

SAIL

Series 2 *Studies in American Indian Literatures*
Volume 12, Number 4 Winter 2000

CONTENTS

A Conversion with Simon Ortiz John Purdy and Blake Hausman	1
Coyote, He/She Was Going There: Sex and Gender in Native American Trickster Stories Franchot Ballinger	15
The Politics and Erotics of Food in Louise Erdrich Kari J. Winter	44
“Settling” History: Understanding Leslie Marmon Silko’s <i>Ceremony, Storyteller, Almanac of the Dead, and Gardens in the Dunes</i> Denise K. Cummings	65
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS	91
REVIEWS	
Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation by Rebecca Blevins Faery Michelle Burnham	93
Momaday, Vizenor, Armstrong: Conversations on American Indian Writing by Hartwig Isernhagen Randall C. Davis	96
The Blood Runs Like a River through My Dreams: A Memoir by Nasdijj MariJo Moore	100
LaDonna Harris: A Comanche Life by LaDonna Harris Annette Van Dyke	102

CONTRIBUTORS 105

2000 ASAIL Patrons

**Gretchen M. Bataille
A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff
Will Karkavelas
Karl Kroeber**

and others who wish to remain anonymous

2000 ASAIL Sponsors

Sonia Bahn
Jeane Breinig
Alanna K. Brown
William M. Clements
Joyzelle Godfrey
Connie Jacobs
Arnold Krupat
Giorgio Mira
Pat Onion
Malea Powell
Kenneth Roemer
Karen Strom
James Thorson
Akira Y.Yamamoto

and others who wish to remain anonymous

A Conversation with Simon Ortiz

John Purdy and Blake Hausman

Since Simon was in the Northwest for a week-long visit, we were fortunate to lure him a bit further north and west to Western Washington University for a few days to visit a class (taught by Duane Niatum, in which Simon's book, *Woven Stone*, was required reading), speak at Northwest Indian College (where students, staff and community were also welcoming a new president, the Navajo former president of Diné College), and give a reading that drew from his earlier, but also recent works. As always, his presence was greatly appreciated. We, Blake Hausman and John Purdy, had the opportunity to speak with Simon in several capacities, and hope that our conversations may prove useful.

Blake Hausman **(BH)**: It was an honor to meet Simon Ortiz, to actually talk with the man whose writings have meant so much. I like to think of a passage in his essay, "The Language We Know," an image of his father working with stone. He reflects on the persistence and the patience needed to build something that will stand for a long, long time, maybe even forever. He notes that these experiences, helping his father mix mud and carry stones, influenced his consciousness as a writer. And while Simon's

poems and prose are tangible in a way that strikes immediate chords, his work always conveys a sense of balance and precision, forms and ideas built to endure.

Fortunate to speak with Simon a couple times during his stay, the three of us ate lunch on the first day of his visit. John had a reuben, Simon had a burger, and I had a chicken sandwich of some sort. We talked, and Simon mentioned that he was planning to meet soon with the Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, author of *Decolonizing the Mind*. My ears perked up—I often think about the connections between many contemporary African and Native American writers, hoping that channels of communication between the two continents will open wider, and Simon was saying things that are important and eminent. It seemed like a good place to start our “conversation,” and the passages that follow begin with a discussion anticipating Simon’s meeting with Ngugi.

John Purdy (JP): I have admired Simon’s writings for as long as I have known that “Native American Literatures” exist. When Montana Richards Walking Bull first opened the door for me, Simon was there. While it was not the first of his poems that caught me, “My Father’s Song” remains a favorite; born and raised on a farm, and sucker that I am for parent/child poems, this one comes to visit me no matter where I am or what I am doing, because it has the fundamental spirit of Simon’s, and all great, poetry: it speaks to me in very intimate and humane tones that reveal old truths in new ways.

And that is the power of the person behind the literary work. In our time together, we talked of many things: the future of contemporary Native literatures, the world-wide issues that face us all, the past. However, what continues to impress me about our visits, and what marks this poet, writer, man, is the obvious commitment to the world that he exudes. I know several people he has mentored, or supported, or encouraged, or put into contact with others who could help; true, his literary works have brought and will continue to bring readers into a serious and productive interaction with their world, but the marvelous ripple effect of his civic-minded works on our society may only be known by powers beyond us.

The afternoon before Simon’s reading, Blake and I met with him in the café in his hotel. A transcription of the taped conversation follows and it is, as with all conversations, taken out of the context of the discourses that precede and will, no doubt, come after. As we settled into our booth, we had already picked up the thread of a conversation from the previous day.

Simon Ortiz (SO): Wa Thiongo Ngugi. For a long a time I've been interested in the African connection with Native literature as a decolonizing strategy. My own interest goes back to the late Sixties, when I began to read Chinua Achebe, and *Cry, The Beloved Country* by Alan Paton. Ngugi used to be James, didn't he? Kenyan. Achebe is from Nigeria.

When I was at the University of Iowa in 1968 there was a guy I'll always remember. His name was Peter Palangyo. Tanzanian. He was quite a person, an intellectual, a writer. He was the Cultural Minister after he went back home to Tanzania.

In the International Writing Program at the university, there were numbers of people from other countries, but there were only two Americans. Me and Emory Evans, Jr. Having come out of the Watts Writing Workshop, Emory was an African-American, a tall, lanky guy, Emory Evans. A great poet, a great poet. Had this wonderful laugh that would just fill up the room. (Laughs.) He was just a kid, actually, about twenty, twenty-one. He had been through the Watts riot and all that. Others in the International Writing Program were from Europe and Africa. And China, a couple people from the Philippines, and South America. And I remember a Chilean poet, Juan Palazuelos.

JP: Juan Palazuelos? Chilean.

BH: It seems to me that so much African literature is at the center of the decolonizing impulse in literature today. It seems that colonized people around the world could benefit from more . . .

SO: Self assertion. Self assertion as a style and decision of identity is necessary for Indigenous peoples of the Americas. And they can look toward Africa for example. I think one of the things about Native American intellectualism and writing is that we have often been caught in a real dilemma, sort of a forced choice about what to do in terms of the language to use. So we end up very early on, starting five hundred years ago, going along with the colonizer, the Spanish conquistador first and then other Europeans. As a means of survival, we were forced to acquiesce. Yet, it's a choice that people did make. And so to some degree, repercussions of that continue which really undermines our sense of wholeness. Not that there isn't a way in which one can still be whole and express oneself in terms of ones integrity—cultural, spiritual, or physical integrity—with this other language. But it's got to be a real choice; it's got to be a real choice.

To some degree you know, obviously, we use the language of colonization, the language of domination, in an appropriate manner. But it is still not a complete choice. Because we find ourselves regarding our Native or Indigenous languages as secondary. In South America, Mexico, Central America, we find ourselves speaking Spanish. Here in the United States, English.

JP: Or in Africa, French . . .

SO: Or British English. Or in Brazil, Portuguese. It's a dilemma.

BH: Ngugi has approached it by writing in Gikuyu and English. What do you think about that? You mentioned something about risks . . .

SO: Ngugi's friend and associate at NYU, Tim Weiss, and I talked about the possibility of getting together with Ngugi, for him and I to talk. I want to learn from him. What are the principles, the theories, and practices that make it possible for him to believe in the use of an Indigenous language. It's much more of an assertive method to use an Indigenous language such as Gikuyu or any other Indigenous language as the main mode of communication for the conveyance of knowledge.

I really think its possible to use an Indigenous language so that it is truly a language of choice for you, but still you can use another language or other languages. For example, though I don't have any real research to back this up, I think that Native peoples in the Americas were multilingual before the Europeans came.

They spoke not only their home language, that is, say Acoma—let's just go with the people at home—we spoke our own home language. But we also spoke neighboring languages. Such as Navajo. By the time the Spaniards came, Navajos had become a part of the general cultural world of Acoma, so Navajo was spoken. That was a fairly recent language.

Before that, there were other Pueblo languages. Zuni Pueblo is to the west, fairly close to Acoma. It has an entirely different language, yet I believe people were familiar with and knew how to speak the Zuni language. To the east, are the Tiwa speakers of Isleta and Sandía, just north and south of Albuquerque, wholly different languages. And then not too far away are the people of Jemez Pueblo, another different language. And then there were people of the plains further to the east who certainly interfaced with Pueblo peoples.

So there were a number of languages. When the Spaniards came and

brought a language different from any of the others, I think that the people were already multilingual. European people used language as the device to control and to dominate, certainly as a means of control and imposing their power. I think today there is no real reason not to use your own language, that is the language of your choice. Meaning that if I decide to use my own Native language—that is Acoma, or Keres which is the language that Acoma speaks—I'll use that as a choice, a decision.

But also if I want to use English or Spanish or any other language. Navajo or Zuni.

JP: German.

SO: German, yeah. I should be able to do that. As long as it is a decision that is made as a matter of ethics, that it's the right thing for me.

BH: Critics may look at Ngugi and say, "That's wonderful; you're writing in your native tongue, but the majority of people in your homeland can't understand it." It seems like quite a paradox to be able to exercise that choice, an act of reclamation if you will. But I wonder what you think of some of the tensions involved in using an Indigenous language. You have such a larger audience when you work in English or a European language.

SO: We make that choice. Or we are forced into making that choice because of the larger context. The larger context of the world surrounds us, and obviously choices are made, choices determined by the surroundings. Political choices are kind of choices of convenience. In other words, since not many people speak Gikuyu here in Bellingham, or Acoma, or in Lummi, the Indian community and reservation where I was today, then we end up making the choice and decision to speak the language that everyone understands. Meaning that right now, the present society we are surrounded by and we live within speaks and understands English—and so we go along with English, not that that's a better choice and not because it's a wise choice but that it is a choice of convenience. It's what we manage things by.

Someone asked me a question yesterday about the Internet as another form of language, another form of communication. As long as Internet doesn't become a language of control that takes me over, I think that it can be helpful and useful. But I think the tendency is to become dependent upon it, and we have no choice except to live by it.

JP: It becomes the default language.

SO: Yeah. In the same way, in some sense. Let's look at the political economy. We end up using dollars and cents because we either lack the imagination or the will or the power to not use dollars and cents. We end up going along with the system as it is. We know it's not the best system in the world. We know in a deep innate sense that it's not and that we're somehow working against ourselves when we use the default.

In terms of literature, we really can speak truly for ourselves and have a sense of authenticity, honesty, and integrity. It's not as if we don't have a sense of that choice, a decision we can't make. I bring up the question to myself and to others: What happens when we don't conscientiously use the English language? And go along with it just because it's convenient?

In answer to myself I said that when I use *nuu yuh Aacquemeh hano ka-dzeh-nih*—Acoma people's language—it feels more tangible in a palpable way. It's not abstract. When I speak English sometimes I find myself in the Western cultural world of abstraction. I don't know whether this is a conflict or not, but abstraction and objectification. Treating ideas like things or objects. I find it quite convenient to objectify when I'm in that mode of Western cultural thought. When I am speaking in the Acoma language, it seems to be less so, less abstract, unless I'm just fooling myself somehow. I am less abstract when I am speaking in the Native language. But perhaps I don't really know because I haven't fully thought it out—because in some way there is a sort of abstraction that may come from a defensive position, when you are only speaking in a very specific dimension and only thinking for a specific purpose.

JP: Well, do you think it could be just second-language use? I wonder about that, too, because when you speak in your native language, whether it be Acoma or English or whatever, and then you speak in another language, the process of speaking has a different significance than it does when you're speaking the language that you're born and raised in as an native speaker.

SO: If you mean a different process, you believe in it in a different way? Or do you believe it's somehow much more tangible or weighty?

JP: No, I think it's that the act of utterance itself becomes the focus rather than the thing that you're saying, because of the translation differ-

ence. So if I'm a native English speaker and I go to Germany, for instance, and I'm conversing with someone in German, all of a sudden there's a subtle shift in the dynamics of language itself.

SO: When I have found myself translating, I don't feel comfortable translating mechanically or technically. Because I felt like I was objectifying my thoughts. And I don't want to objectify my thoughts. In other words, this sort of relates to what I was saying about making it abstract. Nothing should be abstract because some abstractions are intended to be manipulative, and you're abstracting only to create diversion and to create a different sense other than what you intend.

Do you speak other languages?

BH: I speak Spanish and Russian, and I've stared at the Cherokee syllabary many times, though I think I may need to go to Oklahoma and stay for a while to pick it up. But there is something in the process of translating your ideas . . .

SO: You know I wanted to read the Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer. In Yiddish. And study his ideas, discussions, and conversations about language. When a native speaker speaks in his own language and in his own cultural mode, he is his own cultural real self. He is probably more real then, unless I'm just saying this because it's what I want to believe. Singer was much more real when he wrote in his native Yiddish than when he was working with translators, although I've never heard him say that.

How about that other guy? Conrad?

JP: Joseph Conrad?

SO: He was Polish, but he wrote in English. A great English writer.

JP: There are a number of them. Nabokov, Russian and English. That kind of takes me back to what you were saying earlier about that possibility for cross-pollenization, working with people or peoples or authors from other continents who have faced colonial issues as well. When we were talking about it earlier, it was only directional in one way, in a sense. Well . . . it would be nice to work with them, to find out what they've experienced, but also what you could learn from them. But the other possibility is that they could learn a lot from that exchange as well.

SO: That's the other motivation for wanting to talk with Ngugi. To know the agenda or the reasons for insisting on your own language. It has to do with what your experience has been under colonization, your experience of colonialism. We Native people in the Americas have not really faced our use of Spanish and English. We use them but we have not really looked at our use. I even have the feeling, maybe more of a sentiment, that we have arrived at our use of English too easily. In other words, we have had not a big experience with English and Spanish but we use them quite well. What does that mean? Does it mean that we have let our Native spirit, our Native soul, our Native culture, our Native identity go too easily? I hate to think of it but that's one of the explanations.

BH: I'm sure that people have asked you this before, but when you write something in your Native language, how do you hope that younger people, on the reservation or in cities, wherever, would react to that?

SO: That they be encouraged. That they be encouraged to write in their own Native languages. Although, of course, representations of Native language are for the most part phonetic, and using alphabets of Western cultural languages such as English, using the symbols and script, using equivalent sounds represented by visual symbols. The devising or development of a written Native language has not taken place. Although Sequoia, the Cherokee, to some degree did that, developed a syllabary that has been useful and is an example.

I do have some reservations about writing. It has reference to why some Indian people do not want to teach the writing of their Native language or do not want to allow the writing of their Native language. Oral language—compared to written language—is much more immediate and intimate; that's the only way language and culture can actually be lived. Not represented but actually lived. Representation is like photography. Take a photograph of this cup of coffee; it's just a picture, it's not the coffee. Language is the same way; you can't "write" the language down; that's a representation of it, a photograph of it. Actual language is what you and I are talking—words, sounds, body and facial and eye language. We are involved in and participating in the act of language.

Language and literature are a form of participation. Story, I think, is participatory. There's not just one way of telling a story. Story is a manifestation of flexibility.

BH: Like the end of *Ceremony*, when Grandmother says, "It seems like I

already heard these stories before . . . only thing is, the names sound different.”

SO: People, of course, have imagination and different kinds of insight, and may still be tied to something consistent, but yet they’re different. And that kind of difference is a kind of love. You don’t let something go, you keep it. Although it’s different, it is still useful and helpful to you. Songs, I think, are good examples. Songs that evoke emotion. They may be different but they are rich and full and deep and have a dimension of emotion that convey feeling.

BH: Every time I read one of your poems, there is so much emotion that I feel a connection to it. This is sort of a big shift of topic here, but not really. I’m taking a poetry seminar right now, and among the many things we’re reading is language poetry—English fragmented, fractured, so many ideas taken out, verbs taken out, to the point where the finished poem is, at least has the appearance of being, void of emotion, void of narrative. There is no “I” in the poem. It raises interesting issues about how you ask the reader to interact with a poem, and it even has music in it somehow. But often I feel a huge distance between myself and the poem. I just wonder what your take on that approach to modern poetics was, because personally I identify with your work much more than that.

SO: Sometimes I find that I’m not very well-schooled in formal poetics. I’ve read a lot, but I think I’ve not been a very good scholar of what I’ve read. I read because I like the appeal of being immersed in ideas. It’s like jumping into a pool of ideas. I feel that maybe I’m more into the sensation of those ideas rather than following any analytical string of thought. My reading is this and that . . . all over the place.

I’m a student of poetics because I like poetry. [Laughter.] I’m not a very good critic either. When I first began to read poetry as poetry I read Beat poetry because it seemed to be very ordinary, very common, very approachable, very accessible. It was something that I could identify with without having a formal, scholarly, or analytical, or critical, approach. It was something very tangible, something that I could relate to in a very immediate, non-abstract way. Of course I was also very impressionable when I was in high school. That was in the late 1950s, when the Beats were people like Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac.

JP: Like yesterday, when you talked about Black Mountain in North

Carolina, and Robert Creeley.

SO: Yeah. They seemed to me something that were not removed from my own world. It was all right to be all right, it was all right to be who you were, and I think there's a real freedom in that. And yet there were also specific things, like Zen Buddhism. I was reading Eastern philosophy that I associated with my own Native culture. I mean there's some Native American similarities with Buddhism, I also liked Dostoyevsky. Of all the Russian authors, Dostoyevsky was my favorite. And also Chekhov. I'm not sure why. It wasn't a real highly developed intellectual reasoning I think.

BH: Something that was tangible.

SO: Checkov is very tangible. He was a dramatist. I like not his plays so much but rather his stories. I think as far as American literature went I know I really liked some of the same kind of style. Like Steinbeck, some of Ernest Hemingway. Sherwood Anderson. Of course this probably also had to do with the kind of high school literature classes that I had. I like literature, but I don't know why. [Laughter.] Probably in retrospect, if somebody did analyze why, they would come up with something that I would agree with. [More laughter.]

JP: There's always that chance.

SO: You know who I liked years and years ago? I haven't read him for a long time. Saul Bellow. But I wonder why? And I liked Norman Mailer too You read him?

JP: Yeah, sure. But it'll be curious to look ahead maybe fifty years or more. Have someone sitting around with an up-and-coming young writer, or somebody who's doing very well, some Anglo guy, and say who are your influences—say Scott Momaday, or Jim Welch, or Simon Ortiz, or Louise Erdrich, or Leslie Silko.

SO: I had a kind of strange sort of reading upbringing. My father read some, and also my mother, but I would not say that they were literary people at all, not in the classical or "literary" sense. My dad used to like Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour. I remember my mother reading Pearl Buck to me. And who was the guy who wrote *Shangri La*?

JP: Hilton?

SO: Yeah. James Hilton, I remember being fascinated. I was in grade school then

JP: Well, you may not agree with the elements of the story, but they were stories.

SO: Oh yeah.

JP: Stories that kept you going.

SO: I haven't talked to Leslie Silko or Louise Erdrich or James Welch or Scott Momaday about this but I wonder how similar we may be in our reading backgrounds. I was kind of a strange kid. I read a lot but I don't know why, I just wanted to know. I just wanted to know.

Part of it was being conscious of myself as an Indian. So I may have been deliberately making a choice of trying to attain something. If I felt like I was being looked at disparagingly, that is, in a demeaning way, as an Indian, I think that I may have selected literature accordingly, literature I liked and identified with. Not that I didn't like it; I mean I loved reading. I still do. But that may have been part of my subconscious decision or choice that I read in high school someone like Blake or Shakespeare. I remember I checked out books like *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, not your typical high school fare. And I think that it became a part of my aesthetic development. I don't think it's a matter of choice of developing one's mind; you go where your interests are.

JP: So you find somebody who's writing who shares an interest with you, and that's part of the attraction?

SO: Yeah, I think. Or you like something that someone else likes. And you sort of admire that person—so you go with that. Or you identify with someone you admire and respect.

JP: Rudolpho Anaya was here a few years back, and I'll never forget. For his reading, he said, "Everyone's always asking me to read from *Bless Me, Ultima*. That's an old book. I've read from it a thousand times. I want to read you a poem I've never read." And it was a poem about Walt Whitman coming to New Mexico." [Laughter.] He said, "I like Walt

Whitman. Why not? So I wrote a poem about Walt Whitman coming to New Mexico.”

That’s the way literature works. I mean, we all share stories, and find someone who has a similar interest and a different story. It’s good to share in that somehow.

SO: There was an old guy, I think he may have passed away by now, Sabine—I’ll always remember his stories. A Chicano, he used to teach Spanish at University of New Mexico. He’d say, “Simon, my friend, you and I, we are the only storytellers left” [spoken in dialect, laughter]. I got a kick out of that.

Native American literature is a way—for those who write it, Native writers themselves—for us to insist on our validity. Because in some ways, Native literature is still not accepted. That may have to do with the choice of language. We use English, obviously, as the language of dominant culture, and we go along with the dominant culture. But I think we have to be conscious of our reasons for using English and to be aware of its pitfalls. If we’re not, we’re simply going along with it, pitfalls and all. I know that some of my fellow Native writers may disagree with me.

BH: It’s a matter of your consciousness of your language.

SO: There are a few writers who insist on Native language use. Rex Lee Jim is one. And Irvin Morris. And Ray Young Bear, from Iowa.

Let me ask you a question.

BH: Okay.

SO: You said you had looked at Cherokee—why?

BH: Why?

SO: Do you want to speak it, or just understand it?

BH: Both, I think. I suppose that as a Jewish Cherokee who can’t speak Hebrew or Cherokee, I sometimes feel dislocated. And as a young writer, I think there is much I can learn from the old stories in their native tongue.

Every time I look at a newspaper or something that comes from Tahlequah, the tribe puts so much emphasis on maintaining culture through language. To teach the language, to maintain culture through language. I

feel like I should be doing something which I could justify as helpful or constructive in some way, and one way I can do that is learning to speak the language, so maybe that's what I ought to do. People in my family have worked to sustain the vitality of Indian people in many ways, on reservations, in the courts, the government, academia. I look at my cousins and myself, and our place in time, and I think that it's important. I don't know, I'm not quite sure how to explain it.

SO: I'll tell you a story. Years ago, in 1970 or so, I had gone to Oklahoma. This is on that trip that I took to look for Indians. I went to Tahlequah and met a couple of Cherokee guys. We'd become friends. The guys told me, "You know, we're Cherokees. But do you want to meet a real Cherokee?"

I said, "Well, sure."

They said, "Lets go see ol' Smitty."

I said, "Okay. Where does he live?"

They said, "Oh he lives over there, behind those hills."

They pointed over toward the Ozark hills, northeast Oklahoma. Kind of over to the Missouri, Arkansas border.

So we go out that way a day later or so. I don't know how many miles we went, quite a ways up into those hills. Soon the road gave out onto just this dirt track. And then we stopped. At a little house. Nobody seemed to be around, and we just sat in the car drinking beer and stuff. Pretty soon the door of the house opened, the guys got out of the car, and they talked to a woman.

The guys came back and said, "He's not here right now; he'll be back in a while I guess." So we sat some more, waiting. Waiting.

Pretty soon from around the back of the house comes this older guy, maybe seventy something. He was a nondescript older Indian man. He spoke Cherokee, nothing but Cherokee, at least that's what I thought then. And they—the guys and he—all spoke Cherokee, and of course I don't speak Cherokee.

The impression I got was that he—ol' Smitty—was this real authentic Cherokee man who didn't speak English, who only spoke Cherokee!

Well, after maybe an hour or so, it turns out he *did* speak English. But he only spoke English when he was assured that you were going to approach him as a Cherokee man.

We talked. He was a nice guy, good sense of humor, a storyteller. I think if he had only spoken Cherokee I would have thought he was just being stubborn or he didn't want me to be associated with him. And

when it turns out he spoke English, he was even more Cherokee to me.

JP: Well then we're back to the issue of choice, right? Like we're talking about with the writing . . .

But at this moment we found that we were late for Simon's reading, and we had no choice but to defer the conversation until later.

In a recent letter, Simon noted that his last story was cut short. His story of ol' Smitty continues: "He was an elderly fiddle maker who young white people from Tulsa and Oklahoma City came to seek out I guess. They seemed to regard him as some kind of folk figure, an exotic throwback or something, an Indian artifact more or less, and that's the way they saw him or preferred to see him! And he spoke only in Cherokee to them, never English. Although he spoke English! Which he spoke with me after he decided-understood I wasn't going to treat him like he was some throwback Cherokee artifact." Sounds like they had quite an interesting conversation . . .

***Coyote, He/She Was Going There: Sex and Gender in Native American Trickster Stories*¹**

Franchot Ballinger

Most readers of Native American oral traditions have at least a nodding acquaintance with a trickster—Raven, Coyote, Blue Jay, Iktomi the spider or Nanabush—and most are aware of the ribaldry often informing trickster stories. Few, however, have considered the implications of Tricksters' sexuality. Fewer still have considered the fact that tricksters are commonly, but not exclusively, male. Of the hundreds of trickster tales I have read, in no more than a few dozen are the trickster protagonists female (and some of these stories can be found in other Native American oral traditions in versions with male protagonists). Moreover, even in those tribes whose trickster stories have female protagonists, such stories are apparently in the minority. These few facts suggest that exploring trickster stories for an understanding of sexuality and gender expectations may provide some unique, if not revolutionary, insights into Native American trickster stories while underscoring the richness of the trickster tradition as a socially formative kind of entertainment (as opposed to the Euroamerican scholarly cliché of Trickster as a sort of Romantic overreacher).

With Siobahn Senier, who also considered questions of gendering, I “ask why [a trickster story] is gendered and relayed as it is . . . and [I]

speculate as to what kind of impulses [a] narration might be reinforcing or subverting" (223). Even if Native American storytellers and audiences have not commented on or otherwise explicitly acknowledged the role of gender in trickster stories, there are clues that gender roles are sometimes part of their underlying didacticism and satire. The thesis of this paper is, then, that in a number of Native American trickster stories, gender matters. The use of either male or female tricksters as well as a storyteller's gendering narrative details may point to a storyteller's critical cultural judgments or personal observations on a tribe's gender assumptions—for example, attitudes toward male headmen or the nature of men's and women's behavior or ideals of male or female social roles—or to corrective commentary directed at an individual. Certainly, this is so in male trickster stories, and it is likely true in at least some stories with female tricksters. Further, there are a few trickster stories that are interesting to consider in the context of the Two Spirit people (once known as *berdaches*).

Readers might question the wisdom and value of focusing on the topic of tricksters' gender, considering that it seems of little or no significance in the discussion of so many trickster stories. However, the effort in recent studies of Native American oral traditions has often been to "read" stories as works of individual creativity, not as the products of a homogeneous, traditional voice. The fact that trickster gender was a matter of indifference to many trickster storytellers may make all the more significant those instances in which gender does seem to be an issue. Some storytellers certainly would have been more responsive than others to opportunities for social commentary and teaching afforded by trickster stories, just as some were more sensitive to and skillful at practicing the "aesthetics" of the community's storytelling tradition. In this context, I want to proceed carefully in my "interpretations." Readers should not assume that I see a particular story as an official reflection of a culture's values.² I am well aware of Craig Thompson's caution: "Every group—every individual—is a producer of cultural meaning; nobody is merely an object of cultural perceptions" (36). It is not accurate to claim that a myth projects a society's "real" attitude about anything. Rather it is probably true that "in the actual context of performance, there were a variety of audiences which a single 'univocal' reading doesn't account for." Stories are part of a "continual social discourse"; that is, meaning lies in "reactions to the tales and in the effect that the tale had on intertribal relations" (23). Similarly, a story represents a single storyteller's interpretation of how a story's narrative details open a window on his or

her culture's values. Clearly, the cultural value theme dramatized in one telling of a trickster story may not be at all present in another telling. Nevertheless, some cultural generalizations may be possible as an entry point for this topic.

Melville Jacobs first stimulated my curiosity about gender issues in the Trickster tradition. One of a few writers to consider why female tricksters are relatively rare, Jacobs argues that male tricksters are exclusive in the Chinook oral tradition because Coyote's main personality traits—particularly inordinate, vulgar sexuality and traveling for the sake of adventure—were considered male traits only (*Content* 141). He further conjectures that a male storyteller would have recounted “more and better” Coyote stories than his storyteller/consultant, Mrs. Howard, because the “Coyote personality would surely have been identified with more often by men than women” (*Content* 121). In some other cultures as well, narrating trickster stories was apparently associated with men only. One example is that Anishinabe Wenebojo stories related to the *Mide wiwin* were told mainly by men (Barnouw 117). Also, associations between the trickster and male characteristics were made in other tribes; the Cayuga trickster, to cite another specific instance, “represents unrestrained male sexuality” (Day 77).

To call such assumptions and understandings *stereotyping* would be ethnocentric. However, in matters of social expectations for men and women, Turtle Island's indigenous peoples assumed specific and different social and family roles for men and women. While such assumptions don't, in general, seem to have been justification for oppressing or otherwise belittling women (men's and women's roles and responsibilities commonly being accorded equal significance), there do seem to have been clear cut assumptions and expectations about gender character and responsibility. Consequently, given the licentiousness associated with men, it is no accident that most tricksters are male.

In any event, the hyperbole that abounds in dramatizations of male trickster sexuality carries that sexuality to levels traditionally unacceptable to many Euroamericans, but traditionally, many Native American societies have been less priggish than the dominant Euroamerican culture. In early times among the Klamath, obscene anal and erotic details were essential features of some myths (both trickster and non-trickster) and were recounted even in the presence of children (Stern, “Some Sources” 137).³ Native American playwright Hanay Geigomah acknowledges that “among the boys” trickster stories were commonly pornographic (Lincoln 75-6). Nevertheless, while these stories may have provided juicy

entertainment, the social dangers and disorder attending or threatened by men's unbridled sexuality is at the heart of a number of trickster tales.⁴

Trickster's prodigious sexual appetites and energy are hilariously and powerfully dramatized by the gamut of their lusts and the size of their penises. The Yurok trickster, Wohpekumeu, to cite one instance, is so sexually robust and so promiscuous that he impregnates women with a mere glance. Because of his sexual threat, the people once literally leave him in the world alone, making him temporarily one of the few truly outcast Tricksters (Kroeber, *Yurok* 311). No doubt the best known depiction of a trickster's sexuality is the Winnebago Wadjunkaga's extraordinarily long penis (long enough that it can snake across a stream and insert itself into a woman's vagina) which he carries in a box on his back, giving the illusion of control (Wiget, *Native* 16-17)—a control essential to good social order but a control clearly beyond a trickster's capabilities, as the evidence of the stories show.⁵ Also well equipped, the Athapascan Coyote carries his penis flung over his shoulder (Erdoes 71). Even though such a phallus is not explicitly characteristic of all male tricksters, the image has become synecdochic for all tricksters' licentiousness. Males in many cultures keep telling themselves that size is everything, the bigger the better. However, in one Crow trickster story, it's the little things that count—at least temporarily, and we get a wonderfully comic image of the lengths to which Old-Man Coyote will go to have sex with a pretty girl. During a dance, a young woman tells the men to expose their penises because she wants to marry the man with the smallest. Old Man Coyote exchanges penises with mouse. The girl chooses him, of course, but his triumph lasts only until the on-lookers see mouse trying to walk through the encampment dragging Old Man Coyote's huge penis (Lowie, *Myths* 43).

No woman is safe for long from a trickster's penis; not virgins or other men's wives, not his daughters, not his mother-in-law, not even his grandmother. Nor, consequently, is any social relationship or institution safe. Community well being and harmony, friendship, marriage, family: all fall before trickster's incorrigible penis. Sometimes a trickster's sexual rapaciousness drives him to violate very specific tribal moral customs. Crow married women were vulnerable to being kidnapped by former lovers in the rivalry existing between the Lumpwood and Fox societies. It was shameful for a man to take back a wife who had been abducted. However, Old Man Coyote brags that he has done so three times. In fact, his mere glance reminds a woman of the sexual favors he has shown her, so that regardless of any disgrace, she will return to him (Lowie, *Crow*

56). Human females are not his only victims; a buffalo cow mired in a wallow is on occasion as acceptable to a trickster as a human woman.⁶ In a sense, he even sexually abuses men when in some stories he marries a chief's son. Thanks to his prodigious penis, Trickster even "abuses" himself when he commits self-fellatio (Bright 70-72; Ramsey, *Reading* 44-45). The issue in many of these stories is not sexual victimization as such but rather the cruelty, self-deception, and absurdity of a man whose unrestrained sexuality poses a threat to the community. Such stories dramatize the power of human sexuality to whirl us beyond the boundaries of human social constraints.⁷

These facts notwithstanding, there are occasions when a trickster's sexual assertiveness is stimulated by hostility and aggression toward a woman, and women become his victims because of their gender. In a Nez Perce story, an old woman ridicules his eyes because they appear wide-open in the dark. "Coyote then thinks to himself, 'Your saying such a thing, woman, makes me want to make you my wife and get even with you' [that is, have sex with her]" (Walker 206). Sometimes, he acts out his anger or hostility toward a woman for other reasons and perhaps in non-sexual ways. Coyote becomes so angry when Eagle's daughter refuses to marry him that he turns women into rock (Clark 113). More often, sex seems a weapon, as when in some Nez Perce stories Coyote rapes and impregnates "young women who are enemies" (Walker 207-8). There is at least one common story type in which female sexuality is the cause of trickster's hostility: so-called vaginal dentata stories. In these stories, female sexuality—not male, as is usually the case in trickster stories—poses a threat, at least to the availability of women to men. In an Upper Cowlitz story of Soft Basket Woman's vaginal teeth, Coyote destroys the teeth with artificial penises and then announces that in the future sexual union between men and women will be more congenial to and a good deal less dangerous to men (Jacobs, "Sahaptin" 188-90).

Male tricksters' dealings with women are often directed by their response to or manipulations of gender expectations for women. Sometimes they shape women's lives. In many instances, a trickster's shenanigans introduce a few benefits but more often, limitations, even controls, on women's lives. Hence, Coyote creates pregnancy in a Wishram story (Ramsey, *Coyote* 52). In a Havasupai story, Coyote gives origin to women's menstrual cycles by flipping fresh fawn blood between his sister's legs, apparently in order to prevent her sharing in his freshly killed deer meat (Niethammer 37-38). Similarly, Manabush originates menstruation by throwing a clot of bear's blood between the legs of Nokomis,

his grandmother (Hoffman 173-5). Finally, Crow legend tells us that it was Old Man Coyote who made women's very existence possible, for he created women to keep men company and to assure that the people will increase in number (Lowie, *Crow* 124).⁹

In another common trickster episode, one not overtly sexual but with obvious sexual and gender ramifications, women (or at least, a certain kind of woman) are clearly a trickster's victims and the object of the story's satire. The so-called "well-behaved girl" (a euphemism for chaste but maybe also prudish?) stories tell of a young woman who arrogantly rejects all suitors and all thought of marrying. She pays a high price for her pride: Trickster hoodwinks her into marrying him or at least having sex with him, a severe humiliation given women's usual disdain for Trickster. The Yurok trickster *Wohpekuman* impregnates two young women who refuse to marry (Kroeber, *Yurok* 304). Similarly, the Arapaho *Nih 'An Ca'* sleeps with two pretty sisters who won't marry (Dorsey and Kroeber 73-4). In a Tewa version, Blue Corn girl and Yellow Corn girl refuse one by one to marry the Cloud Boys of the four directions who offer them marvelous gifts as marriage tokens. Coyote says that these women are "lazy about [marriage]." When he dances and sings for them, they want to marry him. The next morning before the girls awaken, others in the village see that the girls have married Coyote and chase him away (Parsons, *Tewa* 242-6).

From a contemporary Euroamerican point of view (particularly if the point of view is informed by feminism), this latter story type may seem an assertion of male sexual-social authority over women. However, imposing such views here would be a mistake. It is likely that this trickster's audience—male and female alike—would have approved of his victim's chagrin in these cases, their roles as a woman. Clara Sue Kidwell has pointed out:

The status of Indian women within their communities is based upon different cultural values than those of typically middle class white women. The tribally oriented societies of Indian cultures and the extended family situation in which several generations may live very closely together give a different definition to the roles of women than do the nuclear family orientation and the technological aspect of the dominant society. . . . Marriage was a necessity for the survival of the community . . . for the procreation and carrying on of the group identity and culture. (114)

While a woman might have chosen not to marry and would have been allowed to live out her choice, she was nevertheless still subject to the disapproval of the community, for such a woman was “considered guilty of the sin of pride, a sin that in the close-knit structure and interdependence of the tribal group is of major import. . . . (R)ejection of her [social] role was in a sense a rejection of the whole society” (116; see also Lindsay 329-30). Looked at from this point of view, we see a trickster in an uncommon and ironic light: as enforcer of social stability teaching a woman a lesson. When a woman is the satirical butt of a male trickster story, it is usually because she (for once not the trickster) has—her culture agrees—rebelled against the community’s values and needs.

But it is not only women who suffer Trickster’s chastening for not fulfilling society’s gender expectations with respect to marriage. Male versions of the “well-behaved girl” stories involve what might be called Tricksters transgendering, yet another way that tricksters cross the boundaries of the expected. In these stories, Trickster poses as a woman and marries a man. An Anishinabe story of this sort satirizes a chief’s son’s arrogant refusal to marry. When the beautiful woman he has married is unveiled as *Wenebojo* the young man is appropriately humiliated (Barnouw 106). In a Swampy Cree version of this tale, the trickster *Wichikapache* hears of a conceited young man who wants a wife but who can’t find a “good one” and therefore finds fault with every woman he sees (Norman 165). The trickster transforms himself into a beautiful woman, whom the young man “quickly likes” (Norman 165). *Wichikapache* proves to be a good wife, even giving birth to children. However, the children are wolf cubs, a fact that makes the young man the laughing stock of the community. It is immediately obvious to all that the beautiful woman must, in fact, be the trickster.

In any event, this last type of trickster marrying story notwithstanding, it is safe to say that, generally speaking, the laughter stimulated by most sexually-oriented male trickster stories is not because of what the trickster does to women but rather because of what he reveals about himself (and males?) as he victimizes others.

Tricksters relationships with women are not always based on sexuality alone; sometimes their attitudes and behavior toward women grow from their own failures to fulfill their gender roles. Deward B. Walker points out that “Coyote is not adept at skills a woman finds attractive in a potential mate such as fathering, hunting, or fighting” (206); hence women reject him repeatedly. His aggression toward women, then, is at least in part a consequence of his own gender failings. In episodes involving

adult males also, we see tricksters failing to fill gender expectations. Walker points out that hunting is the usual ground of the Nez Perce Coyote's interactions with males (221). The same is true for other tricksters. Commonly in these circumstances, their incompetence, lack of self-discipline, and unseemly competitiveness lead inevitably to failure as hunters. Episodes in which a trickster demonstrates his incompetence as father and provider abound. Those that come to mind most readily in this context are the bungling host stories in which a trickster is hosted by an animal who feeds his guest through some magical manipulation, sometimes involving killing his children but bringing them back to life after the feast. On occasion, the killing is only a ruse to trick the trickster. In any event, when the trickster tries to play host by killing his children for food, of course, the results are less fortunate. Walker also recounts a Nez Perce story in which Coyote cheats Porcupine in a rivalry for a buffalo carcass. He fetches his wife and children to help him carry home all of the meat rather than just taking home what he can carry. However, Porcupine kills them all. This fatal but predictable ending comes about because Coyote foolishly brought his family "to a place where enemies are present, thus placing them in danger" (85-88, 211).

On the basis of such evidence, it seems clear that the satire of many trickster stories focuses on gender values.

But what about those relatively few stories in which a female trickster is protagonist? The first obvious question is, why are there so few? Given the vagaries of recording and translating stories from oral traditions, it may be that female tricksters were more common than current publications indicate. Perhaps many recorders—largely dominant-culture males—simply showed no interest in female tricksters, or perhaps, as Wiget has suggested, women storytellers, more likely to tell female trickster stories, weren't sought out by male investigators in the mistaken belief that the men of the community were the "repository of traditional knowledge" ("His Life" 89). Perhaps they suppressed such stories for propriety's sake. Or maybe the storytellers themselves, noting Euroamerican moral predilections and cultural assumptions about women, suppressed the stories. We could conjecture further, but the fact remains that there are many fewer female than male tricksters, in the academic record at least, and, possibly, in First Nations' oral traditions as well.

Even when female tricksters have appeared in Native American stories, there has been little or no printed commentary on the protagonist's gender by either storyteller or ethnographer. Of course, the inevitable question is, given the socially formative or didactic nature of so many

trickster tales, might it not make a difference whether a trickster is male or female? Are female tricksters assigned certain kinds of motif or episode? Another logical question is whether American Indians had/have different attitudes about male and female tricksters. As far as the published record is concerned, it appears to some that, again, from the point of view of storyteller and ethnographer, the presence of a trickster personality is more important than gender. Writing about a Hopi story with a female protagonist, Andrew Wiget comments: "the female sex of the trickster seems only a contrivance to initiate the action, an element of setting, and is not integral to the central action" ("His Life" 39).¹⁰ Further support for this general point of view may come in an Acoma trickster tale in which the protagonist's gender seems of so little consequence to either the storyteller or the recorder that pronoun gender references change a couple of times in the course of the story (Parsons, *Pueblo Folktales* 227-228).

Perhaps a trickster's gender is a matter of narrative and thematic indifference to many storytellers. Still, I would suggest that this is not always so, but rather that, at least on occasion (and maybe more frequently than we know), gender plays a role in plot and narrative details and reflects something about either a culture's or a storyteller's gender attitudes. Or perhaps the plot and narrative details of an episode type (for example, the borrowed feathers episode below) encourage a storyteller to use a gender-appropriate protagonist. On the few occasions that tricksters have status or authority in a community, their positions are generally of a sort associated with males in patrilineal societies. If it's reasonable to assume that such satirical narrative details of some trickster stories are male-directed, it seems equally reasonable to assume that some storytellers used female tricksters because they saw certain episodes as gender appropriate.¹¹ Although there may be no particular kinds of episode assigned exclusively to female tricksters, when a story has a female protagonist, it sometimes seems to frame a gender-related theme or to be gender appropriate. In the relative absence of analysis and commentary by Native Americans, we can only conjecture about these matters. Readers must understand, then, that much of the following is hypotheses, not unflinching assertion; it is inference based on available cultural and narrative evidence. The many variables and the insufficiency of evidence here would make anything more than hypothesizing foolish. Still, it is interesting to speculate.

Partial evidence for intentional gendering in a trickster story may be the fact that in one tribe a particular trickster episode may have a male

protagonist, while in another it may have a female protagonist. For example, the common Bungling Host story among Plains and Central Woodlands tribes has a male trickster imitating his erstwhile host by killing his own children for food, while versions among the Tewa and the Hopi use female tricksters (Parsons, *Tewa* 291; Malotki and Lomatuway'ma 77). The presence of male and female tricksters for the same or similar episodes in respectively patrilineal and matrilineal societies is not likely casual happenstance.¹² However these changes in gender came to be, it seems reasonable to assume that for some storytellers, at least, cultural values and assumptions led to considering certain stories as particularly appropriate for female coyotes.

To proceed, then, in the few female trickster stories available to us, she is commonly the object of the satire. The questions arise: Is she satirized because she is a woman or is she satirized because she is a trickster who incidentally is female? What, if any, relationship exists between the trickster's gender and the narrative elements in the stories? I believe that in most female trickster stories the protagonist's trickster personality causes her to fall short of her community's gender role expectations. She is, therefore, fair game for satire, as is the male trickster personality when he fails his society's expectations, some of them gender-related, for example, when he fails both as a warrior and a chief in the Winnebago cycle or when he perverts his father's role by marrying his daughter. Furthermore, it seems that cultural context sometimes implies particular (if not essential) appropriateness for the narrative events and/or details of some female trickster tales.

As we begin considering female tricksters, we should note that there are two specific trickster attributes not represented among published female trickster tales. This isn't to say that stories of either type don't or didn't exist; again, collections simply do not seem to contain them. First, there seem to be no female trickster/transformers of the mythical proportions of many male tricksters. The closest we get to female tricksters/transformers is a Crow story in which Old Man Coyote's wife proves as creative as her husband through "sacred reversals" (to use Gerald Vizenor's term) when she causes various transformations of the world by contradicting the transformer Red-Woman's edicts. Like her husband and other transformer tricksters (particularly those who act as marplots in the creation of the world), she contributes to making the newly shaped world into the human world by establishing the possibility of early human death, by giving origin to *bates* (the so-called *berdache*), as well as to roots for medicine, etc. (Lowie, *Myths* 28-30).¹³ The relative

absence of female trickster-transformers is not likely due to denigration of feminine creativity, for, of course, many American Indian tribal mythologies contain female personages who transform the physical, social, and ceremonial worlds. This includes matrilineal societies with female trickster stories.

A second trickster attribute absent among published female trickster stories is the trickster's prodigious sexual appetite. A possible exception is a Hopi episode in which a widowed female Coyote grinds her dead husband's penis into powder which she applies to her vulva whenever she desires the same rollicking, rapturous sex the living husband provided her (Malotki and Lomatuway'ma 55). However, this mother Coyote lacks other identifying trickster traits, and her motivation seems not so much rash bawdiness—what we would expect from a male trickster—as simply a widow's longing for the continuing benefit of her husband's sexual prowess.¹⁴ Whatever the explanation for the paucity of sexual content, it is generally speaking not prudishness about women and sex, for there are other kinds of stories, including male trickster stories, in which women prove equally lusty as men.

The most obvious fact we should note about stories with female tricksters is that they are all from matrilineal and/or matrilocal tribes, most Southwestern peoples, but a few from Caddoan peoples. In most, and maybe all, of these tribes, women have generally had significant *de facto* or "official" authority or power. For example, among the western Tewa and the Hopi, women have traditionally controlled the economic system and the home that is at the core of that system. Women own the houses, the fields, and the fruits of cultivation through their clans, with the clan mothers having final say in matters of distribution. Furthermore, strong ties among mothers-daughters-sisters create solidarity of opinion, which in turn carries much authority. Among the Tewa, it is the women who have traditionally cared for family ritual possessions, no mean office, to be sure (Schlegel 169-71; Dozier 137). Among the Navajo, in addition to an authority attending matrilineality and matrilocality, women have traditionally benefited from the liberation and authority of having independent incomes and of owning property, often more than men (Kessler 112). It should come as no surprise, then, that at least some trickster stories are about women in societies where women are notable social and economic forces.

Because some male trickster stories satirize men who are in positions of authority or power, for example headmen or shamans, we might be tempted to approach female trickster stories in matrilineal societies as

satires of women's authority. But when Mother Coyote is satirized, the reasons seem to be other than her authority or power. In fact, she is so incompatible with her society's expectations of her that she seems to have neither. And this may be the point of the stories: perhaps she is the object of satire because she is incapable of being the strong woman her society expects her to be. These possibilities are underscored by a second fact: in these stories, Trickster is always a coyote. To be sure, among the tribes whose female trickster tales I've examined, male as well as female tricksters are coyotes. As wandering hunters and as social transgressors, all coyote tricksters, male and female, live wayward lives of risk and transience. Nevertheless, the female coyote trickster's incongruity with her community is even more pronounced, for to have a hunting mother in a culture where mothers traditionally control the agricultural means of production (as they did in most of these tribes) seems in itself a comment on her fecklessness.¹⁵

Interestingly, it is not only general plot details but also specific narrative details that might reflect gender awareness. In some female trickster stories, particularly Hopi stories, we find narrative details befitting women's roles. For example, in New Mexican and Arizona Tewa versions of the borrowed feathers story, both using male tricksters, the birds at the beginning of the story are either picking up wheat that lies about or dancing in gratitude for a grass-like wheat available to them (Parsons, *Tewa* 161, 283). In the eastern Pueblos, women were the gatherers of seeds and nuts. Perhaps we see another example in the eastern version of Coyote's once more placing himself out of his element, in this case gender fitting sustenance activities. In a Hopi version of the story, a female Coyote chances upon the Bird Girls as they grind corn, typically women's work at which, the storyteller informs us, they are always busy. While they grind, they sing songs whose images suggest the integral relationship between grinding, their identity and even their physical traits.

Bird Girl, Bird Girl
Brush the cornmeal off the grinding stone.
Bird Girl, Bird Girl
Brush the cornmeal off the grinding stone.
Callous, callous are the nails,
Callous, callous are the horns
[Presumably, calluses from using the grinding stone]
Meehe'e'e'e hew, hew, hew. (Malotki and Lomatuway'ma 93)

When the song ends, they briefly fly into the air, then return to their grinding, repeating the work-ritual sequence again and again. Into this scene, vagrant Coyote intrudes. She sees, perhaps, not the stability of women's work-ritual but rather a game and, one assumes, an easy meal of Bird Girls. At her request, the Bird Girls allow her to join in the grinding, which she does awkwardly. This is not, after all, her usual work. Next, she wants to learn the song and then the dance-flight, both of which are as alien to her earth-bound presence as the customary women's work of grinding corn. The Bird Girls give Coyote some of their feathers so that she, too, can fly. The consequences of her whim are predictably disastrous when the Bird Girls pluck their feathers from Coyote while she is in the air.¹⁶ The fundamental point here is that the Hopi storyteller's use of a gender related activity like corn grinding gives to the story a more pointed and focused satirical thrust than the Tewa male version. Once again, Mother Coyote demonstrates how miserably she fails to meet the demands of her role, in addition to proving that her blundering imitations take her into unfamiliar territory where she doesn't belong. While such gender-specific details are by no means a consistent difference between male and female trickster stories, even their occasional occurrence suggests that some storytellers were aware of the difference gender makes in the import of a story.

Another fact deserving note is that in almost all stories with female tricksters, some reference is made to her children. In all tribes' male trickster stories, references to Trickster's family are relatively infrequent. When his family are referred to or even made characters in a story, their roles are, with a few exceptions, quite perfunctory, with no essential plot or thematic function.¹⁷ To be sure, in some female trickster stories, references to or uses of trickster's family may be equally perfunctory. Still, there are other instances in which the family as a whole, or Coyote's children or husband in particular, seems to fill significant plot or thematic role. Sometimes a story merely opens with a reference to the fact that she has a family; sometimes the beginning shows or implies that Coyote is trying to meet her maternal duties, for example, by hunting or fetching water for her children.¹⁸ She starts, then, with the best of intentions (something we can seldom say about the male tricksters). But in each instance, her good intentions dissolve under more immediate enticements. Greed, envy, curiosity, her inability to postpone gratification, her ambition to possess what is not rightfully hers, or some vanity or another leads her to instability and to grief. In one story, her desire to have children as pretty as Deer's makes her gullible enough to burn or

suffocate her own children when she is tricked into putting them in a fire. In an even more common story, her wish to possess another's song, which she wants to sing to her children but which she repeatedly forgets, causes her children to die waiting for her to bring food or water. Her efforts to cheat Porcupine backfire as Porcupine exploits Coyote's gullibility leading to her and her children's deaths. On those occasions when she decides that she wants something not rightfully hers (for example, pretty spots for her children, a certain song, an improved scheme for hunting), her children's presence in the story underscores their trickster mother's foolishness, lack of self-control, or unnatural desires. Considering the frequency with which the children appear in or are referred to in female trickster stories, we are, I suspect, often intended to see a female Coyote's failings as specifically a mother's failings.

A Coyote trickster's character may be particularly threatening to the values attached to women/mothers in Native American stories. In most American Indian traditions, a woman was expected to play a stabilizing role in a community through her steadfastness and creative powers. While men's traditions were, according to Paula Gunn Allen, largely about risk and change, women's and mothers' traditions and rituals were devoted to food, household, medicine; that is, with the maintenance and continuity of life (82). Another source of stability and continuity, particularly for the extended family but also for the community as a whole, can be seen in the expectation that women would defer willingly (but not irrevocably) any immediate personal goals they might have (Bataille and Sands 19-20; Kessler 111). Even without reading the stories, we can guess that Mother Coyote will fail to meet such ideals and expectations. If nothing else, her wandering undercuts the domestic stability she ought to provide.

A Hopi story illustrates Mother Coyote's failings dramatically and also reveals that not all trickster stories are comically amusing, for this story—one of the most stunning trickster stories I have read—ends tragically, if ironically. While it may evoke laughter, as do most trickster stories, the laughter is an uneasy, even grim laughter. In this story, Mother Coyote learns, or thinks she learns, sorcery.

From the story's beginning, we can see that this mother is in a difficult position. Her husband is dead and she, being Coyote, after all, is alone without the support of an extended family; she must do all the hunting to feed her children. Once while hunting, she comes upon a kiva where witches (*Two-Hearts* as the Hopi call them) are engaging in their ceremonies, the most important being jumping through a hoop to trans-

form themselves into animals, a common ritual for witches, as is their killing others—even relatives—for their hearts so that the witches might survive. Curious, Coyote spies on the witches, who discover her and drag her into their kiva much against her wishes. Told that she must now become a Two Heart, Coyote decides that she wants the power to turn herself into a cottontail, for in this form she can chase down rabbits, changing back to a coyote for the kill at the last instant. The hoop rolls; Coyote jumps through and becomes a cottontail, but unknown to her the head witch spits, which means that Coyote won't be able to transform herself back. When the ceremonies end, Mother Coyote heads for home, delighted at her new power which is sure to increase her ability to care for her little ones. As she approaches home, she says, "I'd like to turn back to a coyote," but, because it is dark, she can't see that she does not transform. In addition, we might assume that, because Coyote possesses so little self-awareness, she is unable to sense any difference in herself. Eager to rejoin her children, she rushes into the lair. You can imagine the reception this cottontail gets from the starving coyote pups (Malotki and Lomatuway'ma 161-77).

A characteristic failing of Coyote's—nosiness, being where she has no business—places her in a circumstance that must inevitably lead to evil, destructive ends. Of course, anyone's joining witches would be horrendous, but a mother's doing so seems especially appalling. Moreover, rather than a ceremonial tradition that maintains life, as women's traditions do, she joins a ritual whose participants survive only through other's deaths, a ritual which is a menace to the community and to the family, the very people a mother's steadfastness and selflessness should sustain. Part of the grim irony of this story is that Coyote joins the Two Hearts who survive by killing even family, but her children kill her as they struggle to survive. While her desire to find a better way to provide for her pups is understandable, the fact remains that her desire for an unnatural advantage leads her to violent change and death, not to life's perpetuation.

In brief, with the ghastly laughter this story elicits from its audience, Mother Coyote unwittingly teaches us exactly what Old Man Coyote teaches us: more often than not, we will pay a price for yielding to the moment's whim and trying to be someone we are not. But it does so in narrative terms that seem particularly appropriate for the gender and cultural context of its protagonist.

There is little doubt that gender expectations play a significant role in trickster stories with male protagonists and at least some of the time in

female protagonist trickster stories. Such an observation about males and females is a relatively straightforward matter. One particular trickster story, however, complicates the issue of gender and tricksters and elicits more questions than answers. An Omaha trickster story published in Erdoes and Ortiz's *American Indian Trickster Tales* raises other sorts of gender questions about tricksters, this time about the persons called in the past *berdaches*, now called by many writers, Two-Spirit people.¹⁹

Unlike Euroamerican cultures whose gender distinctions are binary and focus on heterosexuality only, many Native Americans generally defined genders in terms of occupational propensity and behavior rather than sexual choices or biology (Callender and Kochems 455; Malta and Archambault 23). Some contemporary students of Native Americans' gendering assert that Native American traditions often recognized not only male and female but also Two-Spirit womanly males and Two-Spirit manly women as genders (Sharp 68, Lang 103). This rejection of a dualistic either/or gendering is consistent with the Native American ability to accept what in our culture would be regarded as ambiguous or as an unacceptable boundary transgression, such as the tricksters themselves engage in.²⁰ A young man might become a Two-Spirit because he demonstrated interest in women's work and by keeping company with women (Callender and Kochems 451). So choosing life as a Two-Spirit was not first and foremost a matter of sexual preference.²¹ As with other genders, some kinds of sexual behavior for a Two-Spirit were considered more appropriate than others. Thus, a male-bodied Two-Spirit's having sex with a masculine man was not considered homosexuality, for the Two-Spirit was of a different gender (Lang 104-105). On the other hand, sex between two male-bodied Two-Spirits would have been considered homosexuality, for they were of the same gender (Jacobs *et al* 12). Many nations accepted what amounted to marriages between a Two-Spirit and a man, the Lakota and Winnebago among them (Williams 101).

The presence of Two-Spirit people in some indigenous cultures is also consistent with the tendency of Native American societies to find a contributory role for many kinds of people with diverse characteristics, knowledge and skills. Often, these Two-Spirit people were respected for their artistic natures, their hard work and generosity (Williams 27). In addition, they were frequently honored for their spirituality. In some tribes—for example, the Shoshoni, Miami, Hidatsa and Lakota—Two-Spirit people were assumed to have accepted their gender in response to a vision (Gill and Sullivan, "White Faces" 337; Callender and Kochems 448-9).²² Two-Spirits figure prominently in the religious traditions of

some tribes. Among the Navaho, Hidatsa, and Assiniboin, Two-Spirits were considered holy. A *nádleehé* plays a significant role in the Navajo creation story. It was the supernatural gift of birds and animals that lead to the first Arapaho *haxuxana'*. Kroeber identifies the Trickster *Nih'a-n'çan* as the first *haxuxana'*, for he "pretended to be a woman, married the Mountain-Lion, and deceived him by giving birth to a false child" (Kroeber, *Arapaho* 19). The Lakota *winkte* was traditionally regarded as fulfilling a spiritual destiny and as a possessor of special powers, especially magical and ritualistic powers (Lang 103-4; Williams 32). Northern Plains nations believed that a Two-Spirit might receive special powers for performing women's activities, for example, quilling or tanning. Or their powers might have to do with healing or heterosexual matchmaking (Thayer 290). Often, Two-Spirits performed specific ritual functions such as handling corpses (Yurok), cutting ritual lodge poles (Crow), or performing prominently in scalp dances (Cheyenne) (Gill and Sullivan, "Gender Crossing" 99).

Even before Euroamerican perspectives influenced many indigenous peoples views of gender crossing, choosing life as a Two-Spirit was not without its ambivalence. While claiming that among the Cheyenne the Two-spirit enjoyed high status, James Thayer also points out that such a person among most northern Plains peoples was "both feared and prized because, and even in spite of, the supernatural vocation and power" of the person's life, to say nothing of the fact that the Two-Spirit lived in a manner some in Plains society would consider "abnormal," even if accepted (290, 293, 292).²³ Among the Dakota, *winktes* lived on the fringes of camp, the same location where orphans and widows lived, thus manifesting a marginal presence in the community (Thayer 290).²⁴ Moreover, the Two-Spirit people themselves may sometimes have adopted this gender role with some ambivalence. As occurred in other instances of living a vision-led life, a Two-Spirit also was faced with a challenge through obligations imposed by the vision, in this instance, taking on a new gender role and perhaps new ceremonial responsibilities. Thayer claims that some were so reluctant to take up this challenge that there were occasional suicides. Omaha men sometimes attempted "to conceal [their vision], or even kill themselves to escape their destiny" (Callender and Kochems 451, 453). Following Dorsey, Thayer claims that *miati*—the Hidatsa word for a *berdache* (Thayer's usage)—is derived from *mia* (woman) and the suffix *ti* (to feel an involuntary inclination) (289). Finally, an Omaha became a *winkte* as a result of a vision in which the Moon offered him a choice between a bow and a burden strap. If the

person chose the bow (indicating thereby choice of a traditional male role), sometimes the moon would force the burden strap on him.

The issue of the Two-Spirit's life is not a cut-and-dried matter, which is appropriate enough in a paper considering tricksters. The Omaha story referred to above, entitled by Erdoes and Ortiz as "The Winkte Way," carries its own ambiguities. The editors' introductory note says, "Iktinike [the Omaha trickster] and Rabbit are always chasing women, but sometimes, just for a change, they turn themselves into *winktes*, doing it the *winkte* way" (133).²⁵ Meeting up with Rabbit, Iktinike suggests exactly that. Rabbit objects when the trickster wants Rabbit to be the passive partner and bend over, allowing Iktinike to get on top of him. After they argue about positioning for a time, it is Iktinike who gives in and bends over so that Rabbit is in the superior sexual position. After he finishes, Rabbit jumps off and runs away with Iktinike calling after him, "Hey, come back! It's my turn now!" to no avail. As Iktinike approaches home, one group of boys playing games after another tells him that Rabbit is spreading the word that he mounted the trickster. Soon, Iktinike feels that he must relieve himself. When he squats little baby rabbits rather than feces come out!²⁶ Arriving home, he is greeted by his amorous wife who wants to have sex. Iktinike begs off: "I've got a headache" (Trickster 133-135).

How "traditional" this story is, is impossible to say, although the conclusion's use of a clichéd Euroamerican joke is perhaps a fairly recent turn. In any event, what or who is being ridiculed here? One possibility, of course, is that, under the influence of Christian missionaries, the story ridicules *winktes*. In this perspective, *winktes* would be identified with Trickster—master of the perverse violation of all standards and limits—in that they, like him, try to be what they are not, that is, (according to this view) women.²⁷ The story also seems to equate homosexuals and *winktes*, thus emphasizing sexual practice over other aspects of a *winkte*'s cultural role. Yet, a quite different perspective is possible, also based on gender expectations. In *winkte*-male sex, the *winkte* either performed oral sex on the man or took the passive role in anal sex. Sometimes, however, perhaps "just for a change," like Iktinike and Rabbit, the partners might reverse sex roles. In such circumstances, the man would not want his part to become known, for taking the passive role would reflect badly on his masculinity (Williams 96-97). Does this story satirize swaggering machismo by making public the humiliation of the trickster's usual aggressive masculinity sexuality? (After all, it is he who initiates the sexual contact.) Even the boys, who presumably would have

looked up to a masculine role model, know Iktinike's secret. And his mortification is so complete that for once sexually extravagant Trickster is curbed. From this point of view, then, the story may be a satire of the pretense and posturing involved in men's notions of masculine gender images. Finally, trickster stories often show a trickster posing as one with sacred power and, usually, suffering a penalty for this hubris.²⁸ Is the Omaha story, then, yet another example of a trickster fooling around in sacred territory where he has no business being?

As we have seen, Arapaho tradition says that *Nih'an'çan*, the Arapaho trickster, was the first *haxuxana'* (Kroeber, *Arapaho* 19). What more obvious original could we ask for in this matter: Trickster the shape changer and violator of boundaries. What's even more revealing is the fact that an Arapaho myth explains that this came about when *Nih'an'çan* "pre-tended to be a woman, married the Mountain-Lion, and deceived him by giving birth to a false child" (Kroeber, *Arapaho* 19). Such stories occurred throughout Native America. The Arapaho story and the Omaha story of *Iktinike*'s brief experience as a *winkte* encourages another look at the male versions of well-behaved girl stories. Could some of these stories be satires of Two-Spirits or might they use Two Spirits for satirical purposes?

In a Winnebago version of such episodes, Wakdjunkaga, in a scheme with his companions Fox, Jay, and Nit to survive the winter, "marries" a man. He makes a vulva from an elk liver, breasts from an elk's kidneys, and dons a woman's dress. As the final step in his transformation into a pretty woman, he lets Fox (followed by Jay and Nit) have intercourse with him and impregnate him.²⁹ His arrival announced by an old woman that lives at the edge of the village, Trickster enters the village and marries the chief's son, a good hunter, and provides him with three sons. Wakdjunkaga's secret is revealed when he playfully jumps over the fire and "drop[s] something very rotten" (one assumes the liver-vulva) and runs off from the village (Radin, *Trickster* 22-24). This story is full of the sorts of violations we expect in a Trickster story, although they aren't all of his doing: a "woman" goes visiting alone (unheard of among the Winnebago); an old woman of little social status appoints herself town crier to announce the arrival of a handsome woman; and the trickster-bride devours the bridal meal most unceremoniously (Radin, *Trickster* 57). A major point in the story seems to be the implied criticism of the chief, who "puts the satisfaction of having his son marry a beautiful woman ahead of the prudence and judgment required by his position (Wiget, *His Life* 90). Ironically, trickster, the one usually driven by passion and in-

stinct, becomes the chastening agent of the chief whose self-interest has made him ignore “the demands of tradition and responsibility for the common good” (Wiget 90).

Wiget goes on to say that the story reminds us of the danger of confusing the person and the role. Of course, in this instance, the confusion is intentional. Still, Wakdjunkaga does fulfill part of his assumed role: curiously, he/she does give birth. Nevertheless, the humiliating joke rests on the same ground as in the female versions of this episode: the haughty one who defies the culture’s gender expectations is duped by Trickster, in this case because the victim assumes that the one he takes as wife is who the person is. However, given the ambivalence sometimes accompanying the tradition of Two-Spirits, the gender-crossing Trickster’s shenanigans could be a burlesque warning to both Two-Spirit and husband not to take their “marriage” too seriously; that, in fact, there is no real spousal relationship but only a relationship of convenience. Finally, ever mindful of the multivalence of Trickster stories, let us not forget how commonly they prove the imperfections of human categories. Trickster’s occasional transgendering adventures comically demonstrate the inadequacy of what seem to be “natural” gender expectations but which are, in fact, artificial—that is to say, only human—boundaries. Trickster prepares us for the necessity of Two Spirits.

Early in this paper, I acknowledged the role that conjecture would play in my discussion. My treatment of female tricksters and of Two Spirits is the focal point of most of this conjecture. There is no need, however, for speculation when it comes to the satirical, didactic thrust of Trickster stories. That the stories serve(d) such ends has long been recognized. Only on occasion, however, have scholars and other writers examined the stories for their specific lessons, Jarold Ramsey and Andrew Wiget being two notable exceptions. In any society, satire is usually directed toward culturally specific issues rather than general human foibles (the much acclaimed “universality” of Western world literary “classics” notwithstanding). We should not be surprised, then, that Native American trickster stories target particular behaviors and kinds of people within their cultures. And just as female-male relations and gender expectations have been at the heart of much Euroamerican satire, so, too, in Native American oral traditions gender expectations come in for their share of hilarity. While Native American cultures traditionally have been more tolerant than Euroamericans of the ambiguities that sexual behavior and gender roles can comprise, most nevertheless were clear about what the roles were and about expectations surrounding them. It is clear that Trick-

that Trickster stories were significant instruments for enforcing tribal sexual/gender mores. A part of this effort—for some storytellers, at least—involved gendering the plots and details of some trickster episodes.

NOTES

¹Parts of this essay have been published previously in “Living Sideways: Social Themes and Social Relationships in Native American Trickster Stories,” *American Indian Quarterly* (Winter 1989). I wish to thank University College Dean John Bryan and Department Head Janet Reed for granting me the released time that allowed me to complete this article. My thanks also to friend and colleague Roger Dunsmore for his suggestions, encouragement and challenges.

²“The final question may [be] whether it is appropriate at all to draw broad conclusions about the functions of these story’s gendered figures in their cultures” (Senier 224).

³As Klamath were exposed to and adopted Euroamerican attitudes, such details have often been omitted or concealed (Stern, “Trickster” 168).

⁴Other trickster stories that are not so sexually oriented make socially focused observations on male tricksters’ behavior. (See Ballinger, “Living Sideways.”) It is probably in the ribald tales, however, that gender plays the most obvious role.

⁵There is one story in which the fact that trickster’s penis has a will of its own is manifested in anomalous fashion. Erdoes and Ortiz retell a Gros Ventre story in which *Nixant*’s penis proves to be a more responsible citizen than its owner by warning girls about the trickster’s designs on them, telling others that he is a liar, etc. (160-161).

⁶Stories of sexual intercourse between humans and animals and their resulting offspring are much more than salaciousness. They reaffirm our relationship to the world of non-human persons. In this vein, some remind us the obligations we owe such relatives. For example, see the Blackfoot buffalo wife story reprinted in Feldman’s *The Storytelling Stone: Myths and Tales of the American Indians*.

⁷Of course, little is straightforward and unambiguous when we are talking about tricksters. The conventional wisdom in trickster studies tells us that the bawdy stories are, on another level, a vicarious romp in

the forbidden. More, while the stories may unveil lurking threats of social disintegration and chaos, Trickster's doings also reveal how by ripping through the barbed wire of human moral proscriptions and artificial moral categories Trickster exercises creative, even sacred, powers. Out there beyond our social frontier, Trickster makes all things possible and creates reality. This aspect of trickster stories has been amply discussed by Babcock, Ramsey, Toelken, Wiget, etc.

⁸A Kwakiutl story tells of Coyote's similarly defeating Death-Bringing Woman and her vaginal dentata (Erdoes and Ortiz 362-365). Other versions are in Erdoes and Ortiz, 283-285, 362-5; Jacobs "Sahaptin," 188-90. There are non-trickster versions of such episodes, as well.

Other stories in which Coyote has sex with dangerous females—a butterfly and mussel-shell killers—are included in Walker, *Nez Perce Coyote Tales* (25-27, 28-29).

⁹Occasionally, even in trickster stories, one comes upon a detail or other story element that raises questions about possible Christian influence.

¹⁰Wiget further observes, "Female trickster figures are known in Native American traditional literatures, and their occurrence does not seem to depend on the sex of the storyteller or audience or even particular contexts. Thus, at least in some societies, a female trickster was a commonly understood, unexceptional figure, whose character is contrasted with that of the male. Among the Arizona Tewa, for instance, Coyote Woman is all treachery and malevolence and lacks the pathetic qualities of the male figure that ameliorate our judgment of him" (89). Wiget overstates the case here. The Coyote Woman in the Tewa story is neither more nor less treacherous and malevolent than male Coyotes. And if male Coyotes possess "pathetic qualities that ameliorate our judgment of him," such an evaluation can be made only after examining a range of trickster stories. Given as large a body of female trickster stories, we might well make similar assertions about them.

¹¹That indigenous storytellers allow gender to influence their performance is evidenced elsewhere in addition to trickster stories. See Morrow and Mather and McClellan, Johns, and Wedge (Swann, *Coming to Light* 41 and 129).

¹² The use of male or female tricksters according to the culture's lineal traditions is not invariable. To be accurate, I must note that even between two closely related matrilineal societies like the Arizona Tewa

and the Hopi there may be gender differences in the tricksters of the same or similar episodes (Parsons 282; Malotki and Lomatuway'ma 91). In different versions of one story with either a male or female protagonist, a Coyote's desire to have children as pretty as Deer's makes him/her gullible enough to burn or suffocate his/her own children when he/she is tricked into putting them in a fire. In a Hopi version of this story, it is the spots of Antelope's children that Coyote wants to imitate (Malotki and Lomatuway'ma 27). A Navaho variant can be found in Parsons, *Navaho* 371. A Hopi version with a male Coyote combines Coyote's gullible admiration of Turkey's children with a variation on the Bungling Host episode (Voth 199-201).

And even within the same tradition, the same episode told by different persons might have not only differences in narrative details but differences in the trickster's sex. Thus, a Zuni story in which Coyote repeatedly forgets a song just learned has a male protagonist in the version Tedlock published in *Finding the Center* (78-83) and a female in *The Zuni: Self-Portrayals* (98-101).

¹³In a secondary creative role, she also originates moccasins, leggings, tanned robes, and methods of preparing pemmican. In one story, she debates another woman about how things should be arranged on earth and in Crow society, insisting that life shouldn't be made too easy for the People (Lowie, *Crow* 132).

¹⁴In fact, a Lipan Apache version of this story has a male Coyote as its protagonist (Opler). This Coyote is more obviously a trickster. The story, then, is consistent with what we expect of a trickster.

¹⁵"[T]his legitimate predator-trickster of the hunter era is out of tune with the lifestyle of sedentary planters, such as the Hopi Indians" (Malotki and Lomatuway'ma vi). We should also note that men were traditionally the hunters among Hopi.

¹⁶For two more Hopi versions of the Borrowed Feather episode, see Voth 196-7 and 201-2. In the first of these, Mother Coyote and Father Coyote are hunting for their children. She sees Blue Jays dancing in the trees and asks to borrow feathers so that she can join their dance. In the second, a male Coyote is apparently out hunting on his own. It is certainly not far-fetched to suggest that the storyteller knew of some of these other versions and intentionally chose the corn grinding activity.

¹⁷Except, of course, for the Bungling Host stories and Coyote marries his daughter stories.

¹⁸Seumtewa and Vogelin translate one such Hopi story (“Wren and Coyote”) in which Mother Coyote—carrying water in her mouth for her children at home—laughs every time she passes Wren who is singing, dancing, and laughing, spilling the water (Kendall 104).

¹⁹Actually, this term refers to all “alternatively gendered people of either sex” (Lang 100). My discussion focus on the person traditionally called a *berdache*. This person is male-bodied but chooses to live as a woman does, and may, therefore, dress and behave like a woman (including performing in a woman’s occupations and having sex with a man). At times in the past, such a person might be a man’s second or third wife in a society that permitted multiple wives. The most comprehensive treatment of this social role is Walter L. Williams’ *The Spirit and The Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*.

Because the term *berdache* carries inappropriate connotations (such as *slave*), I shall use either the term Two-Spirit or a tribal name for this gender. The Lakota term is *winkte*; the Arapaho term is *haxu’xan*; Crow, *baté*; Navajo, *nádleehe*; Shosboni, *tainna wa’ippi*. Callender and Kochems provide a table identifying Native American cultures that acknowledged Two-Spirits (445). Internet surfers will find additional indigenous terms for Two-Spirits along with a map locating Two-Spirit traditions at www.geocities.com/westhollywood/Stonewall/3044/berdache.html.

²⁰For a discussion of the theme of ambiguity and tricksters, see Ballinger, “Ambigere: The Euro-American Picaro and The Native American Trickster.” *MELUS* 17.1 (Spring 1991-1992):21-39.

²¹Callender and Kochems assert that a Two-Spirits sexual practices were a consequence of choosing this gender role, not a cause of it (454-5). Resistance to an alternative sexuality may explain some of the ambivalence about assuming a Two Spirits role discussed below.

²²Thayer suggests that, because the Two-Spirit’s “power was from outside the ordinary realm, and was located within the sacred realm of the vision quest-guardian-spirit complex,” gender behavior that might otherwise have been considered outside of the norm was accepted (292).

²³Among the Lakota, *winktes* were feared as well as respected because of the supernatural origin of their skills (Gill and Sullivan, “Gender Crossing” 98, “*Winkte*” 342). Do we see evidence of Arapaho ambivalence in the name *haxu’xan*, which Kroeber says means “rotten bone” (Arapaho 19). It is also interesting to recall, as stated earlier, that Old

Woman Coyote—in a contrary mood—was responsible for the creation of the Crow *bates*.

Apparently, husbands of Two-Spirits faced some difficulties as well. Callender and Kochems report that among Plains tribes a husband might be ridiculed for taking a wife who could both hunt and keep house, the implication being that the husband was too lazy or unable to hunt (448).

Not all cultures were accepting and tolerant of Two-Spirited people, for example, the Haudenosaunee, the Apache, the Comanche, and the Tohono O'odam (Williams 39). Similarly, not all people in nations that once accepted Two-Spirits still accept this tradition. Beverly Little Thunder claims that Two-Spirits are no longer honored in Lakota communities (Little Thunder 204-209).

²⁴We ought to remember the protective, restorative role widows and orphans often play in Native American stories. For example, see the story of Bloodclot Boy in Elsie Clew Parsons' "Kiowa Tales" (62). Like the orphans of oral tradition, *winktes* might have been marginal in a social sense but still loaded with potential for power. In fact, many might argue that they received their power from their marginality, as Babcock and Pelton have explained the concept.

²⁵Doing something in a different way, "just for a change," is certainly consistent with tricksters' characters: they are never satisfied with what they have or who they are.

²⁶Is this detail a parody related to the stories in which trickster's feces are his advisors and sometimes referred to by a relational name?

²⁷This is an appropriate place to point out that some Native Americans came to identify Trickster with Satan (Radin 201-2; Stern, "The Trickster" 168-9).

²⁸Tricksters in the Bungling Host type of story are a readily accessible example of this common theme in trickster stories.

²⁹Other versions can be found in Ramsey, *Coyote Was Going There: Indian Literature of the Oregon Country* (23-4) and in Deward Walker's *Nez Perce Coyote Stories* (97).

WORKS CITED

- Allen, Paula Gunn. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon, 1986.
- Babcock-Abrahams, Barbara. "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered." *Journal of Folklore Institute* 11 (1975): 147-86.
- Ballinger, Franchot. "Ambigere: The Euro-American Picaro and The Native American Trickster." *MELUS* 17.1 (Spring 1991-1992): 21-39.
- . "Living Sideways: Social Themes and Social Relationships in Native American Trickster Tales." *American Indian Quarterly* (Winter 1989):15-30.
- Barnouw, Victor. *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and Tales*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1977.
- Bright, William. *A Coyote Reader*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Callender, Charles, and Lee M. Kochems. "The North American Berdache." *Current Anthropology* 24.4 (1 983):443-470.
- Clark, Lila E. *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1953.
- Day, Gordon M. "The Northeastern Algonquians and the Northern Iroquoians." *Dictionary of Native American Literature*. Ed. Andrew Wiget. New York: Garland, 1994: 73-80.
- Dorsey, George Amos, and A. L. Kroeber. *Traditions of the Arapahoe*. Field Columbian Museum Publication 81 Anthropological Series. Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1903.
- Dozier, Edward. *The Pueblo Indians of North America*. New York: Holt, 1970.
- Erdoes, Richard, and Alfonso Ortiz. Ed. *American Indian Trickster Tales*. Viking: New York, 1998.
- Feldman, Susan. *The Storytelling Stone: Myths and Tales of the American Indian*. Dell: New York, 1965.
- Gill, Sam D, and Irene F. Sullivan. "Gender Crossing." *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- . "White Faces." *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- . "Winkte." *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

- Hoffman, Walter J. *The Menominee Indians*. BAE Annual Report 14, Pt I. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1896.
- Jacobs, Melville. *The Content and Style of An Oral Literature: Clackamas Myths and Tales*. New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation, 1959.
- . "Northwest Sahaptin Texts." Pt. 1. *Columbia Contributions to Anthropology* 19. New York: Columbia U P, 1934.
- Jacobs, Sue-Ellen, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang, ed. *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1997.
- Kessler, Evelyn S. *Women: An Anthropological View*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976.
- Kidwell, Clara Sue. "The Power of Women in Three American Indian Societies." *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*. 6.3 (Fall 1978): 113-121.
- Kroeber, Alfred L. *The Arapaho*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983.
- . *Yurok Myths*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.
- Lang, Sabine. "Various Kinds of Two-Spirit People: Gender Variance and Homosexuality in Native American Communities." In Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 100-118.
- Little Thunder, Beverly. "I Am a Lakota Womyn." In Jacobs, Thomas and Lang; 204-209.
- Lincoln, Kenneth. "MELUS Interview: Hanay Geiogamah." *MELUS* 16.3 (Fall 89-90): 69-81.
- Lindsay, Beverly. "Minority Women in America: Black American, Native American and Asian American Women." *The Study of Women: Enlarging Perspectives of Social Reality*. Ed. Eloise Snyder. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.
- Lowie, Robert. *The Crow Indians*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935.
- . *Myths and Traditions of the Crow Indians*. American Museum of Natural History 25. New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1918.
- Malotki, Ekkehart, and Michael Lomatuway'ma. *Hopi Trickster Tales: Istutuwutsi*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1984.
- Niethammer, Carolyn. *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women*. New York: Collier, 1977.
- Norman, Howard A. *The Wishing Bone Cycle: Narrative Poems from the Swampy Cree Indians*. 2nd Ed. Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1982.

- Opler, Morris Edward. *Myths and Legends of the Lipan Apache Indians*. New York: J.J. Augustin, 1940.
- Parsons, Elsie Clews. *Kiowa Tales*. New York: Krause, 1969.
- . "Pueblo Folk-tales, Probably of Spanish Provenience." *Journal of American Folklore* 31(1918). 216-55.
- . *Tewa Tales*. New York: American Folklore Society, 1926.
- Radin, Paul. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.
- Ramsey, Jarold, ed. *Coyote Was Going There: Indian Literatures of the Far West*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983.
- . *Reading the Fire: Essays in the Traditional Literatures of the Far West*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983.
- Schlegel, Alice. "Three Types of Domestic Authority: A Cross-Cultural Study." *Being Female: Reproduction, Power and Change*. Ed. Dana Raphael. The Hague: Mouton, 1975.
- Senier, Siobhan. "A Zuni Raconteur Dons the Junco Shirt." *American Literature*. 66 (1994): 223+.
- Seumtewa, Evelyn, with C.F. and F. M. Vogelín. "Wren and Coyote." *Coyote Stories II*. Ed. Martha B. Kendall. IJAL-NATS Monograph No. 6. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980: 104-110.
- Stern, Theodore. "Some Sources of Variability in Klamath Mythology." *Journal of American Folklore* (1956): 1 +
- . "The Trickster in Klamath Mythology." *Western Folklore*. 12.3 (July 1953): 158-74.
- Swann, Brian, ed. *Coming To Light: Contemporary Translations of the Native Literatures of North America*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Tedlock, Dennis, trans. *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians*. New York: Dial, 1972.
- Thayer, James Steele. "The Berdache of the Northern Plains: A Socioreligious Perspective." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 1980: 287-293.
- Thompson, Craig. "Gender Representation in Two Clackamas Myths." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 3.1 (Spring 1991): 19-39.
- Walker, Deward, in collaboration with Daniel N. Matthews. *Nez Perce Coyote Tales: The Myth Cycle*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1998.
- Wiget, Andrew. "His Life in His Tail: The Native American Trickster

and the Literature of Possibility.” *Redefining American Literary History*. Ed. A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward. New York: MLA, 1990. 83-97.

—. *Native American Literature*. Boston: Twayne, 1985.

Williams, Walter L. *The Spirit and The Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1992.

Zuni People. *The Zunis: Self-Portrayals*. Trans. Alvina Quam. New York: New American Library, 1972.

The Politics and Erotics of Food in Louise Erdrich

Kari J. Winter

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.
Joy Harjo, “Maybe the World Ends Here”

In an Anishinaabe landscape seasonally imprinted by brutal winters, food has always been connected to life-and-death struggles that are both political and erotic. Colonialism intensified these struggles when missionaries introduced a religion that encouraged “mortification” of human bodies and the American government pursued genocidal policies of starvation and land-reduction that made food ever scarcer for the Anishinaabe during the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. In the face of colonialist deprivation and denial, Erdrich affirms the primacy of food and drink to human existence. As Bakhtin observes about Rabelais, so, too, in Erdrich: “There is scarcely a single page . . . where food and drink do not figure” (*Rabelais* 279). While critics like Daniel Cornell and Robert A. Morace have fruitfully explored connections between Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and the Anishinaabe trickster tradition as sites of resistance to official culture and rejuvenation of folk culture, this essay focuses on the multi-

faceted meanings in Erdrich's insistent use of food and drink as tropes through which to make meaning of human behavior.¹

Erdrich's fiction often places the maternal body on center stage, highlighting the impact on both women and their children of maternal nourishment or deprivation. Her commitment to writing women's bodies is explicitly theorized in her memoir, *The Blue Jay's Dance*, in which she states: "Organized Christian religion is more often about denying the body when what we profoundly need are rituals that take into regard the blood, the shock, the heat, the shit, the anguish, the irritation, the glory, the ear-nestness of the female body" (47). While attending to women's bodies, Erdrich does not neglect male bodies; indeed, she situates virtually all of her characters in material, symbolic, and metaphorical relation to food and drink. In *Cooking, Eating, Thinking*, philosophers Deane Curtin and Lisa Heldke suggest that the Western understanding of human identity would change radically if scholars attended to "embodied, concrete, practical experience" instead of privileging the rational, abstract, and mental. They argue:

taking the production and preparation of food as an illuminating source, we might formulate a conception of the person which focuses on our connection with and dependence on the rest of the world. Personhood, then, might be thought of as an unfolding *process*, with identity conditions which evolve over time. Might such perennial philosophical knots as the mind/body problem, the problem of our knowledge of the external world, and the problem of other minds be untied in the context of a food-centered philosophy of human being? (xiv)

In Anishinaabe culture, as in most American Indian cultures, the mind/body split has not been a "perennial philosophical knot." Anishinaabe culture traditionally views identity as unfolding and shifting over time, and Erdrich extends that view. Her work also suggests that people are defined by where, what, how, and why they eat. The politics and erotics of food shape peoples relationships to themselves, other people, animals, and the land.

"Potchikoo's Life After Death," a prose poem in *Baptism of Desire* (1989), suggests some possible reasons for Erdrich's insistent attention to food. Old Man Potchikoo, an Ojibwa trickster, begins his journey after death with frybread that his wife Josette had cooked for him. Unlike Christian heroes, tricksters have enormous appetites for food, so

Potchikoo devours the frybread in no time. Tempted by a "huge luscious berry he knew he shouldn't eat if he wanted to enter the heaven all the priests and nuns described" (51), he stuffs so many handfuls into his mouth that he becomes "fat from his greed" (52). He fears that Saint Peter will turn him away from the pearly gates because of his berry stains, but Saint Peter looks down his list and finds "only one word there. The word *Indian*" (52). Potchikoo is forbidden entrance. Gluttony would be a sin for a Christian, but Potchikoo's racialized body is marked as inherently sinful regardless of his actions. Later in the poem, Erdrich contrasts Potchikoo's sensual greed with Christian culture's consumerism. Investigating the white people's hell, Potchikoo discovers not a fiery cauldron but rather the damned "chained, head and foot and even by the neck, to old Sears Roebuck catalogues" (54). Western culture fetishizes products and dead documents, while eschewing the erotics of conversation as embodied in dialogue, in food, and in sex. Sensuality is thus excluded from hell as well as from heaven.

In an epigraph to *Jacklight*, her first volume of poetry, Erdrich highlights the traditional Ojibwa association of sex and food: "The same Chippewa word is used for both flirting and hunting game."² Similarly, Claude Levi-Strauss observes bluntly that in cultures world-wide: "To eat is to fuck" (qtd. in Carter 79). Erdrich dramatizes the inseparability of eating and sex in *Love Medicine* when Nector and Lulu smear butter over each other's bodies before partaking in a sexual feast; in "Le Mooz" when Margaret exhorts Nanapush to catch a moose "or my legs are shut to you"; and in many other scenes. Food and sex transgress the boundary between life and death in ways that Bakhtin illuminates: "In the act of eating . . . the confines between the body and the world are overstepped by the body; it triumphs over the world, over its enemy, celebrates its victory, grows at the world's expense. . . . Sadness and food are incompatible (while death and food are perfectly compatible)" (*Rabelais* 283).³ When Margaret withholds sex and feeds Nanapush indigestible food, Nanapush dies, but during his funeral he comes back from the dead to eat the mourners' food, to drink their wine, and to assure them that "[o]n the other side of life there is plenty of food and no government agents" ("Le Mooz" 80). He returns from death a second time to share with Margaret "the finest and most elegantly accomplished hours that perhaps lovers ever spent on earth" (80).

The trickster Potchikoo is filled with desires that simultaneously pain him and keep him peskily present in the world. Erdrich represents his hunger as both troublesome and comic. He uses his penis until it burns

up, falls off, and has to be magically renewed. Yet he is not a symbol of “individual and class gluttony and cupidity”; on the contrary, Erdrich’s tricksters represent what Bakhtin calls “the soul of the people as a whole” (*Rabelais* 292). As Basil Johnston explains, the Ojibwa trickster is “the prototype of humanity and the center of human interest” (xiii). As a representative human, the mythic Ojibwa trickster, Nana’b’oozoo, is simultaneously childish and mature, masculine and feminine. Sexually he “not only wanted to know what it was like to be a man with a woman, but he was equally curious to know what it was like to be a woman with a man” (82). In this vein, Nanapush, Erdrich’s trickster in *Tracks* and “Le Mooz,” emotionally mothers an adopted daughter and granddaughter, longs to know what it means to give birth to children, and radiates sexual energy, even in old age. Erdrich’s tricksters are reminiscent of figures in the European popular-festive tradition who “differ sharply from the images of private eating or private gluttony and drunkenness in early bourgeois literature” (301). Representative humans, Potchikoo and Nanapush celebrate voracious life. The trickster’s appetites and acts of eating are “joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage” (281).

In *Tracks* Erdrich further develops a contrast between Ojibwa sensuality and Christian asceticism. This novel explicitly situates the politics of hunger and food in the historical conditions of early twentieth-century America.⁴ Nanapush’s celebrations of life are grounded in the bitter historical reality of ethnocide testified to in the lyrical opening line of *Tracks*: “We began dying before the snow, and like the snow, we continued to fall.”⁵ Tragic, comic, sometimes a fool and sometimes a genius, Nanapush finds within himself the strength to wage continual war against colonialism, despite decade after decade of loss. Surrounded by starvation, disease, and death, he affirms food, healing, and sex. Rather than clinging to dogma, tricksters like Nanapush learn through trial and error, constantly adapting. Nanapush never ceases to search for ways to feed his community, both physically and spiritually.

In contrast, Pauline, the second narrator of *Tracks*, “tries as best she can to deny all bodily functions and desires” (Morace 52). Embracing Catholic ideology and welcoming death, she eventually helps the colonialist powers wreak destruction on the Ojibwa nation. A maniacal embodiment of Christian asceticism, Pauline mortifies her flesh by self-starvation and other forms of self-torture, eventually denying her Indian heritage and embracing a sinister new name: Sister Leopolda.⁶ As Sister

Leopolda, Pauline appears in four of Erdrich's novels, mutilating herself and torturing generations of Indian children in the convent school. Sister Leopolda's most memorable scene of torture takes place, significantly, in the convent kitchen in *Love Medicine*, where she tantalizes a hungry Marie Kashpaw with visions of forbidden delicacies and disrupts their bread-baking to torment and scald the young girl.⁷ In *Tracks* Pauline starves herself partly out of self-hatred for having had a sexual relationship. A survivor of ethnocide, Pauline internalizes Catholicism's self-hatred and learns to loathe her sexuality, to castigate her body, and to deprive herself of food. She calls self-starvation "fasting" and sees it a sign of spiritual triumph. Rejecting her own body, she also rejects her baby before it is born and refuses to look at it when delivered. (Marie Kashpaw is revealed in *Tracks* to be Pauline's unacknowledged daughter, which illuminates Sister Leopolda's obsessive animosity toward Marie in *Love Medicine*). At the end of *Tracks* Pauline's morbid revulsion against the body is projected outward when, in a delusional rage, she imagines that her former lover is Satan and murders him.

Erdrich's writing suggests time and again that searching for and listening to our relations' stories is crucial to overcoming the historical amnesia that traps us in the compulsive repetition of trauma and violence. Her attentiveness to human bodies, to food, to the hands that cook, to the touch that wounds or heals expresses her rejection of conventional narrative recipes for psychological development and maturation. Individual identity is incomprehensible apart from the narrative web of family systems and socio-political history. By rejecting the web of family ties and Ojibwa narratives that she was born into, Pauline renders herself incomprehensible ("mad") and, indeed, she becomes someone else. Erdrich's characters dramatize the insight of Bakhtin's assertion that "[t]he very being of man (both internal and external) is a *profound communication*. . . . I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception)" (Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin* 96). In Erdrich's tales, food precedes and enables communication; it is the staff of life in every sense. Her greatest storyteller, Nanapush, notes that starvation inhibits speech by leaving his "lips . . . parched, stuck together," whereas eating makes conversation (in every sense of the word) possible. After eating he says, "My voice rasped at first when I tried to speak, but then, oiled by strong tea, lard and bread, I was off and talking" (*Tracks* 7). For Nanapush, words both spark sexual desire and make sexual performance possible. Starvation threatens to render him "too weak to

make any hay," but when he expresses his sexual anxieties, Margaret laughs: "As long as your voice works, the other will" (*Tracks* 129).

As Erdrich's novels progress chronologically, they emphasize the historically shifting nature of the politics of food. In *Tracks*, which opens in 1912, Ojibwa survivors of colonialism and ethnocide are struggling to maintain the remnants of land that have not yet been stolen from them. Reduced to reservations inadequate to sustain their needs, the people are starving and the animals have almost vanished. Erdrich contrasts Ojibwa and white ideologies by dramatizing what Carol J. Adams calls "the sexual politics of meat." Shortly after the novel opens, Fleur Pillager, Nanapush's adopted daughter whose extended family was wiped out by starvation and disease, finds a job in a butcher shop named Kozka's Meats in the white town of Argus. Pauline, whose family also has died, narrates this section. She observes: "The men who worked at the butchers had carved about a thousand carcasses between them . . . not even mentioning the chickens, which were beyond counting" (13). As the story unfolds, the men who butcher the animals are shown to be racist, misogynistic, and contemptuous of the animals on whose lives they depend. In keeping with Ojibwa tradition, Fleur respects and identifies with the animals. Her empathy with them is shown when she bathes nightly in the slaughtering tub and sleeps in the smokehouse. The European-American men also associate women with animals, but they despise both.

For several weeks Fleur beats three men at cards, winning a dollar each night. One night the men raise the ante, and she cleans them out. Their response is to gang-rape her. Describing their assault, Erdrich constructs a series of images that closely identify Fleur and a sow. The ring-leader (named "Lily," perhaps to suggest his lily-whiteness) slips in the pigpen and wrestles with a powerful sow when he is trying to get his hands on Fleur (25). Neither the sow nor Fleur are passive victims, but both are subjected to violence. After the rape, a tornado shaped like a pig's snout attacks the butcher shop and exacts vengeance against the rapists, who are trapped in a meatlocker where two of them freeze to death and the third loses several limbs.⁸ Although Erdrich does not share Carol Adams's advocacy of vegetarianism, she, like many contemporary feminists, does highlight interconnections between violence against women, animals, and nature in America's imperialistic patriarchy.

While the butcher shop in Argus slaughters and packages abundant meat for white consumers, a starving, weak, aged Nanapush spiritually guides his nephew Eli Kashpaw on a moose hunt. Singing and praying, Nanapush oversees Eli through visions. As Beth Carroll observes,

"Nanapush's vision, drumming, and song bring Eli back safely from the hunt. The land speaks through Nanapush and saves both him and Eli from starvation. Nanapush acknowledges that the song moves through him, not from him; his power exists within, not above, nature" (8). Like his uncle, Eli knows the moose's ways. When he advances on the moose, Nanapush telepathically reminds him not to frighten the animal: "*Do not sour the meat . . . a strong heart moves slowly*" (102). After killing it, Eli carefully carves and binds the warm slabs of meat around his body, both to carry them and to keep himself warm against the frigid winter air. In an important sense, he unites himself with the moose: "He pressed to himself a new body, red and steaming" (103). When he returns to Nanapush's cabin, Nanapush observes: "The meat stood on its own in pieces, a moose transformed into the mold of Eli" (104). In this transubstantiation, Eli becomes the moose and the moose becomes Eli. Animals and humans give life to and for each other. At the smell of roasting meat, Nanapush almost weeps. The hunt has saved his extended family from death. Survival is dependent on knowledge, discipline, and respect for animals as well as people.

Erdrich's stories, however, like Bakhtin's carnivalesque, are "hostile to any sort of conclusive conclusion" (*Problems* 165). As capitalism advances in the twentieth century, the politics of meat shift in the real world and in Erdrich's representation. Kozka's Meats, which was the site of exploitation, gratuitous violence, and rape in *Tracks*, becomes a woman-dominated small business in *The Beet Queen*. Mary Adare, a German American, inherits the butcher shop from her Aunt Fritzie and Uncle Pete in the 1940s after Fritzie is injured by the electric butcher saw. Although Kozka's Meats represents an alien world of disconnection between humans and animals from a traditional Ojibwa perspective, for Mary Adare it is "my perfect home"—a warm, light place where customers come to talk (67). Cruel as it seemed in the previous context, in *The Beet Queen* the butcher shop sustains a relationship, albeit distant, between humans and animals. Mary reflects: "Across Fritzie's garden and the wide yard, [customers] could watch cows and sheep moving in the darkness of the stockpens, half visible between the heavy rail ties" (67). Fritzie, Pete, and Mary make sausages from their own recipes, and they give samples to customers to compare and select. Erdrich describes the customers incisively as "heavy people, Germans and Poles or Scandinavians, rough handed and full of opinions" whose "light eyes did not shift nor their conversation falter when they happened to look up, on slaughtering day perhaps, to see a pig penned in the killing chute, having

its throat cut" (68).⁹ Unappealing as this culture may be, Erdrich suggests that it is less atomized, alienated, and anesthetized than the supermarket culture that will replace it in the 1960s and 1970s. Mary Adare and her lifelong friend, Celestine James (a "mixed-blood" from the Ojibwa reservation), maintain longterm relationships with their customers. Mary and Celestine put care into the butchering process, meat preparation, and recipes, although some of their dishes are less than successful. In a moment of anger, Celestine berates Mary's cooking in a way that aptly encapsulates an unappetizing northern-European midwestern culture (the culture from which the German-American side of Erdrich's family comes). Celestine says: "Even thinking about [Mary's] strange Jell-O makes me furious. Nothing she cooks is normal, not her bran cookies, not her sheet cakes, not her liver casseroles. I don't want her awful cooking . . ." (217). Clearly for Erdrich the culture of the butcher shop continues to be problematic. *The Beet Queen*, however, represents the homogenizing culture of supermarkets as even more alienating because they eliminate the last shreds of relationality between animals and humans. Customers can buy meat so neatly packaged that its relationship to actual animals and to the people who slaughter animals is almost imperceptible.

Cultural alienation, bourgeois affectation, and detachment from the processes of creation lead to food poisoning in one of *The Beet Queen*'s comic scenes. Sita Kozka, Mary Adare's cousin, is an incarnation of stereotypical white femininity. She is so fully devoted to appearance without substance that by the end of the novel she is nothing more than a well-dressed corpse in the town parade. A sign of her fate is evident in the middle of the novel when she opens a French restaurant which she names "Chez Sita, Home of the Flambeed Shrimp." Large crowds turn out for her heavily publicized opening night and wait hungrily in "ghostly" candlelight for food. At last Mary and Celestine go into the kitchen where they find Sita "wear[ing] an apron, stand[ing] before an open grill, and behind her two long tables are covered with a welter of open cookbooks and empty pots" (120). Incapable of cooking, Sita explains that her chef and helpers "came down with food poisoning. . . . It was the shrimp stuffed with crab" (120). Mary, Celestine, and an Ojibwa relative toss together some food, pretend it is French (none of the customers know what they ordered anyway), and save the evening. A few weeks later the state health inspector shuts Chez Sita down. By juxtaposing Mary's relationship to food with that of many different characters in varied contexts, Erdrich creates a complex spectrum of food-related experiences instead of constructing binary oppositions between "good" and

“bad” ways of relating to food.

Through attending to the politics and erotics of food (as well as the anti-erotics of food deprivation), Erdrich’s work exhibits an acute awareness of social injustice and personal pain.¹⁰ Both her first published novel, *Love Medicine*, and her fifth novel, *Tales of Burning Love*, are framed by narrations of the death of June Kashpaw, a death that encircles Erdrich’s five inter-related novels and disturbingly signifies an accident, a suicide, and a murder for which members of June’s society are collectively responsible.¹¹ June’s death as well as the suicides, murders, abandonments, rapes, beatings, and alcoholism that pervade Erdrich’s fiction are rooted in colonialism’s mortification of (Indian) flesh.

In the opening scene of *Love Medicine*, June Kashpaw is waiting for a bus to take her home to the reservation when a man peeling Easter eggs beckons her into a bar. She walks in, drawn toward “that blue egg in the white hand, a beacon in the murky air” (2). The man (who says his name is Andy¹²) peels off pink shells and hands June “the naked egg” (2). Eating it leads June to discover “how hungry she was” (2). When June gobbles up four eggs, symbols of female fertility, her hunger indicates a craving for female nurturance as well as food. Aching and “totally empty,” June tricks herself into hoping she has found a recipe for survival: she thinks “the eggs were lucky” and the man “could be different” from all the others who have used and abused her (3). Trapped in a compulsive repetition of traumatic events, addicted to the alcohol that masks her insatiable emotional hunger, June attempts to deny once again that patriarchal society defines her as the prey, not the hunter; the meal, not the chef. As a small child June was abandoned to starvation. Her father ran off, her alcoholic mother neglected and abused her, and her mother’s boyfriend raped her. After her mother’s death, nine-year-old June survived “by eating pine sap in the woods” (85). Alcoholic relatives found June wandering in the woods and brought her to her aunt, Marie Kashpaw, who did not want her because her house was already overcrowded “with mouths [she] couldn’t feed” (85). But Marie was moved by the story of June’s survival and by her desperate appearance. She later recalls, “What I saw was starved bones, a shank of black strings, a piece of rag on her I wouldn’t have used to wipe a pig” (86).

Marie feeds, clothes, and grows to love June, but June has been so hurt by her mother that she cannot respond to Marie. Marie looks at her niece and recognizes this: “There was a sadness I couldn’t touch there. It was a hurt place, it was deep, it was with her all the time like a broke rib that stabbed when she breathed” (91). June decides to return to the woods

to live with a traditional Ojibwa man, Eli Kashpaw, who emotionally adopts and raises her. Erdrich refuses to sentimentalize; her novels dramatize levels of pain that cannot be healed. June's childhood of deprivation and abuse leave her permanently bereft, insatiably hungry. Marie reflects in Erdrich's fourth novel, *The Bingo Palace*: "She had tried to save . . . June, but it had been too late to really save her. June had worn out the world with her hurt, headlong chase. June was damaged goods, found once freezing in an outhouse, in a ditch, on the steps of the Sisters, and at last starving in the woods. Some children, you could not repair" (27-28). Starved in every sense, June has ravenous appetites that lead her to addictive consumption. When she looks for nourishment, she finds herself ravaged by the wrathful appetites of her violent husband Gordie Kashpaw and a string of abusive lovers. In a patriarchy that empowers men to take without giving, to use women's bodies nonreciprocally, June finds herself consumed time and again.

In her last search for nourishment, June is murderously devoured. After an evening of bar-hopping, June and Andy take a ride in the countryside in Andy's pickup truck, where he peels off her clothes with less grace than he had peeled the eggs, ineptly attempts to thrust himself into her, and drunkenly passes out. Stripped of her fragile defenses against the world, feeling "smooth and strange" like a newborn baby, a shattered June escapes from the man's dead weight and falls out of the pickup into the cold air, which, the narrator tells us, "was a shock like being born" (6). As if she were a feminine Christ, June encounters an Easter Sunday blizzard, walks over the snow "like water," and leaves behind her egg-shell body so her "pure and naked" soul can go home.

Associating eggs with Easter—the eggs like women are "painted" pink and blue—Erdrich suggests that female fertility has been placed in the service of men's resurrection. Desperately needing to be mothered, June must become her own mother. She can give birth to herself only through death. Haunted by her ghost, character after character in Erdrich's novels wrestles with the feelings of guilt, grief, inadequacy, anger, and longing that June's death awakens in them. As Elaine Tuttle Hansen has observed, Erdrich's novels "cohere around the quest to know mothers' true stories" (123). More specifically, Robert Silberman argues that June's

death becomes a means of exploring not only the victim's life but the lives of those around her. *Love Medicine* could have been called "Who Killed June Kashpaw?" or rather "What Killed Her?" since the responsibility and guilt are shared by many individuals embed-

ded in an entire way of life, a complex mesh of biographical and historical factors. . . . June's presence, that is, her absence, haunts the book. (103-04)

The quest for June is often creative and productive in the self-analysis it engenders.¹³ The first character who narrates June's loss is her niece Albertine. Prompted by June's death to return home to the reservation, Albertine's meditations are framed by observations about food. When she arrives at the home of the mother she both loves and hates, she finds her mother Zelda and her Aunt Aurelia "indoors, baking. I heard their voices from the steps and smelled the rich and browning piecrusts" (12). Erdrich uses food imagery throughout this chapter, "The World's Greatest Fishermen," to suggest that the way people relate to food is a key indicator of their psychological well-being and ability to relate to other people. The mother, Zelda, and the daughter, Albertine, have an abrasive relationship that Albertine says is "like a file we sharpened on, and necessary in that way" (11), but Zelda's flaws as a mother are counterbalanced by her status as a nurturer of human life, which is demonstrated by her kitchen. The verbal exchanges between Zelda and Aunt Aurelia are often spiteful, but their hands, which are "buried in a dishpan of potato salad," "caked" with food, "patting and crimping the edges of pies," form a conversation that binds the family and the community together (12, 13). Albertine notes that the pies her female relations bake are collaborative, sensual creations: "beautiful pies—rhubarb, wild Juneberry, apple, and gooseberry, all fruits preserved by Grandma Kashpaw or my mother or Aurelia" (13).

In this context of hunger and food, Albertine contrasts the actions of two men who are labeled "the world's greatest fishermen." Eli Kashpaw, Albertine's great-uncle who raised and loved the abandoned child June, is the traditional Anishinaabe man who Nanapush telepathically guided on a moose hunt in *Tracks*. Trained in the woods and intimately acquainted with animals, Eli merits the title "the world's greatest fisherman." For decades he has prepared food for his community to ward off starvation. From skunks to fourteen-inch trout, Eli is expert in the survivalist arts of hunting, fishing, and cooking. In contrast, June's son King is a shiftless city boy who claims (falsely) that his first kill was a "gook" in Vietnam and who proceeds with a litany of lies about murderous exploits that reveal the ugly shape of his fantasy life (30). His Norwegian-American wife Lynette, who is both his victim and his enabler, gives him a hat that pronounces him "The World's Greatest Fisherman."

As the destructive dynamics of this marriage unfold, Albertine recognizes King's kinship to his father. Rather than eating life-sustaining foods that are produced by and foster communities, both father and son consume vast amounts of alcohol which alienate them from themselves and their communities.¹⁴ When King threatens Lynette with violence, Albertine hears June's voice: "June had said, 'He used the flat of his hand. He hit me good.' And now I heard her son say, ' . . . flat of my hand . . . but good . . .'" (17).

After June's death, King uses money inherited from her life insurance to buy himself a car. He conflates aggression against his mother's body with aggression against his wife's body when he beats on the car (symbol of his mother) while his wife crouches inside terrified:

King screamed at her and threw his whole body against the car, thudded on the hood with hollow booms, banged his way across the roof, ripped at antennae and sideview mirrors with his fists, kicked into the broken sockets of headlights. Finally he ripped a mirror off the driver's side and began to beat the car rhythmically, gasping. (35)

Shocked by the spectacle of a son who is emulating his own behavior, King's father Gordie wrestles him to the ground, saying, "King, baby! . . . It's her car. You're June's boy" (35). King begins to shake "with heavy sobs" and to lament his mother's death: "It's awful to be dead. Oh my God, she's so cold" (35). After this brief recognition of his mother's pain and his own loss, King flees from painful truths and twists away from his father, blaming him for his mother's death and accusing him of wanting to take his car. In keeping with Erdrich's symbology of food, the final sign that King is beyond hope comes when Albertine discovers that King has smashed the pies that she had pledged to protect: "All the pies were smashed. Torn open. Black juice bleeding through the crusts. Bits of jagged shells were stuck to the wall and some were turned completely upside down. Chunks of rhubarb were scraped across the floor. Meringue dripped from the towels" (41). Albertine works "carefully for over an hour" to mend the pies but is forced to conclude that "once they smash there is no way to put them right" (42). The waste of King's life is mirrored in the pies he has destroyed. Through a combination of circumstance and choice, he is smashed, and there is no way to put him right. June was shattered like a fragile egg; her son falls apart like Humpty Dumpty.

June's second son, Lipsha Morrissey (whose father is Gerry

Nanapush), spends his childhood knowing nothing about his mother except that she abandoned him, yet his gradual acknowledgment of grief at her absence helps create his tenderness and healing touch. A poignant, untrained and often inept healer, Lipsha near the end of the novel attempts to create a recipe for love medicine that will restore the love of his grandfather (Nector Kasbpaw) for his grandmother (Marie Lazarre). At the last minute Lipsha substitutes refrigerated turkey hearts for freshly hunted goose hearts. Like his mother's misguided recipe for love, Lipsha's recipe leads to death. When Marie forces Nector to eat a turkey heart, he chokes on it and dies. Despite this apparent catastrophe, Lipsha gains two crucial insights from his practice of love medicine. First, witnessing the ferocity of his grandmother's love for his grandfather causes Lipsha to wonder if he is too chicken-hearted to "love like that" (234). Second, Nector's willingness to die leads Lipsha to recognize that his grandfather "wasn't choking on the heart alone. There was more to it than that. It was other things that choked him as well" (250). Consequently, Lipsha begins to contemplate the meanings of his grandfather's life.

Trying "to get down to the bottom of my heritage," Lipsha travels to the Twin Cities where he believes he will find his father, the trickster Gerry Nanapush, who is the son of Lulu and the grandson of Nanapush (342). Lipsha winds up in King's apartment and observes that years of meanness have taken their toll on his half-brother. Lipsha thinks, "He did his best to make me feel like a beggar at the table of life. I was supposed to eat the *real* children's crumbs" (342). Despite King's "legitimate" status, it is he, not Lipsha, who is emaciated, spiritually as well as physically. He has rejected Ojibwa definitions of kinship, which are expansive and inclusive, and he habitually violates Ojibwa traditions of meal-sharing and hospitality. King's son Howard is a "skinny little kid" who wants to turn his abusive father over to the cops. Lipsha offers to help fix dinner but then realizes that no one in his brother's household intends to cook. When little Howard pours himself a bowl of cereal, King's only comment about his hungry son is: "He does it all backwards. . . . First he should put the cereal in his bowl, then the milk" (345). Thoughts of feeding his son do not enter his mind, nor does he recognize his own needs for nourishment.¹⁵

Born into a cycle of starvation and abuse that deployed the violence of colonialism, Lipsha desperately needs the love medicine that would save him from his mother's fate. He finds it through his trickster father. Freshly escaped from prison, Gerry Nanapush shows up in King's apartment. Challenging King to a game of cards, Lipsha wins his brother's car

(his mother's legacy) and drives off with his father hidden in the trunk. When father and son finally have a chance to talk, Gerry touches his son and says, "You're a Nanapush man" (366). Lipsha thinks, "To be a son of a father was like that. In that night I felt expansion, as if the world was branching out in shoots and growing faster than the eye could see" (366). United with his father and connecting with his mother's legacy, Lipsha recognizes that June "was part of the great loneliness being carried up the driving current" (367). He begins to forgive his mother and thereby to allay his emotional hunger. Lipsha's quest for his mother will continue in *The Bingo Palace*, but his father's touch in his mother's car is a love medicine that nourishes and heals.

Erdrich's newest novel, *The Antelope Wife* (1998), is perhaps the most food-centered of all her works. She powerfully dramatizes the realities of violence and the possibilities of bliss through food in a series of encounters between European Americans and Ojibwas in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century midwest. The novel opens with "Father's Milk," a tale of identity transformations. A young white man named Scranton Roy, the son of a Quaker father and a poet mother, is inspired by passion for an actress to "prove himself" by traveling westward. He joins the US Cavalry in Minnesota and after military training finds himself gripped by "frigid hate" during "a spectacular cruel raid upon an isolated Ojibwa village mistaken for hostile during the scare over the starving Sioux" (4, 3). Eager to kill, he bayonets an old woman. When her body closes over the blade, "[h]e braced himself against her to pull free, set his boot between her legs to tug the blade from her stomach, and as he did so tried to avoid her eyes but did not manage" (4). He sees in her eyes his own mother and runs away in horror at his act of matricide and symbolic rape. Although Erdrich's fiction references abundant historical atrocities, this scene is perhaps the most graphically violent she has written. She offers Scranton Roy no psychological excuse for his behavior: he has gone "against the radiant ways of his father" and thoroughly violated his mother's teachings. He appears to be the unredeemable face of murderous colonialism and rapacious patriarchy.

Nonetheless, Scranton Roy undergoes a second transformation in the following pages. His transformation into a murderer had been triggered by, among other things, his emotional hunger in a colonialist context in which Indians are physically starving. (Colonialist policies led to the Sioux starvation with its consequent desperation and white fears, which motivated the slaughter of a peaceful Ojibwa village.) When he sees his mother in his victim and runs away from the raid, he chases a dog with a

hungry baby strapped on its back. His responsiveness to the baby's hunger humanizes him. Instead of killing people, he begins to hunt animals (rabbits, partridges, buffalo) to feed the baby, the dog, and himself. Of course the baby cannot eat meat, and her incessant cries of hunger "resounded, took over everything, and brought his heart clean to the surface. . . . It seemed, when he held her close upon his heart as women did, that the child grew angry with longing and desperately clung, rooted with its mouth, roared in frustration, until at last, moved to near insanity, Roy opened his shirt and put her to his nipple" (6). In Erdrich's view, babies can teach adults a great deal about how to be human. Adults need babies as much as babies need adults.¹⁶ This desperate baby rescues Scranton Roy from psychic if not physical death. After a few days of the baby's fierce sucking, Scranton Roy finds that "[h]is nipples tightened. Pity scorched him, she sucked so blindly, so forcefully, and with such immense faith. It occurred to him one slow dusk as he looked down at her, upon his breast, that she was teaching him something" (7). Her faith teaches him faith, and the result is a profound transformation, physical as well as emotional: his breasts begin to produce milk. Reclaiming his mother's legacy, he begins writing poetry and names his adopted daughter Matilda after his mother.

In a magical realist scene later in the novel, Erdrich once again juxtaposes war to food and suggests that food is redemptive, "the very secret of life" (136). In 1945, an Ojibwa man who fought in World War II and saw his cousin killed during battle kidnaps a young German immigrant to Minnesota named Klaus and brings him to the reservation. While a group of Ojibwa men contemplates enslaving or killing the German, Klaus offers to cook in exchange for his life. With great ceremony, he bakes a cake. The reservation looks on impatiently. When he opens the oven door, a fragrance floats out: "More than delicious. . . . Impossible. Perhaps an Anishinaabe vision word comes close and perhaps there is no way to describe the premonition they all experienced then" (137). The narrator, unborn during the events he narrates but the son of a man who will be named Klaus, after the German, describes Klaus's cake as such a work of art that eating it elicits the sweetest possibilities of humanity and transforms hatred and vengeance into a sense of oceanic oneness. Rarely has a cross-cultural encounter been described in richer terms than those Erdrich's narrator uses to describe the Ojibwa community eating the German cake:

We are people of simple food straight from the earthen earth and

from the lakes and from the woods. . . . Suddenly this: a powerful sweetness that opened the ear to sound. Embrace of roasted nut-meats and a tickling sensation of grief. A berry tartness. Joy. Klaus had inserted jam in thin-spread layers. And pockets of spices that have no origin in our language and no experience on our part. . . .

Together, they sat, swallowed the last crumbs, pressed up the powdery sweetness with their fingers. When they had licked every grain into themselves, they sat numb with pleasant feelings and then, over the group, there stole a sweet poignance. (139)

In the cake's orgasmic afterglow, some people see their dead loved ones, others remember their mothers, all are transformed. Following the ecstasy of this food orgy,

They breathed together. They thought like one person. They had for a long unbending moment the same heartbeat, same blood in their veins, the same taste in their mouth. How, when they were all one being, kill the German? How, in sharing this sweet intensity of life, deny its substance in even their enemies? (139)

Because of his cake, the German is adopted into the Shawano clan. Erdrich uses this magical realist scene to dramatize the erotic power of food. Food sustains, enlivens, and reconciles human beings one to another. The transcendent value of the art of cooking is suggested when the narrator says that after death, "I believe I will taste the true and the same taste, mercy on the tongue. And I will laugh the same way they all did, at once, in surprise and at the same sweet joke" (139).

Whether describing the butcher shop or the hunt, a wedding cake or a disastrous jello, Erdrich insistently connects food to work. As Bakhtin observes: "In the oldest system of images food was related to work. It concluded work and struggle and was their crown of glory. Work triumphed in food. . . . Collective food as the conclusion of labor's collective process was not a biological, animal act but a social event" (281). Capitalism mystifies the labor of food, while patriarchy relegates it to women and renders "women's work" invisible. In mainstream, bourgeois literature, according to Bakhtin, food imagery usually partakes of private gluttony in "a series of artificial, meaningless metaphors" (*Rabeiais* 282). In the "Great Tradition," cooking is largely ignored. Curtin and Heldke suggest reasons for this erasure:

In many, if not most cultures, food production and preparation are women's work and/or the work of slaves or lower classes. Certainly this is true of Euro-American cultures, and to that extent it is not difficult to determine why western philosophers have not considered food a properly philosophical topic. (xiii)

Against this context, Erdrich, like Joy Harjo, proposes a mythos to counter John 1.1: "In the beginning was Food." From painfully narrating the consequences of the colonialist strategy of starving Indians to celebrating acts of human nurturance to including in her memoir recipes for her favorite foods, Erdrich focuses our attention on the primacy of embodied experience. A dinner with "excesses that saturate the senses" can have "a purifying effect upon the mind," she argues (132). Her carnivalesque tropes and recipes invite the reader to participate in a community¹⁷ that is both physical and intellectual. The pleasure of the text grows beyond Barthes's readerly *jouissance* into a sensual interplay of story, smell, touch, and taste. Words materialize into dishes; Erdrich's recipes are transubstantiated and consumed; the word is made flesh and dwells in us.

NOTES

I would like to thank Donald A. Grinde, Jr. for his astute comments on drafts of this essay. Thanks also to my research assistant, Alison Kelly, and to Beth Carroll, Betty Moss, and Robyn Warhol for helpful conversations and suggestions.

¹ Morace's excellent essay provides suggestive details exploring how the "Rabelaisian spirit . . . manifests itself in the pervasive references to food and sex in *Love Medicine*" (45), but it does not develop the topic adequately.

² The epigraph is taken from R. W. Dunning's 1959 *Social and Economic Change Among the Northern Ojibwa*.

³ For a different reading of the ways food transgresses the life-death boundary, see Gish's article, which focuses on hunting.

⁴ Erdrich's 1999 novel, *The Birchbark House*, describes the beginnings of the colonialist devastation of traditional Ojibwa life in the mid-nineteenth century. The main character, a young girl named Omakayas, is the sole survivor of her clan, which has been wiped out by smallpox,

which the U.S. government deliberately spread among certain American Indian populations. Although a vaccination was available, few American Indians were provided access to it. The novel places food—hunting, wild ricing, maple-sugaring—at the center of traditional village and familial life.

⁵ Erdrich's simile of snow and death highlights the difficult winters in Ojibwa territory, but the simile also brings to mind Auschwitz, where the ashes of the victims covered the ground like snow, an image used by many survivors and witnesses.

⁶ As Morace observes, Pauline's first name connects her to "a misogynist saint (his loathing for women transformed into her self-loathing)" and her second name, Sister Leopolda, is "an echo of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and index of her masochistic (and later sadistic) personality" (51).

⁷ For an interesting reading of how the struggle between Leopolda and Marie is connected to eating disorders and how Erdrich "uses transgressive forms of consumption to show a society whose order depends on whether its members conform to interrelated, if false, roles," see Medeiros (25).

⁸ For a fuller discussion of this scene, see Beth Carroll.

⁹ In her glowing review of *The Beet Queen*, Angela Carter rhapsodizes that Erdrich's description of Germans, Poles, and Scandinavians (in the paragraph from which I have quoted) gives "a whole chunk of social history complete in one exquisitely precise piece of observation" (154).

¹⁰ The despair over history and over the effects of social problems like fetal alcohol syndrome that were expressed by Michael Dorris in his writing and finally in his suicide is a testament to how intimately Louise Erdrich has had to deal with social and personal devastation.

¹¹ A poem entitled "A Love Medicine" in Erdrich's first volume of poetry, *Jacklight* (1984), describes a prototype of June in Wahpeton, the North Dakota town where Erdrich lived in as a child. The poet rescues her "sister" from parks, ditches, and fields where she spends the nights in rainstorms after being beaten by "her man" (7). Sitting in the dark by a swollen river, the poet concludes the poem: "Sister, there is nothing / I would not do" (8). This powerful, anguished poem suggests that Erdrich's concern for the Junes of the world—the beaten, aching, "dragonfly" women (one of whom might be her former or potential self)—motivates

her writing.

¹² We learn in *Tales of Burning Love* that Andy's real name is Jack Mauser.

¹³ The search for June continues in Erdrich's later novels. She is central to the development of both *The Bingo Palace* and *Tales of Burning Love*. In the former novel, fourth in the series, June's apparition appears first to her son Lipsha and later to her lover Gerry Nanapush. In the latter novel, fifth in the series, Jack Mauser must wrestle with June's ghost until he admits responsibility for her death, weeps for her, and accepts for himself "the pain of coming back to life" (452).

¹⁴ For useful reflections on alcoholism in *Love Medicine*, see Ratcliffe.

¹⁵ Unlike Lipsha, whose well-being depends on connecting with his father and with his mother's stories, Howard's survival and well-being depend on his disconnecting from his dysfunctional parents, especially his father. While Erdrich offers no hope for King's recovery, she does offer hope that Howard will be able to break the cycle of violence in his family system (passed down from Gordie to King). In *Tracks*, Erdrich represented Pauline's act of accepting a name (Sister Leopolda) from a dead piece of paper as the final step in her self-obliteration. In *Love Medicine*, Howard gains a chance at life from a piece of paper. His teacher asks him which of his names (King Howard Kashpaw, Junior) he would like to be called, thereby giving him the chance to name himself and distinguish his identity from his fathers. She then writes his name with "permanent" Magic Marker on a heart which she tapes to the classroom wall. While Lipsha inherits the Nanapush heart from his father, Howard is empowered by the paper heart: "He stared at the heart with his name firmly inside of it, and suddenly something moved inside of him. He felt a jolt of strangeness. For a moment he was heavy, full of meaning. Howard was sitting there. Howard was both familiar and different. Howard was living in this body like a house. Howard Kashpaw" (331).

¹⁶ For example, in *The Beet Queen* a desperate Martin Miller steals the baby abandoned by Adelaide Adare to give his wife a replacement for their dead infant. Significantly entitled "Rescue," this narrative segment concludes with the criminally adoptive mother saving the clothes "the baby had been wearing on the night he came to her rescue" (47).

¹⁷ For analyses of how recipes form communities, see Bower.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Carol J. *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Literary Theory*. New York: Continuum, 1990.
- Bower, Anne L. *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1997.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.
- . *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Carroll, Beth. "Rape, Colonization, and Resistance in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *A Leadership Journal: Women in Leadership—Sharing the Vision* 3.1 (Fall 1998): 45-52.
- Carter, Angela. *Expletives Deleted: Selected Writings*. London: Vintage, 1993.
- Cornell, Daniel. "Woman Looking: Revis(ion)ing Pauline's Subject Position in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 4.1 (1992): 49-64.
- Curtin, Deane W. and Lisa M. Heldke, eds. *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.
- Erdrich, Louise. *The Antelope Wife*. New York: HarperCollins, 1998.
- . *Baptism of Desire*. New York: Harper, 1989.
- . *The Beet Queen*. New York: Bantam, 1986.
- . *The Bingo Palace*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- . *The Birchbark House*. New York: Hyperion, 1999.
- . *The Blue Jay's Dance*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- . *Jacklight*. New York: Holt, 1984.
- . "Le Mooz." *New Yorker* 24 January 2000: 74-80.
- . *Love Medicine*. 1984. New York: HarperCollins expanded version, 1993.
- . *Tales of Burning Love*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.
- . *Tracks*. New York: Holt, 1988.

- Gish, Robert F. "Life into Death, Death into Life: Hunting as Metaphor and Motive in *Love Medicine*." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1999. 67-83.
- Hansen, Elaine Tuttle. *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997.
- Harjo, Joy. *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*. New York: Norton, 1994.
- Johnston, Basil. *The Manitous: The Supernatural World of the Ojibway*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1995.
- Medeiros, Paulo. "Cannibalism and Starvation: The Parameters of Eating Disorders in Literature." *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment*. Eds. Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992. 11-27.
- 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.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. "A Rhetoric of Classroom Denial: Resisting Resistance to Alcohol Questions While Teaching Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *The Languages of Addiction*. Eds. Jane Lilienfield and Jeffrey Oxford. New York: St. Martins, 1999. 105-21.
- Silberman, Robert. "Opening the Text: *Love Medicine* and the Return of the Native American Woman." *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures*, ed. Gerald Vizenor. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1993. 101-20.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Trans. Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984.

“Settling” History: Understanding Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony, Storyteller, Almanac of the Dead, and Gardens in the Dunes

Denise K. Cummings

With increasing frequency, scholars note Leslie Marmon Silko’s status as a major author whose power of story has come to mean a great deal to many readers, especially critical readers. While there has been a growing body of criticism on her fiction, there has been minimal analysis of her various texts as a collective corpus of literary experiment. Indeed, a noteworthy exception is Paul Beekman Taylor’s “Silko’s Reappropriation of Secrecy,” an analysis of Silko’s work perhaps most visible in this regard of theorizing the relationships between Silko’s texts. Taylor admirably recognizes the turning of Native American story into English as a method of appropriation and reappropriation. Building on the work of contemporary literary and cultural critics, he applies this idea to *Ceremony*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and select short stories. Taylor, like many other commentators, also acknowledges his own perspective as pointedly Eurocentric, and makes note of his place as a writer of European descent. He argues that his “point of view . . . gives [him] a distinct if not privileged perspective on the American Indian’s cultural convergence with mainstream American civilization and upon [the Indian’s] strategies of appropriation and reappropriation of cultural goods” (23).

By asserting that he finds “the Indian example instructive for the European who senses that his own cultures are in a deeper crisis now than they were five hundred years ago when the competition for conquest and appropriation of the riches of the Western Hemisphere began,” Taylor evaluates the significance of the material he indicates. In doing so he self-reflexively explores the vital connection between the knowledge and power that American Indian arts transmit across cultural boundaries. He insists, “we in Europe have in large part lost touch with the land, our ancestry, and with those primal mythic values that are figured and refigured in American Indian story from its native oral matrix into the Eurocentric compartments of word and graph” (24). Superimposing the European and American literary map upon contemporary American Indian written lore, Taylor maintains, “brings into sharp relief lines of convergence and divergence of cultures and exposes much of its promising power to rejuvenate what many lament as a stale and moribund mainstream American literary koine, and if that, its power can touch world literature” (24).

Furthering Taylor’s claims, particularly his notion of convergence and divergence of cultures, I suggest Silko’s work rejuvenates more than the mainstream American literary koine and world literature. By examining the changes that take place *between* each of Silko’s major texts, I will present how her work might be understood within historical webs, which in turn prompts a reevaluation of the ethical and political choices involved in historical process and textual analysis. My own critical perspective stems from certain concerns that I have had, while it also raises new questions. I am deeply interested in Native authors like Silko and how they combine ethnohistorical and tribal oral traditions with the literary conventions derived from American and Western European literatures. Likewise, I want to articulate an interpretive approach to Silko’s work that bridges the projects of literary and cultural studies and critical theory. Such a desire encourages me to contemplate Silko’s potential integral role in understanding the processes of social and cultural history. I ask myself how in reading her work readers might imagine both the possibilities as well as the pitfalls of using a cross-cultural methodology, or more specifically for my purposes here, of placing one indigenous culture in contact with another.¹

An unlikely source

The importance of the work of Leslie Marmon Silko can be found, in part, in her experiments with different forms, genres, and modalities in

each of her narratives. It is my contention that in each of her works, Silko experiments with a certain form, exhausting its potentialities, coming up against its limits, and then abandoning it for another possibility in her next work. This energy and innovation, I believe, is part of her significance as a writer. In fact, I will call it her particular brand of genius.

In order to bring into focus possible reasons for Silko's shift, I turn to what may at first appear an unlikely source, Paul Carter's 1987 *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*. When I read this text, Silko's work resurfaced in my mind in surprising and stimulating ways. In brief, Carter's subject is the European exploration and settlement of Australia and his intention in the book is to re-examine the writing of history as positivist, imperialist chronology and offer "spatial history" as an alternative; his subtitle thus declares his approach.

A methodological or summary preface remains absent from Carter's text. Rather, his hermeneutic method leads readers to discover spatial history. First we explore its byways, as Captain James Cook explored the Australian coast, discovering as we go. Moving geographically over space rather than chronologically through time, always shifting our point of view, we journey to spatial history. In his introduction, Carter informs us that spatial history is not imperial history, by which he means history as chronological two-dimensional reporting from an invented point of view, history where the past has been settled even more than the country, history upon a stage, history as "playwright" (xiv), history as a succession of events which assumes a chronological chain of cause and effect, history "that pays attention to events unfolding in time alone" (xvi), history with "possession" and colonization in mind. Carter claims that it is "the specificity of historical experience that is enemy of positivist history: it is the active charge of historical time and space that undermines the cause-and-effect patterning of lives, events and facts into something significant" (4). The imperial history he seeks to undermine is writing that was under the influence of Nineteenth-century scientific world view, the proper relations are those governed by cause and effect and of a singular, fixed perspective. He foregrounds, then, that the "specificity of historical experience" is exactly the terrain he'll investigate; it is in the particular that we'll rediscover "history." Early on in his argument, Carter provides us with:

a fact of the greatest significance for spatial history; which is that rhetoric, the whole range of figurative terms by which we denominate the world, attempting to translate it into plausible conceptions, is itself inherently spatial in nature. Metaphor, for instance, is quite

literally a spatial figure of speech: in a static sense, it stands in for or in place of something else; in this way, it makes what is invisible or only dimly perceptible emerge clearly before our eyes; in a mobile sense, metaphor carries meanings over, brings distant things near or even runs alongside normal usage on a parallel track. . . . (30)

Our excursion with Carter takes us through Cook's Australian place names, those Carter identifies as having a relevant spatial itinerary. The names, he argues, "underline the active nature of the explorers space and time" (4) and thus reveal as history the process of exploration itself. Any attempt to classify Cook's names according to a static cultural taxonomy, whether etymological, semantic, or biographical, he believes, ignores the historical circumstances in which the names were given (4-6). Carter further investigates the places where language and spatial experience intersect to make history. We tour through the written journals of overland explorers Charles Sturt and Edward Eyre; the survey expedition of Thomas Livingston Mitchell; Matthew Flinders' circumnavigation and autobiographical account; the significance of town squares and grid plans; versions of the picturesque in Australian landscape; the disparate Australias of settlers, explorers, and convicts. And, finally, we appreciate that the typical "origin story" cannot be found in this text. What I mean is that Carter ends where other "histories" begin: with a discussion of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. In his last two chapters, which I will soon describe at considerable length, we make the necessary connections with his first nine, and discover "spatial history." Here Carter takes up the problem of the exteriority of aboriginal culture to Western norms and interpretive frameworks and the problem then of faithfully capturing some sense of this otherness.

"The Road to Botany Bay," Carter's penultimate chapter, critiques the "one-way logic of positivist chronology" (293). Spatial history "does not go confidently forward. It does not organize its subject matter into a nationalist enterprise. It advances exploratively, even metaphorically, recognizing that the future is invented" (294). Such a description seems to illuminate not only "spatial history," but also Carter's method in his attempts to describe this alternative history. For Carter imagines that we, the readers, are like the explorers, not legislators. Consonant with Carter's assessments are Michel de Certeau's ideas in "Spatial Stories" from *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau argues that narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes and narrated adventures do not merely constitute what he calls a "supplement" to pedestrian enunciations and

rhetorics. Rather, narrated adventures “make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it” (116). De Certeau believes that sayings and stories are proliferating metaphors that organize places through the displacements they “describe.” He makes a clear distinction between space and place, arguing *that space is a practiced place* (117, de Certeau’s emphasis). The story describes, and every description is a culturally creative act (123). “As a general repetition before the actual representation,” de Certeau writes, “the rite, a narration in acts, precedes the historical realization” (124). Stories go ahead of social practices in order to open a field for them. “Preceding judgment that regulates and settles, there is a founding narration” (125-26).

It seems important to bear in mind de Certeau’s views of founding narration when we turn with Carter to the importance of the convict narratives—the voices previously unheard, previously under erasure. In the writing of imperial history, the convict narratives disappear or they are stereotyped. Yet the unheard reveals the logic of the heard. Carter argues, “In dealing with authority, the convicts revealed its rhetorical foundations: maps and memos were instruments of strategy, not incontestable facts . . .” (*The Road to Botany Bay* 313). Before there were facts, there had to be a fiction of facts (313). The explorers:

welcomed these imaginary places as hypotheses necessary to rational travelling. Fiction or fact, they lent the traveller direction. The confirmation of these tales was less important than the ideal place they offered as a goal. The mythic and the marvellous were essential to travel, as Flinders recognized, and in this respect the convicts’ stories only spelt out what was officially known but suppressed. (314)

Carter draws attention to the crisis of authority that surmounted. He argues that the convicts ironically appropriated the tricks of the dominant discourse thereby revealing its flimsiness (317). “By a final irony, the official historians *will* the convicts to take to the woods: for is it not where they belong, in the prehistoric, pre-rational realm of Australian nature?” (318, Carter’s emphasis).

In his final, dense chapter, “A Wandering State,” Carter tells us that “In Botany Bay, the name and the symbolic place, the convict and the savage were fused into the figure of unreason” (320). This is how “like the convicts, the Aborigines make their appearance in the pages of history as tale-bearers. . . . And by a final ironic twist, true or false, their stories are consigned to the unverifiable realm of the hearsay prehistoric”

(323). On imperial history's stage, much gets "excluded." Carter's attention to the year 1790, and to the mate Daniel Southwell on the ship the *Sirius*, summarizes exclusion.

The mate evokes visual perceptions in his journal that reveal his intentional state of mind, or what Carter calls the mate's "single-minded orientation towards the horizon . . ." (324). For example, "Southwell scans the sea not because he *expects* to find a sail there, but because *he would like to*. . . . His narrative reveals the primary act of perception as interpretation (324, Carter's emphasis). Carter perceives, "Southwell's . . . orientation is at once empirical and imaginative; his poetic precision keeps the horizon open, and it also opens up the possibility of the kind of history attempted here, a history of intentions" (324). But the real importance of all this, Carter insists, is that Southwell's fantasies, or anything like them, are largely excluded from the imperial chroniclers, except they appear in the stories of the Aborigines "where the context neutralizes their emotional appeal" (324).

Absent from "history" are the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence. Carter believes, "to draw attention to the lost history of the convicts is to engage in a genuinely dialectical activity: it not only reflects critically on dominant historical tradition, but also gives the convicts a place within it, a place from which to speak and be heard" (326). History, for Carter, "is essentially an act of interpretation, a re-reading of documents . . . [it] *hides* our origins from us" (336, Carter's emphasis). None of this, however, applies to the Aborigines, "for the simple reason that, from the beginning of white occupation, the Aborigines were made to speak a language which was not theirs. . . . Their motives, unlike those of the convicts, remained hidden: there was no history in terms of which to interpret them" (327). Carter adds, "The constitutional inability of imperial history to engage the Aborigines, to recognize the possibility of a different history, emerges in a variety of ways. But, underlying them all, is the question of language" (332). Carter then insists that though the Aborigines may be discursively enigmatic, *spatially* they come into prominent view. "Aborigines' spatial command of the country allowed them not to travel for the sake of seeing new countries, but in order to continue to inhabit their own" (336). The country, for them, "came into being like a text read aloud" (337). The white narrative of history, by contrast, seems to Carter "brittle and narrow" (345). He then comments on the intentional nature of historical activity:

What . . . the nomad, black or white, symbolized, when he wrote or danced or simply made tracks, was not the physical country, but the

enactment of a historical space. In his writings . . . what he sought to re-enact symbolically was the figure of intention that brought the country into focus in the first place. It is here, in recognizing the intentional nature of historical activity, that the possibility of *writing* an aboriginal spatial history emerges. . . . A cross-cultural history . . . has to be, in some sense, dialectical: it has to see what aboriginal perceptions have to tell . . . about the limitations of white history. (349)

To recapitulate, in "The Road to Botany Bay," Carter attempts, therefore, to recuperate the silenced voices of the convicts with the aim of both filling out and exposing the repressed logics of imperial history itself. Now I think with this goal in mind, Carter would have no problem with the notion of representing the aboriginal as a kind of "black convict"; problems arise, however, when in doing so we forget that such a project is itself already, like the imperial history, one of silencing by way of translation, writing the aborigines within European culture, forcing them, in short, to speak English. He writes, "we have no grounds for presuming that aboriginal history can be treated as a subset of white history, as a history within a history" (325).

Thus, one possible response, Carter suggests, is to engage in a sophisticated deconstruction of the forms and unities of the imperial history, doing so through the use of bricolage form. Now while Carter proposes that such a project does have an important decentering force, it too runs up against certain limits, those of what he calls "imitative fallacy." He writes:

The limitation of this kind of deconstructive reading is that, while it reveals a sophisticated understanding of "reading," it remains fundamentally empirical in its assumptions about spatial experience. The country" may be "written over" by many discourses, but it remains, for all that, there, an *a priori* place, something to be read. (348)

Crucially, it is where Carter goes from here that all of this becomes essential, at long last, for my analysis of Silko's texts. He states:

After the critical dismantling, there has to be something more: a restoration of meaning, a process which cannot avoid being interpretive and imaginative . . . It is active recreation . . . as symbolic history. . . . Such a history, giving back to metaphor its ontological role

and recovering its historical space, would inevitably and properly be called a poetic history. (349-350)

Understanding Silko

While reading *The Road to Botany Bay*, I recalled the Native American practice in literature to offer a “story of a telling” *not* antithetical to the “telling of a story,” but *in addition to* such a Western conception. Within this context, it became paramount for me to revisit Silko’s work. Carter’s text, and in particular his discussion in his final chapter, offers the foundation for a reconsideration of Silko’s project. I saw that Silko’s major texts correspond in some interesting and productive ways to each of Carter’s three forms of history: restored voice of the other, the deconstructive history, and finally what he calls poetic history. Crucially, such a connection is in my analysis no more, but then no less, than a heuristic one, a tool, or even a form of poetic history, enabling me to see things in each text and, even more significantly, the relationship that had escaped me, and perhaps other readers, up to this point. Moreover, the brief interpretive context of Carter’s text discussed above is only the preparation of the ground for what I believe is the heart of this analysis: my specific demonstration of the way in which each of Silko’s texts fulfills each of these stages. I will consider *Ceremony* as the seminal text and build on existing criticism of that novel; *Storyteller*, unique in form and content, thus discloses its deconstructive potentialities; voluminous and complicated, *Almanac of the Dead* stands as an exceptional achievement of poetic history in its renderings of geographic movements and maps; *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko’s latest novel, as a return to the classic Nineteenth-century novel form, is a reworking of poetic history most readily accessible in its characters and the interplay between secular and sacred storytelling.

Before I continue, it seems important to note that strategies of interpretation and current critical analyses of Native American texts, or what we might call traditional theoretical and methodological strategies, might somehow deflect us from a recognition of alternate readings. For although we know that reading Silko, for instance, through a Western lens can blur her intended meanings, it remains difficult if not impossible on some level not to rely upon familiar strategies of interpretation. A great deal of Silko criticism, in fact, calls attention to this problem without really engaging a way to move past the quandary. Therefore, it becomes pertinent to look at the analyses that have been offered to date, and, more importantly, to ask what might be beyond the horizon of current critical

analyses. From Taylor's "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy," I concur with his recognition that "The arts, and particularly the literatures of the American Indian, are effective tools for shaking the European's perspective loose from tight ideological shackles to engage him in alternative realities" (23).

I understand Silko's texts as performative speech events.² Significantly, Michel de Certeau asserts that, "A spatial story is in its minimal degree a *spoken* language, that is, a linguistic system that distributes places insofar as it is *articulated* by an 'enunciatory focalization', by an act of practicing it" ("Spatial Stories" 130, de Certeau's emphasis). As we shall see, the connection between Silko's speech events and de Certeau's notion of a spatial story will take shape and so address, even if to a small extent, the problem of critical approach to these texts. Furthermore, in adopting or appropriating a Western form to convey an oral tradition, American Indian story and its native oral matrix, Silko, like Momaday and other Native American writers, runs the risk of adding to the desecration already caused by white appropriation. I will soon explain this point a bit further, but for now I want to stress that appropriating the discourse of the Euroamerican entails a confluence of indigenous with imported story. Arnold Krupat argues, "Native Americans have had to make a variety of accommodations to the dominant culture's forms, capitulating to them, assimilating them, sometimes dramatically transforming them, but never able to proceed independent of them" ("The Dialogic" 56-7). Recall that de Certeau argues that, "As a general repetition before the actual representation, the rite, a narration in acts, precedes the historical realization" (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 124). Stories, according to de Certeau, "go ahead of social practices in order to open a field for them" (125). Adapting Krupat's notion of dramatic transformation and de Certeau's enunciatory focalization, I understand Silko in her traditional stories, her bricolage, her scathing criticism of Western culture, and her use of the Nineteenth-century novel form as trying (perhaps unconsciously) to reveal the illogic of the dominant discourse while simultaneously using the dominant forms to rewrite history.³

Since the publication of *Ceremony* (1977) and M. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), which also recuperates the previously silent Native American voice (much, as we shall soon see, like Carter's recuperation of the convict tales), scholars and critics have suggested that the novels question and reevaluate Western ideas of history and experience. *Ceremony*, Silko's "seminal" work, and the prolific critical essays focusing on the text, reveal that the novel immediately challenges

readers with a new epistemological orientation while altering previously established understandings of the relationship between reader and text. The novel is also the most formally familiar of Silko's texts. Scholars suggest that *Ceremony* is the author's attempt to find a particular strength within what has most universally been treated as the "tragic" fact of mixedblood existence. "*Ceremony* is a story about stories and their power to heal," writes Gregory Salyer (31). Louis Owens believes that, "The central lesson of [*Ceremony*] is that through dynamism, adaptability, and syncretism inherent in Native American cultures, both individuals and the cultures within which individuals find significance and identity are able to survive and grow, and evade the deadly traps of stasis and sterility" (167). And Simon J. Ortiz, for instance, praises *Ceremony* as a "special and most complete example of affirmation and what it means in terms of Indian resistance," particularly the characteristically Indian creative incorporation of "foreign ritual, ideas, material in . . . Indian terms" (11). Additionally, many essayists suggest along with Owens that, "like virtually every novel written by the American Indian, *Ceremony* describes a circular journey toward home and identity" (Owens 191). Such assertions smack of stereotype, and also expose that these "novels" are, as I have mentioned, both subject of and subjected to Western ideas of form and interpretation.

In *Ceremony*, as well as in *Storyteller*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and now in *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko unequivocally celebrates one aspect of human experience: storytelling. I call her storytelling, first in *Ceremony*, retrieval of what has been silenced or forgotten. A now familiar way to understand the "retrieval" is to identify one's mythology as hidden in the recesses of an ancestral memory. Kathleen Brogan, for example, in arguing for cultural hauntings in American fiction, suggests that ghosts function in contemporary ethnic literature "to recreate ethnic identity through an imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present" (151).⁴ One's mythology is also illuminated by signs and symbols on the landscape.

For example, Ts'eh explains to Tayo the faded painting of a she-elk, "bigger than life," along the base of a cliff: "Nobody has come to paint it since the war. But as long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone" (*Ceremony* 230-31). The painting, revitalized by Ts'eh and Tayo to a "dark blue shadow on the cliff" (231), incarnates time and story. It is enough, for the moment, that Tayo remembers so that, wherever he is, he can regenerate the story. The cliff portrait of an elk holds its power as long as it is remembered. For Paul Beekman Taylor, the

painting suggests that story functions to reclaim the lore the Natives themselves may have forgotten or the white man has metamorphosed (26). Just as Carter's concentration on the convict narratives functions as an effort to recuperate what has been forgotten or silenced, this brief "story" from *Ceremony* and Tayo's "circular journey" (which is both geographical and psychological), function as a Native American's enactments of historical space. Equally, Silko's prologue to Tayo's story insists on resistance as well as curative powers of story:

You don't have anything
If you don't have the stories.
Their evil is mighty
But it can't stand up to our stories. (*Ceremony* 2)

Silko's opening to *Ceremony* announces that loss is precisely what the colonizer wants, so they try to destroy the stories, or let the stories be confused or forgotten. The medicine man, Betonie, tells his patient Tayo quite simply: "I tell you, we can deal with white people, with their medicines and their beliefs," and the way of dealing is recycling "the leftover things the whites didn't want" (139, 133). Taylor argues that for the Native American, recycling the white's disposable cultural debris in story reclaims a vital culture of sacred lore from the dustbin of the Euro-Americans public economy. He continues:

Furthermore, the Indian's recycling of European language and literary forms enriches the Anglo mainstream with the particular value of Indian experience. Finally, translation of place and language re-effects secrecy by shifting attention away from the original hieratic nature of community story to the distinctive constituents of new forms whose simple demotic cover is all the more resistant to the hermeneutic scrutiny of the uninstructed. (32)

The form and structure of the stories are paramount. In an interview with Laura Coltelli in 1985, Silko commented on *Ceremony*. "[U]ltimately," Silko offered, "the whole novel is a bundle of stories" (141). In a story there are many stories. Silko explains that she is interested in certain convergences and configurations, where many times the real focal point is her reconciliation of Western ideas of linear time and the older belief, which her Aunt Susie talked about, and the old folks continue to talk about, "a place, a space-time" (138). Silko's overarching

interest is in things that are not at all linked together in some kind of easy system. For example, the character Helen-Jean, the Ute woman in *Ceremony*, appears only briefly. Yet with Helen-Jean Silko is telling the story of Tayo's mother without having to tell that story. But for Silko, "What happened to Tayo's mother is what happened to Helen-Jean, is what happened to, on and on down the line. These things try to foreshadow, or resonate on each other" (140, Silko's emphasis). Silko calls this structural form narratives within narratives within narratives (141). She, as "storyteller," includes the Helen-Jean section for structural reasons. She writes, "But it's the old theme, which the old lady at the end [of *Ceremony*] articulates: 'seems like I already heard these stories before.'" (141). The resonance of the stories, I would argue, is discernible as active, performative, spoken recuperation of the voice of the other.

Ceremony also demonstrates Silko's incorporation of Native performative ritual. One essay in Richard Fleck's well known compilation of critical essays is worth noting here. Valerie Harvey's "Navajo Sandpainting in *Ceremony*" details the history and process of the sandpainting ceremony. "When completed, [the sandpainting] possesses its own language which can only be read, understood, and interpreted by those versed in the various myths and symbols" (256). Handed down through the oral tradition, these interpretations and meanings have their origins in the tribal myths, creation stories, chants, prayers, and songs of Navajo culture (257). I take this reshaping of myth as not only a manner of retrieving and adopting indigenous lore; but also a strategy of resistance to the white's continuing appropriation and secularization of Native American story tradition.

Important to keep in mind is that *Ceremony* starts out in a seemingly "realistic" mode, but then goes on to incorporate details and events that do not fit into the typical readers view of what is "real." Thus the reader of this work must face or raise questions about how to read the novel. Such questions are central to understanding Native American literature because our assumptions about what is "real" underlie our view of the people telling the stories. *Ceremony* thus expands categories, as Carter's convict narratives expand the previously written "history" of white settlement in Australia. Moreover, as we have seen in the various critical comments concerning *Ceremony*, scholars, indeed, recognize Silko's performative act in the text: through Tayo, who represents the convict, she restores the voice of the other. She has in *Ceremony*, in effect, transmitted a "frozen idiom of a people's sacred lore" through the stories she tells through Tayo's journey. Crucially, however, her novel form, once out there, can be "classed and stored as an ethnographic curiosity" (Taylor 31).

In some ways, this is exactly what occurred with *Ceremony*. Following Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, a rapid formal, generic rigidification occurred in the "Native American novel." *Ceremony* became the "quintessential" form of the restored Native American voice characterized, as I mentioned earlier, by such phraseology as "like virtually every novel written by the America Indian." In short, western intellectuals codified her first novel the typical Native American tale of the previously unheard voice of the other. I argue, then, that it is precisely these structural limits of the form and the myopic textual analysis, an awareness of (perhaps an unconscious, artistic awareness) that "forces" Silko to abandon it and engage in another kind of experiment. In order to avoid "stasis and sterility," Silko cannot repeat her performative act that is *Ceremony*. Instead, she surprised her readers with another modality, and that experiment, I will argue, resembles Carter's deconstructive history.

The sandpaintings in *Ceremony* are stories; they're bound up in language. Arnold Krupat claims, "Any story Silko herself tells is always bound up with someone else's language; it is always a version, and the story as a *version* stands in relation to the story as officially sanctioned myth as the novel stands to the national epic" (*Voice* 166). As Silko writes early in *Storyteller*:

by word of mouth an entire history
 an entire vision of the world
 which depended upon memory
 and retelling by subsequent generations.
 . . . the oral tradition depends upon each person
 listening and remembering a portion. (6-7)

As the significance of *Ceremony* became apparent to readers and critics, Silko continued her work by uniting Laguna myths and tales, local gossip, letters, commentary, and photographs in *Storyteller*. Critics distinguish *Storyteller* as an illustration of the nature of storytelling in Laguna; namely, it finds its genesis in landscape and community rather than in individual creation. For Bernard Hirsch, oral tradition and the written word dramatically converge. He writes of *Storyteller*:

Comprised of personal reminiscences and narratives, retellings of traditional Laguna stories, photographs, and a generous portion of her previously published short fiction and poetry, this multigeneric

work lovingly maps the fertile storytelling ground from which her art evolves and to which it is here returned—an offering to the oral tradition which nurtured it. (151)

The achievements of the “multigeneric” text have been well noted, particularly by Helen Jaskoski, who writes in “To Tell a Good Story” of the remarkable aspects of Silko’s stories, including their variety and virtuosity of form and type (91).

In fact, in *Storyteller* Silko creates a text Elizabeth McHenry sees as governed not by the standards of the European literary tradition but rather, as I too have mentioned, a mixture of written genres, written transcriptions of conversations and internal memories, and photographs (101). According to McHenry, all outward appearances of the creation suggest that, as literary object, *Storyteller* follows the traditional conventions of bookmaking. But beyond the formalities of cover, publication data, and her name appearing as “author,” *Storyteller* suggests Silko’s denial of conventional authorship. Among the mixture of genres presented, there are no numbered divisions, no chapter titles, no chapter headings, and no photo captions. The book is also off-sized, thereby effectively refusing to be categorized according to recognizable dimensions (101-102). I believe, along with McHenry, that Silko’s subversion of the trappings of literary publication is significant, “but her seeming independence of vision and desire to see anew her work and community in the midst of established forms of presentation should not be mistakenly associated with ‘experimental’ literature” (102). Cognizant that there are alternate ways to “read” Silko’s *Storyteller*, McHenry astutely concedes that it is more accurate to consider that Silko’s nonlinear form of narrative in *Storyteller* appears as it does because Silko sees it as the only appropriate vehicle of expression that will contain the transcription of her fragmented and collective experience (102). If we consider the text as “appropriate vehicle,” to use McHenry’s words, then I would like to further McHenry’s conclusion and consider how the text is an apt vehicle for the kind of deconstructive history Carter describes; I return, once again, to his account of Australia’s pre-colonial past.

Recollection is not passive imitation; Carter attempts to create or recreate, in a sense, the settling of Australia. His own practice suggests that his is not just an attempt to recuperate his “own” land. Agency is called into question and evoked at the same time. His absence of a methodological preface or summary allows Carter to evoke and transform space as place. Thus, by suppressing summary prefaces, his last two

chapters have a kind of priority in what he is trying to do. Carter's recreation would be fundamentally lost if he structured his text in any other way. Australia as a space is constituted through performance; the performance itself literally creates the space. Performance equals re-creation. Moreover, the assumption, stated earlier, is that storytelling is performative.

Storyteller, like *Ceremony*, also honors the moral force of Native American tradition in conflict with intrusive, impoverishing Western culture. In effect, however, and to put a more fine a point on it, *Storyteller* emerges as the type of deconstructive history Carter describes. Here, in Silko's "bricolage," an attempt to "deconstruct" the devices of imperial history is at work. Carter's formulations of this practice of deconstruction seem to describe perfectly, if unwittingly, Silko's performance in *Storyteller*:

To replace the uni-vocal linearity of conventional history with a "bricolage" of "texts" (photographs, oral testimonies, theoretical commentary, anthropological notes) is undoubtedly a spectacular way of imitating, amongst other things, the open-ended, occasional character of the journal and the journey. It demonstrates clearly the incommensurability of authorities or, better, the authority of all viewpoints. But such an approach still perpetuates an illusion of its own: that, in some way, the multidimensional spatiality of aboriginal culture is hereby being *imitated*. (347-348, Carter's emphasis)

The limitation of this kind of deconstructive reading, Carter insists, is that while it reveals a sophisticated understanding of "reading," it remains fundamentally empirical in its assumptions about spatial experience.

The "country" may be "written over" by many discourses, but it remains, for all that, there, an *a priori* place, something to be read. Spatial, unlike discursive, horizons remain unmapped. . . . But, as we have seen, historically speaking, the country did not precede the traveler: it was the offspring of his intention. (348-349)

It is risky business, as Carter has warned us, to merely write *over*.

Significantly, in "Spatial Stories," de Certeau writes that the story has "distributive power and performative force (it does what it says) when an ensemble of circumstances is brought together. Then it founds spaces"

(123). Nowhere in any contemporary novel, to my knowledge, is this performative act more elaborately demonstrated than in Silko's "763-page indictment of the United States" (Coltelli 312). Some ten years after the appearance of *Storyteller*, Silko published her second novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). The title itself refers to a pre-Columbian manuscript circulating within the novel that is said to foretell both the arrival of Cortés to the day and the eventual disappearance of all things European from the continent (*Almanac of the Dead* 570). According to Dana Donnelly in her essay "Old and New Notebooks: *Almanac of the Dead* as Revolutionary Entertainment," Silko conceived of the almanac/*Almanac* as a "fictional" companion to the three actual Mayan codices or almanacs that survived the post-conquest destruction of Mayan written culture. These three surviving almanacs are literally entombed in libraries, and are named for the cities that possess them: Paris, Madrid, and Dresden (247). Donnelly characterizes Silko's forth almanac, by contrast, as a text that has been traveling among native peoples for five hundred years, preserved and remarked upon by many generations of the dead (247).

The text as a whole, like *Ceremony* and *Storyteller*, again treats the Native American ethos, reverence for the earth and especially one's ancestral land, as touchstone. More than her earlier texts, however, *Almanac*, among many things, suggests numerous ways in which Native and oral tradition is both inherently novelistic and simultaneously theoretical. As Carter's *Essay* reminds me, history and story are often connected to ideas about what constitutes "fact" and what constitutes "fiction." By connecting the idea of the land to story and history, Silko points to the convergence of these three in ways that not only suggest how the old stories explicitly connect past and present as aspects of contemporary Native American reality, but also imply that history, in Carter's term, is "spatial."

Initially, fewer essayists engaged *Almanac* than they had *Ceremony*, *Storyteller*, Silko's poems, or her short fiction. One reason for the preliminary lack of critical material could be quite simple: *Almanac* is nearly 800 pages in length. The initial silence could have indicated a loss: what does one say about the capacious novel beyond the obvious, here are "tales" of debauchery and resistance? The publication of *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays* in 1999 marked a turning point: the editors give "a generous amount of space to essays that demonstrate the artistry and meaning of this complicated, original, and wide-ranging text" (2).⁵ The editors suggest that *Almanac* had been neglected "perhaps be-

cause its powerful vision of cultural decadence, racial conflict, and fearful retribution has been so unpalatable to many readers that it obscured the novel's achievement" (2). I would argue that there is still more work to be done to understand Silko's accomplishment in *Almanac*. Returning to the work of Arnold Krupat, I find that he seems to locate a pertinent entry point for my purposes here.

Krupat recognizes *Almanac* as "a powerful work of anti-imperial translation" (*The Turn of the Native* 38). He identifies as a "specific strategy of resistance" in Silko's text the "insistence on a north-south/south-north directionality as central to the narrative of 'our America.'" This shift in the directionality of history in itself, he offers, "works as an ideological subversion of the hegemonic Euramerican narrative, whose geographical imperative presumes an irresistible ('destined') movement from east to west" (51-52). Krupat perceives that it is exactly this east-west narrative that Silko contests. "Insisting that history happens north to south, south to north, she shifts the axis of *where* is important, thus shifting the axis of *what* is important (53). This dimension of her novel, I would argue, derives more nearly from her traditional Native language than her Western language. As I mentioned earlier, Silko's use of language, particularly her Laguna language, figuratively performs ideological work. Thus her north-south/south-north directionality figuratively performs resistance to imperialism.

Investigating Krupat's ideas further, I call attention to Silko's use of the "map" in *Almanac*. Printed on the end papers inside the cover of her novel is the "Almanac of the Dead Five Hundred Year Map." The map, however, is not simply a series of lines and geographical indications. It performs at least two other important functions. First, it offers pertinent narrative. In one of its four framing blocks, it tells us "through the decipherment of ancient tribal texts of the Americas the Almanac of the Dead foretells the future of all the Americas. The future is enclosed in arcane symbols and old narratives." Seen in the light of Carter's text, "old narratives" has/have new meaning. Second, de Certeau argues that "What the map cuts up, the story cuts across" (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 129). The map Silko employs functions to not only buttress her north-south/south-north directionality, but also the "map" becomes story. De Certeau continues, "In Greek, narration is called 'diegesis': it establishes an itinerary (it 'guides') and it passes through (it 'transgresses'). The space of operations it travels in is made of movements: it is *topological*, concerning the deformations of figures, rather than *topical*, defining places" (129, de Certeau's emphasis). I believe that in Silko's intentional recovery of the intentional common place of history vis-à-vis the map, in

Almanac we might come to see, in Carter's words, "the way in which historical activity . . . is never merely routine, but always, possibly, an original recovery of what was previously self-evident" (351).

In her provocative essay, Dana Donnelly asserts that *Almanac of the Dead*, both as it departs from and extends Silko's earlier work, can best be understood in the context of two shifts, one cultural and the other personal. Donnelly suggests that the first is a paradigm shift in the social sciences, particularly history, which conceives history as the struggle for domination between competing stories. The second shift reflected in the novel, she posits, is in the author herself toward a more flamboyant and prophetic Laguna storyteller. Donnelly concludes that this shift is most obvious in the sheer length, scope, and digressiveness of the novel (245-246). This latter idea of vocational storyteller is something I'll return to momentarily. The former idea of a paradigm shift is of interest here.

It is quite interesting that 1988 marked the commemoration of two hundred years of British settlement in Australia, and 1992 the quincentennial of America. The subsequent self-consciousness of one's place in history, one's place in the world, seems, then, to drive both Americans (Silko is both Native *and* American) and Australians alike to new levels of introspection. The nature of heritage, the principle according to which members of a group might define their identity and relationship, seem of equal concern to both Silko and Carter. Both writers recognize the active charge of time and space. It remains true, also, that as scholars have pointed out and I have previously mentioned, Silko's work challenges traditional categories of criticism and does not lend itself to familiar interpretive strategies.

Carter's text has been similarly marked. Critics of Carter are clear in that they are uncomfortable with Carter and his refusal to rely upon familiar strategies of the interpretation of history.⁶ For a particularly salient example, consider this: following his rather tepid review of *The Road to Botany Bay*, Tom Millar then writes a more positive book review and begins with this phrase: "History more like we're used to is found in Stuart Macintyre's volume of the new *Oxford History of Australia*" ("The Australian History Boom" 57). We are not "used to" what both writers offer. Carter and Silko bid us, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's terms, to distance ourselves from that which we are used to. Carter writes:

empirical history, a discipline that, after all, is grounded in the same Enlightenment assumptions as botany: it is precisely the particular-ity of historical experience, the material hereness and nowness which

cannot be repeated, that such history crowds out in favour of a transcendent classification in terms of multiplying causes and effects. (22)

Thus, it is with the lengthy *Almanac of the Dead*, with its publication in 1991 positioning it as a sort of preemptive strike against the anticipated excesses of the quincentenary, that Silko disrupts her performance in *Storyteller* and writes “spatial history.” *Almanac of the Dead* can be read as a form of poetic history. The text, with its embedded ancient almanac, is, as I have argued, active recreation; it is symbolic history. Silko seems to identify that such a recreation “might begin in the recognition of the suppressed spatiality of our own historical consciousness” (Carter 350).

In both *Ceremony* and *Almanac*, Silko’s stories evince a pattern: a movement away from Laguna to encounter “non-Laguna forces” and an eventual return with the acquired knowledge of how to live with those forces. Tayo recovers the ability to read the natural world in *Ceremony*, while the Euroamericans of *Almanac* are notably impervious to signs. This pattern of “recovery” and white “blindness” is likewise demonstrated in Silko’s latest novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999). Yet I would argue that this novel, as a return to the Nineteenth-century novel form, is a continuation or reworking of poetic history. In *Gardens*, Silko effectively takes on an old form, imputes the quality of introspection as she did in *Almanac*, and gives vent to an unspoken component, a repressed content.

I will return to Carter once more. Remember that in his text, Carter seeks to undermine writing that was under the influence of Nineteenth-century worldview, the proper relations are those governed by cause and effect and of a singular, fixed perspective. Carter re-tells history by harmonizing documented, empirical historical records with the spatial practices and stories he seeks to recuperate. An Aboriginal history of space might, according to Carter,

Take the form of a mediation on the absent other of our own history. It might begin in the recognition of the suppressed spatiality of our own historical consciousness. It would not be a question of comparing and contrasting the *content* of our spatial experience, but of recognizing its form and its historically constitutive role. A history of space which revealed the everyday world in which we live as the continuous intentional re-enactment of our spatial history might not say a word about ‘The Aborigines’. But, by recovering the intentional nature of our grasp on the world, it might evoke their historical experience without appropriating it to white ends. (350)

Similarly, a Native American's "history" of Nineteenth-century "space" might perform the remembrances that it also refers to. In other words, Silko's myth and storytelling in *Gardens in the Dunes* function to bridge a rupture and perform cultural recovery in yet another genre, another form. Astoundingly, Silko's discourse here moves not away from faith, as one might expect considering the trajectory the West took at the turn-of-the-(last)-century in its attraction to reason. Rather, and quite significantly, I think, Silko reflects in *Gardens* on the possibility of a different historical trajectory, one that moves toward spiritual and mystical recuperation. Such a gesture on Silko's part is likely tied to ideas of storytelling. In Pueblo culture, a storyteller is to be known as one who participates in a traditionally sanctioned manner in sustaining the community. For a Native American writer to identify herself as a storyteller today is to express a desire to perform such a function.⁷ By contrast, in the West the idea of vocational storyteller seems distant; the social role is less clear and conventional.

While the cast of characters in *Gardens* is small in comparison to the nearly eighty in *Almanac*, one manifestation of the poetic history in *Gardens* is revealed in Silko's characterization. Due to the confines of the "space" of this essay, I will demonstrate just one instance of the poetic history that I see functioning in Silko's latest text by considering two of the novel's white, Euroamerican characters, the couple Hattie and Edward Palmer.

Hattie is the "heretic of Oyster Bay" (79). Edward is "a man of science" (79). Together, they represent a woman who learns to balance Western ideas with a Native American worldview and a man who never learns a lesson. Hattie is a failed academic: we discover at the outset that her thesis committee had been unanimous in their determination that her assertions that Jesus had women disciples and Mary Magdalene wrote a gospel suppressed by the church was nothing but Gnostic heresy, pure and simple (79). Seeking solace, Hattie's ill-fated marriage to Edward at first feels right to her. Yet her marriage becomes secondary not only to her self-imposed responsibility to Indigo, a mixedblood "orphan" whom she and Edward tow over to Europe and back again, but also to her own sense of self and place in the world. In *Gardens*, Hattie accepts the mystical and her journey resembles Tayo's in that she struggles to find her home and her identity by the end of the novel.

Edward, by contrast, is more akin to the unseeing characters in *Almanac*. In some ways, he's in worse shape. In *Gardens*, Silko demonstrates her understanding of modernity most clearly in her characteriza-

tion of Edward. Consider this “list” of Edward’s belongings:

The floor of [Edward’s] study had been spread with lanterns, candles, tents, tarps, a folding shovel, a trowel, a clock, bottles of chemicals, formaldehyde and alcohol, and a number of handsome cherry wood boxes that contained magnifying glasses, a microscope, a small telescope; and, of course, one cherry wood box contained Edward’s camera, another the glass plates and bottles of chemicals. Specimen collection envelopes, botanical field guides, a book of maps, blank notebooks, leather boots, rubber boots, rubber hip waders, a wide-brim straw hat, a pith helmet, mosquito netting, a canteen, and a revolver all were carefully packed into huge steamer trunks. (78).

History, life even, for Edward, is an epistemological game. His relationships with the technological apparatus of the camera and to photography lead to his fall and subsequent injury while he’s driven to photograph and classify rare orchids in the sub-tropics. I would argue that his very use of the camera and his obsession with the classificatory system of botany identify him with Western modernity. The epistemological failure of Western science and technologies renders Edward blind; he can never “see” and, consequently, dies trusting in a quack’s “scientific cure” for an illness he endures.

While I do not think that Silko is completely absconding the scientific world view, technology, or photography for that matter, I do think that in the fates of her characters Hattie and Edward she is balancing the epistemological with the ethical: it is ethically crucial to recognize where one finds her/himself in the world. This is performed life. Hattie recognizes the balance and listens to stories, whereas Edward knows no dialectical relationship and remains not only blind, but also deaf, and dead!

The actions of the main Native characters in the text, Grandma Fleet, Sister Salt, Mama, and Indigo, dramatize the reconciliation of generations and deep associations to spirituality and religiosity. In this respect, I find de Certeau helpful. In his “Translators Introduction” to de Certeau’s *The Writing of History*, Tom Conley explains that de Certeau approaches history through theories of religion; he views language and mimesis as forces informing most collective relations. Because modern history cannot fail to study the erosion of the symbolic shapes of religion, it must always return to question the narratives and legends that engender a communally significant past (xvi). Furthermore, mysticism for de Certeau is very material, if not graphic, evidence of a continued historiographical or

“scriptural” process engaged in a dialectic of belief, writing, and absence. Seen in the light of Conley’s perceptions and de Certeau’s theories, through the classic Nineteenth-century novel form, at its core, *Gardens in the Dunes* demonstrates Silko’s understanding of the differences between secular and sacred uses of story. What is more, Silko finds yet another possibility or experiment. We have seen that in *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko writes spatial history. She then must return. In her latest novel, I am drawn to her method and how she dramatically and forcefully stages the confrontation between these two modes of historical representation.

I am likewise fascinated by Paul Carter’s contention, early on in *The Road to Botany Bay*, that the classificatory system derived from *Linnaeus* wholly ignored the circumstances of discovery. As we have learned, by recovering the intentional nature of our grasp on the world, part and parcel of discovery, a spatial or poetic history might evoke historical experience without appropriating it to white ends (350). With *Gardens in the Dunes*, Silko offers a superficially simple yet innately complex narration. Our apprehension of it is filtered through systems of knowledge that are perforce circumstantial and local but are persistent and always renewed through representation. It is not coincidental that *Gardens* ends where it began, back in the old gardens; there, an image of growing life emerges out of old scars and wounds.

If I am right in considering Silko’s collective corpus as an on-going literary experiment, I wonder if understanding her in this respect might lead to the charge that she employs ideologically incompatible elements within a single text or within her several main texts. In an attempt to think of Silko’s design and her variety of discursive and narrative conventions in a historically complex and nonreductive manner, I espouse Raymond William’s notion of residual, dominant, and emergent ideologies which can coexist at any given cultural moment:

In authentic historical analysis it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific dominance. It is necessary to examine how these relate to the whole cultural process rather than only to the selected and abstracted dominant system. . . . What has really to be said, as a way of defining important elements of both the residual and the emergent, as a way of understanding the character of the dominant, is that *no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in*

reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention. (Marxism and Literature 121-127)

The implication of this passage for reading Silko's work involves an active, political challenge. The recounting of events that "really occurred" on the stage of history is a form of narrative. Fictional narrative and historical narrative, or two forms of narration, are closely related forms of order-giving. Imperial history is just as "performative" as Native literatures and Carter's text, just as imaginative and affective. Emergent speech acts reveal history as performance, as history in the making. This is why stories must be told and retold. Our journey with Carter and, now, with Silko, leads us to understanding. "Spatial history" encompasses the transformation of space into place, the cultural construction of landscape and the construction of cultural landscapes, the perceptions and experiences of people often invisible, the phenomenology of journeying, and the deconstruction of imperialist history. But most of all, as Carter shows us, "the study of intentions" distinguishes spatial history (351).

NOTES

¹ In "Retrospective and Prospective," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9.3 (Fall 1997), Gretchen M. Bataille, in reflecting on the 20th Anniversary of the Flagstaff Conference on Native American Literatures, notes, "[c]omparative literary studies of indigenous peoples are of increasing interest to scholars, and interdisciplinary approaches frequently cross both disciplinary and geographical boundaries" (29).

² Elaine Jahner, in "An Act of Attention: Event Structure in *Ceremony*," immediately establishes that the "energy" that engages a reader of *Ceremony* seems to "elude discussion because the labeling required in any kind of analysis appears more than usually inadequate for describing the act of attention that is an essential part of the reader's experience" (35). Jahner seeks to resolve such a problem by exploring the experience of event rather than sequentially motivated action as the determinant of plot coherence.

³ Both Silko's celebrated first novel *Ceremony* (1977), and her more recent *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), were written, she says, to counter-balance historical inaccuracies about Native peoples" (Leslie Marmon

Silko." *Native American Women Writers*).

⁴ Brogan's arguments are particularly illuminating. She insists that we undoubtedly see in literature by minority authors, particularly in the descendants of enslaved or colonized peoples, a heightened awareness of the disjunction between official history and the experience of minority groups. This awareness, she argues, leads to an emphasis on multiple viewpoints, the fictionality of any reconstruction of the past, and the creation of alternative histories through the telling of unheard or repressed stories. See pages 158-159 for her complete argument on these matters.

⁵ Indeed, many of *Almanac's* essayists in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson, 1999, have proved helpful for my own analysis here.

⁶ Even the criticism of Carter's text echoes the language used to describe and define Silko's work. Take, for example, the following excerpt from the review by Gordon R. Lewthwaite of California State: "To the uninitiated reader, *The Road to Botany Bay* may seem like a maze; if its guiding thread is found and followed, the journey is likely to prove illuminating, but that thread is somewhat hard to find and easy to lose" (*The Professional Geographer* 244).

⁷ In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin sees that storytelling involves continuity, versus discreet, fragmented, problem-oriented exchange of information. Storytelling for Benjamin is communication that is associated with artisans; it is not technical. For Native Americans, stories aren't just entertaining; they have a survival function in sustaining the identity of the community, even if within a hostile environment. Paul Beekman Taylor suggests, "When the Native American writes, she suffers from having her idea of the sacredness of story reduced to mundane entertainment and the white misses the significance of Native sacred secrets by reading them at best as exotic lore and at worst as retrograded barbarism (Taylor 28). De Certeau argues that "where stories are disappearing (or else being reduced to museographical objects), there is a loss of space: deprived of narrations (as one sees it happen in both the city and the countryside), the group or the individual regresses toward the disquieting, fatalistic experience of formless, indistinct, and nocturnal totality" (*The Practice of Everyday Life* 123).

WORKS CITED

- Barnes, Kim. Interview. "A Leslie Marmon Silko Interview." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 13.4 (1986): 83-105.
- Bataille, Gretchen M. "Retrospective and Prospective." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9:3 (Fall 1997): 25-30.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 83-109.
- Brogan, Kathleen. "American Stories of Cultural Haunting: Tales of Heirs and Ethnographers." *College English* 57:2 (February 1995): 149-165.
- Carter, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987.
- Certeau, Michel de. "Spatial Stories." *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. 115-130.
- . *The Writing of History*. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia U P, 1988.
- Coltelli, Laura. Interview. *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1990.
- Donnelly, Dana. "Old and New Notebooks: *Almanac of the Dead* as Revolutionary History." *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999. 245-259.
- Fleck, Richard F., ed. *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993.
- Hirsch, Bernard A. "'The Telling Continues: Oral Tradition and the Written Word in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*.'" *"Yellow Woman": Leslie Marmon Silko*. Ed. Melody Graulich. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers U P, 1993.
- Hunt, Lynn. "History as Gesture; or, the Scandal of History." *Consequences of Theory*. Ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1991. 91-107.
- Irvine, Judith. "Formality and Informality in Communicative Events." *American Anthropologist* 81(1979): 773-90.
- Jahner, Elaine. "An Act of Attention: Event Structure in *Ceremony*."

- Native-American Writers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998.
- Jaskoski, Helen. "To Tell a Good Story." *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999. 87-100.
- Krupat, Arnold. *A Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1989.
- . "The Dialogic of Silko's *Storyteller*." *Native-American Writers*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998.
- . *The Turn of the Native: Studies in Criticism and Culture*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1996.
- McHenry, Elizabeth. "Spinning a Fiction of Culture: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*." *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999. 101-120.
- Millar, Tom. "The Australian History Boom." Rev. of *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, by Paul Carter. *History Today* 38 (March 1988): 56-57.
- Ortiz, Simon J. "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism." *MELUS* 8:2 (1981).
- Owens, Louis. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. Norman and London: U of Oklahoma P, 1992.
- Salter, Gregory. *Leslie Marmon Silko*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Almanac of the Dead*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
- . *Ceremony*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 1977.
- . *Gardens in the Dunes*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.
- . *Storyteller*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1981.
- Taylor, Paul Beekman. "Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy." *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Eds. Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1999. 23-62.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 1977.

Call for Submissions

International Life Writing Prize for 2001: Biography and Geography

The Center for Biographical Research, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* invite submissions for the International Life Writing Prize.

Award: \$1,000 and publication of the essay in *Biography*.

The topic for 2001, Biography and Geography—life and place—grants writers the widest possible latitude to treat their subject in ways that open it to various applications, interpretations, and interdisciplinary theorizing. Submissions may, for instance, focus on life writing in a specific region or at a specific site. They may explore ways that geography as the study of the earth's surfaces and divisions is relevant to forms of life writing. Or they can explore landscapes and topographies as metaphorical constructs pertinent to life writing issues and modalities. Submissions may investigate the theoretical, historical, generic, or cultural dimensions of any form of life writing—biography, autobiography, oral history, group history, diaries, travel writing, and so on.

Submissions should be double-spaced, ideally between 3,000 and 10,000 words. A double-blind submission policy will be followed: authors' names should not appear anywhere on the manuscript. An accompanying cover letter should contain the authors' names and addresses. All

submitted manuscripts will also be considered for publication in *Biography*. Deadline: July 1, 2001.

For more information, or to submit an entry, contact

The Center for Biographical Research
University of Hawai'i at Manoa
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96522

Telephone or fax: (808) 956-3774

biograph@hawaii.edu
www.hawaii.edu/biography

Reviews

Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation by *Rebecca Blevins Faery*. Norman, Oklahoma: U of Oklahoma P, 1999. 0-8061-3149-7. 275 pages.

As its title suggests, Rebecca Blevins Faery's *Cartographies of Desire* addresses the intersections between a host of very large and complex categories. but it does so by examining the highly specific representations of two women within American literature and history: Mary Rowlandson (nominated here as exemplar of the white woman captive), and Pocahontas (offered as the prototypical "Indian princess"). This very readable book devotes one chapter to each figure, and a third to the revealing ways in which the mythologization of these two captive females has worked to generate and sustain a national identity that has proven dangerous and damaging.

Chapter one examines Mary Rowlandson's 1682 narrative of captivity among the Algonquin Indians as a "prototype" (25) for the genres of the captivity narrative and the Western, arguing that the representation of the embattled bodies of white women in those genres not only energized the project of colonizing North America but worked to construct a national culture built on racial opposition and exploitation. While recent work on the captivity narrative tradition has called into question this foundational status traditionally granted to Rowlandson's text, Faery's insistence on the colonialist consciousness embedded within Rowlandson's narrative is certainly on target. And she is also right to acknowledge that the narrative often complicates its own claims about

Indian and English cultures, and that it frequently ends up subverting many of the cultural and gender assumptions dominant in her Puritan and Anglo-American culture. It is precisely this fascinating ambivalence that has made Rowlandson's text the object of so much critical attention within the last half-decade or more, a fact, however, that Faery tends to suppress. When she positions her own reading against what she describes as "the continuing emphasis on Rowlandson as a representative of traditional patriarchal Puritanism" (53) and on her text "as an unproblematic, univocal exemplum and defense of colonial racism or of Puritan religiosity" (64), she mischaracterizes recent scholarship, much of which Faery herself relies on. But even if its reading of this captivity narrative largely rehearses material available elsewhere, the chapter as a whole offers a superb synthesis of Rowlandson scholarship that should be especially valuable to readers unfamiliar with it.

More importantly, this chapter—like the book as a whole—nicely combines academic analysis with personal narrative in a way that is both entertaining and instructive. Faery prefaces her examination of Rowlandson, for example, with an account of traveling to Lancaster, Massachusetts (the site of Rowlandson's home) during the Gulf War. Like her entry into the subsequent Pocahontas chapter—which tells the story of traveling to Pocahontas, Iowa to watch the premiere of Disney's Pocahontas film—this account tellingly illustrates the larger argument of the book: that a racialized and sexualized colonialist ethos persists within American nationalist discourse.

The Pocahontas chapter shares many of the same strengths and some of the same weaknesses as the Rowlandson one. Here, too, Faery at once depends on and synthesizes prior studies of Pocahontas. But the chapter also usefully identifies Pocahontas as an Indian captive, held in confinement by the English and by American national discourse. The historical silence of this Indian woman has enabled a succession of stories to be "invented" around her (117). Whereas the Rowlandson chapter concludes with Louise Erdrich's poem, "Captivity," a rewriting of Rowlandson's colonial narrative, the Pocahontas chapter ends with the voices of writers Michelle Cliff and Beth Brant, whose essays similarly rewrite her story by giving voice to Pocahontas.

Both of these female captive figures and the stories about them have been eroticized and "appropriated as a terrain of racial and cultural contest in eliciting the story of the nation" (154), and the third chapter traces the appearance of white women captives and "Indian maidens" in subsequent American literature, especially of the nineteenth century, and in

film. Its analysis of the ways in which representations of these two captive women mirror and support each other within American racial discourse is the most compelling contribution of this chapter, and perhaps of the book as a whole. Faery notes, for instance, that while white female captives like Jane McCrea are represented with an arm outstretched in defense, Native women like Magawisca (of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's 1827 novel, *Hope Leslie*) are portrayed with an arm extended in "a gesture of willing self-sacrifice" (178). If we wish to understand the development of American racial politics, we must look to historical representations of both white and Native women.

Although *Cartographies of Desire* is centrally concerned with the "twinned figures" of the white woman captive and the welcoming Indian maiden, the book also suggestively illustrates how the twinned emotions of anger and desire have been generated by the same colonial and national history that their stories have combined to create. Anger is the dominant emotion throughout most of Faery's book, which exposes how these figures have been manipulated to create and sustain an American "ideal of white superiority and thus supremacy" (273) while enabling "the extermination of American Indians and their way of life" (176). Although Faery does acknowledge that both sets of stories also "threaten to unsettle" dominant notions of gender and race, this very important complication is generally not given as much attention as it probably deserves. But the beginning and ending of her book is marked not by anger but desire. It begins, for example, with her childhood memories of "playing Indian" (to use Philip Deloria's phrase) and desiring to be Indian. It ends with her desire to see the historical past and present in a new way, to "[d]isplace the way of looking that has been privileged by the dominant stories" (226). As such, *Cartographies of Desire* is itself an intriguing example of the tensions and conflicts that are at the very heart of the texts and themes that it studies.

Michelle Burnham

Momaday, Vizenor, Armstrong: Conversations on American Indian Writing by Hartwig Isernhagen. *American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series Vol 32. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1999. ISBN 0-8061-3120-9. 224 pages.*

In the summer of 1994, European scholar Hartwig Isernhagen met separately with writers N. Scott Momaday (mixedblood Kiowa), Gerald Vizenor (mixedblood Anishinaabe), and Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan, Penticton band) to pose a series of questions—many of which had been supplied in advance—about Native American literature. The taped interviews were subsequently transcribed and annotated with follow-up questions (and responses) as well as comments by Isernhagen. The result is *Momaday, Vizenor, Armstrong: Conversations on American Indian Writing*. While overall the volume is disappointing, it does offer several lively exchanges on a number of important issues concerning Native American literature.

One feature that distinguishes this volume from most other collections of interviews is the role of the interviewer. Isernhagen foregrounds his own agenda, seeking to elicit with his questionnaire approach particular information—a database, as it were—about Native American literature. “Recognizing how obviously the questions reflected my own understanding of and interests in American Indian literature,” Isernhagen acknowledges, “I have from quite early on in the process consciously given preference to the [interviewer’s] equal partner role.” Since Isernhagen plays such a leading part in the discussions, it would be useful if the reader were told more about him. The book jacket identifies Isernhagen as a Professor of English at the University of Basel, Switzerland. Isernhagen announces that he taught a seminar on American Indian literature at the University of Berne in spring of 1994. His questions reveal a familiarity with the works of Momaday, Vizenor, and Armstrong, and in his introduction he alludes to “Dennis Tedlock’s ethnopoetic methodologies.” Yet he makes few references to other Native American writers and reveals little specific awareness of the ongoing critical discourse about Native American literature; there is no mention of the critical work of, for example, Louis Owens, Arnold Krupat, or even Vizenor himself. The absence of references to other writers and critics is not necessarily a fault; indeed, Isernhagen emphasizes his perspective as a self-identified “outsider,” concerned with the “possibility of an independently European perspective in North American studies.” Yet for a project in which Isernhagen consistently attempts to generalize about “American Indian

writing," it would have been helpful had the volume provided more background about Isernhagen's own understanding of the subject.

After his introduction—titled "Prejudices, Aims, and Procedures"—and before the interviews themselves, Isernhagen reproduces the questionnaire that had been sent to the subjects in advance. Isernhagen notes that through these questions he "[does] not try to provide the type of specific information on background and development, or the statements of opinion, that are a prominent object of standard interviews." Instead, the majority of questions ask the subjects to reflect upon their roles as American Indian writers and to characterize Native American literature: "How much 'ethnographic' knowledge do you expect from your readership?"; "How does an Indian author deal with attacks on the authenticity of his/her 'Indianness'?"; "What is the relation between specific (local, tribal) notions of Indianness and more universal notions of the indigene, or nativeness?"; "How would you write (or tell) the (hi)story of Indian writing in North America? Where are the beginnings? What are the major phases?" While Momaday, Vizenor, and Armstrong sometimes show a reluctance to become spokespersons for American Indian writing, occasionally evading questions, their responses to questions about writing processes are some of the most revealing, especially those concerning the possibilities and limitations of writing in Native languages. Isernhagen brings out some candid observations, particularly from Armstrong, about pressures upon Native American writers both to find a readership and remain responsible to Native communities. The fact that each writer was asked essentially an identical set of questions at times lends a sameness to the interviews, though it can be interesting to compare writers' approaches to the same question (and, with the absence of an index, it does make it easier for a reader to locate discussions of specific topics).

Unfortunately, a number of the questions elicit little productive discussion. This may be due in part to a vagueness in some of the wording (for example, "The important first phase of Indian writing appears to have taken place very much in a 1960s/early '70s way. How different is current writing from that earlier phase?" It's not clear what Isernhagen means by "1960s/early '70s way"). Other questions are derived from premises that the writers clearly do not share. Ironically, the one question that Isernhagen suggests prompted his choice of these three writers—"Do you accept a label such as 'realistic' or 'modernist' or 'postmodern' for your writing?"—turns out to be one of the least successful. In his introduction, Isernhagen asserts that "Jeannette Armstrong

would probably be labeled a realist by most critics . . . N. Scott Momaday, a modernist; and Gerald Vizenor, a postmodernist.” “In representing realistic, modernist, and postmodernist tendencies in current Native writing,” Isernhagen maintains, “these interviews suggest the continued vitality of those movements.” Yet Momaday admits that he doesn’t think of his own work in such terms, Isernhagen classifies a response by Vizenor as “thoroughly modernist,” and Armstrong ends up identifying herself as a postmodernist. Even if the terms “realist,” “modernist,” and “postmodernist” were more carefully defined, it’s not clear that they would have been of much use in situating the work of these writers in Native American literature or of characterizing American Indian writing in general. In his introduction, Isernhagen in fact acknowledges that some of his questions did not work well.

The interviews are entertaining to read, especially since Isernhagen “preserved their original conversational qualities and the occasional power plays . . . between the interviewer and the interviewee.” One can often hear, though, in Momaday’s and Vizenor’s responses echoes of statements from previous interviews and other pieces by the writers (in his introduction, Isernhagen also notes the “habitualized responses of the frequently interviewed authors”). Because Momaday and Vizenor have been so extensively interviewed—both subjects of book-length interviews—there is little new in Isernhagen’s conversations with them. A reader interested in interviews with Momaday would do well to consult Charles L. Woodward’s *Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (U of Nebraska P, 1989); for Vizenor, a reader might look at Vizenor and A. Robert Lee’s more recent *Postindian Conversations* (U of Nebraska P, 1999).

Isernhagen’s most successful interview is with Jeanette Armstrong, with whom readers may be least acquainted. Since Isernhagen asks more specific information about Armstrong’s own career, the interview works better as an introduction to her work. Isernhagen shows particular interest in the En’owkin Center, a cultural and educational organization run by the Okanagan Nation, where Armstrong helped to found the En’owkin School of International Writing, for Native American writers. Armstrong’s close involvement with the Enowkin School may have also better prepared her to generalize about “American Indian writing.”

Momaday, Vizenor, Armstrong’s ultimate “hook” is Isernhagen himself. In its promotion of the volume, the University of Oklahoma Press highlights Isernhagen as a “European critic” who brings a “unique perspective” to the interviews. While Isernhagen cannot be expected to rep-

resent “the European perspective”—any more than Momaday, Vizenor, and Armstrong can be expected to represent the totality of “American Indian writing”—Isernhagen may have done better to emphasize to a greater extent his own “Europeanness.” When he does, the exchanges become the most lively. For example, note the following from the interview with Vizenor, prompted by Isernhagen’s question about an American Indian group identity:

Viz: If we speak of Indian literature, then we reduce the rich complexities of human experience of every tribal group, of every writer coming from a uniquely, distinctly identifiable experience. If we reduce that by this colonial word, in my view we don’t have a literature worth considering except in its political sense or ideological sense. And surely there are people who embrace that. They embrace a literature they can use against America. And Europeans like to do that, too; they like to take up the group literature—“Indian”—and use it against America—the Italians, the Germans, and French take some pleasure in that.

Isern: Why, do you think, is that so?

Viz: Maybe because there is some envy of the power in the world, of American institutions and products—and just presence, I suppose.

Isern: [in a follow-up footnote] From my perspective, not just envy of a “presence,” but fear of active interference. I won’t throw the word “imperialism” at you, because it is somewhat late in the game to introduce it, but it is a word that is once again being applied to the relationship between the U. S. and other parts of the world.

Viz: We are talking about the bourgeois simulation of Indians in Europe.

Isernhagen stresses his European perspective again when he proposes that Native American writers may be “culturalizing” problems in Native American communities that may be better understood as “political, economic, sociological,” suggesting that Europeans may be better able than Americans to perceive such problems as derivative of differences in class rather than culture. More questions like these may have allowed the volume to add more to the growing critical discussion of Native American literature. Perhaps these elements of the book may help contribute to a continuing dialogue between European critics and Native American writers.

Randall C. Davis

The Blood Runs Like a River through My Dreams: A Memoir by Nasdijj. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. ISBN 06-180-489-28. 216 pages.

Some writers know how to write from life experiences, others do not. Those who do not slide by on attempts of explaining their lives, finding a meaning to what needs no explanation. But those who are truly meant to write are those whose lives have been so chaotic, so episodic, it only makes sense to write. Nasdijj is one of these ambiguously gifted writers.

Nasdijj (Athabaskan for “to become again”) has lived in many worlds: the world of mixed race (Navajo and Caucasian), fetal alcohol syndrome (his mother drank heavily while pregnant), migrant camps (he was the child of migrant workers), homeless (living for a while in his truck and a tent), the Tenderloin District of San Francisco (at the request of two Sioux mothers, he goes to find their sons who have become heroin addicts and male prostitutes), and American Indian reservations (living on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona). His latest venture is into the world of published writer.

Recently released by Houghton Muffin, Nasdijj’s *The Blood Runs Like a River through My Dreams: A Memoir* has made me once again realize Spirit makes no mistakes. We just often take a long time to see the connections. The powers that be have chosen Nasdijj to bring an encouraging message to the hearts of many who have had similar experiences, and to educate those who have no idea that such lives exist. Just as, I believe, Tommy Nothing Fancy was chosen to teach Nasdijj to accept himself—all of himself.

Tommy, Nasdijj’s adopted Navajo son, was born with fetal alcohol syndrome, just as Nasdijj was. Although Nasdijj attributes “rather severe learning disabilities, all my craziness, my inability to deal with authority, my perceptual malfunctions (I can read entire books upside down) and my rage” to his FAS, Tommy’s problems are even more severe. He has epileptic seizures and out-of-control behavior. But to Nasdijj, “he was perfect.” Seeing the beauty of Tommy’s spirit, Nasdijj is determined to help him enjoy life, regardless of the circumstances.

“Death,” Nasdijj explains, “to the Navajo, is like cold wind that blows across the mesa from the north. We do not speak of it.” But the author felt compelled to break with this tradition, “because the silence is ill fitting when it comes to FAS, and the fact that so many Indian children have this horrible affliction must be articulated. When pregnant women drink alcohol, there are serious consequences.”

As Tommy grew older and the disease became more prevalent, Nasdijj's solution "for coping with the demons of my son was to take him fishing." Nasdijj took his son fishing everywhere: Canada, Colorado, the Sea of Cortés, and Key West. "Fishing was our antidote to keep from falling into the blackness Tommy knew was there gnawing at his bones like an animal." When the seizures became more frequent, almost paralyzing, and medication no longer worked, Tommy "didn't want to die in a hospital. He hated hospitals." He wanted to go fishing, and it was on a fishing trip he died in Nasdijj's arms after a final breath-stealing seizure. He was six years old.

I asked Nasdijj why he felt compelled to write his memoir. He stated having the good fortune to work with children who live at the edges or margins of America: abused, neglected, living in institutions, incarcerated children, those growing up in migrant camps, homeless shelters, or simply homeless, junkies, foster children, and the abandoned; it is his distinct impression that all these children have one thing in common. He explained, "Regardless of anything the statistics say about their diversity, these children share one big thing: They feel alone."

He added, "I have a message for these children even if they never read my book until perhaps they are adults. My message is this: YOU ARE NOT ALONE."

Nasdijj's stories are records he feels negate those kept by the culture around him. The records that "do not imbue me with identity but wipe my identity away. The culture around me is forever telling me that I am nothing." He writes "to help others arrive at an awareness that our stories are a shared responsibility, and that responsibility imbues us with a spiritual power versus a wiping out of our identities." He feels this power is what scares "the ones who would either see us dead or baring our deadness would see us rendered irrelevant. We who live in the shadows of the margins are many things and beautiful, too, and we are not irrelevant."

It does not take a Masters Degree in Creative Writing to become a writer of the truth. It does not take years and years of creative writing workshops or belonging to certain writers' groups. It takes guts, willingness, and the capacity to relive parts of one's life that hurt to the core every time a memory surfaces. Still, as Nasdijj so eloquently put it: "There are places I refuse to visit. To attempt to do so would pull me down into the vortex, and the vortex is not a place I care to recall."

Nevertheless, Nasdijj has shed his blood that runs like a river through his dreams. Spilled it all over the pages of this book so that others might

relate. Raw, poignant, poetic, and painful, Nasdijj's style of writing is refreshing.

I read this book slowly, carefully, intently, relatedly. Not all at once. That would be too much blood to taste at one time. I had to let a small amount of the blood of the words sit on my tongue, move around with my thoughts, then let it intermingle with blood I thought had long ago dried and gone away. Then, I had to cry and remember, be grateful, and then read some more.

This book is not to be taken lightly. Read this book if you want to exercise your compassion; if you haven't cried in a while; if you like poetic symbolism; if you have lost someone to addiction or FAS; or for its educational realism. If none of these reasons seem to appeal, then I challenge you to consider reading this book as if it were a car accident you happen upon.

You slow down to look, curious, wanting to know what happened, who died, who survived, but mostly because it makes you grateful that you were not involved. Read this book if only to feel better about your own current state of affairs. Then say some prayers for the children society often forgets.

MariJo Moore

LaDonna Harris: A Comanche Life by LaDonna Harris. *Edited by H. Henrietta Stockel American Indian Lives Series. Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 2000. ISBN 0-8032-2396-X 147 pages.*

"Traditionally one became a strong person in order to give back to the community. The community nurtured you while you were becoming strong, and once this was achieved, you looked for opportunities to give back to the community . . ." LaDonna Harris tells the reader (xix). This is one of Harris' ongoing Comanche values and one that seems to exemplify her life.

Harris was raised in Oklahoma on a farm near Walters by her maternal grandparents. The farm was settled by the Tabbytites (which in Comanche means "the sun rays coming through the clouds" [2]) in about 1910 as a result of the Dawes Act. Although her family was under the usual pressure to acculturate, Harris notes that she grew up on the stories of the government's attempts "to subdue the Comanches by any means necessary" (5) and that traditional Comanche kinship values were very

much part of her life.

Harris' mother, Lily Tabbytite, was the first to marry "outside the Comanche way" (17). Harris' father was a white man who seemed to have had little to do with her life. When she was growing up on her grandparents' farm, her mother having left for a job at Fort Sill Indian Health Service, her grandfather's peyote existed side by side with her grandmother's Christianity. In school, Harris received the message that "If you give up your Indianness and become educated like us—be like us—then you will be accepted in society. And if you give up your Indian ways and not dance and . . . do all those Comanche things, you will become a Christian and be acceptable" (20). However, Harris knew that "Indian people were not approved," (20) especially if they were dark skinned. Harris, who was fair-skinned, says she "learned how to manipulate people to make them happy . . ." (21). Harris credits her grandparents for "instill[ing] a sense of self-worth" in her (22) and not allowing her to become a victim like those raised by their parents in that particular time.

Harris never considered going on to college because she was dyslexic. Like many women of her era she wanted to be a wife and mother and have a nice house. That ambition was later gratified when she met her future husband Fred Harris, a white college student at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. She "became very ambitious through" him (28).

Marrying after she graduated from high school, Harris took various jobs to assist her husband through law school in the 1950s. Early on, Fred Harris took a case for LaDonna's grandmother against the oil companies. This began his interest in tribal politics. Meanwhile, he was attending Comanche churches with LaDonna and learning the language. LaDonna was an activist in her own right and was instrumental in starting Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity in the 1960s.

When the Harrises were in their midtwenties, he ran for the Oklahoma state senate and won, the first of his political offices on his way to the U.S. Senate in 1964. In the Senate campaign, LaDonna became "a full partner with her husband, and someone he needed in order to reach *their* goals" (65) while raising three children. In Washington D.C., LaDonna was on numerous boards and saw this as an opportunity "to learn strategies from every one and create a network of people." Especially important was her anti-racist and civil rights work.

Today, LaDonna Harris, divorced and living in Bernalillo, New Mexico, continues to give back to the community. She is president of

Americans for Indian Opportunity. She and her editor, H. Henrietta Stockel, have put together “LaDonna’s life story as she lived it and as it affected those she loved” (xvi). The only criticism I can offer probably stems from the method used, of LaDonna telling her story as Stockel recorded it. Stockel then gave the typewritten script to LaDonna for her review. This sometimes seemed to result in shifts in thought in mid-paragraph. Not a history of contemporary Comanche life, an ethnographic study, nor an academic discussion of Comanche culture, it nonetheless is a very good account of one of the foremost Native American activists of our time.

Annette Van Dyke

Contributors

Franchot Ballinger teaches English at University College, the University of Cincinnati. A past president of ASAIL, he also compiled the first edition of ASAIL's *Guide to Native American Studies* programs. He has been pursuing Native American tricksters for about two decades.

Michelle Burnham is assistant professor of English at Santa Clara University. She has recently edited *The Female American*, by Unca Eliza Winkfield (Broadview Press, 2000) and is the author of *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*.

Denise K. Cummings is a doctoral student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, specializing in Film History and Theory with additional interests in Native American literatures, critical theory, and cultural studies. She teaches courses in film analysis, modernism, literature, and composition.

Randall C. Davis is an associate professor of English at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama.

Blake Hausman is a Masters degree candidate at Western Washington University, where he is studying creative writing and American Indian literatures. He plans to pursue a PhD in American Indian and post-colonial literatures.

MariJo Moore, Cherokee, is the author of *Spirit Voices of Bones*, *Desert Quotes*, *Crow Quotes*, and the forthcoming *Red Woman With Backward Eyes*. She resides in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

John Purdy has been editor of *SAIL* since 1994, which he has found rewarding. Nonetheless, he looks forward to new challenges after the next issue of the journal, when Malea Powell will assume the duties as editor.

Annette Van Dyke is an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Womens Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield. She is the author of many essays on S. Alice Callahan, Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Louise Erdrich, the most recent appearing in *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich* edited by Allan Chavkin.

An associate professor of English at the University of Vermont, **Kari J. Winter** is the author of *Subjects of Slavery, Agents of Change: Women and Power in Gothic Novels and Slave Narratives, 1790-1865* and numerous articles on American Indian and African American literature, including essays on Erdrich in *Inquiry*, *Northwest Review*, and the forthcoming *MLA Approaches to Teaching Louise Erdrich*.