. Despite diverse histories and heritages, these four writers all challenge dominant hegemonic ideology by recuperating “sacred tales of historically specific struggle and female power,” using multiple narrative perspectives to challenge dualism and prompt readers to change

unexamined, ingrained ways of thinking.

Ruoff, A. LaVonne Brown. *American Indian Literatures: An Introduction, Bibliographic Review, and Selected Bibliography*. New York: MLA, 1990. 92-94.

Comments on Allen's feminist perspective and use of a southwestern setting in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*,¹⁰ describing the novel as the "journey toward spiritual rebirth." Praises Allen's poetry as insightful, well-written, and powerful.

Ruppert, Jim. "Paula Gunn Allen and Joy Harjo: Closing the Distance Between Personal and Mythic Space." *American Indian Quarterly* 7.1 (1983): 27-40.

Analyzes poetry from *Coyote's Daylight Trip* (1978) and *Star Child* (1981), concentrating on Allen's representation of the individual's search for meaning and significance in a barren world, and defines the term "mythic space" as "the fusion of person, spirit, and land." Allen reaches the realm of mythic space internally, through the "imagination and the senses," and creates "effective poetic structures designed to open the perceptions of readers." A reader is able to discover the significance of his or her own life through the poet's search for meaning, which is informed by an "understanding inherent in Native American experience."

Ryan, John Barry. "Listening to Native Americans: Making Peace with the Past for the Future." *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 31.1 (1996): 24-36.

Addresses the development of a college course in Native American religions, recognizing the importance of reading Native literature in order to "make visible what had been largely invisible although present all around us." Cites Allen's *Studies in American Indian Literature* and recommends *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* because it incorporates some of the "best in Native American creative writing." Valuing *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* for the shared consciousness of its contributors, Ryan describes Allen's introduction as "scathing," although he acknowledges the importance of "listening" to a dissimilar collection of Native American voices.

St. Clair, Janet. "Uneasy Ethnocentrism: Recent Works of Allen, Silko, and Hogan." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 6.1 (1994): 83-98.

Touches on an inconsistency in Allen's career in which she "complains that Leslie Silko had ethically violated the legendary privacy of the Lagunas by including sacred clan stories in her novel *Ceremony*." Yet Allen subsequently published "a collection of sacred stories

drawn from many North American tribal traditions” in *Grandmothers of the Light*. St. Clair argues that recent works by Allen (and other Native American writers) can be perceived as ethnocentric because tribal lifestyles are portrayed as spiritual and community-oriented, whereas whites are stereotyped as “monstrous perversions of human ideologies.” While “monolithic labels and stereotypical assumptions are not altogether fair . . . they are entirely understandable” because “indigenous traditions can serve as models for postmodern reconstruction.” Allen’s Native American, feminist message is conveyed through the language of Western tradition, yet she offers a hopeful perspective transcending the “stubborn boundaries of culture, gender, class and race.”

Sarris, Greg. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993. 124-30.

Claims that in *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen “replicates in practice what she sets out to criticize.” Suggests that in the section “Women as Healers, Dreamers, and Shamans” (in the chapter “How the West Was Really Won”), Allen simply summarizes the interviews with Mabel McKay and Essie Parrish rather than allowing either woman to have “an individual voice represented in the text.” Therefore, readers may question the accuracy of many of Allen’s texts because she interprets the experiences of these women, formulating generalizations that discredit an individual’s perspective.

Scarberry, Susan J. “Grandmother Spider’s Lifeline.” *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs*. Ed. Paula Gunn Allen. New York: MLA, 1983.

Both creatrix and protector, Grandmother Spider weaves a web (representing “wholeness, balance, and beauty”) through imagination, and her acts are emulated by her people. Although Western cultures tend to rebuke the Grandmother Spider figure, she is a source of inspiration for many Native American poets. Focusing on this image, Scarberry discusses the following works by Allen: “Women’s Day 1975,” “Affirmation,” “Ephanie” (in *Shantih*), and “Grandmother.”

Sevillano, Mando. “Interpreting Native American Literature: An Archetypal Approach.” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 10.1 (1986): 1-12.

Disputes Allen’s argument in her essay “The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Indian Perspective on American Indian Literature,”¹¹ in which she contends that Native American literature requires an “ethnic approach” to criticism. Sevillano illustrates parallels between Chris-

tian/western and Native belief systems, and cites Carl Jung's model of the collective unconscious to establish that "the existence of certain universal archetypes seems self-evident." Recounting a Hopi story called "Poowak Wuhti," Sevillano identifies two universal archetypes: the unfaithful wife (a destructive force) and the wise old woman (a spiritual guide). Relating the Hopi wise woman to the Christian Holy Spirit, he concludes that Allen's more narrow critical approach to Native American literature does not allow for a "plurality of interpretations."

Shi, Jian. "Healing through Traditional Stories and Storytelling in Contemporary Native-American Fiction." Diss. Lehigh U 1995. *DAI* 56 (1995): 3964.

Discusses the healing power of storytelling in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, Silko's *Ceremony*, and Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. Asserts that Momaday and Welch search in the past for answers, whereas Silko and Allen look to the future for solutions to American Indians' problems.

Smith, Patricia Clark. "Coyote's Sons, Spider's Daughters: Western American Indian Poetry, 1968-1983." *A Literary History of the American West*. Ed. J. Golden Taylor. Ft. Worth: Texas Christian UP, 1987. 1075-76.

Brief section concerning Allen's portrayal of Sacagawea (a Shoshoni Indian who assisted the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the Pacific Northwest) in "The One Who Skins Cats." Contrary to conventional textbook representations of Sacagawea as passive and compliant, Allen depicts her as a "tough, witty, wise, uncompromising realist."

TallMountain, Mary. "Paula Gunn Allen's 'The One Who Skins Cats': An Inquiry into Spiritedness." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 5.2 (1993): 34-38.

Examines Allen's poems about three famous Native women: Pocahontas, La Malinche, and Sacagawea. Citing traditional historical accounts as stereotypical, TallMountain contends that Allen's depiction is more insightful. Despite the fact that each of the "heroic" women was rejected by her own people, Allen portrays them as "possessed by spiritedness," and she celebrates how each was able to carry out her obligatory commitment to guide explorers.

Toohy, Michelle Campbell. "Dialogic Abundance: Hildegard of Bingen, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Paula Gunn Allen." Diss. Indiana U. of Pennsylvania, 1996. *DAI* 57 (1997): 4813.

Hildegard of Bingen (a medieval abbess), Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

(an African-American abolitionist and women's rights advocate), and Paula Gunn Allen are similar because each woman "values multiplicity as the operative principle of change." Using a variety of perspectives, styles, and writing strategies, these women work to decenter the oppressive ideologies within which they live.

Van Dyke, Annette. "Curing Ceremonies: The Novels of Leslie Marmon Silko and Paula Gunn Allen." *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality*. New York: New York UP, 1992. 12-40.

Uses the argument and examples cited in "The Journey Back to Female Roots: A Laguna Pueblo Model" (see entry below) to compare Silko's *Ceremony* and Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, both of which are seen as "curing ceremonies." Despite the gender difference of the main characters—Tayo is male (Silko) and Ephanie is female (Allen)—each "half-breed's" experiences are very similar. The most notable divergence is the way in which Ephanie and Tayo react to "division from self, from the land, the Mother." In both novels, balance is restored to the community, and Tayo and Ephanie are healed when each reconnects with the female principle, which is represented by Thought Woman.

—. "The Journey Back to Female Roots: A Laguna Pueblo Model." *Lesbian Texts and Contexts*. Eds. Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow. New York: New York UP, 1990. 339-54.

Indicates the importance of Laguna culture in Allen's work, and defines the Pueblo worldview as "based on the concept that all things inanimate and animate are related and are part of the whole." European invasion, which brought an ideology of human superiority over all creation, disrupted this harmonious worldview. However, ceremonies facilitate healing, and for the Laguna, "storytelling often functions as a ceremony for curing." *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* itself can be seen as a curing ceremony because it is about a journey to healing. The traditional tribal tales are ineffective because they do not incorporate the changes brought about by whites, and the stories must be told "according to the requirements of the listeners." Allen seeks to "restore balance to the community-at-large" because the novel offers non-Indian readers a fresh "non-Euro-American perspective."

—. "Paula Gunn Allen." *Contemporary Lesbian Writers of the U.S.: A Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Eds. Sandra Pollack and Denise D. Knight. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Includes biographical information and brief analysis of Allen's major

works. Highlights her predominant themes, such as a woman-centered culture, rebirth, the power of oral tradition, healing, and transformation. Critics have focused on Allen's feminist issues and often neglect her lesbian themes, an omission which seems to "indicate a homophobic reaction and, perhaps, a heterosexual blindness to Allen's work." Van Dyke believes Allen's lesbian content merits more recognition.

- . "Paula Gunn Allen." *Notable Native Americans*. Ed. Sharon Malinowski. Detroit: Gale Research, 1995. 6-9.

This sketch provides information about Allen's heritage, upbringing in Albuquerque, education, and professional career. Allen's criticism and poetry are rooted in the woman-centered culture of Laguna Pueblo, which emphasizes women's power, identification with myth, and connection to the sacred. Discusses the various sources and influences which contribute to the "multicultural vision" of Allen's work. (Includes a list of selected writings by Allen and secondary sources.)

- Witalec, Janet. "Paula Gunn Allen." *Native North American Literature: Biographical and Critical Information on Native Writers and Orators from the United States and Canada*. Ed. Jeffrey Chapman. New York: Gale Research, 1994. 125-133.

Introduction provides biographical information and commentary about Allen's main themes of assimilation, self-identity, remembrance, and the quest for spiritual wholeness, and states that generally her work has received positive criticism. Following a list of her major works is a section of criticism, with excerpts from Jim Ruppert's "Paula Gunn Allen and Joy Harjo: Closing the Distance between Personal and Mythic Space," and Elizabeth Hanson's *Paula Gunn Allen* (see entries above), ending with a brief list of "Sources for Further Study."

- Zimmerman, Bonnie. *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989*. Boston: Beacon, 1990.

Chapter 5, "Community and Difference," claims that "all lesbian literature is mythic," maintaining that since "myth helps heal the wounds caused by fragmentation, women of color and ethnic women draw upon their cultures' rich and distinctive mythic languages to construct a self." Explicates the metaphor of falling in Allen's novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. Just as Spiderwoman/Great Mother is a counterpart to the writer (Allen), Ephanie's alter ego is The Woman Who Fell, another mythic figure from Native American legend. Zimmerman explains that "having jumped and fallen, Ephanie is once again able to dream," because falling and jumping signify the aban-

donment of old ways in favor of the risk-taking which is necessary to achieve wholeness.

NOTES

1. From interview with Annie O. Eysturoy.
2. N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1969, stimulating public interest in Native American Literature. Allen's cites Momaday as a major influence, especially because his writing provided Allen with reassurance and a sense of connection to her native homeland.
3. *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* won the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1990.
4. *As Long As the Rivers Flow: The Stories of Nine Native Americans* is co-edited with Patricia Clark Smith, who was Allen's dissertation chair and is author of "Coyote's Sons, Spider's Daughters: Western American Indian Poetry, 1968-1983" (see entry above).
5. Allen's books of poetry include: *The Blind Lion* (1974), *Coyote's Daylight Trip* (1978), *A Cannon Between My Knees* (1981), *Star Child* (1981), *Shadow Country* (1982), *Wyrds* (1987), *Skins and Bones* (1988), and *Life is a Fatal Disease: Collected Poems 1962-1995*. She is working on a poetry manuscript called "Soundings."
6. Some anthologies containing Allen's poetry include: *A Circle of Nations: Voices and Visions of American Indians*, *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*, *Earth Power Coming: Short Fiction in Native American Literature*, *Four Indian Poets*, *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writing of North America*, *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*, *Smoke Rising: The Native North American Literary Companion*, *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back: An Anthology of Poetry by American Indian Writers*, *That's What She Said: Contemporary Poetry and Fiction by Native American Women*, and *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the U.S.* Additionally, an autobiographical essay, "The Autobiography of a Confluence," is contained in *I Tell You Now*.
7. Draper's *Contemporary Literary Criticism* includes many book reviews (see entry above).

8. Contains Kenneth Lincoln's essay, "The Now Day Indi'ns," Annette Van Dyke's "The Journey Back to Female Roots: A Laguna Pueblo Model," and a portion of Jim Ruppert's "Paula Gunn Allen and Joy Harjo: Closing the Distance between Personal and Mythic Space." Interviews included are from Joseph Bruchac's *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets* and Annie O. Eysturoy's *This is About Vision*.
9. Ann E. Reuman's article, "Walking in Balance: Dialogic Differences and the Potency of Relationship in Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*," is forthcoming in *Border Crossings: World Feminisms in Dialogue* (edited by Merry Pawlowski).
10. Refers to the protagonist as Epiphanie rather than Ephanie. In the novel, her name is discussed: "But like her it was a split name, a name half of this and half of that: Epiphany. Effie. An almost name. An almost event. Proper at that for her, a halfblood. A halfbreed" (*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* 3).
11. Allen's essay, "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Indian Perspective on American Indian Literature," is in Chapman, *Literature of the American Indians: Views and Interpretations*.

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Dismantled Horses

What is left of the burning barrels
and buffalo chips that fueled our dreams
is at the end of your cigarette,
the only light within five miles.
And the stars are not out tonight.
The night is just a smell
of burning tobacco.
Comanche County ends on a gravel road,
underneath a pick-up truck.
We lie cross-legged with the dark,
stealing tribal license plates
and reinventing horse-capture songs
with screwdrivers.
And when you inhale,
we exist only as an orange glow
with a manhood built
out of these stolen plates.
For you, morning will be tribal princesses
being carried away by yellow beads
sewed into the shape of horse-legs.
For me, it's bolts and winged nuts
of dismantled horses.
The mercy where sunlight,
like brilliant swords in diagonal swing,
takes us by the neck.

Stuart Hoahwah

Time-Out: (Slam)Dunking Photographic Realism in Thomas King's Medicine River

Stuart Christie

"You still got some film in your camera, Will? I want to get a picture of us standing over Custer's grave . . ."

"I'll bet Custer wasn't even close at half-time. . ."

Harlen laughed and slapped his legs. "Hell, Will, Crazy Horse slam-dunked that bastard. Whooooeee, slam-dunk."

"Time-out," I shouted. "That's what Custer was yelling when all those Indians came riding out of the hills."

"Time out," shouted Harlen.

We missed the turnoff.

Thomas King, *Medicine River*¹

Medicine River is a town at rest on the "broad back of the prairies," Thomas King writes in his novel of the same title (1). This town, King continues, is "an unpretentious community of buildings banked low against the weather that slides off the eastern face of the Rockies" (1). Like High River, or maybe Medicine Hat, Alberta (farther east), the text called *Medicine River* invokes historical correspondences without wanting to be reduced to them. The novel moves as a metaphor between Indian (or Native) history and its representation, and everywhere it raises the issue of the negotiation and relation between the two.

As a metaphor for Native experience, the title of the novel also suggests the overall representational project of the text. In the creative gap established between "official History" (with a capital "H") of Indian or Native experience, and an individual's personal experience of it, there is a

tribal photographer furiously re-inventing memories on silver nitrate plates and, ultimately, wondering which side of the camera he is on. The narrator of the novel, Will, doesn't wonder long; he discovers that the representation of the town Medicine River mandates his presence on both sides of the lens as well as on both sides of the discourse the lens creates: subject and object, white father and Native mother, status and non-status, urban and reserve, Native and Canadian.

The story begins with Will recounting his first glimpse at photos in an old box inherited from his mother, a Blackfoot woman who lived and recently died in this town that abuts the Blackfoot reserve somewhere in southwestern Alberta. These "photographs in a box" offer stories to the narrator throughout the novel. After locating pictures of his mother, Rose Horse-Capture, Will finds "one of an old man with braids sitting in a straight-backed chair on the edge of a coulee" (4), a man Will learns is his maternal grandfather.

Will's process of unearthing each photo's meaning, the stories that each brings into personal context, serves to accumulate the shared history of the town and reserve, the network of intra-tribal relationships, and the role of Will's witness for the novel's readers. This gradual elaboration of meaning, of family and history, accretes in King's text associatively through a proliferation of shared tribal images. This association of what King elsewhere refers to as "all my relations," rather than an express definition of what Medicine River "is," or what its people "are" in photographed form, takes pictures of tribal identities out of museums, and off coffee tables, and puts them back into the hands of communities that give them meaning.²

As texts of relation, I argue that the pictures Will "discovers," much like those that he will subsequently shoot, offer King's critique of photographic realism in the text. As has been suggested by recent scholarship, "photographic realism" may be considered the alliance of photographic technologies with literary genres of American realism (including romanticism).³ With origins in nineteenth-century representations of "the noble savage," this alliance of discourse and technology persists in representing tribal identities and cultures as artifacts of their own inevitable disappearance, the history of Anglo-European genocide conveniently cropped out. Photographic realism on the so-called "frontier," in Native country, establishes fundamental rules of representation, rules that typically, until the last generation or so, excluded subjectivities and identities for whom the "real" has been, distinctly (and often violently) different. The literary mode of American realism—from tragic romance to dismissive essentialisms

about what tribal identities are “really” like—has been nothing less than the discursive strongman of Anglo-European colonization.

The tribal revitalization of the photographic image undertaken by King’s text transgresses the lineage of photocolonialism associated with camera technologies that began in the nineteenth-century on both sides of the 49th parallel. Photographic technologies were instrumental in the military conquest of tribal communities (including the hunting down of tribal fugitives), indispensable to the so-called “Great [American] Surveys” prior to allotment of tribal lands, and concurrent with attacks on tribal cultures once military conquest was achieved. Warriors in service to colonialist discourses of conquest, assimilation and termination, Alexander Gardner, Louis Herman Heller, William Henry Jackson, Frank Hamilton Cushing, James Mooney and, after 1895, Edward Sheriff Curtis—among many others—participated in projects the ostensible “ethnological” imperatives of which dove-tailed with the expansionist and capitalist economy of the newly imperialist American power.⁴ While the Anglo-Canadian history of colonization brings important differences to the American version of genocide, photocolonialism offered a necessary and lucrative support to the popular invention of the West in both nations; the alliance between visual media and popular culture was early established as necessary to the political and cultural agenda of white supremacy on both sides of the Medicine Line.

Yet *Medicine River* does not preoccupy itself solely with disabusing readers of the innocence of photography as a tool attending colonialism, nor limit itself to applauding the notion of “First Nation Photography” (100) as overdue compensation for lack of tribal representation within established media such as photography (although both points are important). The ironic inversion invited by the notion of an Indian photographer cannot alone account for the text’s power; indeed, it becomes clear that King’s text challenges the mode of irony as an insufficient literary response to the complex dimensionality of Indian representation. For instance, that Indians believe ghosts return from the dead in pictures is a persistently racist truism that, in ironic terms, haunts Indian encounters with technologies, reducing them to the status of victim rather than agent. King’s text may be read as a lengthy rebuttal of this position, that held by the Anglo-Canadian in the novel who suggests to Will that it is “Kind of ironic, isn’t it? I mean, being a photographer . . . You know . . . the way Indians feel about photographs” (229).

Rather than validating irony as a legitimate form of tribal critique, *Medicine River* rises above irony by offering a compelling metanarrative

of realist photography. The novel presents a self-reflexive text in pictures about what pictures can and cannot achieve as frames around, or borders onto, tribal discourses. Amidst “all my relations,” *Medicine River* re-inserts the tribal relation into photographs, puts back stories that have fallen out of the picture, stories that, in the absence of meaningful historical relationships, run the risk of becoming confused with the pictures themselves.

The realist, often romantic, discourses invoked by Edward Curtis’ coffee table portraits explode in the materiality of the present of *Medicine River* where the adult Will, after sufficient cajoling by Harlen Bigbear, establishes the town’s only Native-owned photography studio. Despite Will’s protests at the idea, the fulfillment of which entails Will’s leaving the community and life in Toronto, Harlen is persistent: “No Indian photographers [in town], Will. Real embarrassing for us to have to go to a white for something intimate like a picture. Bertha says you got a lot of relatives on the reserve. You think they’d go to a stranger for their photography needs when they can go to family?” (95).

At the beginning of the story, Will’s witness—via the lens—seems merely documentary. Apparently Harlen Bigbear, the likable and dogged champion of community planning, as well as unflagging enemy of entropy within the narrative, gets most of the credit for keeping relationships together in *Medicine River*. Yet Will, too, has an important function in town. In a tidy division of labor, Harlen orchestrates much of the narrative, and at weddings, funerals, and impromptu photo shoots, Will records it. Moreover, by means of a stylistic in the text that crosscuts Will’s childhood memories of 1950s-era termination policies in Canada with contemporary events in town, Will directs the gaze of his audience away from linear narrative while still framing important associations that link present to past. For example, the mysterious suicide of Jake Pretty Weasel, a wife beater in town (43), emerges in a diptych alongside Will’s childhood memories of another eccentric neighbor, Mrs. Oswald, whose misplaced faith in ideals of Canadian liberalism suffers underneath her own husband’s blows (48).

Will, like Harlen, “keeps track” of community events, and both are “somehow reassuring” at the community events each attends (47). Nevertheless, Will’s role as tribal cultural historian, we discover by story’s end, necessitates breaking down the enlightenment perspective and objectivity of such a historical remove, necessitating Will’s participation *within* the frame of tribal histories. To this end, King’s project in *Medicine River* moves beyond the photographic frame of reference associated with Will’s

witness to contest the ontology—the self-referential realism—of the photographic text. Indeed, King's text reminds us early and often that photographic realism and the prophetic verisimilitude it seems to offer only exist through an artful (re)arrangement of any photo's historical contents.

Even before photos emerge in the story as text-objects bearing the special burden of absent history, the issue of representation writ large, of how meaning is made graphically, cues the cultural work Will undertakes later in the darkroom. Will's brother, James, an accomplished artist at an early age, possesses the artistic talent in the family: "My lines were stiff and crude. James tried to help me, but I just couldn't see what he saw" (12). James makes beautiful pictures that the neighbor kid, Henry, defaces with cartoon characters (21). James isn't rattled at all. He says, "I can make them as big as I want. . . . And I can draw eagles over and over again" (21). The two brothers get a large piece of butcher paper, James draws an eagle on it, and they hang it out their bedroom window. "The rain came first and soaked the butcher's paper and plastered it to the side of the building. The wind came a few days later and tore the drawing loose. Some of the ink bled through, and for a long time after, you could see a faint outline of the eagle in the brick. James could draw. He really could" (21). Here the inexhaustibility of James' own creation is linked to what the text tells us about the "ink bleeding through." James' art imparts permanence to representation, to graphesis as an historical act, even—or especially—when the materiality of a specific representation is threatened.

Maydean, another of Will's childhood neighbors, signifies inexhaustibly, too; she is developmentally disabled, and it is apparently her body, rather than speech, that imparts the text of her difference. She hugs hard and "slobbers"; she gives "embarrassing hugs" (193). Presuming Maydean's "retarded" (192) immunity from what is spoken and written, the boys ignore her "as though she wasn't there," "as if she didn't exist" (193). Consequently, she "goes wild" one day and tries to erase an unflattering image one of the other children has drawn of her. Will recounts that she used "her bare hands, and she got most of it off, but not before she cut her hands on the concrete. They didn't bleed much, but you could see the faint fan of blood on the wall" (193-4).

Part of Will's coming of age appears to be his understanding of an indelible history attending any act of representation, however ephemeral such an act may at first appear. The "faint fan of [Maydean's] blood on the wall," like James' "faint outline on the brick" invokes the historical stakes and conditions of all representation. History imparts an ethical trace that violates every so-called neutral or objective representation of "what hap-

pened"; you can't erase it, kill it off, or put it inside a reserve. Attending representation, history necessarily transgresses the supposed "level terrain" of "objective truth" and renders such truths political, just or unjust, right or wrong. In a word, history transgresses all borders, in representation as well as identity.

In his short story "Borders" (1992), King criticizes national—as opposed to cultural—citizenship. An account of border crossings between Montana and Alberta, "Borders" speaks to the delimiting function of nationalism as a definitive declaration of "who" and "what" Natives are. In the post-NAFTA economy shared by Canada and the United States, "Blackfoot" doesn't signify or, put differently, what it does signify transgresses the ideological and political forces that police these epistemological lines. King's short story overlays the signs "Native" and "Canadian" and "American" to suggest, as does the grandmother in the short story, that the semiosis of Indian identity is not governed by border guards or the representational constraints such guards, in dominant discourse, impose.

In *Medicine River*, the world travels of tribal elder Lionel James offer tangible proofs (as well as contestations) of such Anglo-European powers that try to domesticate Indian and Native identities and signifying practices.⁵ We read that James is part of a traveling exhibit that showcases "Indian-ness" to European audiences willing to pay for displays of Native authenticity. Recently returned to the reserve from a European trip, Lionel James pays a visit to Will's photoshop to ask for help in getting a credit card. It seems the hotels Lionel needs to stay in Europe won't let him in without one (170). Specifically, James laments the backdating of tribal identities to a mythic past. He says, "I got some real good stories, funny ones, about how things are now, but those people say, no, tell us about the olden days" (173).

This backdating of Indian and Native culture bankrupts the vision of the present and pushes back from the present the very re-emergence of history that can heal. Will, too, suffers from the internalization of this backdating process, and years away from the reserve have further isolated his sense of tribal identity. For his part, Lionel James embodies positive values of tribal myth, as opposed to extra-tribal mythologies photographic realism might impose. James' refusal to acknowledge Indian identity as domesticated, as reduced to commodity status in a world system, emboldens and hastens Will's own transformation and frees his own camerawork from colonialist implications. After securing Will's help in getting the credit card, James tells a funny story about Coyote and Raven

debating the need for a credit card in the modern world (172). Lionel then allows Will to photograph him.

As an incomplete image in tribal memory, Will's long-deceased father remains for much of the story curiously unresolved. Using materials gleaned from his mother's old box, Will constructs a composite of the rodeo man, a pastiche consisting of old letters without return addresses, several photos, incomplete jokes and recollections, and indulgent fantasies. We do know Will's father is white, and that he left Rose and her sons to get by alone in Calgary. In the photographs, Will's father is typically concealed—an off-center figure in uniform “kneeling behind” Will's mother (5), or again “a hat . . . was pulled down over much of his face” (86). In one of the photos that Will possesses where his parents do appear together, his mother “look[s] back, not turned quite far enough to see the man behind her” (10).

Early on, you discover that the project of enhancing Will's father's image, of making his history visible to his grown son, is intimately related to the book's larger project of asking questions about how collective history is made and remembered. Glancing at one of the photos, Will recalls: “I remember the picture of the two of them. My mother with her dark hair and dark eyes, the pleated skirt spread all around her . . . His hand lay on her shoulder lightly, the fingers in sunlight, his eyes on shadows” (10). You can read, I think incorrectly, the play of light here, of light onto shadow, as the effect of pathos on the visual text. The unfamiliarity of the man, his whereabouts, the alternative histories he gave up when he chose to leave Rose and the boys behind: from this perspective, such gaps in history inform an allegory of larger historical forces affecting tribal communities, what in this case the camera cannot see. In King's text, this argument runs, the shadow obscures or “darkens” Will's father's whiteness as a function of its exclusion from a tribal world.

I argue, however, that *Medicine River* writes against such an allegorical reading of race as shadow, in much the same way as it contests ironic reversal as an adequate vehicle for contemporary Indian representations. Such allegories of tribal representation verge dangerously towards essentialist givens of what such a “shadow” on mixedblood identity might mean. Rather, recent work by Susan Bernardin suggests how the emergence of shadow in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* marks competing and often conflicting discourses of nation and miscegenation within representations of mixedblood identity.⁶ Shadows indeed conceal, but they also render other aspects of composition, of representation, visible. In Will's case, it will be tribal stories (from Lionel James and others) that, rather than

“unveil” his father’s identity, provide added resolution to what his search for his father has heretofore displaced: the network of tribal relations invisible to the photograph that have held him strong.

Fittingly, it is Lionel James who, unlike the camera, can share his humor and memories to speak of Will’s father intimately, in terms that neither romanticize nor damn the man’s history in a grown son’s eyes. Up to this point, the absent figure of Will’s white father has exerted a strong undercurrent in the story, a pull towards the tragic and bitter fate of mixedblood identity King’s text elsewhere resists. From Lionel, however, we learn that he and Will’s father were friends before Will was born (168). Lionel recounts the time Will’s father hid Will in a laundry basket and tried to convince Rose that the boy was in the washing machine (175). In a longer anecdote, Lionel recalls:

“When I was in Norway, I told the story about the time your father and mother went to one of those chicken restaurants after a rodeo. Your mother was pregnant, and I guess the smell of all that fat and grease made her sick because she threw up.”

“Threw up. At the restaurant?”

“That’s right. She was sitting near the window, and she couldn’t get out. It was real messy.”

“My mother did that?”

“So your father, quick as he can, said in a real loud voice, ‘Hey, what’s in this chicken anyway?’” (172-3)

Through the prism of Lionel’s memory, Will’s father takes on a dimension no photographic lens can reproduce. Will’s father has a sense of humor that Lionel can appreciate. Not the globe-trotting free-lance photographer, pilot, or college professor (84-5) of Will’s fantasies, Will’s father emerges here as a no less sympathetic figure, a rodeo man whose story has a meaningful basis in tribal memory. Lionel James, and the trickster humor he brings to the text, emerges at precisely the right moment to foreground Will’s role not merely as photographic witness to the tribal history pictured around and outside of him, but in the context of his own personal history, his sense of identity-in-relation to the tribe.

Through Will’s reeducation concerning his mixedblood identity, King’s text dispels the ontology of a self-contained realism, of tribal histories as solely determined by a larger history of white abandonment. Tribal histories cannot be reducible to mere reflections of dominant culture. In these terms, *Medicine River* avoids the stylistic play of light that essentializes

tribal history, recognizable in the black blankets used as backdrops in the photos shot by Edward Curtis. With Lionel's help, Will avoids the chiaroscuro effect on discourse, the visual representation of pathos, the foredoomed visage of what Louis Owens calls the "Hollywooden Indian."⁷ Ultimately, the increased resolution of Will's father's image, his re-emergence in tribal discourse, doesn't obscure or indemnify his abandonment of Rose and the boys and the larger issue of Anglo-European abuse of tribal histories. Rather, Will is able to construct a broader relation with a father figure that, up to this point, had been informed by sentimental considerations of a bitter realism (abandonment) and tragic romance (the orphan's tale).

Finally, two photo shoots—one missed, one achieved—vitiates *Medicine River's* critique of photographic realism. The shoot that doesn't happen occurs on the way back to Medicine River from a basketball tournament in the States when Harlen convinces Will to stop by the Custer National Monument at Little Big Horn to take a photo for the folks back home. Will, whose spirits are low, says aloud, "I wasn't that depressed" (110) and adds, "The Blackfoot didn't fight Custer" (107). In any case, Will and Harlen arrive too late for the gate, shut out by a young white park ranger who, despite a long night of travel and Will's exclamation that "Did you tell him we're Indians!" (112), refuses to let them in. Will fantasizes that he could "see that kid hiding in the dark, hunkered down behind the fender of [his] Bronco, his hands shaking around his rifle, waiting for us to come screaming and whooping and crashing through the gate" (112).

Will doesn't crash that gate; he doesn't let fantasy realize what is, after all, a "dumb idea" (110). More importantly, Will reads his exclusion from the Anglo-European narrative of "national" history in increasingly more positive terms as the epigraph to this essay suggests. Up to this point in the chapter, hints about Will's possible investment in a psychology of abandonment and mixedblood exclusion—cross-cut in the narrative with an account of an abysmal relationship with a white woman in Toronto—have kept his self-image frozen in a nationalist imagination only partially of his own heritage: white, Anglo-European, and exclusive. As his persistent fantasies about his father likewise attest, Will has distanced himself from the very tribal history that he needs. "Timed out" from the hegemony of Anglo-European nationalism, and primed to "time in" to the Indian critique of such a nation, Will's jubilation at the temporally-mixed metaphor of slam-dunking Custer speaks to the revisionary representational practice *Medicine River* subsequently implements.

Attending this revisionary process, the photo shoot that does take

place starts out innocuously enough. After some cajoling from Harlen, Will decides that he'll offer an affordable special on family portraits. "So I ran a special. Not for Harlen's reasons and not for Leon's . . . So for the last two weeks in June, you could get a family portrait for twenty dollars. . . . It was a great deal. Joyce Blue Horn was the first one to call" (202-3). Suddenly, things get complicated. Joyce Blue-Horn, Will realizes, has a broad construction of what "family" is. "By twelve-thirty, there were in the vicinity of fifty-four people—adults and kids—in my studio" (206-7). They adjourn to the river, where Will sets up his camera and, with some difficulty, prepares to take his first shot. Everybody clamors for Will to be in the photo, too (214). (Harlen, of course, knows how to coach him on the self-timer.) The visual effect the narrative achieves is remarkable. King writes:

The first shots were easy. I set the timer, ran across the sand and sat down next to Floyd's granny. But with a large group like that you can't take chances. Someone may have closed their eyes just as the picture was taken. Or one of the kids could have turned their back. Or someone might have gotten lost behind someone else . . . Then, too, the group refused to stay in place . . . the kids wandered off among their parents and relatives and friends, and the adults floated back and forth, no one holding their positions. I had to keep moving the camera as the group swayed from one side to the other. Only the grandparents remained in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them. (215)

As a literary text resisting (re)colonization in realist terms, *Medicine River* here achieves a masterful appropriation of what might otherwise appear as simply a visual text, a simple picture in narrative. By dismissing the realism, or prophetic verisimilitude, of what photos capture, King frees up their "content" to better and different purposes: the imagination and reinvention of social and cultural bonds and histories that can reawaken the desire for community and home. This liberation results in an image that cannot be captured, with a cultural vitality that refuses to sit still for the camera.

The indelibility of history that King's text continuously reinscribes on each photographic image emerges here as the plenitude of time, a time-in-being of tribal identity that verges, as close as any writing can, on the cinematic.⁸ The uncontainable image of tribal family points outside itself to explode the self-referentiality of the realist image. In terms of its larger

project, *Medicine River* goes even further in making an argument about how a revisionary practice of photographing tribal identities works. Photos, after all, just speak what they're told: they don't necessarily have to create the fiction, the illusion, of capturing a meaning that can stand by itself. Only a photographer, on behalf of his or her photo, can ever claim the ontological self-sufficiency of what photos merely represent: "reality." And even then, as the out-takes among Curtis' photos suggest, the photographer is often wrong and needs to suppress "inadvertent" representations that might contest his own. For his part, Will, informed by his own sense of a renovated personal history and that of the tribe around him, refuses any longer to stake such a representational claim.⁹

To conclude, Will records the photographic history of his town while investing his photos with a testimonial function of tribal witness, of "time out" from hegemonic, Anglo-European culture in Native (Blackfoot) country. His photos remain something that the residents of *Medicine River* can hold on to, in terms even more compelling than Harlen Bigbear's failed career as a hoop dancer or Clyde Whiteman's effortless jumpshot on break from serial jail terms. Yet these photos cannot, in a strict sense, be considered artifacts. The AIM activist, David Plume, carries what Will considers an "unremarkable" image—torn, emulsion cracked and peeled, "beat up a lot"—the only artifact he has left to link him to Dennis Banks and his claim to have been present at Wounded Knee. "That's me," David says. "What do you think?" (190).

Will, on the other hand, revitalizes his father's memory by displacing it from the shadowed referent on Kodak paper, and recontextualizing his mixed-blood identity within tribal discourse, of which photos are at best a compelling inducement. With the avowal of photographs as sites of communal memory, *Medicine River* discounts the denotative function of tribal photos as an "authentic" Native culture in themselves, an extra-tribal authenticity that, in turn, validates extra-tribal determinations of the value of Native cultures.¹⁰

Moreover, *Medicine River* deconstructs any realist basis for the distinction between words and pictures. The text's critique explodes the realist frame around tribal referentiality to include the vast histories and memories photographic realism excludes. The pictures remain: not as metonymies of realism that sustain the cultural "capture" of Indian and Native identities but as metaphors of Indian difference, resistance, and humor attending an uncapturable semiosis. The text proffers word-images in form of pictorial representations that, ultimately, collapse back into words in a jubilant deferral of stabilized (racist) meanings.

In tribal hands, photography emerges as a culturally and historically *productive* process, rather than merely reproducing or making copies of “authentic” tribal culture. This process, what Roland Barthes has termed the *camera lucida*, enables Will, a Native chronicler of tribal survival, to assert the Native (in)difference to a Eurocentric notion of History limited to the silence of alienated images. Of this capital-H History, Barthes writes: “[It] is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (Barthes 65). A Blackfoot wizard of silver nitrate and its processes, Will excises this version of History—the inheritance of Edward Curtis—from the legacy of the present. Thomas King, for his part, merely lets the pictures of *Medicine River* speak for themselves, acknowledging that they must willfully slip out of any strictly realist frame, borne upon a flowing “ocean of relations” (215).

NOTES

1. Thomas King, *Medicine River* (Toronto: Viking Penguin, 1989), 110. Subsequent references to the text appear by page number in parentheses.
2. King uses this expression for the title of his edition of short fiction: *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Native Fiction* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1990). In his introduction to the volume, King writes: “‘All my relations’ is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives . . . [It] is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations)” (ix).
3. The relation of literary realism to its historical contemporaries, romanticism and naturalism, is important, and in using the term I don’t want to totalize realism in a way that can’t address its mutations, its persistence in discourses of race and race difference over time. For an influential and controversial history of nineteenth-century American realism and naturalism see Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987). For recent scholarship that investigates the relation between the agency of Indian photographers and their “subject” see Lucy Lippard ed. *Partial Recall*:

- Photographs of Native North Americans* (New York: The New Press, 1992) and Timothy Troy, "Anthropology and Photography: Approaching a Native American Perspective," *Visual Anthropology* 5 (1992): 43-62. For work on Curtis see Christopher Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward Curtis* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
4. Moving beyond the critique of photographic realism, *Medicine River* presents a renovated model of agency within the technologies of (self)representation for Natives, such as Will, who associate the liberation of the Indian sign with self-determination. Will uses the apparatus of flash, exposure, and silver nitrate to dislodge photography's association with photocolonialism. The vast *Œuvre* of Edward Sheriff Curtis exemplifies the association of photographic technologies with the implementation of Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" in Indian country. Curtis was the in-house photographer of a nascent (yet powerful) culture industry, whose notable proponents included Curtis' sponsors J.P. Morgan and the Smithsonian Institution.
 5. For an oral history that documents tribal travel within a global market for "Indian" identity, as well as tribal resistance to its commodification, see Harry Robinson, "An Okanagan Becomes Captive Circus Showpiece in England" in King's *All My Relations*; Robinson's tale, like the travels of Lionel James in *Medicine River*, invokes the liberating, postmodern trickster narrative mode theorized by Gerald Vizenor. See his "Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games," in *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*, Gerald Vizenor ed. (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1989), 187-212.
 6. Susan K. Bernardin, "Mixed Messages: Authority and Authorship in Mourning Dove's *Cogewea*, *The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range*," *American Literature* 67.3 (September 1995): 487-510. Bernardin writes: "A signifier of sexual danger in sentimental fiction as well as a term widely associated with blacks in the nineteenth century, the term 'shadow' . . . denotes the presence of the predatory white [character]" (489). *Medicine River* initially participates in the sexualized discourse of "shadow" Bernardin pinpoints, only to deallegorize the representation of Will's father in the present, to exculpate his memory in terms more positive than abandonment. In a persuasive overall analysis, Bernardin also situates *Cogewea* within a sentimental discourse of the orphan that "enables [Mourning Dove] to address the culturally taboo issue of miscegenation" (496) includ-

ing the illegal status under U.S. law of mixed marriages between Anglo men and Indian women. In a Canadian context—where after 1857 the official governmental policy of enfranchisement actively promoted mixed marriages to hasten assimilation—*Medicine River* illustrates how the abandonment of a white father emerges in the present to constrain representations of a tribal past.

7. Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1992), 201, 219.
8. As a cinematic stylistic, King's novel presents narrative "snapshots" that, once motivated through the function of plot, move cinematographically; different historical images are cross-cut in each chapter: POV shot, reverse angle, POV. This stylistic enhances—in tribal terms—the literary representation of "modernist" photographic realism first undertaken in the *USA* trilogy by John Dos Passos. The film, *Medicine River* (Margolin 1992), starred Graham Greene, Sheila Tousey, and Tom Jackson and won critical acclaim at the 1993 American Indian Film Festival (Taos). The film adaptation of King's text, based upon King's screenplay, was produced with largely public funds—through subsidies from the Canadian government—rather than from private sources.
9. *Medicine River* reestablishes an incontrovertible (Marxian) relation between the technology of representation and the consciousness of the man or woman who uses it; an idea that has been lost with the lucrative representation of "Indian" identity by primarily non-tribal capital in the culture industry. The persistent humility of King's text in using photographs to frame the world of *Medicine River* speaks to the reticence of his text to abuse the power afforded by tribal representations. Only certain deserving individuals, such as Lionel James, appear able to invoke history without importing the violences associated with that history.
10. The denotative function of semiosis—of delimiting meaning—is contrasted with its more productive or connotative meaning. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z* Richard Miller trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

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Beyond the Frame: Tom King's Narratives of Resistment

Darrell Jesse Peters

Since the first European ships landed in the “New World,” the literature of Native Americans has been very much concerned with the reclaiming of identity, identity that has been erased and/or altered through wars, labels, and published histories. And that reclamation inherently demands a negotiation between dominant stereotypes imposed upon Indian peoples and the self-definitions those peoples struggle to articulate within the parameters of the dominant culture. Gerald Vizenor has described contemporary Native American literature as caught up in the vocalization of survival and the resisting of domination: “The postindian warriors encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses, and they create their stories with a new sense of survivance. The warriors bear the simulations of their time and counter the manifest manners of domination” (*Manifest Manners*, 4). In order to achieve this goal, authors have most often written with voices that reflect resentment towards the dominant culture while simultaneously resisting that culture. Perhaps more than any other group in history, theirs is the literature of resistment, a literature that is gradually scratching its way to the surface and carving out a position within the rocks of the traditional canon. As Kimberly Blaeser has put it, “Much of contemporary Indian literature . . . writes itself against the events of Indian/White contact and, perhaps more importantly, against the past accounting of those events” (37).

The Cherokee, Greek, German writer Thomas King is a champion of resistment. He identifies with his Native American heritage, and that heritage provides the inspiration for his fiction. As he said in an interview with

Constance Rooke, "I think of myself as being a part of that community [the Native community], even though I'm outside of it especially as I am writing the novel" (63). King identifies himself as part of an "Indian" community, if that generalization can be made, and he ultimately uses his prose to construct and reinforce the values and identity of that community. As Louis Owens explains in *Other Destinies*, the "recovering of or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community, becomes in the face of such obstacles [colonial and post-colonial displacement] a truly enormous undertaking. This attempt is at the center of American Indian fiction" (5). In his two novels, *Medicine River* and *Green Grass, Running Water*, King actively seeks, and finds, a profoundly articulate voice for a Native community, in this particular case the Blackfoot community, a voice that demands recognition and, ultimately, respect. These two novels work in tandem to establish an environment for Native people that places them in direct opposition to the dominant culture's view of them.

King's most useful tool is the notion of Trickster, and as in many traditional Native cultures, he uses Trickster characters and strategies to force his audience into self-awareness and the non-Native reader into an awareness of another cultural experience. As he explains, the "trickster is an important figure for Native writers for it allows us to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony" (*All* xiii). His novels require readers to consider and reconsider both themselves and the "other." For readers locating themselves within the dominant culture, the "other" is the constructed idea of "Indian," an idea that is constantly being deconstructed and then reconstructed in King's fiction. Conversely, many Native readers will recognize the "other" as the dominant culture which King, with his own sense of Native identity, is at continual odds with. This is an act of resistance that serves ultimately, and at times aggressively, to reject the prescribed roles for "the Indian."

King's first novel, *Medicine River*, is, as Percy Walton points out, a text that "tries to forge a presence for natives in order to combat their status as Other" (78). The strength of the work lies in its deconstruction of popular stereotypes concerning Native people. This is the first step in King's process of articulating an independent identity for Native Americans. In order to posit a "new" identity, the old one must be destroyed, so the novel "plays upon and reverses the negative semiotic field of the indigene, with its connotations of drunkenness, violence, dishonesty, and mysticism, nature, nostalgia" (Walton 79).

Although Walton's article, "'Tell Our Own Stories': Politics and the Fiction of Thomas King," does a very good job of explaining King's method of destroying stereotypes, she ultimately feels that:

The text avoids prioritizing native culture over other cultures. It therefore also avoids positing a new centre, a centre which would necessitate the construction of new margins. King's text rejects the culturally exclusive endeavor that has marginalized the native as Other, and privileges instead an inclusive and collective process that does not rest upon cultural superiority/inferiority. (79)

Although it may be nice, and less threatening, to view the text as an "inclusive and collective process," the author, and the reader for that matter, must necessarily view the idea of Native cultures in light of the "other." Even if King is not making a statement of cultural superiority by placing Native cultures in opposition to the dominant "other," which I believe he does to a certain extent, perhaps constructing the new margins Walton denies, he is certainly and unavoidably placing Native cultures in opposition to their representation as "other" by the dominant culture. It would be naive to think that "King breaks with the idea that in order to delineate culture, one must, necessarily, cast another as Other" (Walton 78). As the very title of Walton's article suggests, it is extremely difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to separate Native American fiction from politics. With any politically charged discourse, there is inherent opposition resulting in the construction of "otherness" and the dynamics of a "superiority/inferiority" relationship.

One of the main events of *Medicine River* is Will's return home. Having been raised away from the reservation, away from his extended family, away from his culture, it is obvious that Will, like Momaday's Abel, has lost his way. He returns to the reservation after his mother's death in order to reclaim, with the help of Harlen, his sense of identity within his cultural framework. As Harlen explains, "You see over there . . . Ninastiko . . . Chief Mountain. That's how we know where we are. When we can see the mountain, we know we're home. Didn't your mother ever tell you that?" (93). Apparently she had not, but Harlen steps into Will's life and educates him. But, Will says, "Harlen Bigbear was my friend, and being Harlen's friend was hard. I can tell you that" (11).

Medicine River revolves around this central catalyst, Harlen Bigbear, the Trickster, who forces Will, and others, to (re)consider their situations and make decisions that lead to a reaffirmation of cultural identity. He is:

like a spider on a web. Every so often, someone would come along and tear off a piece of the web or poke a hole in it, and Harlen would come scuttling along and throw out filament after filament until the damage was repaired. Bertha over at the Friendship Centre called it meddling. Harlen would have thought of it as general maintenance. (31)

King describes Harlen as making “sure that the world is in good health . . . Darning the community” (Rooke 67). Like the Trickster of traditional stories, Harlen’s job is to keep things ordered, focused, and centered. And in this case the center is both a physical location and a cultural framework, the two of which are inherently linked. Perhaps more importantly, this center is almost exclusively Blackfoot.

There is the profound sense that Will comes home because it is better for him. To use the comparative “better” is to immediately call to mind the obligatory “than,” and in this case, the sentence would surely be, “better than urban, white, dominant, etc. culture”; it is better than the “other,” at least for Will. By the end of the book, Will has taken his role within his community, illustrated through the metaphor of a group photograph. As Will sets up the shot, Lionel James, one of the tribal elders, says, “Best you be in the picture, too” (214). In a very humorous scene, Will runs back and forth from the self-timed camera to the chair Floyd’s granny has provided for him. The experience of the group picture is described through Will’s eyes:

Then, too, the group refused to stay in place. After every picture, the kids wandered off among their parents and relatives and friends, and the adults floated back and forth, no one holding their positions. I had to keep moving the camera as the group swayed from one side to the other. Only the grandparents remained in place as the ocean of relations flowed around them. (214)

Walton considers this photograph to suggest that “the margins become indistinguishable from the centre and hence obliterate a centre” (83). But clearly there is a center in the picture: the grandparents around whom everyone else revolves. The elders provide a cultural anchor to which Will, the lost “non-status” Indian, is at last tied. Will’s adoption back into his culture is underscored when Harlen says, “Granny says you remind her of him [her dead son]. She says maybe she should adopt you. That boy of hers always had a good story” (211). It seems that Will, too,

has a good story, a story of coming home and claiming his lost center, of rejoining his extended family.

King contrasts the world of the "other" with Will's new-found center through a fitting comparison of photographs. When Will was young, his mother had decided they needed a family portrait. The picture consisted of Will, his brother James, and their mother, and it remained tacked on the kitchen wall in Calgary "until the paper began to curl up and the colours started to fade" (204). Harlen has the opportunity to see this picture in juxtaposition to the group photo. Of it he says, "You and James look like someone sprayed you up and down with starch" (215), pointing out the artificial nature of Will's early, isolated, nuclear family. Unlike his new family portrait, which is full of supportive motion flowing around a firm cultural center, the earlier picture is static. Will takes both pictures home and puts them up on his kitchen wall. As he looks at the group picture, he realizes, "I was smiling in that picture, and you couldn't see the sweat" (216). The stale, sweaty picture taken in the city becomes a metaphor for the dominant culture, which Will must ultimately reject.

There is a similarity between the photographs, however. Will explains that "Floyd's granny was sitting in her lawn chair next to me looking right at the camera with the same flat expression that my mother had, as though she could see something farther on and out of sight" (216). This image is very similar to Gerald Vizenor's description of Ishi: "Ishi smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and looked past the camera over the borders of covetous civilization, into the distance" (128). All three of these Native people, whether they are living in a museum, isolated in urban Calgary, or at home on the reservation, refuse to be contained by the static definitions and stereotypes imposed on them by the dominant culture. They look beyond the frame provided for them, "into the distance," towards "something farther on." Perhaps that something is an existence of their own choosing, and in this case it seems to be an existence based on resistance, one which aggressively denies the prescriptions of dominant culture.

If *Medicine River* is the first step in deconstructing stereotypes and rearticulating identity, then *Green Grass, Running Water* is the second step with its reconstruction of narratives. King, juxtaposing Christian with Native American narratives throughout the novel, certainly demands increased effort from his readers, particularly from those outside Native cultures. He takes characters and events from Native American creation myths as well as from the history of the colonization of North America and blends them with Western expansion and creation myths, thus forcing the reader to consider the message contained within the world he creates.

Although King's method seems to be, at times, both a bit too easy and a little too "punny," he succeeds in constructing an alternate narrative that relocates power within Native American cultures and grants respect to the people of those cultures. This move is central to King's work, as it is to much contemporary Indian fiction. As Blaeser explains, "Because historical stories, imaginative stories, cultural stories work to form our identity, the disarming of history through satiric humor liberates and empowers us in the imagination of our destinies" (49). It is also important to note that this syncretic act of blending differing cultural beliefs and myths is not a simple acceptance of their combination historically, but rather a subverting of the dominant matrix as a way to deconstruct and reject it.

In this second novel, King relocates Christian narratives as stemming from a crazy dream of Coyote. As the novel opens, "That Coyote was asleep and that Coyote was dreaming. When that Coyote dreams, anything can happen. . . . So, that Coyote is dreaming and pretty soon, one of those dreams gets loose and runs around. Makes a lot of noise" (1). The dream is full of self-importance and believes that it is Coyote at first, but Coyote tells the dream that it can be a dog. Being a dog is not good enough for this dream, and "when that Coyote dream thinks about being a dog, it gets everything mixed up. It gets everything backward . . . I am god, says that Dog Dream" (2). As the novel progresses, the notion of the Christian God as a backwards idea becomes clearer; for many people, indeed, Christianity's god is no more than dog spelled backwards and is, in philosophy and function, merely doggerel. Since Coyote is a trickster figure for many Native cultures, his creation of the Christian God privileges Native American over Western deities. The power differential is recaptured. This idea is reminiscent of Betonie's words in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*: "We can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place" (132).

As illustrated above, King quickly, within the first three pages of the novel, subverts the Christian view of god. His next step is to set up an environment and characters whose actions further the devaluation of Christian doctrine specifically and Western philosophy in general. The prison at Fort Marion in Florida becomes King's symbol for the ill-treatment of Native Americans during the colonization of this continent. This prison housed mostly Plains people, and aside from being a simple cage, it was also a torture chamber. The prisoners had to deal with poor living conditions, an unfamiliar and unfriendly climate, and extreme loneliness due to their separation from family. In effect, Fort Marion symbolizes the

hell Native Americans went through at the hands of the invading colonizers. King locates the Christian heaven within this hell of a prison, and, in actuality, the “heaven” colonists found upon arrival in the “new” world became a “hell” for the people who had always lived here.

King transplants this heaven of Fort Marion to a mental hospital filled with recognizable administrators. In charge of the facility is Dr. Joseph Hovaugh. His secretary’s name is Mary, and his trusted colleague is Dr. John Eliot. For them, the place is paradise, but interestingly, the hospital can’t seem to sustain itself unless the four old Indians are contained within it.

The trouble had started in the spring, seven years before. There had been a blight and all the elm trees in the garden had died. Even the huge oak that stood at the center of the grounds had been affected. Several large branches had turned gray, and though the tree was still alive, the leaves were sparse and dull . . . [and] the death of the old trees, which were almost as old as the garden itself, left Dr. Hovaugh burdened with inexplicable remorse and guilt. (77-8)

This time of death and decay, apparently occurring in a seven year cycle, coincides with the escapes of the old Indians. The Western, Christian idea of “the garden,” which on this continent is irrevocably bound up in guilt-free colonization, is only able to exist when Native American identity is locked up inside it. That is to say that the dominant culture can feel good about itself and what it has done when Native American cultures are either absorbed or contained.

Also, King is speaking to, through this same image of the living/dying garden, the fact that the colonial culture lives a parasitic life, drawing sustenance from the lands and cultures of the people indigenous to this continent. This point is linked to differing narratives. Dr. Hovaugh tells Sergeant Cereno,

I suppose I should begin by saying that in the beginning all this was land. Empty land. My great-grandfather came out here from the Old World. He was what you might call an evangelist . . . He bought this land from the Indians . . . He bought the land from a local tribe. They’re extinct now I believe. . . I believe they were all killed by some disease. (102)

Dr. Hovaugh has constructed a specific historical narrative, which

suits his position in reality. He, like many members of the dominant culture, finds it easy to think of the land as being empty when his forefathers landed, and it is perhaps tragic, but not self-implicating, to think of the Indians who lived here as dying of some disease.

The four old Indians are key to the structure of the novel. King divides *Green Grass, Running Water* into four sections, each centered around one of the old Indians. The subsections of the novel that deal specifically with the old Indians are told through a conversation between Coyote and an *I*, a sort of universal narrator whose job is to explain why the world is broken. It becomes clear that the old Indians escape from the hospital because they are “trying to fix up the world” (133).

The first section of the novel is presented “according to the Lone Ranger” (8) who is one of the old Indians. He begins the story, a story which ultimately is the very text of the novel it is contained within. The Lone Ranger attempts several beginnings of the story, which are all rejected by the other old Indians. Apparently there is a *correct* beginning for this story, a beginning that is both traditional and divorced from Western culture as well as from the stereotypical Hollywood rhetoric attached to the image of Native Americans. When the Lone Ranger makes an attempt at the beginning—“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth,”—he is told flatly, “That’s the wrong story . . . That story comes later” (11). Once again, King reinforces the fact that the Christian narrative is secondary to traditional Native American narratives. The Lone Ranger says, “Everybody makes mistakes,” but the reply comes, “Best not to make them with stories” (11).

The narrative *I* explains that First Woman “walks around that world [Sky World] with her head in the trees, looking off in the distances, looking for things that are bent and need fixing. So that one walks off the edge of the world. So that one starts falling” (38-39). First Woman falls out of her world, her narrative, and lands in another world, Water World, but this world is confused by the presence of GOD, the backwards dog dream of Coyote. At first everything seems fine; First Woman comes across grandmother Turtle, and they proceed to develop land. But then GOD decides that a garden is needed, and First Woman lives in the Garden with Ahdamn.

Eventually GOD enters the garden and comes into direct conflict with First Woman. GOD tells her, “just so we keep things straight . . . this is my world and this is my garden. . . . There are rules, you know . . . Christian rules” (72-73). First Woman does not agree with these Christian rules or with GOD’s “grouchy” demeanor, so she and Ahdamn decide to leave the garden; they attempt to walk out of the narrative that has been constructed

for them but find themselves moving west, a reflection of the narrative of manifest destiny. They come upon a "bunch of dead rangers," (74) and are accused of the murders because "it looks like the work of Indians" (75). Ironically, First Woman is able to disguise her identity as Indian by masking herself. When she puts on the black mask, she is recognized as the Lone Ranger, but when she removes it, she is arrested and sent to Fort Marion. In this world, Native Americans are allowed freedom only when existing behind the mask of the Western narrative. However, the ability to speak from within the discourse of the dominant culture is also an asset.

The other three old Indians all arrive at the hospital run by Dr. Hovaugh in similar ways. Changing Woman, Thought Woman, and Old Woman all fall out of Sky World and into Water World, and each finds herself forced into a role within the dominant narrative. For the old Indians, the stories they find themselves in are not their own; they, due to Coyote's dream, are caught up in narratives in which they do not belong. These Christian based, Western narratives, in accordance with an all too familiar tradition, want these Native American characters to assume familiar roles, preconceived roles demanding that Indians be stoic, inferior, and powerless on the tragic path to disappearance. However, just as King's novel itself attempts to, the old Indians reject these stagnant parts and carve out new narratives for themselves by appropriating the dominant roles within dominant narratives.

If, as Coyote says, "that silly dream has everything mixed up," (72) and the world is suffering because of it, the old Indians do their best to correct the problem. Their mission is best illustrated through their quest to change the outcome of Hollywood Westerns: the popular narratives of the colonial culture. In these films, Native Americans are represented as the "other," who must be destroyed in order to preserve the dominant way of life. As Latisha points out, "if the Indians won, it probably wouldn't be a Western" (216). In the novel, the Western they attempt to "fix" is "*The Mysterious Warrior*. The best Western of them all, with John Wayne, Richard Widmark, Maureen O'Hara" (211). The plot of this movie is the typical narrative for all Westerns: "every one was the same as the others. Predictable. Cowboys looked like cowboys. Indians looked like Indians" (353). John Wayne and Richard Widmark are pinned down by a group of Indians, but just as the Indians move in for the kill, the cavalry comes to their rescue. The old Indians, however, appropriate and reconstruct this old, black and white narrative:

Everywhere was color . . . Portland turned and looked at Wayne and Widmark, who had stopped shouting and waving their hats and were

standing around looking confused and dumb. Without a word, he started his horse forward through the water, and behind him his men rose out of the river, a great swirl of motion and colors—red, white, black, blue And then Portland and the rest of the Indians began to shoot back, and soldiers began falling over John Wayne looked down and stared stupidly at the arrow in his thigh, shaking his head in amazement and disbelief as two bullets ripped through his chest and out the back of his jacket. (357-358)

The old Indians give the clichéd Indians of the Western the ability to resist the narrative constructed for them and fight back, just as King's novels fight back.

The old Indians also walk into the lives of the non-mythic characters in the novel and affect their world, particularly the world of Lionel Red Dog. Lionel is at a transitional stage in his life, and he is not sure exactly what route his life should take. After Bill Bursom sets up his store display, a map of Canada and the United States constructed out of television sets, he thinks, "Lionel might just appreciate it. And then again, he might not" (140). The map represents "a concept that lay at the heart of business and Western civilization," (330) and it is not clear whether Lionel will identify with, and ultimately follow, this Western concept, or not. Norma recognizes her nephew's dilemma and encourages him to follow a traditional path: "Lionel, if you weren't my sister's boy, and if I didn't see you born with my own eyes, I would sometimes think you were white" (7), and it is she who suggests that the old Indians help Lionel as part of their project. For his birthday, the old Indians give Lionel a leather jacket with fringe. It is the same jacket John Wayne wore in the movie, but now the jacket has "a couple of holes . . . in the back," (336) symbolizing the resistment and reversal of the traditional Hollywood narrative in which the Indians are killed and the colonizing whites are victorious. This jacket gives Lionel the strength to reject the dominant "other" and defend the traditions and culture of the Blackfeet.

King's empowerment of Lionel specifically, and the Blackfoot community in general, is perhaps most recognizable in Lionel and Eli's victory over George. Earlier in the novel, Eli recalls a childhood memory of a "man [who] climbed on top of [his] car and began taking pictures" (151) of the Sun Dance and when noticed, "slid off the car, climbed into the driver's seat, rolled up all the windows, and locked the doors" (152). Eli's uncle, Orville, confronts the man at his car, explaining, "You can't take pictures of the Sun Dance" (153). Eventually, the man gives Orville the film, but when it is developed, "the film [is] blank" (157); the man has switched the film

and is thus successful, not unlike the dominant culture in general, in stealing part of a Native American culture.

By the end of the novel, however, Lionel and Eli are able to protect their beliefs. George comes to the Sun Dance and begins to take pictures secretly, but he is discovered and confronted by Lionel. He forces George to open up his case, revealing a hidden camera, but George simply says, "No harm in a couple of pictures" (425). Mirroring the words of his own uncle, Eli tells George, "You can't take pictures of the Sun Dance" (425). George also attempts to trick them by giving them a blank canister of film, but Eli searches the case:

George looked past Lionel. Eli was bent over the case . . . Eli released the camera from its mount, opened the back, and took out a roll of film . . . Eli got to his feet and turned to face George. He held the film canister in his hand . . . and he caught the end of the film between his thumb and forefinger and stripped it out of the canister in a great curling arc. (426)

In this case, the dominant culture is not allowed to selectively capture and appropriate part of a Native culture; the story has worked out differently. George, unable to carry out his plan, shouts, "It's the twentieth century. Nobody cares about your little powwow. A bunch of old people and drunks sitting around in tents in the middle of nowhere" (427). Lionel replies simply, "There's nothing for you here" (427).

Apparently there is something here for Lionel. Even though at first "it was awkward sitting cross-legged on the blanket, trying to keep from spilling stew on his pants," (404) Lionel, like Will in *Medicine River*, comes to recognize the strength and stability of his culture: "The circle was tightly formed now, the older people sitting in lawn chairs along the front edge, the younger people standing in the back, the children constantly in motion" (429). Both of these characters find themselves within a setting that is comfortable, and in many ways healing, to them, a setting which is almost exclusively Native American and anchored by traditions symbolized by the elders. Before the old Indians leave the Sun Dance, Hawkeye advises Lionel: "Try not to mess up your life again . . . We're not as young as we used to be" (428).

As a final symbolic gesture of their repairs to the world, the old Indians, with the help of Coyote, cause the dam to break. This dam, built on Native land, has stopped the flow of the river and created Parliament Lake and is, in effect, a symbol of the power of the dominant culture to alter

narratives at will. Bill Bursom reflects this sentiment: “As long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn’t mean anything. It was a metaphor. Eli knew that. Every Indian on the reserve knew that. Treaties were hardly sacred documents” (296). Even if Western culture has the power to stop the water from running, King announces that Native American cultures have the power to release the water. Even though the symbolism is too obvious, King places three cars on the lake, a Nissan, a Pinto, and a Karmann-Ghia, representing Columbus’ fleet. Coyote sings a song, causing the dam to burst: “And the dam gave way, and the water and the cars tumbled over the edge of the world. . . . Below, in the valley, the water rolled on as it had for eternity” (454-455). The releasing of the waters reverses the Western narratives of discovery and colonization.

In his introduction to *The Native in Literature*, Thomas King writes, “These terms, ‘Indian’ and ‘Native,’ are historical and literary terms much like ‘continent’ and ‘narrative,’ which seem to suggest specific, known quantities but which hint at vast geographies and varied voices” (9). King’s own literature attempts to provide these “varied voices,” and in doing so, “places the Eurocentric reader on the outside, as ‘other,’ while the Indian reader (a comparatively small audience) is granted, for the first time, a privileged position” (Owens, *Destinies* 14). Writing the literature of resistance, King, like many Native American novelists, refuses to take part in the narratives of the dominant culture. As Owens adeptly explains, American Indians “are in their fiction rejecting the American gothic with its haunted, guilt-burdened wilderness and doomed Native and emphatically making the Indian the hero of other destinies, other plots” (*Destinies* 18).

In *Medicine River*, King illustrates the fact that Native Americans, like Will’s mother and Floyd’s granny, must look beyond the frame that has been provided for them in order to combat a stereotypical, stagnant existence. *Green Grass, Running Water* effectively erases the frame itself and empowers Native people to construct their own narratives and defy the “rules” of dominant Euroamerican culture. As Owens tells us,

Native American writers are insisting that rather than “use” Native American literature, the world must enter into dialogue with that literature and make it profoundly a part of our modern existence, just as Native Americans have for centuries made European literature a part of Native America. And they are insisting that rather than looking to this literature for reflections of what they expect to see—their own

constructed Indianness—readers must look past their mirroring consciousness to the other side. (*Mixedblood* 23-24)

These novels taken together make a bold statement about the reclaiming of voice, in this case a voice that has been systematically marginalized. As the narrator of *Green Grass, Running Water* points out, "There are no truths . . . Only stories," (432) and through the voice of Thomas King and others like him, Native Americans are putting forth *their own* stories, stories of resistment which acknowledge the inherently syncretic nature of the world while simultaneously fighting cliches and stereotypes. Readers need only to listen and to take notice.

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Ode to Loobey

God, we used to pee on that kid.
Jimmy Loobey, a name that could only come from the South.

Flaming orange-headed stepchild of Coyote
we feared he'd ride his bicycle
to our houses at mid-night,
break into our bedroom windows,
and exchange places with us.

And with our own underwear and rusty bicycle-chains,
he'd tie us down to the urinal depths of humiliation.

Jimmy Loobey, the Comanche word ranging in meaning

from an in-grown toenail
to your braids cut off
and mouth rinsed out with bleach;

from finding a strand of burnt hair
inside your frybread
to burying a grocery sack of stillborn kittens;

from losing your favorite turquoise ring
to losing your virginity without a condom
to a girl with line-backer shoulders and bad acne.

That name has become a song throughout the years,
the death song for both Comanche and animal alike,
echoing from ditches and top of trees
being whispered in the dark corners of bedtime . . .

Jimmy Loobey, the name for all children's nightmares.

Stuart Hoahwah

Earth's Mind: Essays in Native Literature. Roger Dunsmore. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1997. \$17.95. ISBN 0-826-31798-7. xiv + 225 pages.

Artistry in Native American Myths. Karl Kroeber. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. \$25.00. ISBN 0-803-27785-7. xi + 291 pages.

A few years ago my husband and I became involved in a dispute with a neighbor over some half-dozen old-growth oak trees that lined a common driveway to our house in the southern California mountains. Although the driveway was and had been perfectly usable, our neighbor wanted to cut the trees in order to widen the passage. We tried to find a legal way to prevent the destruction of the trees, and in a consultation with our lawyer I asked if there were not something inherent to the wholeness and viability of the mountain slope—the age and value of the trees as habitat and food source, the watershed of the slope, the distribution of sun and shade on that side of the mountain—that would weigh against the neighbor's rights on the deed. Did land have no rights at all? I learned that it did not; moreover, in the deposition that eventually took place, the trees were consistently labeled as impediments and the driveway, over my objections, defined as an improvement. The experience was a revelation: there was locked into our legal concepts, our very language, a manner of seeing so inimical to what seemed to me both profound and *prima facie* common sense that I could not believe so many people credited it. It would take a monumental and fundamental rethinking of mental (as well as mountain) premises to change such a strange and hostile way of thinking and looking at the world.

These two books undertake, it seems to me, the beginnings of just such a tectonic shift in deeply ingrained ways of thinking, particularly thinking about literature, but with ramifications for that wider kind of looking as well. Both books ask the reader to begin rethinking not only the

texts under discussion, but all texts, and even the nature of text and textuality. They represent a departure from much of the criticism to date on American Indian literatures, which has generally sought to validate the literature by showing how well it can be illuminated by this or that theory or analytic method; here instead, Dunsmore and Kroeber ask us to take the literature itself and see how it can help us interrogate our theories and re-view our values.

Earth's Mind, although I have just described it as a radical departure, is also a very old-fashioned book in resurrecting an unfortunately much-neglected critical form: the personal essay. Dunsmore's pieces (not all are essays—some are poems, one is a kind of closet drama or as he calls it, a ritual that is “an exercise in ethno-poetics”) are the fruit of years of thought, meditation, conversation and classroom exercises. Long a professor in Montana, where his teaching integrates writing and first-hand environmental awareness, Dunsmore incorporates what he has learned from Indian students, friends and colleagues in his ruminations on the connections between literature, personal history and the natural world.

The introduction and title essay present the substructure of Dunsmore's theory: it seeks to explore the connection between the word and the world via an etymology linking human/humus/humble and reaching out to embrace John Swanton, Chief Joseph, Chiricahua traditions, Wallace Stevens, and a Crow student. Subsequent essays on Silko's *Ceremony*, McNickle's *Wind from an Enemy Sky*, and Laurens van der Post's *The Heart of the Hunter* continue the theme, always mindful of an underlying, unspoken question: Aside from making a career of it, what is literature for, anyway? The essay on Nicholas Black Elk, especially, should become essential reading.

There are risks in this kind of writing: the occasional slip into pomposity or posturing, the experiment that does not completely succeed. The book does not successfully avoid all pitfalls, but the glitches are modest and far, far outweighed by the quiet, respectful, continually enriching insights.

Karl Kroeber's *Artistry in Native American Myths* takes a different road to look at some of the same questions, notably the basic one of what we are trying to do when we read literature at all. There is a passage in Leslie Silko's short story “Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hands” that speaks to the problem. The story's protagonist—a Laguna bachelor with a fondness for the bottle and an eye for the ladies—overhears a couple of women speaking in Spanish; what he hears is the phrase (rendered in the

English text as) “as big as a horse,” and from it he concocts an elaborate and highly detailed set of assumptions about the sexuality of Mexican women. The vignette offers a cautionary paradigm for the critic who would approach transcribed translations of traditional American Indian oral texts. Most of us are even further removed than Silko’s protagonist from anything like a reliable sense of indigenous texts: we encounter fragments of verbal artifacts torn from their cultural and textual contexts, rendered into unfamiliar vocabularies, petrified in the alien medium of print, and in general estranged from almost every conceivable connection that could render them meaningful.

Up to this point, the major—indeed, arguably the only—credible criticism of this literature has been tentative and careful attempts to reconstruct in some conceptual way whatever can be ascertained of the composition, performance and linguistic contexts that would make sense of it: the work of Larry Evers and Felipe Molina, Dell Hymes, William Bright, and Dennis Tedlock. Karl Kroeber has contributed to this scholarship the special perspective of comparative literature, and his article theorizing translation of American Indian texts as a model for comparative literature studies deserves much wider recognition. In *Artistry in Native American Myths* Kroeber pulls together many of the threads that have been introduced in previous uncollected writings and offers a sustained study of oral texts in translation.

Artistry in Native American Myths is a personal book, especially in Kroeber’s unique ability to draw on the riches of his father’s work. In its format the book looks like something many of us have expressed a longing for: the “casebook” anthology incorporating related primary texts with critical and background commentary. Each of the five sections opens with primary text (in sections two through five there are several related texts) followed by commentary. The sections focus on “Anthropological Roots of Ethnopoetics,” “Mythic Imagining,” “Human Cultures, Animal Cultures,” “Trickster-Transformer’s Orality,” and “Myth as Historical Process.” The reader has the rare chance to look at thematically related stories (e.g., the Bear Woman story, Yurok stories about the origins of blood-money payment, the Stone Boy story, and of course Trickster tales) followed by commentaries that pull together anthropological, literary and personal observations.

Throughout his exegesis Kroeber stresses the importance of moving away from “justifying” texts by applying theory and moving towards using local knowledge (insofar as it is available or reconstructable), the necessity of considering the uniqueness of the individual performance

productions of any text, of seeing at all points the relationship between what Toby Langen, in an important essay introducing some of the core ideas that Kroeber draws on, has called the “version” and the “collection.” While arguing for an alternative to the universalizing tendencies of anthropology and folklore, Kroeber makes use of theoretical and critical abstractions to rationalize the literature so far as possible from a non-western perspective. The main difficulty the discussion faces throughout is the elusiveness and ephemerality of oral performance: pinning down in print the distinctive features of evanescent oral telling is a paradoxical and eventually frustrating endeavor, but not less necessary or valuable. The reflections on trickster stories illustrate the point, for regardless of the importance of seeing the distinctive particulars of any given story, the argument inevitably ends up referring to the disembodied archetype. Such contradictions—particularly apt in the case of discussion of Trickster—invigorate the discussion, drawing attention to the way in which it opens up new territory.

The most important contribution of these two books is that of opening up new territory. Rich meditations in themselves, they only hint at how important and rewarding their approaches should come to be as more of us attempt to make these tectonic shifts in vision and perspective—shifts that can ready us for whole new ways of seeing, new ways of using language.

Helen Jaskoski

Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place. *Louis Owens. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1998. \$27.95. ISBN 0-806-13051-2. 263 pages.*

Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-Busting, Border-Crossing, and Loose Canons. *Paula Gunn Allen. Boston: Beacon P, 1998. \$24.00 cloth. ISBN 0-807-04640-X. 254 pages.*

When I first met Larry Evers, I was even more ignorant than I am today. Dropped by chance into Tucson, I connived an appointment with Evers, the English department head at the University of Arizona, and swallowed up about an hour of his time to talk about how masterfully I was running our writing center at the University of Georgia, how brilliantly I had set up our computer systems, and how much I had learned about what I probably called Amerindian literature in the past few years. I closed out my time by asking him if he knew of any experts in Yaqui stories that could be of help in my reading of Alfredo Veá's *La Maravilla*. Well, even if you've only done a subject search on Yaqui songs, you'd know better. And if you'd read the introduction of *Yaqui Deer Songs: Maso Bwikam* (by Evers and Molina), with its arresting discussion by both authors about working together, you would know that Evers' mention of a couple of the more obvious names, as well as a recent Arizona graduate who liked Veá's work, and of his friend Felipe Molina, without mentioning his own name, was the act of a man who knew I was a fool but was too polite to point the fact out directly.

By the time I met Louis Owens, I had made considerable strides in figuring out what I did not know. I asked him about that big cattle hound that appears with him on the back flyleaf of *Other Destinies*, and I told him about the 17-year-old collie mix that I talked to whenever I needed advice from my dead father, and I worried out loud about our little spare dog with a liver problem. Somehow, the contrast in the meetings has stuck with me for a while, and I now believe they echo what I think is a growth in literary

talk/criticism aimed at Indian literatures. That is, when I hear or read a literary critic, I always hope I'll hear an answer to a very old set of questions: who are you? who are your people?

Like most scholars old enough to worry about their cholesterol, I was taught to believe that good criticism spoke with the anonymous voice of a master rationalist, a sort of also-ran scientist, who dissected literary works like dead cats fresh out of the formaldehyde. I have since not only learned more ways to skin a cat, but to develop enough respect for cats to leave them fuzzy and contrary. I like them living in disdain of me (like stories) far more than splayed out on a lab table (like texts). And no matter how sharp a critic may hone in on a work/writer/movement, I now believe he's always telling me a personal story, not a universal narrative aimed at decoding a text.

All of the above informs my view of two new books by Louis Owens and Paula Gunn Allen, both of which thrust forward an answer to those ancient conversational openings—who are you, and who are your people—which past readers have asked of Owens and Gunn Allen with widely ranging levels of politeness. Neither book is purely genealogy, but both return at many points in their telling to build literal and emotional family trees, and for both books, “genealogy” builds the foundations and boundaries for their most central theses. The mountain neighbors that I think of from my childhood spoke in much the same way: while each would gladly share an opinion on the TVA, federal tax laws governing distilleries, and other topics from “those lying Atlanta newspapers,” they would also preface every global comment with “Course all I know runs from the hills in front of me to the hills in back of me.”

At first glance, Louis Owens seems to be on an academic quest in *Mixedblood Messages*; in fact, many of the pieces in the book have appeared as journal articles or are echoed closely by his *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. However, the running struggle of the book is a heightened wrestle with authenticity—in literature, film, television, and Owens himself. Owens' *Other Destinies*, a standard in college Native literature courses, makes one accurate but not always popular observation—that most American Indian literature now read as such is by authors of mixed blood, typically authors more often tenured than not. This statement draws fire from some Indian authors, such as Sherman Alexie and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, who have in various media derided most of the rather small pool of academically-adopted Indians as self-invented. Hence, one finds Owens authenticating himself in what at first might seem to be a self-justifying genealogy but is instead a complex of essays that one

might more properly term an anatomy of Louis Owens.

As with *Off the Reservation*, we find an apparent linear structure (with literature, film, autobiographical sections, followed by an almost anagogic section called "Words, Wilderness, and Native America"). But while Gunn Allen will explicitly come home, in every sense of the word including a return to Laguna Pueblo, Owens records a dislocation of memory as the "blood trails" of his grandmothers and great aunts, centered around wonderful but generations-old stories of Oklahoma and Mississippi, which give way to the west coast lands upon which his own childhood memories map meaning. While the final essay, "'Everywhere There Was Life': How Native Americans Can Save the World," tackles a feeble opponent (the revisionist theory that Indian over-hunting wiped out the mega-fauna of eons past, probably the result of some ghost of Thomas Jefferson still trying to prove his silly Mastodon theory), it offers one of the more coherent suggestions of what "pan-Indian" sensibilities might be. Nonetheless, I find what Louis Owens has to say about *himself* to be much more compelling, for the same reason that *Off the Reservation* resurrects my interest in the person Paula Gunn Allen. Owens' autobiographical passages ring true: "Missing from the photo are the family's father and grandfather, just as fathers and grandfathers seem to be missing in almost all photos on the mixedblood Indian sides of both my mother's and father's families" (137). In fact, Owens takes great pains to delineate the bewildering situation of Southeastern tribes' descendants:

Many Indian people have been strong enough or fortunate enough to cling to family, community, clan, and tribe through this half millenium of deliberate, orchestrated, colonially and federally designed physical and cultural genocide. But a great many have not. Those mixed white-and-Indian families, or white-Indian-and African American, with children sometimes resembling a Rainbow Coalition, assembled for somber photos in front of blanket-covered cabins, represent a crucial period in the histories of America and of mixed-blood peoples in this country, a period that is often either unknown or misunderstood by Americans, Indian and non-Indian alike. Cherokees frequently bear the brunt of jokes throughout Indian Country because too many are blond and too many who identify as Cherokee have only the faintest and most cliched ideas of Cherokee princess great-grandmothers. However, the Southeastern tribes did, in fact, have early and intense contact with Europeans, and a great many did, in fact, marry or cohabit with Europeans—especially Irishmen, Welshmen, Scotsmen, and Frenchmen (147).

Underlying all of *Mixedblood Messages* is Owens' career-long move

to re-appropriate the term *frontier* for those who really inhabit it—mixedbloods and other cross-cultural inhabitants—but the book most literally marks out boundaries of identity or “authenticity” as Owens unfolds his personal genealogy of body (complete with pictures of Choctaw and Cherokee relations) and of mind.

Off the Reservation, Gunn Allen explains, copies “an expression current in military and political circles” that designates “someone who doesn’t conform . . . anomalies: mavericks, renegades, queers” (6). Her original choice of title for the book was “Pocahontas Perplexed: An Indian Woman’s View of Life, Literature and Philosophy,” as opposed to the publisher’s choice of “A Native American’s View”; however, a *SAIL* interview (Fall 1997; 9.3:14) offers a personalized summary of many of the book’s features, particularly Gunn Allen’s insistence that “I’m saying these things. I know what I think; that’s my responsibility. I’m not supposed to know what other people think.”

The collections of essays fall into three sections, Haggles/gynosophies, Wyrds/orthographies, and La Frontera/na[rra]tivities, which move from the theoretical, to the relational, to the personal, but every essay “has a narrative line, a plot if you will” (10) that never strays far from Gunn Allen’s childhood and the woman-centered stories that informed that childhood, such as the two women who are abducted by Bear Man or Snake Man, tested by the mothers of those two, with each “then sent back to her people to give them the Chantway she has earned the right to sing and bestow” (55). Many of the not-always-well-received ideas that permeate *Sacred Hoop* and other Gunn Allen writings resurface here, yet they are placed more squarely in what I will call a genealogical context, and even the most political statements that mark out territory for lesbians and academic multiculturalists boil down to one: “You can’t be right, self-righteous, and truthful at the same time” (64). And who can deny for any community the hope that “the community itself will in all matters make all decisions pertaining to itself, its lands, and its progeny” (74). Other observations may be fond recollection: “Among other things, the Laguna example demonstrates that violence of any kind is not a male trait dictated by either hormones or natural law” (80), but even if this is a revisionist myth, one cannot but wish it to be so. A few stances seem surely aimed to both strike truth and incite knee-jerk denial: “It is instructive to note that in every region where Aryan patriarchal elitist systems have held sway, human populations have risen far beyond the ability of the environment to sustain them” (88).

Much of Gunn Allen's criticism of white American patriarchy seems mere bear-baiting (though she would no doubt suggest that I'm slandering bears), but one thread that I find particularly convincing surfaces most fully in the essay title "'Indians,' Solipsisms, and Archetypal Holocausts." In essence, Gunn Allen describes a distinction between the solo/solipsistic nature of much of Western literary criticism, and the relational nature of criticism she would hope for, as essentially cultural: "In the world of the patriarchs everything is about politics; for much of the rest of the world, politics occupies little or any part of our preoccupations. Native Americans are entirely concerned with relations to and among the physical and nonphysical and various planetary energy-intelligences of numerous sorts" (172). I would tend to simplify this distinction into one between those who think they're smarter than the world they live in, and those who don't, as I think Gunn Allen would have us apply this distinction far beyond the lit-crit world. Somewhere in the world I hope a grad student will begin re-reading her alongside Silko and Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge*, and not just because of the confluence of those three writers' meditations on the yellow dust of uranium mines.

Literary criticism is nonetheless Gunn Allen's frequent subject, perhaps an indication that small world though lit-crit is, it is largely in need of fixing: "In the narcissistic enterprise of contemporary criticism, we have lost sight of the purpose of criticism. . . . Confusing the menu with the meal is an occupational hazard for intellectuals, and maintaining colonial boundaries through the agency of intellectual domination is not an appropriate endeavor for professionals who would bear the title of Humanist meaningfully" (153). And just as Thomas King so effectively deconstructs the term "post-colonial" ("Godzilla versus Post-Colonialism," *Western World Literature Written in English*, 30.2 [1990] 10-16) that it has since left my vocabulary, Gunn Allen rolls a hand-grenade into the tent of "magical realism" (239ff) in describing the inability of critics to let a story do its job without pre-shackling the reader's ability to wonder. From "Thus Spake Pocahontas" we hear the multiculturalist academic, tired of the pretentious ambushes of faculty politics: "Even our few solid backers in academe perceive us as extensions of the great white way. . . . Our capacities as creative, self-directing, self-comprehending human beings are lost in the shuffle of ideology and taxonomy" (164).

At heart, though, *Off the Reservation* observes a very large world from its Laguna neighborhood, very much through woman-centered eyes: "Where I come from, God is a Woman; her name is Thinking Woman. She is accompanied by her sister-goddesses Memory and what I will translate

as Intuition, and she is an elder of the male gender. She is called Grandmother . . . and also Spider . . . Where I come from, society is . . . matrilineal, matrilocal, and matrifocal” (89). While Paula Gunn Allen does not rival the seventeen or more family photographs that Owens offers in *Mixedblood Messages*, her Pueblo and Lebanese ancestors show themselves as vividly through her, the “mixed-blood Laguna girl” born “on the border of the mixed-blood Laguna Reservation and the Cubero Land Grant, to a mixed-blood Laguna mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and perhaps great-great-grandfather to Oak clan, to the Sunrise/Summer people; and to a Maronite-American father born and raised around the mountain to the east of Cubero” (4).

David Payne

Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place.
Louis Owens. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1998. \$27.95.
ISBN 0-806-13051-2. 263 pages.

At the heart of both the fiction and scholarly work of author Louis Owens is an exploration of mixed blood identity. His latest book, *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*, continues that examination with a collection of essays that probes a variety of genre-films, literature, family photos and stories, and environmental commentaries. This mix of genres is appropriate as they all center around an ability to exist in a mixed blood space of hyphenated identity. He argues that “virtually everything that is new and vital and exciting in American literature today is coming from the so-called margins” (xv). As a result readers will be required to “read across lines of cultural identity around us and within us” (11).

Speaking from a mixed heritage of Cherokee, Choctaw and Irish, Owens discusses who has the right to speak as a Native American for Native Americans. Is determining authenticity as simple as knowing the tribal affiliation of the author? He asks why the rules are different for authors who write about Native Americans than they are for canonical writers who write about love and war without the appropriate credentials. He asks who reads these novels and questions what they expect to find in “Indian Territory.” Additionally, are American Indian writers creating opportunities for “literary tourism,” or are they subversively using the colonizers’ language to disguise their anger? Owens argues that Native American writers have moved away from subversion and have begun “to openly confront the dominant culture on its own textual grounds” (23). As the voices from the margins begin to surround and possibly engulf the center,

Native American writers are insisting that the world enter into dialogue with the literature and make it a part of their existence, rather than experience it as a "literary tourist."

In his essays on American Indian novels, Owens continues critical analyses begun in *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. He offers new insights into the works of American Indians ranging from early writers such as John Rollin Ridge, Mourning Dove, and D'Arcy McNickle to writers of the Native American Renaissance such as N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Silko, James Welch and Gerald Vizenor. Owens touches on current literary theories espoused by scholars of Bakhtin and Said and proposes that there needs to be a new kind of critical-theoretical approach if "multiculturalism is to be more than another discourse of dominance, what has been called 'critical imperialism'" (49). These essays are interesting, grounded in critical theory and ideas, and provide new perspectives on what Gerald Vizenor labels as the literature of "survivance."

Also interesting and often wryly amusing are Owens' analyses of two Hollywood portrayals of American Indians: Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* and John Wayne westerns, specifically *The Searchers*. Owens admits to distrusting and even disliking John Wayne as he was growing up. He explains that when he found out "John Wayne's real name was Marion, that cut it. I knew then that he had made up everything, the whole kit and caboodle from beginning to end" (100). In the course of 150 films, Marion Morrison reinvented himself and grew into the hero that America demanded to "match the nation's pathological craving for an archetypal hero fitted to the great, violent myth of the American West" (101). In his discussion of *The Searchers*, Owens explores the ambiguity of Wayne's attitude toward Indians; but he finally posits that although in all his films Wayne cannot exist outside "Indian Country," the films' storylines reflect America's eroticized hatred of the indigenous peoples of America.

On the other hand, albeit *Dances With Wolves* represented an important breakthrough in many ways in Hollywood's representation of American Indians, Owens astutely sees the trickster tale underneath the politically correct surface. Owens asserts that *Dances With Wolves* depicts in "marvelously complete fashion the crux of America's relationship with the indigenous people of this continent" (127). Disguised as exactly the opposite, the film is a reenactment of the colonization of America, "a narrative whose purpose is simply to erase Indians from the national consciousness as actual, living people" (126).

In contrast to the humor Owen exhibits in the discussion of films, the "Autobiographical Reflections" section, a section which should be the

most personal, is often melancholy and distant. The reader becomes a part of the search for his identity as Owens verbally sifts through family photographs and stories, not always able to put faces and names together. As he moves through his own personal landscape in Oklahoma, Mississippi, California and New Mexico, he begins to question both Indian identity and relationships with the landscape-ideas embodied within his own personal mixed blood history and represented in Indian literature and film.

In *Mixedblood Messages*, Louis Owens has provided another valuable resource for Native American Studies. This group of nonfiction essays complements both his previous fiction works (*Wolfsong*, *The Sharpest Sight*, *Bone Game*, *Nightland*) as well as his nonfiction and critical work.

Barbara J. Cook

{half-page ad}

Animating the Ordinary, Empowering the In-Between: The Cold-and-Hunger Dance. Diane Glancy. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1998. \$22.00. ISBN 0-8032-2173-8. 109 pages.

Diane Glancy's burden as an American Indian writer is precisely her gift: to animate those voices long considered unfit for literary or scholarly representation, to empower those voices too ordinary, too marginal, or both. Like many contemporary American Indians, Glancy is of mixed descent, identifying ancestors who were Cherokee, English, and German. And like many American Indians, Glancy was not raised in a predominantly Indian community. Instead, as her Cherokee father sought employment, her family relocated frequently within the dominant culture, only infrequently returning to the Cherokee world of her grandmother. Moving between worlds has characterized Glancy's adult life as well. Over the past decade, in an impressive list of book-length works in every genre, she has worked to excavate the intersections and ironies of her mixed heritage and to analyze her life of travel.

In her most recent collection of creative nonfiction, *The Cold-and-Hunger Dance*, Glancy once again begins with her personal journey, stating that she "was born between two cultures . . . I could walk in both worlds; I could walk in neither" (2). This is the "ordinary" experience that informs the collection: a contemporary American Indian experience of living with mixed blood and with mixed heritage. Of living in what Glancy calls "a no man's land" (2), feeling "outside of every tradition I've been in" (28). Of identifying as an American Indian, as a mixedblood, as a poet, as an academic, and as a Christian—despite the potential for conflict among any combination of these subject positions. Rather than allow her self-described position as "a marginal voice in several worlds" to disable her, Glancy seizes the power of the marginal to "tell several stories at once" (1).

And as in her previous works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction prose, Glancy confronts her “ordinary” experience of constant negotiation with a survivor’s sense of humility and humor, with an understated passion, and with a striving toward theory and its promise of greater clarity.

The sixteen pieces collected in *The Cold-and-Hunger Dance* range widely in both form and topic. In addition to expository essays, readers encounter poems, transcribed oral storytelling, and extended metaphors and meditations. Connecting these diverse individual performances of memoir, analysis, and contemplation is a persistent attention to the details of living and thinking *between* identities, *between* cultures, *between* histories and spiritualities. There is also a persistent attempt to manipulate standard and academic American English into forms that might represent the complexity and the volatility of the in-between. In the title essay, for instance, Glancy rehearses the trajectory of her writing life; she begins by contemplating her early and ongoing hunger for reading the Bible, a text “which is full of stories of expanding boundaries.” She writes that “I think I am a Christian because of the words in the Bible. The sturdiness of them. The *oratures* of them” (3). As the essay progresses, Glancy’s sense of the “*storyness*” of the Bible—its relationship to oral traditions—helps to connect her Christianity and her development as a writer to “Native American storying,” which she defines as “an act of *gathering* many voices to tell a story in many different ways.” Glancy argues that this “alignment of voices” is typical of Native “storying”; American Indian stories construct a “*relational stance*” that is not typically a feature of dominant Western discourses, “a migratory and interactive process of the moveable parts within the story.” As yet, Glancy notes, there is no adequate terminology for the process of rendering American Indian oral traditions with the written word, but she sees herself as working toward giving “solid nomenclature to something that is a moving process, and resists naming” (9).

Glancy develops this theme of writing from a location somewhere between Christianity and American Indian traditions in essays titled “Sun Dance,” “The Bible and *Black Elk Speaks*,” and “On Boards and Broken Pieces of the Ship.” In “A Fieldbook of Textual Migrations,” Glancy complicates her position as a contemporary Native writer by examining her relationship to the Cherokee language, which she does not speak. “To be Indian is to know the loss of language,” she writes. But, unsatisfied with the seeming finality of that mournful statement, she pushes toward theorizing what it might mean to write from a position of such loss, what it might mean to imagine the possibilities of surviving, even surpassing the

disruption of language. "To be *delanguaged*," she writes, "is a *recitrocity*"—a reciprocating atrocity—"It has ramifications" not only for the language lost to subordination or oblivion, but also for the language made dominant. Glancy tries to imagine an American English imbued "with the otherness of the [indigenous] languages it met. Without the *interfuss* [the quarrel between] of them. Which is their absence" (102). Unable to reclaim the Cherokee language as an integrated, fully functioning system of communication and culture, Glancy gleans what lessons she can from inscriptions of written Cherokee, "to write words I can't speak," to write the "life" suggested by Cherokee language through her own manipulations of English—"Because directly is not a route" (105).

As the above examples make clear, Glancy's experiments with language play, like those of Gerald Vizenor, are attempts to produce adequate theories for understanding the particular conditions under which contemporary American Indians produce literature. Toward the middle of her essay entitled "She-ro-ism," Glancy states, "I like to make up words to fit the broken disenfranchisement I feel" (97). However, as yet Glancy's efforts at "doing theory" lack an active dialogue with the work of other Native writers, critics, and scholars—in addition to Vizenor, Paula Gunn Allen, Robert Warrior, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, and Jace Weaver come readily to mind—that might push her theorizing toward greater precision. What might become possible if Glancy juxtaposed her "storying" with Vizenor's "survivance"? If she responded directly to Warrior's call for "intellectual sovereignty"? Or if she situated her "made up words" within Cook-Lynn's reflections on "what it means to claim the power to narrate"? These questions are meant not as negative criticism of *The Cold-and-Hunger Dance*, which I find to be a work of considerable beauty and power, but rather as a hope for Glancy's future endeavors. In *Claiming Breath*, her award-winning 1992 collection of essays, Glancy defines her ongoing project simply and profoundly: "That's what writing is," she tells us, "we come to grips with the world in our own way." Indeed, this may be the central lesson of Glancy's work—that the clarity and precision of theory begins with the mapping of our own "ordinary" lives.

Chadwick Allen

I Remember the Fallen Trees: New and Selected Poems.
Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. Eastern Washington U P, 1998.
\$15.95. ISBN 0-910-05545-9. 137 pages.

There's a possibility of interpreting a book according to your own vision and not what the author intended. Cook-Lynn is not a writer you do that to.

Imagine Indians
hunted like wild beasts along the
sun-drenched river beds
smoke on every horizon
the wounded lying in the bushes
unable to run or regret.

You've got the picture. ("Remembering the Spirit and the Land in the Time of Sitting Bull")

In this new poetry collection, Cook-Lynn is focused as usual. She takes responsibility head on.

I worry
that the pact we made in order to
save ourselves marks us survivors of the wasteful dead . . . ("To Whomever One Calls Whenever One Has a Quarter")

This is a writer I respect, a writer whose essays, *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner*, I use every year in class. I am glad to have these poems.

Oddly enough, as I read her poems, I was flying over the Black Hills in South Dakota where she returned when she retired from academic life. I thought of her there. Maybe it's why the poems seemed so real to me. I also thought of Black Elk who said the Black Hills were the center of the earth. Certainly it seemed so from the air, especially as the plane crossed from South Dakota across the flat brown floor of Montana.

There is no title poem in the collection, but the title is in the first line of a poem, "Collaborator," which introduces the thought of the loss of the past:

Forgive me, my children
I barely hear soft raindrops on shrouded drums
of my father and his father and yours.
Periodic, unpredictable, their songs
sway in the gloom
of my forfeiture.

Reading the poem, I got the feeling the fallen trees are the songs and voices, maybe the relatives and ancestors themselves.

There were times I wished for the explicit. "I don't like people who go behind the bush and beat around" Cook-Lynn tells us in "The Bleak Truth Is." But I felt there was a beating around the bush. I wanted to hear the stories of the river in that poem. I wanted to hear more specifics. But maybe they are private tribal matters that remain unsaid.

Sometimes I felt a cold reconciliation: "things pass and times are gone forever" ("The Way It Is"). Sometimes I felt resolution:

I silently promise
the woman who lived here
before me that in this
burnt-out twentieth century
the flame won't flicker and out. ("Spider as She Used to Be")

Always, I felt the unseen ones:

I encounter
the real and imagined
spirits and am annoyed
with them for
appearing in my headlights

like anguished relatives
who know my wounds. ("Muffled Thunder")

I liked reading about Cook-Lynn's life. Her achievements. I also felt Cook-Lynn's poignancy in her academic position in a prose poem:

Eventually we drove our aging Pontiac to a college town which led us through days designed by racist professors and disciplines that deserved to be blown up, splintered and charred. In that place, still warm from regular paychecks and full tables we grew to know that those who suffer loneliness don't always learn to despise themselves if their bellies are full. ("My Previous Life")

But getting back to what I thought about as I read her book, not beating around the bush any longer: it is my own stance with faith and Christianity I saw as I read the book, which is readily dismissed by Native Americans, and sometimes readily hated. But I see that subject in *I remember the fallen trees*. I see Christian images all through Cook-Lynn's work. Maybe because I want to see them, Catholicism, in this case, though denominations and their differences are another subject:

Inyan (the rock) was said to be soft
and without shape
and all-powerful
until he opened himself and bled
and then he became hard
giving some of his power away. ("Not Everything")

This is the first piece in the book and I thought of Christ.

When the Dakotapi really lived as they wished, they thought it important to possess a significant tattoo mark. This enabled them to identify themselves for the grandmothers who stood on the ghost road entering the spirit world asking "mitakoja (grandchild), where is your tattoo?" If the Dakota could not show them his mark, they pushed that one down an abyss and he never reached the spirit land.

This piece opens section IV. Again I saw Christianity, fundamental Christianity that explains the mark of blood on the doorpost in Exodus 12:13 as a type of the blood of Christ that would mark the believer. I also thought of the unbelievers with the mark of the beast in Revelation 14:9.

Christianity itself was named in “My Grandmother’s Burial Ground”:

Ancestral bones
lie in anonymity in this New World
except that History called you Christian
and your name
kill-in-war-with-spear
vouched for you.

Also from that same poem: “History, that ‘counterfeit absurdity’/is no match for Buffalo bones/and dried skins of crows.”

In “Mythology of the Eternal Homeland,” Cook-Lynn writes: “We talk of apostates/and the price we paid.” I wondered here if they were apostates from their own tradition or apostates from the Christianity that missionaries tried to force on them.

Other lines, from “Distances”:

I was nine, reading the parables while
standing
at the apron of the altar . . .
The words were not in my heart.
Stone valley bushes along
the creek where the diamond willows grow, sky color light
against a fishy star in dark waters. That’s the real sermon. . . .
I come to wonder about disbelief this time of my solitary years.

After walking the dusty roads alone and counting the miles
all day I see the yellow of my grandmother’s dress
go farther and farther away from the distant reaches of the
imagined world of parable and Christ’s fables; my breath the
breathed vengeance of a hapless survivor.

Anti-Christian, certainly, but Christian concerns nonetheless.

It made me regret the Church didn’t do a more inclusive job, but instead, alienated so many Native Americans. “We lighted candles in a church that didn’t want us,” again from “My Previous Life.” Maybe, given a chance, the Native could have enriched Christianity, made it the useful faith it should have been, especially since the Native already acted on a community of voices and the sharing of possessions. If poetry draws you out of your own world, then returns you to it, changed, I had that sense of something that could have been.

The Christian imagery and dialogue and experience continue, as I said, throughout the book. "In this image, she seems to sit on the floor of the small Christian chapel, surrounded by many relatives and friends of the community, her long white hair bound with a black silk scarf. . . . Finally, with the last of her courage, she lets the Catholic priest take the body of her beloved and beautiful daughter and place it in a box and bury it deep inside the darkened earth." From the prose poem, "Old Woman Loved to Sing."

Later
we cross the bridge
but not before we scrutinize
the cost compose the history
of the world according to
all the pleas of all the Indian priests
we ever knew

Immense distances
hold authority
as we learn
in good conscience
the bitter stories
of broken faith. ("Getting Rich")

A bitter faith? Is it possible? Is it what Cook-Lynn is exploring? A relinquishing, a coming to terms with an occasional kick.

If another purpose of poetry is to get us in trouble (at least reviewing a poet's work can serve that purpose), to keep the dust stirred up in the cleared path of fallen trees, this terrific collection provides the reader with poetry they can enter at their own risk.

Diane Glancy

Gardens in the Dunes. Leslie Marmon Silko. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. \$25.00. ISBN 0-684-81154-5. 479 pages.

Leslie Marmon Silko's much loved first novel *Ceremony* (1977) is probably the most widely read and taught novel by a Native American writer. Her next novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), published fourteen years later, surprised and shocked her readers with its apocalyptic ferocity. *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), her third novel, is just as much a surprise, although of a very different kind, and demonstrates once again that Silko is one of the most talented and versatile of American writers. A meticulously researched historical novel set at the turn of the Twentieth Century, *Gardens in the Dunes* returns to a kind of literary realism in the tradition of Henry James, exploring in lively detail the pursuits of wealthy East Coast aristocrats during the period of the closing of the Western frontier. *Gardens in the Dunes* also draws on elements of the naturalist tradition, American Transcendentalism, and Gothic Romance—invoking writers as diverse as James, Edith Wharton, D.H. Lawrence, the Brontes, Wilkie Collins, and Margaret Fuller—to build an exciting tale of adventure, intrigue and mystery. By returning to more familiar genre and narrative conventions and overtly drawing on canonical American and British literary figures, Silko brings her work into the literary mainstream in a way that cannot be ignored. At the same time, *Gardens in the Dunes* challenges and reshapes those conventions into something that is distinctly indigenous. Thus Silko accomplishes the kind of reindigenization of the continent that she predicts in *Almanac of the Dead*, a “retaking of the Americas,” as Silko explains in a recent interview, that is “not literal, but . . . in a spiritual way of doing things, getting along with each other, with the earth and the animals” (Arnold 10).

The central character of *Gardens in the Dunes* is Indigo, an eleven-year-old girl of the disappearing Sand Lizard tribe, a fictional group of Colorado River Indians who lived peaceful, agrarian lives before the invasion of Euroamericans. Indigo is separated from her mother when soldiers break up a performance of the Ghost Dance. After the death of their Grandma Fleet, Indigo and her Sister Salt are captured, and Indigo is sent to boarding school in Riverside, California. She escapes and takes refuge with Hattie Abbott Palmer, a scholar whose disappointment over the rejection of her controversial graduate thesis on “the feminine principle” (101) in early Christian history impelled her into a marriage of convenience to botanist Edward Palmer. Heirs to wealthy Long Island families, the Palmers have come to California to manage the family citrus groves, while Edward struggles desperately to recoup investment losses and rebuild the waning family fortune. Thinking Indigo is an orphan, the Palmers take her on a summer tour of the grand homes and elaborate gardens of East Coast and European family and friends, and Hattie and Indigo enter into a process of mutual education. Hattie teaches Indigo the pleasures of books, art, and travel, while Indigo’s intense delight in the beauties of the world, her devotion to her animal companions—the monkey Linnaeus and the parrot Rainbow—and her unflagging determination to return to her family and their gardens in the dunes teach Hattie a new way of being in the world. Hattie’s growing bond with Indigo and her commitment to returning the Sand Lizard child to her home help Hattie recover the courage of her convictions and reclaim her rights as a woman to self-definition and joy. By the end of the novel, betrayed by Edward and stripped of her dowry and possessions, Hattie turns to her Indian women friends for help when she realizes she cannot return to “her former life among the lies” (461).

Silko’s suspenseful tale of separation and reunion, treachery and revenge is told in rich, lyrical prose, with generous humor and exquisitely detailed description, providing delicious feasts of flavors and scents, color and light, texture and sound. A major trope of the novel is consumption, and through it Silko contrasts two very different ways of relating to and taking in the world. Grandma Fleet and Indigo, like Edward Palmer and his colonial cronies, collect and import seeds and plant cuttings, cultivate and hybridize them to augment their beauty and improve yields. But the Sand Lizard people care for plants like relatives, in intimate and mutually sustaining relationships that nourish spirit as well as bodies and weave humans into the living web of interdependence and creativity that is the hallmark theme of Silko’s work. One of the novel’s characters observes of the booming Southwest, “[S]omething was wrong here. Too much taken away and not enough given back” (421). What the Sand Lizard people

give back is respect and love, expressed in the pleasures of sensory attunement and ingestion, in the giving of the self to nourish what sustains human life, as Grandma Fleet gives her body in death to feed the apricot trees she has lovingly grown from pits salvaged in city dumps. In contrast, the extravagant formal gardens of the New England Robber Baron estates, transplanted and forced to bloom at obscene cost, exemplify the flowering of capitalism in the Americas, the reshaping of the land for power, profit, and display that builds on the exploitation and destruction of its native human, animal, and plant inhabitants, and the creation of economic dependencies that prevent subsistence outside the system. British and American capitalism consumes the world without giving back, epitomized by the damming of the Colorado River, the burning of large areas of Brazilian jungle to insure that Victorian investors possess the only specimens of rare orchid species or disease-resistant rubber plants, and Edward's theft of citron cuttings in an attempt to break Corsican monopoly of the citron trade.

Yet *Gardens in the Dunes* refuses to break down into oppositions between tribal and Euroamerican, traditions and technologies; rather Silko examines systems of thought that underlie Western patriarchal culture's oppression of women, indigenous peoples, animals, and earth, and explores ways that the exploited and powerless can join together across artificial national and cultural boundaries against the forces of destruction fueled by the drive to possess and catalogue, control and produce. Silko has said that the creation of *Gardens in the Dunes* was part of her own healing from the writing of *Almanac of the Dead* and a reward for her readers, who waited so long for *Almanac* and accepted its strong medicine (Arnold 7). *Almanac* describes the return of the days of the Death's Eye Dog foretold by the ancient Mayan calendars, a period of male dominance characterized by the worship of violence and aversion to all that is associated with the female—fertility, nurturing, emotional and spiritual connection, life itself. *Gardens in the Dunes* focuses on women, women coming together to form alliances among themselves and with the other living creatures and plants of the earth that will remake the world by restoring life-giving practices of caretaking and inclusivity. Silko deftly links the Gnostic heresies Hattie researches, which celebrate the power of women, with the fertility goddesses and myths of old Europe so lovingly displayed in the Italian professoressa Laura's gardens, and ties them through Indigo's experience to the oral traditions, matrilineal systems, and joyful sexuality of American Indian women.

Though without the structural and temporal challenges of her earlier novels, *Gardens in the Dunes*, as Silko herself observes, is possibly more

subversive even than *Almanac*, especially in the way it breaks down barriers between Euroamerican and Native cultures (Arnold 11; Cohen). Linking the old stories and spirits of Europe and the Americas, absorbing and restructuring the stories of Christianity by bringing an uncrucified Christ across the ocean with his Mother, wife and children to hearten American Ghost Dancers, Silko patiently draws the patterns and impulses that connect people across cultures: the longings for the fullness of sensory participation with/in the material world, for respect and love that speak across languages (as the words of the Messiah are understood by all present at the Ghost Dance), for the unmediated experience of spiritual luminacy, joy, and deep connection that occurs in moments of transcendence. *Gardens in the Dunes* is also subversive in the way that it restructures the reader's perceptions. Through Indigo's experiences, the reader's awareness is immersed in a flood of rich and sumptuous sensory input. We are taught the kind of close attention to and participatory re-merging with the world that is characteristic of indigenous communities and must be recovered in order to remake the broken relationship between humans and the world. In this healing novel, Silko reimagines the survival of all peoples on earth as a sensuous and ecstatic possibility.

Ellen Arnold

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CONTRIBUTORS

Chadwick Allen is the current Vice President of ASAIL and an Assistant Professor of English at Ohio State University, where he teaches postcolonial and American Indian literatures.

Ellen L. Arnold is a doctoral candidate in Interdisciplinary Studies at Emory University and has just been hired as Assistant Professor in the English Department at East Carolina University, where she will teach American and Native American literatures and cultures.

Stuart Christie is a graduate of the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he studied with Louis Owens. Stuart Christie currently teaches in the Department of English of Hong Kong Baptist University.

Barbara J. Cook is enrolled in the English Ph.D. program at the University of Oregon, where she is a Graduate Teaching Fellow. She received an MA in American Studies from Utah State University, where she was an Instructor of Writing. She received her BA in Art, with an emphasis in Art History and a Minor in Southwestern Studies, from Southwest Texas University.

Diane Glancy teaches Scriptwriting and Native American Literature at Macalester College. Her forthcoming books are *The Voice That Was in Travel* (short stories) from the University of Oklahoma Press, *Fuller Man* (novel) from Moyer Bell, and *Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings After the*

Detours (anthology) from Coffee House Press. Her plays also are forthcoming in various anthologies.

Stuart Hoahwah, member of the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma, received his BA in English at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He plans to pursue a graduate degree at Oklahoma State University next year.

Elaine A. Jahner is a professor of English and Native American Studies at Dartmouth College. She has published, translated, and analyzed texts from various Dakota and Lakota communities. Many of these texts were recorded at the turn of the century. She has also specialized in and published numerous articles on cross-cultural literary criticism.

Helen Jaskoski is the author of *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Twayne 1998) and *Early Native American Writing* (Cambridge 1999). She has published widely in American literature.

Cynthia McDaniel currently teaches composition and literature while working on an MA degree in English and ESL certification at San Diego State University. Her research interests include Native American literatures, autobiography, and linguistics.

David Payne teaches technical writing, early American literature, and American Indian literatures at the University of Georgia, where he also directs the writing center. Those things about which he has found himself sufficiently ignorant to justify research include *The Cherokee Phoenix*, Herman Melville, and Flannery O'Connor.

Darrell Jesse Peters is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of New Mexico and will begin teaching at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke in August 1999. He fishes.