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Sugar Cane and Sugar Beets: Two Tales of Burning Love

Dennis Cutchins

The direction Native American literature and scholarship are to take in the new millennium is a hotly contested question. Issues of ownership and colonization constituted much of the subtext and a good deal of the often heated text of the American Literature Association sponsored symposium "Native American Literary Strategies for the New Millennium" in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico in November 1999. One scholar went so far as to ask white scholars what they were doing at a conference on Native American literature. That questions of ownership and scholarly autonomy should arise is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that scholars and writers should become emotional about how these questions are answered. Problems of race, culture, and livelihood are involved. What is interesting, however, is that so many learned people are willing to approach these issues as if questions like them had never been asked, or answered, before.

Nevertheless, these questions have been asked before. The trajectory of African American literature during the 1930s, '40s, and '50s bears a strong resemblance to the pattern Native American literature has followed in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. Black writers and scholars have had to come to terms with issues of literary representation at the same time that they face questions of political and social autonomy/integration. How should Black characters be portrayed in works of fiction? What is the role of literature in social reform movements? What is a writer's primary responsibility when depicting a group of people who face serious oppres-

sion? What is a scholar's primary responsibility when critiquing that depiction? In short, are there lessons critics, writers, and even publishers of Native American literature can learn from African American literary history?

Clearly, there are differences between African American literature and Native American literature, just as there are differences between the Harlem Renaissance and the Native American Renaissance. These differences include population figures, questions of sovereignty, federal policy, Jim Crow laws, and the threat of lynching. But while the situations faced by African American writers in the 1930s and Native American writers in the 1980s are certainly not identical, certain parallels are, nevertheless, startling, and they suggest a generalizable pattern. They are nowhere more apparent than in a general comparison of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Louise Erdrich's *The Beet Queen*. Their separate reception histories, the comments of the writers in interviews and essays, and the two novels themselves are amazingly similar. These similarities suggest more than a historical coincidence. Of course they hint at Hurston's influence on Erdrich, but they also indicate that the two writers were forced to deal with similar racial/historical situations and that they reacted in similar ways. Both writers rejected racial paradigms for their novels, choosing instead to focus on romantic/familial relationships. In so doing both Hurston and Erdrich "normalize" minority life. In other words, instead of radicalizing African American or Native American life by portraying it as somehow fragmented against a predominately white other, these novels portray minority life as whole or complete within itself. In so doing Erdrich and Hurston actually do more to overcome racial and ethnic stereotypes than other minority authors who foreground race in their fiction.

In 1937, near the end of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston published *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel focused on a distinct ethnic group and set primarily in an isolated rural community. The book received mixed reviews, but has since become one of the more important texts in American literature, taught in college and even high school classes across America. Fifty years later, in 1986, near what may have been the end of what has been termed the Native American Renaissance, Louise Erdrich published *The Beet Queen*, a novel also set in an isolated rural community and with at least a partial focus on a distinct ethnic group. Erdrich's novel also received mixed reviews.

Their Eyes Were Watching God was not warmly welcomed by African American scholars and writers. Most of these critics were concerned

with the apparent lack of notice the novel paid to racial injustice. Richard Wright, a prominent African American writer and strong advocate for equal rights, was particularly critical of what he perceived as the novel's weak stand on racial issues. He wrote:

Miss Hurston can write; but her prose is cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley. . . . Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. Her characters . . . swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears. . . . The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. (25)

Other black reviewers echoed Wright's criticism of the novel. Alain Locke felt that the novel dangerously oversimplified the lives of blacks. He wondered when Southern black writers would "come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction?" (18). W. A. Hunton in the *Journal of Negro Education* asks bluntly why there are not more scenes "in which white and colored characters oppose each other" (72).

Hurston responded to these criticisms, at least indirectly, in numerous interviews and essays. In 1936, she answered a similar objection to her first novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, in an interview with Nick Aaron Ford. When Ford asked about her light portrayal of race issues in the novel, she answered,

Many Negroes criticize my book because I did not make it a lecture on the race problem. . . . I have ceased to think in terms of race; I think only in terms of individuals. I am interested in you now, not as a *Negro* man but as a *man*. I am interested in the problems of individuals, white ones and black ones.

She expanded this idea in a later essay entitled, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." There she wrote:

I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings

are all hurt about it. . . . No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife. (153)

In interviews and essays Hurston consistently shifted focus away from racial groups and racial concerns and toward individual action. She likewise rejected racially oriented criticism of her works.

Louise Erdrich has faced similar questions about her novels and has arrived at a similar answer. Like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Beet Queen* also received mixed reviews. After *Love Medicine* a good many reviewers didn't know exactly what to do with *The Beet Queen*. Erdrich's first novel had been set primarily on the reservation and had concerned itself mostly with Native American characters. In *The Beet Queen*, on the other hand, most of the characters are white, and even the nominally American Indian characters seem more concerned with issues of romance and friendship than with racial equality. Perhaps the most prominent of the novels negative reviews was the one written by Leslie Marmon Silko, a Native American author and, like Wright, a strong advocate for equal rights. Though she praised Erdrich's writing as "dazzling and sleek," she was critical of the novel's lack of "historical, political or cultural connections" (178). "In the entire 338 pages," Silko laments, "only once is any bitterness over racism ever expressed" (184). She goes on to add that the novel,

is a strange artifact, an eloquent example of the political climate in America in 1986. It belongs on the shelf next to the latest report from the United States Civil Rights Commission, which says black men have made tremendous gains in employment and salary. This is the same shelf that holds the *Collected Thoughts of Edwin Meese on First Amendment Rights* and Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. (184)

Clearly, Silko's 1987 review of *The Beet Queen* voices some of the same concerns as Wright's 1937 review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The similarity of these two reviews reflects the concern Wright and Silko share that literature should both reflect and help shape sociopolitical reality. Both reviewers, though, to paraphrase the words of Susan Perez Castillo, may have missed the racial subtlety of the novels they reviewed (287).

Erdrich's response to criticisms that her novels are not politically conscious is quite similar to Hurston's. In a 1985 interview Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris talked about how they "consciously saw [*Love Medi-*

cine, Erdrich's first novel] differently from much other contemporary fiction by American Indians" in that it did not focus on conflict between whites and Indians. Erdrich wrote the book, Dorris notes, to be

centered in a community in which the outside world is not very present or very relevant in some respects. This is a world that is encompassed by that community, and it isn't so much the outside world of discrimination... this is how a community deals with itself and the members of itself. (Coltelli 46)

Just as Hurston had set *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the fictionalized all black town of Eatonville, Florida, Erdrich chose to set *Love Medicine* almost exclusively on the fictionalized Turtle Mountain reservation. In a 1991 interview Erdrich and Dorris qualified their position somewhat. Erdrich notes, "You can't write a book about native Americans without being political . . . Everything's political. Getting your teeth fixed is political. There's no way around it. I just don't want to become polemical" (Schumacher 29).

The demand for a literary polemic, however, has always been strong. In 1936 Nick Aaron Ford cut the issue to the bone when he suggested:

Since the Negro novelist has not produced even a first rate novel, is he not justified in laying aside the pretensions of pure artistry and boldly taking up the cudgel of propaganda? Could he not produce much greater results for the cause of his race and bring more honor to himself by open warfare of this nature than by secret subterfuge? (102)

Robert A. Bone addressed that very question in 1958 in his book *The Negro Novel in America*.

The arguments in refutation of the art-as-a-weapon fallacy are as old as the fallacy itself. They rest on the autonomy of art. To violate this autonomy is to destroy aesthetic standards entirely and to replace them with extraliterary criteria. The task of criticism becomes wholly ideological: a novel is good if it serves our cause. Nothing has done more to retard the growth of the Negro novel than this stubborn effort to reduce it to the status of a pamphlet on race relations. (218)

In 1964 Ralph Ellison joined Bone in criticizing what he called "the deadly

and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race" (109). He advocated, instead, writing

with honesty and without bowing to ideological expediences the attitudes and values which give Negro-American life *its sense of wholeness* and which render it bearable and human and, when measured by our own terms, desirable. (Ellison 103, emphasis added)¹

It is the idea of wholeness, I believe, which best captures Ellison's vision. He is not suggesting that Blacks do not need to work for sociopolitical equality; rather he proposes that an image of wholeness is far more empowering than one of fragmentation.

That, it appears in retrospect, may have been precisely what Hurston had been working toward in the 1930s. In an essay entitled "What White Publishers Won't Print," she rejected the portrayal of Blacks as either smiling and insipid fools or vindictive and angry victims. In either case the stereotype denies Blacks the power of individualized thought:

But for the national welfare, it is urgent to realize that the minorities do think, and think about something other than the race problem. That they are very human and internally, according to natural endowment, are just like everybody else. So long as this is not conceived, there must remain that feeling of insurmountable difference. . . . Argue what you will or may about injustice, but as long as the majority cannot conceive of a Negro or a Jew feeling or reacting inside just as they do, the majority will keep right on believing that people who do not feel like them cannot possibly feel as they do. (171)

Oddly enough, Hurston seemed to anticipate that Native American writers would eventually find themselves in the same position. Earlier in the same essay she noted the "skepticism in general about the complicated emotions in minorities" (170). "All non-Anglo-Saxons," she notes, are considered, "uncomplicated stereotypes" (170). "The American Indian," for instance, is considered

a contraption of copper wires in an eternal war-bonnet, with no equipment for laughter, expressionless face and that says "How" when spoken to. His only activity is treachery leading us to massacres. Who is so dumb as not to know all about Indians, even if they have

never seen one, nor talked to anyone who ever knew one? (170-1)

The question Hurston struggles to answer is how one can write about “real” minority characters in the face of stereotypes like these. “For various reasons,” she points out, “the average, struggling, non-morbid Negro is the best-kept secret in America. His revelation to the public is the thing needed to do away with that feeling of difference which inspires fear and which ever expresses itself in dislike” (173). In a 1985 interview Erdrich seems to echo this same sentiment when she makes a special point of mentioning the humor she works to include in her novels:

I really think the question about humor is very important. Its one of the most important parts of American Indian life and literature, and one thing that always hits us is just that Indian people really have a great sense of humor . . . , it’s a different way of looking at the world, very different from the stereotype, the stoic, unflinching Indian standing, looking at the sunset. (46)

The similarity of the two novels certainly moves beyond either their reception histories or the comments of the two writers. The novels share a similar tone and subject matter, both focusing on the interrelationships of family, friends, and lovers. Hurston’s novel centers on Janie, a mixedblood black woman. Janie’s father is absent as the novel begins, and her mother, Leafy, abandons her when she is young, leaving her in the care of a grandmother, Nanny. Although important to the narrative, race is not an overt part of Janie’s life. As a child, in fact, she did not recognize any difference between herself and the white children she played with. She was surprised one day to discover in a photograph that she was black. Her sexuality, on the other hand, becomes one of the main features of the novel. Perhaps the first important image in the narrative is that of a pear tree which grows in Nanny’s back yard. Janie is drawn to the blossoming tree in the spring: “she had been spending every minute she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days” (23). In heavily sexual language Hurston describes “a dust bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from the root to the tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight” (24). Immediately after this image Janie has her first romantic encounter, as she kisses a neighborhood boy over the fence.

Nanny's response to witnessing this kiss is to tell Janie the story of Leafy, highlighting issues of sexual misconduct. She explains the circumstances surrounding lames birth. Leafy was raped by a schoolteacher who then abandoned the girl and left town. In explaining these events the grandmother notes, "You know, honey, us colored folks is branches without roots and that makes things come round in queer ways. You in particular" (31). The significance of the mother's name, "Leafy," is not to be missed. She "leaves" Janie essentially a bare and broken branch on the family tree.

Like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Beet Queen* concerns itself with the complex interrelationships of family, friends, and lovers. Erdrich's novel fragments its attention between five main characters: Mary and Karl Adare, Sita Kozka, Celestine Kashpaw, and Wallace Pfef. Like Leafy, Mary and Karl's mother, Adelaide also abandons her children. She leaves Mary, Karl, and their infant brother standing on a fairground as she flies off with a barnstorming bootlegger pilot. The children are soon divided: the baby is practically abducted by a childless couple; Mary is adopted by her Aunt Fritzie and Uncle Pete; and Karl runs away and becomes, at least figuratively, a branch without roots. Erdrich seems to borrow from Hurston the imagery of the blossoming fruit tree and the bare, rootless branch for her novel. In the opening section of the novel we find Karl and Mary trudging through Argus, North Dakota, in the early spring to find their aunt and uncle. Karl, however, notices an apple tree "tossed in a film of blossoms" (2). Just as Janie was inexplicably attracted to the pear tree, Karl seems drawn to the apple tree. Though his sister moves on, "Karl stopped. The tree drew him with its delicate perfume. His cheeks went pink, he stretched out his arms like a sleepwalker, and in one long transfixed motion he floated to the tree and buried his face in the white petals" (2). When the owner of the house sics her dog on him, Karl breaks the blossom-laden branch from the tree and uses it to fend off the dog. He carries the branch back to the rail yard and falls asleep in a boxcar. A few hours later he has his first sexual/romantic experience with a hobo on the freight train. He carries the broken branch for days afterward, and years later the image of Karl holding the rootless branch haunts his sister Mary. Though the scenes are clearly different, with issues of homosexuality in Erdrich's novel, the similarity of imagery and form deserves attention.

The use of the fruit tree motif and the parallel themes of abandonment and rootlessness indicate more than simply a literary coincidence or even a later writer influenced by an earlier one. Hurston and Erdrich

seem to be responding in their writing to very similar historical situations. Historically, both African Americans and Native Americans suffered tremendously at the hands of whites, and there were many “branches without roots” created by an imbalanced sociopolitical structure. To be more specific, however, Hurston and Erdrich faced similar situations as they wrote and published their novels.

Within a few years of the publication of Erdrich’s second novel, Native American scholars had begun to recognize the problems associated with the dichotomies caused by the atmosphere of racial and cultural sovereignty. Robert Allen Warrior (Osage) worked through many of these issues in his book *Tribal Secrets*. There he strives to create a critical aesthetic for understanding Native American literature based more or less strictly on the writings of Native American critics, primarily Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) and John Joseph Matthews (Osage). He concludes the well-argued book by acknowledging the philosophical difficulty of his project.

However much we believe that Native traditions are more humanizing than the destructive ideologies and theologies of the West, that belief issues from how those Native traditions prove themselves to be a humanizing element in contemporary praxis. (124)

As a critic, Warrior avoids the simple dichotomy of literature as art or literature as propaganda by suggesting that “The truly humanizing work of criticism . . . points toward a future that begins with our own decisions to take what control we can of our lives and experience the pain and beauty of living in this America” (124-125). As Native American writers and scholars fail to do this, he believes, they situate themselves “in the same place as Malcolm X, sitting in Alex Haley’s car wondering in desperation how to live beyond the momentary power of counternarratives, saying, ‘They won’t let me turn the corner’” (125).

One of the most important jobs facing contemporary scholars of Native American literature may be to recognize what most scholars of African American literature failed to recognize in 1937: the best way to overcome racial stereotypes is to portray minority life with a wholeness that includes plenty of humor, friendship, and love. Louise Erdrich, in a way strikingly similar to that of Zora Neale Hurston, has managed to “turn the corner.” The roundness of her Indian characters suggests that she has moved beyond race as the major structuring trope of her fiction and has, in fact, made it difficult for critics, scholars, and reviewers to

classify her novels as “Native American literature.” One of the editors of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* made this same observation in 1987 in a short preface to the reprint of Silko’s review of *The Beet Queen*:

[This review] marks the beginning of a critical definition of Erdrich as something other than a fine “ethnic” or “Native American” novelist endeavoring to incorporate her into the fictional “mainstream.” This process seems an inevitable one for Native American writers who begin to attain increasing recognition for their artistic skills. While they will rightly profit, this recognition will pose problems for them, and for those of us who criticize their work. They, and we, will be required to re-imagine the nature and function of Indian literary art in contemporary society. (178)

The good news is that Zora Neale Hurston has already shown what the re-envisioned “nature and function of Indian literary art” might look like. Let’s hope that the process doesn’t take as long as it did the first time.

NOTES

- ¹ This certainly should not suggest that all scholars of African American literature agree upon these points. Hazel Carby has argued that Hurston’s work has become popular in the last twenty years not because it offers a more humane and whole vision of African American life, but because it does precisely what Richard Wright accused it of doing in 1937. Wright suggested that Hurston’s characters had been created only to “make the ‘white folks’ laugh, that they remained in the “narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears” (17). Along these same lines, Carby wonders if “*Their Eyes Were Watching God* [has] become the most frequently taught black novel because it acts as a mode of assurance that, really, the black folk are happy and healthy?” (90). “Perhaps,” she goes on to add, “it is time that we should question the extent of our dependence upon the romantic imagination of Zora Neale Hurston to produce cultural meanings of ourselves as native daughters” (90).

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There Is No Limit to this Dust: The Refusal of Sacrifice in Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine

Patricia Riley

American fiction, particularly that of the nineteenth century, has often characterized Native American mixedbloods as an unfortunate group of people, genetically marked as doomed, defective, and double-crossed by racial and cultural confusion (Beider 24, 27). Ostensibly torn between two worlds and unable to exist in either, numerous mixedblood protagonists have trooped across the pages of dime novels and other forms of popular fiction, always moving inexorably towards their deaths on the altars of "manifest destiny." According to William Scheik in *The Half-blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction*, the sacrifice of the mixedblood character is "the simplest literary strategy for resolving the dilemma his [or her] existence poses" (83). While this strategy, with its variations of voicelessness and inaction, has also been utilized by some contemporary Native American novelists, it is a final solution that Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* firmly rejects.

Like Gloria Anzaldua's "new mestizo," Louise Erdrich has learned to "juggle cultures" and to function as a writer "in a pluralistic mode" (79). In Erdrich's novels, "nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly" (79) come together on the page to struggle towards a more rounded depiction of mixedblood experience. Her work exposes and defies the rigid notions of adversarial dualism that have often imprisoned mixedbloods within a stereotype of condemnation, while it demonstrates how such stereotypes can be transformed.

Erdrich's use of Catholic symbolism, her exposure of pre-Christian elements embedded in that symbolism, combined with her use of myths and symbols drawn from other sources of discredited or denied knowledges, such as Chippewa mythology, the Tarot², and the myths of Isis and Osiris, imbues her work with various layers and shades that create a discourse that openly resists the authority of the West. That Erdrich chooses to (re)member all of these cultural elements drawn from her mixedblood background, to employ, adapt, and interrogate them, illustrates a conscious move away from the limiting restrictions of nineteenth-century stereotypes that trapped mixedblood images within a fixed, non-interactive prison house of fractured identity which more often than not dictated dismemberment. At the same time, Erdrich moves towards a (re)membered identity formation that is fluid, interactive, and continuously evolving.

As Sheila Moon points out in *A Magic Dwells: A Poetic and Psychological Study of the Navaho Emergence Myth*, (re)membering is an integral component of good mental health and a strong sense of identity. According to Moon, to fail to remember is to fail to be:

Memory, whether recognition or recall, is our relationship to our past and to our own evolving structure. Not to remember . . . is a horror and shatters us to our core because not to remember is, from the viewpoint of consciousness, not to be, not to have identity. (28)

Dismemberment, whether physical or psychological, is the portion allotted to the sacrificial victim or scapegoat, a role the majority of Erdrich's characters reject. Erdrich combats the stereotype of mixedblood doom through the employment of what I call mythological synergy, a device which carries within it the post-colonial strategies of appropriation and abrogation. *The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* defines "synergy" as "the working together of two or more muscles, organs, or drugs," and "synergism" as "the combined action of two or more which have a greater total effect than the sum of their individual effects" (1003). I have borrowed this medical term, and discarded the often-used term "syncretic," to demonstrate how Erdrich's use of myths and symbols functions as a remedy for the stigmatic wound inflicted on the characterisation of mixedbloods by Western definitions, and to illustrate how her use of multiple mythologies differs from syncretism, in which "incompatible elements are subsumed under the mantle of a newer model" (*New Lexicon* 1003).

By using myths and symbols synergistically, each element is allowed to retain its own identity and tell its own story, albeit, oftentimes, with a twist or two, while enriching and enlivening the text in a way that no single mythology could do. In addition, Erdrich pulls apart many of the syncretized symbols of Roman Catholicism, exposing their non-Christian origins and allowing them to regain some portion of their original mythic voices. In "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," Homi K. Bhabha calls this strategy of appropriation and abrogation, "hybridity" (173). According to Bhabha, hybridity consists of a "reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity" and "displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (173). An expression of hybridity therefore "terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition" (176). It interferes with the images of the dominant culture, and "turns the discursive conditions of dominance into grounds of intervention" (173) as it directly questions the very authority of those in power (174): "Hybridity . . . reverses the effects of colonial disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition" (175). Additionally, the mythological synergy found in Erdrich's novels clearly functions within the realm of intertextuality. As Vincent Leitch observes in *Deconstructive Criticism*:

The text is not an autonomous or unified object, but a set of relations with other texts. Its system of language, its grammar, its lexicon, drag along numerous bits and pieces—traces—of history so that the text resembles a Cultural Salvation Army Outlet with unaccountable collections of incompatible ideas, beliefs, and sources. The "genealogy" of the text is necessarily an incomplete network of conscious and unconscious borrowed fragments. Manifested, tradition is a mess. Every text is intertext. (59)

To use a Jungian term, Erdrich's novels are "mythologically apperceptive." They reveal the "tendency of the symbol . . . to bring together the most diverse provinces of life into contact with one another, by crossing, blending, and weaving them together" (Neumann 17), as well as utilizing symbols as springboards for a critique of colonization and of Western Interpretations of mixedblood experience. Erdrich's construction of mythological synergy acknowledges her participation in a "cultural and creative consciousness [which] lives in an actively polyglot world"

(Bahktin 12), and depicts a polyphonic world view that disrupts the linear boundaries of the stereotype of the doomed mixedblood, as it constructs a literary affiliation with traditional indigenous healing practices.

According to psychologist Eduardo Duran, the two most widely held Native American concepts of illness are “object intrusion” and “soul loss” (25). If we map these two indigenous theories of disease onto a colonial/post-colonial framework, drawing upon Memmi’s notion that the colonizer, and by extension the colonizer’s ideas, constitute “a disease of the European” (147), then the multiple mythologies in *Love Medicine*, all of which relate in some way to healing, become a medicinal literary device that counteracts the diseased stereotype of the doomed mixedblood, effectively combating a deformed image that has assumed archetypal proportions in the Euroamerican imagination, and replacing it with a new likeness. Armed with a variety of mythic symbols, Erdrich reconstructs mixedblood protagonists and demonstrates how colonization has affected their lives.

Furthermore, Erdrich’s synergistic employment of cross-cultural mythologies within her novels goes beyond a purely syncretic mythic opposition towards an expression of mythic resistance that effectively deconstructs the figure of the mixedblood as an icon of sacrifice in the ongoing myth of the “vanishing American.” In making use of denied and/or discredited forms of knowledge, Erdrich also draws upon recognizable Christian imagery which she then either forces back upon itself, or opens up to expose and free the previously subsumed non-Christian elements. This strategy allows for new interpretations that subvert traditional associations and moves the characterization of mixedbloods decisively away from the role of scapegoat or sacrificial victim.

One of the finest examples of Erdrich’s synergistic mythic resistance occurs in chapter two of *Love Medicine*, which details the violent struggle between Marie Lazarre and the formidable Sister Leopolda. To critique the way the Catholic Church, as agent of the colonizers, has consumed the lives of Indian people and encouraged them “to kill off parts of [them]selves” (Anzaldúa 37), Erdrich characterizes Marie’s arch-nemesis, Sister Leopolda, and the Sisters in general, as windigos, the dreaded cannibal spirits of Chippewa mythology. The Sisters are described as having “tried to cram [Marie] right down whole” (LM 44). From the windows of their convent, they peer “into the marrow of the town” (LM 44), and Leopolda is said to have “a stringer of children who could only breathe if she said the word” (LM 46). Since it is believed that one of the ways a person could become a windigo is through starvation (Brown and

Brightman 88), the most telling clue to Leopolda's windigo nature lies in the source of the nun's uncanny strength. According to Marie, Leopolda's "strength was a perverse miracle, for she got it from fasting herself thin" (LM 49). Once transformed, a windigo was also capable of turning others "into cannibals by starving them, by weakening and possessing them so that they forfeited their humanity, their identity" (Vecsey 77).

At first glance, Marie's decision to sacrifice her worldly life by joining "the black robe women" (LM 43), appears to indicate that she had been considerably weakened already and was on the verge of forfeiting her identity. Indeed, her own recollection gives further testimony to the notion that she had become partially infected by Leopolda's dis-ease due to her previous exposure while a student at the convent school. Marie remarks that:

I was that girl who thought the black hem of her garment would help me rise. Veils of love which was only hate petrified by longing—that was me. I was like those bush Indians who stole the holy black hat of a Jesuit and swallowed scraps of it to cure their fevers. But the hat itself carried smallpox and was killing them with belief. (LM 45)

However, a second glance reveals that Marie's desire "to sit on the altar as a saint" (LM 48) is as deeply colored by her need to bring the pristine brides of Christ down off their "high horse" (LM 43), as it is by her need to elevate herself in the eyes of the world around her.

Underneath it all, Marie's true motivation lies in her wish to "overcome Sister Leopolda" (LM 48) by getting into heaven first. And there is something more subversive still in the knowledge she carried with her, something that further illustrates the deeper animosity Marie feels towards Leopolda and her Sisters, because she says that "[when] she went there, [she] knew the dark fish must rise" (LM 43), and that dark fish represents far more than a euphemism for Marie's person as a Catholicized half-breed girl. As a symbol it has a double valence. On the one hand, the fish unmodified can be seen as a world-wide symbol of the Great Mother Goddess (Walker *Encyclopedia* 313) emblematic of the "female power" to "produce new life" (Walker *Dictionary* 16), rather than to sacrifice it. On the other hand, the modified dark fish, as a "psychic being . . . in the unconscious" (Cirlot 107), is representative of some aspect of "the life-force surging up" (Cirlot 107) that is associated with her tribal heritage. Lodged somewhere amidst the layers of Marie's colonized consciousness lies a part of her that still listens to the shapeshifting,

rebellious trickster of the Chippewa. And although the colonized part of her may desire Sister Leopolda's "heart in love" (LM 49), the rebellious Chippewa in her would like to see it "roast on a black stick" (LM 49). And it is this trickster "life-force" (Cilot 107), in spite of Sister Leopolda's efforts to destroy it, that allows her to throw off the yoke of sacrificial victim and come "back down alive" (LM 44).

Upon Marie's arrival at the convent, Leopolda almost immediately embarks upon an inquisition-like campaign of dehumanizing torture in an effort to bring about Marie's final dissolution. When Marie fails to retrieve the "good cup" (LM 51), which has fallen and rolled beneath the stove, Leopolda seizes her opportunity to perform a "trial by ordeal" drawn from the darkest period of the Middle Ages, the ordeal by hot water (Baroja 203). Stepping firmly on the back of Marie's neck, Leopolda pins her to the floor, takes up a steaming kettle and begins to pour:

I heard the water as it came, tipped from the spout, cooling as it fell but still scalding as it struck. I must have twitched beneath her foot, because she steadied me . . . I felt how patient she would be. The water came. My mind went dead. Again . . . I could not stand it. I bit my lip so as not to satisfy her with a sound. She gave me more reason to keep still. "I will boil him from your mind if you make a peep," she said, "by filling up your ear." (52-53)

Although disguised as a desire to snatch Marie from the clutches of "the Dark One who wanted [her] most of all" (LM 46), Leopolda's sadistic action is in actuality a campaign to complete Marie's disconnection from her Chippewa heritage by severing her relationship with the Chippewa trickster, called Satan by Catholic missionaries (Vecsey 82), but "called other names" (LM 45) by Marie's grandmother who "was not afraid" (LM 45). By driving out and silencing the rebellious trickster who "whispered" to Marie "in the old language of the bush" and told her things "he never told anyone but Indians" (LM 46), Leopolda hopes to eliminate any remaining vestiges of Marie's resistance.

Generally speaking, religions of human sacrifice demand that the victim be dismembered prior to being consumed, and Marie does not escape this particular aspect of Leopolda's sacrificial drama. However, in Marie's case, the dismemberment takes place on an internal level. Believing herself lost in Leopolda's "black intelligence" (LM 53), and despairing of ever becoming a saint, she mourns the lost parts of herself; lamenting for the "inside voice" that had directed her and for her "dark-

ness" (LM 54), the parts of herself that made her Marie and that had been mutilated and stripped away by Leopolda.

Left alone for a moment while Leopolda served the other Sisters dinner, Marie is just about to accept her defeat and "make a run for it," (LM 54) when the pain of her persecution suddenly triggers a vision that "allows her to see in surface phenomenon the meaning of deeper realities" (Anzaldua 38). This vision that "rose up blazing in [her] mind" (LM 54) causes her to experience a communication "in images and symbols" (Anzaldua 50) that calls her back and renews her resolve to overcome her oppressor:

I was rippling gold. My breasts were bare and my nipples flashed and winked. Diamonds tipped them. I could walk through panes of glass . . . She was at my feet, swallowing the glass after each step I took . . . The glass she swallowed ground and cut until her starved insides were only a subtle dust . . . She coughed a cloud of dust. And then she was only a black rag that flapped off, snagged in bob wire, hung there for an age, and finally rotted into the breeze. (LM 54)

The subtlety with which Erdrich crafts one of the most pivotal moments in her deconstruction of the figure of the mixedblood as sacrificial victim is exhibited by a seemingly insignificant conversation that takes place between Marie and one of the other Sisters. Upon learning the name of Leopolda's new postulant, the Sister compliments her by calling her "Marie. Star of the Sea" (LM 54), to which Leopolda adds, "She will see . . . when we have burned off the dark corrosion" (LM 54).

The title, "Star of the Sea," was originally "an epithet of Isis" which was later bestowed on the Virgin Mary by the Catholic Church (Walker *Encyclopedia* 958), and also relates to the 17th trump card of the Tarot known as The Star. The appearance of the Star in a Tarot reading signals the beginning of "a new phase in the [heroine's] development" (Nichols 304). By re-casting Marie in the mold of Isis at this most crucial point in her struggle, Erdrich moves her dismembered mixedblood protagonist from the altar of sacrifice, and reconfigures her as the agent of her own resurrection. If we will recall, it was Isis who resurrected her murdered husband, Osiris, gathering together the dismembered pieces of his body and literally re-memembering him.

Leopolda's terse rejoinder, a clear allusion to the Church's desire to eradicate the non-Christian origins of the numerous Black Madonnas venerated throughout the world³, coupled with her pseudo-compassion-

ate effort to eradicate not only the pain of Marie's burned back but the very memory of the torturous act committed against her, signifies on the strategy of the colonizer to "falsify history" (Memmi 52) and thereby "extinguish the memories" (Memmi 52) of the colonized, causing them to question the veracity of their own experience. Marie, herself, is cognizant of the importance of remembering her pain and struggles to hold onto the memory, though Leopolda would have it otherwise:

I was weakening. My thoughts were whirling pitifully.

The pain had kept me strong, and as soon as it left me I began to forget it; I couldn't hold on. I began to wonder if shed really scalded me with the kettle. I could not remember. To remember this seemed the most important thing in the world. But I was losing the memory. The scalding. The pouring. It began to vanish. I felt like my mind was coming off its hinge, flapping in the breeze, hanging by the hair of my own pain. I wrenched out of her grip. (LM 55-56)

In a darkly comedic scene reminiscent of Hansel and Gretel, Marie's failed attempt to destroy Leopolda by pushing her inside the Sister's oversized oven results in her being knocked out and "stabbed . . . through the hand" (LM 57) with a bread fork. When she awakens, she finds she has achieved her "deepest dream" (LM 58) and is being worshipped as a saint by Leopolda and her Sisters. True to form, Leopolda once again tries to erase the truth of the days events: "I have told my Sisters of your passion." she manages to choke out. "How the stigmata . . . the marks of the nails...appeared in your palm and you swooned at the holy vision..."(LM 59).

This time, however, Leopolda's revisionist effort fails to have the desired effect but instead brings about her own defeat at the hands of "the dark fish" (LM 43), Marie, who notes triumphantly that, "[Leopolda] was beaten. It was in her eyes" (LM 59). In order to demonstrate Marie's recovery from the windigo sickness that otherwise would have allowed her to fully enjoy and take pleasure in another's defeat and humiliation, Erdrich prevents Marie from gloating too much over Leopolda's downfall by having her recognize her oppressors weakness and feel pity for her:

For I saw her kneeling there. Leopolda with her soul like a rubber overboot. With her face of a starved rat. With the desperate eyes drowning in the deep wells of her wrongness. There would be no one else after me. And I would leave . . .

My heart had been about to surge from my chest with the blackness of my joyous heat. Now it dropped. I pitied her.
I pitied her . . . (LM 60)

Marie's last taunting whisper to Leopolda, "Receive the dispensation of my sacred blood," (LM 60) suggests that she has reconnected with her tribal heritage and is again listening to the trickster who has whispered things to her in the past. This is further strengthened by the chapter's concluding scene, which parodies the resurrection of the biblical Lazarus: "I fell back into the white pillows. Blank dust was whirling through the light shafts. My skin was dust. Dust my lips. Dust the dirty spoons on the ends of my feet. Rise up! I thought. Rise up and walk! There is no limit to this dust!" (LM 60).

Significantly, it is not Christ who is responsible for the resurrection but Marie herself. Once more in touch with the life-force of the trickster and wrapped in the regenerative power of the dark goddess, Marie, as Isis, Star of the Sea, calls her own self forth from the prison of Leopolda's convent-tomb. Rather than continuing a dubious literary tradition, Erdrich's unique synergetic strategy of mythic resistance effectively overturns the stereotype of the mixedblood as sacrificial victim. By endowing Marie with the power of regeneration, she makes it possible for her mixedblood protagonist to exchange the role of "sacrificial goat" (Anzaldúa 80) on the altar of "manifest destiny" for that of "officiating priestess at the crossroads" of change (Anzaldúa 80).

NOTES

- ¹ Perhaps the most familiar example of the negative characterization of mixedbloods in the nineteenth century can be found in Mark Twain's portrayal of the brutal and degraded Injun Joe in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. For a discussion of Twain's portrayal see Patricia Riley, "'That Murderin' Halfbreed: The Abjection of the Mixedblood in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*'" in *Native North America: Critical and Cultural Perspectives*, Renee Hulan, ed. Toronto: ECW Press, 1999.
- ² The Tarot is a Western system of divination consisting of 78 pictorial cards.

- ³ For a full discussion of the non-Christian origins of the Black Madonnas see Ean Begg's *The Cult of the Black Virgin*. New York: Arkana Books, 1985.

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Fleur Pillager's Bear Identity in the Novels of Louise Erdrich

Nora Baker Barry

Louise Erdrich's novels show strong affinities to Native American oral traditions. Joni Adamson Clarke, speaking of *Tracks*, describes a narrative strategy that is true for other Erdrich texts as well. She sees *Tracks* as:

a transformational text which cavorts in the margins and flirts with danger because it plays with different parts of traditional myths, pulls stories this way and that and threatens to alter the shape of the oral tradition by bringing it into a new, written, pattern. (35)

In some Native American oral traditions, a series of stories is told at certain times of year and not necessarily in any particular order; however, the mythical characters appear over and over and with certain specific and expected traits. Some of Erdrich's novels, although not published in chronological order, do encompass the lives of her characters from 1912 to the 1990s and trace the "spiritual legacies of a small Chippewa band's attempts to survive the encroachments of Euro-American society" (Van Dyke 15). Anyone who has read *Tracks*, *Love Medicine* (in two versions), *The Beet Queen*, *The Bingo Palace*, and *Tales of Burning Love* knows what to expect when a Pillager appears in the text. Pillagers are people of power with the smile of a wolf and the clan markers on their graves of "four crosshatched bears and a marten" (*Tracks* 5), who "knew the secret ways to cure or kill" (2), who are feared and respected by all,

and who fight the encroachments of Euroamerican culture. They are a family whose members appear to have the powers of at least the dangerous fourth degree of the *midewiwin*, the Grand Medicine Society, and perhaps beyond. Moses and Fleur Pillager and their mentor and friend Nanapush have affinities with shamans of the *midewiwin*, and Fleur Pillager especially reflects the role of bears in this medicine society as well as in Chippewa and universal myths.

In ancient traditions and among many peoples of the northern hemisphere in the old and new world, ritual surrounded the killing of bears. The bear was addressed before being killed with a war club or a knife; the head was displayed upon a pole and festooned with ribbons or silver and wampum; strict rules surrounded who could eat which parts of this chief of animals (Gill 116-18, Hallowell throughout, Shepard and Sanders 83). This early reverence for bears led to myths and legends in the northern hemisphere throughout the world where stories about bear mothers and fathers abound. Bear's son tales are especially popular in the Scandinavian and Germanic traditions, *Beowulf* being the most famous example. In the North American Chippewa tradition, reverence for bears is explained through tribal myth and the role of bear in the *midewiwin*.

The Chippewa creation myth is of the earth-diver type, where muskrat brings back a few grains of earth from the waters surrounding the great turtle. After the land grows and life is restored, bear is the first to offer his flesh to humans so that they might survive. "The death of the bear encompassed life for the new beings. Thereafter, the other animals sacrificed their lives for the good of men" (Johnston, *Heritage* 26, 50). However, the people become indifferent to the sacrifice of bear, deer, moose and others, and the animals hold a meeting to gain their freedom from servitude to man. As chairman, bear leads the debate on whether to kill humans or to let them live. And it is bear who finally decides humankind's fate (52).

Strength is bear's most outstanding characteristic in this mythology, and bear, along with wolf and lynx, is an important totem to warriors (67). Bears are also the source of the use of wampum, in that *mudjeekawis*, eldest brother of the trickster Manabozho, comes upon a conference of very large brown bears who read from wampum sashes and who tell *mudjeekawis* that these sashes record the past. *Mudjeekawis* steals the wampum and eventually becomes chief of the bears (Johnston, *Heritage* 152-3, *Ceremonies* 165, *Manitous* 20-25). Numerous other tales about killing giant bears (*Ceremonies* 26), a child nurtured by bears in a variant of the universal bear's son folktale (900, a song for bears (103), a white

bear who, along with Chief Snake, comes up against the trickster Manabozho [Manabush] (Radin and Reagan 73) permeate the myth and folklore of the Chippewa.

In Chippewa religion there are five great beings: Misshipeshu (lion or lynx), Thunderbird, Sacred Bear, Great Turtle, and Windigo (Dewdney 39, also see Basil Johnston's *The Manitous*). Certainly, the significance of bears in this culture is very important to the rituals of the Grand Medicine Society, the midewiwin, and in the initiation and life of the *mide* or shaman. In the myth and folklore, bears transform, sustain, and even regulate human existence. In *Summer in the Spring*, Gerald Vizenor tells how *gichimakwa*, great bear, serves as a means to bring the sun spirit to teach the Chippewa about the *midewiwin* (91-2). In the rituals of the Grand Medicine Society, bears serve as guides, barriers, the breakers of barriers, and guardians of portals to spiritual power. Great Bear could restore life (91), and the power of immortality and resurrection are associated also with the orders of the *midewiwin*.

There are eight orders or degrees of membership in the Society: four earth and four sky (Dewdney 111-114, Johnston, *Heritage* 84, Landes 52). Basil Johnston notes that there were "minor variations in different areas of the land of the *anishnabeg*" (84). However, to go beyond the fourth order was considered by many a perversion of power (Dewdney 114, Landes 52). Most individuals belonged only to the first order as the fees for entrance to the next three orders were very high (Dewdney 114, Landes 53). Selwyn Dewdney concludes that these expensive fees above the first degree brought about the "emergence of privileged families that might have evolved into heredity ranking" (88). Louise Erdrich's Pil-lager family is presented as possessing this hereditary power. To go beyond the fourth degree was always suspect and an indication that the *mide* wished to use his powers destructively and to avoid death (Dewdney 115-16). Even masters of the third or fourth degree were both respected and feared because of their powers:

The fourth-degree *mide* master had already approached the absolute of manito power. If, in addition to having acquired a full knowledge of the *mide* rites and lore, he was also a man of great medical skill and visionary gifts he was indeed "the man who knows everything": one in whose presence it was wise to tread lightly. (Dewdney 114)

The old *mide* shaman was taken to be "evil" (Landes 43) and "regarded with minglings of dread and awe by his fellow villagers" (Dewdney 165).

In his 1997 novel *Hotline Healers*, Gerald Vizenor notes that “The shamans can be treacherous, unstable, and touchy, but only the envious mistrust their visions” (52). In Erdrich’s texts Fleur and her cousin Moses represent these respected and feared figures. Lipsha Morrissey, Fleur’s great grandson, when seeking love medicine knows he should consult Old Man Pillager [Moses]: “But the truth is I was afraid of him, like everyone else. He was known for putting the twisted mouth on people, seizing up their hearts. Old Man Pillager was serious business” (*Love Medicine*, first version, 199).

The process of becoming such a powerful figure resides in the initiation ceremonies of the various degrees of the *midewiwin* and involves the important Bear Spirit as well as other animal spirits. Candidates for initiation traditionally go through a year of preparation, including vision quest, learning about spiritual and medicinal issues, and fasting.² During the actual ceremony, which represents death and rebirth into a new spiritual life, the candidate must make his way around and through the *midewigun*, a rectangular structure where the ceremony takes place. Bears represent both good and evil in this ceremony (Dewdney 117, Johnston, *Heritage* 85-6). Good bears appear at the entrance and serve as guides, but the candidate also meets bears representing “evil and temptation that the candidate would encounter in the moral order” and who serve as barriers to the candidate (Johnston 83-86). An offering is made to Bear to purchase entrance to the *mide* life (Landes 136). At certain moments the priest conducting the ceremony, as well as the candidate, impersonates the Bear (Dewdney 116). While bears could represent barriers, Bear and Otter are considered the great breakers of spiritual barriers. According to Selwyn Dewdney “Most prominent in the ceremony are the Bear’s three hesitating steps and final successful one into the *midewigun*” (171).

Arriving at the central lodge, the candidate is welcomed and tested on knowledge necessary for the particular order. Having passed the test without error, the candidate is then shot with a migis shell and revived and reborn into a new spiritual existence. “Such was the dramatic way in which the state of non-existence and resurrection were demonstrated. The candidate now was not what he was before, but transformed. He had been reborn” (Johnston, *Heritage* 87). While the first order allows the successful initiate to “conduct funeral ceremonies and preside at Feasts of the Dead” (89), the fourth order gives *mide* masters power over life and death. As Dewdney notes, the “problem for the midewiwin was how to harness the power or convert the role of the most dangerous manitos” (158). Bears play a particularly important role in this initiation; as guard-

ians they are armed with bows and “symbolically shoot the lynx, turtle, wolverine, fox, wolf, and bear. In triumph, they kill evil” (Johnston, *Heritage* 92).

The significance of bears in the folklore, myth, and ritual of the Chippewa is reflected in the contemporary literary tradition. The novels of Louise Erdrich (and Gerald Vizenor also) echo this significance in ways that reflect the *manitou* world of the Chippewa. Basil Johnston insists that the term *manitou* does not mean simply great or little spirit but “depending on context, might mean spirit, but which in its more fundamental senses meant talent, attributes, potencies, potential, substance, essence, and mystery” (*Ceremonies* 6). Erdrich enriches her post-modern novels with the mystery, power, and potential of bears as breakers of spiritual and cultural barriers, as guardians, as transformers, and as representatives of a tribal spiritual tradition alive in contemporary literature. She does this through characters such as Nanapush, but particularly through the powerful *mide* Fleur Pillager, whose bear identity is essential to understanding her importance in all of the novels and to explaining the power of her descendants.

Fleur’s savior and mentor Nanapush, one of the narrators of *Tracks*, is directly associated with the *midewiwin*. He possesses the qualities of a trickster, and his name is close to Manabush or Manabozho who helped found the Grand Medicine Society. As his father tells him, “Nanapush that’s what you’ll be called. Because it’s got to do with trickery and living in the bush” (*Tracks* 33). Nanapush is also a *Jeesekeewinini* (188), a third degree member of the *midewiwin* who is:

able to summon supernatural powers and beings, cause vibrations in things for the well being of the afflicted, commune with the supranatural order and beings. As *jeesekeewinini*, the member of the third order, had as his special patron the thunders. The power of the *jeesekeewinini* was of the skies, the reason why he can move and shake things such as lodges. Added to his powers was the ability to extract hidden things and meanings. (*Heritage* 91-2)

Like the mythical Manabush, Nanapush in *Tracks* is also a preserver, an inveterate story teller, an intermediary for the Pillagers between the traditional spirit world and the emerging new world of the reservation. He talks to survive and to rescue. Nanapush of *Tracks* is very human, but he is also a shaman with strong connections to the *manitou* world and the *midewiwin*. He envisions and sings a hunt when Eli Kashpaw must find

food during a starvation winter and keeps Eli alive with his drum as Eli returns with the meat of the moose he has killed bound to his body (Tracks 102-05). Nanapush saves Fleur's life early in the novel and adopts her daughter Lulu. When Fleur is rendered spiritually ill by the loss of her second child, loss of her powers, and the threat of loss of her land, he arranges a ceremony to cure her. He, who echoes the role of the trickster Manabozho and his connection to the *midewiwin*, preserves this powerful *mide* family by rescuing and sustaining its most powerful member, Fleur Pillager.

Although Erdrich does not directly mention the *midewiwin* in conjunction with Fleur Pillager herself, the center of *mide* power in her novels is this woman who is associated with bears and with the smile of a wolf. From her flows the power of her descendants as hereditary *mides*, for as Pauline/Leopolda notes:

Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, which in the Pillagers are strong and knotted, big, spidery and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person. (*Tracks* 31)

Bear imagery is used extensively in Erdrich's novels, but it is Fleur Pillager who is most closely associated with the power of the Bear Spirit. Pauline describes her as "mess[ing] with evil," and getting "herself into some half-forgotten medicine" and transforming herself into a bear:

She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We know for sure because the next morning in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. (*Tracks* 12)

Of course, Pauline, a powerful spiritual presence in a distorted Christian manner, might not be a reliable narrator. However, Pauline's early perception of Fleur remains with this powerful *mide* until the end of her earthly existence in *The Bingo Palace* where some "claimed they found her tracks and followed to see where they changed, the pad broadened, the claw pressed into the snow" (273). Some "have heard the bear laugh—

that is the chuffing noise we hear and it is unmistakable" (274). In both of these passages the tracks and the bear sound are associated with old medicine or old songs (273-4), associated with the medicine lodge and even with the attempt to escape death connected to the higher orders of the *midewiwin*.

Bears play an important role in other aspects of Fleur's life. When Nanapush advises Eli Kashpaw on courting Fleur (a bad idea since Fleur is presumed responsible for the death of several men through her *mide* powers) he does warn Eli that "it's like you're a log in a stream. Along comes this bear. She jumps on. Don't let her dig in her claws" (*Tracks* 46). During the difficult delivery of her daughter, Lulu, Nanapush helplessly listens to Fleur's cries and associates her experience with the animal spirits of the *midewiwin* initiations:

But it wasn't until the afternoon of that second day that the stillness finally broke, and then, it was as if the Manitou all through the woods spoke through Fleur, loose, arguing. I recognized them. Turtle's quavering scratch, the Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp.

Perhaps the bear heard Fleur calling, and answered. (59)

Nanapush assumes that the bear heard her cries when a drunken bear appears outside the cabin, chases Nanapush up onto a woodpile, enters the house, and is eventually shot by Pauline. However, the bear escapes into the woods leaving no tracks and "could have been a spirit bear," according to Nanapush (60).

The animals of the clans and of the *midewiwin* appearing when Fleur needs them is evidence of her association with the higher degrees of the Grand Medicine Lodge. As in the traditional ceremonies, the drunken bear breaks a barrier through sublime terror for Fleur as her child is born. "When Fleur saw the bear in the house she was filled with such fear and power that she raised herself on the mound of blankets and gave birth" (60). At the too early birth of her second child, the bungling Pauline describes Fleur as grabbing her in frustration with "her fingers, the talons of a heavy bear" (157).

Similar to the *mide* masters of the highest degrees, Fleur apparently takes on the ability to transform herself into bear and to summon the powers of the *manitou* spirits at will. Pauline sees her as an intermediary between the *manitous*—such as the powerful Misshipeshu, who lives in Matchimanitou lake and with whom Fleur is suspected of having very

intimate contact—and humans, between the everyday reality and the spiritual reality: “She was the one who closed the door or swung it open. Between the people and the gold-eyed creature in the lake, the spirit which they said was neither good nor bad but simply had an appetite, Fleur was the hinge” (139). She is like the bear guardians in the *midewiwin* initiations who can open the spiritual doors of the powers to cure and kill; she is a way into or a barrier to the spiritual world of the Chippewa. Fleur plays a role in Pauline’s life and the lives of all the Chippewa similar to the bears in the *midewiwin* ceremonies as a barrier, a breaker of barriers, a guide. She summons her most dramatic powers in an effort to save the Pillager land from logging interests. She and her *mide* kinsman, Moses, with the help of some very tangible and earthly saws and axes, stage a crumbling of the forest. Nanapush warns the assembled loggers, but the trees fall around them as Fleur “bared her teeth in a wide smile that frightened even those who did not understand the smiles of Pillagers” (222-223).

Fleur temporarily leaves her land and her daughter behind to wander, and yet she returns often during her lifetime, like a bear returning to its home territory. In her periodic wanderings from and returns to Pillager land, Fleur is seen in *The Beet Queen* and the second version of *Love Medicine* in the role of healer. This role reflects the universal Bear Mother motif (see Shepard and Sanders throughout) and the role of the compassionate healing shaman of the *midewiwin*.

In 1932, she rescues and heals Karl Adare who had jumped from a moving train and broken his feet. She uses a quasi-scientific, and god-like creative method. As Karl remembers, “Fleur proceeded to knead, mold, and tap the floating splinters of my bones back into the shape of ankles, feeling her own from time to time to get the shape right” and then making plaster-of-Paris casts for him (44). When he develops pneumonia, she creates a sweat lodge from which Carl envisions animals approaching in the night. “I saw the eyes of skunks, red marbles, heard the chatter of coons, watched the bitterns land, blacker than the black sky, and drowsy hawks. A bear rose between the fire and the reeds” (45-6). Fleur also takes care of the often wounded and eventually crippled Russell Kashpaw, veteran and hero of two wars.

In the new version of *Love Medicine*, Fleur takes Moses Pillager’s place in some sections of the novel, or appears in newly created chapters. Moses was the original much-feared *mide* of the first version of the novel. In this new version, as in *The Beet Queen*, Fleur appears as a traditional shaman and healer who refuses to conform to the twentieth-century, domi-

nant culture:

The Pillager was living back there with no lights, she was living with spirits. Back where the woods were logged off and brush had twisted together, impassable, she kept house and cared for Nanapush. That side of the lake belonged to her. Twice she lost it, twice she got it back. Four times she returned. Now she wore hide slippers, moccasins, let her braids grow long, traveled into town on foot, scorned the nuns as they scorned her, visited the priest. She made no confession, though some said Father Damien Modeste confessed his sins to her. She received no forgiveness, no money, no welfare when that came about. And although Rushes Bear was furious that her youngest son, Eli, loved her once and was rumored to go back there still, she always had to admit Fleur knew the medicines. (*Love Medicine*, new version 101)

Summoned by Rushes Bear in 1948, Fleur takes care of Marie Kashpaw in a difficult birth and refuses money for her services from the man who was at least partly responsible for her losing her land the first time—Nector Kashpaw. In *Love Medicine* Fleur reflects not only the healing *mide* but also the feared and isolated shaman who refuses the temptations of the modern world.

Of course we need to remember that Fleur will gamble with anyone, and win, when necessary. She gambled for Lulu's life in *Tracks* and gains her land back in a rigged poker game in *The Bingo Palace*. This gambling aspect of her character is, however, connected to the gambling abilities of Manabozho and his mythic dish game with The Great Gambler who would destroy the Chippewa.³ In her gambling aspect, Fleur still represents the traditional tribal ways and connections to the traditions of the Grand Medicine Society and the continuing rituals of Chippewa life. Her grandson Lyman Lamartine, a contemporary version of the mythic Great Gambler, in deciding to build a casino, reflects on the rituals of gambling he has witnessed:

Gambling fit into the old traditions, chance was kind of an old-time thing. He remembered watching people in a powwow tent, playing at the hand games, an old-time guessing event. Casino without electricity. Just hands and songs and spells. He watched a lady with a pop can in which pebbles shook and bounced, her rattle. Her teeth were out on one side of her face, her arm was weak, but her voice

was high and mocking of the others in the opposite chairs. He watched a man with a red satin cover for his conjuring of the bones, the marked bones. He went around with them, around, like he was stirring the soup. But there was an old man on the other side with gleaming hooded eyes and a deep-toned drum. And he was smiling, and he was dancing the illusions, and he was telling and he was pointing in which hand the bone. And when he got it right the trills and yells. (*Love Medicine*, new version 326-27)

Similar to a ferocious bear mother, Fleur will do anything to protect her children and her land, including cheating at cards. Her gambling skill reflects the barriers she sets up against encroachment on traditional Chippewa existence just as the bears of the *midewiwin* create spiritual barriers against evil.

Fleur's association with bears is emphasized in the last novel in which she appears, *The Bingo Palace*. When her great-grandson, Lipsha Morrissey, gains the courage to consult her about some love medicine, she, instead, instructs him in the knowledge of the *midewiwin*:

unexpectedly, too quickly for an old lady, she whirls around and catches me in the dim light, looks steadily into my eyes until I blink, once, twice. When I open my eyes again, she broadens, blurs beyond my reach, beyond belief. Her face spreads out on the bones and goes on darkening and darkening. Her nose tilts up into a black snout and her eyes sink. I struggle to move from my place, but my legs are numb, my arms, my face, and then the lamp goes out. Blackness. I sit there motionless and my head fills with the hot rasp of her voice. (136-37)

Lipsha later realizes that she was instructing him with her "bear thoughts, laughing in tongues" (151), but at the moment he does not appreciate her gift. Fleur functions as the bear guide and teacher for this unwilling initiate into traditional *mide* powers even though her methods are not quite traditional. Although Lipsha has had visions (visions on how to find his father and a traditional vision quest where he experiences a comic vision of a skunk), there is no traditional year-long learning period. Fleur, now very old and very powerful, teaches her great grandson through her bear persona and, literally, wills him her powers. She is again the hinge, the means of entrance into spiritual power just like the bears of the initiation ceremonies.

When a girl, Fleur nearly drowns twice, and both times, according to local legend, she causes the men who either did or did not rescue her to take her place in the world of the dead (*Tracks* 10-11). When Lipsha Morrissey is nearly frozen to death at the end of *The Bingo Palace*, Fleur is “thinking of the boy out there. Annoyed, she took his place.” She takes with her only “those things she carried with her all of her life” (272) and walks over Matchimanito lake to her powerful *mide* cousin Moses Pillager and her ancestors, for “On the island there was a cave and in that place her cousin sat grinning from his skull chair, waiting for her to settle into the whiteness and the raving dust along with all of their relatives” (272). In doing so she is transformed, at least for those who try to track her, into a bear. Fleur and Moses Pillager appear to be those *mides* of the sky orders who have somehow avoided an ordinary death, an ordinary passage between this world and the next. In Chippewa mythology Manabozho, the trickster and messenger to humans from the gods, retires to an island, “where he still lives, accessible only rarely to some vision seeker” (Landes 25). Undoubtedly the Pillagers and their savior Nanapush are among the privileged and are part of the continuing Manabozho tradition.

Fleur has four heirs to her formidable powers. Her wayward but powerful daughter Lulu, the contemporary trickster Gerry Nanapush, her entrepreneur grandson Lyman, and her dreamy, vision-seeking, great-grandson Lipsha. Her powers are scattered among her relatives who must live in a world dominated by another culture. Lipsha reflects on this dilemma when considering his uncle Lyman’s plans for a casino on Fleur’s land:

Where Fleur’s cabin stands, a parking lot will be rolled out of asphalt. Over Pillager grave markers, sawed by wind and softened, blackjack tables. Where the trees that shelter brown birds rise, bright banks of slot machines. Out upon the lake that the lion man [Misshipeshu] inhabits, where Pillagers drowned and lived, where black stones still roll round to the surface, the great gaming room will face with picture windows. (*Bingo Palace* 219)

The conjunction of cultures in this passage reflects the experience of the Pillagers in the last hundred years and raises issues of survival or diminution of culture. Lipsha knows that Fleur has shared her powers with Lyman, but he questions her wisdom and in doing so takes on his own particular, traditional power:

I cannot help wonder. . . if we were going in the wrong direction, arms flung wide, too eager. The money life has got no substance, there's nothing left when the day is done but a pack of receipts. . . . Our reservation is not real estate, luck fades when sold. Attraction has no staying power, no weight, no heart. (221)

What kind of *mides* Fleur's heirs will become only Erdrich can tell us. She does tell us that the Chippewas at the end of *The Bingo Palace*, hearing Fleur's bear laugh, cannot make sense of it and suspect "that there is more to be told, more than we know, more than can be caught in the sieve of our thinking" (274).

Of course, we, as readers, can look forward to the continuing story, moving backward and forward in time, to the ongoing story of bears and *mides* as told by Louise Erdrich. In her most recent novel *The Antelope Wife*, about a different set of characters, Almost Soup, a Chippewa dog narrator and expert on survival, informs readers that dogs "of course" worship bears (79). In her fictions, Erdrich continues to transform a rich spiritual and mythical tradition into a post-modern literary mode. That many in her audience do not know this may not be particularly important. The power of her novels is apparent to all. However, we might want to know that in an abstract manner we readers are being initiated into the power of the *midewiwin* when we read her novels, that we are being changed, that American literature is absorbing the Native traditions in subtle and mysterious ways, that we should still be in awe of bears, even as abstract literary figures. Old traditions are not only surviving but being reborn in new ways through contemporary literary initiations and rebirths.

NOTES

- ¹ The *anishinabe* people are called Chippewa in the United States and Ojibway in Canada. For clarity, I will refer to them as Chippewa in this essay.
- ² To become an initiate for the *midewiwin* and a medicine person, a young individual must have knowledge or willingness to learn about the nature of plants and their healing properties. A candidate must be of good character, not simply in appearance but in action, must have had a vision; if the candidate is a man (because women could

give birth a vision was not required), he must be proposed for candidacy by a member of the *midewiwin*. Before initiation the candidate goes through a year of tutoring about plants and learns the songs and prayers to be rendered to plants. The candidate gathers specific offerings for the ceremony and fasts and cleanses himself for four days before the initiation.

- ³ On the role of the Great Gambler in Chippewa myth and in the texts of Gerald Vizenor see Nora Barry's "Chance and Ritual: The Gambler in the Texts of Gerald Vizenor."

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Being There: The Importance of a Field Experience in Teaching Native American Literature

Roberta Rosenberg

Teaching Native American literatures to contemporary non-Indian students presents some daunting challenges to the college professor. As members of a post-Enlightenment culture, many students possess mutually contradictory and paradoxical beliefs in rationalism (and therefore a suspicion of the mystical) and, at the same time, a nostalgic desire for a mythic/magical world they believe to be extinct. How does the teacher of Native American literatures provide undergraduate and graduate students with educational experiences as free from Western bias as possible? Is this goal feasible or practical? Joseph Bruchac offers one method of approaching a cross-cultural experience; he advises teachers to “begin any Native American Literature course not in the classroom, but in the woods.” It is important, Bruchac notes, “to have a sense of the American earth, of the land and the people as one” (“Four” 4). Contextual, direct experience is as important as academic or intellectual knowledge according to Bruchac: “if you are teaching Native American literature well,” he argues, “you are not just teaching literature, you are teaching culture. To understand the work—or to begin to understand it—it must be seen as it was used”(6).

Like Bruchac, I wanted to expand my students’ ability to understand and appreciate Native American literatures by making a field experience an intrinsic part of my course in “Storytelling in Native American Literature.” Specifically designed for present and potential teachers in our English department, this course was often an introduction for students

with only a superficial knowledge of Native American cultures. Only a few students had been to local Virginia powwows, and, in general, most students' experiences were limited to reading a novel or historical text in a multicultural American literature course.

Since I was particularly interested in the process of their understanding, I asked students to keep a writer's journal of their impressions before, during and after the field experience. Since the field experience preceded the course and because not all students who took the course could go on the field trip, it was also interesting to have all students respond to the literature during the class itself. In every case, the students who participated in the trip had stronger, more highly developed reactions to the course literature. They had visually, emotionally and intellectually more intense reactions than their counterparts who were unable to join the field experience.

If successful, therefore, a field experience provides students with intuitive learning not easily acquired in the classroom. The best description of this process is articulated by the theologian Zalman Schachter-Shalomi who describes this kind of education as "going up to the highest place—the fire—there it isn't knowledge with the head, it is intuition . . . knowing by being rather than with your head" (Kamenetz 76). I am not, however, suggesting that "being there" is some mystical panacea that enables students always to see both Native literatures and people with a clearer eye instead of one clouded by cultural preconceptions. As I will explain later, some students respond positively and some do not. Furthermore, field experiences may exclude the student without funds or with family responsibilities that preclude travel. However, in response to the professor who worries about the practical problems encountered on such a trip, I would say, fear not; my students and I learned as much from what went wrong on our trip to the Havasupai and Walapai tribes in and around the Grand Canyon as from what went right. The best experiences were, ironically, not planned educational packages, but outright accidents.

By offering a field experience, I hoped to enhance the ability of students to "see" without presuppositions, a problem discussed by Native and non-Native cultural anthropologists as well as by Walker Percy in his essay on the Grand Canyon entitled "The Loss of the Creature." Percy believes that in our highly technological society, it is no longer possible to "see" the Grand Canyon because the tourist comes to the canyon with "pre-packaged" expectations about what it is supposed to look like. Percy contends that the Canyon has "been appropriated by the symbolic complex . . . which has already been formulated—by picture postcard, geog-

raphy book, tourist folders, and the words *Grand Canyon*.” Therefore, if the viewer does not SEE what he has been programmed to see, he believes that he has not experienced the Canyon: “the sightseer measures his satisfaction by the degree to which the canyon conforms to the preformed complex” (7).

Percy then uses this experience of the Grand Canyon as a metaphor for cross-cultural seeing of all kinds. We cannot, he contends, understand another perspective or culture unless we can remove students from the “educational package,” which we as instructors unconsciously interpose: “The new textbook, the type, the smell of the page, the classroom . . . may only succeed in transmitting themselves” instead of the topic under study (14). Percy suggests that one can avoid this “educational packaging” of education by “wandering,” even if that activity precipitates an “ordeal”: in this way, the student or professor becomes a “sovereign wayfarer . . . [a] wanderer in the neighborhood of being who stumbles into the garden” (16).

Although Percy does not focus on Native American cultures specifically, he characterizes well the dilemma of the American Indian literature instructor when he theorizes about a hypothetical museum curator of Native American cultures: “the archaeologist who puts his find in a museum so that everyone can see it accomplishes the reverse of his expectations. The result of his action is that no one can see it now but the archaeologist. He would have done better to keep it in his pocket and show it now and then to strangers” (18). The professor of Native American literatures, whose classroom interpretations lack physical/spiritual context and reference, may also find him or herself in the archaeologist’s unhappy situation. Joseph Bruchac advises this literature teacher to “constantly link contemporary Native writers to their roots, to their people and their places, their traditions” (“Four” 6).

No less than the tourist blinded by a postcard of the Grand Canyon, the average, non-Native American student is “programmed” not to see Indians. Old and new film stereotypes, images from advertising and little if any exposure to reservation life have all contributed to our students’ obscured vision. And like Percy’s tourists, if students do not see what they expect to see, they will either be disappointed or see it anyway, regardless of what is really there. As anthropologist Barre Toelken argues in his essay “Seeing with a Native Eye: How Many Sheep Will It Hold,” that “if certain ideas are offered to people in patterns which they have not been taught to recognize, not only will they not understand them, they often will not even see them” (11).

Therefore, resistance to cultural values not ones own is a particularly vexing obstacle for Western students and their teachers. As one of Toelken's students once said to him, "If I hadn't believed it, I never would have seen it" (23). In fact, this ironical version of "believing" is "seeing" is even more troublesome for students who have never met a Native person or been on Indian land. Instead, students' limited knowledge and experience of Indianness create a vacuum filled by preconception and stereotype—the equivalent of the Grand Canyon picture postcard—equal parts fantasy and misinformation.

Equally difficult to communicate to Western students is a clear portrayal of Native Americans, unclouded or untainted by white racism, fantasy projection, or guilt. In his essay "On Seeing With the Eye of the Native European," Richard Comstock characterizes the traditional Euroamerican's view of American Indians as either "gods or demons" or conversely "tragic heroes . . . 'the stoic warrior in noble defeat' . . . noble, grand, imparting an aura of tragic dignity" (61-62, 68).

Thus, the sons and daughters of technological, post-Enlightenment society fill our Native American literature classes, searching for an understanding of the peoples their ancestors have tried to subjugate by warfare, disease, and legislation. Yet, because these students have an almost indelible picture postcard in their minds of what an "Indian" can or should be, as well as a bias against communalism and the spirit world, it is a challenge for all of us—teachers and students alike—to see Native literature and its people in as clear a light as possible.

The field trip I planned as a complement to my literature class was one way to introduce my Southern, white, middle-class students to a new culture. I suspected that the entire concept of storytelling—despite their southern backgrounds—would be a new one for modern students who receive most of their stories from books or electronic media. Few, if any, students have a conception of the oral tradition and the importance of ceremony, beyond the rituals of Christian baptism, marriage and funeral. For this reason, I anticipated that my students would have difficulty understanding what Leslie Marmon Silko meant when she said of her own Writing: "when I use the term storytelling, I'm talking about something much bigger than that. I'm talking about something that comes out of an experience and an understanding of that original view of creation" (50).

In addition, my peripatetic students, many of whom are from military families, also have little appreciation for the importance of community and land as one, an important concept in Native American literature. Coming from a Judeo-Christian "Genesis" tradition, my students would

also have difficulty viewing all life—land, human, animal—as equal and unhierarchical. The idea that mountains have the same spiritual source as a person or a coyote would be a foreign concept. Furthermore, my students might not readily accept Paula Gunn Allen’s argument in *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters* that a definition of “relative” or “kin” might include “the supernaturals, spirit people, animal people of all varieties, the thunders, snows, rains, rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, fire, water, rock and plants are perceived to be members of one’s community” (ix).

As residents of a region of the country that celebrates Colonial Williamsburg, the 18th century and the Age of Reason, my students often have a Western faith in empirical knowledge and bias against non-rational states of consciousness. According to Toelken, this bias creates an impediment for Western, post-Enlightenment students whose perspective is both individualistic and rationalistic, based as it is on “planning, manipulation, predictability, competition, power over.” In contrast, the Native American’s perspective may be more communal and spiritual, since it is based on “reciprocation, flowering, response to situation and cooperation” (24).

Toelken succinctly describes the dilemma we face as teachers who attempt to communicate Native culture to Western, post-Enlightenment students:

Many tribes feel the real world is not one that is most easily seen, while the Western technological culture thinks of this as the real world, the one that can be seen and touched easily . . . To many native Americans, the world that is real is the one we reach through special, religious means, the one we are taught to ‘see’ and experience via ritual and sacred patterning. (24)

Paula Gunn Allen would seem to agree with Toelken’s characterization of cultural difference. In her essay “The Sacred Hoop,” she argues that “the study of non-Western literature poses a problem for Western readers who naturally tend to see alien literature in terms that are familiar to them, however irrelevant these terms may be to the literature under consideration” (3). One area where this disparity in apprehension is particularly vexing is in Native cultures’ lack of dualities between the “seen” and “unseen” worlds. Native American belief, according to Allen, collapses many Western body/spirit dualities and thus does not “draw a hard and fast line between what is material and what is spiritual, for it regards

the two as different expressions of the same reality" (8). This is particularly a problem for Western readers who "presume that the experiences—sights, sounds and beings encountered on psychic journeys—are imaginary and hallucinatory." How does the professor of Native American literature interpret/explain/discuss the nature of vision so prevalent in Indian literature, when, as Gunn suggests "nowhere in the literature on ceremonialism have I encountered a Western writer willing to suggest that the 'spiritual and the commonplace are one'" (17).

I hoped that by the end of the trip, my students would understand the reason for the Lakota saying repeated by *Lame Deer* that

the white man sees so little, he must see with only one eye. We see a lot that you no longer notice. You could notice if you wanted to, but you are usually too busy. We Indians live in a world of symbols and images where the spiritual and the commonplace are one. To you symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book . . . We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart. (16)

It is also important for my students, who are often members of a white, urban, homogenous, dominant culture in Tidewater, Virginia to develop a greater understanding of the tensions that exist within Native American society—both from without and within. The history of white persecution of tribal peoples, and the imposition of modern technology and education on Indian rural culture, have had long-lasting effects on contemporary Indian life.

In this essay, I would like to discuss how a cross-cultural field experience can enhance students' understanding of such important Native American concepts as: 1) a belief in the people and land as one; 2) storytelling and a sense of the sacred; and 3) the history and impact of discrimination. If a field trip can even begin to introduce these concepts clearly, students will be able to receive and understand Native literatures with greater clarity and appreciation. The fact that we learned these values through hardship is not unimportant. Despite my enthusiasm, however, I would like to add a word of caution: a field experience is usually not as controllable or as orderly as an academic lecture. However, paradoxically, this is one of its main advantages since accident may be crucial to this type of learning; if one is going to understand another culture beyond the "educational packaging" or prefabricated event, it may come by unanticipated ordeal and not by Western planning and reason.

The people and the land as one

I chose the Havasupai Reservation for some very specific reasons. Since it is at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, it is isolated from the outside and has been able to maintain much of its traditional culture and language. However, the Havasupai also have made accommodations to some tourism—a campground, store and fledgling tourism office. For this reason, my group would not cause resentment by disrupting everyday life. Finding a situation which is natural and yet not an imposition on residents is always a challenge but also crucial for an instructor arranging a field experience.

My students and I began our hike into the Canyon and the Havasupai Reservation at 9:30 AM on a day that would be 110 degrees (about 120 in the box canyons). Like many Westerners, we were accustomed to “managing nature” and were quite cavalier about water. In addition, our role model for the hike was Thoreau or Wordsworth—the solitary traveler communing with a benevolent nature. By the end of the 11 mile, all day hike, we realized our error: we were exhausted, dehydrated and at one point lost. Although the hike had been described by our group leader as a “leisurely walk” into the Canyon, it took on the element of a vision quest—albeit unintentionally.

One of my students, Susan Engle-Hill, described the experience this way: “Last two horrendous miles, you are at the mercy of the landscape and nature. Nothing out there to count on; everything has to come from within. Total mercy of the landscape and the only thing holding you together is the spiritual part. And you realize that these people have been living this their whole lives.” This same student also began to understand the necessity for community: “Walking separately was wrong. We wouldn’t have felt such desperation had we been in community at that point” (Journal).

Thus when one lone hiker, who was wandering in a rock area known for rattlesnakes, was found by a member of the Havasupai tribe and taken to camp on horseback, we began to respect the power of nature and the need for cooperation. This experience helped us to understand Leslie Mannon Silko’s analysis of the land and people as interrelated: “The unpredictability of the weather, the aridity and harshness of much of the terrain in the high plateau country explain in large part the relentless attention the ancient Pueblo people gave to the sky and the earth around them. Survival depended upon harmony and cooperation not only among human beings, but among all things—the animate and the less animate” (*Yellow* 29).

Not everyone on the Havasupai Reservation, however, had learned this lesson about relationship and communal responsibility. Our meeting with the Euroamerican principal of the Havasupai public K-8 school was illustrative of this point. The principal of the school had lived on the reservation for many years but didn't speak Supai or hire teachers who were Native speakers. When we questioned this, because English is a second language for the Havasupai, we did not receive an answer. Like many school officials, the principal had to satisfy both the requirements of the State Board of Education and the conflicting needs of the community; however, he seemed especially ill-equipped.

The principal's particular frame of mind added to his difficulties since he was not sensitive to cultural difference, even refusing to share his house, which he conceded was too large for one person, especially by Havasupai standards. He acknowledged that this aloofness was alienating to the tribe, but he steadfastly refused to change his ways. Not surprisingly, he stressed the hardships and isolation of teaching in this school at the bottom of the Grand Canyon: the high attrition rate among teachers, the inability to get out in winter, the loss of his wife. When we left his office, Susan Engle-Hill noticed the high fence around the school and saw it as symptomatic of the school's problems. She later wrote in her journal: "What kind of education are they getting? Go through chain-link fence. Keeping them in and keeping town out. What is that chain link fence doing in a close knit town?" In her journal, the same student speculated about the graffiti all over the school: "Why couldn't they have a school with their people from within running the school and those that speak their language running the school? The whole thing I would love about being a principal is to be out there with the children. He only wanted to be apart—makes you suspicious about his intentions" (np).

The chain link education offered in the public school seems antithetical to the sense of community and land that is so important to Native cultures. Paula Gunn Allen argues that "singularity is antithetical to community. For Indians, relationships are based on commonalities of consciousness, reflected in thought and behavior . . . individualism (as distinct from autonomy or self-responsibility) becomes a negatively valued trait." The graffiti which deface the school seem a physical embodiment of the violation of tribal values omnipresent at the school. The graffiti are ugly, the opposite of tribal art which "embodies the principle of kinship, rendering the beautiful in terms of connectedness of elements in harmonious, balanced, respectful proportion of each and any to all in All" (*Spider* ix).

As we spoke to more and more tribal members, we began to understand that American education on the reservation was often associated with disconnection, discontinuity and separation—the opposite of its intended goal. This is particularly obvious in the stories we heard about Indian boarding school. Since the Havasupai school does not go beyond the eighth grade, children must relocate to as far away as California for further schooling. One tribe member related a story about being sent to Riverside, California for high school. He was allowed only one trip home and, while there, was prohibited from speaking his own language. Rebellious and homesick, he returned to the reservation without completing his degree and now had only an eighth grade education.

Another tribal member told us a story about being four and a half years old, given a sock full of coins and taken by his father for a horseback ride. Engle-Hill reflected upon the story in her journal: “They ended up at a boarding school. Punished for speaking Supai (the language God gave us). Marched militarily to everything. Run like a military school. Misfits were rounded up and sent to Ft. Apache. The young children were also sent there . . . At the school for 6 years—home in summers. Law said children must go or the parents would go to jail” (np).

What is difficult to communicate in words or in this essay were the looks on the faces of the people who told us these stories. The desolation and disconnection were palpable and provided my students—who had never been forced to do anything against their will and were great believers in the empowerment of the American educational system—with insights not easily acquired in a book or classroom.. Yet, these memories gave my students a new ability to empathize when they read about Indian boarding schools in poems like Louise Erdrich’s “Indian Boarding School: The Runaways”: “Home’s the place we head for in our sleep . . . We know the sheriff’s waiting at midrun/to take us back” (334).

Also of equal importance is the fact that my students had to evaluate the technological frame of mind that makes it possible for one culture to impose on another “for its own good.” As anthropologist Richard Comstock argues: “The peoples with advanced mechanical technologies—whatever their race—have been heartless in their treatment of societies based on a simpler technology and kinship social structures. It is as if the societies with complex technologies have felt some kind of threat from these people so easy to defeat in an uneven battle, but so difficult to exorcise from the secret imaginings of their hearts” (73).

The West’s failure to respect the sacredness of the land predisposes it to “witchery” in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* because the people

regard the land as dead/inanimate. The whites look at nature and “see no life/When they look/they see only objects. The world is a dead thing for them/the trees and rivers are not alive” (135). The idea that “religious” or “sacred” space must be designated by a special sign or object—a church or relic—is unnecessary from this point of view. This clash of Native and Western values is portrayed repeatedly in the literature of Momaday, Erdrich, Dorris and Silko.

At first, we could only see inanimate, “dead” objects when we looked at the hills and sand on the Walapai reservation. But with the guiding perspective of Native storytellers, we began to see something else entirely: the sacred and commonplace together in a powerful vision—a hierophany. In his article, “Native American Attitudes to the Environment,” N. Scott Momaday describes this perspective as having two components, “one is physical and the other is imaginative.” He argues that “the Indian has achieved a particularly effective alignment of those two planes of vision. . . . The moral implications of this are very far-reaching. Here is where we get into the consideration of religion and religious ideas and ideals” (81).

A sense of harmony and balance with the land is of paramount importance in Native American cultures and literatures; therefore, my students would not only have to readjust their own values, but also their ideas about American literary plot. The concept of “homing in” instead of seeking one’s quest outside of the community, discussed so well by William Bevis in his essay, “Native American Novels: Homing In,” is often difficult to explain to usually autonomous, upwardly mobile Anglo students (580-620). In Indian society, the highest good may not always be personal success in a job or individual accomplishment apart from the tribe. The American archetypal “rags to riches” scenario about a unitary hero who succeeds in a monetary way alone may need to be rewritten in a Native American literary text. Characters in Native American novels achieve a richness but it is often a communal, spiritual success as in Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Welch’s *Winter in the Blood*.

One experience we had on our trip made this concept of “homing in” more comprehensible in a concrete way. The Havasupai people have not been successfully converted to Christianity but retain older religious traditions. Despite this fact, there is a Christian church on the reservation, and when we knocked on the door, we met Beamus, a member of the tribe who had converted to Christianity and was translating the New Testament into Supai. As teachers and students of cross-cultural literature,

we were particularly interested in the difficulties of making one tradition clearer to another. When we asked Beamus if he had encountered any specific problems, he mentioned one. He said that in the book of John, he had to find a Supai word equivalent for “condemn,” a term used often in the New Testament. He explained that Supai did not really have a Christian sense of sin and damnation, and, thus, he substituted the word “put aside,” as in “to excommunicate” or “to expel” from the community as the closest equivalent. Within the tribal reality, to be “condemned” by God was very much like being a village outcast. Having just wandered alone in the Grand Canyon, we had a palpable image of what this meant. And it was this actual experience which would help us understand the fear of isolation or alienation in Momaday’s *Abel*, Silko’s *Tayo* and Erdrich’s *Lipsha* later in the literature course.

The importance of the land to a sense of community is also a value that my students needed to experience first hand. Two members of the Walapai tribe spoke to my students about the spiritual quality of their land, an idea which my students only half understood in the comfort of the air-conditioned tribal van we were riding in at the time. The tribe wished to preserve the mountains by getting them designated as religious sites by the federal government, since the remains of their ancestors were tucked into the mountain crevices. Thus the dust of the ancestors was the origin of the sacred mountains. Despite its sacred purpose, however, the area was ineligible for religious designation because there was no archaeological evidence of an Indian church, burial crypt, etc. We could “see” the sacred by listening to the Walapai storytellers, but the federal government would not—not without concrete artifacts.

A specific power place is also crucial to the aesthetic health of Native society since the land is a well for the artistic imagination and storytelling. Leslie Marmon Silko provides an excellent example of this when she reminisces about her Aunt Susie:

What excited me was listening to her tell an old-time story and then realizing that I was familiar with a certain mesa or cave that figured as the central location of the story she was telling. That was when the stories worked best, because then I could sit there listening and be able to visualize myself as being located within the story being told, within the landscape . . . So we sometimes say the moment is alive again with us, within our imaginations and our memory, as we listen. (*Yellow* 42-3)

Storytelling and the sacred

After our hike into the canyon, we all understood the need to become better readers of the land as Silko interprets it. Engle-Hill told me that she only occasionally felt the power of nature before, perhaps when a hurricane landed on the Virginia coast. "But," she related to me, "they [the Havasupai] feel the power of it daily. The land does seem alive with its own forces. It is no wonder you would find spirit in the land" (Interview). It was, in fact, this student who believed that our "field experience" had moved from the "experiential" into the realm of the "spiritual" during the course of our descent and return from the Canyon floor. My students' conflation of the supernatural and commonplace was a new concept for students who usually compartmentalize their lives into secular work and religious Sunday church going.

This belief in the ordinary nature of the extraordinary or "the sacred" is an extremely difficult idea for modern, urban, secular students. However, within the context of our trip to the Havasupai Reservation, the sacred nature of everyday experience seemed both obvious and natural. In an article on teaching Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Susan Scarberry-Garcia discusses the importance as well as the difficulty of teaching just such a concept in the classroom. She notes that students need to become "sensitized to the 'extraordinary' in an ordinary" occurrence. Like many teachers of Native American literature, Scarberry-Garcia is concerned that "if sacred events in the journey are seen as imaginary fables—rather than as life-giving religious stories—then the loss in comprehension of the text is immeasurable. There can be no genuine learning from the text if this most fundamental level of understanding how to see the text according to a sacred perspective is bypassed or overlooked" (97).

A willingness to see a commonplace experience as somehow invoking the spiritual or sacred, however, does not happen overnight. When we first began our field experience, we met with some members of the Walapai tribe. This event preceded our trip into the canyon; at this point in the journey, we were fresh from the airport and our Western lives. One member of the tribe recounted the story of his life, his battle with alcoholism and then a life-altering vision which led to his salvation. At first, my students interpreted the vision as chemical or metaphorical. But it was obvious to me that his spirit world was not to be intellectualized or rationalized; this, however, did not prevent one student from recording his life story like a clinician listening to the pathology of a patient:

Alcoholism is great among the people of his tribe. He was an alcoholic and often visited the third world or “spirit world” where he would meet his ancestors. The spirit world he described was the moon where he said his ancestors drew their power. He also said that if one fell off of the moon they could die. The experiences he described of *alcohol induced trances* [my emphasis] sounded like people who “fell off of the moon” were having heart attacks as a result of their trance-like state. He was proud he had conquered the bottle and adamantly encouraged young people of the tribe not to fall victim to alcohol. (Clark np)

The spiritual journey that this particular man described was viewed by my student as an “alcohol-induced trance,” not an actual spiritual experience. In her early journal notes, she describes ecstatic states of consciousness with a skeptic’s quotes as in “spirit world.” Although the storyteller recounts his extraordinary experience, my student hears only the part she can accept: a twelve-step plan to abstinence and physical healing.

However, later on in the field trip, several days after our arduous journey down into the canyon, this same student had a very different reaction to a Zuni medicine man who arrived in the village for a healing ceremony. She wrote in her journal: “How about the scene where I was on the phone and turned around to see the medicine man arrive! The rainstick. The sacrificial heart, in the cooler packed on horseback, Roland was going to use in a ceremony to cleanse the land by moonlight” (Clark np). Gone are the rational explanations, the outsider comments about disease and healing, the rational explanations of drug induced states. Even the tone and excitement level are different as the student begins to live the experience from the inside.

Engle-Hill also revealed an increased ability to accept a sense of the supernatural. She described a member of the Havasupai tribe’s spiritual awakening and assumption of leadership as follows:

The power of the eagle feathers. Four eagle feathers delivered by a white man and said they were from a medicine man from the west. They prayed in the sweat lodge for a devastating flood to come to the village to wake up the people and reunite them. The next day at 2 p.m. a 50 foot wall of water flooded their village. He was confirmed as the spiritual leader. (Journal np)

Interestingly, the concept of medicine men as spiritual leaders had come up earlier in our trip but the reactions of students were quite different. When we visited the Walapai tribe at the beginning of our journey, Emmet, a community elder, related memories of former traditional medicine men and noted that they had all died. When we asked why the tribe had not trained young people to follow in their footsteps, Emmet explained that this wisdom was not “taught” in any sort of rational or intentional manner. Instead, the tribe would have to wait for the spirits of these men to find the correct people to reveal themselves. This knowledge would come in a visionary manner—like Black Elk’s own transcendent experience—and could not be transferred by conscious education. My students—many of whom are or will be public school teachers—had difficulty accepting the idea that one had to wait for a vision instead of just creating a curriculum.

Learning to wait and remain quiet—a state of receptive passivity—is an arduous task for students who believe in self-direction and planning. However, time and again, this was a lesson we needed to learn. Although our group had tried repeatedly to contact Roland, the great, great grandson of the last Havasupai chief, to arrange a storytelling session, we never made contact. However, by wandering around the town, we met him by accident and were able to arrange to meet him the next day at 9 AM. When Roland did not appear until 3 PM because of a ceremony, we had to accept the situation and wait, although several members of our group gave up and left for other activities. Those who had patience, however, were witness to an extraordinary event, one which was not really possible to communicate to the impatient when they returned from their adventures.

Spending a week within the canyon also allowed us to wander the village and meet with other Havasupai storytellers and community members. Experiencing an actual storytelling session is crucial for students who want to understand a living, spiritual and dynamic oral tradition. Elaine Jahner describes the problems in only having a written account of Native stories: “Transcribing an oral event is comparable to preparing sheet music. Only experience of the performed event can permit full entry to the meaning of what is transcribed” (212). A written account also does not pay respect to the magic and conversely the taboo nature of stories.

In our visit to the Walapai Reservation two tribal members sat with us and told stories. When Cheryl began to tell a story about an animal, Emmet interrupted her and informed her that this was an out-of-season

story and, thus, taboo. She paused for a moment, reflected and then continued; we got our first opportunity to see the mystical connection between the spirit world and storytelling, but also the tensions within the Native American community of “modern” people who discount taboo and the traditional people who observe the old ways.

A similar situation developed again in our storytelling session with Roland who discussed how the supernatural enters the ordinary through storytelling. Roland was extremely upset with the National Park Service rangers who discussed tribal myths out of the prescribed season. He told my students that “if we tell the stories at the wrong time, it makes us sick. The Park Service told winter stories in summer. The tribe fought against it” (Engle-Hill, Journal np). This lesson in taboo storytelling is especially important for my students since most of them will be teachers in the public school system and will have to make choices about whether to tell or not to tell stories “out of season.” Joseph Bruchac’s position on this subject is clear but, I suspect, often unheeded:

Much of Native America’s traditional culture is living in the strongest sense of that word. Revealing that culture to the uninitiated is sacrilegious . . . I cannot emphasize that word RESPECT strongly enough. In some cases it may even mean NOT discussing something. That is a hard direction for people with the Western mindset to follow, that Western mindset which says “tell it all, show it all, explain it all.” I feel that those with that mindset would be better off avoiding the teaching of Native American Literature. (“Four” 7)

The need to be silent, to withhold judgment, to refrain from explaining every experience is crucial to an understanding of Native American cultures—literary, social and religious. Peggy Beck, Anna Lee Waters and Nia Francisco, the authors of *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life*, stress that “learning the way” of their people means experiencing and not always articulating. They quote Larry Bird, a member of the Keres people who believes that “you don’t ask questions when you grow up, you watch and listen and wait, and the answer will come to you. It’s yours then, not like learning in school” (48).

“Learning the way” also requires students to refrain from always “asking why.” Beck, Waters and Francisco believe that in order to achieve true education, knowledge should “not get separated from experience, wisdom from divinity.” In order to accomplish this, the elders “stressed listening and waiting, not asking why . . . By not asking why, they are

saying, you might have the experience of directly confronting and learning from the great powers of the Mysteries" (48-9). This attitude is intrinsic to an understanding of characters like Momaday's Abel or Silko's Tayo who listen to the sacred stories of their people in order to learn about themselves; yet, the values that influence such a stance are often difficult for inquisitive, iconoclast, "can do" Euroamericans to understand.

This concept of silent introspection—a quiet intellectualism—and a cessation of analysis is very difficult for my Western, post-Enlightenment students who read Momaday's novels and essays in the course. This problem is articulated well by Helen Jaskoski in her interpretation of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, when she argues that "the book requires cultivation of silence and of the visual as well as verbal attentiveness, and—paradoxically—it challenges us to participate in completing its meaning." This goal, however, is not always achieved, as Professor Jaskoski notes: "I emphasize receptive silence as crucial to understanding and experiencing the book; however, specific methods of achieving this attitude will depend on the temperament and wishes of the instructor [and] . . . class" (69).

Confronted by an unknown cultural background, students often rush to critical analysis. This is especially a problem when interpreting a character's action since, often, students will become exasperated: "Why doesn't he (or she) DO SOMETHING instead of just sitting there?" they demand. The idea that someone IS doing something by just sitting there is a cross-cultural leap that many students need to experience themselves in order to learn. Silko analyzes the magical transference that happens at a storytelling session: "the storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" (*Yellow* 50).

After hearing many wonderful stories from a variety of people, my students could begin to understand how Silko could envision her Aunt Susie, the source of many of her stories in *Storyteller*, saying to a young Silko: "Go open the door so our esteemed ancestors may bring us the precious gift of their stories" (*Yellow* 43). At the beginning of our trip, my students may have considered this action either metaphorical or hyperbolic. But at the trip's conclusion, this ability to renew oneself and one's relationship to the past through storytelling was quite real. In addition, they could see the relationship between oral storytelling and written literature, a connection not always as clear in mainstream American lit-

erature. Luther Standing Bear describes storytelling as: “the libraries of our people” (Beck 57). Therefore, the source for many of Silko and Momaday’s work as well as many other Native American writers is oral, at least in part. Recognizing the influence of the oral tradition on the written is an important learning experience if one is to appreciate American Indian literatures fully.

The history and impact of discrimination

Teachers of Native American literatures may encounter other obstacles that make it difficult for students to see the literature or its people. Anthropologist W. Richard Comstock argues that “what is important to our concern is that the factual reports about America and its native inhabitants were inevitably and for a variety of reasons intertwined with myth, theology, fantasy, and dreams” (61). For this reason, he sees Euroamericans’ ability to “see” Native Americans in two stages. Stage one includes viewing tribes as “gods or demons, unfallen creatures possessing an original innocence or devils with a brutish evil” (62). In Stage Two, Indians are “subdued, defeated . . . transformed by the conquerors into tragic heroes . . . ‘the stoic warrior in noble defeat’” (68). Thus, in approaching either traditional or contemporary Native American literatures, the teacher and students must confront all of the myths—god, devil, innocent and tragic hero—in order to arrive at a picture of Native Americans which is as free from racist stereotype, national guilt or fantasy projection as possible. Our field experience helped in many ways to do just this.

The stories about the Indian boarding school experiences enabled my students to see the true deprivation of separation and dislocation engendered by the American educational process. These stories now had specific faces and histories attached; my students who had met the people involved would not likely forget them. This experience would also enrich their understanding of the “Schooldays” readings in *Growing Up Native American*, an anthology I would use in my course (Riley).

But the isolation and forced confinement of the reservation way of life—with all of its ambiguities—was made graphic by spending time down at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. My students’ attitude towards the beautiful canyon walls had changed considerably during our stay on the Havasupai Reservation. The last morning, as we stood watching the sun hit the high canyon walls, one student had an interesting reaction. She had heard several stories about the migratory patterns of the tribe before they had lost their above canyon land to the federal government.

Now, the Havasupai people live year-round in the canyon, even in winter when the sun enters the village only between the hours of ten and three. That early morning, when the reservation was still in shadow, my student saw the canyon, not as an exquisite picture postcard, the way a casual tourist might; instead, she viewed it as a government prison, complete with high walls, the last vestige of a reservation system which imprisoned native peoples within their own land. The impact of white prejudice and government power was stinging. The Grand Canyon was, no doubt, a beautiful prison for the remaining members of the tribe; however, this did not change the fact that, at times, the Havasupai people must feel like government hostages within their own dark, cold, winter home.

Another incident worth relating was one which gave my students an unpleasant taste of race prejudice from a completely unexpected point of view. One of our students could not hike out of the canyon and, thus, I decided to have everyone take the helicopter to the top. We lined up in the morning awaiting the first helicopter, assuming that we would be taken in order of arrival—"first come, first served." When the helicopter landed, however, anyone who was from a local or distant tribe was allowed to get on before the white tourists. Engle-Hill noted in her journal: "They should have interwoven [white and Indian] people." She believed that this unfair system based on race and tribal affinity (or friendship) created "more tension and bad feeling" (np). The situation, ironically, struck me as paradigmatic of Indian-Anglo relations, except in reverse. Seniority or "first come, first served," has counted for little in American history. One need only reflect on the Europeans' usurpation of North America to understand that the principle of seniority was not observed. I asked my incensed students to consider how they felt when they were the first to arrive but the last to receive benefits. For students who have never experienced this kind of prejudice, it was a chastening but enlightening experience in American "equality."

An encounter with a contemporary Indian community also had a way of exploding stereotypes which my students may have brought with them. Like other parts of the United States, Indian reservations have a complex and sometimes contradictory mixture of traditional and modern elements—medicine men and satellite dishes. This fact deflated all the romanticized, Hollywood myths about Native Americans as natures vanishing innocents who live in achronological harmony and peace. The clash of ancient and modern ways, the simultaneity of old and new traditions living in a complex, sometimes confrontational symbiosis, was in

evidence on the Havasupai reservation as well. The disjuncture between ancient and contemporary ways, in fact, may be more pronounced on a reservation when there is a racial/social overlay: mixedblood tribal members educated in modern business practices on Anglo, off-reservation schools may impose their will on full blood members whose education has been entirely traditional and local. The fantasy that “Indians” all think alike and live in some white-projected “mythic” past was deflated in one quite tense incident we encountered. And while this experience was unpleasant, it gave us a sense of the tensions which surface in Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues*, Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* and N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*.

The Havasupai Tourist Bureau on the Reservation is run by a young, mixedblood man who has been educated outside the reservation. Since the Havasupai are expanding their tourist industry, they are beginning to institute Western business practices and, therefore, have hired this particular man to oversee their operations. Yet, when we agreed to rent horses from an older member of the tribe, this younger individual suggested that the traditional way of doing business—a handshake and an oral promise—might be unreliable. After all, the older man just gave us his word and no written contract. In the end, we were caught between two ways of life—two realities really—that have not yet found common ground. And, consequently, because we had done business with both, we found ourselves without horses and transportation as the two tribal members refused to deal with anyone who would use the other individual.

Through this experience, we learned first hand what Kathryn Vangen describes as one of the “challenges of teaching Native American literature—avoiding nostalgia and white preconceptions about ‘Indianness.’” In her essay, she asks teachers to help their students develop “an awareness of Indian diversity; American Indian literature reflects a politics, and we must teach the politics as well as the poetics of the work” (136). Our painful and clearly anxiety-producing situation prepared us for the political struggles between Lyman Lamartine and Lipsha Morrissey over the pipe in *The Bingo Palace*; the religious tension between Tayo’s Aunt and Betonie in *Ceremony*; the racial antagonism between Rayona and Foxy Cree in Dorris’ *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*.

Without this awareness of diversity and politics, well-intentioned students and professors never see beyond their own romanticism or guilt. In his essay, “Native American Literature in an Ethnohistorical Context,” Michael Dorris explains the danger in refusing to see the dynamic nature

of contemporary Native American cultures:

No wonder tourists visiting reservations, upon viewing a person clad in other than a blanket, riding in something other than a dog-pulled travois, often bemoan the “loss of culture”; somehow they seem oblivious to the fact that they themselves are not passing through on a covered wagon and wearing homespun dickeys. (244)

Our experience on the Walapai and Havasupai reservations provided us with a sometimes peaceful and sometimes contentious but always enlightening portrayal of what Dorris refers to as Native America’s “ancient and ongoing” traditions (244). This may not be the comfortable fantasy of a tranquil people living in unWestern harmony that many Euroamericans may want to project onto Native America as an antidote to their own troubled society; however, it is closer to the truth that we, as teachers, should present in our classrooms.

Conclusion

Although we learned a great deal through our field experience, the trip was not universally successful for everyone. One of my students completely shut down on the hike. Once in camp, she stayed in the tent and literally washed and rewashed her hair, in a hopeless attempt to retain control over her body and this experience. When I asked her recently over e-mail (she seemed to be avoiding a “face-to-face” interview) how the trip had changed her reading of the literature, she answered, “To be honest, I don’t think that the trip added that much to my comprehension of the literature. . . . I was so caught up in trying to live through it that I didn’t really see all that y’all saw.” This student then broke off communication by concluding her message with: “I don’t know when I will be back in the [computer] lab next. You can call me though” (Anonymous).

Not long after I received this message, the same student appeared at my office door with a present—a large, color photograph of the Grand Canyon—the one that Walker Percy must have had in mind when he described the tourist’s idealized vision. The poster said to me that this student could not or would not see the canyon or its inhabitants outside of her own reality. She wanted the safety and predictability of the educational package: the Grand Canyon on a temperate, sunny day, devoid of inhabitants or hikers.

However, the impact of the field experience on my other students and on me continues to enrich our understanding of Native American

cultures and their literatures. Our respect for the land and community is felt in spiritual as well as practical ways—as one student said, the trip moved from the “experiential to the spiritual” quite by accident, ripping open the carefully created “educational package” and allowing us to see, at least for a moment, a view of another culture, unclouded by preconception, nostalgia, prejudice or wish projection. Although sometimes painful and often destabilizing, our trip provided us with an important educational experience. We may be somewhat comforted by Michael Dorris’ comment that “if the process [of education] appears easy, something is wrong—for it is truly difficult to cross the boundaries of culture and time and class and language in order to see the world through another’s eyes” (“Native” 253). Despite the discomfort, however, we had a glimpse at a culture not easily available within the suburban boundaries of Newport News, Virginia and our classroom. Our journey acted upon our consciousness in a way best described by Louise Erdrich who believes that “when you go on Indian land [you] feel that there’s more possibility, that there is a whole other world besides the one you can see and that you’re very close to it” (Bruchac, “Whatever” 98-9).

Although it is difficult to intellectualize or even put in words what one learns from a field experience on Indian land, it is best expressed as a glimpse of life from a different point of view. N. Scott Momaday defines this perspective as the Indian’s “perfect alignment” of vision, a vision which allows both the extraordinary and commonplace, the personal and communal, the intellectual and the spiritual worlds to exist in harmony and balance. And it is this special ability, Momaday contends, “to see what is really there, but also to see what is REALLY there” (84) that we, as students and teachers of Native American literature, hope to achieve in the process. There is the world that we can simulate in the classroom, but then there is a world of intuitive “being” which exists outside of a planned, academic lesson. Black Elk describes this state of mind as going “into the world where there is nothing but the spirits of all things.” And, like Momaday, Black Elk does not problematize this state but simply acknowledges it as “the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world” (Neihardt 85). A field experience can provide both the teacher and students with a window into these worlds. And it this perspective that enriches the individual, the literature and the learning experience.

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An Annotated Secondary Bibliography of Louise Erdrich's Recent Fiction: The Bingo Palace, Tales of Burning Love, and The Antelope Wife

Laura Furlan Szanto

You have heard the bear laugh—that is the chuffing noise we hear and it is unmistakable. Yet no matter how we strain to decipher the sound it never quite makes sense, never relieves our certainty or our suspicion that there is more to be told, more than we know, more than can be caught in the sieve of our thinking.

Erdrich, *The Bingo Palace* (274)

Although Louise Erdrich's fiction has gained increasing popularity in recent years, much of the critical focus remains on her first three novels, the original "trilogy" that includes *Love Medicine* (1984 and 1993),¹ *The Beet Queen* (1986), and *Tracks* (1988). These "provocatively constructed [early] narratives" (Purdy 423) have established Erdrich as a central figure in the so-called Native American Renaissance, a term coined by Kenneth Lincoln to describe the surge of Indian writing following N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. For the most part, Renaissance writing is fiction. In fact, *Love Medicine* has been called the first novel to represent the "new Indian writing," fiction that combines traditional elements with popular culture (Smith 11). Taken together, this early trilogy continues to be important to contemporary American and Native American canons, and it lays the groundwork for understanding Erdrich's fictional world. However, in fiction as in life, "there is more to be told, more than we know" (BP 274). With the publication of *The Bingo Pal-*

ace, the trilogy became a quartet, or tetralogy, and with *Tales of Burning Love*, it is now a quintet, growing into a series. As Erdrich's multiple narrators, Chippewa families, and Indian humor brought success to her first works, so do they reappear with the same magic in her three recent novels: *The Bingo Palace* (1994), *Tales of Burning Love* (1996), and *The Antelope Wife* (1998).

The fourth installment of Erdrich's Matchiniano series, as critics now call it, *The Bingo Palace* interweaves the themes of identity, journey, luck, and cultural continuity. While half of the novel is told by Lipsha Morrissey himself (who first appears in *Love Medicine*), the other half is told by the communal voice of the reservation. Erdrich uses specific character types from Chippewa lore, including the trickster Nanabozho. The novel is essentially a love story between Lipsha and Shawnee Ray Toose, which is complicated by Lyman Lamartine's claim on Shawnee. The families of characters from her earlier novels return in *The Bingo Palace*. Lipsha, now in his twenties, is the son of the deceased June Morrissey and imprisoned trickster Gerry Nanapush. Mysteriously summoned home by his Grandma Lulu, Lipsha returns to the reservation where he was raised. He accepts a job at Lyman's bingo hall and soon becomes involved in plans to expand the hall into the palace of the title. Lyman's project is to be built on land that belongs to Fleur Pillager, Lipsha's feared and staunchly traditional great-grandmother. As the plot becomes compounded by the appearance of June's ghost and Nanapush's escape from prison, Lipsha comes to terms with his own identity. The novel ends with uncertainty: Lipsha, protecting a kidnapped infant in a stolen car, is stranded in a blizzard.

Because many of its characters and events intersect with the earlier novels, *Tales of Burning Love* may be seen as the fifth installment in Erdrich's growing series. The story begins with the drunken marriage of June Morrissey and Jack Mauser (he uses a pseudonym to conceal his tribal affiliation) and June's subsequent death by freezing. This marriage is described by the narrator in *Love Medicine*, Jack tells the story in *Tales of Burning Love*. Now a construction contractor with a declining business, Jack is a man whose fifth marriage has deteriorated. When a fire on New Year's Eve threatens to destroy his home, he decides to fake his own death in order to escape impending legal action. Jack's wives gather after his funeral only to become stranded in a snowstorm (the very same storm that traps Lipsha) en route to the airport. These women—Dot, Eleanor, Candice, and Marlis—must remain awake throughout the night, and they do so by sharing their intimate secrets about Jack in stories that

are lively and humorous. Each woman is characterized in detail, just as each of their relationships with Jack is unique. Ironically, the hitchhiker biding in the back of the snowbound Explorer is Gerry Nanapush, just escaped from prison in *The Bingo Palace* and still legally married to Jack's current wife Dot.

The Antelope Wife begins differently from other Erdrich novels, with a mythical vision of twins beading the universe. The narrative that follows describes an 1800s attack on an Ojibwa village during which Scranton Roy kills an old woman, then flees the village, following a dog with an infant bound to its back. Roy catches up and raises baby Matilda as his own. Many years later, her mother, Blue Prairie Woman, leaves her Shawano twins and reclaims young Matilda, only to die shortly thereafter. Matilda Roy is then raised by a herd of antelope, and the futures of these two families are forever connected. The story moves to the modern-day Shawanos, Roys, and the antelope wife of the title, Sweetheart Calico, who is abducted at a powwow by Klaus Shawano. The main plot centers on Rozin Whiteheart Beads, who has left her husband Richard for Frank Shawano, a baker. Depressed by his wife's desertion, Richard kills himself in a dramatic scene on Rozin's and Frank's wedding night.

The Antelope Wife is told through many narrators, including a dog named Almost Soup and Cally Whiteheart Beads, the surviving twin daughter of Rozin and Richard. Erdrich's novel contains many sets of twins, such as those seen beading in the mythical beginning. The usual themes of love, survival, and identity are combined with contemporary urban problems, such as homelessness, alcoholism, and the loss of community. What may appear to be a solemn tale is lightened by Erdrich's comical incidents. The characters are Chippewas and mixedbloods who are extensions of "the branches of the families who populate Erdrich's [earlier] work," according to the novel's cover material.² *The Antelope Wife* is a distinct work that is indeed a departure from the others.

Critical reception of the three novels in this study is as diverse as their audience. In general, reviewers compare *The Bingo Palace* to the first three novels and disagree as to whether it lives up to its predecessors and is truly the fourth novel of a tetralogy. According to Claire Messud of the *Times Literary Supplement*, "*The Bingo Palace* is less radiant, less intense a novel . . . but for those already familiar with her oeuvre, it offers a profound and moving complement to the sequence" (23). The fictional world Erdrich creates in this tetralogy is often compared with Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. *Tales of Burning Love*, like *The Beet Queen*, does not take place on the reservation but in the town of

Argus, North Dakota. It has been deemed a “popular” novel, with little literary worth because it contains less Native mysticism than her previous novels. Reviewer Mark Shechner asserts, “*Tales of Burning Love* provides the writer with a moments respite from the role that has been thrust upon her, of being America’s favorite Indian novelist and therefore a bearer of memory and conscience” (226). Other reviewers applaud the novel’s complexities and Erdrich’s use of humor and suspense. One critic has compared it to *The Scarlet Letter*, paralleling each of the wives to an aspect of Hester Prynne’s character (Matchie). Like *Tales of Burning Love*, *The Antelope Wife* is also set away from the reservation, this time in Minneapolis, a former trading village. This novel is arguably the most complicated in plot structure; as a result, reviews of this work are especially passionate. The possibility of a parallel between Richard Whiteheart Bead’s suicide and Michael Dorris’s has distracted many critics from the actual text. Others, such as Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times*, hail the novel as a major achievement: “*The Antelope Wife* stands as one of her most powerful and fully imagined novels yet” (C18).

Due to the relative newness of these three novels, most of the secondary material covers their immediate critical reception. I have also included interviews with Erdrich in which she reveals information pertinent to the study of these novels. At the time of this writing, scholarly critiques of the Matchimanito series were steadily appearing.³ Many aspects of Erdrich’s fiction remain unstudied, thus making this bibliography a work in progress. Compiling this material becomes the story of how a contemporary author has become a luminary in modern fiction studies. Erdrich is not only a successful Native American writer but a major American author, and as suggested by reviews of *The Antelope Wife*, she will continue to be. Her next novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, is scheduled for release in December. Erdrich’s concern with the issues of adoption and mixedblood identity, her poetic style, captivating characters, and intricate plot designs distinguish her from other writers of her time. We can only ask, “What will she do next?” Her fiction itself is the laughing bear, for it “never relieves our certainty or our suspicion that there is more to be told, more than we know, more than can be caught in the sieve of our thinking” (BP 274).

Author’s Note: The first annotated bibliography on Erdrich’s work, compiled by Lillian Brewington, Nonnie Bullard, and R. W. Reising, was published in 1986. This publication covered *Jacklight* (poetry), *The Beet*

Queen, Love Medicine, and Dorris's *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*. I have undertaken my project with the work of Debra A. Burdick in mind. Burdick's 1996 annotated bibliography surveys the criticism of Erdrich's first three novels through 1994. This bibliography continues to be important to students of literature, and I have endeavored to tailor my compilation as a companion piece to Burdick's. My research is current as of June 20, 2000.

In my bibliography the secondary criticism is divided into three sections, each corresponding to one novel. In addition to reviews from major periodicals, I have included many regional reviews that provide unique insight into the novels. The *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), for example, takes a particular interest in Erdrich, who now makes Minneapolis her home. The most important resources for this bibliography include *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*, *MLA International Bibliography*, *Pro Quest*, *Dow Jones Interactive*, *Bibliographic Index*, *Expanded Academic Index*, *EBSCOhost*, and *News Bank*.

The Bingo Palace (BP)

Abrams, Rebecca. "Life as an Uneasy Compromise." Rev. of *BP*. *Guardian Weekly* [Manchester] 3 July 1994: 28.

Praises Erdrich's ability to juxtapose humor and tragedy. Calls the final scene "one of the finest, most haunting pieces of writing I've ever read." Urges readers to read the entire tetralogy.

Allen, Paula Gunn, and Patricia Clark Smith. "Louise Erdrich." *As Long as the Rivers Flow: The Stories of Nine Native Americans*. New York: Scholastic, 1996. 290-313.

A biography of Erdrich written for a juvenile audience, this chapter analyzes *BP* in relation to the financial recovery achieved by contemporary gaming tribes.

Arant, T. J. "In Love and Bingo." Rev. of *BP*. *Antigonish Review* 98 (1994): 99-101.

Likens Erdrich's fictional world to that of Faulkner. Views Lipsha as a humorous but weak character. Praises Erdrich's storytelling skills, comical style, and contemporary subject matter.

Austin, Lori. "Parent-Child Relationships in the Works of Louise Erdrich: An American Indian Perspective." Masters Theses Collection: San Francisco State U, 1993.

Places Erdrich's fiction within an anthropological Chippewa con-

text and within the tradition of Native American literature. Categorizes parental archetypes in Erdrich's early novels and in the story "The Bingo Van." Proposes that each archetype has a specific psychological effect on the children.

Barak, Julie. "Blurs, Blends, Berdaches: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 8.3(1996): 49-62.

Contents that many of Erdrich's characters exhibit gender-fluid qualities usually attributed to the figure of the berdache. In *BP*, Fleur, Lipsha, Gerry Nanapush, and Lyman Lamartine are tricksters, "liminal figures" who exhibit both male and female characteristics.

Baringer, Sandra. "'Captive Woman?': The Rewriting of Pocahontas in Three Contemporary Native American Novels." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 11.3 (1999): 42-63.

Argues that many contemporary Indian novelists "signify" on the Pocahontas myth by assigning her characteristics—primarily sexual desirability and heroism—to their own female characters. Erdrich's Shawnee Ray Toose in *BP* is a positive rewriting of the Pocahontas character because she challenges patriarchal gender roles, she "recuperate[s] the power of maternity in service of Indian rather than Euroamerican interests," and she "shows that cultural borders can be crossed and negotiated without loss of life or loss of identity."

Barton, Gay. *Pattern and Freedom in the North Dakota Novels of Louise Erdrich: Narrative Technique as Survival*. Diss. Baylor U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. 9938953.

Asserts that Erdrich's narrative patterns are derived from Ojibwa oral tradition and that the "metanarrator" of the series is in fact a trickster.

Beidler, Peter G. "Louise Erdrich." *Dictionary of Literary Biography. Native American Writers of the United States*. Ed. Kenneth M. Roemer. Vol. 175. Detroit: Gale, 1997. 84-100.

Suggests *BP* is not the last of the series and that the story "American Horse" became *BP*'s chapter "Redford's Luck."

—. Rev. of *BP*. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18.3 (1994): 271-74.

Acknowledges comparison between Erdrich and Faulkner but finds it more important to focus on their differences as Indian and non-{67}

Indian. Believes that Erdrich's increased confidence in her writing makes *BP* a better novel than *Love Medicine*.

Bensen, Robert. "Creatures of the Whirlwind: The Appropriation of American Indian Children in Louise Erdrich's 'American Horse.'" *Cimarron Review* 121 (1997): 173-88.

Identifies that "American Horse" reappears in *BP*, though in a much-changed form. Argues that the battle over custody of Indian children served as the impetus for Erdrich's concern with mother-child relationships and that the government's attempts at "possessing and educating" Indian children have been detrimental to the continuance of Native cultures.

Berninghausen, Tom. "'This Ain't Real Estate: Land and Culture in Louise Erdrich's Chippewa Trilogy.'" *Women, America, and Movement: Narratives of Relocation*. Ed. Susan L. Roberson. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1998. 190-209.

Contends that the tetralogy centers on a celebration of survivors and their relationships to place. Connects Chippewa history, including allotment and loss of land, to the events in Erdrich's quartet. *BP*, in particular, focuses on restoring lost land. Argues that the use of a communal voice in *BP* signifies a strong tribal, traditional culture. Believes that *BP*'s uncertain ending is due to a weakened "connection to the past and to the land."

Birch, Helen. "Lucky in Love, with Reservations." Rev. of *BP*. *Independent* [London] 29 May 1994: 34. *Academic Universe*. Online. Lexis-Nexis.⁴ 14 Aug. 1998.

Recognizes Erdrich's gifts of comedy, narrative, and poetry. Admires Erdrich's portrait of the "psychological landscape of the dispossessed."

Brehm, Victoria. "The Metamorphoses of an Ojibwa *Manido*." *American Literature* 68 (1996): 677-706.

Provides important ethnohistorical background of Micipijiu, the powerful figure believed by Great Lakes tribes to reside in all bodies of water, as a key to understanding *Love Medicine*, *Tracks*, and *BP*. After determining that the myth of Micipijiu existed prior to European contact, traces the historical development of this character and of Western influences on Ojibwa culture. As the protector of valuable resources, Micipijiu "represents the power of American Indian spirituality and tradition, which are being drowned in American cul-

ture.” The trickster figure, sometimes called Wenabojó, is central to the Ojibwa origin myth and is often at odds with Micipijiu. Another function of Micipijiu is seen in animal groom stories, in which women combat this figure. Proposes that the character of Fleur Pillager in *BP* reflects the sorcery attained by women who befriend Micipijiu and become too strong.

In response to European contact, a new religion called Midéwiwin arose among the Great Lakes tribes. The power assumed by Midéwiwin shamans was soon misappropriated and abused, leading to the development of a class system and the demonization of Micipijiu. By associating Fleur with Micipijiu, Erdrich presents a female character who “uses his power to help her people survive by recovering traditional culture,” thereby prophesying the continuity of that culture. In *BP*, Fleur’s struggle to keep her land is opposed by Lyman Lamartine, who represents a corrupt shaman. Lipsha, on the other hand, “embodies the conflicted inheritance of modern Chippewa” as a combination of Micipijiu and the trickster. Erdrich’s stories are compared to oral tradition because neither audience “always know[s] how a narrative would end.”

Buchholz, Laurie Lynn. *The Search for Connectedness: Identity and Power in Louise Erdrich’s Fiction*. Thesis. Mississippi State U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996. 1380553.

Focusing on identity, spirituality, and the “interconnectedness of all beings,” argues that Erdrich’s fiction transcends the category of Indian fiction and provides a universal appeal.

Castillo, Susan. “Women Aging into Power: Fictional Representations of Power and Authority in Louise Erdrich’s Female Characters.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 8.4 (1996): 13-20.

Asserts that “minority” writers, specifically Native Americans, create female characters who defy the stereotypical downfalls of women in mainstream fiction. Focuses on Zelda Kashpaw, a force Lipsha must overcome in order to win Shawnee’s heart. By the novel’s end, Zelda’s character softens, and she reconciles with Xavier Toose, her long-rejected true love, but her doing so does not jeopardize her power or authority.

Chernoff, Maxine. “Bingo Palace Is a Hot Number.” Rev. of *BP*. *Chicago Sun-Times* 2 Jan. 1994, late ed.: 12. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Likens Erdrich’s choral narration to narrative method in Faulkner’s

“A Rose for Emily.” Suggests that Erdrich purposefully suppressed details from some scenes in order to create suspense for future novels.

Chick, Nancy Leigh. *Becoming Flower: Gender and Culture in Contemporary Ethnic American Women’s Literatures*. Diss. U of Georgia. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1998. 9920012.

Examines how contemporary women authors “respond to and revise” the metaphor of the flower, which traditionally symbolizes “white femininity.” In a chapter about Erdrich’s quartet, defines Fleur Pillager as a trickster who “presents an alternative mode of becoming flower that looks back to indigenous American syncretism.”

Coe, Charyl Lynn. *Changes in Methods for Self-Identification as Exemplified by Characters in the Novels of Louise Erdrich*. Thesis. California State U, Fresno. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1997. 1386272.

Contends that the juxtaposition of Ojibwa and white cultures in Erdrich’s fiction highlights changes in Native ideology, which are manifested in the characters of Nanapush, Pauline, Marie, and Lipsha.

Cryer, Dan. “Chippewas Struggle with Fate and a Harsh World.” Rev. of *BP*. *Newsday* [New York] 27 Dec. 1993: 32. *Dow Jones Interactive*. Online. Dow Jones.⁵ 1 Apr. 2000.

Argues that Lipsha’s dedicated pursuit of Shawnee Ray gives *BP* “a sharper focus” than *Love Medicine*. Describes Lipsha as “part boy-man, part philosopher, part fool.”

Desmond, John F. “Catholicism in Contemporary American Fiction.” *America* 14 May 1994: 7-11.

Identifies Erdrich’s mysticism and simultaneous criticism of the Catholic Church. Explains the disappearance of both Christian and Chippewa religions in *BP* as the result of the tribe’s adoption of consumer culture.

Dumas, Rene Babich. Rev. of *BP* and Dorris’s *Paper Trail, Essays*. *Confrontation* 54-55 (1995): 33 8-39.

Celebrates Erdrich’s communal narrative voice, prose style, complex plot structure, and observations of Native American life.

Erdrich, Louise. Interview. “Indian Tales, and a Nickel for the Birds.” By Marianne Brace. *Independent* [London] 4 June 1994: 30. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Erdrich acknowledges the influence of Faulkner on her own writing and confirms the suspicion that she withholds details for later novels. She explains her own spiritual bonding with the land, a connection that has been historically compromised by colonization and, in Erdrich's view, by Indian gaming.

- Interview. "Lady Luck." By Lisa Garey. *Newsday* [New York] 16 Jan. 1994: 34. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Erdrich discusses literary influences and her avoidance of overt political issues in her writing. She admits that the source of several chapters for *BP*, written in only nine months, was excess material from the 1993 *Love Medicine* revision.

- Interview. "Writing with Love Medicine." By Paul Seesequasis. *Aboriginal Voices* 2.1 (1995): 7-9.

Erdrich considers the financial benefits of reservation casinos, now necessary after 1980s federal budget cuts. She argues that Fleur's land is sacrificed at the end of *BP* for the good of the tribe and not as a symbol of modernity prevailing over tradition.

- Furlan, Laura M. "The House We Have Always Lived In: Mothers, Magic, and Medicine in Contemporary Homing Plot Novels." Thesis. San Diego State U, 2000.

Views *BP* in terms of Lipsha's journey home, his relationship with his mother and his surrogate mothers, and his healing powers. Suggests that Lipsha is healed by his vision quest and his love for Shawnee Ray.

- Getlin, Josh. "A Voice No Longer Ignored." Rev. of *BP*. *Los Angeles Times* 13 Dec. 1993: E1+.

Emphasizes Erdrich's role in establishing modern Native American literature as a "flourishing genre." Praises *BP*'s lyrical qualities and insightful realism. Erdrich reveals to Getlin her concern with the increasing commercialism of the publishing industry, her disdain for the romanticizing of Native American cultures, and her ability to find humor amidst tragedy.

- Hafen, P. Jane. "Repositories for the Souls: Driving through the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." *Heritage of the Great Plains* 32.2 (1999): 53-64.

Argues that images of automobiles in Erdrich's fiction demonstrate "how Erdrich has taken a mainstream signifier and reinscribed it for

her own presentation of Ojibwa survival.” In other words, characters are able to combine traditional values with technological advances as they negotiate their own identities. In *BP*, Lipsha is associated with June’s Firebird, the bingo van—“a representation of the American Dream”—and, finally, the stolen car in which he remains at the end of the novel.

Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. “What If Your Mother Never Meant To?: The Novels of Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris.” *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. 115-57.

Examines the “mother without child” throughout Erdrich’s and Dorris’s novels. Argues that Erdrich’s female characters break the Pocahontas stereotype of Indian women. In *BP*, June and Fleur as mother figures represent both “‘tragic,’ irrecoverable loss and the ‘threat’ of survival and resistance.”

Holstrom, David. “Reservations about Latest Indian Novel.” Rev. of *BP*. *Christian Science Monitor* 11 Jan. 1994: 13.

Faults *BP* for lack of emotional interaction between Lipsha and Shawnee Ray. Notes overuse of melodrama and clichés but compliments “deftly woven” subplot structure for “revealing subtleties and mysteries of Indian ways.”

Houston, Pam. “Alive and Awake.” Rev. of *BP*. *Los Angeles Times Book Review* 6 Feb. 1994: 1+. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Although Erdrich’s most compelling characters are typically women, claims that Lipsha is the strongest element in *BP*, “her most exciting and satisfying book to date.”

Hower, Edward. “Magic Recaptured.” Rev. of *BP*. *Wall Street Journal* 4 Jan. 1994, eastern ed.: A8.

Finds strength of the novel in Lipsha’s character. Compares *BP*’s success to that of *Love Medicine*.

Hughes-Hallett, Lucy. “On Common Ground.” Rev. of *BP*. *Times* [London] 29 May 1994: n. pag. DJ. 1 Apr. 2000.

Contents that Lipsha’s narrative sections are the most lively: “he has the most lyrical lines, and he has all the jokes.”

Huntington, Lee. Rev. of *BP*. *Antioch Review* 52 (1994): 366.

Praises the novel’s “spiritual world” but finds the characterization of Lipsha to be unsympathetic.

Jacobs, Connie A. *Artificer and Bearer of the Tradition: Louise Erdrich's Mythopoetic Quartet from the North Dakota Plains*. Diss. Northern Illinois U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996. 9703749.

Focuses on Erdrich's commitment to community, storytelling, and the endurance of her people. Sees the character of Fleur Pillager, who is symbolic of traditional ways, as the underlying connection between these four novels.

Justice, Marjorie Ann. *Orality, Literacy, and the Electronic Age in Louise Erdrich's Fiction*. Thesis. Northeast Missouri State U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1995. 1378774.

Suggests that Erdrich's focus on oral tradition highlights the effects of literacy on this Chippewa community.

Kakutani, Michiko. "Reinvention of a Past Rich with Tribal Magic." Rev. of *BP*. *New York Times* 16 Jan. 1994, late ed.: C20.

Compares setting to Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. Calls the first half of *BP* "schematic and contrived"; the second, however, is imbued with usual Erdrich magic.

Kloppenborg, Michelle R. "The Face in the Slough: Lipsha's Quest for Identity in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *BP*." *European Review of Native American Studies* 11.1(1997): 27-34.

Traces Lipsha's "homing plot" through *Love Medicine* and *BP*, when his reconnection to community is complete as a result of a vision quest and receiving a skunk as a guardian spirit. Describes Lipsha as both a survivor and a trickster, not unlike Nanabozho from Chippewa lore.

Martin, Sandra. "A Powwow of a Novel that Jeers at Cultural Assumptions." Rev. of *BP*. *Globe and Mail* (London] 12 Mar. 1994: C19. DJ. 1 Apr. 2000.

Compares the novel's opening scene to that of a Hollywood western: "the camera pans across an empty prairie." Suggests that Lipsha's voice is more feminine than masculine.

Matchie, Tom. "Building on the Myth: Recovering Native American Culture in Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*." *American Indian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Contemporary Issues*. Ed. Dane Morrison. New York: Peter Lang, 1997. 299-312.

Surveys criticism of *BP* and explains the novel's themes and literary devices to a student audience. Likens Lipsha to Huck Finn because

he is "naive in his relationships, innocent of worldly affairs, and quintessentially humble."

Meredith, Howard. Rev. of *BP*. *World Literature Today* 68(1994): 614.

Likening Erdrich's style to a traditional dance, highlights the characters interrelationships in the novel. Relates Shawnee's butterfly tale to a traditional Chippewa trickster story.

Messud, Claire. "Redeeming the Tribe." Rev. of *BP*. *Times Literary Supplement* 17 June 1994: 23.

Names *BP* the "grimmiest" of the quartet but praises Erdrich's alluring prose style. Suggests that first-time Erdrich readers not begin with this novel. Equates Lipsha's quest for identity with the struggle to preserve Native culture.

Morace, Robert A. "From Sacred Hoops to Bingo Palaces: Louise Erdrich's Carnavalesque Fiction." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 36-66.

Views Erdrich's fiction in terms of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, with emphasis on elements of intertextuality, comedy, duality, and physicality. Claims *BP*, while highly intertextual and quietly political, is Erdrich's "least carnivalesque." In *BP*, the focus is not on crossing boundaries but on the boundaries themselves.

Padget, Martin. Rev. of *BP*. *Western American Literature* 30 (1995): 304-05.

Touts Erdrich's numerous "narrative voices," lyrical prose, and imagery. Sees Lipsha as a multifaceted character who speaks volumes for the survival of his culture.

Pasquaretta, Paul. "Sacred Chance: Gambling and the Contemporary Native American Indian Novel." *MELUS* 21.2 (1996): 21-33.

Discusses traditional gambling practices in relation to recent Native fiction. Briefly mentions Lipsha's quest for the van in *BP*.

Peterson, Nancy J. "Indi'n Humor and Trickster Justice in *The Bingo Palace*." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 161-81.

Using Kenneth Lincoln's *Indi'n Humor: Bicultural Play in Native America* (1993), suggests that Erdrich's use of humor in *BP* signifies an ability to emotionally survive a history of dispossession. Her "new kind of Indi'n humor" thrives in the postmodern world, and

her characters use it to attain a sense of justice. In *BP*, this justice comes in the form of bingo profits aiding the recovery of stolen lands.

- Purdy, John. "Against All Odds: Games of Chance in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 8-35.

Contends that Erdrich's novels, especially *BP*, are imbued with a "concern for the empowerment of Native nations." Proposes that the tetralogy can be viewed as "an exploration of the nature of chance," more specifically, as "employing (possibility) to one's advantage." Traces references to gambling (and luck) through *Love Medicine*, *Tracks*, and *BP*. Luck in *BP* is crucial to survival not only for Lipsha but for the entire Turtle Mountain Chippewa community.

- . "Betting on the Future: Gambling against Colonialism in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." *Native American Women in Literature and Culture*. Ed. Susan Castillo and Victor M. P. Da Rosa. Porto, Portugal: Fernando Pessoa UP, 1997. 37-56.

An earlier version of "Against All Odds."

- Rainwater, Catherine. *Dreams of Fiery Stars. The Transformations of Native American Fiction*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999.

Argues that "in their semiotic re-creation of the world, Native American artists are also 'reinventing' tribal people." In *BP*, Erdrich uses the trope of the snare to demonstrate how the reader is "caught . . . in a new frame of reference." Sees Lipsha as the "textual equivalent of the naive reader" because he is easily manipulated. Believes that Lipsha dies at the novel's end.

- . "Ethnic Signs in Erdrich's *Tracks* and *The Bingo Palace*." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 144-60.

Proposes that Erdrich's use of ethnic signs—visual signs in *BP*—is intended to challenge the Eurocentric, non-participative reading habits of her audience. Lipsha plays an important role in this scenario: he is like an inexperienced reader who is repeatedly trapped by more artful characters/writers.

- Rev. of *BP*. *New Yorker* 14 Mar. 1994: 95.

Disappointed with *BP*'s lack of action, calls novel a "hurry-up-and-wait installment." Encourages readers to instead select revised edition of *Love Medicine*.

Rev. of *BP*. *Publishers Weekly* 15 Nov. 1993: 72.

Suggests that Lipsha's struggle is realistic, but Lyman and Shawnee Ray are flatly characterized, and the plot is stunted by too many details.

Rolfe, Patricia. "Native American Wit and Wisdom." Rev. of *BP*. *Bulletin* 6 Sept. 1994: 96-97.

Admires the strength of *BP*'s characters and Erdrich's ability to combine humor and tragedy.

Rosenberg, Ruth. "Louise Erdrich." *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Novelists since World War II*. Ed. James R. Giles and Wanda H. Giles. Vol. 152. Detroit: Gale, 1995. 42-50.

Reveals that Lipsha's skunk story was based on an event that occurred when Erdrich was fourteen years old. Believes the 1993 revision of *Love Medicine* was necessary in order to connect *BP* to the series.

Ross, Patricia. Rev. of *BP*. *Library Journal* Jan. 1994: 159.

Celebrates *BP*'s comedy and emotional ending.

Rounds, Kate. "Back to Erdrich Country." Rev. of *BP*. *Ms. Magazine* Jan.-Feb. 1994: 72.

Praises Erdrich's prose style but desires "more dialogue and story."

Sarvé-Gorham, Kristan. "Games of Chance: Gambling and Land Tenure in *Tracks*, *Love Medicine*, and *The Bingo Palace*." *Western American Literature* 34 (1999): 277-300.

Contends that the gambling motif in Erdrich's fiction, taken from Ojibwa oral tradition, represents the contemporary debate surrounding Indian gaming in a way that empowers Native peoples over colonial aggression. In *BP*, Fleur, Lyman, and Lipsha are gamblers whose efforts ultimately result in the recovery of Indian lands, thus reversing the history of the frontier.

Scheick, William J. "Structures of Belief/Narrative Structures: Mojtabai's *Ordinary Time* and Erdrich's *BP*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 37 (1995): 363-75.

Because "form is not merely an ordering device" but is intertwined with belief structure, analyzes the narrative structures of *BP* and *Ordinary Time* and suggests their similarity. While Mojtabai's work reflects a Christian belief pattern, Erdrich's is based on Chippewa

circle symbolism. Claims that *BP*, like Erdrich's earlier works, consists of a series of fragmented episodes that "mysteriously inclines or circulates toward some remote completion or revelation," obscure to the reader and the characters. Lipsha's search for identity lacks a traditional plot structure but reflects the "tangled bloodlines" he must unravel. Although the episodes "never become a satisfying whole," Erdrich's technique may purposefully allude to a pattern inherent to her Native American heritage.

Sims-Brandom, Lisa. "Smoked Jerky vs. Red Pottage: Native American Tradition and Christian Theology in Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 21.2 (1995): 59-69.

Contents Lipsha is informed by Native American tradition via Fleur Pillager and Christianity via Gideon's Bible. Calls Lipsha a "compilation of several biblical characters." Incorrectly identifies Lipsha's relationship to Lyman as half-brother instead of nephew, thereby distorting a parallel to Jacob and Esau. Likens Lipsha to Moses because he too was abandoned in water by his mother. Other "binary oppositions" in the novel include "wealth/poverty, success/failure, and life/death."

Skow, John. "An Old Bear, Laughing." Rev. of *BP*. *Time* 7 Feb. 1994: 71.

Acknowledges Erdrich's gifts as a writer but faults *BP*'s structure as "all but aimless."

Smith, Jeanne Rosier. "Comic Liberators and Word-Healers: The Interwoven Trickster Narratives of Louise Erdrich." *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. 71-110.

Proposes that while Erdrich's work is essential to a discussion of modern trickster figures, her characters transcend the scope of traditional tricksters; Erdrich's tricksters are "central to the formation of identity, the creation of community, and the preservation of culture." In an analysis of *Love Medicine* and *Tracks*, points out that Erdrich does not use a single trickster figure in each novel but instead assigns trickster-like traits to several characters. As a result, the trickster is unrestrained, "questions rigid definitions and boundaries[,] and challenges cultural assumptions." Traces Fleur Pillager's trickster status through the quartet of novels; Fleur remains powerful even

though she never narrates her own story.

Erdrich's use of multiple narrators emphasizes community, provides a link to oral tradition, and contradicts stereotypes. Also, the number of narrators incrementally increases the number of audiences. The storytelling techniques Erdrich employs—sometimes characters' tales even conflict—provide a promise of survival for her Chippewa culture. Proposes that *BP*'s uncertain conclusion makes it the most trickster-like Erdrich novel. Lipsha, the predominant trickster, is an outcast in his own community. His uncle Lyman is also a trickster figure; his selfish business dealings counter communal thinking. The disputed land in *BP* becomes "the ultimate trickster." The struggle between "chance and design" is at the core of *BP*, and the tricksters' "disruption of pattern[s]" ultimately defines their own success.

- . "Comic Liberators and Word-Healers: The Interwoven Trickster Narratives of Louise Erdrich." *Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. 71-110. Rpt. in *Native-American Writers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea, 1998. 259-76.

Revised version of previous essay. Excludes section "Evolving Community, Evolving Novels: The Trickster's Communal Voices," in which Smith suggests the connection between Erdrich's multiple trickster narrators and the creation of community.

- Tanrisal, Meldan. "Mother and Child Relationships in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." *American Studies International* 35.3 (1997): 67-80.

Proposes that Erdrich's female characters mirror the matrilineal structure of Native cultures and thus give evidence to cultural continuity. Even when a mother is absent, adopted children and biological children are treated equally in Chippewa families. Suggests the conflict in *BP* occurs between mothers, mostly mixedblood women. Also, Erdrich's use of "psychological time" as opposed to "historical time" in her fiction is a means of identifying with Native storytelling tradition.

- Thornton, Lawrence. "Gambling with Their Heritage." Rev. of *BP*. *New York Times Book Review* 16 Jan. 1994: 7.

Praises Erdrich's ability to combine reality and spirituality in *BP*. Charges that Gerry Nanapush's late entry into novel is evidence of

an unnecessarily complicated plot.

Upchurch, Michael. "The Logistics of Love and Luck: The Final Volume in Louise Erdrich's North Dakota Quartet." Rev. of *BP*. *Chicago Tribune Books* 9 Jan. 1994, final ed.: 1. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Ranks the quartet's volumes: *Love Medicine*, *Tracks*, *BP*, and *The Beet Queen*. Finds the genealogy of *BP* confusing and unnecessarily crowded with secondary characters. Suggests that Erdrich should stick to writing short stories, the genre in which she is a master.

Van Dyke, Annette. "Of Vision Quests and Spiritual Guardians: Female Power in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 130-43.

Contends that through a "transformational," often sexual, power, Erdrich's female characters, especially Marie, Zelda, Lulu, and Fleur, counter stereotypes of Indian women as merely "good" or "bad." The transformation is rooted in the traditional vision quest and in the spiritual guardian—in this case, Misshepeshe, the water spirit man.

Velie, Alan. "Magical Realism and Ethnicity: The Fantastic in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." *Native American Women in Literature and Culture*. Ed. Susan Castillo and Victor M. P. Da Rosa. Porto, Portugal: Fernando Pessoa UP, 1997. 57-67.

Interprets Lipsha's vision quest, his relationship to Misshepeshe, and the novel's ending in terms of magical realism, or the deliberate combination of European and Indian world views.

Wallace, Karen Lynn. *Myth and Metaphor, Archetype and Individuation: A Study in the Work of Louise Erdrich*. Diss. U of California, Los Angeles. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1998. 9905556.

Places Erdrich's fiction within the context of American literature, proving that readers do not need an understanding of "uniquely Chippewa views" to appreciate her writing.

Tales of Burning Love (TBL)

Barton, Gay. *Pattern and Freedom in the North Dakota Novels of Louise Erdrich: Narrative Technique as Survival*. Diss. Baylor U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1999. 9938953.

Suggests that Erdrich's narrative patterns are derived from Ojibwa oral tradition and that the "meta-narrator" of the series is in fact a

trickster.

Beidler, Peter G. "Louise Erdrich." *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Native American Writers of the United States*. Ed. Kenneth M. Roemer. Vol. 175. Detroit: Gale, 1997. 84-100.

Uncovers the plot connections between *TBL* and *BP*. Proposes that *TBL* is a feminist novel because its women are always at the forefront.

Blair, Elizabeth. Rev. of *TBL*. *Western American Literature* 32 (1997): 90-91.

Charges *TBL*'s plot twists are disorienting. Questions whether Erdrich exerted too much effort connecting this novel to her earlier works.

Buchholz, Laurie Lynn. *The Search for Connectedness: Identity and Power in Louise Erdrich's Fiction*. Thesis. Mississippi State U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996. 1380553.

Focusing on identity, spirituality, and the "interconnectedness of all beings," argues that Erdrich's fiction transcends the category of Indian fiction and provides a universal appeal.

Childress, Mark. "A Gathering of Widows." Rev. of *TBL*. *New York Times Book Review* 12 May 1996: 10.

Applauds Erdrich's ability to integrate disjointed, Chaucer-like fragments into a compelling whole. Regrets that Jack is too frequently relegated to the background.

Curwen, Thomas. Rev. of *TBL*. *People* 27 May 1996: 38-39.

Classifies *TBL* as a collage of vignettes, each a noteworthy characterization of a bereaved wife.

Erdrich, Louise. Interview. "The Book Queen." By Dave Wood. *Star Tribune* [Minneapolis] 15 Apr. 1996: 1E. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Erdrich discusses Dorris's influence on the plot of *TBL*, her brief career as a construction worker (relived by Dot Adare), and her childhood in Wahpeton, North Dakota.

—. Interview. "Telling Their Story: For Louise Erdrich, the Native Americans of North Dakota and Minnesota Remain the Source of Her Imagination." By Dan Cryer. *Newsday* [New York] 15 May 1996: B04. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Erdrich discusses her debt to Isak Dinesen, on whose "Deluge at Dorderney" *TBL* is loosely based. She reveals that she will continue

to add novels to her tetralogy, the next narrated by *Tracks*'s Father Damien and set in an Ojibwa village during the 1800s.

Greenlaw, Lavinia. "Jack and the Five." Rev. of *TBL*. *Times Literary Supplement* 14 Feb. 1997: 21.

Compares *TBL*'s setting to Tobias Wolff's rural America and its confessional tales to Raymond Carver's intimate conversations between the sexes. Favors characters' dialogue over Erdrich's overt narration.

Hafen, P. Jane. "'Repositories for the Souls: Driving through the Fiction of Louise Erdrich.'" *Heritage of the Great Plains* 32.2 (1999): 53-64.

Argues that images of automobiles in Erdrich's fiction demonstrate "how Erdrich has taken a mainstream signifier and reinscribed it for her own presentation of Ojibwa survival." In other words, characters are able to combine traditional values with technological advances as they negotiate their own identities. The bulk of *TBL* is set in a red Ford Explorer, while Jack Mauser leaves his child in an idling Honda, which he then chases in a snowplow.

Hoffert, Barbara. Rev. of *TBL*. *Library Journal* 15 Apr. 1996: 121.

Argues that Erdrich's lush descriptions outweigh a clichéd plot.

Kim, Walter. "Women in Groups." Rev. of *TBL*. *New York* July 1996: 48-49.

Categorizes *TBL* as "warm emotional gravy thickened with mythic starch," complete with conspicuous themes, "unreal dialogue," and "morbid gags" from *Monty Python*.

Klinkenborg, Verlyn. "A Gulliver Shipwrecked on a Coast of Women." Rev. of *TBL*. *Los Angeles Times Book Review* 16 June 1996: 3. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Commends Erdrich's ability to connect her novels using reappearing characters. Describes *TBL* as "a more garrulous book" that "occupies a different space . . . within the same landscape as her other novels." Suggests *TBL* documents the characters' consuming need for individuality and independence.

Lee, Michael. "Erdrich's Dakota as Metaphor for American Culture." Rev. of *TBL*. *National Catholic Reporter* 24 May 1996: 21+.

Analyzes *TBL* in terms of its religious elements. Discusses the contrast between Jack Mauser and Gerry Nanapush; the former suppresses

his Ojibwa identity while the latter uses his politically. Compliments Erdrich's use of comedy.

Matchie, Thomas. "Louise Erdrich's 'Scarlet Letter': Literary Continuity in *TBL*." *North Dakota Quarterly* 63.4 (1996): 113-23.

Suggests that the five wives of *TBL* represent the five distinct semblances of Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, thus linking Erdrich to a powerful American literary tradition. Erdrich's use of romanticism, natural imagery, and religious motifs also connects her to Hawthorne. The lesbian relationship between two of Jack Mauser's ex-wives, Candice and Marlis, is described as a modern social commentary on *The Scarlet Letter*; instead of hatred between rivals, love is what arises.

Max, D. T. Rev. of *TBL*. *Harper's Bazaar* Apr. 1996:116. LN. 16 July 1998.

Confirms Erdrich's dominant place in Native American fiction. *TBL*, a best-selling novel of woman-bonding, is deemed far inferior to *Love Medicine*.

Mesic, Penelope. "Truly, Sadly, Deeply: Louise Erdrich Looks at Love in All Its Variety." Rev. of *TBL*. *Chicago Tribune Books* 21 Apr. 1996: 1. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Suggests that some scenes are unbelievable, though Erdrich's keen observation of people makes this novel a success overall.

Morace, Robert A. "From Sacred Hoops to Bingo Palaces: Louise Erdrich's Carnavalesque Fiction." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 36-66.

Compared to *BP*, *TBL* is comparatively her "most physical and sensuously gratifying novel." In addition to its intertextuality, *TBL* combines numerous "extremes and excesses." Its characters are cartoon-like and double in nature. *TBL* relies upon a collective voice, created by a cast of overly powerful women.

Rev. of *TBL*. *Publishers Weekly* 19 Feb. 1996: 202.

Proposes that *TBL*'s commercial success boosts Erdrich's reputation but at the expense of the mysticism for which she is known. Commends the novel's vivid characterization, realistic dialogue, and unexpected plot twists.

Rev. of *TBL*. *Virginia Quarterly Review* 72.4 (1996): 131.

Describes Jack Mauser's existence as "Dantean" and Erdrich's fictional world as "Dickensian."

Rifkind, Donna. "Stories for a Stormy Night." Rev. of *TBL* and *Martin Dressier*, by Steven Millhauser. *Wall Street Journal* 24 Apr. 1996, eastern ed.: A12.

Both Erdrich and Millhauser emphasize the need for storytelling. *TBL* differs from Erdrich's other works in terms of setting (no longer the reservation) and the absence of mysticism.

Robinson, Roxana. "Married to a Mob." Rev. of *TBL*. *Washington Post* 21 Apr. 1996: X03. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Classifies *TBL* as a successful "Gothic comedy" in which each event propels the next, disregarding a reader's sympathy for its characters.

Rolfe, Patricia. "Jack of Hearts Loses Five-Card Trick." Rev. of *TBL*. *Bulletin* 1 July 1997: 74-75.

Although many of *TBL*'s details are irrelevant to the story, Erdrich's literary command ranks her with authors Richard Ford, John Updike, and John Cheever.

Shechner, Mark. "Until the Music Stops: Women Novelists in a Post-Feminist Age." *Salmagundi* 113 (1997): 220-38.

In an attempt to illustrate the thematic differences between male and female writers, compares three contemporary novels by women: *TBL*, E. Annie Proulx's *Accordion Crimes*, and Joanna Scott's *The Manikin*. Calls *TBL* a "meandering and episodic" comedy that allows Erdrich to escape from her role as successful Native American author and to write for the sake of writing. All three novels are described as "post-feminist" because they fail to emphasize political gender issues.

Siegel, Lee. "De Sade's Daughters." Rev. of *TBL*. *Atlantic Monthly* Feb. 1997: 97-102.

Cites *TBL* as an example of the new genre of women's erotic fiction. The emergence of this genre is a social reaction to the traditional submissive female in men's writing. Discusses Jack Mauser's failure to consummate his marriage on his first wedding night, an event that leads to June Morrissey's death. By the novel's end, Jack learns to respect women and concerns himself with pleasing them.

Smith, Jeanne R. Rev. of *TBL*. *MELUS* 23.1 (1998): 200-02.

Even though *TBL* appeals to a larger audience and contains less "Na-

tive American subject matter” than Erdrich’s previous works, contends that its use of storytelling as a “Native art form” places the novel within the genre of American Indian literature. Argues that Erdrich makes “some of her most comic feminist statements yet” in this novel.

Spring, Kit. “Five Weddings, Three Divorces, Two Lesbians and a Funeral.” Rev. of *TBL*. *Observer* [London] 5 Jan. 1997: 15.

Commends Erdrich’s ability to create credible male and female characters and strong visual imagery.

Stephenson, Anne. “Author Mixes, Matches Vignettes to Arrive at Novel.” *Arizona Republic* 13 May 1996, final ed.: Cl. *Pro Quest*. Online. Bell Howell.⁶ 20 June 2000.

Reveals the origin of Jack Mauser’s character and claims that in creating the five women, Erdrich “gave pieces of herself to each one.”

Stokes, Karah. “What about the Sweetheart?: The ‘Different Shape’ of Anishinabe Two Sisters Stories in Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* and *Tales of Burning Love*.” *MELUS* 24.2 (1999): 89-105.

Demonstrates how Erdrich’s female characters—specifically Dot and Eleanor in *TBL*—mirror two contrasting sisters, Oshkikwe and Matchikewis, from Ojibwa mythology. Dot and Eleanor, two of Jack Mauser’s wives, compete and cooperate with one another as they narrate equal parts of the novel.

Winders, Glenda. “Wive’s Tales Burning Love Blaze Separate Paths to Single Story.” Rev. of *TBL*. *San Diego Union-Tribune Night and Day* 4 Apr. 1996: 58. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Highlights Erdrich’s characterization of the landscape in *TBL*, a humorous study of everyday life.

The Antelope Wife (AW)

Beidler, Peter G. Rev. of *AW*. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23.1 (1999): 219-21.

Relates *AW* to Erdrich’s earlier novels in terms of common themes (love, family, tradition) and techniques (extended metaphors, multiple story lines). Believes *AW*’s main philosophical inquiry—“Who is beading us?”—transcends the explorations of her previous works.

Callen, Kate. “Stubborn Love.” Rev. of *AW*. *San Diego Union-Tribune*

Books 5 Apr. 1998: 8.

Celebrates novel's surrealism and prose style. Suggests that with *AW* Erdrich anticipated Dorris's suicide.

Churnin, Nancy. "Tales Span Generations—With a Few Angry Gaps." Rev. of *AW*. *Dallas Morning News* 10 May 1998: 9J. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Blames the novel's failure on its circularity, numerous narrators, and obvious parallel to Erdrich's life.

Cryer, Dan. "Native Myths Deepen Fine Human Portraits." Rev. of *AW*. *Newsday* [New York] 31 Mar. 1998: B02. LN. 18 July 1998.

Identifies love and survival as the two themes of this lyrical novel. Appreciates Erdrich's juxtaposition of comedy with dismal realism but regards the dog narrator, *Almost Soup*, as too unbelievable. Finds the familial relationships confusing.

Curwen, Thomas. "Love Hurts." Rev. of *AW*. *Los Angeles Times Book Review* 17 May 1998: 9. LN. 18 July 1998.

Notes that *AW* is Erdrich's first novel not dedicated to her husband. The poetic passion of this novel outweighs its structural problems.

De Lint, Charles. Rev. of *AW*. *Fantasy and Science Fiction* 95.3 (1998): 48-49.

Commends Erdrich's mixture of contemporary and traditional lifeways in *AW*. Believes this novel succeeds in removing "the false romance and over-wrought sentiment" concerning Native peoples.

Erdrich, Louise. Interview. "Erdrich Talks about Her First Novel since Husband's Suicide." *CNN Interactive* (30 Mar. 1998): n. pag. Online. Internet. 2 June 1998. Available FTP: cnn.com/books/news/9803/30/louise.erdrich.ap/.

Erdrich proclaims that *AW* was written prior to Dorris's death. Before publication, he had reviewed the sections about Richard Whiteheart Beads, the character whose fate so closely resembles his own. Erdrich later tried but was unable to remove the suicide from the novel.

Frucht, Abby. "The Silent Center: Louise Erdrich's Tale of Fate and Family Merges the Everyday and the Mythical." Rev. of *AW*. *Boston Globe* 29 Mar. 1998: G1. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Defines Sweetheart Calico's position in *AW* as the "fulcrum" meant

to keep the others balanced; however, this technique fails as she remains merely a silent character in a complicated novel.

Goldberg, Carole. "Balancing the World in the Way of the Ojibwa." Rev. of *AW*. *Hartford Courant* 15 Mar. 1998: G3. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Calls Erdrich's "one of the most original voices in contemporary American fiction." Believes *AW*'s success is due to Erdrich's vivid characterizations of both men and women.

Hoffert, Barbara. Rev. of *AW*. *Library Journal* 15 Mar. 1998: 92.

Proposes that the relationship between families in *AW* is representative of the historical relations between the white and Indian races. Erdrich exhibits her usual lyricism in *AW*.

Jackson, Marni. "A Swirl of Stories: Louise Erdrich Uses a Rough Mythic Magic in This Tale." Rev. of *AW*. *Ottawa Citizen* 24 May 1998: ES. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

The confusing fragments of the narrative combine into "a crazy sort of beauty." Claims that in writing *AW* Erdrich predicted her husband's suicide.

Kakutani, Michiko. "Myths of Redemption amid a Legacy of Loss." Rev. of *AW*. *New York Times* 24 Mar. 1998: C18.

Argues the tragic parallel to Erdrich's life is insignificant. Praises *AW* as Erdrich's best novel thus far, citing its emotional depth and masterful storytelling.

Martin, Claire. "*Antelope Wife* Seamlessly Traverses Four Generations." Rev. of *AW*. *Denver Post* 10 May 1998: E04. LN. 18 July 1998.

Suggests a parallel between the dogs' and humans' family histories in the novel. Advises readers to slowly delight in *AW*'s dream-like consistency.

McCay, Mary A. "Home on the Range: Louise Erdrich Traces Strands and Designs in Family, History." Rev. of *AW*. *Times-Picayune* [New Orleans] 24 May 1998: D7. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Characterizes *AW* as a "collage" of tradition and modernity that is in keeping with Erdrich's previous novels.

McGillis, Ian. "The American Indian Experience in Rich Variety." Rev. of *AW*. *Gazette* [Montreal] 9 May 1998: J3. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Calls the novel's opening scene "as arresting as any in recent fic-

tion.” Finds the story and characters captivating. Discounts any attempt to draw autobiographical comparisons between the author and the novel.

Meredith, Howard. Rev. of AW. *World Literature Today* 74 (2000): 214-15.

Points to Erdrich’s use of Ojibwa language as problematic, for which of many dialects she uses is unclear.

Milofsky, David. “Mysticism of ‘Wife Chokes Plot.’” Rev. of AW. *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver] 12 Apr. 1998: 2E. LN. 18 July 1998.

Commends the opening scenes of AW in which Erdrich describes Scranton Roy’s ability to breastfeed a kidnapped child. The magical realism of the remainder of the novel overpowers this story.

Ott, Bill. “Upfront: Advance Reviews.” Rev. of AW. *Booklist* 1 Mar. 1998: 1044.

Warns that AW’s multiple narrators and circular plot maybe too difficult for some readers, but confirms the novel is worth the effort.

Packard, Wingate. “Strong Parts Don’t Add up in New Erdrich Novel.” Rev. of AW. *Seattle Times* 14 June 1998: M2. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Speculates that while certain scenes are captivating enough to stand alone as short stories (Scranton Roy’s tale, the wedding scene, and the blitzkuchen story), the narrative is too weak to connect them into a coherent novel.

Panofsky, Ruth. “Erdrich Delivers a Dark and Tender Tribute.” Rev. of AW. *Globe and Mail* [London] 4 Apr. 1998: D15. DJ. 1 Apr. 2000.

Claims that the novel’s focus on “the pain of day-to-day living” is its greatest strength.

Peterson, V. R. Rev. of AW. *People Weekly* 13 Apr. 1998: 31.

Accepts the novel’s premise that humans and antelope are related. Calls attention to Erdrich’s mingling of past and present to create “a captivating jigsaw puzzle.”

Postlethwaite, Diana. “A Web of Beadwork.” Rev. of AW. *New York Times Book Review* 12 Apr. 1998: 6.

Discusses the central metaphors of AW: beadwork and food. The novel’s power derives from its underlying existential question: “Who is beading us?”

Rev. of *AW*. *New Yorker* 6 July 1998: 73.

Describes Erdrich's voice as "smoky, resonant" and claims that sporadic glitches in the structure of *AW* do not detract from its strength.

Riley, Jason L. "Bookmarks." Rev. of *AW*. *Wall Street Journal*, 20 Mar. 1998, eastern ed.: W7.

Compares *AW*'s themes and mysticism to those of *Love Medicine*. Charges that numerous narrators sound too similar to be effective. Believes excessive imagery obstructs the plot and that characters, especially males, are underdeveloped.

Shechner, Mark. "*The Antelope Wife*, Erdrich's Indian *X-Files*." Rev. of *AW*. *Buffalo News* 24 May 1998: 6E. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Suggests that *AW*'s incongruous structure is merely a disguise for the author's nearly-confessional grief over her husband's suicide.

Steinberg, Sybil, and Jonathan Bing. Rev. of *AW*. *Publishers Weekly* 9 Feb. 1998: 72.

Highlight the sensual and comical aspects of this "beautifully articulated tale." Cite the novel's complicated plot as problematic.

Stone, Brad. "Scenes from a Marriage." Rev. of *AW*. *Newsweek* 23 Mar. 1998: 69.

The novel is consistent with the themes and lyricism for which Erdrich is famous. In an interview, the author herself addresses the similarities between her own tragedy and the plot of *AW*.

Todd, Tamsin. "All Strung Out." Rev. of *AW*. *Washington Post* 17 May 1998: X11. LN. 18 July 1998.

Although the novel as a whole creates a lasting impression, the detailed vignettes alone are uninteresting. Praises the scenes in which Erdrich blends traditional Native thought with modern urban life.

Warren, Colleen Kelly. "Author Mixes Farce, Sorrow in *Antelope Wife*." Rev. of *AW*. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 7 Apr. 1998: D3. LN. 14 Aug. 1998.

Likens *Almost Soup*'s narration to "Jesse Jackson on an oratorical roll." Examines the parallel between the novel's twins and the dual identities of modern American Indians.

Zlogar, Laura W. "Louise Erdrich's Latest Up to Expectations." Rev. of *AW*. *Star Tribune* [Minneapolis] 12 Apr. 1998: 16F. LN. 18 July 1998.

Compliments Erdrich's storytelling skills, prose style, and command of Midwestern setting.

NOTES

- ¹ In order to develop stronger plot connections to *BP*, Erdrich revised and added four new chapters to *Love Medicine*, republished in 1993.
- ² As Beidler and Barton point out, one reference in *AW* to "a Pillager woman" (35) is the only connection to Erdrich's other novels.
- ³ Three essential volumes recently published are Chavkin's *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* (1999), Beidler and Barton's *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* (1999), and Stookey's *Louise Erdrich: A Critical Companion* (1999). Chavkin's collection contains critical essays pertinent to the study of Erdrich. Beidler and Barton's book is an excellent resource for reading all six novels, giving geographical, genealogical, and chronological information in addition to extensive character descriptions. Part of the Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers series, Stookey's work provides useful biographical information and a discussion of characters and themes in each of Erdrich's novels. A fourth volume, Scott's *The Gamefulness of American Postmodernism: John Barth and Louise Erdrich* (2000), was not yet available at the time of this writing.
- ⁴ Subsequent references to the database Lexis-Nexis *Academic Universe* appear as LN.
- ⁵ I refer to *Dow Jones Interactive* as DJ.
- ⁶ References to *Pro Quest* appear as PQ.

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(RE)NAMING ME

Dad drove me to this place of names and left me.
He's been driving his Indian family to these places all of my life.

His white face, red with pain,
sometimes happy, camera in hand, taking pictures of names.

These names are quietly
killing me.
Seneca County.
Cayuga license plate.
Take a right on Cheyenne.

Here the voices hide behind a reconstructed landscape,
sunk in the swamp
 drained long ago
 by a people who named themselves
pioneers.
A people crazy
crazier
than the god they so love

crazy in love with love, or hate, depending on your point of view

I think I'll build my own world of names:

*I'll drive the jeep whitey with cold hands.
I'll live in cracker hills.*

Books mimic—

A place of paper where we appear in name only.

We exist pre-everything.

Toledo. “Established in 1837.”

Just as in the bible, out of nothing came America.

They

white gods

wrought existence out of chaos.

My name is now Indian for chaos in every Native language.

It is . A litany, a song, names, naming, acts insanity and science cannot account for. Love and religion become ways of labeling, naming, and they’re not enough, not enough . . .

Someone, tell me my name. Maybe its Hitchhiker. Or Longhair.

Maybe every name I’ve been called is an Indian name, printed on the license plate of America’s car, changing in every state, merely an American

Nightmare, easily dissipated.

Erika T. Wurth

Calls for Submissions

The Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association—American Culture Association

March 7-11, 2001
Sheraton Oldtown Hotel
Albuquerque, NM

Native American Studies is a growing, interdisciplinary area, encompassing all aspects of Native American Indian cultures, including, but not limited to, literature, history, anthropology, archaeology, religion, philosophy, music, and theatre. The Native Studies section of The Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association - American Culture Association invites proposals for papers and panels from all disciplines of Native Studies for its annual conference to be held March 7-11, 2001 at the Sheraton Oldtown Hotel in Albuquerque, NM.

Last year there were eleven Native Studies panels: "Native Iconographies: Cultural Encounters over Graphic Art, Architecture, and Archaeology"; "Spirits and Questions of Place"; "The Cultural Politics of Identity"; "Place, Hypertext, and Indian Education"; "The Fiction of Louis Owens"; "Mapping and Mediating Borders"; "Native American Studies: On the Path Home"; "The Media and the Messages"; "Mediating the Sacred in Native Literature"; "Allotment, Identity, and Race Relations in

Indian Territory”; and “American Indians Past and Present: Applications from Ethnohistory.” Additionally, Native Studies papers were read in other sections such as those on Southwestern American Literature, Race and the Southwest, and Captivity Narratives. Duane Niatum, internationally-known Klallam poet, gave a wonderful poetry reading for our special event. This year looks quite promising as well.

The meeting in Albuquerque draws a wonderful group of scholars. We are very lucky to again be able to use the Sheraton, an elegant Southwestern hotel located within walking distance of Albuquerque’s Historic Old Town, containing over two hundred shops, restaurants, art galleries, the Albuquerque Museum and New Mexico Museum of Natural History.

Please send abstracts of around 200 words in length by 1 November 2000 to:

kgr@mcc.cc.tx.us

or to:

Kimberly Roppolo
McLennan Community College
Liberal Arts Division
1400 College Drive
Waco TX 76708
phone 254-299-8000, FAX 254-299-8935.

National Association of Native American Studies National Conference

February 12-17, 2001
Houston, Texas

Abstracts, not to exceed two pages, should be submitted that relate to any aspect of the Native American experience. Subjects may include but are not limited to literature, demographics, history, politics, economics, education, health care, fine arts, religion, social sciences, business and many other subjects. Please indicate the time required for presentation of your paper (25 minutes/45 minutes).

Abstracts with home and school/agency address must be postmarked by November 17, 2000.

Send abstracts to:
Dr. Lemuel Berry, Jr.
Executive Director, NANAS
212 Rader Hall
Morehead State University
Morehead, KY 40351
Telephone: (606) 783-2650 Fax: (606) 783-5046
Web site: www.NAAAS.org

22nd American Indian Workshop

April 26-28, 2001
Universite Michel de Montaigne

Bordeaux, most widely known for its red wine, also has a number of connections with the "red man." Montaigne, for example, wrote his *Essais* (notably featuring a Tupinamba cannibal) there and was mayor of the city; Father Lafitau was born and died in Bordeaux. In recognition of this tradition, but also of the fact that French-Indian relationships were not only intellectual or spiritual, the main theme of the 22nd American Indian Workshop will be Furs, Faith, and the French: Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters in North America. This theme invites papers on economic (material), religious (spiritual), and intellectual relations and their reflection in literature and art, with an emphasis on (but not restricted to) the French. Sessions on "Father Joseph-Francois Lafitau and the American Indians" and on "Missionaries in Native American/Canadian Literature" have already been proposed. Proposals of further sessions and of individual papers (30 minutes) are herewith invited.

In addition, there will be the usual session(s) with reports (20 minutes) on "Current Research," for which individual papers may also be proposed. All proposals should be submitted by 30 November 2000.

For submissions and further information, contact:
Bernadette Rigal Cellard,
U. F. R. des Pays Anglophones,
Universite Michel de Montaigne
Bordeaux III, F-33607
Pessac Cedex, France.
E-mail: brigal@montaigne.u-bordeaux.fr.

Correction

We regret that, in a review in the previous issue of *SAIL*, we incorrectly quoted a passage from William Sander's *The Ballad of Billy Badass and the Rose of Turkestan*. The correct passage follows:

The story begins as Billy, trying to recover from his first peyote meeting, finds himself facing a bluejay who looks at him and remarks, "*Siyo, sgilisi, gado haduhne?*" Naturally startled, even through his hangover, Billy finally comes to grips with the idea that his Grandfather Ninekiller, five years dead, has occupied the body of the bird to talk with him.

Reviews

Always a People: Oral Histories of Contemporary Woodland Indians Collected by Rita Kohn and W. Lynwood Montell; Foreword by Michael and Linda Shinkle; Preface and Acknowledgments by Rita Kohn and W. Lyn wood Montell; Introduction by R. Dave Edmunds; Portraits by Evelyn J. Ritter; Afterword by Project Consultant Michelle Mannering. Indiana University Press, 1997. ISBN: 0253332982. 289 pages.

Always a People is a collection of interviews from forty contemporary Woodlands elders and tradition bearers who, according to Kohn and Montell, represent 11 Woodlands tribal nations. Though Kohn and Montell are not Native people themselves, this project did receive the support of the now-defunct Minnetrista Council for Great Lakes Native American Studies, the Museums at Prophetstown Project and the Prophetstown Council for the Preservation of Great Lakes Native Americans. The context these organizations provide for this collection of stories is significant. The Minnetrista Council was founded in 1991 by Raymond O. White Jr. (Principal Chief of the Miami Nation of Indians of the State of Indiana until his death on March 3, 1994), Nick Clark (a Prairie Band Potawatomi tradition bearer who was director of the Minnetrista Council and is the Executive Director for Museums at Prophetstown), and Michael and Linda Shinkle (longtime financial and spiritual allies of both the Minnetrista and the Prophetstown Councils). At first only the Miamis of Indiana and Oklahoma were formally allied

with the Council, but by 1994 all of the tribal nations that had once lived in Indiana plus other Great Lakes Nations, a total of 23 tribes, were members of the Council. With the support of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, these allied tribal nations began the Museums at Prophetstown project in 1995, which led to the formation of the Prophetstown Council (currently with 24 member nations). The result of this work—a resurgence of old alliances and of Woodlands language and cultural traditions—is reflected in the voices we hear in *Always a People*. The stories in *Always a People* are really narrativized responses to interviews held by Kohn and Montell over a period of three years (1992-1995). Nearly all the interviews were recorded on audiotape, and sometimes videotape, and all tapes were returned to the participants after the publication of the book. Tapes were “transcribed verbatim” minus the interview questions; each transcript was “sent to the narrator with a request for corrections, additions, and deletions,” and these “corrected” versions were forwarded back to the narrator for final approval (xiv). Although the description of their methodology seems sound, some of these stories have an odd feel to them since the reader isn’t privy to the interview questions that prompted the stories. This sort of a contextualizing glitch is, of course, methodologically accounted for in the “final approval” provided by individual participants but, nonetheless, is responsible for the oddness, as well as the seeming lack of narrative focus, in many of the stories.

In their preface to the collection, Kohn and Montell describe their methodology, as well as the difficulties they encountered in making this book, both the logistical problems inherent in contacting such a large group of people for interviews and follow-up, as well as the lack of outside funding to support collection of the interviews. They cite the support of Woodlands people themselves as the reason those difficulties were overcome; for example, Don Greenfeather (Tribal Chair, Loyal Shawnee of Oklahoma) told them: “Many things, many people will try to stop you from accomplishing this task, but you must not allow anything or anyone to deter you. You must push forward” (xvi). And they credit Woodland leaders like Ray White for the convictions that informed their work. They write that:

The central issue of *Always a People* deals with uncovering and making public the vibrancy of the Woodland People as a distinctive, related, cohesive, Native American culture with not only an ancient and important heritage but also an equally significant tenacity to

endure. . . . We set out on a journey to make a book that would honor twentieth-century Woodland People. It turns out that it is they who honor us with their words, their friendship, their example. For this we say "Megwitch," thank you. (xvi)

And Kohn and Montell have shown their thanks by donating profits from sales of the book to the Woodlands Nation Scholarship, administered through the Indiana University Foundation. Further, because Kohn and Montell "wanted these oral histories to be accessible to general readers who might be unfamiliar with Woodland history, culture, tradition and geography," historian David Edmunds provides some general background in his introduction to the volume entitled "'Paint Me As Who I Am': Woodland People at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century" (xv). Edmunds essay begins with a very brief sketch of the region's "pre-Columbian" past and moves on to a short description of the region's early contact character—the alliance of Woodland nations with the French against the Iroquois, the Dutch, and the British, and the trade relationships and intermarriage that created the metis culture that characterizes these tribal nations. Edmunds then moves into a series of brief historical sketches (1-3 pages each) of the major tribal nations of the region and their varying alliances, covering the Peorias, the Miamis (Indiana and Oklahoma), the Pokagon, Prairie and Citizen bands of Potawatoin is, the Delawares (Lenapes), the Absentee, Loyal and Eastern bands of Shawnees, the Sauks and Foxes (Mesquakies), the Lac du Flambeau band of Lake Superior Chippewas, the Ottawas, the Winnebagos (Ho-Chunks), and the Oneidas. Each of these sketches is as good a historical outline as one would expect in such a small space.

Edmunds moves from broad historical strokes back to the specific people in the volume, writing that though "being a Winnebago is different from being a Miami," there are, displayed in these collected narratives, "certain shared patterns of experience" that construct the shared consciousness of Woodland peoples (20). Edmunds delineates six kinds of shared experiences: 1) "almost all of the individuals featured in this volume are the products of a rural upbringing" in reservation, non-reservation and farming communities (20); 2) almost all "are of mixed ancestry," both tribal and non-tribal, though "such a heritage does not make them 'less Indian'" (21-22); 3) all "share a deep and abiding commitment to their families" and to the "extended kinship ties" that are often seen as unimportant by non-Indians (22); 4) all "come from tribal communities that have overcome almost insurmountable difficulties, but that persisted"

and “maintained a sense of cohesion that has triumphed” over “geographic dispersions” and “extended acculturation” (22); 5) relatively few are fluent in the native language of their people but almost all hold some proficiency in that language and “all would agree that the retention or resurrection of tribal languages is a key factor in maintaining tribal communities” (23); and, 6) all have “tenaciously clung to their sense of community” through tribal histories, stories, traditions and ceremonies and by rearticulating what it means to “be Winnebago” or to “be Miami” by incorporating new traditions and stories as well. Edmunds ends his essay with the story that is the inspiration for its title—Philip Alexis’s (Pokagon band Potawatomi, Executive Director, Confederated Historic Tribes, Inc.) caveat to portrait artist Evelyn Ritter: “you can paint me under one condition, that you don’t paint me as a 1700 or 1800 Indian. You have to paint me as I am. This is who I am. I am Phil Alexis” (27, 34). Overall, Edmunds’ history emphasizes the connections between the past and the present of the Woodland peoples who speak in this collection.

It would be impossible for me to summarize adequately the stories in this volume. Participants speak of everything from boarding school humiliations and racist name-calls to their own pride in belonging to a tribal nation, their own work to get Woodland nations recognized, and beyond. Many, like Floyd Leonard (Chief, Miami Tribe of Oklahoma), speak of the importance of education, even a “white” education, to the survival of tribal nations, advising that children “learn all they can learn to be able to further the cause of the Indian in the big world outside” (144). Lora Siders (Elder, Miami Nation of Indians of Indiana) echoes Leonard’s thoughts: “I want us to be educated in both ways . . . the Indian education . . . and the white

What I can tell you about the narratives in this collection is how they affected this reviewer: when I received this book in the mail, I cried. A mixedblood descendant of the Indiana Miamis, I grew up in the fertile farmlands of the Wabash River Valley in north-central Indiana. In fourth grade, during the “Indiana History” section of our curriculum, I brought in pictures of Frances Slocum (Maconaquah) and told the story of how the Mississinewa Reservoir (a scant 15 miles from my elementary school) had covered up her real grave along with lands that belonged to the Miamis. In eight grade, we visited the battle sites where the Miami Confederacy and, later, Tecumseh’s alliance of tribal nations had fought for our homelands. When I left home I discovered that not only did people in other parts of the country not know that the Miami nation existed, they also didn’t recognize contemporary Woodlands people as “real Indians.”

America's memory is short, and the Miami confederation of tribes was significant in the 1790s, not the 1890s. Lacking the mythic status of the Lakotas, the seeming spiritual availability of the tribes of the Southwest, and the apocryphal significance of the Cherokee, the "lesser known" Woodlands tribes that I was familiar with—Miamis, Potawatomis, Lenapes, Delawares, Shawnees, Winnebagos and Peorias—were (and often still are) seen as either completely assimilated or long-conquered in the American imagination. So when I looked at a book with the faces of people I recognized on the cover and that contained even *some* representation of the wisdom of those elders and tradition, I was overwhelmed.

Always a People is not a perfect book; it is, however, an opening and a reminder, a piece of evidence that points to the continued existence of Woodlands nations and to the continued survival of Woodlands cultures. As Lora Siders puts it: "We've changed some. It's been a necessity. But basically, we're still the same" (193). For anyone who ever wondered what happened to those tribal nations who defeated Arthur St. Clair in 1791 or who so bravely faced William Henry Harrison in 1811, this book will give you a glimpse of the nations who are returning to Prophetstown today and who have been, despite proclamations to the contrary, always a people.

Malea Powell

Postindian Conversations by Gerald Vizenor and A Robert Lee. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999. ISBN 0-8032-4666-8. 189 pages.

Despite his brilliance at using literary forms and written language in ways that both renew those forms and point readers past static words, mixedblood Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor knows he has an "audience problem." "I face an unusual problem here," he told Kimberly Blaeser in 1987. "I'm working in a kind of literature . . . that doesn't exist. . . . The problem for me is that I have to educate an audience to understand what I am doing so I can do it." While it could be argued that many readers have caught up with Vizenor over the thirteen years since he made those remarks, *Postindian Conversations*, a compilation of focused new interviews conducted by A. Robert Lee, will contribute much

to our understanding of Vizenor's life, ideas, and individual works.

Bearing credit for authorship by both Lee and Vizenor, the book is divided by topic into eleven chapters. Lee's stylized introduction, while offering a rapid-fire summary of Vizenor's works and themes, unfortunately reveals little about the process the two men went through in making the book. The exchanges, Lee writes, were first taped at Berkeley, then repeatedly "reworked in locales that add Hong Kong, Macau, Minnesota, and South Dakota to those of California, Kent, and Tokyo." But what was reworked by whom, and how did these interviews come to their final form? What hand, or final say, did Vizenor have in any editing that might have been done? How spontaneous and how "reworked" are these "conversations"? Lee also omits any description of how the project was conceived and initiated, or how he came to know and work so closely with Vizenor. Perhaps many readers will be unconcerned with these questions, since the result of the collaboration is an entertaining, fresh view into Vizenor's world.

Most previously published interviews with Vizenor range rapidly across his life, works, themes, and methods. But this extended format obviously allows Lee and Vizenor to engage these topics in depth. In the lengthy first chapter, "Postindian Memories," Vizenor meditates on the nature and power of memory, story, chance and choice as he recalls scenes from his life. Before discussing his childhood with his mother, father, stepfather and other close relatives, he situates his memories in the realm of "survivance," chance, and the "visual sense of presence" that he deems necessary to outwit tedious scenes of tragedy and "victimry." Many of the details of his father's violent murder when Vizenor was only two, and of his volatile childhood in foster care, have been sketched previously in his *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors* (1990). As in that text, Vizenor here weaves an intricate theory of memory, humor, story, and identity into the telling. "I want much more from my memories than victimry," he states. "Survivance stories honor the humor and tragic wisdom of the situation, not the market value of victimry" (36).

GV: We are postindian storiers at the curtains of that stubborn simulation of the *indian* as savage, and the *indian* as a pure curative tradition. The *Indian* is a simulation, an invention, and the name could be the last grand prize at a casino.

ARL: Could we return to the idea that fear is not your life?

GV: Listen: Dread, panic, and horror are the greatest teasers, and

tragic wisdom is our best chance in a dangerous world. I have never lived by fear, because fear is not a life. My life, in a sense, has been a chance to outwit the panic teasers at least in stories. I was abused as a child but not by physical violence. Not to live in the fear of violence is a chance, a chance to trust people in the ordinary sense of human confidence. I live by trust, not fear, and took the chance to trust people. . . . Fears are not my life, and neither are simulations, *indian* or otherwise. (21-22)

The initial chapter also covers Vizenor's recollections of military service and literary inspirations in Japan, his years as a college student in New York and Minneapolis, and his pre-academic careers in urban Indian advocacy and magazine and newspaper journalism.

As we might expect, Vizenor resists a linear procession of literal detail in his answers; the "stoner" is forever reimagining his own story, recasting memories and histories into new turns. His past is a place to adventure in search of scenes that take him, ironies that delight, and chance encounters that ignite new metaphors. Lee deftly moves with Vizenor's flights, never forcing the conversation into neat procession, but often pulling Vizenor back to an earlier thread. The opening section concludes with stories of Vizenor's early academic life and his 1983 retreat from the "backbiters" and "destructive identity politics" in one Native studies department when he accepted a visiting position with his wife, Laura Hall, at Tianjin University, China. This experience, of course, inspired Vizenor's novel *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987). "The Chinese Monkey King and Naanabozho, the *anishinaabe* trickster," he tells Lee, "never court the deadbeat stories of victimry. These characters can trick a wise man right out of his library card, adjectives, underwear, and fate" (55).

Perhaps most useful to scholars and students of Vizenor's writings will be the central seven chapters which range across the body of his work, each focusing on a single text or a grouping of works; autobiography, haiku, scripts and plays, *Wordarrows*, *Earthdivers*, *Landfill Meditations*, *Griever*, *Bearheart*, *Tricksters of Liberty*, *Heirs of Columbus*, and *Hotline Healers* are all discussed. Vizenor speaks, at times with great candor, about his individual works, the circumstances of their creation, and the themes and language that inform them. The chapter on haiku provides fascinating insight into Vizenor's love of chance, tease, ambiguity and motion in visual memory. The taut silence slipping between dense, suggestively juxtaposed images in the best haiku of Issa or Basho

resounded for the eighteen year-old who happened to be stationed near Basho's famed Matsushima. Vizenor recalls being "caught" and "turned back to the seasons, back to the memories of my own nature" (66).

Poetry, and especially haiku taught me how to hold an imagistic gaze and that gaze is my survivance. Many chapters in my novels begin with a natural metaphor and create a sense of the season, the tease of a haiku scene. I learned how to create tension in concise images, by the mere presence of nature. (69)

In the compelling sixth chapter, Lee prompts Vizenor through a discussion of many key issues raised by his disturbing first novel, now titled *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1978). After touching on the novel's pilgrimage form and the violence so prevalent in the text, they move from a probing discussion of the names, motivations and fates of the central characters, to an in-depth reading of several of *Bearheart's* most troubling episodes. Vizenor's reading of the novel, in turns both candid and evasive, refuses to stay within the bounds of his art. Here and elsewhere in the volume Vizenor angles for living, ongoing allegory and irony in his tricky stories of "transmotion" and "survivance." The nine government-funded regional word hospitals in *Bearheart*, he reminds us, are not so far from government film ratings or campus speech policing. "Clearly, the government has supported far more bizarre research in the social sciences than the Bioavaricious Word Hospitals" (108).

When ranging away from specific works, these interviews offer clear reiterations of Vizenor's humorous, often scathing assaults on the social sciences among many of his other favorite targets. The legacy of cultural anthropology in Native America has long attracted Vizenor's "wordarrows" because anthropologists, he teases, have repeatedly sewn and re-sewn the seams of the shroud or simulation we call "Indian."

The seams get even tighter as more studies are conducted to eliminate all of those loose ends and ambiguities, and to explain every doubt and nuance. The seams are measured right down to the actual words and names in stories about natives. These are the anthro seams, the ironic cultural representations of the other. The great spirit told me to loosen the seams and tease survivance in my name. (79)

When Lee asks why he has been so fierce in his views toward anthropology, Vizenor replies bluntly: "There are no measures of fierceness that

could be reparations for the theft of native irony, humor, and original stories. There's not enough time to be critical of the academic enterprise of cultural anthropology." He goes on to elaborate on what he sees as the conspicuous injustice, arrogance, and cruelty perpetuated like a plague on "every native in the universe" (90).

Vizenor also has much to say throughout the volume about fellow Native authors and the state of Native literature and literary studies. Midway through Chapter 10, "Almost Browne Stories," Lee prompts a discussion of what Vizenor has called the three "new native literary wars." In the first, Vizenor argues, the late Michael Dorris, through his New York connections, charm, "identity apologies," and "academic poses" managed a lucrative family enterprise while dominating other Indian writers. He credits a second, more recent literary war to Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, whom he calls "separatist and essentialist." "She seems very determined," says Vizenor, "to be the grand arbiter of native identity" (149). Sherman Alexie is assigned responsibility for initiating the third literary war. "The Shermanator," (Vizenor borrows this cognomen from a Seattle weekly paper) like Cook-Lynn and other "identity inquisitors," revels in the "blood politics of envy and separations" (150). In the next breath, Vizenor praises those scholars and writers who constructively interpret Native literature as "creative art, not as culture artifact." He credits Ruoff, Kroeber, Velie, Owens and other Indian and non-Indian scholars with helping to unburden authors, as well as critics and teachers, of the reductive, static, social science approach to Native stories and literary works.

Toward helping readers more readily grasp Vizenor's overall project along with his singular language and style, Lee asks many direct, basic questions, the kinds of questions students at all levels might pose in a literature course or seminar: "The manifest is clear in the context of cultural dominance, but why the manner in manifest?" "What do you mean by 'Postindian'?" "What, whose, are the 'dead voices' of your novel *Dead Voices*?" Vizenor's answers to these and similar queries provide insights and clarifying points for those who might be dizzied or frustrated by Vizenor's singular language and his constant refusal to treat characters and themes in familiar, mimetic ways. Indeed, Vizenor insists here, as in much of his fiction and essays, that words and assertions are forever slipping and floating from firm grasp, so why not play in the wildness of language and delight in the refusal of terms to be trapped and sapped of life? Asked what he means by postmodernity, he answers, pithily: "The notion that words are wild, of course" (21).

Postindian Conversations includes a current and useful bibliography of Vizenor's published writings and selected interviews; the list of selected criticism that concludes the book, while of very limited use to scholars, will point new students of Vizenor to several of the best published studies. The omission of notes and index is unfortunate; perhaps the latter would have been especially useful. Still, the eleven chapter divisions make it fairly easy to find discussion on topics of interest. Vizenor's challenging texts will probably continue to daunt and repel some readers. For those who seek to enter and explore the unique literary world of this most prolific Native American author, however, *Postindian Conversations* will long serve, alongside Blaeser's *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition*, as an invaluable primer to his works.

Kevin Dye

Song of the Hummingbird by Graciela Limón. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1996. ISBN: 1 -55885-091-0. 217 pages.

In her fourth novel, *Song of the Hummingbird* (1996), Graciela Limón cleverly takes on the master narratives of the conquest of Mexico with a gripping story set in the 16th century. The voice of Limón's indigenous female protagonist, Huitzitzilín, is unmatched in Chicana literature—except perhaps by protagonists in the author's other works, namely *María de Belén: The Autobiography of an Indian Woman: A Novel* (1990). Here, the Mexica (Aztec) woman's voice starkly contrasts such "historical" colonial voices as the arrogant, self-promoting Hernán Cortés, or the imperialist nostalgia that bleeds through the pages of Bartolomé de las Casas's *Devastation of the Indies*. Huitzitzilín is outspoken, unapologetic, and unafraid to contradict Spanish exotic fantasies about the "savage" Mexica.

Set just sixty years after Cortés's fateful march on Tenochtitlán-Mexico, Limón's novel begins at what is seemingly the end of Huitzitzilín's life. Now elderly, infirm, and living in refuge in a Catholic nunnery on the outskirts of Mexico City, she seeks her final confession from a priest. Eager to absolve the native woman of her "pagan sins" before it is too late, the Church sends young Father Benito to hear her confession. What follows is a battle of wits between Huitzitzilín and the young priest, and the reader soon learns that this is no confession at all.

Rather, the penitent strategically subverts the priest's sacred role as confessor. She knows that the details of what she has witnessed will be too tempting for the priest *not* to document. Thus, Huitzitzilín sets the stage for the recording of her life story: an eyewitness testimony of the conquest of Mexico unlike any other because it is from the point of view of a conquered Mexica woman.

In recent decades, writers of postcolonial literatures in the United States have used poetry and prose to recuperate remnants of their fractured indigenous histories. Limón's fiction clearly is informed by this literary trend of blurring the lines between historical fact and fiction. Yet, the work of authors like Limón is far from trendy. This literature bears the marks of authority, anger, passion, and originality.

Few Chicana authors to date have looked beyond the historical figures of La Malínche or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz for models of indigenous heroines. In focusing her novel upon a female character whose social position within the Mexica tribe places her just a few feet away from key historical figures, Limón provides the reader with an unveiled glimpse of the violence of 16th century Spanish colonialism. It is a violence that many associate with the complete genocide of an indigenous culture, but the author's emphasis on the literary legacy of Mexica *flor y canto*, flower and song, demonstrates that this notion of successful ethnic cleansing is a myth.

Some of the most compelling, and often humorous, scenes in the novel are the religious debates between Huitzitzilín and Father Benito. Playing to the priest's fascination with Mexica ritual, Huitzitzilín recounts events such as Moctezuma, in full native regalia, reciting his final prayers before the Spaniards arrive in Mexico; a women's cleansing ceremony at the Temple of the Mother-goddess Tonantzin; an erotic snake dance performed in honor of Coatlicué, goddess of life and death. In these and other scenes like them, Limón uses Huitzitzilín's fictional autobiography to criticize European cultural and sexual exploitation of the Mexica. Returning to her side day after day, Father Benito, his sexuality protected by Church doctrine, sits transfixed as this woman confesses her "sins" of fornication and lust. It is only after hearing the details of her stories that he protests, gathers up his notes, and runs away, "redfaced," ashamed. This is the same shame that drove priests to destroy Mexica libraries and sacred temples. Through the form of the novel, Limón asks her readers to consider what our world would be like today had this culture not been devastated and these places not destroyed. But this is not a novel about destruction. Survival is at its core. Indigenous survival.

The Mexica name “Huitzitzilín” means hummingbird, a sacred animal associated with the sun and rebirth. As flower and song, *flor y canto*, the Mexica concept of poetry, Huitzitzilín’s name and the existence of her song signifies the survival of her people. No matter that she did not live in “real” life. The fact that Limón breathes life into this woman through this novel is enough. One of the first acts of colonialism is to take away language, stories. Native writers know this all too well. Chicanas, descendants of Mexican Indians, some Aztec, some not, often describe themselves as “twice colonized.” Few have official tribal status in Mexico or the US. *Song of the Hummingbird* is a novel that adjusts the focus of indigenous identity politics and indigenous literary debates just enough to spark a new light.

Alesia García

Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays. Eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. *Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P*, 1999. ISBN 0-8263-2033-3. 319 pages.

As a creative writer and literary scholar of mixed Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Euroamerican ancestry, I have to admit I began reading *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson, with a great deal of hesitation. After all, one contributor, Paul Beekman Taylor, begins his article with an open admission of Eurocentrism, a stance that, in the past, has led to what I and many other Native Americans working in the field of Native literatures feel has been a continuation of the colonial impulse. Another, Caren Irr, concedes that she is “not a specialist in Native American culture or writing” (225), a confession that might make some critics of Native literature, whatever their ancestry or background, wonder why they should even proceed to read her work, wonder what, if anything, they can learn from someone “invading” their publication territory, so to speak. However, after having been urged forward by the warm, reader-response style preface contributed by Robert Franklin Gish and encouraged by the presence of a few names listed in the table of contents—Robert Benson, Helen Jaskoski, and Janet St. Clair—names well-known by now to all serious scholars of Silko’s work, I have to say I was forced to change my mind

about this book. Barnett and Thorson have compiled a text that I believe will prove to be an important one not only for Silko studies, but also for Native American literary studies in general.

Like Taylor's article, the bulk of the text focuses on Silko's neglected epic, *Almanac of the Dead*. Despite the number of publications on this text in the past few years, *Almanac* still has not received nearly as much attention as it deserves. Admittedly, with over seventy characters and seven hundred pages, *Almanac* is a daunting text with which to work. However, vituperative reviews like Sven Birkerts, which Irr makes note of in her introduction, did more, I think, to lead scholars who had absolutely doted on *Ceremony* away from *Almanac*, giving the book an unjustified reputation as a polemic, racist diatribe, rather than as the complex, multivocal novel that it is. The articles in this collection by St. Clair and Irr, as well as those by David L. Moore, Ami M. Reiger, Daria Donnelly, and Janet M. Powers, have not been able to completely escape the kind of justification those of us who have written about this novel have felt compelled to offer our readers, but they have been able to *go beyond* that justification to present a remarkably varied set of feasible approaches to *Almanac* within the confines of this anthology.

Taylor's "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy" is the most problematic for me of all the articles in this book, for reasons other than his confession at the beginning. His central questions as a European scholar—he is a professor of Medieval English Literature at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, who became interested in Native and Chicano cultures and literatures while visiting the University of New Mexico ten years ago—are "What does this literature mean for us? To what use can we put it?" (23). Taylor's "us" and "we" are white academics and European and American students, and the *use* he sees for Native American literature is that it can be a catalyst for "analyzing and treating our [again, European and Euroamerican only here] cultural malaise" (23). Admittedly, Taylor is at least incorporating Native literature in the classroom, something that I think we all want to see happening on a wider scale. But, while Taylor may not realize the offensiveness of this stance, his approach both "others" those of us who are of Native American ancestry who study our own literature, and it commodifies the literature itself. Moreover, Taylor's essay contains more than a few errors that someone should have caught: using "Black Swan" for "Night Swan"; misunderstanding of El Feo's name as the masculine for "Fe" (47), meaning "Faith," rather than "Ugly"; and designating Root as a "white" character, rather than presenting him as influenced by multiple heritages as the novel does.

Nevertheless, this article is, in other ways, one of the finest in the book. His analysis of what he calls “the polemics of Indian Secrecy,” or what I would call the politics of code-switching, does seem sound. He asserts that authors such as Silko who have been accused of revealing “clan secrets” have really revealed nothing “secret” except to the portion of their audience who “already know(s) the mysteries” (29). Thus, the use of sacred materials in Native literature written in English by these authors is really a reappropriation or resacralization of those materials, many of which have been desacralized by anthropologists and ethnographers. In short, by fusing old story with new experience, the artist “writes over European story” (32), creating new mythologies to give life to the people. He sees *Almanac* as “reappropriat[ing] the secret force of the Mayan texts, for coding secrets in the oppressors language turns the weapon of appropriation against him and makes new secrets he can read no better than he can read the signs of the land he has appropriated from the Indian” (46). Taylor is also excellent at delineating distinctions between European/Euroamerican and Native American philosophies, distinctions that greatly affect the hermeneutics of these respective cultures. Incorporating both European mythology and a wide range of Native literature, this essay is useful for scholars interested in any Native author, not just Silko.

Moore suggests in his “Silko’s Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*” that Silko posits her readers as “witnesses of death,” both historically and textually. In turn, he focuses on how this “witness” is played out through the continuation of the Tayo/Arrowboy myth she had earlier incorporated in *Ceremony* and on “the narrative circulation of life and death, through the trope of blood itself” (150). He contrasts this witness with the voyeurism of many of the novel’s most deviant characters, a voyeurism he claims “Silko ties . . . directly to colonial ideology and its most extreme capitalist extensions” (160). Though I hesitate to agree with his suggestion that *Almanac* is a “prequel” to *Ceremony*—I think Robert Nelson’s recent work on “homology” offers more in the way of explaining the relationship between these texts—Moore’s innovative structuring of his argument works well with a complex text like *Almanac* and may offer a pattern for dealing with the interweavings of other Native literary texts.

The other contributions on *Almanac* are just as fruitful. Reiger’s “Material Meeting Points of the Self and Other: Fetish Discourses and Leslie Marmon Silko’s Evolving Conception of the Cross-Cultural” focuses on the “fetishism” in *Almanac* as means of explaining Silko’s move-

ment from the centripetal text of *Ceremony* to the centrifugal one of *Almanac*. She suggests that “Silko investigates ‘objecthood’ for its dialectical potential as a material meeting point of self and other, not as the colonized opposite of ‘subjectivity’” (187). In her “Cannibal Queers: The Problematics of Metaphor in *Almanac of the Dead*,” St. Clair deals with what has been one of the most troublesome aspects of the text, the seemingly stereotypical—or, indeed, outright homophobic—depictions of gay males. St. Clair asserts that in *Almanac*, Silko’s portrayal of homosexuality is not meant to be a literal representation, but rather a “metaphor . . . amplified through the emblem of cannibalism, which figures the insatiable greed that inevitably attends undisciplined individualism and amoral objectification” (207). Irr’s “The Timeliness of *Almanac of the Dead*, or Postmodern Rewriting of Radical Fiction” places *Almanac* in the context of the radical utopian fiction of the 1930s and suggests that Silko is confronting with this work Euroamerican notions of time which suggest that change is impossible, that “history is the repetition of self-identical defeats” (224). Donnelly’s “Old and New Notebooks: *Almanac of the Dead* as Revolutionary Entertainment” examines Silko’s combined use in *Almanac* of a struggle for “narrative domination”—within a notion of “history” as “competing stories”—and what she labels “the prophetic mode” (245-46).

Powers, the last writer who centers her article on *Almanac* in this collection, makes a comparison between the novel and Dante’s *Commedia* in “Mapping the Prophetic Landscape in *Almanac of the Dead*.” This is a bold move in that, on the surface, it would seem to force a Native literary work to fit within a decidedly European context. Nevertheless, because of the prophetic tone of both literary works and their status as “correctives” to their respective cultures, Powers’ application of the mapping strategies Jon Ciardi and Dorothy Sayers have utilized with the *Commedia* offers a reading which suggests that “the narrative world that reveals . . . truth can be mapped in linear fashion, but the vision attained from it transcends that diagram, and urges the reader to an immense spiritual understanding of the Destroyers and the Earth” (271).

However, this collection does not merely examine *Almanac* alone. Helen Jaskoski’s “To Tell a Good Story” is an analysis of Silko’s short fiction in *Storyteller*, its polarities of “lying” and “story,” the centrality of language, and the cultural power shift that transpires within the covers of the book from the title story, through the six stories between, to “Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hands” at the end. Linda Krumholz and Elizabeth McHenry also focus on *Storyteller*. In “Native Designs: Silko’s Sto-

ryteller and the Reader's Initiation," Krumholz combines dialogics with a more "indigenous" critical approach based on Larry Ever's "A Response: Going Along with the Story." Krumholz argues that, in reading *Storyteller*, the "reader's process is a ritual of initiation," leading him or her to "embrace Laguna values" (68). McHenry's "Spinning a Fiction of Culture: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*," takes a different approach to the text, that of genre-study, suggesting that with *Storyteller*, Silko "deni[es] conventional authorship" (102), that she functions "as both artist and ethnographer" in bringing the voice of the communal storyteller to the page. In "Shifting Patterns, Changing Stories: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Yellow Women*," Elizabeth Hoffman Nelson and Malcolm A. Nelson trace Silko's depiction of this Keresean figure in both *Ceremony* and in *Storyteller*, arguing that both Tayo and Tseh share affinities with the young Pueblo woman/Yellow woman of the latter work. Daniel White's contribution to this volume, "Antidote to Desecration: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Nonfiction*," is particularly important, as he examines how Silko contrasts mainstream ideals with indigenous philosophy in the most overlooked area of Silko's writing.

Robert Nelson's "A Laguna Woman" focuses on Silko herself, rather than her book of poetry as might be expected. However, like his other recent articles, this one is not merely insightful, it is thoroughly enjoyable to read. In this brief essay, Nelson explores both the more commonly reported as well as lesser-known biographical details of Silko's marginality at Laguna and how this liminal status impacts her work. Nelson asserts that Silko works within a "cultural contact-zone," a term he borrows from Mary Louise Pratt. Unlike most critics—Robin Cohen being the one exception of which I am aware—Nelson addresses Silko's filmwork as well as her photographic essays. It is only regrettable that Nelson's contribution to this volume could not have been longer, as fuller development of these thoughts would be profitable to all interested in Silko's works.

The volume closes with a bibliographic essay and bibliography by Connie Capers Thorson. Though William Dinome recently published an updated bibliography of Silko in 1997 in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Capers' list does include a few primary and secondary works not on Dinome's bibliography or others with which I am familiar, notably Silko's film scripts and her dramatic version of "Lullaby," which she worked on with Frank Chinn for the American Bicentennial Theatre Project, and *Rain*, a book-length work Silko put together with her photographer father, Lee Marmon, in 1996. The essay itself would make a

wonderful introduction for beginning students of Silko in an undergraduate course or graduate seminar focusing on her work.

Kimberley Musia Roppolo

Women on the Run by Janet Campbell Hale. Moscow: U of Idaho P, 1999. ISBN 0-89301-21 7-3. 178 pages.

Janet Campbell Hale's, *Women on the Run*, a book of short stories, chronicles with uncompromising honesty the mistreatment of women in the contemporary world. Women face conflict in every stage of their lives, and Hale's stories indicate that their devaluation and lack of respect are linked to not only the crass materialism of contemporary America, but to a long legacy of self-centeredness and greed that existed also in ancient tribal life.

The six stories entitled "Claire," "Dora Lee in Love," "Women on the Run," "Alice Fay," "Deborah and Her Snakes (A Cautionary Tale)," and "Alma" place women in the very real, class context of poverty and struggle, like many women in American society. Driven to the brink of madness, these women have been left with only a thin ray of hope. Yet one must admire their strength in finding that one thin ray.

The story of Claire begins in Loma Vista, an old peoples home in Oakland, California where she has been placed by her son, Ozzie. Her treatment at Loma Vista reminds this seventy-six-year-old woman of being grabbed, manhandled and scolded when she was a girl in a mission school on the reservation. Claire's seven-year-old grandson, Buddy, the "one bright spot" in her life, can understand her misery living in the "home"; he wants to break her out of her confinement and suggests that the two of them run away, which sets Claire thinking. Borrowing clothes from Arthur, another inmate, she disguises herself as a man, and escapes one night. The next morning, for the first time, she walks Buddy part way to school. Elated that she has escaped, he gives her his cap so she can tuck in her braids. Claire pawns her diamond ring and takes buses to San Francisco and then to Portland. Eventually, she stops at Biggs Junction, from which she hikes out into the hills and finds a camping spot. Sleeping for hours on a rock in the sun and looking up at a sky "all filled with

stars" makes her think "*Whatever happens now . . . it's worth it for this.*" But the old woman's bones begin to ache; she can't go on sleeping on the ground. The first morning, she awakes with a sore throat. The second night, her dream tells her to go to her nephew Joe Whitehawk, a widower with a son the age of Buddy. The story ends with Claire walking down the road to Joe's house and being met by his son. Illustrating the essential importance of a woman controlling her own destiny, Claire is the book's strongest protagonist and the only one who finds a home to run to.

"Dora Lee" is a grim fairy tale. Dora Lee finds a man wrapped in seaweed on the beach of Vancouver Island. He looks dead. But just as she decides to call the Coast Guard, he emits a loud snore. Then she considers throwing the man back into the sea or dragging him far enough that the waves cannot wash him back out to sea. He reeks of alcohol, and Dora Lee wonders how he got there. Eventually two teenaged boys help her carry the man to her house. She cleans the man up, but he remains asleep; and then she too falls asleep reading. "I'm going to call you Angel," he says when he awakens her, thanking her for rescuing him and asking her to marry him. His name is Jean-Paul, and he is rich. The two travel to Puerto Vallarta, get married and make lots of love. But one day Jean-Paul changes. Enraged that Dora Lee has failed to pick up a glass of tea he left on the floor the night before, he kicks the glass into the woodwork, breaking it, and tells her to get her "lazy fat butt into gear and clean up this mess!" The story ends with Dora Lee realizing that her husband was not "put before her by God but by Lucifer himself."

The title story of the book, "Women on the Run," juxtaposes the lives and voices of two Native American women, Bobbi Trumaine, a woman of action, and Lena Bowman, a writer. The only Indian commercial fisherwoman and the first person to establish an Indian casino, Bobbi married a useless man who gambled away their wealth. A homeless fugitive at the beginning of the story, Bobbi is on the run from charges of racketeering, of receiving stolen goods, and of hiring a hit man to kill her ex-husband's former lover. After divorcing her ex-husband, she flees to Canada where she gains political asylum and settles into a good life with her friend Alice. Lena, suffering from depression, is a struggling writer who achieved a measure of success with her first two novels, but who has fallen on hard times. Her struggle is metafiction; she is caught in the dilemma of how to survive as an artist in contemporary America. When she sees a story on the television news about Roberta Trumaine, Lena decides to write about her. She thinks that surely Bobbi's story will sell. She interviews Bobbi, but before Lena has a chance to ask her the impor-

tant questions, Bobbi has a heart attack and dies. Lena then settles down with her third husband, Tom, a mail carrier. Insecure in this relationship, Lena wonders if her husband will run out on her “the way all my other men have?” At the end of the story, she stops writing Bobbi’s story and is halfway through another novel. Her protagonist, Helen, is a social worker in Seattle, and the book is a murder mystery, a potboiler. Lena, the writer, is seen as being constantly forced to compromise her art in order to create a book that will make the money she needs to survive.

In “Alice Fay,” Hale elaborates on a character from her first novel, *The Owl’s Song*. The daughter of a glamorous and depressed white mother, Norma, and an absent Indian father, Alice Fay suffers from neglect her entire life. Because she has the dark, Indian features of her father, Alice Fay has been an embarrassment to her mother’s relatives, except for Granny Gloria, who loves her; but when Granny grows ill with cancer, Norma enrolls Alice Fay in a mission boarding school where she suffers physical and psychological abuse. While she is in the school, Granny dies. As the story begins, Alice Fay is caring for Norma during the last days of her life. When Norma dies, Alice Fay learns that Norma’s sister Tilly is the beneficiary of her insurance policy. After Norma’s funeral, Alice Fay finally meets her father. She cries, not because her mother has died, but because she has finally met her father, whom she has always felt close to. After this meeting, Alice Fay dreams of going to Alaska during her vacation, but instead she sits in her apartment sunk in depression, drinking the sherry her mother left behind. The ray of light at the end of the story is a letter she receives from her father, with a \$1,000 check inside. She opens the window to let in the fresh air and snow flakes; love has entered her life, and there is hope that Alice Fay will find some reason to live.

“Deborah and Her Snakes (A Cautionary Tale)” is a parable about gambling. Deborah, who has suffered from illness and poverty, has a recurring white snake dream. She is forced to go to the food bank to feed her children. But when an elderly woman interprets her dream as a vision of “The Good Luck Snake” and lends her \$20 to gamble, her luck turns. She wins \$10,000 and is able to provide for her family. She even finds a better job. But a few nights after her big win, she has a dream of an “awful red snake.” When she tells the elderly woman the dream, she is warned that the red snake “brings only ruin.” Nevertheless, Deborah gets sucked in: “White Snake/Red Snake. They want your soul. Once they get ahold of you, they never let you go.” Very contemporary in its message, this story warns women to avoid gambling addiction and run.

"Alma," the final story, also involves gambling. The protagonist, who is only twenty, goes to a party to escape the humdrum boredom of her life as a single parent and student and meets a man named Jesus (*Hey-sus*, she calls him). She gets drunk, spends a night with him and gets pregnant. Unable to support another child, she flies to Mexico City for an abortion. On the flight back to San Francisco, she begins to wonder whether she will always be alone, without a man all her life. Seeing the reflection of the moon on the surface of a dark lake far below, she remembers the ancient story of Coyote's love for a beautiful young woman named Frog. From a woman's perspective, it is the story of Frog's thwarted love for a poor boy named Badger. Frog's father, who had initially held out for a high price for his daughter, fell into Coyote's trap and agreed to gamble with him because gambling was his "*one terrible weakness*." Having lost everything, Frog's father agrees to give Coyote her hand in marriage if Coyote will return his possessions. Meanwhile Frog and Badger have secretly plotted to elope, but Coyote finds out and has Badger killed. But when he informs Frog of this, she hops "*more and more out of control . . . so high*" she lands on the moon.

Like the fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman a hundred years ago, Hale's *Women on the Run* is a red flag. The psychological and moral dilemmas of contemporary life in these United States are inescapable in Hale's fiction. She has the courage as a writer to meet the devaluation of women head on. Like the ancient stories of America's indigenous peoples, her stories show that women who are deprived of love and respect in their society will find their own freedom in nature or in madness.

Norma C. Wilson

Contributors

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Kevin Dye currently teaches literature and writing at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, a national Native American community college in Albuquerque. He is a PhD candidate at the University of New Mexico with concentrations in American literature and folklore studies. His edited volume, *Recollections From the Colville Indian Agency 1887-1889*, is forthcoming in 2000.

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Patricia Riley is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Idaho, where she teaches courses in Native American and Ethnic literatures. Her collection, *Growing up Native American*, was published in 1993, and she has since published essays on the works of James Welch, Louise Erdrich, and Alice Walker.

Kimberly Musia Roppolo, of Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek descent, is a doctoral student at Baylor University, specializing in Native American Literature, and a full-time instructor at McLennan Community College. She served as the 1999-2000 President of Baylor's Native American Student Association and is a member of Wordcraft Circle, ACA/PCA, the Western Literature Association, the American Indian Philosophy Association, and the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures. Her first creative writing publication, "Selections from Breeds and Outlaws," will appear in Editor Robert Benson's *Children of the Dragonfly*. She has also published reviews in *News from Indian Country* and *Studies in American Indian Literatures*. She has other poems and articles scheduled in upcoming publications, including a special Native Women's issue of *Hypatia* and a Native American issue of *Paradoxa*. Kimberly resides in Hewitt, Texas with her husband and three children. She anticipates taking her degree in May 2001.

Roberta Rosenberg is Professor of English at Christopher Newport University, where she teaches courses in Multicultural Literature, Women's Studies, and Native American Literatures. She received her PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and has published two books and a number of articles. She is currently working on an anthology of essays for Peter Lang in New York. She was the 1998 chair of the Native American Literature section of SAML A. She recently completed the Native American literature section for the new *Companion to Southern Literature* published by LSU Press.

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