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## **“The Men in the Bar Feared Her”: The Power of Ayah in Leslie Marmon Silko’s “Lullaby”**

**Patrice Hollrah**

Leslie Marmon Silko, who is of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and white ancestry, states her political agenda: “I feel it is more effective to write a story like “Lullaby” than to rant and rave. I think it is more effective in reaching people” (Seyersted, *Two Interviews* 24). In the short story “Lullaby,” which is “among the most often reprinted stories in American Indian literature,” Silko draws on Navajo (Diné) characters (Graulich 19). First published in 1974 in both *Chicago Review* and *Yarbird Reader*, “Lullaby” was later selected by Martha Foley as one of twenty works for *The Best American Short Stories of 1975*. Silko then included it in *Storyteller* (1981). Writing outside of her own Laguna Pueblo tradition in “Lullaby” presents the challenge to the reader of having to be aware of not only Silko’s tribal heritage but also that of the Navajo.

In “Lullaby,” Ayah searches for her husband, Chato, as she walks in the falling snow to Azzie’s Bar where he has gone to buy wine. During her walk, she reminisces about her life, remembering, among other things, scenes from her childhood, the loss of her son in the war, the removal of her two young children from her home, and Chato being fired from his cattle rancher’s job. Silko juxtaposes the past and the present to show both how Ayah maintains her sense of tribal identity in the face of change, disillusionment, and loss, and by extension how problems still exist today not just for the Navajo but for many American Indians. The story ends on a dual note, one that implies death, but more importantly one that signifies continuity, survival, and hope. This essay examines how Navajo culture, specifically the concept of *hozho* and the Navajo deities Changing Woman and Spider Woman, helps explain how Ayah is also a powerful individual despite events that portray her only as a victim. Taking into account the Navajo historical and cultural contexts of “Lullaby” illuminates more fully the political ramifications of gender complementarity for the female protagonist, Ayah.

In the ideology of gender complementarity, or tribally constructed gender roles, there is no hierarchy of genders but rather an equal regard for the roles and work of each. A patriarchal culture denotes a relationship with women in subordinate position to men, a relationship of unequal power. However, when men and women complement each

other in tribal societies, the result is a certain degree of autonomy and independence from each other with the understanding that there also will be generosity and sharing (Albers and Medicine 189).

In Laura Tohe's (Navajo) essay "There Is No Word for Feminism in My Language," she writes about the cultural role of Navajo women in general as important members of the family and tribe:

As long as I can remember, the Diné (or Navajo, as we are also referred to) women in my life have always shown courage, determination, strength, persistence, and endurance in their own special way. My female relatives lived their lives within the Diné matrilineal culture that valued, honored, and respected them. These women passed on to their daughters not only their strength, but the expectation to assume responsibility for the family, and therefore were expected to act as leaders for the family and the tribe. Despite five hundred years of Western patriarchal intrusion, this practice continues. (103)

Tohe's description of Navajo women serves as an introduction in how to regard Ayah in the context of her own family: her grandmother, mother, husband, and children. Also, the way in which Tohe characterizes the Navajo women certainly applies to Ayah, the "courage, determination, strength, persistence, and endurance" that she shows "in [her] own special way," in view of the hardships that she has endured.

Silko's knowledge of Navajo culture comes from several different sources. As a child, Silko heard family-related stories involving Navajos, which she fashions into new stories for her collection in *Storyteller*. In one, Silko's Grandma A'mooh recounts how when she was a child, she heard the story of the hungry Navajos who stole a herd of Laguna sheep. A'mooh's uncles and grandfather were among those who caught the Navajos and told them the next time they were hungry they should ask for something to eat and the Laguna people would feed them. Silko contends that today Laguna homes always welcome Navajo people during Feast time (210). In addition to the historical account of sheep raiding, this story's theme focuses on the tribal characteristic of sharing, an important concept in a communal culture.

In another story from *Storyteller*, Silko's Great-grandpa Stagner hired Juana, an adult Navajo woman who as a child was kidnapped by

slave hunters. Juana came to live with Silko's Great-grandmother Helen to help raise her children. As a child, Silko along with her Grandma Lillie would place flowers on Juana's grave (88-89). Although Silko does not explain why Juana might be well-suited to help in the raising of children, the Navajo concept of mothering might explain her propensity for this kind of work. This idea will be dealt with in greater detail later in this essay.

In a third story from the collection, Silko writes about the Navajos who visited every year at Laguna Feast time: "Navajos used to jam the hillsides with their wagons and horses. [. . .] My father made all of us kids come outside and watch the last wagon come" (202). In one anecdote, Silko relates how her grandfather became good friends with one Navajo man:

Grandpa Hank had a friend like that, an old man from Alamo. Every year they were so glad to see each other, and the Navajo man would bring Grandpa something in the gunny sack he carried—sometimes little apricots the old man grew or a mutton shoulder. [. . .] I remember the last time the old Navajo man came looking for my Grandpa. [. . .] we told him, "Henry passed away last winter." The old Navajo man cried, and then he left. He never came back anymore after that. (187)

Growing up in proximity to the Navajos along with hearing stories about the relationships among them and the Laguna people are just two of the ways in which Silko learned about her Navajo neighbors. The stories reveal details of intimate friendships, employer-employee relationships, historical events involving sheep raiding and kidnapping, traditional tribal ceremonies, family customs, and other information about the Laguna and Navajo lifestyles. Evidently, these family stories of personal experiences with the Navajo carry enough importance in Silko's life that she feels compelled to share them in her own storytelling, and she shows a deep abiding respect for the role these Navajo people have played in her family's history. Having this much personal information about the Navajo at her disposal would certainly explain Silko's comfort with writing the short story "Lullaby."

Silko undoubtedly met more Navajos when she attended the University of New Mexico where she earned her B.A. in English in 1969 and afterward completed three semesters of law school. Later,

Silko taught for approximately two years at the Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona. In an interview, Silko responds to a question about the character Betonie in her novel *Ceremony* by speaking about one Navajo friend in particular with whom she had long conversations:

Betonie is partly based on things that I began to perceive from the two years I spent in Navajo country and from one Navajo man who was a friend of mine. What he told me in our long discussions was that he was constantly probing the Navajo beliefs he had grown up with. He has this tremendous mind, and he's constantly examining and reexamining basic assumptions and presumptions. Not just in Navajo culture, but . . . he went to St. John's College in Santa Fe, and he studied Greek. He has an incisive mind. From talking with him, I began to appreciate the kind of conservatism I'd been taught to connect with Navajo culture, Navajo thought. (Fitzgerald and Hudak 33)

Silko seems to have spent a substantial amount of time in the company of enough other Navajo people to assume that she acquired a degree of familiarity with Navajo culture. After leaving the Navajo reservation, Silko moved to Ketchikan, Alaska, in 1973, and, while living there, she wrote "Lullaby" (30).

Apart from the personal contact that Silko has had with Navajo people, she has incorporated both the Navajo landscape and Navajo characters into her own creative work. One of the most obvious references to the actual geographical location of Navajo reservations near Laguna Pueblo occurs in the reworking of a Laguna traditional tribal abduction story "Yellow Woman." Silko positions Silva, the narrator's lover, so he can see the Navajo reservation:

"From here I can see the world." He stepped out on the edge. "The Navajo reservation begins over there." He pointed to the east. "The Pueblo boundaries are over here." He looked below us to the south. (*Storyteller* 57-58)

Silko also suggests that Silva might be Navajo: “Even beside the horses he looked tall, and I asked him again if he wasn’t Navajo” (60). Finally, when the narrator returns home, she decides to tell her family that “some Navajo had kidnapped [her]” (62). A. LaVonne Ruoff points out this “allusion to the old Navajo practice of raiding Pueblo settlements for food and women” (“Ritual” 13). The consequences of both the historical events and the physical proximity of the Navajo to the Pueblo people lend themselves to the narrative structure of Silko’s “Yellow Woman.” The short story “Lullaby,” about a Navajo family, is not an anomaly in Silko’s writing. She has established a pattern of writing about Navajo characters based both on her personal history and the larger history of the two tribes.

Silko refers to the Navajo in several other places in *Storyteller*. In the poem “Storytelling,” Silko inverts the usually gendered paradigm of the abductor-abductee relationship, and three Navajo men become the kidnapped victims of four Laguna women: “‘We couldn’t escape them,’ he told police later. / ‘We tried, but there were four of them and / only three of us’” (96). Later in the same poem, the speaker accuses a Navajo of threatening her life:

It was  
that Navajo  
from Alamo,  
you know,  
the tall  
good-looking  
one.

He told me  
he’d kill me  
if I didn’t  
go with him (97-98)

The historical influences of kidnapping as well as the mythical influence of Yellow Woman’s leaving the pueblo and engaging in sexual relationships permeate the poem. Not understanding Silko’s larger personal and historical contexts for using the Navajo in so much of her work might lead to a misinterpretation of what at times on the surface appears to be a negative although humorous portrayal of them, and this reading, of course, would not be correct. In fact, having the women abduct the men is a perfect example of gender

complementarity, in which the women are equally as strong, powerful, and capable of playing the role of kidnappers, as well as of acting as the sexual aggressors. As for the woman who claims that the Navajo man threatened her, she uses language to defend herself, to blame him, when she most likely went willingly.

Also, two of the Lee H. Marmon photographs in *Storyteller* deal with Navajo subjects. For one landscape photograph, Silko provides a note that explains a Navajo legend: "The Navajos say the black peaks in this valley are drops of blood that fell from a dying monster which the Twin Brothers fought and fatally wounded" (n. 14, 271). The second photograph from the early 1950s pictures Navajo wagons at the Laguna Fiesta (n.14, 271). Her knowledge of the Navajo not only has come from the oral stories she heard growing up but also from the photographs that her father took. She saw for herself many of the objects and events in the photographs, and had the pictures to remind her of those images. In story and picture, Silko weaves the Navajo people, culture, and history throughout her work as if they form a natural part of her own intellectual landscape.

Another aspect of Silko's affinity for integrating the Navajo into her work comes from the similarities between the Navajo and Laguna Pueblo in terms of matriarchies or matrilineal societies. In an interview, Silko explains the role of Laguna Pueblo women:

In a matrilineal society, in a matriarchy, and especially in this particular matriarchy, the women, as I've already said, control the houses, the lineage of the children, and a lot of the decisions about marriages and so forth. In a sense, the women have called the shots pretty much in the world of relationships and the everyday world. While the Pueblo women were kind of running the show, buying and selling sheep, and *of course the Navajos are the same way too*, the women making many of the business decisions, the Pueblo men would be taking care of ceremonial matters or maybe out hunting. (emphasis added, Barnes 96-97)

Silko describes the Laguna Pueblo as a matrilineal, matriarchal, and matrilocal society, and she asserts that the "Navajo are the same way." In reality, the Navajo "tribe is matrilineal and matrilocal (preferred) with apparent high status for women" (Shepardson 159). Based on

these similarities, that Silko would feel open to using Navajo characters in “Lullaby,” as well as in her other works, is understandable. She focuses on commonalities rather than any differences among the tribes, and specifically, she considers issues of women’s power and gender complementarity in matrifocal societies.

The abundance of evidence for Silko’s use of Navajo material in her writing is necessary to defend against any critique of her choice to write about another culture outside of her own Laguna Pueblo tribe. Noted scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) speaks to the current problem of appropriation as she perceives it in American Indian literary studies:

A great deal of the work done in the mixed-blood literary movement is personal, invented, appropriated, and irrelevant to First Nation status in the United States. If that work becomes too far removed from what is really going on in Indian enclaves, there will be no way to engage in responsible intellectual strategies in an era when structures of external cultural power are more oppressive than ever. (130)

The appropriation of cultures other than the author’s leads to the fear of misrepresentation of that culture. American Indians resent cultural outsiders defining who they are. The evidence for Silko’s knowledge of the Navajo and her sincerity in portraying them within their own cultural and historical contexts cannot be denied. Cook-Lynn’s concern, however, also speaks to whether the writing will address the most important issues necessary to the future survival of American Indians:

Does this art give thoughtful consideration to the defense of our lands, resources, languages, children? Is anyone doing the intellectual work in and about Indian communities that will help us understand our future? While it is true that any indigenous story tells of death and blood, it also tells of indigenous rebirth and hope, not as Americans nor as some new ersatz race but as the indigenes of this continent. (134)

In telling Ayah's story in "Lullaby," Silko addresses those very issues of resources, language, and children. In writing images that reflect the past and present of the Navajo, she tells about death, but taking into account Navajo mythology, she also offers continuity and survival for them.

Silko portrays the Navajo woman Ayah as a character who shares common experiences with other American Indian women. She has lived through a variety of historical and cultural changes and still retains an intact connection to her Navajo identity. Some historical information and general principles about Navajo culture offer a better understanding of Ayah and what a Navajo woman's life entails. One major historical event is the Navajo War of 1863-64. Under the military leadership of General James H. Carleton and the command of Colonel Kit Carson, federal and volunteer troops captured and killed Navajos, burned their hogans, destroyed their crops, and seized their herds (Bailey and Bailey 9). In August 1863, surviving groups of Navajo prisoners began the Long Walk to Bosque Redondo, where almost 8,500 Navajos were eventually imprisoned (10). The Treaty of 1868 allowed the Navajo to return to their sacred homeland after having suffered for four years. Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorothea Leighton describe the lasting negative impact the effects of the war and subsequent imprisonment have had on the Navajo:

Fort Sumner [Bosque Redondo] was a major calamity to The People; its full effects upon their imagination can hardly be conveyed to white readers. . . .

One can no more understand Navaho attitudes . . . without knowing of Fort Sumner than he can comprehend Southern attitudes without knowing of the Civil War. (qtd. in Bailey and Bailey 10-11)

The plot structure of Ayah remembering injustices suffered in her past and *walking* to find her husband recall the Long Walk that her ancestors endured. That the Navajo returned, survived, and flourished also indicate a potentially positive reading of the end of "Lullaby." Based on her tribal history, Ayah could have negative feelings about the whites even before she experiences personal injuries by them.

A second important historical event that would color Ayah's perceptions of whites would be the United States government's 1930s stock reduction programs. The United States government and the Navajo both saw the problems of erosion and the resulting damage to

Navajo both saw the problems of erosion and the resulting damage to the grazing lands from completely different perspectives: “Indian Service officials saw the problem as overgrazing [. . .] and stock reduction as the only solution” (Bailey and Bailey 185). Ruth Roessel and Broderick H. Johnson, on the other hand, note that the Navajos “perceived a different set of factors which produced the erosion—namely, the reduction of stock ‘caused the rain clouds to diminish,’ which kept the grass from growing, and this in turn resulted in the erosion” (qtd. in Bailey and Bailey 185-86). Destroying thousands of animals to which the Navajos had complex and profound cultural and economic attachments did not make any sense to them. This key event of enforced herd reductions could color the way that Ayah perceives Anglo-Americans.

Language creates origins, and Silko knows that Ayah’s worldview begins with a Navajo origin myth. Like the Laguna Pueblo, the Navajo have an emergence myth. They believe that they have emerged through several worlds to the present one. Peter Iverson offers a brief summary of the emergence myth, which includes stories of the Four Worlds, First Man and First Woman, and the animals. He goes on to describe how the world as the Navajos know it continued to be shaped:

The stories tell of the first hogan being constructed, the first sweat bath being taken, the four seasons being established, day and night being created, the stars being placed in the sky, and the sun and the moon coming into existence. The Glittering World encompasses both beauty and difficulty. In one episode after another, listeners hear the consequences of improper behavior, and learn about the difficulties that may ensue through carelessness or thoughtlessness. (9-11)

The Navajo find not only their relationship to this world and the land in their origin myth but also their identity. The central idea in Navajo religious thinking, called *hozho*, “translates as balance or harmony, and they strive to maintain this harmony” (Tobert and Pitt 34):

[I]t is not something that occurs only in ritual song and prayer; it is referred to frequently in everyday speech. A Navajo uses this concept to express his happiness, his health, the beauty of his land, and the

harmony of his relations with others. It is used in reminding people to be careful and deliberate, and when he says good-bye to someone leaving, he will say [. . .] (“may you walk or go about according to *hozho*”). (Witherspoon, *Language* 18)

Traditional Navajo elders Chauncy and Dorothy Neboyia summarize the Navajo philosophy in the following way: “The earth is our mother; she sustains us. Those who give birth nurse their young. It is the same with the earth. Living and working well will bring a good life and a good reputation” (*Seasons*). Navajo worldview encompasses life in a holistic way; the people, environment, work, and spirituality are interconnected at all times, and this worldview is omnipresent in “Lullaby.” Therefore, an understanding of Navajo cultural and historical contexts opens up the reading of “Lullaby” in a necessary way that no other approach offers.

The Navajo practice three general kinds of ritual to maintain, insure, or restore *hozho*: Blessingway rites, Holyway rites, and Evilway rites (Witherspoon, *Language* 34-35). The opening paragraph of “Lullaby” contains a wealth of information that hints at Navajo culture, including a reference to ceremony:

The sun had gone down but the snow in the wind gave off its own light. It came in thick tufts like new wool—washed before the weaver spins it. Ayah reached out for it like her own babies had, and she smiled when she remembered how she had laughed at them. She was an old woman now, and her life had become memories. She sat down with her back against the wide cottonwood tree, feeling the rough bark on her back bones; she faced east and listened to the wind and snow sing a high-pitched Yeibechei song. (*Storyteller* 43)<sup>1</sup>

Teams of masked dancers perform the Yeibechei songs during the last two evenings of the Nightway ceremony, a healing ritual. They are “widely known as the most dramatic of Navajo songs” and

have been described as being “piercingly powerful,” having “hypnotic power,” and “displaying almost acrobatic feats of bounding back and forth between octaves.” [. . .] All these differences are intentional

octaves.” [. . .] All these differences are intentional for it is the voices of the gods that are heard [. . .] and they should not sound like ordinary singing. (McAllester and Mitchell 609)

Clearly, Silko references the Yeibechei song to allude to the healing and ritual nature of the story that follows, an attempt to restore *hozho*—“everything that is good, harmonious, orderly, happy, and beautiful,” the opposite of *hocho*—“the evil, the disorderly, and the ugly” (Witherspoon, *Language* 34). In light of the negative events in Ayah’s life, she would need to concentrate on a healing ceremony to restore *hozho*.

In addition to the introduction of the protagonist, the ceremonial nature of the story, and the seasonal time in the opening paragraph, there are other conventional elements of the short story: the setting, style, and indication of plot. Unsurprisingly, a detailed description of the natural environment coincides with the worldview of *hozho*, one of harmony and balance with surroundings: “snow,” “wind,” “new wool,” “cottonwood tree,” “bark,” “east,” “arroyo,” “Cebolleta Creek,” “grass,” “trickle of water,” “skinny cows,” “winding paths,” and “manure.” Elaine Jahner calls this Silko’s “signature opening move, the use of nature descriptions to refer to psychological and cosmic temporality” (503). Silko presents a seasonal panorama that illustrates the close connection between the landscape and Ayah, the importance of water in an arid Southwest geographical location, and a glimpse of the gendered economic enterprises of the Navajo. Even the direction “east,” that of the rising sun, balances the implied direction of west in the opening line, “The sun had gone down.” The “east” also resonates with the Navajo cultural practice of constructing the door to face the east in the hogan, the Navajo word for house, which has now come to mean the traditional eight-sided log house with a domed, earth-covered roof. A close reading of the introductory paragraph reveals a setting that supports the Navajo worldview.

The gendered economic enterprises alluded to in the first paragraph are weaving for women and herding for men. The traditional roles of the Navajo women center around the maintenance of the home, the care of the children, and the spinning, carding, dyeing, and weaving of the wool. Later, when Ayah wants to block out memories of Jimmie’s death, she comforts herself with thoughts of her mother and grandmother working with the wool:

She did not want to think about Jimmie. So she thought about the weaving and the way her mother had done it. On the tall wooden loom set into the sand under a tamarack tree for shade. She could see it clearly. She had been only a little girl when her grandma gave her the wooden combs to pull the twigs and burrs from the raw, freshly washed wool. And while she combed the wool, her grandma sat beside her, spinning a silvery strand of yarn around the smooth cedar spindle. (*Storyteller* 43)

Silko provides insights into how the process of weaving has been a major force in shaping Ayah's life. As a traditional activity, it binds her to her mother and grandmother, emotionally and culturally. The memories sustain her and provide solace during times of great emotional pain and grief. Therefore, the weaving becomes therapeutic beyond the actual act.

Not only do the Navajo blankets serve a utilitarian function for the family, but they also most likely would serve an economic purpose:

With the unemployment percentage for Navajo adults exceeding 60 percent (in 1973) and with many of the limited jobs being seasonal and uncertain, such as fighting forest fires, working on the railroads, and farm labor, the role of women in weaving to provide a reliable source of food and clothing is of extreme importance to the existence of Navajo family life. The Navajo have always been matrilineal with women holding a position of prestige in Navajo culture, and weaving helps assure the continuation of this position for women. (Roessel 595)

Thus, in addition to memories that keep her connected to her people, weaving in Ayah's life represents an economic means of survival for the women and their families in her tribe. Tohe points out,

Diné women have always worked to help support the family, even before the reservation system was established. Later, when the white man established trading posts on the reservation, the women wove and

sold blankets in exchange for food and supplies.  
(104)

Unlike the women, however, Navajo men did not always fare so well.

Tohe adds, “While the male roles diminished as protectors and providers for the family, the women’s roles persisted and, in many instances, the women adapted more easily” (104). In “Lullaby,” through all the setbacks that Chato and Ayah experience, Ayah fares better than Chato. For Navajo men, herding sheep and cattle, gathering and cutting firewood, and helping the elders act to complement the roles of women. Ayah knows that Chato misses the wage labor he used to do: “She knew he did not like walking behind old ewes when for so many years he rode big quarter horses and worked with cattle” (*Storyteller* 50). The plot revolves around Ayah’s memories of her past, specific things that have changed, seen in the metaphorical snowfall: “she could watch the wide fluffy snow fill in her tracks, steadily, until the direction she had come from was gone” (43). Though the “direction” seems to have vanished, as Charlene Taylor Evans notes, “The reader can experience the fluidity of time; the past is omnipresent” (176).

Silko, however, does not necessarily lament the changes that have occurred, because, in juxtaposing images of the past and present, she again demonstrates adaptation and continuity, lessening the nostalgic effects. Indeed, she intends a political statement about some of these changes, but one needs to keep the idea of *hozho*, or balance, in mind in the following examples of the past and present: her mother’s woven blankets and Jimmy’s Army blanket; high buckskin leggings wrapped over elkhide moccasins and black overshoes with metal buckles; the traditional hogan and the boxcar shack; a traditional medicine man and the children’s clinic at Cañoncito; and traditional Navajo names and English names. Yes, contemporary versions have replaced traditional items and customs, but one aspect of the story preserves and privileges the traditional way of life. Ironically, the English language of “Lullaby” will keep the traditional Navajo way of life alive for future generations to read about, so the past lives on despite change. This sentiment can be found in Silko’s dedication in *Storyteller*: “This book is dedicated to the storytellers as far back as memory goes and to the telling which continues and through which they all live and we with them” (title page).

Other elements in the opening paragraph of “Lullaby” allude to Changing Woman. The story’s season is winter, and Ayah is “an old

woman” (43). An important principal female deity, Changing Woman was raised by First Man and First Woman. She symbolizes nature and the mystery of birth; cyclic, she never dies but grows old in the winter and is forever young again in the spring. Anthropologist Mary Shepardson discusses the implications of Changing Woman for Navajo women:

Puberty rites are celebrated for girls, not for boys. A great goddess in Navajo mythology is Changing Woman, who created the Navajo and the four original clans. She was the first to be honored with Kinaaldá, the girl’s puberty rite. She was the mother of the hero twins, who rid the world of monsters. She symbolizes, through changes from youth to age and return to youth, the four seasons of the year. She is the Earth Mother. All these factors mean high status for Navajo women. (160)

Silko mentions two other seasons in the opening paragraph, “springtime” and “summer.” Setting the story during winter, noting the cyclic nature of the seasons that will follow, and placing Ayah in old age generate a wealth of contextual background for anyone who understands the influential role of Changing Woman in Navajo culture. Her presence is felt during the later telling of the birth of Ayah’s son, Jimmy, and in the implied death of Chato at the end of the story. Knowing, however, that Changing Woman connotes a cyclic return—a rebirth—the focus on the otherwise tragic ending softens, and a positive note of continuity and survival appears.

Additionally, knowing the high status that Changing Woman provides Navajo women, Ayah is not necessarily seen as a powerless figure, buffeted about by events perpetrated by the dominant culture. Laura Tohe writes with great respect about Changing Woman and confirms the findings of anthropologist Shepardson:

Changing Woman, sometimes known as White Shell Woman, is the principal mythological deity in the Diné culture. She gave to the Diné the first clans and the guidelines of how the Diné should live their lives. She birthed the Twin Heroes who destroyed the monsters that were ravaging the people. She underwent the first Kinaaldá ceremony, the puberty

ceremony for young women. Through her, the matriarchal system of the Diné was established. (Tohe 104)

Although in the story Ayah does not interact with members of her community other than her kinship-based residence group, within that environment she would have a degree of standing and integrity that outsiders might not realize, and *Changing Woman* is, in part, to be credited with that status.

The positive valence of Ayah's role as a mother appears in the opening paragraph as she recalls laughing at her babies reaching for snowflakes, warm memories in contrast to the cold snow that surrounds her, another example of balance. Ayah comes from a culture that values women for their ability to bear children, a natural physiological function and part of the life cycle. Tohe claims that the Navajo woman "is groomed for motherhood, which carries a different connotation in Diné culture than in Western culture" (105). Based on Ayah's affectionate memories of her children, she obviously takes great satisfaction in her role as a mother. While the premature loss of children most certainly always brings sadness, the fact that motherhood carries such power in Navajo culture seems to add even more poignancy in view of Ayah's loss.

Silko offers an additional indication of the importance of the role of motherhood in Navajo culture by describing Ayah's memories of the birth of her son Jimmie:

She felt peaceful remembering. She didn't feel cold anymore. Jimmie's blanket seemed warmer than it had ever been. And she could remember the morning he was born. She could remember whispering to her mother, who was sleeping on the other side of the hogan, to tell her it was time now. She did not want to wake the others. The second time she called to her, her mother stood up and pulled on her shoes; she knew. They walked to the old stone hogan together, Ayah walking a step behind her mother. She waited alone, learning the rhythms of the pains while her mother went to call the old woman to help them. The morning was already warm even before dawn, and Ayah smelled the bee flowers blooming and the young willow growing at

the springs. She could remember that so clearly, but his birth merged into the births of the other children and to her it became all the same birth. They named him for the summer morning and in English they called him Jimmie. (*Storyteller* 44)

This passage presents the customs associated with giving birth: the use of a separate hogan for labor and delivery, the assistance of a midwife, and the presence of the mother. Also, elements of the natural landscape intimately entwine with Ayah's physical sensations of painful contractions: the time of day, the warm temperature of the summer morning, the fragrant smell of the flowers, and the willow situated near the water. The landscape creates balance and harmony with the work and pain associated with giving birth, an example of the Navajo worldview, *hozho*. These details of the surrounding environment ingrain themselves in Ayah's memories of her physical sensations, and in keeping with circular time, Jimmie's birth becomes much like the births of all her children, as equally important and memorable. Finally, the double naming, both in Navajo and English, comments on the Navajo people's mediation between both cultures through language, a major theme in "Lullaby."

To balance the memory of Jimmie's birth, Ayah also remembers receiving the news of his death. Her recollections suggest that Jimmie died during the Vietnam War, her feelings regarding Jimmie's service to the United States armed forces, and Navajo customs surrounding death:

It wasn't like Jimmie died. He just never came back, and one day a dark blue sedan with white writing on its doors pulled up in front of the box-car shack where the rancher let the Indians live. A man in a khaki uniform trimmed in gold gave them a yellow piece of paper and told them that Jimmie was dead. He said the Army would try to get the body back and then it would be shipped to them; but it wasn't likely because the helicopter had burned after it crashed. (44)

Jimmie's death by helicopter crash strongly suggests that he dies sometime during the Vietnam Era, from the 1960s to the early 1970s. More importantly, however, is the ambiguity that Silko creates by not

specifying the time period. The resulting anachronistic quality more appropriately fits the American Indian sense of time and removes the story from any one specific time period. Silko would want all Navajo war veterans honored and memorialized.

In fact, part of Ayah's anger upon hearing the news of her son's death might be attributed to her scorn for the white society's treatment of Navajo veterans upon returning home from World War II. While enlisted, many American Indians for the first time experienced respect from whites. Then, when they were discharged, they received the same kind of shabby treatment they had before entering the service:

American society had never before conferred such respect upon Indian people, and native servicemen and women came to like the resulting feelings of self-worth and national worth. When the war ended, however, and the uniforms came off, Indians found that America's respect had vanished as well. Indian people, even the most "assimilated," would seemingly always be second-class citizens, kept in their places by both the subtle snub and the sign reading "No Dogs or Indians Allowed." After the liberating experience of wartime, America's return to prewar discrimination proved doubly humiliating for many Indians and raised the level of frustration in Indian country to new heights. (Deloria, "The Twentieth" 427)

Not only did returning war veterans face poor treatment from American citizens but they also had to worry about finding employment. For the Navajos, World War II followed on the heels of the stock reduction programs, from which some herds never recovered: "Returning Navajos discovered that their herds and farms could not support their families even at bare subsistence, and that opportunities for wage labor were minimal" (Bailey and Bailey 220). Silko heard veterans talk about their war experiences and sympathized with the employment problems they faced: "When I was really small, I listened to World War II and Korean War veterans. They had drinking problems and lacked regular jobs, but they had good souls and spirits" (Boos 243). Thus, to understand Ayah's anger at hearing the news of Jimmie's death, the history of veterans returning home to the Navajo reservation from previous wars must be considered.<sup>2</sup>

Knowing how the Navajo think of the dead clarifies why Chato tells the Army official to keep Jimmie's body and not return it (*Storyteller* 45). Traditionally, the Navajo guard against any unnecessary or unwise contact with the dead:

The anxieties and extraordinary precautions concerning death, burial, and the visits of ghosts were greatly relaxed when it was an infant or a very old person who died. An infant could not have developed animosities, it was thought, and an aged person who had lived out his life fully was considered beyond rancor. It was the person who dies with his promise and hopes unfulfilled who was to be feared. (Opler 378)

An example of no anxieties about the death and burial of infants occurs when Ayah gives an account of her own babies that died and how she buried them:

There had been babies that died soon after they were born, and one that died before he could walk. She had carried them herself, up to the boulders and great pieces of the cliff that long ago crashed down from Long Mesa; she laid them in crevices of sandstone and buried them in fine brown sand with round quartz pebbles that washed down the hills in the rain. She had endured it because they had been with her. (*Storyteller* 47)

On one level Ayah has no problem dealing with the death and burial of her young babies, and once again, Silko grounds even death and burial in a descriptive context of the natural environment. With Jimmie's death, however, he has not had an opportunity to live a full life. His death is one that must be feared and handled with precautions "in order to prevent unnatural illness and premature death" (Witherspoon, "Language and Reality" 571). Hence, Chato and Ayah do not care if the Army recovers his body. They do not want to deal with it.

The implied death of Chato at the end of "Lullaby" presents a more complex situation. Has Chato lived long enough to release any bitterness, so death would not create any anxiety for anyone left behind? In light of his unemployment, the resulting alcoholism, and

the loss of children, he probably has not. Yet, Silko's reference to the Yeibechei song at the beginning of the story—the implied healing nature of this telling—and the lullaby at the end of the story should help to counterbalance any hostility that Chato still feels. Moreover, “[f]or the Navajo death from old age is considered to be both natural and highly desirable,” and “[t]he goal of Navajo life in this world is to live to maturity in the condition described as *hózhó*, to die of old age, the end result of which incorporates one in the universal beauty, harmony, and happiness [. . .]” (Witherspoon, *Language* 19, 25). Therefore, rather than a tragic ending to the story that plays into the myth of the vanishing American Indian, the possibility of Chato's death signifies sadness not because death in itself is a negative event but because it might be a premature death due to alcoholism. Silko seems to attribute Chato's drinking, which did not begin until after losing his job, to “the dislocations of acculturation and social change” (Kunitz and Levy 5).<sup>3</sup> The rate of alcohol-related deaths is ten times greater for American Indians than the non-Indian population (Forbes 40). Chato's alcoholism, its causes and effects in his life, is the tragedy, one that would not incorporate his death “in the universal beauty, harmony, and happiness.”

That Ayah does not become alcoholic might be attributed to Silko keeping her more connected to the traditional aspects of Navajo women. Although Ayah accompanies Chato, she does not leave the reservation to find wage labor like he does. Unlike Chato, Ayah manages to maintain a degree of standing afforded Navajo women. Shepardson lists the following considerations as indicators of the gender status of Navajo women: clan affiliation, kinship-based residence group, social rights to divorce and custody of children, puberty rites, and inheritance rights. The Navajo women are “born into” their mother's clan and “born for” their father's clan. This kinship structure provides the “network of relations of responsibility and expectation of helpfulness” (Shepardson 160). In “Lullaby,” Silko illustrates that the mother's clan is of chief importance by focusing on the female protagonist and her family line: her children, her mother, and her grandmother. As Ayah thinks of Jimmie's death, she reveals the importance of his role in the family:

And she mourned him as the years passed, when a horse fell with Chato and broke his leg, and the white rancher told them he wouldn't pay Chato until he could work again. She mourned Jimmie because he

would have worked for his father then; he would  
have saddled the big bay horse and ridden the fence  
lines each day, with wire cutters and heavy gloves,  
fixing the breaks in the barbed wire and putting the  
stray cattle back inside again. (*Storyteller* 45)

That Jimmie would have worked for his injured father means more than just a good-natured son willing to help his family. In truth, the child's role in the family involves a kind of solidarity: *k'é* is characterized by love and unsystematic sharing, while nonkinship solidarity is characterized by reciprocity or systematic exchange (Witherspoon, *Language* 84-85). The latter describes the husband-wife bond while the former describes the mother-child bond. Gary Witherspoon notes, "The mother-child bond involves what might be called cognatic or kinship solidarity. The giving of life and the sharing of sustenance is considered to be the most powerful, the most intense, and the most enduring of these two bonds, and is considered to be the ideal pattern or code for all social interaction" (85). Understanding this kind of family dynamic in which the mother-child bond takes precedence over all other relationships sheds light on Ayah's expectation of helpfulness from Jimmie. The intense degree of regard in the mother-child relationship also contributes to understanding her deep and lengthy mourning of his death.

Although Silko privileges Ayah's perspective in "Lullaby," this point of view should not be interpreted as a diminishment of the husband's role for two reasons. First, telling Ayah's story from the third-person limited point of view draws attention to the fact that she does not speak English; she cannot tell her story from the first-person point of view unless the reader speaks Navajo. Silko resists the oppressor's language, English, by not writing the story in the first-person; in one sense, she makes the telling from the third-person a political act to privilege Ayah's native tongue. Second, Silko does not diminish the husband's role because the primary bond of nonkinship solidarity in Navajo culture is found in the husband-wife relationship. Hence, this relationship does not carry the same import as the mother-child relationship. Witherspoon explains Navajo custom provides for easy divorce if the husband or wife feels the union does not satisfy the needs of either party:

[W]hen a husband is irresponsible or immoral, a wife  
usually sends him away. If a wife is barren, a

husband usually goes elsewhere. In other words, if either sees the relationship as without merit to himself or herself, it will likely be dissolved. The relationship is supposed to be advantageous to both parties through mutual obligations. (“Navajo Social” 525)

Given that “a woman could divorce her spouse simply by leaving his personal possessions outside the door,” (Tohe 108), Ayah could have dissolved her relationship with Chato at anytime. Obviously, Ayah has fulfilled her duties in that she has given birth to numerous children, even though those children either have died or been removed from her home. Chato, on the other hand, has behaved irresponsibly in Ayah’s eyes. She blames him for the papers she signs in English, enabling the white doctors and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) policeman to take away her young children, Danny and Ella. Thus, again the story critiques the English language and how poorly it has served, at least in this case, American Indian peoples.

At first, Ayah takes pride in having learned how to write her name, an act that the dominant culture values: “Chato had taught her to sign her name. It was something she was proud of” (*Storyteller* 45). Later, Ayah resents Chato for teaching her anything to do with the English language, causing the loss of her children: “She hated Chato, not because he let the policeman and doctors put the screaming children in the government car, but because he had taught her to sign her name. Because it was like the old ones always told her about learning their language or any of their ways: it endangered you” (47). By criticizing literacy, Silko privileges the oral tradition. She esteems the elders’ advice, favors the Navajo language, and calls attention to a history of treaties among the United States government and American Indian tribes, legal agreements in which tribal members often unknowingly signed away land and other rights.

Similar to tactics often used by the United States government officials, the authorities must know that Ayah does not understand the repercussions of signing the papers:

She was at the shack alone that day they came. It was back in the days before they hired Navajo women to go with them as interpreters. She recognized one of the doctors. She had seen him at the children’s clinic at Cañoncito about a month ago.

They were wearing khaki uniforms and they waved papers at her and a black ball-point pen, trying to make her understand their English words. She was frightened by the way they looked at the children, like the lizard watches the fly. (45)

Alone and afraid, Ayah has no defenses against the intruders. The officials do not consider Ayah's lack of knowledge of the English language, nor do they offer to bring someone who can translate for them. This episode marks another reason that Ayah regrets Jimmie's death: "If Jimmie had been there he could have read those papers and explained to her what they said. Ayah would have known then, never to sign them" (46). Silko associates not speaking English with Ayah's traditional ways, which have a positive valence; she then associates English as a second language with Chato and Jimmie, one an unemployed alcoholic and the other a dead serviceman respectively, which have negative valences. Silko seems to reconcile the ambivalent attitude toward the adoption of English by using it to tell stories that resist the United States' history of oppression and marginalization of Native peoples.

The doctors and BIA policeman claim that they have to remove Ayah's children from her home because of the threat of tuberculosis: "it was the old woman who died in the winter, spitting blood; it was her old grandma who had given the children this disease" (46). American Indians experience a rate of tuberculosis that is 7.4 times greater than in the non-Indian population (Forbes 40). In addition to the officials refusing to honor Ayah's request for a tribal medicine man to treat her children, they offer no consideration of her feelings in how they remove her young ones. In fact, the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 resulted as a response to authorities removing American Indian children from their tribal homes without any regard for the breakup of families and the damaging results to the children:

The law requires state courts, adoption agencies and anyone else placing Indian children to first notify the child's tribe or tribes. In most cases it gives tribal courts jurisdiction over the child's placement and requires those courts to give priority to members of the family, members of the tribe and other Indians who want to adopt the child. (Smith 403)

Granted, nobody adopts Ayah's children, and supposedly she has signed papers giving permission for them to go to Colorado. Nevertheless, the children suffer a great loss—their language—as Ayah can see when they return to visit. During the first visit, “Danny had been shy and hid behind the thin white woman who brought them. And the baby had not known her until Ayah took her into her arms [. . .]” (*Storyteller* 49). By the end of that first visit, the children were “jabbering excitedly” in Navajo (49). They have not completely lost their language yet, but Ayah realizes as she watches them leave that they soon will lose their culture: “Ayah watched the government car disappear down the road and she knew they were already being weaned from these lava hills and from this sky” (49). Ayah clearly understands the image of the land nourishing the people with their identity and the children losing their cultural identity because of the loss of their language and displacement from their home. By the last visit, Ayah knows that she has lost them for good:

Ella stared at her [. . .]. Ayah did not try to pick her up; she smiled at her instead and spoke cheerfully to Danny. When he tried to answer her, he could not seem to remember and he spoke English words with the Navajo. But he gave her a scrap of paper that he had found somewhere and carried in his pocket; it was folded in half, and he shyly looked up at her and said it was a bird. She asked Chato if they were home for good this time. He spoke to the white woman and she shook her head. “How much longer?” he asked, and she said she didn't know; but Chato saw how she stared at the boxcar shack. Ayah turned away then. She did not say good-bye. (49)

Silko alludes to more than just removing American Indian children from their tribal homes because of illness. She exposes how well-meaning federal authorities can destroy culture and obliterate family structures, all in the name of acculturation and assimilation.

Silko calls attention to another issue that involves removing American Indian children from their tribal homelands—off-reservation boarding schools. The historical reason for parents' resistance to sending children to distant schools arises from the treaty of 1868: “The compulsory school attendance provision of the peace treaty of 1868 further alienated Navajo parents who tried to protect their children from

meddlesome Indian agents bent on sending children off the reservation to far away schools” (Emerson 659). Edith Blicksilver does not even credit the removal of Ayah’s children to medical reasons but attributes their removal to the off-reservation boarding school. She writes: “Ayah recalls [. . .] the snatching of her remaining two small children by Anglo educators. After their time in the white man’s school they return only briefly and feel uncomfortable in what now seems to them her alien and culturally backward world” (150). Perhaps because the children speak English when they return for a visit home, Blicksilver attributes their removal to the influence of the off-reservation boarding school rather than to the doctors. Regardless, the language issue speaks to the effects of the United States government’s assimilationist education policies.

To attain the United States government’s goals, that the children learn English and be assimilated into the dominant culture, they must attend school. About the history of off-reservation boarding schools, Silko writes:

When the United States government began to forcibly remove Pueblo children to distant boarding schools in the 1890s, the Pueblo people faced a great crisis. Like the slaughter of the buffalo, the removal of Native American children to boarding schools was a calculated act of cultural genocide. How would the children hear and see, how would the children learn and remember what Pueblo people, what Native Americans for thousands of years had known and remembered together? (Foreword 7)

Silko rightly questions the negative impact of the off-reservation boarding school experience on the future generations of American Indians. “Lullaby” clearly shows what happens to the children who lose their language, identity, and connection to the land. They become detribalized, strangers to their heritage.

After Danny and Ella are gone, Ayah could leave Chato if she wants; yet she stays with him. Having lost her children, Ayah in one sense replaces them with Chato; he becomes like a child for whom she must care. Granted, her change of heart toward him does not come immediately, but she does assume the role of caretaker for her sick husband:

She slept alone on the hill until the middle of November when the first snows came. Then she made a bed for herself where the children had slept. She did not lie down beside Chato again until many years later, when he was sick and shivering and only her body could keep him warm. The illness came after the white rancher told Chato he was too old to work for him anymore, and Chato and his old woman should be out of the shack by the next afternoon because the rancher had hired new people to work there. That had satisfied her. To see how the white man repaid Chato's years of loyalty and work. All of Chato's fine-sounding English talk didn't change things. (*Storyteller* 47)

Ayah's anger prevents her from sleeping with her husband, but perhaps she has another reason for rejecting him. Maybe she cannot bear the possibility of becoming pregnant again only to lose another child. Although she feels vindicated in her contempt of the English language when it does not assure Chato that he will remain employed, she does not turn her back on him when he becomes ill. She nurses him in much the same way that she would a sick child. Once Ayah's children no longer comprise part of her everyday life, she merely transfers her mothering to Chato, not only tending him during his illness but also watching over him as he repeats a cycle of spending government welfare checks on alcohol and passing out at Azzie's Bar (*Storyteller* 48). Ayah continues to care for Chato when nobody else will, looking for him when he becomes intoxicated: "She walked north down the road, searching for the old man. She did this because she had the blanket, and there would be no other place for him except with her and the blanket in the old adobe barn near the arroyo" (49). Regardless of how Ayah has felt toward Chato or treated him in the past, she will not allow him to pass out and suffer exposure to the cold; she will protect him. Ayah displays *k'e*, which "includes love, compassion, kindness, cooperativeness, friendliness, and peacefulness"; it is "[t]he ideal mode of all social relations" (Witherspoon, *Language* 194).

Ayah's caring for Chato should not be confused with loving him as a husband. The narrator says that Ayah thinks of Chato as a stranger: "for forty years she had smiled at him and cooked his food, but he remained a stranger" (*Storyteller* 48). For that reason, Ayah's wifely duties might be compared to the same kind of treatment that she might

give a dependent child. Witherspoon notes how this kind of relationship can exist between individuals other than mother and child:

The solidarity of mother and child symbolized in patterns of giving life and sharing items which sustain life, is projected in Navajo culture as the ideal relationship between and among all people. All one's kinsmen are simply differentiated kinds of mothers; and, since everyone is treated and addressed as a kinsman, all people are bound together by the bond of *k'e*. [ . . . ] the *k'e* that exists between mother and child provides the foundational concepts and forms for all relationships in Navajo social life. (*Navajo Kinship* 125-26)

Consequently, Ayah chooses to remain with Chato and to worry about him despite her anger and resentment. In her Navajo worldview, Ayah would consider sustaining Chato's life more important than her own feelings of bitterness and disappointment.

Returning to Shepardson's list of indicators of the gender status of Navajo women, the social rights to custody of children, inheritance rights, and kinship-based residence group also must be considered. Already mentioned, the matrilineal nature of the social structure of the Navajo accounts for the women's social rights to custody of the children and inheritance rights. The last indicator of kinship-based residence group speaks to Ayah's right to use land for settling, cultivating, and grazing livestock:

Preferably, the groom on marriage comes to live in the bride's residence group. Women share in the work of grazing, agriculture, and crafts, all of which makes a substantial contribution to the subsistence economy and is valued. They own their own stock and control the disposal of their own handicraft products. (Shepardson 160)

Silko acknowledges Ayah's kinship-based residence group when she describes Ayah's desire to return home:

If the money and the wine were gone, she would be relieved because then they could go home again;

back to the old hogan with a dirt roof and rock walls  
where she herself had been born. And the next day  
the old man could go back to the few sheep they still  
had, to follow along behind them, guiding them, into  
dry sandy arroyos where sparse grass grew.  
(*Storyteller* 49)

Ayah still lives in the same hogan where she was born, an indication that she has inherited the home. She also owns the few sheep that they still tend and has rights to use the “dry sandy arroyos” for grazing. The small number of sheep might be an allusion to Ayah’s family never really having recovered from the enforced herd reductions of the 1930s. Nevertheless, even though Chato no longer has his job or housing provided by the cattle rancher, Ayah owns a home and livestock, both of which add to their meager economic resources.

Ayah’s lack of sympathy for Chato’s plight comes as no surprise in view of her low opinion of the whites and what she has suffered because of them. Conversely, Chato’s effort to assimilate into the dominant mainstream society by speaking English and working as a wage laborer does not represent an anomaly. If Ayah’s children no longer make up part of her resident extended family, then there are no other members to help with the support of the basic social unit. If herding on the reservation could no longer supply even basic subsistence needs for Ayah and Chato, then naturally he would have to look elsewhere for employment.

Despite events that might portray Ayah as a victim, someone marginalized by the dominant mainstream society, she, in fact, transcends loss and disappointment in her life to emerge as a powerful figure. Viewing Ayah in the context of gender complementarity helps explain the resulting image of a strong woman. Considering the role, status, and autonomy of Ayah in the narrative sheds light on how this character survives. She has displayed autonomy in terms of how she functions in the marriage, choosing when she will sleep with Chato: she has control over her own body. She has retained ownership of her hogan and livestock. She has kept her tribal identity alive with her connections to the land and memories of family. Having a structure of balanced reciprocity between women and men contributes to Ayah’s sense that she can capably do anything. Silko has voiced this same philosophy about the ability of women:

I never thought that women weren't as strong as men, as able as men or as valid as men. I was pretty old before I really started running into mainstream culture's attitudes about women. And because I never internalized the oppressor's attitude, I never behaved in a passive, helpless way. Instead of being crushed by sexism, I was sort of amused or enraged, but never cowed. (Perry 319)

In much the same way, Silko does not allow Ayah to feel "cowed" by the dominant culture's male authority. On the contrary, when Ayah realizes that the authorities want to take her children, she does not hesitate to protect them:

She moved suddenly and grabbed Ella into her arms; the child squirmed, trying to get back to her toys. Ayah ran with the baby toward Danny; she screamed for him to run and then she grabbed him around his chest and carried him too. She ran south into the foothills of juniper trees and black lava rock. Behind her she heard the doctors running, but they had been taken by surprise, and as the hills became steeper and the cholla cactus were thicker, they stopped. (*Storyteller* 45-46)

Ayah responds to danger like a brave female warrior, never thinking for a moment that she does not have the strength, courage, or conviction to succeed in escaping those who want to abduct her children. Knowledge of the landscape also aids Ayah in her getaway. She knows the terrain and is accustomed to traveling it, but the authorities do not know how to maneuver among the steep hills and cholla cactus. They are at a disadvantage and soon cannot continue the chase. While her act of resistance might seem only to delay the inevitable, that Ayah should even attempt the flight signals a woman who feels empowered to change the course of events.

In terms of Ayah's strength, the most telling moment of the story occurs during her search for Chato in Azzie's Bar when she faces the discrimination of the bar owner. Knowing that the bar owner does not want her on his property does not prevent her from entering. She does not fear him:

The bar owner didn't like Indians in there, especially Navajos, but he let Chato come in because he could talk Spanish like he was one of them. [. . .] She held herself straight and walked across the room slowly, searching the room with every step. [. . .] She felt calm.

In past years they would have told her to get out. But her hair was white now and her face was wrinkled. They looked at her like she was a spider crawling slowly across the room. They were afraid; she could feel the fear. [. . .]

She felt satisfied that the men in the bar feared her. Maybe it was her face and the way she held her mouth with teeth clenched tight, like there was nothing anyone could do to her now. (48-49)

What would make men fear an old woman? As a Navajo woman, Ayah knows who she is, where she comes from, and where she belongs. The narrator's comparison of Ayah to a "spider" alludes to one of the Navajo Holy People, Spider Woman, who taught the Navajo how to weave (Shepardson 171). Comparing Ayah to the spider implies that she has the power to weave her own story.

Linda L. Danielson agrees and sees the connection between Ayah and Spider Woman as one in which Ayah has control over her life, certainly a powerful image:

Web imagery reinforces the structural statement in the story "Lullaby" as the old Navajo woman, Ayah, spins a narrative of the end of her and her husband's lives. One could see her as a victim. Her children have been taken by white people who "know best." Her husband's loyalty to any employer has been rewarded by callous dismissal and eviction. The husband, Chato, is evidently drinking himself into discouraged oblivion. But the structural context of the spider web, combined with the story's imagery, associates Ayah with Spider Woman, and thus with control over the making of her life. (335)

That Ayah walks proudly, determined not to let anyone keep her from her mission of finding her husband, exemplifies taking control of the

situation. Such an act of overt confrontation by an old Navajo woman makes a strong political statement. Nobody in the mainstream culture can intimidate her or prevent her from carrying out her intentions. As Ayah has control of her life at other times and in other places, at this particular moment in the world of Azzie's Bar, a place where she is not wanted, Ayah is a powerful woman who controls the making of her life.

That Silko uses the image of the spider is not surprising because for the Laguna Pueblo, Spider Woman is another name for Thought Woman, who brought everything in the universe into creation by thinking it. Silko begins her novel *Ceremony* with this creation myth: "Thought-Woman, the spider, / named things and / as she named them / they appeared" (1). Thus, the significance of the "spider" allusion for both author and Ayah connotes one of great power, one of creation in language and/or weaving, one which by association gives Ayah an aura of power that the men in the bar can sense and fear. As noted earlier, Silko believes that the Indians of the Southwest "shared cosmologies, and oral narratives about [. . .] their grandmother, Spider Woman" (*Yellow Woman* 123). Including what the spider signifies to Silko in reading "Lullaby," however, is an inappropriate strategy because it combines deities from different tribes that mean different things to different people. To conflate the Laguna Pueblo and Navajo meanings of the spider is a mistake that should be avoided.

Ayah's sense of survival humor also displays her strength. How does a person successfully cope with loss of children, unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, illness, and death? In keeping with her worldview of *hozho*, a sense of balance and harmony, Ayah must have laughter in her life. "The more desperate the problem," writes Vine Deloria, Jr., "the more humor is directed to describe it" (*Custer* 147). Chato's drunken, disheveled appearance, in which he "smelled strong of woodsmoke and urine" and his delusional ramblings, signs of mental deterioration due to alcohol, certainly qualify as a man with a desperate problem, and Silko directs humor to it: "[H]e walked on determined, limping on the leg that had been crushed many years before. [. . . .] The rags made his feet look like little animals up to their ears in snow. She laughed at his feet; the snow muffled the sound of her laugh" (*Storyteller* 50). That Ayah can find humor in and laugh at the sad physical state of her husband might amaze someone who does not understand survival humor. Deloria explains, however, that laughter in these circumstances is necessary: "When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together

without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive” (*Custer* 167). Ayah laughs; Chato drinks. The one holds her life together, and the other chooses the extreme path of alcohol. Ayah survives through humor and maintains *hozho*. Silko agrees, “in order to have perfect balance or harmony you have to have humor” (Perry 336). Through humor, Ayah finds her strength.

The concluding lullaby that Ayah sings at the end of the story offers one more example of her strength. She understands that Chato might freeze to death: “She recognized the freezing. It came gradually, sinking snowflake by snowflake until the crust was heavy and deep. It had the strength of the stars in Orion, and its journey was endless. Ayah knew that with the wine he would sleep. He would not feel it” (*Storyteller* 51). Alcohol would make Chato feel warm, giving him a false sense of security and preventing him from realizing the dangerously cold temperatures. Perhaps Ayah acts benevolently, knowing that Chato’s death will be painless. Ayah has no evil intentions, however, even though she understands the possibility that Chato might die. As already explained, this reading does not fit with Ayah’s cultural worldview of sustaining life and avoiding unnecessary contact with the dead.

Contrary to one of the alternative readings that Elaine Jahner posits, Ayah does not methodically plot “to murder her sick husband by getting him drunk and then watching and singing while he freezes in the cold” (505). The only evidence of Ayah planning their stop occurs during the snowstorm when she suggests, “Let’s rest awhile” (*Storyteller* 50). “The Storm passed swiftly,” and while waiting, Chato falls asleep (51). In fact, in Tohe’s description of the strength of Navajo women, she relates a similar situation in which she knows her own mother would not let any harm come to her and her siblings in a snowstorm: “I grew up knowing that my mother, who divorced my father several years before, would drive us through the thirty miles of muddy reservation road to get groceries. I never doubted that she would get us through the dizzying snowstorm that fell on the deserted dirt road alone with my brothers and me in the back seat” (109). Navajo women know how to take care of their families in severe circumstances. More than likely, Ayah has reached the end of her story, accomplished the healing that she set out to do, let go of her resentments, and merely sees that perhaps the time is right if Chato should peacefully pass away in his sleep. Rather than see his freezing to death because of alcohol, she might feel that to look death in the face and to accept it at this point in her life simply acknowledge that she has

reached the Navajo goal of living to old age. Death is the natural and inevitable next step, but the actual dying is only implied and not the most important part of the ending.

As already noted, Silko is comfortable with incorporating the Navajo as subjects in her writing. Mixing Silko's personal views with traditional Navajo views, however, can result in contradictions. Chato's death from freezing in an alcoholic sleep does not necessarily coincide with the revered Navajo goal of death from old age or Silko's view that death is part of something sacred (Barnes 99-100). Ayah, a woman associated with the Navajo Spider Woman and the Laguna Spider Woman, cannot truly be an empowered Navajo woman living an autonomous life when, in fact, she loses her children. Inconsistencies begin to appear if only the Navajo cultural and historical contexts are used to understand "Lullaby." Similarly, using just the Laguna cultural and historical contexts fails to offer a consistent reading. Using both Navajo and Laguna cultural readings also poses problems. Therefore, Silko's use of the Navajo characters to tell her story creates problems that she might not otherwise encounter if she were to limit herself to a purely Laguna Pueblo context. American Indian tribal cultures are specific and unique; they do not always smoothly overlap, no matter how similar they might appear to be on the surface.

Silko eliminates any previous problems of inconsistency by having Ayah sing the lullaby at the end of the story. In Navajo style, the lullaby speaks about two of the most important Navajo deities, Mother Earth and Father Sky, in addition to other elements of the natural environment. In discussing a prayer from the Navajo Night Chant, or Nightway, a healing ritual designed to cure an individual's illness in mind and body, Ruoff offers an insightful description that equally applies to Silko's lullaby:

The prayer illustrates the emphasis on physical and spiritual harmony and on the sacredness of place so much a part of American Indian oral literatures. Among the elements of the prayer that are common in these literatures are the following: repetition, movement in time and location, progression from physical well-being to spiritual peace to ability to speak, and the comprehensiveness of the allusions to aspects of nature. (*Introduction* 21)

While Silko offers a short lullaby that has varying degrees of these aspects, it completes the cyclic nature of life, birth and death, in a context that is connected to the people, land, and mythic time:

*The earth is your mother,  
she holds you.  
The sky is your father,  
he protects you.  
Sleep,  
sleep.  
Rainbow is your sister,  
she loves you.  
The winds are your brothers,  
they sing to you.  
Sleep,  
sleep.  
We are together always  
We are together always  
There never was a time  
when this  
was not so. (Storyteller 51)*

Concluding with the lullaby connects Ayah not only to her deceased children but also to her grandmother and mother who sang the song, and it emphasizes the continuity of tradition. Although Ayah cannot “remember whether she had ever sung it to her children” (51), now that she has told the story, the song will endure through Silko’s voice. The positive theme of eternity in the lullaby creates a note of survival and hope for Ayah and her people.

For Silko, the political is involved in the very telling of her stories. Gloria Bird (Spokane) observes, “That we are still here as native women in itself is a political statement,” and Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek) adds, “We are still here, still telling stories, still singing whether it be in our native languages or in the ‘enemy’ tongue” (Harjo 30, 31). Indeed, Ayah’s story is a political statement narrated in the “enemy tongue.” However, her story also testifies not only to the ongoing survival of the Navajo woman but also to the survival of all Native women.

Tohe writes how Navajo women have continued to survive despite any “story about ‘those poor’ Indian women who were assimilated, colonized, Christianized, or victimized”:

This is a story about how these women cling to the roots of their female lineage despite the many institutional forces imposed on Indian communities and how they continue to survive despite five hundred years of colonialism. The Diné women continue to possess the qualities of leadership and strength and continue to endure and ultimately to pass on those qualities to their daughters, even though there is no word for feminism in the Diné language” (104).

Ayah’s power arises, in part, from the paradigm of gender complementarity, a vision of self as an equally important member in the communal tribal structure. Ayah never loses her sense of herself as an important part of the marriage relationship. Her role of caring for her husband and children, while she had them, carries as much weight as Chato’s role of working for the rancher or cashing the welfare checks. She never complains about her domestic contributions to the partnership because she values who she is and what she does, as does her tribal community. Ayah remembers her past and in doing so keeps the traditions alive in the telling. Although she will not have the opportunity to help her daughter give birth or to pass on the skill of weaving to grandchildren, by remembering and telling the story, she keeps the connection to her tribal identity alive. Her act of remembering the traditions of the past creates a future with her story that can be retold, a story of unemployment, government welfare checks, and alcoholism, but also a life of continuity, adaptation, and survival.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, “Lullaby,” *Storyteller* (New York: Arcade, 1981) 43. All quotations from “Lullaby” are taken from this edition and are referenced by page number in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Silko’s novel *Ceremony* (New York: Viking, 1997) deals in more detail with the issues of World War II veterans. Tayo, a Laguna Pueblo

mixed-blood veteran, returns home to his reservation and has trouble dealing with the memories of his wartime experiences. Tayo suffers guilt due to a number of factors: he could not prevent the death of his cousin, Rocky, with whom he enlisted and served in the Philippines; his uncle Josiah dies while he is away, and Josiah's cattle wander off; his Auntie Thelma will not let him forget that his mother was a prostitute and he is of mixed-blood heritage; and the drought from which New Mexico suffers must be due to his praying for the rain to cease while he was in the Philippines. Tayo's other veteran friends deal with their problems through alcohol, sexual promiscuity, violent acts, and braggadocio. Tayo has not found healing through the veterans' hospitals or the Laguna medicine man. He begins to recover when he visits a Navajo healer who believes that traditional practices must adapt and include modern techniques. Tayo begins to take responsibility for his own healing and reconnects with Laguna spirituality through Ts'eh, a female connected with Mt. Taylor and the sacredness of the land.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen J. Kunitz, and Jerrold E. Levy, et al., *Drinking Careers: A Twenty-Five-Year Study of Three Navajo Populations* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 5. The authors argue that the results of their original study caused them to question the then-reigning explanation of abusive drinking by Indians, which Silko seems to suggest. Instead they argued: "As the livestock economy was destroyed by the government in the 1930s and as people were paid cash for the stock they had lost, beverage alcohol became easier to purchase. Moreover, during World War II many Navajos were in the army or employed off the reservation and learned to drink in those settings. After the war, roads improved, and motor vehicles became more available. The result was that alcohol was more accessible to more Navajos. From an item of high prestige available primarily to the wealthy and their dependents, by the mid-1960s—only a generation later—alcohol had become accessible to virtually everyone. Thus, more people could drink in the highly visible groups that had been one characteristic pattern of the traditional Navajo style" (3-4).

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## Poetries of Transformation: Joy Harjo and Li-Young Lee

Jacqueline Kolosov

Two of the strongest voices in contemporary American poetry are Muscogee poet Joy Harjo and Chinese-American poet Li-Young Lee. Given their respective backgrounds, initially an exploration of their affinities seems unlikely. Joy Harjo is committed to recording the history of tribal peoples under colonialism. Her aesthetic integrates tribal belief and maintains a strong affiliation with the oral tradition as titles like “The Creation Story,” “The Naming,” and “The Myth of Blackbirds,” make clear (From *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*). Meanwhile, Li-Young Lee sees the poem as a little instance of “cosmic presence” (Jordan, 37). Lee’s poetry attempts to move beyond language to the single Word. With the publication of his third collection, *Book of My Nights*, Lee has pushed even deeper into this present silence, foregrounding the writing of a poetry that enables what is not spoken to resonate in a collection he has called a book of “lullabies” (Ibid, 35).

Whereas their aesthetics and points of origin differ dramatically, their visions of poetry manifest strong affinities, for both Joy Harjo and Li-Young Lee are committed to the creation of a poetry of transformation. By being present to, by *witnessing* experience, both the harrowing and the graceful, they honor that experience, inscribing it in the collective consciousness. Ultimately, a poetry of transformation involves finding the love within hatred, the eternal within the temporal. Such poetry disavows the submergence of memory to include overlapping time frames, where physical and spiritual realities brush up against each other, and the speaker of the poem reveals herself/himself to embody a host of other voices and identities: past, present, and future.

Such poetry is especially necessary and valuable in a contemporary world ravaged by violence and terror, for a poetry of transformation offers the reader as well as the writer a way out of fear, hatred, suffering, and passivity. Instead of constructing histories of prejudice, loss, and displacement solely as stories of victimization in which the individual and the collective find no course of action and must therefore be resigned to the status of victim, a poetry of transformation offers a powerful alternative. Writing and reading this poetry enables the individual and the collective to chart a history which transforms the

passivity of the victim through the written and the spoken word. This poetry does not extol the nurturance of wounds. Instead, this poetry offers the possibility of survival and redemption through bearing witness within the collective consciousness of poetry. Readers of a poetry of transformation are ultimately empowered by the discovery that we carry within ourselves internal landscapes shaped by memory, myth, ritual, and history. Readers come to realize that the seeds of transformation lie within, if we are brave enough to face our experiences and realize that we might find a way to fortify and heal ourselves through channeling the very experiences which have made us suffer.

To begin with a brief sketch of each poet's career and so create a context for approaching their work, Harjo's first book, *The Last Song*, was published in 1975. Later books such as *Secrets from the Center of the World* (1989) and *In Mad Love and War* (1990) gained critical attention and earned her the elite William Carlos Williams Award and the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Prize. Although Harjo's poetry is often located within the Southwest, where she has lived for most of her adult life, her landscapes are as much mythical as they are physical. In much of her poetry, Harjo is focused on tribal identity under colonialism, and her language and thinking are infused with Muscogee history, culture, and concerns. Harjo sees it as the responsibility of the tribal poet to record and therefore witness the destructive power of colonialism, as well as to imagine a way out of that suffering through love and memory. Harjo's work ultimately foregrounds the way tribal identity, as well as feminism and other philosophies, can empower one's writing.

Many critics have commented upon the inward trajectory in Harjo's later work, including *She Had Some Horses* (1983) and *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* (1995), drawing attention to the fact that during the last twenty years, her poetry has become increasingly interior and complex, with greater emphasis on breaking down the boundaries between personal and mythical spaces (Womack, 224). The closing lines from the long prose poem, "Autobiography," illustrate this beautifully, epitomizing what Harjo is seeking from language, a meeting ground between past and present, a recovery of energy:

A hummingbird spoke. She was a shining piece of  
invisible memory, inside the raw cortex of songs. I  
knew then this was the Muscogee season of

forgiveness, time of new corn, the spiraling dance.  
(*In Mad Love and War*, 15)

Like Harjo, over time, Li-Young Lee's poetry has become increasingly interior. Like Harjo, Lee is engaged in a search. "Listen," he writes, "Whose footsteps are those / hurrying toward beginning" ("Hurry towards Beginning," *Book of My Nights*, 12). Lee won the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award for first book, *Rose* (1987). Since then, he has published *The City in Which I Love You*, winner of the 1990 Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets; a prose memoir, *The Winged Seed*; and his third poetry collection, *Book of My Nights* (2002). Although *Rose* is characterized by a kind of plain speech, as is the subtle language of *Book of My Nights*, the language of *The City in Which I Love You* is dense, visceral, and lushly erotic. The constant in Li-Young Lee's work is humility, what Gerald Stern has called:

A search for wisdom and understanding . . . a  
willingness to let the sublime enter his field of  
concentration and take over, a devotion to language  
. . . [and a] search for redemption. (Stern, *Rose*, 9)

According to Lee, a poem is "an image of the maker, as the human being is an image of God" (Jordan, 35). In such a framework, a poem does not "simply transpose being. It also proposes the possibilities of being" (*Ibid.*, 35). For a poem to propose the possibilities of being, it must manifest a vision larger than the present by drawing upon the past and by delving into the future as viable realities, as well as by allowing for the presence of the mythic and the divine. Ultimately, for Lee, such poetry professes the grace associated with God. It must and inevitably enter a sacred circle beyond ordinary speech, as the movement of "One Heart" dramatizes:

Look at the birds. Even flying  
is born

out of nothing. The first sky  
is inside you, open

at either end of day.  
The work of wings

was always freedom, fastening  
one heart to every falling thing.  
(*Book of My Nights*)

Lee has said that the lyric self is the ideal self for autobiography because that self is provisional and always in flux (Lannan Reading). This does not disavow the individual's participation in the eternal, for the self simultaneously maintains an integral connection to a larger memory and so remains faithful to the teachings of the past, thereby establishing a continuum:

Lie still now  
while I prepare for my future,  
certain hard days ahead,  
when I'll need what I know so clearly this moment.

I am making use  
of the one thing I learned  
of all the things my father tried to teach me:  
the art of memory.

In Joy Harjo's poetry, an individual may incorporate voices from her/his own past, including parents and lovers, as well as archetypal identities:

He gives the young man his favorite name and calls him his brother. The young killer is then no longer shamed but filled with remorse and cries all the cries he has stored for a thousand years. He learns to love himself as he never could, because his enemy, who has every reason to destroy him, loves him. ("Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century" in *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*)

For both Harjo and Lee, the emphasis on simultaneous time frames and facets of identity (mythic, historical, individual) enable a kind of a homecoming; a return towards origins. For Harjo, going home is about going back to a sense of wholeness for tribal peoples (Womack, 231). Through love, the poet acquires the power and the vision to transform

hatred and persecution. “*I knew then this was the Muscogee season of forgiveness, time of new corn, the spiraling dance*” (emphasis added).

Although Li-Young Lee does not seek a homecoming in the sense of a restoration of lands and culture, his poetry, too, is preoccupied with the elusive search for origins:

A memory of the sea, it's what remains.  
Homesickness in the rocks.  
Homecoming in the trees.  
("In the Beginning," *Book of My Nights*)

Li-Young Lee is in search of that foundational place. If one was to get there, Lee seems to say, one would understand what lies behind birth and death. He seems to understand, too, that the destination is not achievable. Yet the integrity of the approach puts one on the right track—towards a greater understanding. Like Harjo, Lee posits a world in need of healing, and his vision allows for that possibility, even if it only exists in the individual imagination:

I draw a window  
and a man sitting inside it.

I draw a bird in flight above the lintel.  
That's my picture of *thinking*....  
Or erase the birds,  
make ivy branching around the woman's ankles, clinging  
to her knees, and it becomes *remembering*.

You'll have to find your own  
pictures, whoever you are,  
whatever you need.  
("A Table in the Wilderness," *Book of My Nights*)

For both Harjo and Lee, what's at stake in remembering lies in an immediate connection basic to their identities as poets. Both needed to seek out alternative realities to the physical present because both initially felt like outsiders. Harjo inherited the suffering and dislocation of the Muscogee tribes; she grew up tasting prejudice first hand. Many of her poems return to the voiceless girl and woman of the past, one

who eventually learned to use language to transform her life and the lives of others.

Li-Young Lee and his family came to the United States in 1964. Prior to their arrival, Lee's father had been a physician to Communist leader Mao Tse-Tung. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, his parents fled to Indonesia, where his father was later jailed as a political prisoner. Allowed at last to leave, the family made their way to Hong Kong and Japan before eventually arriving in the States. At the time of his arrival, Li-Young Lee was seven years old.

In Lee's poetry, as in Harjo's, feelings of dislocation and fragmentation translate into intense spiritual longing. Such a quest (for meaning and for continuity) is often played out among family, as well as within the larger community of watchful and protective ancestors. So too, such longing often takes the shape of (and is sometimes resolved by) erotic love. Lee foregrounds this trope in his work with his first book, *Rose*. In "Dreaming of Hair," for example, the beloved enables a connection to past and future:

My love's hair is autumn hair, there  
the sun ripens....

What binds me to this earth?  
What remembers the dead  
and grows toward them?

I'm tired of thinking.  
I long to taste the world with a kiss.

I long to fly into hair with kisses and weeping....

In Harjo's "The Woman Who Fell From the Sky," as in other poems, communion can only come through the beloved because love opens up a window inside the self that allows one access to the eternal:

Lila also dreamed of a love not disturbed by the  
wreck of culture she was forced to attend. It sprang  
up here and there like miraculous flowers in the  
cracks of the collision. It was there she found  
Johnny....

As part of their quest to understand, to heal, and to belong, both poets find sustenance in myth. Myth becomes ongoing, relevant expression. It is the core experience, what Womack has called “fundamental reality” (Womack, 248). For Joy Harjo, myth is the world, and we live inside of it:

[Memory’s] like saying “world” . . . . In a way, it’s like the stories themselves, the origin of the stories, and the continuances of all the stories. It’s this great pool, this mythic pool of knowledge and history that we live inside. (Carabi, *Spiral*, 138-9)

Like Harjo, Lee takes comfort in the fact that the great stories are bigger than the individual. Growing up as a child in Indonesia, Lee recalls the power Javanese stories exerted on his sense of reality:

We felt both less substantial and more, for we couldn’t tell if we inhabited a world densely populated by three or four orders of beings, as the stories suggested we did, or if we were stranded on an island adrift in some old, measureless sea of anonymous powers which constantly threatened to overcome our finite ground. . . . The greater stories called to some correspondent thing inside us that resisted a name, something barely apprehended and timeless (122-124).

During the family’s years of exile in Indonesia, Li-Young Lee made sense of his life—and specifically struggled to process his father’s imprisonment—by turning to the mystery of story. As the passage above makes clear, Lee did not see a division between the world of myth and his own reality. Rather, the child accepted a vision of multiple, ongoing realities. When Lee came to write poetry, he maintained that same sense of fluidity and simultaneity.

No wonder, then, that in *The City in Which I Love You*, a dead brother can walk through the bare rooms (“This Hour and What Is Dead”); and a lost father can maintain his character and concerns well into the afterlife:

My father, in heaven, is reading out loud  
to himself Psalms or news. Now he ponders what

he's read. No. He is listening for the sound  
of children in the yard  
("My Father, in Heaven, is Reading Out Loud").

For Lee, as for Harjo, alternative realities are accessible. Both poets collapse the boundaries regarding time, space, myth, and personal experience in order to enrich/deepen possibilities for finding meaning.

To extend this exploration to the discussion of a poetics, for Li-Young Lee, existence is teeming or saturated with "presence":

I have the sense that the world around us, the whole universe in fact, is saturated with presence: terror, wonder, splendor, and death. Sometimes we do all we can to create illusions that it's not. Art . . . disillusions us in order to uncover this original saturated condition. . . . Sacred reality is the saturation of presence in the world. Wind and trees and clouds and people and rocks and animals are all saturated with the presence. . . . I think the saturated condition is the sacred condition. There has always been only one subject—*being*. (Jordan, 38)

To a great extent, Lee's "sacred reality" with its "saturated presences" stems from his quiet religiosity. Lee's father became a Christian minister when he came to this country; for Lee, the English language became a language infused with mystery, and the King James Bible, a text that gestured at other realities, greater presences. Ultimately, Lee applies these ideals to the process of artistic creation:

I think a really good poem can impart a stillness which is God—which is also awe. I would say that disillusionment is revelation and revelation is apocalypse and every poem is apocalyptic. On the one hand we have ecliptic things that hide and on the other hand we have apocalyptic things that reveal. The writing of poetry is writing that reveals, but doesn't just reveal a personal presence, it reveals a transpersonal presence and the dualities of that presence is silence, stillness, and the saturation of presence. (Jordan, 36)

If Li-Young Lee is in search of the silence that lies at our origin (the ultimate silence and the ultimate origin for Lee being the Word of God), then Joy Harjo is intent on discovering a path towards stories of origin (Stever, *Spiral*, 76). “If these words can do anything,” she says in “Creation Story,” “I say bless this house/ with stars.” “Sacred” and “saturated” presence are touchstones for Lee; for Joy Harjo, the key word is “spiral.” As Craig Womack has pointed out, the spiral “resists fixed shape of definition because it is fluid, moving” (Womack, 250). Two moments of Harjo’s use of the word “spiral” point to the richness of this image:

When the mythic spiral of time turned its beaded  
head and understood what was going on, it snapped.  
(Harjo, *Mad*, 54)

And the day after tomorrow, building the spiral called  
eternity out of Each sun, the dance of butterflies  
evoking the emerging (64).

For Harjo, the possibility of moving fluidly across time and modes of being (historic/ mythic as well as waking/ dreaming and subconscious/ conscious) is contained by the idea of the spiral because it allows for simultaneity, a movement across boundaries and levels of time and identity. Such simultaneity enables the poet to find beauty and strength at a time and in a place where these things would be otherwise inaccessible. As “The Woman Who Fell From the Sky” makes clear, in order to find her way into this eternal spiral, Harjo populates her poetry with figures that fuse the physical world with the spiritual. In her own words:

It has to do with an understanding of the world in  
which the spiritual realm and the physical realm are  
not separate but actually the same thing. The  
physical world is just another vibration, another  
aspect of the real world . . . what I’m trying to do is  
make that spiritual realm more manifest, obvious.  
(*Spiral*, 79)

The spiral allows spatial and temporal boundaries to collapse and be inclusive of the mythic and the personal as well as the political. This inclusive, multi-faceted vision allows for a porous sense of identity,

where the poem's speaker becomes a composite of selves past, present, and future. Harjo states this outright in her brief lyric, "Skeleton of Winter":

I am memory alive  
    not just a name  
but an intricate part  
of this web of motion,  
meaning: earth, sky, stars circling  
my heart  
    centrifugal.

As Harjo sees it, the tribal poet must record what her people has suffered. The poet may not find the words, but she will at least witness their experience and therefore give it a voice, a shape, and therefore a history, precisely because memory is not passive but a vital and transformative energy:

I am ashamed  
I never had the words  
to carry a friend from her death  
to the stars  
correctly.

Or the words to keep  
my people safe  
from drought  
or gunshot....

If these words can do anything  
I say bless this house  
with stars.

Transfix us with love.  
("The Creation Story").

Harjo's poetry remembers and recognizes the destruction; in places, her poetry imagines another reality; always, it searches for a language to benefit her people. And much of that searching is done among the worlds of myth, ancestors, and nature:

And the day after tomorrow, building the spiral called  
eternity out of each sun, the dance of butterflies  
evoking the emerging. (*Mad*, 64)

If Harjo's fluid, inclusive sense of identity is bent on the healing of a people, Li-Young Lee's permeable selves are part of a quest to create something permanent out of what, on the surface, might appear transitory. Lee has said that he is obsessed with death. Indeed, he has called it the "one subject" (Lannan video). Because of death, love's value trebles. For Lee, love becomes a way into the eternal. The very early poem, "Braiding," demonstrates this beautifully. Here, into the daily ritual of braiding his wife's hair (a ritual that his father performed for his mother), Lee weaves an exquisite metaphor for the making of a life and poetry:

My fingers gather, measure hair,  
hook, pull and twist hair and hair.  
Deft, quick, they plait,  
weave, articulate lock and lock, to make  
and make these braids, which point  
the direction of my going, of all our continuous  
going.  
And though what's made does not abide,  
my making is steadfast, and, besides, there is a  
making  
of which this making-in-time is just a part,  
a making which abides  
beyond the hands which rise in the combing,  
the hands which fall in the braiding,  
trailing hair in each stage of its unbraiding.

Like braiding, like selfhood, the making of poetry is a process. It is a ritual action that people perform lovingly from one generation to the next. It is part of life's journey, and though this making-in-time may not last, the temporal making acquires a kind of steadfastness, a permanence, because it is done with loving and total attention. Such steadfastness partakes of the eternal, that which abides, and it inevitably recollects Harjo's own sense of love, not simply as an emotion but as an action. Steadfastness blesses the creator and those he/she loves.

If ritual action is important to Lee, it is fundamental to Harjo. In her universe, repetition as chant can effect transformation. Such ritual language borrows its power from tribal ceremony and the oral tradition. In a poem like "Remember," Harjo asks the reader to remember her connections to the eternal and the transcendent, connections that come through the natural world. Through repetition of the word 'remember,' Harjo propels the poem forward, simultaneously infusing into the poem a feeling of sacred ritual and ceremony:

Remember the sky that you were born under,  
know each of the stars stories....  
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled  
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of  
her life, and her mother's, and hers.  
Remember your father. He is your life, also...

Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.  
Remember language comes from this.  
Remember the dance language is, that life is.  
Remember.

Remembering becomes an action that recovers a continuity between the human and the natural; the human and the spiritual. Active remembering enables a movement across time. "Remember the dance language is, that life is." Lee's sense of "saturated presence" resonates in Harjo's vision of the extraordinary within the ordinary. Ultimately, for Harjo, remembering becomes an action done for justice (Womack, 258). In a poem like "New Orleans," specific Creek memories enable Harjo to witness, honor, and remember her people's suffering. "My spirit comes here to drink," she says. The action of the poem prevents their deaths by drowning to remain forgotten, prevents the submergence of memory:

There are voices buried in the Mississippi  
mud. There are ancestors and future children  
buried beneath the currents stirred up by  
pleasure boats going up and down.  
There are stories here made of memory.

Although Li-Young Lee's poetry seems, at least initially, less focused on the ideals of justice and political witness, there are crucial,

touchstone moments throughout his work where he seeks a place from which to confront fears and prejudices. In his second book, *The City in Which I Love You*, poetry enables Lee to discover and define a countenance in language. “The Cleaving” is a harrowing but invaluable poem for understanding how Lee uses language to foreground the discovery and acceptance of oneself in a society that may not only refuse to recognize you, but one that may even despise you for your difference. “The Cleaving” is a poem about being faceless; yet it is also a poem about loving—or at least a poem about rendering with love—one’s facelessness in a culture. A poem that runs over three hundred lines, the concluding stanza reads:

No easy thing, violence. One of its names? Change.  
Change  
resides in the embrace  
of the effaced and the effacer,  
in the covenant of the opened and the opener;  
the axe accomplishes it on the soul’s axis.  
What then may I do  
but cleave to what cleaves me.  
I kiss the blade and eat my meat.  
I thank the wielder and receive,  
while terror spirits  
my change, sorrow also.  
The terror the butcher  
scripts in the unhealed  
air, the sorrow of his Shang  
dynasty face,  
African face with slit eyes. He is  
my sister, this  
beautiful Bedouin, this Shulamite,  
keeper of Sabbaths, diviner  
of holy texts, this dark  
dancer, this Jew, this Asian, this one  
with the Cambodian face, Vietnamese face, this Chinese  
I daily face,  
This immigrant,  
this man with my own face.

The speaker goes to exaggerated lengths to understand that it is through cleaving that one can find and accept oneself—accept one’s difference:

“I did not know the soul/ is cleaved so that the soul might be restored.”  
In this poem, Lee makes a ritual out of eating—taking into oneself—what another might despise:

I would devour this race to sing it,  
this race that according to Emerson  
managed to preserve to a hair  
for three or four thousand years  
the ugliest features in the world.  
I would eat these features, eat  
the last three or four thousand years....

By writing about being despised for being other, the poet banishes fear. He gets rid of shame and rage. At the very least, he transforms that rage into art. And in so doing, he gives the possibility of the performative act of poetry to others; he passes empowerment on by embracing past sufferings and transforming them into the active utterances of the poem.

In his decision to give shape to—to witness—prejudice, Lee manifests a strong and direct tie to Harjo, whose work is focused on the necessity of telling what hurts, a telling that begins with her own struggle, as autobiographical poems like “Javelina” and “Autobiography” make clear:

Even at two I knew we were different. Could see  
through the eyes of strangers that we were trespassers  
in the promised land. (“Autobiography”)

Throughout her poetry, Harjo enacts the empowerment that comes from facing what one fears, whether these are centuries’ old persecutions or yesterday’s, for they’re inevitably connected, a part of the same energy. Towards the end of “Autobiography” Harjo concludes: “I have since outlived that man from Jemez, my father and that ragged self.” Harjo learned to survive through writing a poetry that delves into this past and recasts it.

One could call Harjo’s “I Give You Back” a mantra for survival. Like “The Cleaving,” it is a poem that takes into itself all of the hatred and suffering; then hurls it back, refusing to make that hatred and suffering a part of the self’s image:

I release you, my beautiful and terrible

fear. I release you. You were my beloved  
and hated twin, but now, I don't know you  
as myself....

You are not my blood anymore.  
I give you back to the soldiers  
who burned down my home, beheaded my children,  
raped and sodomized my brothers and sisters....

The poem collapses time to make the individual's fear a part of the historical collective's. Recollecting the movement of "Braiding" in reverse, here disavowing the action, fear, is what enables survival. Yet the disavowal comes through the ritual action of chant: "I give you back."

Ultimately, for Harjo and for Lee, releasing fear becomes about individual and collective survival. It becomes about speaking and remembering the stories of the past because these stories are relevant: alive. In an interview, Harjo invokes Gandhi's saying that experiencing that anger can turn it into a power that can move the world (Bruchac, *Spiral*, 28). Anger is tied to memory as an active, present force:

I . . . see memory as not just associated with past  
history, past events, past stories, but nonlinear, as in  
future and ongoing history, events, and stories. And  
it changes. (Coltelli, *Spiral*, 61)

Time is not linear but spatial. Such a conception of time enables a poetry that both remembers suffering and journeys through the imagination to recover ancestors, creatures from myth, and in the process, create a rich alternative reality.

Such is the non-linear energy that drives Lee's epic "The City in Which I Love You," a poem which takes as its epigraph these words from the Song of Songs:

I will arise now, and go  
about the city in the streets,  
and in the broad ways I will seek...  
whom my soul loveth.

These gorgeous, mysterious lines usher the reader into a city where "my most excellent song goes unanswered, / and I mount the scabbed

streets...” Historical time collapses into the mythic. Here, he creates a violent city, a dark metaphor for our time and for times that have come before us, as well as for times that may lie ahead:

Past the guarded schoolyards, the boarded-up churches,  
swastikaed  
synagogues, defended houses of worship, past  
newspapered windows of tenements, among the violated,  
the prosecuted citizenry, throughout this  
storied, buttressed, scavenged, policed  
city I call home, in which I am a guest....

And the ones I do not see  
in cities all over the world,  
the ones sitting, standing, lying down, those  
in prisons...  
they are not me....

The woman who is slapped, the man who is kicked,  
the ones who don't survive,  
whose names I do not know;

They are not me forever....

I quote from this poem at length to exemplify what Lee is describing when he talks about “saturated presence.” He is like Emerson’s omnipresent eyeball, and yet the difference is that this all-present speaker is a part of the suffering. He is a part of the terrible city, and he witnesses what its citizens endure. Like Joy Harjo drinking from the bloody river in New Orleans, Li-Young Lee takes on the bruises and suffering of all the citizens of his city; and in so doing, like Harjo, Lee transforms hatred into love.

Straight from my father’s wrath,  
and long from my mother’s womb,  
late in this century and on a Wednesday morning,  
bearing the mark of one who’s experienced  
neither heaven nor hell,

my birthplace vanished, my citizenship earned,  
in league with stones of the earth, I

enter, without retreat or help from history,  
the days of no day, my earth  
of no earth, I re-enter

the city in which I love you.  
And I never believed that the multitude  
of dreams and many words were vain.

Like Harjo, Li-Young Lee becomes a compassionate witness and a participant because he views time and identity as multi-faceted and inter-connected.

At this point, Li-Young Lee's own explicitly non-linear perception of time becomes important: In the West we usually think of the future as lying ahead of us and we walk forward into it, leaving the past behind. But it's probably the other way around for an eastern mind . . . . To a Chinese mind, tomorrow, the future, is behind me, while the past lies in front of me. Therefore, we go backing up into the future, into the unknown, the what's-about-to-be, and everything that lies before our eyes is past, over already. (Marshall, 133)

Lee's emphasis on witness and non-linear time bring him very close to Harjo, who believes that human beings live inside memory, "this mythic pool of knowledge and history" (Carabadi, *Spiral*, 138-9). A nonlinear vision of time enables both poets to sustain many possible levels of consciousness in one poem, thereby building a countenance constructed out of stories, myths, innuendoes, and desires. In poetry, they are able to escape the finite range of choices found in the present, and in so doing, they are able to evade displacement.

Ultimately, for Li-Young Lee and Joy Harjo, displacement becomes as much spiritual as physical. Therefore, in this mortal life, if physical returns are not possible, spiritual returns—through poetry—are. At the very least, spiritual return can re-connect the poet with the good energy. It sets one on the right path. In an interview, Harjo states:

I suppose the heart will always lead you where you  
are supposed to go. . . . I've had to learn that my

home is within me. I can take it everywhere. It's  
always there. (Stever, *Spiral*, 75)

Lee would certainly agree with Harjo. In his universe, language of the heart is inevitably language that is moving towards the words or the elusive Word of God:

'Being-in-God is our primordial, absolute condition,'  
Lee says, 'the condition of the psyche's  
embeddedness in Nature and Nature's embeddedness  
in God. Poetry is the language of that condition  
characterized by saturation of meaning, being,  
presence, and infinite potential. The mouth of that  
condition is poetry, saturated language that seems to  
me a perfect paradigm of the universe in its true, un-  
adulterated state of being saturated with meaning,  
reference, and being. (Jordan, 38)

And so we arrive at the extraordinary baseline connection between Li-Young Lee and Joy Harjo. Each poet possesses a resilient faith in what language can accomplish. Each suggests that we can journey towards the sacred by actively remembering people, stories, and the natural world. The work of these two prophetic poets demonstrates the way imagination and language can transform loss, hatred, and suffering—into and through love.

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***Shell Shaker.* LeAnne Howe. Aunt Lute Press, San Francisco. 2001. ISBN# 1-879960-61-3. 227 pages. \$11.95 paper.**

**If You See the Buddha at the Stomp Dance, Kill Him!:  
The Bicameral World of LeAnne Howe's *Shell Shaker***

**Ken McCullough**

LeAnne Howe is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She is widely-known for her performance pieces and plays, her short stories and provocative essays. Her first novel *Shell Shaker* was published by Aunt Lute Press, a small and relatively new press in San Francisco dedicated to presenting high-quality work by women from diverse cultural backgrounds. *Shell Shaker* is a story about women, strong women, based in a matrilineal culture, yet the male characters are neither demonized nor peripheral. Even though the book had no pre-publication reviews, and received little attention otherwise, it was awarded the 2002 American Book Award, an auspicious debut for Howe as a novelist. In the face of a publishing industry dictated more and more by the Barnes and Noble approach, it is reassuring to know that someone, somewhere, somehow, was paying attention.

First, a disclaimer or two: I am not a scholar; I am merely an admirer of LeAnne's work as a fellow writer, and was a participant in ten performances of her play "Indian Radio Days." I myself claim no tribal affiliation by blood, although I have been adopted into the Miniconjou Band of the Lakota Nation through the hunkapi ceremony. Once, after a performance of "Indian Radio Days" at the Heye Center of the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, as members of the cast introduced themselves, including their tribal affiliations, I told the audience that I was an enrolled member of a small tribe originating in Staten Island (my birthplace), called the Tokenhonkies. Later, when we were mingling with the audience, an earnest middle-aged woman approached me and said that she had understood that the Tokenhonkies came from Arizona, and were related to the Pimas. Such occurrences seem commonplace when you are in the company of LeAnne Howe; Satire Happens.

I feel another connection with the book in that my family, Scotch-Irish on my father's side, has lived in Mississippi for the last 200 years, about 35 miles from the center of Choctaw civilization, and one branch of the family settled in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, named for the famous

Choctaw leader, also known as Black Warrior, who faced off with DeSoto. Our countrymen brought with them their own clan affiliations and when they intermarried with Choctaws and Chickasaws the affinities were natural and deep. For some of them, though, their clannishness evolved in a negative direction, when the Klan with a K came into existence. It's appropriate that the antagonist of *Shell Shaker*, Redford McAlester, bears a Scotch-Irish name and was called, at one point in his life, to be a Baptist minister. The two other groups with whom McAlester is in league, are the I.R.A. and the Mafia—both of whom represent the dark side of tribe and clan allegiance.

Here's a brief summary of the book: The action starts in 1738, in Mississippi, when the Choctaws, allied with the French, are butting heads with the Chickasaws, allied with the English. The Chickasaws have even captured Choctaws for the British slave trade. Red Shoes, the war chief of the Choctaws, who was once regarded by some as the *Imataha Chitto*—the “greatest giver”—is now thought of as *Osano*, which means “horsefly” or “bloodsucker.” Red Shoes has two wives, Anoleta, who is Choctaw, and a Red Fox woman, who is Chickasaw. The Chickasaw woman is murdered and Anoleta is blamed. There must be blood revenge. Shakbatina, Anoleta's mother, takes Anoleta's place, and is executed.

We jump to 1991. The Choctaw Chief, Redford McAlester, is murdered, allegedly by the assistant chief, his paramour, Auda Billy. Auda's mother, Susan, comes forward and confesses to the crime. We come to understand, as early as page 23, that McAlester IS Red Shoes reincarnated. And learn that Auda is Anoleta, Susan is Shakbatina. Many of the supporting characters also have parallel lives in both times and places. We go back and forth in time from 1738, when Shakbatina is killed, and from 1747, when Red Shoes is assassinated, to 1991. The disharmony set in motion by DeSoto, the *Hispano Osano*, is absorbed by Red Shoes, and manifests itself 250 years later in McAlester. But Delores Love, an auntie of the Billy daughters, has a vision that instructs her to bury McAlester's body in Nanih Waiya, the Mother Mound in Mississippi. She is the agent through which the 250-year cycle of violence is broken, and the wheel of karma stops spinning. After her work is complete, Delores sits and recognizes that there are “no more loose ends, nothing left undone” (194). These events are painted in with meticulous brush strokes, but there are also swaths of the over-the-top satire one has come to expect from Howe. The book includes juxtapositions of many other sorts, all of which are orchestrated with consummate virtuosity.

In 1991, the story focuses on the Billy family, especially Susan, the matriarch, and her three daughters. Although Auda tells Gore Battise, the family's attorney, that "there's nothing unusual about the Billys" (115), they are far from usual; in fact, they are the antithesis of the characters in many Indian novels who are, in essence, Third World victims of the dominant culture. Auda has a Ph.D. in history and gave up an academic career to become assistant chief of the tribe; Adair is a successful stock broker; and Tema, a well-known actress. Their uncle Isaac is the publisher of a newspaper, and their aunties, the Love Sisters, used to be film stars. Redford McAlester himself graduated from Dartmouth and Harvard Law School.

Another important character in this story is Old Mother Porcupine. *Hashtali* (whose eye is the sun), is the Choctaw Creator. Shakbatina says "when our ancestors lived farther north they believed the porcupine was another symbol of the sun." In chapter one, Koi Chitto gives Shakbatina a porcupine skin that she fashions into a sash, which is passed down as a talisman by the women in the family up to the present. The figure of the porcupine appears a number of times, often as comic relief, most notably as Divine Sarah, who assumes the persona of actress Sarah Bernhardt, and then near the end of the book, when she appears as a witness in the guise of an elderly telephone operator, who gets Auda, the accused murderer, "off the hook." She is a shape shifter, a trickster. She is also responsible, in the Bone Picker chapter (chapter six of seventeen), for instructing Koi Chitto to pick Shakbatina's bones personally and to do it three months ahead of the prescribed time. The creation of this character alone merits some kind of important literary award. "The Bone Picker," incidentally, was one of the early pieces of the novel, having been published as a story in 1991, and it endures, remaining one of the centerpieces, in terms of its vision as well as the writing itself.

*Shell Shaker* gives us high camp and brilliant lyricism to balance the exposition. Throughout, there is a tapestry of remarkable scholarship and tribal lore, almost encyclopedic. They always warn you to be leery of too much disclosure in writing fiction, but the shifting style and perspective of this story allows LeAnne Howe to drop in genealogies, sermons and history lessons without being intrusive. I think she honed this particular skill in "Indian Radio Days," which also plays off high camp against gravity. Although the play was co-written by Howe and the late Roxy Gordon, performances have invariably included new vignettes added by the actors, appropriate to where and when the piece was being performed. The process involved consensus; hence, it had a tribal dimension.

Although there has been significant scholarship on this historical period in the southeast, between the arrival of DeSoto and Removal, no one has written a work of the imagination (of this magnitude) set in this period. The book also shifts the focus away from the Plains Indian experience, further dissipating some of the stereotypes of what Indians do and think.

Another unusual stance of the book is that nothing is concealed from us, there are no mysteries—we know what’s going to happen, and most of the time the characters do also. This is, of course, in keeping with their traditional beliefs, and it gives the characters a credible vehicle through which to disclose information as they piece together their destinies. In this respect, the story more closely resembles a Greek tragedy than a Hillerman whodunit.

But, above everything else, *Shell Shaker* is a story. When Auda is in a coma (as a result of a calculated drug overdose administered to her at the Choctaw Health Clinic, where she goes for dental work), she finds herself sitting in a car with the spirit of McAlester, travelling down the road on automatic pilot. She says “This is an awful story” (201). In the next chapter, as she leaves the car and Delores and Isaac get in, to accompany McAlester to the afterlife, she says to McAlester “We are going to be separated forever.” His response is “You’re making this up” (211). Later, after she has come out of the coma and is speaking with Gore Battiste, Battiste says “you were determined to finish McAlester’s story” (218). In her essay “The Story of America: a Tribalology,” LeAnne Howe quotes anthropologist Stephen Tyler: “The world is what we say it is and what we speak of is the world” (Tribalogy 39). When Auda says “I wish I was dead, too,” her sister Tema says “Quick, take back the words” (93)! We are reminded of the scene in *Ceremony*, when the witch creates white people, and the others say “Take it back. / Call that story back.” But the perpetrator says “*It’s already turned loose*” (Silko 138). Nowatima tells Delores, referring to Conehatta Annie, survivor of the Trail of Tears, “That’s why you remember the words I spoke for her. They were sacred. You will never forget them” (148). When Anoleta says to Red Shoes that if he repeats her words, exactly as she says them, he will become the *Imataha Chitto*, it is significant that he does not speak, has an expression of despair, and then the two of them cry (81). Auda tells Gore Battiste to enter a guilty plea for her in her murder trial, and they shake hands on it, “a gesture as sacred as if they’d signed a treaty” (95). Borden Beane says to Tema “in essence, you’re saying that speech determines actions.” She says “Yes, that’s the way it works” (36).

Where “altered states of mind” occur in the book, Howe shifts into a lyrical mode, which is particularly eloquent and effective. Such states include visions involving shifts in time and place, and a trance-like state called *na tobhi* (“the something white”). It’s almost as if she’s found an equivalent, in English, of speaking Old Code Choctaw. It is the case, in Western tradition too, that prophets and oracles recited or sang in poetry—the mode appropriate to an elevated state. Another altered state, lust, is rendered with convincing sensuality, but, as always, these scenes are balanced, for example, by idyllic descriptions of village life or the touching relationship between Isaac and Delores, which was on hold for 50 years. While the squeamish might consider the “Bone Picker” chapter an episode of necrophilia, it is so intensely evocative, so transcendent, that the reader can’t help but believe in the power of the ritual. There are healthy doses of luxurious language in this book.

*Shell Shaker* takes us from the hilarious scenes with the Sarah Bernhardt/Big Mother Porcupine character in 1991 to depictions of combat in 1747, which are as graphic as Goya’s etchings in “The Disasters of War,” as visceral as scenes in any of Cormac McCarthy’s novels. Always there is the opportunity for disclosure, because the characters move back and forth along the space-time continuum. Susan Power mentions that the book “layers vision upon vision,” but the layers go beyond the visions to every aspect of the book. The opportunities for connections, for parody and for irony are everywhere. And many of them are serendipitous—is it simply coincidence that the Mother Mound, Nanih Waiya, is located in Philadelphia, Mississippi—Philadelphia, the cradle of American liberty—but this Philadelphia is permanently in our consciousness for a very different reason; it is the site where three civil rights workers, Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney, were murdered. The land remembers. Shakbatina says “the sweet remains” of her Choctaw relatives who died during Removal “seared stories into the land. Mother Earth exacted a price. Twenty-nine years later, the white people who pushed my children out of their homelands were driven insane. Witness the destruction of their Civil War and the decades of waste and ruin that ensued” (137).

Before I knew that the name Red Shoes was a generic name for “war chief,” I suspected that LeAnne would have him at some point tap his heels together three times before returning to a place equivalent to Kansas. This doesn’t happen, but we do have Delores flying through the air to Mississippi, and as she passes over Nanih Waiya, she looks down and notices that it looks looking like “an emerald city” (159), a

reference, one assumes, to the Emerald Mound outside Natchez, but is it a latent reference to the Emerald City of Oz? Meanwhile, back in Oklahoma, on the very next page, when the bread dough has turned into mud from the Mother Mound, and Dovie asks Delores “How did it get here?” Delores says “I was taken up into a whirlwind...” (160).

The book is laced with amusing and insightful references to pop culture: Fergie, the Duchess of Kent, for example, turns up as a reporter for CNN to interview Isaac. Characters drop in quotes from Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House*, *Hamlet*, and “The Conference of Birds” (the 12<sup>th</sup> century poetic allegory about Sufism)—and we have the opportunity to figure out how these bits inform the story. The Love Sisters’ lives have intersected with Will Rogers, Louise Brooks, Ronald Coleman and Al Capp, and Divine Sarah says she appeared in “Last Tango in Paris.” We encounter an I.R.A. bagman who has assumed the identity of James Joyce. And then there’s the Big Peanutmobile. And a dog named George Bush.

On a more serious note, there are passages which illuminate the boarding school experience, the casino culture, Indian lawyers, and how Palestinians are in the same position as American Indians. The chapters of the book which include interaction with the French, especially Father Renoir and Jean Baptiste LeMoyné Sieur de Bienville add a striking dimension, particularly in exploring Bienville’s kinship with the Choctaw and his enculturation.

What’s this business about killing the Buddha at the Stomp Dance? It’s a spin-off, obviously, of the old maxim, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him”—in other words, beware of saviors, gurus, etc. and seek the inner guide. The most honored person in Choctaw society is the *Imataha Chitto*, the “Greatest Giver”—the equivalent of the Buddha or spiritual guide. The character of Red Shoes/McAlester aspires to this honor, and, on the surface it may appear that both, especially McAlester, have made important contributions to the advancement of the tribe. But they become *Osano*. The narrator says, of Auda, “She saw him for what he was, a true *Osano*, what Choctaws abhorred most. A predator of his own people” (24). Divine Sarah says that the warriors thought Red Shoes was “the red leader who could unite the people against the foreigners . . .” (72). Instead, it is the “minor” character Mantema (in 1747) who does this, in a much different way, and Delores (in 1991) who reunites the tribe. Delores gives up her Hollywood career to become the “modern *foni miko*, bone picker” (144), the keeper of traditional burial practices. At the end of the story, she and her consort, Isaac, take McAlester’s body to the Mother Mound for burial, and, in the process symbolically reunite the

Oklahoma and Mississippi branches of the tribe, separated via Removal in 1831. Delores and Isaac subsequently sacrifice their lives to stay with McAlester, and attend to his needs in the afterlife, so that his *Osano* spirit will not return. The answer is within the whole, the tribe, not the individual.

Tema, the actress, got her start in “The Conference of the Birds,” a play based on a 12<sup>th</sup> century poem. One message of the poem is that you must overcome pride and reputation through love. In the poem, a flock of birds sets out in search of the ideal spiritual king. When they get to their destination, they realize that this king is within themselves. Maybe this is another Wizard of Oz connection.

There are, incidentally, myriad references to birds in *Shell Shaker*. In one story, The Seven Grandmothers, for instance, turn into birds and escape annihilation by DeSoto, fly to the homeland, where their wings fall off and they found the seven original villages (3-4). In another story, we learn that these same grandmothers defecate on the heads of the Spanish, but what really happens is that they present them, ironically, with a gift; the excrement contains potato seeds, which the invaders “unknowingly spread to starving people everywhere” (78). Red Shoes displays the rotting heads of three Frenchmen he has killed and proclaims “I have made *Filanchi* into something useful: food for birds.” He follows this by saying “alive we are the consumers, in death we are the consumed. We are life everlasting” (171). As with almost everything in the book, this theme is woven throughout, and has both positive and negative poles.

Tribal cultures traditionally operate through consensus. Isaac tells Hoppy and Nick

A long time ago Choctaw councils believed that everyone had to agree, but more importantly they discussed everything in public . . . . [They] met for twenty years before deciding to move against Red Shoes . . . . When twenty-two Choctaw towns allied against Red Shoes, he was assassinated . . . (74-5).

Divine Sarah tells Isaac that Red Shoes’ mother, a Chickasaw, sent him to live with his father, a Choctaw, “to live and learn how to be an interpreter” and that the Choctaws “tattooed his face with the intertribal sign of friendship. He became a messenger for both tribes” (71). But he wound up abusing this privilege, betraying both tribes. At McAlester’s burial, Earl Billy, a Mississippi Choctaw, says he has it on “good authority, that McAlester “received the sign and was supposed

to be a healer. But, for whatever reason—we don't know what happened—he rejected it" (196). We learn, early in the book, that McAlester's mother wanted him to be "a Southern Baptist preacher, but also follow the traditions of his ancestors" (20). Is this the calling to which Earl Billy refers? At any rate, both Red Shoes and McAlester, steeped in the process of consensus, side-stepped it and operated independently, non-tribally.

In the "Penance" chapter (chapter seven) of *Shell Shaker*, Gore Battiste expresses his admiration for the Love Sisters: "They proved to us—our generation—that we could still be tribal people, and make it in the white world." Auda responds, "Individual Indians can do whatever they want, but not without a price . . . [If] all the Indians are off doing their own thing, tribalism will die" (112). In "A Tribalogy," LeAnne Howe quotes Craig Howe (no relation), who says "Tribalism will not die, even if all the Indians do" (Shoemaker 47)—an apparent contradiction—which brings us back to Delores, the "Greatest Giver." Adair tells us "In Delores' vision, one Indian can't do anything alone, but needs the help of ancestors and young people to build the future" (162).

The bicameral reference in my title refers to a book by psychologist Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. My title was intended to sound like something which might crop up in "Indian Radio Days," as a parody of academic pedantry; nevertheless, Jaynes's book is a useful point of reference. Jaynes theorizes that ancient peoples had brains which operated differently from those of modern "civilized" persons; "at one time human nature was split in two, an executive part called a god, and a follower part called a man" (84). Rather than reasoning out a problem, an ancient person would have an actual auditory experience, a voice, an "authorization," arising in the right brain, but transferred to the speech center in the left brain, which would guide them. Jaynes calls this the bicameral mind, and claims that civilized man has developed consciousness, leaving the bicameral mind behind, but that it still operates in tribal societies and in schizophrenics. The characters in *Shell Shaker*, being tribal, hear voices, which they know are not aberrations, and allow themselves to be guided by these voices. The characters are not only privy to voices, but are able to travel to past incarnations. Is it natural to hear voices and travel in time? Or is this just an elaborate metaphor on which LeAnne Howe hangs her novel? Anyone who has spent time in sweat lodges, yuwipi ceremonies, peyote meetings or at sun dances, knows otherwise. I did research in

Cambodia, where people ranging from subsistence rice farmers to people with Ph.D.'s are routinely visited by dignitaries from 800 years ago—what these people have in common is a tribal background. So the bicameral mind is alive and well. But the conscious mind surrounds it. The trick is to be able to use both, to be in both worlds. Isaac, we find, can be in both at the same time. In the epilogue, the narrator says “Since I had acquired the knowledge of splitting myself in two . . .” (222).

Red Shoes/McAlester is the antagonist in this book. It's interesting, by contrast, that many of the seminal novels written by American Indian writers, starting with *House Made of Dawn*, *Winter in the Blood*, and *Ceremony*, and leading up to more recent books such as Alexie's *Indian Killer* and David Treuer's *The Hiawatha*, involve protagonists who are isolated, alone, alienated from the nurturance of tribe, and that these protagonists are male. Welch's *Heartsong of Charging Elk*, of course, puts a brilliant 180 degree existential spin on this scenario. To a great extent *Shell Shaker* explains why these protagonists find themselves in that predicament. But Red Shoes/McAlester isn't a by-product of colonization; the concept of the *Osano* existed before Columbus stepped ashore. And although McAlester may not return, surely there will be another manifestation some time in the future.

*Shell Shaker*, however you want to categorize it, is a Southern novel, but from a fresh perspective. Auda says “If she thinks I'm one of those perverse William Faulkner Indians, a mute character of the Southern literati, she has another think coming” (46). She's referring to the fact that Faulkner's Indians are all caricatures, resembling obese Marlon Brando's pretending to be Mayans. Susan Power, quoted in “A Tribalology,” says

I don't just want to know how the writing of Louise Erdrich was influenced by William Faulkner, although that is a fascinating and necessary study, but additionally how so much of the material produced by white Southern writers and African-American writers reflects Native oral traditions (45).

Faulkner's handling of time may have triggered the structure of *Love Medicine*, but who triggered the circular use of time in Faulkner's work? *Shell Shaker*, like most Southern novels, has its share of eccentrics, gothic settings, and poeticizing. It would be amusing if

LeAnne Howe and Bill Faulkner, despite his blind spots, could sit down together and tip jars for an evening.

*Shell Shaker* is a tour de force. LeAnne Howe's second novel, the one she is working on now, revolves around the Indian Baseball Leagues in Oklahoma during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will be interesting to see what shape the new book takes. Hopefully we won't have to wait another ten years before we get to read it. LeAnne is always complaining that we teach the same old books in Indian Lit classes—I suspect she'll soon become part of the problem.

I leave you with a quote from Rilke, who was raised by women and was, to some extent, cut off from male society during his childhood. In his third "Duino Elegy" he says:

Look, we don't love like flowers  
with only one season behind us; when we love,  
a sap older than memory rises in our arms. O girl,  
it's like this: inside us we haven't loved just some one  
in the future, but a fermenting tribe; not just one  
child, but fathers, cradled inside us like ruins  
of mountains, the dry riverbed  
of former mothers, yes, and all that  
soundless landscape under its clouded  
or clear destiny—girl, all this came before you (23).

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**Ken McCullough's** most recent books are *Travelling Light* (1987), *Sycamore . Oriole* (1991), and *Obsidian Point* (2003). He has received numerous awards for his poetry including the Academy of American Poets Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Pablo Neruda Award, a Galway Kinnell Poetry Prize, the New Millennium Poetry Award and the Capricorn Book Award. Most recently, he received grants from the Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry, the Iowa Arts Council, and the Jerome Foundation to continue translating the work of Cambodian poet U Sam Oeur. *Sacred Vows*, a bilingual edition of U's poetry with McCullough's translations, was published in 1998. At present, McCullough and U are working on U's autobiography, *Crossing Three Wildernesses*, and collaborating on translating Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* into Khmer. McCullough lives in Winona, Minnesota. He was adopted into the Minconjou band of the Lakota Nation in 1993.

***White Robe's Dilemma: Tribal History In American Literature.* Neil Schmitz. Amhearst: U of MA P, 2001. \$17.95 paper, ISBN 1-55849-291-7. \$40.00 cloth library edition ISBN 1-55849-290-9. 224 pages**

Neil Schmitz has written in the past about postmodern literature, Jacksonian discourse, and Gertrude Stein, so I expected his first foray into American Indian Literature to be limited in scope. Not so with his book *White Robe's Dilemma: Tribal History in American Literature*, which focuses on a number of problematic collaborative texts between American Indians and whites, from the early eighteenth century accounts of the Mesquakie warrior White Robe to the 1932 Nicholas Black Elk / John Neihardt collaboration *Black Elk Speaks*.

One might expect Schmitz's survey of these collaborations to attempt to solve the many conundrums and questions that arise from them, but the work of this book is not solving any problems. Rather, the different accounts are presented and allowed to position themselves against one another, thus leaving the interpretive work to the reader.

For example, Schmitz is particularly interested in probing those elements of tribal cultures that are considered off limits and necessarily silent in the broader discourse, those elements that make up the sacred center of a tribe and its culture. Schmitz thus reads, in one passage, the anthropologist M. R. Harrington's *Sacred Bundles of the Sac and Fox Indian* (1914) to show how a sacred bundle is deadened through description; Harrington's possession and documentation renders the bundle "inert, turned-off, dead . . ." (49). In his account, Harrington claims he purchased the bundle, but Schmitz uses a companion text by Sam Peters, who sold (or gave) the bundle to Harrington, to question this assertion and to reveal how "dead" Harrington is to the ethical problems incipient in possessing the bundle itself. For the anthropologist, the bundle is a fetish, a dead object

For Peters, it is a sacred Mesquakie heirloom, and his letter claims that it was loaned to Harrington so that he could protect it as the tribe suffered through a harsh winter.

Peters' text suggests that the bundle is not so much captured as mistranslated by the anthropologist, and the bundle can only reveal itself when in the possession of its tribe. Schmitz refuses to decide the issue, instead offering to bring the historical and cultural realities to play. In the Peters text, Schmitz reads the complexity of the historical moment, the need for cash and the desperation of some tribal members to obtain it, as well as their fear of losing such sacred parts of their

history and culture. Given this context, we are led to ask of the Peters account: “Do we read that statement as genuine, as an alibi, as ironic?” (51). Indeed, we are asked this question in relation to the Harrington text as well. Both have their own historical and cultural masks.

Thus we get, with this sort of analysis, a presentation of a panoply of useful sources gleaned from the Bureau of American Ethnography archives, with a strong resistance towards conclusiveness. This emphasis on closely reading the texts and their rhetorical and cultural positions, however, can be disconcerting for the reader who seeks even tentative conclusions on the texts. Without a strong authorial presence, then, the readings come finely parsed, but are amorphous in their connection. The author’s argument in each section, if it is to be found at all, is found often in the last few sentences, as in the helpful conclusion for the chapter on the sacred bundle: The American Indian historical and cultural perspective on the sacred “ironizes . . . [and], catches the folklorist, the ethnographer, in the stupidity of his or her colonial discourse” so as to escape “the captures of Euro-American knowledge, and translation . . .” (68).

This interest in how the Native American text escapes capture and complete surveillance by Euro-American specialists determines the texts under study. In the first chapter numerous ethnographic and literary readings of the Mesquakie (called by themselves Meskwaki) warrior White Robe are examined, with gestures as well to Mesquakie creation stories and early modern history. In the second chapter Michelson’s sacred bundle purchase and reading (described above) introduces a discussion of the information left out and hidden from Euro-American view. The text of the third chapter turns from the Mesquakies (Fox) to the text of the famous Sauk chief Black Hawk and his manipulation of John Barton Patterson, his opportunistic and avaricious editor, to voice a coherent protest against American imperialism. In the fourth chapter, the strongest in the book, Schmitz traces how Standing Bear’s (Ponca) speaking engagement at Boston in 1879 provoked Helen Hunt Jackson to devote herself to American Indian issues and create *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), which is compared favorably to the collaborative work of Goodalle Eastman and her husband Charles Eastman (Lakota). The fifth chapter continues this attention on the Lakotas through the various versions and responses to the work of Nicholas Black Elk (Lakota). In the sixth chapter Schmitz returns to the Mesquakies to examine the way Ray A. Young Bear both presents and obscures the cultural center of the tribe in his work. The book ends with Georges Sioui’s (Wendat) “newtribalist” (161) recovery of the Wendat (Huron) chief Kondiaronk from Louis-Armand

Lahontan's *Dialogues curieux entre I 'auteur et un sauvage de bon sens qui a voyage* (1703).

This book, then, is certainly an interesting one, particularly because of the way it introduces so many useful sources and opens up so many different debates. The fourth chapter discussion of Jackson and the Eastmans, for example, heightens the complexity of East Coast friend-of-the-Indian movements such as the SAI, particularly in their relation to earlier anti-removal activism in the 1830's and anti-slavery in the 1850's, rather than just dismissing them and their efforts. However, this impulse to present the full complexity and richness of the historical and textual moments is sometimes abruptly broken, perhaps because of the author's trepidation about presenting a stronger argument.

In the introduction, Schmitz highlights everywhere his concern about the charged atmosphere of Native American Studies. After noting Ray A. Young Bear's lampoon of the Euro-American folklorist Frank McTaggart, Schmitz notes: "I am in McTaggart's subject position . . . always open to Indian irony, always making some egregious error" (3). This attitude, perhaps, guides the noncommittal carefulness of the text, which forces the reader to re-read the argument in order to discover it. Not hard to read, though, is a strong attempt to create distance from the mistaken presuppositions of the Euro-Americans in the text. Indeed, we could position Schmitz as what he calls an "Anglo-American counter-Anglo-Indianist" who enters the field by carefully deconstructing the language and politics of Euro-American predecessors (6). In the highly contested terrain of this field, we should not fault Schmitz for showing great care with his language and argument, and I, for one, appreciate greatly his attempt to highlight the political struggles over meaning in the texts he examines. This book, the product of that approach, is a worthy, if not easily accessible, effort in that regard. Hopefully we will see future contributions from Schmitz, particularly those that foreground, in addition to the excellent close-readings he performs here, his own views and perspectives on the materials at hand.

Tol Foster

***The Roads of My Relations: Stories.* Devon A. Mihesuah. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8165-2041-0. 235 pages.**

As a historian and editor of *American Indian Quarterly*, Devon Mihesuah has been a vocal advocate for foregrounding Native perspectives in the production of American Indian Studies. An enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation, Mihesuah has put her advocacy into practice with important historical studies such as *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909*, and with collections such as *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians*. With the publication of *The Roads of My Relations: Stories*, she branches out to fiction, thereby extending the scope of her call for nation-based, tribally specific writing. According to her afterword, many of the stories and characters in the book are based on her own family's stories, transformed into fiction. *The Roads of My Relations* presents a genealogy of an extended Choctaw family, beginning in pre-Removal Mississippi and "ending" at the millennium in Oklahoma. In its historical scope and emphasis on family stories woven into the story of the Choctaw nation, *Roads* is akin to LeAnne Howe's recent novel, *Shell Shaker* (2001). At the same time, its attention to the enduring memories of Removal contributes a significant Choctaw perspective to a growing list of works that bear witness to that catastrophic experience, works by Robert Conley and Diane Glancy, among others.

*The Roads of My Relations* aptly begins with a chapter entitled "My House" which introduces Choctaw centenarian Billie, the prominent narrator in the book, whose own story is inseparable from those of family members she has outlived and those who come after her. From her vantage point in Red Oak, Oklahoma in 1922, Billie speaks to the necessity of continuity and survival that will be reiterated by other members of her family in subsequent chapters. The multiple voices used to organize the narrative lend form to a perspective that suggests that the story of the one cannot be told apart from the story of one's family and nation. Or, as Billie claims near the end of her life, "I've traveled a lot of roads but never alone. My relations are with me" (138).

Billie's richly detailed evocation of her family's place in Red Oak heralds the narrative's careful placement of characters in tribally specific locales, which is also supported by the title headings for most chapters, which identify each story's speaker, date, and geographical location. Grounded in Billie's home, the first chapter establishes the

abiding power of place in the making of her Choctaw identity, even in the face of Euro-America's forcible wresting of home from her nation. "Home," as we see early on, is both the question and answer threading these stories. In "My House," Billie refers several times to the Choctaw homelands that she has not seen in nearly 90 years. As she recounts the patterns of her daily life, organized around the seasons and the land, she says, "every morning, I walk my trail to get water for my garden, just as I hauled heavy buckets of river water to our farm in Mississippi" (3). She then observes that the locusts "make the same up-and-down song in Mississippi" (3) and that her garden "looks the same as our garden in Mississippi" (4). Billie's dual orientation toward Mississippi and Oklahoma reminds her listeners of the continuity of home, spinning relations across time, space, and distance. The long reach of memory evoked in these passages suggests not only a narrative focus on the very personal impact of forced removal on Choctaw people, but their extraordinary capacity to re-make home in permanent exile. The title "My House" then, refers not only to the solidity of a physical structure, but to the strength of relations that is honored in the telling of these stories.

In ensuing chapters, Billie chronicles a complex world of relations in Mississippi, providing a child's view of the intrusion of white settlers, including her stepfather, and the varied responses towards blood, color, and allegiances demonstrated by different characters. Countering the persistence of "white people [who] saw us Indians as all alike" (32), Billie instead sees differences: her family "is colored all shades of brown" (10) and her family's varying attitudes towards Choctaw language and ways of living are mirrored by their relations and neighbors. The child's curiosity about bonepickers and stickball is woven into broader narrative scrutiny of the convulsive transformations of the Choctaw world leading up to the Removal period. The chapter simply entitled "Moving," describing their loss of home and long "walk" to Indian Territory, is wrenching. As their wagon pulls away from her home, Billie says, "my breath left me" (45). The deaths of her aunt, uncle, and brother, along or shortly after the journey, devastate the family. Bearing witness to this horror, Billie claims, "I remember everything about the trip and wish I couldn't" (51).

Forced removal, like the recurring attacks of the "Crows"—witches and outlaws who murder many members of Billie's family over one hundred and eighty years—are the forces that work to separate, weaken, and terrify the people. The long litany of losses—of siblings, parents, children, husbands—in *The Roads of My Relations* is paralleled by broader stories of mourning for Choctaw and other Indian

nations, such as the Cheyenne at Sand Creek. In the chapter, "Ghosts of War," Billie measures the human losses exacted of her family for her sons' and husband's participation in the Civil War against the widespread and wholesale invasion of Indian Territory by settlers and speculators. During the pre- and post-allotment era, Billie's fear that "I thought we were going to disappear" is balanced, however, by her family's determination to survive (109). For example, after the murders of her sister and nephew to the Crows gang, her uncle Ruel, an *alikchi*, or healer, says that they can't kill the evil: "My power simply isn't strong enough. It grows over time. A very long time. That is why our family is so important. You have to stay together and you must teach your children about our family. It is the most important lesson you can give them" (98).

With stories of resistance at mission boarding school, the haunting loss of a sister who sheds her family to pass into white society, and the pride and strength of other family members such as Gilmore and Survella, *Roads* is didactic in the best sense of the word, conveying lessons of resilience and continuance. In the chapter entitled "My Life," a companion chapter to "My House," Billie surveys a life that has been shaped by continuous challenges to the survival of her nation. She acknowledges her life-long hunger for a firmer connection to what she describes as the old ways, seeing herself as having lived "around the edges of being Choctaw" (138). Yet, she accepts all parts of herself, asserting that "knowing our language and learning the stories make me who I am" while claiming the "white tools, learning, clothes" (138) that she found useful in her life as well.

Her words take root decades and chapters later in the lives of two young men, Richard, Billie's descendant, and Reggie, a white anthropology graduate student, who are both told the stories that we have just read. "Kowi Annukasha: The Little People" and "Reggie the Anthropologist" underscore how this Choctaw family's history has ongoing life in the present. In "Kowi Annukasha," Richard unexpectedly comes face to face with how the old stories can come alive with meaning and relevance. In the following chapter, Reggie comes to Willie Louise Walkingstick Christie's place at the Red Oak homestead equipped with all the baggage of that field in Indian matters but comes away with a sense of the complexity and diversity of Choctaw life. Echoing Billie's reflections in "My Life," Reggie returns to his own home, acculturated a bit by witnessing a world of "blended blood, culture, ideas" (169). Mihesuah's sly inclusion of a story that re-educates the non-native "Indian expert-in-training" suggests that there is still a long road ahead to change the "Indian story" in the

United States. Yet *The Roads of My Relations* also travels rewarding roads of family remembrance, with compelling meditations on losing home, making home, and returning home.

Susan Bernardin

***The New Warriors: Native American Leaders Since 1900.* R. David Edmunds, Editor. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. 0-8032-1820-6. 346 pages.**

*The New Warriors* is a collection of biographical essays on fourteen Native American leaders, five women and nine men, from twelve tribal nations. With the exception of two from the Southeast and one from the upper Midwest, the leaders come from both pre- and post-removal Great Plains tribes. Essays focus on important members of pan-Indian organizations, such as Gertrude Bonnin (SAI), D'Arcy McNickle (NCAI), Russell Means (AIM), and Walter Echo-Hawk (NARF), and on leaders whose work centers primarily on a specific tribal community, such as Howard Tommie, Phillip Martin, Wilma Mankiller, and Janine Pease Pretty-on-Top. As leaders, their concerns include economic development, institutional education, and treaty rights, for example, which they address by forming both national and grass roots organizations, seeking grants, funding committees and new governmental programs, and demanding in all possible forums that Native Americans have the right to govern themselves and their communities.

In their references to the same legislative acts, governmental programs, legal decisions, and socio-economic contexts, the authors of the individual essays construct a working definition of what "Native American leader" meant in the twentieth century. Only Bonnin and Charles Curtis, who was the sponsor of the Curtis Act (1898) and Kaw Allotment Act (1902), as well as Herbert Hoover's vice-president, completed the majority of their work before 1934, when Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act. The following generations of leaders worked in contexts defined by the IRA, termination, and relocation, and, then, within the context of both the War on Poverty and the goals of its main arm, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and legislation such as the Indian Self-Determination and Education

Assistance Act (1975), the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988), and NAGPRA (1990). With persistence and creativity, these leaders fought legislation that threatened tribal communities and helped implement legislation that improved socio-economic conditions by working both against and within the federal bureaucracy. In terms of the editor's choices regarding what constitutes a Native leader, the collection raises valuable questions about Native leadership: is the definition of leadership that emerges in the collection too limited? was learning to interpret and negotiate federal policy the primary or only way to be a Native American leader in the twentieth century? in what other contexts might a Native American have led her or his people?

The essay that deviates most substantially from the more conventional leadership narrative that the collection establishes is Phil Deloria's, which focuses on Vine Deloria Sr.'s struggle with racism in the Episcopal Church and his attempt to develop a distinctly Indian type of Christianity that could serve Native communities. Deloria constructs a context for leadership by correlating his grandfather's familial, social, and educational experiences to the performance of his ministerial duties. The essay, too, provides a poignant example of the way that being a Native leader means working with forces openly hostile to Native people. In fact, Deloria's grandfather lived to see a revival of traditional Lakota and Dakota beliefs and practices, which he viewed as an indication of the possible failure of Christianity for the Native communities that he served. This frustration and regret, on the part of a man that Deloria explains was devoted to sincere "cross-cultural mediation," is the legacy of Native leadership in a world in which powerful colonizing institutions militate against Native Americans actually being leaders.

Challenges to the power of these institutions, however, are not predetermined to fail. Clara Sue Kidwell's essay, for example, describes Ada Deer's role in the restoration of the Menominee tribe. Kidwell discusses the tribe's status prior to termination, the specific consequences of termination for the Menominees, and the conflict between reservation and off-reservation tribal members during the process of restoration. Deer was an effective leader both at the tribal and national levels. As President Clinton's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, she helped more than two hundred Alaskan Native villages and twelve additional tribes gain federal recognition. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt requested her resignation, Kidwell explains, due to her advocacy for tribal sovereignty in an era both of budget cuts and a backlash against Native communities that had developed gaming operations. Her forced resignation helps to illustrate the limits of

working within a neo-colonial bureaucracy. Similarly to many of her peers, Ada Deer occupied many different leadership positions because pre-existing restraints—political, ideological, financial, cultural, academic, for example—rendered those positions of limited value in terms of helping Native communities. On the other hand, Wunder’s study of Echo-Hawk’s role in the Native American Rights Fund, an Indian law firm, illustrates the extent to which the legal system can be used to pursue Native concerns. Though it works within the parameters of local, state, and federal court systems, its attorneys pursue successfully NARF’s clearly defined goals: “the preservation of tribes and traditional culture, the protection of tribal resources, the promotion of human rights, the accountability of governments to Native Americans, and the development of Indian law” (299).

Readers familiar with Native Studies will have an interest in the subtext of identity politics in the essays. In his introduction, R. David Edmunds writes of LaDonna Harris that “regardless of her years in Washington, she remains an Indian” (11). Gary Anderson adds, in the first endnote of his essay on Harris, that

LaDonna’s Indian heritage has been well-documented by her family. Her great-grandfather was taken captive as a boy in south Texas or north Mexico in the 1850s. While likely Mexican, the boy became culturally Comanche. He married a Comanche woman, and they became parents of LaDonna’s grandmother, Wick-kie Tabbytite, who helped raise her (140).

Dorothy Parker’s study of D’Arcy McNickle includes a lengthy discussion of his family history that establishes his identity as an Indian, and Donald Fixico writes that as a young man, Ben Nighthorse Campbell “knew that he was Indian, but that was about all” until his visit to the Northern Cheyenne reservation in 1968 and his enrollment in 1980 (264). There is a latent anxiety in these comments that the authors must convince readers that their subjects are Indians before readers will accept them as Indian leaders.

The collection lacks essays on leaders who represent tribal nations from regions such as the Northeast, the Southwest, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska, and there is no critique of the capitalist success story. Howard Tommie (Florida Seminole) and Phillip Martin (Mississippi Choctaw) brought investment and employment to their reservations. Their work benefited their communities by producing

wage-earning jobs, but a socio-economic context that encourages social stratification and establishes an exploited class should not be uncritically affirmed as the only option for impoverished communities. One might ask if the focus on competition and corporate profit produces only less exploited, less under-privileged communities. Tommie and Martin helped their tribes, but to assume that their strategies were the most likely to be beneficial is to foreclose on the possible implementation of more communal, less potentially fragmenting socio-economic systems.

James H. Cox

***The Cherokee Lottery: A Sequence of Poems.* William Jay Smith. Willimantic: Curbstone, 2000. ISBN 9781880684665. 97 pages.**

William Jay Smith's *The Cherokee Lottery*, ostensibly about the removal of southern tribes to Indian Territory, is a maddening and often beautifully written and haunting book: sometimes even at the same time. Smith has enjoyed great literary success; he is a former Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (a post now called the Poet Laureate), the author of a memoir, ten collections of poetry, books of criticism and translations, and the winner of numerous national and international writing awards. His latest is a mixture of dramatic monologues from both Indians and whites, third person accounts (again, from both the Native and white sides), and includes numerous quotes, a map of the Removal routes, some photographs, and pictures of various art works, which creates a collage effect. Since many of the poems retell well-known narratives and reference the key figures of the Removal, Smith's overall approach is journalistic, albeit a kind of lyrical journalism. However, *The Cherokee Lottery* ultimately raises some serious questions about cultural authenticity and the ethics and politics of representation.

Because Smith and his excellent multicultural publisher make much of the former's Choctaw background<sup>1</sup> and because of the *Lottery*'s problematic approach, this heritage needs some examination. In the *Lottery*'s "Acknowledgements and Notes" section, Smith refers the reader to his memoir *Army Brat* for a description of his slow awakening to his Indian roots. The memoir makes it clear that Smith

was reared as a white. He recounts overhearing some youngsters who came to the conclusion that Smith was “the best-looking boy” (*Brat*, 108) in their class. Smith soon came to believe that he did look different, and by adolescence he had acquired a full-blown identity crisis. His eyes in particular concerned him; because of their epicanthal folds, they gave him an “Oriental look” that caused the schoolyard roughs to call him “China-boy” (109). After reading a book that described the physical characteristics of American Indians and after noting the physical characteristics of two “real Indian” acquaintances, Smith concludes: “I decided that I *was* an Indian” (*Brat*, 109).

I have viewed photos of Smith and would have to agree that he is indeed a very good-looking man. However, I fail to understand how this connects to “looking different,” and why having folds over his eyes leads him to believe he is Indian. The reference to “oriental” eyes is especially telling; it seems naïve at best and possibly comes from a latent belief in the Bering Strait theory<sup>2</sup>. But I cannot really tell: *Army Brat*, and, as we will see, also *The Cherokee Lottery*, just assumes that the reader will be able to leap right past non sequiturs.

Smith began demanding to know if his family was “part-Indian” (*Brat*, 111). His memoir reveals that some of his relatives claimed kinship to Rebecca Tubbs Williams, Smith’s great-great-grandmother, who might have been the daughter of Chief Moshulatubbee, the head of the Choctaw Nation at the time of the Removal. The Office of Indian Affairs ultimately rejected the petition of various Smith family members to be listed as part-Choctaw, but this doesn’t mean that there is no kinship. Furthermore, this Choctaw blood provides Smith with the identity that he needs. In an unintentionally humorous section of *Army Brat*, Smith notes a trip he took to Hong Kong, where he demands that a Chinese woman “guess” at his heritage. When she replies, “Chinese,” Smith answers rather forcefully, “No, I said, I am American; my wife is French. I may look Chinese because I am part-Choctaw” (114). He then explains meticulously the possible Moshulatubbee connection. Here, I have to say that my sympathies lie more with the woman: She must have wondered why this American man was shouting at her.

But since Smith claims Indian heritage, it is now necessary to turn to his book of poetry and see how this Indianness works itself out. T.S. Eliot, and not Moshulatubbee, seems to be Smith’s guiding light in *The Cherokee Lottery*. The structure of Smith’s book borrows heavily from Eliot’s “He Do the Police in Different Voices” approach to *The Waste Land*<sup>3</sup>. Smith’s book works similarly: focusing on the principle participants of the Removal and others who are only obliquely related

(or, in some cases, not at all) to the Trail of Tears, the point of view shifts constantly while the time element remains (mostly) chronological. Much like *The Waste Land*, the main motif is that of the journey. After an invocation, the book moves into a poem about the Cherokee Gold Lottery of 1832-33, which forced the Cherokee from their land and onto the Trail. Smith attempts to continue this journey motif by referencing other tribes such as the Sioux and Pequot, particularly the latter's recent spectacular financial success and how they came to this place of wealth, in what appears to be a pan-Indian approach. And like *The Waste Land*, the *Lottery's* connections are loose and jarring. Smith, who has published criticism on modernist poets, might have unconsciously identified the Removal with the modernist era because both marked a time of deep despair and, for the southern tribes in particular, great and unwanted change. But now the question becomes the appropriateness of Smith having chosen a western paradigm for his book and the influence of T.S. Eliot<sup>4</sup> on a book about the Removal.

The journalistic approach has a number of flaws. For example, since most of the narratives Smith includes are from the male point of view, women make few appearances in the *Lottery*, except as passing references. One exception is the "Old Cherokee Woman's Song": Its unflashy style and sorrowful cadences make it deeply moving. Another is the six-line retelling in the final poem "Full Circle: The Connecticut Casino" of the two sisters who are largely responsible for the current success of the Pequot tribe. With all the weight given to the principals of the Removal, both Indian and white, Smith would have better served his subject to give these remarkable sisters more than six brief lines. Considering that females made up approximately fifty percent of the tribes Smith references, the relative absence of women signifies something, well, disturbing.

Smith also includes quotes from Chief Justice John Marshall, Andrew Jackson, John G. Burnett, a US Army interpreter on the Trail, Alexis de Tocqueville, all non-Indians, and retells several dramatic moments in Removal and post-Removal history. In fairness, several of the poems, such as "The Talking Leaves: Sequoyah's Alphabet" and "Christmas in Washington with the Choctaw Chief" are Indian-centered, even if they betray a fascination with famous men. But too much space is given to the non-Indian view, and in poems such as "The Crossing" and "The Pumpkin Field," which are from Tocqueville's and Burnett's point of view, respectively, this non-Indian view helps create a sense of Indian as Other that runs through the book like a dark undercurrent.

Once Smith moves away from the story of the Removal and its aftermath, the narrative falls apart. For example, the final poem in the Removal section is the haunting "Song of the Dispossessed." The next poem is "The Buffalo Hunter," about an Irish baronet who came to the U.S. in 1854 to join in the bloody free-for-all known as the buffalo hunt. The narrator mentions Buffalo Bill Cody at the end of "The Buffalo Hunter," and then one moves into a poem about Sitting Bull in Serbia. There is another leap to "The Burning of Malmaison," the mansion once owned by former Choctaw chief Greenwood LeFlore. The only connection I could see between these poems is a fixation on the dramatic moment and the fact that the poems involve Indians in some way, although more obliquely in the case of "The Buffalo Hunter." Smith's decision to devote a poem to an Irish baronet who kills 2000 buffalo is puzzling: Here he seems to be placing blame outside of white America for the killing of the buffalo. But maybe not: it is difficult to get a fix on what Smith means at times.

The idea of art or re-creation is important as well and plays itself out in a peculiar way. First there is the poet as re-creator of the past, which Smith alludes to in the book's "Acknowledgements and Notes." This notion connects to the idea of the artist, like George Catlin, who, with varying degrees of sympathy and voyeurism, re-creates the Indian as object. The *Lottery* not only includes copies of five of Catlin's works, but an entire poem is devoted to his point of view. Troubling, considering that Catlin's pretty, stylized, blue-eyed Indians had much to do with the 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticized idea of the Native that early 21<sup>st</sup> century America is still suffering from. Another artist who gets a great deal of attention in this book is Charles Banks Wilson, the Oklahoman whose life work is to sketch as many of the pure bloods of various Oklahoma tribes as possible. On the other hand, art by Natives constitutes two of the numerous pieces selected for inclusion in this book. Sometimes it boils down to simple mathematics: If a book references westerners more than Natives, then what you primarily have is the western point of view, no matter how well-intentioned that view is.

The last poem, "Full Circle: Connecticut Casino," in spite of some flaws, is largely successful because, in an imaginative and humorous reversal, it reconfigures power via the Trickster figure into the hands of an Indian tribe that had once been considered to be extinct. The narrator first describes the hugely successful Pequot-owned Foxwoods Casino, where, in a final nod to Eliot, "ladies come and go/ speaking not of Michelangelo" (52-53). Here, the narrator hears the "faint ghostly creaking" (95) of the Cherokee Lottery's wooden lottery wheel

used over 150 years prior, and imagines that Rabbit and Coyote “hover over gambling tables” encouraging gullible and greedy whites to ever more extravagant betting. Clearly Smith is seeing some justice done in the Pequots’ success. This idea is not without its problems, however. With this casino, the narrator says that the Pequots “finally tricked the Great White Father Trickster/ or outfoxed the Great White Fox” (75-76), causing “all the gold stolen from the Cherokees in Georgia . . . to return now to the Pequots in Connecticut” (111-112). In other words, because Smith has chosen a pan-Indian approach, all this money helps repay not only the Pequot but the Cherokee, and by extension all the tribes who were driven from their land. This view, that money makes up for everything, seems more an Euro-American sentiment than an Indian one.

Smith is at his best when he drops the fascination with drama and famous men to sing a quieter, more humble—and more egalitarian—song. Poems such as “Old Cherokee Woman’s Song,” “The Trail,” “Song of the Dispossessed,” “The Buzzard Man,” and “Full Circle: Connecticut Casino” are successful because they offer some relief from the “Indian as Other” idea that is encoded, however subtly at times, in the narrative. Smith undoubtedly had good intentions when he wrote this book, and in many sections his sympathy clearly shines through, but by incorporating the non-Indian point of view so often he sends a contradictory message: he seems to be saying that westerners know Natives just as well as Natives do, which ultimately takes away agency from the very people he wants it restored to.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Curbstone Press’s press release, Smith’s memoir *Army Brat*, the *Lottery*’s dedication page, as well as the *Lottery*’s “Acknowledgements and Notes” section.

<sup>2</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *Red Earth, White Lies* contains an illuminating discussion regarding the dangers of passive acceptance of the Bering Strait theory.

<sup>3</sup> “He Do the Police in Different Voices” (a quote from Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*) was the original title of *The Waste Land*. Eliot first

gave this title to his most famous poem this because it was a “play for voices,” a collage of different views, some despairing, some comic, some mythical, and so on.

<sup>4</sup> Lines 42-43 of the title poem “The Cherokee Lottery” is very similar to line 8 of Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” and the final image in the same poem is strikingly similar to one of the main motifs of Eliot’s “What the Thunder Said”: that of “dry sterile thunder without rain” (342).

Stephanie Gordon

***The Indian Territory Journals of Colonel Richard Irving Dodge,* edited by Wayne R. Kime. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. \$55.00 cloth. ISBN: 0-8061-3257-4. v+486 pages.**

English professor Wayne R. Kime of Fairmont College, West Virginia, has provided researchers with another superbly edited volume chronicling the activities of Colonel Richard Irving Dodge on the Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation in Indian Territory from 1878 to 1880. Dodge authored at least twenty journals, which are now housed by the Newberry Library in the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana. Earlier volumes covering journals one through ten chronicled Dodge’s military escort for the 1875 scientific expedition through the Black Hills and his involvement in General George Crook’s Powder River Expedition, including the winter campaign against the Northern Cheyennes that culminated in the tragic Dull Knife battle. This collection includes journals eleven through eighteen and centers around the construction and supervision of Cantonment North Fork Canadian River. A final volume comprising the remaining journals will cover Colonel Dodge’s service as General William Tecumseh Sherman’s aide-de-camp during his 10,000-mile inspection tour across the West in 1883.

The first two journals in this volume begin with Lieutenant Colonel Dodge commanding the Twenty-third United States Infantry Regiment at Fort Hays, Kansas. During the autumn months of 1878, Dodge tried to prevent the flight of the Northern Cheyennes from Indian Territory. Dodge had been involved in the capture of Dull

Knife's band that had sent the Northern Cheyennes to Indian Territory to live with their southern relatives. Unfortunately, a woefully inadequate rationing system, inhospitable climate, and strained relations with the Southern Cheyennes, caused some 350 men, women, and children to begin a desperate journey away from reservation life toward their homeland on the northern plains. Dodge writes an account of how his superiors bungled efforts to keep Dull Knife and Little Wolf from successfully leading their people across Indian Territory and Kansas into Nebraska. Even though the army had the telegraph and railroads to assist them, the Northern Cheyennes swiftly crossed the Arkansas River and two major railroad lines without detection, acquired fresh mounts by plundering Kansas settlements, and easily evaded military pursuit by foot soldiers.

After the flight of the Northern Cheyennes, Dodge was transferred to Indian Territory to construct a new post to thwart any further unrest in the western portion of Indian Territory. The next three journals chronicle the location and establishment of a six-company post, Cantonment North Canadian River, located midway between Fort Reno and Fort Supply, during the first half of 1879. The fort was the last military installation constructed before Indian Territory achieved statehood. In addition to deterring Indian unrest, Dodge also faced the difficult challenge of preventing settlers from Kansas from illegally invading Indian lands.

Dodge's remaining three journals cover the conflicts that arose between him and Indian Agent John D. Miles at the Cheyenne-Arapaho Agency, highlighting the controversies that occurred throughout the West over jurisdictional conflicts between the Office of Indian Affairs and the Army. In the final two journals, Dodge presents his involvement in assisting Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie in providing a military presence in southwest Colorado after intrusions by prospectors, mining companies, railroads, and towns resulted in violence at the White River Ute agency in 1879.

Taken collectively, Dodge's journals provide a first-hand account of the rapid transition and terrible conditions Indians faced in Indian Territory during the late 1880s. Dodge's day-to-day narrative, written with utter candor, gives an insider's viewpoint regarding military operations, the interplay between commanding officers, and the views of a middle-aged army officer in his fifties. Whether participating in an official military capacity while constructing and commanding forts or on forays against Cheyennes and Utes, Dodge's writings are also interspersed with his personal and family life. His leisure activities usually involved some type of hunting and fishing and he also enjoyed

playing cribbage and billiards.

Dodge's narrative is rich with information surrounding dozens of officers serving in the Platte and Missouri military departments. Interactions between Dodge and particular Indians and tribes are more limited and one-sided. Much more information regarding Dodge's views and experiences with Indians can be found in the three books this soldier-author wrote: the first, *The Black Hills*, published in 1876; the second, *The Plains of North America and Their Inhabitants* (published under various titles in London in 1876 and in America in 1877; a recent edition edited by Kime was published by the University of Delaware Press in 1989); and the third, a manuscript Dodge completed after returning from Colorado in 1880 entitled *Our Wild Indians: Thirty-three Years' Personal Experience Among the Red Men of the Great West* that was printed in 1882.

Kime provides informative introductions setting the stage for the material covered in each journal, with the exception of one journal that is not a continuous record, which is presented in segments. His editorial apparatus is straightforward and does not interfere with the narrative. He includes extensive footnotes and annotations on persons, places, and events, and the volume also contains a few maps, some illustrations, a bibliography, and an index. Military enthusiasts, in particular, will want to read this informative narrative of an officer's life in Indian Territory during the late 1870s.

Jay H. Buckley

***Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture.* Jace Weaver. Volume 39, American Indian literature and critical studies series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001, 381 pp.**

Jace Weaver, in his 2001 book *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture*, announces early on that, "Native American Studies is by its nature two things, comparative and interdisciplinary" (ix).

And, in fact, comparative and interdisciplinary probably most closely describe the character of the book, a study ranging widely among a number of subjects organized into sections entitled Literature, Law, and Culture.

Writing from what he terms the metropole, Weaver lays out broad terrain for his three areas of study, providing readers with a springboard for further study. References to European theorists suggest approaches to American Indian identity politics, although the author also chooses Gerald Vizenor (also probably the individual most resistant to dialogue) as an American Indian source.

Given the fact that urban (or metropolitan) Indians are probably the largest category of native people on the North American continent, as well as the most under-represented, *Other Words* could find a large audience interested in the modernist multiple perspectivism of the book.

In addition, the cosmopolitan reader will find a unique treatment of "American Natives and the American Musical." This audience has probably waited far too long for such subject matter to be brought into some sort of perspective, and the lineup of material, including Lynn Riggs' "Green Grow the Lilacs" (*Oklahoma!*) might well also invite further study. The attention paid to other productions, such as *Whoop-Up*, based on Dan Cushman's treatment of the Rocky Boy's Indians of Montana, *Stay Away, Joe*, risks running contrary to assiduous avoidance of *Stay Away, Joe* by Montana Indian critics who have over the years chosen not to honor it with any kind of response.

Although the author designates chapters in the Literature section of *Other Words* to both Gerald Vizenor and Ray Young Bear, both chapters are notably brief. In addition, although there are references to N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko in the first section of the book, they are also remarkably brief, and presented in what might be described as a modernist stream of consciousness. This is not the case with Karl May, described as "An Ubermensch among the Apache," or with Reinhold Niebuhr's discussion of the irony of American history.

Although "Hell and Highwater" seems to belabor political columnist Jack Anderson's expose of an unfortunate situation, "Innocents Abroad: Or, Smilla Has a Sense of Snow, but our Kanawakes Are in Egypt" touches on the colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland's Inuit people. These Inuits were colonized by the Danes, an interesting and obscure story echoing that of other North American natives, and one that is worth telling.

The insular nature of law seems to facilitate a conversation wherein it is recounted over and over again what is being done to Indian people by the mainstream legal system. NAGPRA, American Indian Religious Freedom, and American Indian Child Welfare reform are certainly worthy issues, but it does seem as though they should be

balanced with proactive discussions focusing on tribal retention of sovereignty not lost consensually through bargaining with the federal government, or unilaterally through statutes adopted under Congress's plenary power over Indian affairs.

Although it is of great concern that the Supreme Court has in recent years consistently eroded tribal sovereignty in the areas enumerated above, as well as by denying tribes certain kinds of authority over non-members found on reservations, it seems it might also be helpful to find alternatives to the existing situation of forced harmonization of federal Indian law with Anglo-American legal values and assumptions.

Such alternatives should include petitioning the court to retrocede to Congress the front-line responsibility for federal Indian legal issues; clearly establishing the perception of tribes as governments rather than voluntary membership organizations; creation of a special Court of Appeals for Indian Affairs; and, adoption of an "un-allotment act" as a means of restoring order to the current legal, social, and economic chaos in Indian country.

One would hope that by restoring order, which tribal philosophy tells us is accomplished by telling the right stories, the Good Red Road of Indian culture can be regained as well. In order to do so, the power of argument must be bolstered by an equally strong vision of the unification of past, present, and future. For example, such a blend might be exemplified by strong support for development of the emerging tribal court system, but also by re-occupying territories now experiencing significant depopulation by those who no longer find them profitable.

Although discussions of Indian culture can be drawn from university libraries, it is also important to cite examples from living communities. An example is the Fort Peck Assiniboine community of Montana. Fort Peck is known for the legendary leadership of Norman Hollow, who served forty-six consecutive years on the tribal council. It is also known for seeing through external influences and concluding instead that its future depends on striving together as a community, and by emphasizing tribal values over materialism.

*Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture*, represents excellent beginnings for a relatively young American Indian scholar. The material of the text, as well as his demonstrated good sense in broadening his intellectual horizons beyond the practice of law, have given him a good start down the Good Red Road.

Sidner Larson

***Spirit Voices of Bones.* MariJo Moore. Candler, North Carolina: Renegade Planets, 1997. ISBN 0-9654921-2-5. 96 pages.**

The artistry of MariJo Moore's self-published *Spirit Voices of Bones* begins on the front cover, where a unique collage entitled "Creation," fashioned by Moore herself, combines pictographs, skulls, and masks with remarkable images of hands and faces. *Spirit Voices of Bones* itself is a collage, a collection of sixty-some poems that confront issues of identity, alcoholism, poverty, veteran experience, reclamation of Indian remains, relocation, and loss of land. In a unique picture poem, "Story is a Woman," Moore continues a contemplation of women's strength that began in her earlier volume, *Returning to the Homeland*. The poet deftly moves through this variety of concerns, all the time maintaining hope for the future. In her introduction, Moore explains, "In times of confusion, poetry as truth can offer healing." Her faith in healing certainly manifests itself by the final poem.

Perhaps the most pervasive theme in this collection—as in Moore's earlier *Returning to the Homeland*—is that of racial memory. These poems, including the very first, "To Celebrate Not Explain the Mystery," are the collection's strongest. For Moore, memory manifests itself in the form of an "inside voice." In "To Celebrate," it is "a silvery voice wrapped / in secrets of red and purple" that declares that "the knowledge that requires no knowing" lies within ourselves. In "Song Morning Song,"

It is the song of the Grandmothers  
rising from the earth, falling with the rain,  
floating on the lilies.  
Pulling us deeper into ourselves  
beyond thoughts past dreams  
under memories  
deep deep deeper.

These first two poems act like an awakening to this memory, a realization that it exists and that it always provides a connection back to our ancestors, no matter where we may physically be. This sentiment continues through the series, and it is especially strong in "The History of Our Mothers' Dreams" and "Living Memories." In the former poem, Moore writes, "The deepest part of ourselves / is formed before we are born." In the latter, "Without the blood-memories / there can be nothing." Moore's concern with memory is reminiscent of other

writers, especially Linda Hogan, whose concept of “cell-deep memory” appears in *Solar Storms*. There is something both mystical and instinctual in this memory.

Moore’s collection ends with a feeling of pan-tribal harmony. The final poem, “Solidarity in the Night,” a prayer-poem, is translated into twelve different native languages. The language is simple, but the message is clear: in unity there is power. While overall this collection is a bit more uneven than Moore’s recent work, the poet confronts many contemporary issues in the lives of American Indians, and at the same time creates a sense of unity and power and pride. MariJo Moore is clearly an artist who expresses herself through truth and vision, to which *Spirit Voices of Bones* certainly attests.

Laura Szanto

***Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon.* Melissa Jayne Fawcett. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8165-2068-2/0-8165-2069-0. 179pp.**

Melissa Jayne Fawcett employs as an epigraph to the first chapter of the book a line from the 1997 Mohegan Vision Statement, “We walk as a single spirit on the Trail of Life.” Noting that the Mohegan Trail of Life is as old as memory and that knowledge of the trail is passed on from elders to succeeding generations, Fawcett chooses *Medicine Trail* as the title for a text that tells the life story of the tribe’s one-hundred-and-two year-old medicine woman, Gladys Tantaquidgeon, affirming that her story “reflects the essence of the trail’s spirit and meaning” (3). It is a life story that starts out from and returns to rocky Mohegan Hill in southeastern Connecticut for, as Fawcett asserts, “Mohegans are not simply tied to the hill. They are of it” (9) and Tantaquidgeon, as *Medicine Trail* makes abundantly clear, is of the hill.

The life story of Tantaquidgeon, as told in *Medicine Trail*, continually stresses that connection to place, with a strong emphasis on the importance of the rocks in the Mohegan landscape, lives, language, and culture. Chapter Three, “Rock Woman,” opens with a quotation from Gladys Tantaquidgeon:

In the Mohegan language, the spirit of rocks is acknowledged in the names for our leaders: a male leader is called *sachem* (which means rock man) and a woman leader is referred to as *sunqsquaw* (which translates to rock woman) (21)

and goes on to refer to the tales of the elders as being as old as the rocks on Mohegan Hill, rocks which are “the bones of Mother Earth . . . [which] contain hidden messages that guide generation after generation of those who listen well” (21).

Gladys Tantaquidgeon became a medicine woman and a respected elder, because, from her youngest days, she listened well to her elders. Chapters in the book tell of the traditional things her mother did (biting rather than clipping her daughter’s fingernails for the first year of her life so that she would not be a thief, turning her shoes over at night so that she would not have bad dreams, trimming her hair only during a waning moon to ensure thickness, health and shine), but also what Gladys learned from her elders, Medicine Woman Emma Baker and Faith Keeper Fidelity Fielding, as well as her grandmother Lydia Fielding and a Nehantic woman named Mercy Ann Matthews: about the gathering and use of medicinal plants; about the importance of giving thanks through the maintenance of sacred sites; about the Makiawisug, the Little People of the Woodlands, and the tradition of leaving small baskets filled with meat, berries and corn bread out in the woods for them to find; about beading and the meaning of the symbols used for the protective practices and arts of medicine women; and the stories of the Mohegan past.

*Medicine Trail* also tells of the parts of Tantaquidgeon’s life trail that led her away from Mohegan Hill, as when, in 1919, at age 20, she went to the University of Pennsylvania to study anthropology although she had not had a formal high school education. After her university studies, she spent time with other tribes, the Nanticoke of Virginia, the Cayuga of Ontario, the Naskapi at Lake St. John, in Quebec, as well as the Wampanoag in Massachusetts, and chapters 11 and 12 include recollections of those times. Chapter 15 tells of her work in the 1930s among the Lakota on various reservations out west.

Gladys Tantaquidgeon’s work among other native peoples and the gifts she received from them inspired her to open, along with her brother and father, the Tantaquidgeon Museum in 1931, now the oldest Indian owned and operated museum in the US, for as the quotation from her brother Harold that opens chapter 13 states, “When the white man talks about our culture, he’s skating on thin ice; when you talk about

our culture, you're skating on the thick ice. Stand tall and firm on the thick ice" (89). The latter part of the book focuses on Tantaquidgeon's work as an ambassador for her people, her work at the museum, and the ways in which she maintains and passes on Mohegan life ways.

*Medicine Trail* is described in the publicity release from the press as a blend of "autobiography and history with tribal tradition," with Fawcett set up as the chronicler of the events of Tantaquidgeon's life. In the acknowledgments, Fawcett herself addresses the issue of genre, noting that

This book is not an academic research monograph. Neither is it a contemporary-style oral history based on taped interviews conducted by an outsider or professional for the purpose of creating a linear evaluation of a person or group. Rather, it is a life story told from the collective perspective of an indigenous nation. In Mohegan oral tradition, the life of any one leader is inseparable from the story of the people as a whole. Gladys Tantaquidgeon's biography epitomizes that seamlessness. (xv)

While Fawcett can claim professional credits, as Tribal Historian of the Mohegan Nation, as the winner of the 1992 North American Native Writers' First Book Award in Creative Nonfiction for her book *The Lasting of the Mohegans*, she is not an outsider. She is both Mohegan and the great-niece of Gladys Tantaquidgeon. Her relationship to Tantaquidgeon means that she can draw on a lifetime of her own memories of the older woman's words in the process of constructing her text and she addresses this issue also, noting that she recorded the text "by listening to Gladys Tantaquidgeon over a lifetime and occasionally taping or taking notes on her words. All quotations not footnoted are from my taped recordings, written notes, and recollections" (xv). Academics expecting a more scholarly text, one that adheres to strict conventions of citation, may be less comfortable with this text, wanting to know when a quotation is a direct quotation from a taped recording versus one that is a recollection from something Tantaquidgeon may have said years before, but they are forewarned by Fawcett's explanatory comments in the acknowledgments.

Stressing the life story as one told from the collective perspective of an indigenous nation echoes some of the definitional statements about testimonial literature as well, when the women telling their life stories frequently stress that they are not telling just their own stories

but the stories of all their people, of all poor Guatemalans, of all indigenous Bolivians, etc. As Doris Sommer puts it, in her article “Not Just a Personal Story,” the “singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole” (108). Just so is Gladys Tantaquidgeon’s life story presented as a *distinguishable* part of the whole, but always as part of the story of the Mohegan people as a whole.

Fawcett, in her remarks as a keynote speaker at the “All Women of Red Nations: Weaving Connections,” The Eleventh Annual Women’s Studies Conference at Southern Connecticut State University, in New Haven, Connecticut, on October 12, 2001, called the writing of Indian women “the literature of the land.” Speaking of indigenous literature—not just that in books, but all the stories and all the oral traditions—as the one true American literature, she stressed the connection of Indian women to the rocks, a connection that is woven throughout her text. When Paula Gunn Allen gave her talk later that day, she spoke of visiting Mohegan Hill and the Tantaquidgeon Museum and told all in the audience that “the land still sings” around Gladys Tantaquidgeon’s museum, reminding us that “these are the places we must treasure in our hearts” because they remind us what our jobs are as human beings, as women, and we must honor them. In writing *Medicine Trail: The Life and Lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon*, Melissa Jayne Fawcett honors her ancestor and the places and traditions Tantaquidgeon maintains as a *sunqsquaw*, a rock woman. Readers of *Medicine Trail* learn what Tantaquidgeon treasures in her heart and are reminded again, as they are by many important works of literature, of their own connection to the land. Some may be inspired to seek out those places near them where the land still sings.

Laura J. Beard

***Surviving Through the Days: Translations of Native California Stories and Songs.* Edited by Herbert W. Luthin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. ISBN 0-520-22269-5. 630 pp.**

*Surviving Through the Days* takes its title from a short Luiseño song that serves as an epigraph to the book. As translated the song’s

tone is resigned, but promoted to the title of this long and significant collection of oral narratives it acquires an uplifting resilience and joy that is echoed throughout the book's pages.

Assembled by Herbert Luthin, associate professor of English at Clarion University and former linguistics graduate student at University of California, Berkeley, *Surviving Through the Days* presents twenty-seven California Indian songs and stories translated into English. (Native-language texts were not included because of publishing and marketing constraints.) The collection, translation, and editing of the texts were done by a variety of Native and non-Native language scholars and storytellers, including Leanne Hinton, William Shipley, Julian Lang, and Darryl Babe Wilson. In his introduction Luthin makes the important point that work on Native California languages and literary traditions is "not exclusively an academic pursuit"; in fact, much of the recent impetus has come from within Native communities, from older as well as younger members fearful of losing linguistic and cultural information with the death of each elder.

Luthin combed libraries across the country (through his university's interlibrary loan system) for more than seven years to locate the narratives. "[S]ometimes literature is simply where you find it, or when," he writes of finding a long-forgotten snippet of song in an early twentieth-century linguist's wordlist. In his effort to be thorough—to create a comprehensive "reader" of essential translations—he also traveled to that most famous of depositories, the University of California's Bancroft Library, which contains thousands of pages of unpublished fieldnotes. He quickly realized, however, that there was simply too much material, published and unpublished (e.g. John Harrington's papers), and he relinquished his ambitious goal of creating a "reader" in favor of what he terms a "sampler." He also makes the important point that no collection could be truly complete because Native speakers are still creating stories and songs—linguistic traditions are still alive and evolving. Newly collected texts are not included in this text; that will have to be another volume.

Selections are grouped by geographic region and supported by essays on collection and translating, and on the state of Native California languages. The essays are brief and offer little new information; the narratives, however, are rich in contextual and interpretive detail, and many are published here for the first time. The selection of narratives represents many tribes and most genres of oral literature, including myths, folktales, memoirs, and songs. The primary shared criteria for selection was that each translation "be grounded in an actual performance"; in other words, that an actual telling of a

narrative be the basis for the translated version. With this, Luthin assures the reader the stories are accurate and authentic. In fact, the strongest point of the collection is the attention paid to the varied and unique circumstances of telling, recording, and translating that make each selection a cultural and historic artifact in its own right.

Each selection is prefaced by an essay, most often composed by the translator, with background information on culture and history. Some of these essays also describe the relationships between tellers and collectors, or collectors and translators, and how the narrative came to be found, and these descriptions enrich the book immeasurably. For example, *Naponoha (Cocoon Man)* was originally collected in 1931 by Susan Brandenstein Park, an anthropology student at the University of California, Berkeley. She had conducted fieldwork among the Atsugewi of Hat Creek, in northern California, in the 1930s, and had recorded thousands of pages of notes but never published anything. Half a century later, in 1989, Park was reading *News from Native California*, a quarterly magazine about California Indian culture to which Darryl Babe Wilson, an Atsugewi writer and scholar, often contributes. Park saw Wilson's name and tribal affiliation in the magazine and asked the magazine's editor to help her contact him. Wilson, who edited the story for *Surviving Through the Days*, was delighted to meet Park. "Soon I was visiting her in Carson City, Nevada," Wilson wrote in his introduction to the selection. "We looked over the old narratives . . . [and] there were my elders, peering back at me through the pages and through time." Park died in 1992; a year later, Wilson published her research in his master's thesis. In editing *Naponoha* Wilson adds detail and context to a story that literally survived through the days, collected so many years ago by Park and brought to him across time and space on a crumbling paper notepad.

Such unique circumstances of hearing (or, in this case, reading) and translating texts are further elucidated in Luthin's essay, "Making Texts, Reading Translations," where he discusses the processes of translation and their limitations. Interpreter translation—where an interpreter translates the narrative while it is being told, so the original Native-language text is lost—is most problematic, because the text is filtered twice and because the original words are lost. Only a few such texts are included in the book. Dictation—where the narrative is recorded by hand in the original words of the teller—is preferable because it preserves the original words of the speaker, and thus more of the verbal style. Dictated texts could be read back to the teller and

verified (and sometimes translated) in this way. The initial translation generated in this process is termed a “running gloss.”

Tape recorders, which were developed in the 1950s, made the process of dictation much simpler and more accurate. They also facilitated descriptions of styles of presentation, which vary from teller to teller and are a crucial element of the meaning of a story.

Luthin also discusses styles of publication and their effect on interpretation. When running glosses are printed under original texts, the style is termed “interlinear.” Because of the differences between English and Native-language grammars and syntax, this format generates texts that look and sound stilted, repetitive, unsophisticated—in a word, “primitive.” The words and their meanings have been preserved, but their sound—their poetry—has been lost. For this reason, linguists often provide “free” translations as well. These are problematic for other reasons—their authors add contextual information, remove repetitions, and otherwise alter the text to make stylistic sense in English. This generates a poetic text but one whose poetry is different from the original.

The newer ethnopoetic approach to translating and presenting oral narratives seeks to remedy this problem by varying the typographic format—adding line and stanza breaks so the text takes the form of a free verse poem. Luthin is careful to point out that while the text might look like a modern Western poem, it is not, at least insofar as the line and stanza breaks are used to indicate other elements of style, such as cadence, tone, and volume. Examples of these various processes of translation and styles of presentation are included in *Surviving Through the Days*, making it an excellent technical primer.

The scope of Luthin’s survey, his interest in circumstantial details, and his commitment to giving voice to Native speakers sets this collection apart from others. At 630 pages, the book is too hefty for use as a text in undergraduate classes, but valuable selections could be made from its contents. For interested readers and scholars of language the book provides a comprehensive (if not exhaustive) and easily accessible survey of genres of narrative and styles of translation. The bibliography is particularly useful for readers wishing to learn more about language studies and California Indians. As Luthin notes, there is an “entire world of information on California Native cultures, languages, and oral literature for interested readers to explore;” his list of resources empowers readers to enter this world.

Margaret Dubin

***The Jesus Road: Kiowas, Christianity, and Indian Hymns.* Luke Eric Lassiter, Clyde Ellis, and Ralph Kotay. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. ISBN: 0-8032-2944-5 (cloth); 0-8032-8005-X (paper). 152 pages, CD with 26 hymns.**

*The Jesus Road* is a collaborative ethnography of Kiowa hymnody conducted during the 1990s at J. J. Methvin Memorial United Methodist Church in Anadarko, Oklahoma, by anthropologist Luke Lassiter, historian Clyde Ellis, and Kiowa hymn leader Ralph Kotay. The Kotay family has a long tradition of hymn-singing. Since 1993, Ralph Kotay has conducted weekly hymn classes to foster both this Kiowa tradition and the Kiowa language. *The Jesus Road* documents, celebrates, and advances Kotay's efforts. It includes essays on the history of Christianity at Kiowa and the language of Kiowa hymns; ten photographs of the Saddle Mountain Baptist Church, Kotay, and his Kiowa hymn class; and a compact disc recording of 26 Kiowa-language hymns. This insightful and illuminating work contributes to a small but growing body of scholarly literature on the vibrant oral culture that is American Indian hymnody, including Michael McNally, *Ojibwa Singers: Hymns, Grief, and Native Culture in Motion* (Oxford UP, 2000).

In "Part 1: The Kiowas and Christianity: The Jesus Road at the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation," Clyde Ellis provides a thoughtful and nuanced history of Christianity among the Kiowa. This history begins in the 1870s, with a government-sponsored influx of missionaries and churches including Quakers, Methodists, and Baptists. (Ellis and the University of Nebraska press recently republished the 1915 autobiography of Baptist missionary Isabel Crawford, *Kiowa: A Woman Missionary in Indian Territory*.) Ellis explains how early missionaries facilitated Kiowa conversions by reconciling practices such as "the Kiowa sweat lodge and Christian baptism" (47). Many powerful Kiowa people joined Christian churches even as peyotism and the Ghost Dance gained Kiowa adherents; however, Kiowa Christianity declined gradually after the 1950s, and hymn-singing has been supplanted, in part, by the growth of powwows as a venue for spiritual and cultural expression. Overall, the story of the "Jesus Way," according to Ellis, "is not necessarily the story of how one set of beliefs replaced another one wholesale, or of the incompatibility of Kiowa practices with Christian ones" (19). Rather, it is a story of mutual transformations: just as Kiowa people became Christian, Christian

churches became important venues for the expression and renewal of Kiowa identity, language, and community.

“Part 2: Kiowa Hymns” provides English-language translations of the 26 hymns recorded on the compact disc, as well as discussion of the Kiowa hymn tradition by Ralph Kotay and analysis by Luke Lassiter. In his essay “Indian Churches and Indian Hymns in Southwestern Oklahoma”, Luke Lassiter describes the value of both the “language in song” and the “language surrounding song” (79)—that is, the performance of Kiowa-language hymns is a collecting point for other personal, family, and tribal expressions of experience and faith. It is a performance which affirms the connectedness of the individual and the community, past and present, dead and living. Kotay provides invaluable commentary on the histories and meanings of individual hymn-texts in his essay “Kiowa Hymns and Their Deeper Meanings.” Especially interesting is his theorization of hymn-authorship, which seems valuable to understanding broader genres of Native oral literature: “Many times we say that a song was ‘made’ or ‘composed’ by a particular person,” Kotay explains, “but these songs are not composed, actually. They come through the Spirit and the minds of the people who really believe. While many of our hymns are so old that we don’t know who made them anymore, every single song goes back to how a particular individual felt when the song came to them” (88). Both Ralph Kotay and his daughter Donna eloquently defend the importance of maintaining the Kiowa hymn tradition and Kiowa language-use, and they both view *The Jesus Road* as a means to this end. “To me,” says Donna, referring to the book, “this is his way of trying to preserve part of our heritage . . . . If our Kiowa hymns go, our language will go, because our language is intertwined with our Kiowa hymns” (110).

For scholars of American Indian literature, *The Jesus Road* is instructive in three ways. First, it reminds us that hymnody is a long-standing Native literary tradition. In 1774, Samson Occom published *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs* and authored several original hymn-texts. Nineteenth-century Native missionaries Elias Boudinot, Peter Jones, and George Copway also undertook Native-language hymn translations and promoted tribal hymnody. Still, ethnomusicologists have conventionally overlooked American Indian hymnody. For example, when Frances Densmore conducted her ethnomusicological surveys among the Ojibwe, she neglected to document Ojibwe hymn-singing. Still, hymnody is among the longest continuously-practiced song traditions in tribal communities such as the Oneida, Cree, and Seneca, and hymn-singing today remains an

important ritual of worship, mourning, condolence, and celebration for many urban and rural Indian communities.

Second, genres like hymnody shed new light on the intersections between oral tradition, print literature, and indigenous languages. Hymnals have been published in dozens of Native languages, from Arikara and Athabascan to Tohono O’odham and Yupik. Indeed, hymns constitute perhaps the largest surviving body of Native-language print literature in the United States. In some tribal communities—for example, the Eastern Cherokee—Native-language hymnals play a crucial role in indigenous language revitalization efforts. *The Jesus Road* contributes to this body of literature, and it has been designed to serve the people whose tradition it represents.

Finally, this collaborative document of the Kiowa experience of hymnody gives us an excellent view of the workings of oral traditions in contemporary Native communities, a view essential to any understanding of Native literature and culture.

Joanna Brooks

***Telling a Good One: The Process of a Native American Collaborative Biography.* Theodore Rios and Kathleen Mullen Sands. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. ISBN 0-8032-9281-3. 365 pages.**

From the American Indian Lives series comes this study of collaborative biography based on Kathleen Sands’s resuscitated interviews with the late Ted Rios, a Tohono O’odham (Papago) man from the San Xavier del Bac District of Arizona. Part-literary criticism, part-narrative ethnography, *Telling a Good One* tries on a number of critical frameworks for examining Rios’s life narrative. While the promise of this work is a methodology for inscribing and interpreting Native American orally-narrated lives, the story it tells is one of failure, a failure Sands attributes to a genre that she finds “intellectually and ethically disturbing—and inadequate” (xiii).

Part of the failure Sands also attributes to the lack of training she brought to this project in 1974. Her familiarity with Tohono O’odham culture was meager, and the resultant interviews show her awkward, often unfruitful, attempts at eliciting a sequential life history from Rios.

But such deficiencies, Sands is eager to point out, do not attenuate the worth of this endeavor. To the self-posed question, “Does that make the edited text of our interviews a literary failure?” Sands answers, “As genre-defined autobiography, yes, I think it does. As cross-cultural experience-based discourse, emphatically no” (51). In the opinion of one of its authors, then, this project is a failure only in its original intent of producing an “as-told-to” autobiography—a linear and putatively unmediated account emptied of the interaction between teller and interlocutor. Twenty-five years later and informed by recent developments in ethnography, it is the exchange between amanuensis and “informant” that emerges as the focus of this text, the insistence on reading “both participants in the encounter [as] Others” (43). But *Telling a Good One* must also be measured against Sands’s statement that “all relationships that have produced Native American personal-narrative volumes have been essentially colonial” in that “rarely have Native American narrators had equal control in the actual presentation of their stories” (34)—an assessment which raises curious implications for a text that is produced not in consultation with Rios but from a scholarly distance years after Rios has died.

Sands defends Rios’s authorship of this work, assuring us that her collaborator “was more than capable of negotiating literary collaboration for his own purposes” (xii). “He demands we participate in and understand his life on his terms, not ours,” she says of Rios’s “intervening role in the narrative process” (239). Indeed, Rios’s tacit control over the content and direction of the interviews frustrated Sands’s early attempts at imposing a generic structure onto his account. Their incommensurable notions of life-story telling prompt an examination of the cultural and linguistic registers of Rios’s expression. In a chapter devoted specifically to this topic, Sands compares Rios’s account with the recorded life narratives of other Tohono O’odham members like Maria Chona, Juan Dolores, Peter Blaine Sr., and James McCarthy. Though enriching to her study, Sands’s discussion of Tohono O’odham narrative practices is limited to Western-edited texts. Repeated references to “Ted’s nontraditional but distinctly Papago way of narrating” (92), his “expression of a distinctly Papago sensibility” (112), also tend toward discomfiting cultural generalizations drawn from strictly textual comparisons.

Rios’s “culturally determined” manner of narration corroborates Sands’s finding that autobiography is not a universal or always translatable genre. But while she maintains that “Ted’s narrative exhibits patterns of life-story telling that are arguably cultural in origin” (112), she also reveals that Rios was not “familiar enough with Papago

oral traditions to deliberately formulate his life within traditional mythic or legendary conventions” (92). For Sands, the value of his narrative lies in its expression of a “nontraditional but distinctly cultural” perspective (93). On Rios’s status as a storyteller, however, Sands is unclear. “To call Theodore Rios a Papago storyteller is a stretch” she admits (190). “His narrative style does not even meet criteria for what is usually termed and increasingly criticized as ethnographic realism, let alone achieve evocation” (92). “Even as performative storytelling,” Sands furthers, “Ted’s narrative is only marginally significant” (77). Despite this skeptical view of Rios’s narrative ability, Sands later characterizes his story as “substantively and stylistically too good to bury it in a file drawer” (256).

The extent to which Rios presides over this text remains a troublesome point. In many ways, the re-packaging of his life-narrative as a metafictional biography erodes Rios’s authority. Sands’s self-reflexive, theoretically-exchanging approach removes the life-story from its original teller and, despite her desire to avoid such an outcome, makes “the actual narrative simply material for analysis” (109). The roving signification of Rios’s life-story as it traverses different critical contexts removes the narrative further from its teller. The dependence of Rios’s life narrative on theoretical structures is confirmed in Sands’s retrospective description of the project’s timing. “Our project was too late to fit into the ‘personality and culture’ form of personal narrative of the previous four decades,” she reflects, “and too early to find a form that would accommodate his style of telling” (xv). What this statement reveals is that the critical framework precedes, rather than emanates from, Rios’s account, and that the identity of Rios’s narrative—its labeling as a “personality and culture” narrative, or by extension, as a “collaborative biography”—awaits the signification of critical trend.

The critical contexts brought together in *Telling a Good One* are valuable, however, and Sands’s exhaustive synthesis of ethnographic, literary, and to a lesser extent, tribal perspectives brings this text into dialogue with a range of disciplines. If a criticism could be made here it is that the text becomes too much a distillation of existing scholarship and does not go beyond the bodies of criticism it summons. When viewed beside the work of Julie Cruikshank, for instance, Sands’s contribution is modest—embarrassingly so, as when Sands compares the ten years Cruikshank worked with Yukon elders Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned to the three weeks she spent interviewing Rios. The influence of Cruikshank and Margaret Blackman—not to mention a host of theorists like Barbara Tedlock and James

Clifford—undermines Sands’s statement that “[t]here are no models for *Telling a Good One*” (79).

This claim of “unprecedentedness” returns to an earlier comment in the text where Sands observes the paucity of publications that document failure. It refers also to the relative absence of collaborative narrative volumes that follow their own process of creation. “Almost never are both participants in the collaborative process overtly present in the text, and when they are, the format is not dialogic,” Sands points out (80). The problem is that Sands is *overly* present in this text. The extended admission of fallible scholarly methods, combined with a tentative, self-doubting editor, ultimately influences the reader’s appraisal of this work. To this end, I close with Sands’s own summation: “[M]y confidence in the appropriateness and validity of the preceding chapters is shaky. Might my interpretation of his narrative be ill-conceived? Very possibly . . . . Might there be other ways to present and interpret Ted Rios’s life that would be more effective, more valid, less colonizing? Certainly” (251).

Deena Rymhs

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## **Boarding School Resistance Narratives: Haskell Runaway and Ghost Stories**

**Denise Low**

An after-hours lover shimmies down a window ledge, avoids the dorm matron's write-up, but hears footsteps behind him. A spectral figure waves from a dark window. Lights flicker on and off when no one is near the light switches. A figure stands under a tree smoking, but disappears in an instant. These are a few of the stories that I have heard in twenty years of teaching at Haskell Indian Nations University. In this intertribal community, oral literature keeps the school's history in the minds of this generation.

Haskell began as an intertribal boarding school in 1884, and since that first terrible year, when many children died, a complicated history has haunted the landscape. At the edge of campus, rows of gravestones are mute testimony to failed assimilation. Along with the physical monuments, other less tangible reminders of the children remain. Their spirits are as much a part of Haskell as the football stadium arch and the gazebo.

These ghost stories have a subversive purpose. They allow the painful experiences of turn-of-the-century Native peoples to remain alive in memory, despite their omission or elision in official history books. In English or tribal languages, Native people were able to use ghost stories for cultural preservation. Ghost stories appeared to be harmless folk tales, and so they were invisible to Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school censorship.

The physical reality of early boarding schools was harsh by any standards, and the students had few options besides the desperate choices of run away or give up life. The schools were modeled after military institutions, and the children were like military personnel who needed permission for any leave. Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, was located far away from most reservations in order to isolate children from their families and cultural continuity. The world champion decathlete Buster Charles' daughter Nola Lodge researched Haskell during the 1920's, the time her Oneida/Yakima father attended the school (Lodge 1999). She found letters from parents expressing concern that their children actually lost weight, because the food meant for children was sold in the surrounding community of Lawrence. The farming programs were, in practice, child labor. One of the most wrenching archival photographs from early Haskell years is a group of fourteen young children in drab uniforms and sheared hair. They sit

before a photography studio background with artificial pillars, tree trunks, and fronds. One child holds a sign, "Haskell Babies." They look like miniature prison inmates. These are the first authors of this literature of resistance.

In the boarding school years, rules restricted access of parents to their own children. Luci Tapahonso tells how some camped across the Wakarusa River at the south edge of campus just to be near their children, even if they could not see them (Low 22). Runaways from Haskell were common. Perhaps this accounts for the many stories of echoing footsteps that follow pedestrians in remote parts of campus. The most famous account is about Jim Thorpe, the Sac and Fox Olympic athlete. He was taken to Haskell as a small boy, and when he ran away, he made his way home to Oklahoma, hundreds of miles. Then Thorpe was sent to Carlisle in Pennsylvania because he could not run home from Pennsylvania on foot. Thorpe's great-nephew told me this version of the story when he attended Haskell (Thorpe 1). The young Thorpe's case was not unusual: the schools were places of sorrow, and children ran when they could.

Runaway stories are not long, and they just cover the bare essentials of flight. The emphasis is on extremes, such as how young the age of the truant, how far the distance, and how severe the threat from law enforcement or school authorities. Alumni of the 1940s have told me stories of a paramilitary student patrol used to keep students confined on the Haskell campus. Hiding places were the barn and the chicken coop. Even this many years later, people do not want their names publicized. Sometimes the stories are about final escapes, or about brief escapes from dorm curfews.

One of my favorite evasion stories occurred at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, when an electric trolley line still ran from Lawrence to Baldwin City. The trolley had identical front and back ends, so when the operator reached the terminal near Haskell, he simply stopped, went to the other end of the car, and started back the other direction. At the end of the night, the last run, some Haskell boys, out past their curfew hour, saw him coming and decided to play a trick. They hid in nearby bushes, and when the operator went to start the trolley, they pulled on the far end so it would not move. The operator checked his brakes and went to the back end to see what was wrong. Nothing. He fired it up again. Again, the car would not budge. He checked again, and again, but he could find nothing wrong. He tried a third time, and the same thing happened. By the fourth time, he was very frustrated and turned the power up as much as he could. This time

the boys let it go, and the trolley burst forward at high speed. The operator never knew what happened, and the boys successfully returned to their beds. They kept out of trouble and had laughter to share, a powerful survival tool.

New forms of runaway stories appear as escapades in resistance to bureaucratic rules. Most of these are humorous mockery of all players, like the time a facilities worker left his utility scooter running during coffee break. A half-dozen or so size extra-extra-large students were surreptitiously drinking beer in the dormitory. They ran out of beverages, and as they considered their predicament, they noticed the available scooter. These large men crammed themselves into it and headed out Kansas Highway 10. The overloaded buggy careened slowly down the busy road, as far as the nearest liquor store. The store owner called Haskell and eventually the facilities worker was found, as well as security staff. A good storyteller can stretch this plot into a good hour's worth of entertainment.

Strict curfews and bed checks continued into the 1980s, when Haskell was a junior college, and such checks violate civil liberties. These years led to a variation of the runaway story, the romantic after-hours escapes. Accounts of crawling in and out of windows, especially in the women's dorms, abound. These teepee-creeping stories have all the twists of romantic tales, plus the stealth of ingenious escapes. Lovers must evade triangles as well as dormitory staff workers, and then in the dark, they hear inexplicable noises behind them.

The most prevalent Haskell narrative is the site-specific ghost story. These ghosts follow patterns seen throughout Indian Country, since it is an intertribal school. In most Native ghost stories, the supernatural beings stay near one site, and these are often places of transition, like bridges, bars, and powwow grounds, as well as boarding schools. The ghosts are often young women. *Diné* (Navajo) writer Luci Tapahonso's poem "The Woman on the Bridge" (*Earth Power*) tells of a man bewitched by a beautiful woman who appears near a certain bridge on the *Diné* reservation in New Mexico. Once the young man is able to travel a certain distance beyond the bridge, he is safe. And the woman cannot travel beyond her bridge:

Sometimes young men driving by pick her up—  
thinking she wants a ride and after riding a ways  
with them—she disappears right in front of them.  
She can't go too far away, I guess. (226)

He passes beyond her place of power, the wooden bridge, and escapes with his life, but he is transformed. Rather than stop at a house where other young people play gambling games, he finds refuge in the hogan of an elder who listens to his story. The old man knows the ghost was a woman who was killed years before, and he prays all night for the boy. Because of the contact with the ghost, the young man is put into relationship with his elder and learns the procedures for neutralizing the frightening experience. The grandfather's oral text finds new life because it has information the young man needs, and so the narrative continues into the next generation.

Other beautiful women spirits, not always ghosts, have traveled Indian Country roads for years. I have heard variants of Tapahonso's story set in Oklahoma, northern Wisconsin, and Haskell. The more remote the place, the better, and the road must be dark, the sky moonless, and the hour late. The woman stands at the side of the road and beckons. Young men partiers lose control of their cars and crash, distracted by their lust. Or they barely escape with their lives, find traditional help, and warn others. Few of these dramatic tales find formal presentation in mainstream publications, yet they contain an important narrative for a conflicted people. The siren lures vulnerable young warriors to pointless deaths, and in reality, mortality rates for young Indigenous men continue to be high. The accounts parallel community vulnerabilities.

In some stories, the woman-spirit is not a ghost, but rather a deer woman. She does travel from her spot on the road, in the guise of a deer woman, but she cannot sustain a presence for long before dissolution. She can shape-shift into a beautiful, black-haired woman, except for her deer hooves. She joins late-night powwows, wins contests, and disappears, sometimes with the best-looking young man. In one version I heard at Haskell, the deer woman is beautiful and wears white buckskin. She enters from the North, dances, and no one can identify her. She appears to be a southern tribe, but she is dressed in northern traditional style. During a break, women follow her into the bathroom. She shuts herself into a stall, and nothing seems unusual. But when the women are about to leave, one notices the deer hooves in the stall next to her, and then the deer woman vanishes.

Spirits such as these find their way into many American Indian and Alaska Native written and oral literatures. Muskogee Creek poet Joy Harjo sets the poem "Deer Dancer," in an Indian bar much like the Lawrence Indian bar, filled with drinkers from many Nations. A beautiful woman stranger in a red dress enters the bar and transforms all of them. No one in the bar is left untouched by this evening, and the

story spreads to the ears of the poem's narrator who, it turns out, was not present but only heard the story second hand. In my classes, students are convinced the bar is the infamous Lawrence Indian bar across the Kansas River, though Harjo has been to Lawrence just a few times. Whether ghost or Deer Woman, the living people around the deer woman experience a break in the usual physical-law universe. In the poem, something magical happens and heals the drinkers' hopelessness, and this inspires Haskell students as well.

Many boarding schools besides Haskell are places where spirits interact with the living. Tapahonso writes about a New Mexico church boarding school and the interaction between residents and spirits. In the narrative "The Snakeman," she tells about elementary school-aged children who bunk on the top floor of the school, near the attic. They are leery of the attic door and what dwells in the darkness above them, on the northern side of the building:

The building was old, like all other buildings on campus, and the students were sure that the buildings were haunted. How could it not be? They asked among themselves. This was especially true for the little girls on the north end of the dorm because they were so close to the attic door. There was a man in there, enough to throw evil powder on anyone who walked by. (81)

But this creepy setting on the north side of the building, the direction associated with witchcraft, is not the truly supernatural event. The story is written from the viewpoint of the youngest school children, and they accept as normal the one orphan girl who sneaks out of the building every evening to meet her spirit parents. Classmates help her in and out of the window and down the fire escape. When she returns, she tells the other children that her parents are buried at the school cemetery. She describes her mother:

"She calls me and waits at the edge of the cemetery by those small fat trees. She's real pretty. When she died, they put a blue outfit on her. A Navajo skirt that's real long, and a shiny, soft blouse. She waves to me like this, 'Come here *shiyazhi*, my little one.' She always calls me that. She's soft and smells so good." The girls nodded, each remembering their own mothers. (82)

In the story, the girls are homesick, and they often cry by themselves. They envy the girl with dead parents who can visit every night. This comments on the desperate loneliness of the children boarded away from home. In Tapahonso's narrative, the children try to understand the church's heaven and hell along with traditional *Diné* beliefs, and in the mix, all representations have the same valence. The child's ghost mother is as real as the attic "snakeman," and the attic darkness is as real as heaven. One child asks, "Why do mothers always want their kids to be goody-good?" (82). The answer is "So you won't die at the end of the world, dummy!" (82). This is the Christian Second Coming narrative, and in the same conversation the *Diné* afterlife is discussed: "But at the end of the world, all the dinosaurs and monsters that are sleeping in the mountains will bust out and eat all the bad people." (83). In the absence of elders and parents, the children turn to themselves for explanations. The spirit-mother is a trope that signifies the absence of the older generations in all the children's lives. Ghosts take the place of elders.

A wetlands area, a cemetery, and old buildings make Haskell a likely home for lost spirits. But since 1984 I have heard no stories about ghosts in the Haskell-Baker wetlands, mostly because I know few people who go there at night. I have heard stories of tragic parties on Forty-Nine Road, which runs through the wetlands—of fights and killings that were never prosecuted. For years the area was a refuge for runaways, according to the stories. One summer a student named Frog lost his dormitory privileges and found himself camping in the swamplands, surrounded by his croaking namesakes. He endured many jokes at his expense.

The Haskell cemetery, however, has many stories attached to it. Over a hundred children were buried there from 1885 to 1913 (Child 66), so Haskell ghosts are usually young children. College students often hear children playing in the cemetery, only to look and see nothing. A student told one of my classes that he walked home late at night along a bike trail east of the cemetery. As he passed the white tombstones in the darkness, he heard laughter. He ran the rest of the way home. Others have seen shadows of children running through the aisles of white marble. In other accounts cemetery lights appear and then recede gradually, getting farther and farther away. A few hardy doubters go there on Halloween, just to see what will happen. They come back frightened and sometimes with stories, but no one will listen

to them for long. Religious leaders hold services at the cemetery every year, in order to calm the atmosphere of the entire school.

In addition to the cemetery, many of the buildings on the Haskell campus are haunted, and many tales abound. Some of the buildings have been torn down, and still ghosts are attached to the remaining spots. They apparently do not want to leave the familiar ruins. Some stories are about people who worked for the school all their lives and died, and just never left. But the most poignant stories are about ghosts of children.

I have heard a dozen variations on this dormitory story: a student hears a pull-toy in the middle of the night dragged across the bedroom or the sound of a ball bouncing. Or the resident assistant's children play with shadows in the hallways and answer someone, but when a witness investigates, no one is there. Children's footsteps resound in the hallways, and sometimes students see a spectral boy riding a tricycle or playing in the hallways (Eakins 2). Dormitory staff see the children so often they do not even remark on it. The ghosts are just part of the job.

Confinement to one site was common for the living, as well as the departed. According to an account by the Arizona writer Laura Tohe, taken from her grandmother's stories about Haskell, a windowed jail in the central yard near the gazebo held errant boys, where they were subject to public ridicule. Tohe relates this in her grandmother's voice: "The boys had the open jail outside. The front part would be open, with bars. But I guess at night they closed it. During the day we used to see who was in jail as we went into the classroom" (xiv). This jail building no longer exists, but the girls' jail does. Theirs was in the basement of one of the dormitories, completely dark, like solitary confinement:

We went down below into the basement. I was very young then. There were two girls in there already, in that dungeon, and it was a real dark place. The rooms were about from here to here, two of them. One on this side and one on that side. They had windows just on this side with little tiny holes. It was a metal place and it had just holes, just full of holes. That's the only window they had. Both sides just like that. There was just one bed with a mattress on it and one blanket. [ . . . ] They had a light bulb, just barely enough to see. They didn't have a toilet but a bucket.

They had a bucket down there for them. These two girls used to yell at night. We used to hear them yelling and crying. They took off with the boys and tried to run away. They must've been about seventeen or eighteen years old. They usually stayed about a month down there, a whole month. (Tohe xiv)

This is a memory of a living nightmare, with the confined young people weeping into the night. This room in Pocahontas Hall is still the site of many ghost stories, since now it is a laundry room and women students use the area. They soon learn to do their laundry during the day and with a companion.

I often ask students to do an oral history project about Haskell, and every time I give the assignment, I get mostly ghost stories. Through the years I have heard about this basement laundry room, but different spirits appear in these stories, either sobbing or angry.

Students also report presences in their rooms. In Winona Hall, a student was washing her face late one night, and she felt someone in the bathroom with her. When she glanced over her shoulder, there was a small Indian girl giggling and pointing at her, but when she turned around again, the girl was nowhere to be found.

Another woman thought she was alone and looked out a Winona Hall window. She saw a friend across the courtyard and waved at her from the open window. It was a warm evening, just dark, and as she leaned out the window, she could see her friend's perplexed look. When she went downstairs to her friend, she found out a strange woman had been standing next to her. She was asked, "Who was the woman next to you in the window? She had on that old looking dress." As they talked, the dorm matron heard the story. She told them the old woman worked there in the 1920's, until she died. She is still seen looking out that window. In another version, a custodian often sees the same woman, "an apparition of a young woman wearing a long, old-fashioned dress," but "I just tell her that I'm there and what I'm doing, and there's no problem'" (Eakins 6).

Sometimes the dorm stories involve the sense of touch. A student is asleep and awakens to the sensation of being pressed down. He thinks someone is sitting on the bed and pushing him into the mattress. The tactile sensation is clearly felt, with no sense that a ghost might be involved—until no other person appears to be in the room. Danny Deo,

a Creek Indian, reports he “woke to the feeling of a presence around him, and he couldn’t move. Deo felt like something was holding him down and taking his breath away” (Eakins 5). He told it to ““Leave me alone, leave me alone.”” until it left (5). He felt confrontation was the best procedure. In another dorm, a little girl spirit braids female students’ hair (Eakins 6).

Most of the dorm ghosts are oblivious to living people. Sometimes they are a nuisance to students, always moving things and making noise, and a spiritual leader will come and smudge the room and bless it. This usually settles the atmosphere. For most, the children are no bother. Students feel compassion for the lost children who never had any other home and try to comfort them.

In some stories, building lights turn themselves on and off. This happens at the library (Eakins 6), and this happened to me when I worked nights in Navarre Hall, site of the old infirmary where children were treated, and sometimes did not survive. Almost no one else worked in the deserted printing building then. One winter night when I was the only person left in the building, around eight o’clock, and the light in the next room went off. I looked to see if another switch triggered the lights, but it did not. I left quickly. As I looked back, I saw the lights go back on. My isolation made the experience more creepy, but I thought someone must be in the building and there must be another switch for the same lights. I did not want to believe any other explanation. The same thing happened several times to me that one winter when I was working late. I never told anybody, until I heard similar stories about different parts of campus.

A recurring story is about Hiawatha Hall, a gymnasium where a girl drowned in a indoor pool. Now people see her looking from the basement windows, where the pool was located. According to oral narratives, the haunting was so bad that the school filled in the pool. Staff workers at Hiawatha still “tell stories about how they will be working in that part of the building and, after leaving the room briefly, will return to find their tools scattered” (Eakins 6).

I had a direct encounter with something at the crossroads by Pontiac Hall, a four-way stop sign. I have always felt uneasy there, even though it is a well-traveled walkway. One morning fifteen years ago, I heard security guards had been chasing a man through campus the night before. He stopped at that spot, leaned against an old cedar tree, and lit up a cigarette. When they reached him, he vanished. Only the smell of smoke remained.

One day last summer I felt that same eerie feeling when I walked by the corner, as though somebody was standing there. Even in

summer's drought at noon, over a hundred degrees, the corner stayed cool and shady. That sunny day I forgot about the old ghost story as I followed newly painted yellow stripes across the intersection. My mind wandered instead of watching where I was going. When I awoke from the trance, I dodged a car that didn't stop.

For me the oddest sensation, though, came when I was reading a student's essay about a ghost in his dorm, and, as I read along, the ghost started to sound familiar. The student described a middle-aged man who grumbled as he limped through the halls and used bad language, an old guy with thinning, slicked-back hair. I recognized the description was old Deer\_\_\_\_\_, a deceased man I had not thought about for years. I remembered he swore every other word. He worked at the warehouse, which he kept in good order, and he was gruff, but still always helpful to me. I was surprised when he had a heart attack and died in the mid 1980s. I realized he must have been in constant pain. He was not an old man, but not happy in this life either. The student described how his transparent image walks the halls at night, swearing and limping as always, but gentle with the residential assistant's kids, who play with him in the twilights. The mixed character in the stories fit the man I remember.

When I put down this student essay, I realized I have been working at Haskell too long if I recognize the deceased people in the ghost stories. This was not my only ghost acquaintance.

There is the story about the light-skinned urban Indian who came to Haskell from Tulsa. He was sleeping alone in his room one night when a beautiful, slender woman with long, chestnut-brown hair tapped him on the shoulder and roused him. She could have been *Diné*. He brushed her off until he sat up and realized he could see right through her. The only ghosts he had seen before had been in cartoons, but this was real. He grabbed a sheet off the bed, swathed himself like Caspar in the cartoons, and ran down to the front desk.

When he described the girl to the dorm assistants at the desk, they looked at each other. One brought out a yearbook and found a photograph of the slender, long-haired girl, a runner, who lived in that same room the year before. One night after the Indian bar across the river closed, she got on the back of her boyfriend's motorcycle, and right then, a car slammed into them. They life-flighted her to Kansas City.

It was one of those head injuries where she seemed okay at first, and she even talked to her friends. Her mother flew in and kept vigil. Then her brain stem swelled, and she could no longer speak, but just

squeezed her mother's hand, yes and no. I drove to the hospital to see her. She had been in two of my classes, never absent, and always attentive. She wrote class notes in round, looped letters and turned in all her assignments. I heard about some trouble when she was out late one night, and after that a friend always escorted her around campus.

Now she lay still, her beautiful hair spread out on the pillows. Even the stoic nurse talked about her beauty.

Later when the dorm staff looked through her old room, they found some of her hair ties along the baseboard. She must have come back for them and found a stranger sleeping in her bed and tried to move him out of her place. After that night, the frightened, light-skinned boy refused to go back into the room. Someone had to get his clothes and belongings. He slept in his car, and later they found him a room in another dorm.

She still returns to the same dorm, like the motorcycle crash never happened. The smell of her perfume still permeates her old dorm room (Eakins 6). Every so often someone sees her in the bathroom, brushing her hair, getting ready for her last date. I have not gone to the Indian bar late at night to see if she waits on North Fourth Street for young men who have been out too late and forgotten their prayers.

This young woman's story, and stories like hers, mediate sorrows of the boarding school experience. During the years dominated by boarding school life—years when American Indians mostly did not have mainstream publication venues—ghost stories circulated, and they are a way to take control of the literary tradition, despite the mainstream stereotypes perpetuated in mascots and other media. Nowadays runaway stories are less current, except as romantic nighttime escapades, since contemporary students are not physically confined. But the ghost story tradition remains strong. More contemporary stories are about tragic deaths of college-age students, from accidents and violence. Others are about employees who do not leave Haskell after death.

Storytelling in boarding schools keeps continuity with older generations, even when they are physically absent. In "The Snakeman" Tapahonso describes the group of institutionally orphaned children talking among themselves at night: "Then they all gathered at one bed and sat in the moonlight telling ghost stories or about how the end of the world was really going to be" (80). Though no elders are present for these children, they turn to the familiar oral tradition. They do have the form of Native narratives, and the older children lead the younger

ones in the storytelling. At Haskell, all generations tell ghost stories, and they recognize the same ghosts through the decades, especially the children from before 1970. Haskell faculty and staff, as well as students, remain as ghosts, or at least stories about ghosts; their storied spirits renew the traditions and bind the generations of the school to each other.

Runaway and ghost stories memorialize individual lives, their hardships, and the specificities of identity; they also connect narratives to landscape, like the association of stories with the Haskell-Baker Wetlands. Besides sites and historic motifs, the stories are about resistance to regimentation. Ghosts in the stories have final vengeance on the harsh boarding school taskmasters, by refusing to remain quiet about the jails and the punishments. The children's continued appearances remind everyone of their irrevocable tragedy. Though the past cannot be changed, these stories create a way to draw boundaries around tragedy, to nullify the horrors, and to create a vital survivance, in times of continuing assault on community identity. As time passes and ameliorates the experience, more Native writers declaim the boarding school experiences in written texts. Bureau policies change, and tribal sovereignty removes the oppressive educational policies. In time more Native elders will people this school, as well as other tribally run educational institutions; fewer tragedies will occur; and fewer ghosts will walk the roadways and halls of Haskell.

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### **The Four Corners Power Plant**

He works in a smoking steel dragon  
melting metal together  
on the Navajo reservation  
where they rip coal from Her insides  
to burn and spin in turbines  
transforming earth to light and TV  
and energy for this computer

Even if he hates it  
there is satisfaction  
in more than survival  
a paycheck from the front line  
where he's disguised as enemy  
amidst inventions galore  
shoulder to shoulder with magic  
from that other land  
wizards bearing down with superior gods  
they like to call science

It worries me that Natives  
are buying food with blood money  
hanging onto jobs that suck the earth dry  
knee deep in pollution  
and unhappy about it  
but unwilling to step out and starve  
afraid to get jobs that reflect New Age bunk  
I've never seen a Hopi massage therapist  
or Navajo Reiki master  
charging a hundred bucks an hour  
and I wonder how I'd feel if I did  
but in the meantime  
we pound this American drum until it bleeds  
fill huge holes with sand  
and stretch odd shaped band-aids across earth wounds  
growing too big to heal.

**Dangerous Visions**

Geronimo gave me communion  
and I wandered down the aisle  
pews on each side  
filled with parishioners  
not noticing it was him  
He whistled for his horse  
that came charging up the aisle  
remembering to genuflect  
on one knee  
for the greatest warrior  
who ever lived

Eat my body  
drink my blood  
the crazy man yelled  
anxious to save his people  
willing to give his life

Only the bullets arrived  
only the cross  
dangerous visionaries  
drag their own death  
up a broken back trail  
of bloody tears

**Deborah Jackson Taffa** was born on the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation of southern AZ. A writer of mixed Quechan/Laguna ancestry, she has backpacked in rural Africa, Asia, and Mexico. Her poetry and prose reflect both her roots & wings.

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## **MAJOR TRIBAL NATIONS AND BANDS MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE**

This list is provided as a service to those readers interested in further communications with the tribal communities and governments of American Indian/Native nations. Inclusion of a government in this list does not imply endorsement of or by *SAIL* in any regard, nor does it imply the enrollment or citizenship status of any writer mentioned; some communities have alternative governments and leadership that are not affiliated with the U.S., Canada, or Mexico, while others are not recognized at this point by colonial governments. We have limited the list to those most relevant to the essays published in this issue, thus, not all bands, towns, or communities of a particular nation are listed.

We make every effort to provide the most accurate and up-to-date tribal contact information available, a task that is sometimes quite complicated. Please send any corrections or suggestions to *SAIL* Editorial Assistant, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Department of American Thought and Language, 235 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1033, or send e-mail to [sail2@msu.edu](mailto:sail2@msu.edu).

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