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Oklahoma

A View of the Center

RUTHE BLALOCK JONES, MARIA DEPRIEST, AND
CYNTHIA FOWLER

PREFACE

In the summer of 2003 a group of twenty-five educators converged at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, under a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship titled "Working from Community: American Indian Art and Literature in a Historical and Cultural Context." It was six weeks of intensive study of American Indian art and literature to further more thoughtful scholarship on indigenous culture and to encourage teaching strategies that might integrate native topics into general courses on art and literature. Under the direction of Gail Tremblay (Onondaga/Mi'kmac), artist, critic, and professor at Evergreen, along with Mario Caro, then a professor at Evergreen and now at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, the seminar was a provocative, engaging, and dynamic discussion of topics related to American Indian culture. It included a stellar lineup of guest lecturers, including writers LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), and Ofelia Zepeda (Tohono O'odham) and artists Corwin Clairmont (Salish Kootenai), Frank LaPena (Nomtipom-Tunai Wintu), Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora), C. Maxx Stevens (Seminole), and Hulleah Tsinnahjinnie (Diné/Seminole/Muskogee). Participants were also introduced to members of the Makah Nation in Neah Bay, Washington, and to local artists such as Greg Colfax (Makah).

The following dialogue began as a collaborative presentation delivered at the seminar. After putting the notes from our original presentation into written form, we developed this paper through e-mail and telephone exchanges over the years that followed. We present our ideas in conversational form to preserve the quality of a dialogue and the spirit of collaboration among colleagues. The conversational form departs from conventional scholarly analysis, yet it is not without precedent and remains viable as an alternative discourse to the prevailing academic model, which presumes the superiority of an individual critique. Shared among three scholars, American Indian and Euroamerican, our work is an alert, ongoing activity of love and fun.

Our focus was, and still is, twentieth-century Oklahoma artists and writers. While Oklahoma has not been recognized in mainstream America as a major center of cultural activity, it has been and continues to be a fertile ground for American Indian creativity.

In our dialogue we explore the shared subject matter of a select group of twentieth-century Oklahoma artists and writers, uniting the divide between the visual arts and literature for a more comprehensive perspective while revisiting the pervasive question of the connection between artist/home/place. We have selected five themes as the organizing principle of our discussion. These themes emanated from the works of art themselves. Based on our shared knowledge of “Oklahoma” art and literature—and this was broadly defined by the three of us to be work produced by artists and writers connected in a wide variety of ways to this specific place—we felt that the categories of travel, loss, memory, transformation, and dance would aid us in our exploration of the significance of Oklahoma as a cultural center.

Ruthe Blalock Jones (Delaware/Shawnee/Peoria), artist and current director of art at Bacone College, provides background information on the Bacone style of painting that emerged from the Bacone College School of Art, an important center of painting since the 1930s, and describes the relationship of her own painting to this long-standing Oklahoma art tradition. American art historian Cynthia Fowler discusses key works by artists C. Maxx Stevens,

Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, Steven Deo, and Anita Fields, all of whom have strong ties to Oklahoma and work in media outside of the painting tradition. American literature scholar Maria DePriest highlights particular tribal, urban, and academic perspectives about Oklahoma in the works of Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, LeAnne Howe, Carter Revard, Rennard Strickland, and Craig Womack. Like the visual artists, the writers figure Oklahoma as both a physical and psychic umbilical cord, a primary relation available for interaction.

INTRODUCTION

CYNTHIA FOWLER: The artists and writers we selected for our discussion work in diverse, even contradictory styles. But they share an important connection in their choice of subjects. This connection is often lost when categories such as “traditional versus nontraditional” and “modern versus postmodern” are imposed upon their work. When we turn the spotlight on Oklahoma, the limitations to these categories become immediately apparent. But even more, the importance of Oklahoma as a vital center of American Indian art and literature has been revealed to us in this process of exploration.

MARIA DEPRIEST: And don’t you think, Cynthia, that one aspect of the vitality we are exploring has everything to do with a complex relationship of artist to place? For example, in a *Western American Literature* issue devoted to Oklahoma’s legacy as “Indian Territory,” Joy Harjo makes a case for the power of language to forge sustaining bonds with people, with the land, and with the past. She begins her short essay with a definition: “Oklahoma—the red earth—gives meaning to a name. Oklahoma is derived from a Choctaw word which means ‘red people’” (“Oklahoma” 125). Moreover, in addition to giving birth to meaning, Oklahoma signals energy for Harjo because it reverberates with diverse languages and cultural practices of the sixty-six American Indian nations residing today in that state. Also, Cynthia, when you mention the idea that works by American Indian artists tend to blur academic distinctions such as “modern versus postmodern,” I think of Carter Revard. In a short piece from *An Eagle Nation* titled “In Oklahoma,” that sage Osage

ironically exposes binaries as fairly irrelevant to his perspective of Oklahoma. Playfully tweaking the famous remark about Oakland made by Gertrude Stein—"There's no there, there"—Revard comments: "Shall I tell you a secret, Gert? You have to be there before it's there. . . . See friends, it's not a flyover here. Come down from your planes and you'll understand. Here" (124). Revard's "here" is a storied geography, redolent with meanings for the artists and writers we discuss.

Ruthe, your work will add Delaware/Shawnee sounds and images to the landscape and, along with the works that Cynthia has chosen, show us something about the dynamism among you, Oklahoma, and the power, fragility, intelligence, emotion, and humor invoked in your art.

RUTHE BLALOCK JONES: Yes, all of that. In addition, I have said that Oklahoma Indian art is a synthesis of all that has gone before, from the artistic production before contact with Europeans to the Indian schools of painting initially developed under the direction of Euroamericans. Oklahoma has also been called a "melting pot," and although we don't use that term anymore, we were referring to the various groups of people who settled or were forced to settle there. So we have the voice of the traveler or one who lives away from the place and returns with a certain objectivity, while the native or one who stays home (behind) perhaps is more concerned with the ongoing, traditional aspects of life. Some artists have stated that they are unable to work "there" and must consciously remove themselves; others stay home because they somehow feel that being with or near their subject is vital to them and to their work. And of course there is the state department of tourism that says "Oklahoma is a state of mind."

At the Bacone School, we teach the Bacone style, which is a recognized style of traditional Indian painting by artists who studied there from 1935 to 1980. Historically our school has always been connected in theory with the Kiowa or Oklahoma Plains style of painting via the University of Oklahoma. You can recognize this style by characteristics like the flat application of water-based paint on paper, no wash shading, and the outlining of subjects to suggest form. Subject mat-

ter is frequently human, bird, or animal with an important emphasis on legend and Indian culture and history. Usually there is an absence of background. This is the method employed in the 1920s by the Oklahoma Kiowa artists as well as the artists of the Santa Fe Indian School, an Indian boarding school that also became an important art center for traditional painting. However, there are subtle differences between the two schools. The Kiowa artists used more bold color and action scenes compared to the more subdued subject matter and almost pastel palette of the Santa Fe artists. These subtle differences between the two schools can still be seen today. The Bacone School developed to employ more detailed rendering of garments, feathers, hair, and facial features, as well as anatomy in both animals and humans. There is also more complex use of color, more multifaceted compositions, and greater depiction of action than either the Kiowa or the Santa Fe schools.

In 1935 Acee Blue Eagle (Creek/Pawnee) was the founding art director of Bacone. He was a contemporary of the original Kiowa artists and was in the group that immediately followed them. I call that group “second-generation Jacobson artists,” after Oscar Brousse Jacobson, who was the head of the School of Art at the University of Oklahoma. Jacobson gave artistic direction to the famous Kiowa Five, a group of Southern Plains artists working in the traditional style who, through Jacobson’s advocacy, gained widespread recognition in both the United States and Europe. Acee Blue Eagle studied under Jacobson before he came to Bacone. Following Blue Eagle at Bacone were Woodrow Wilson (“Woody”) Crumbo (Potawatomi), Dick West (Cheyenne), and Chief Terry Saul (Choctaw/Chickasaw), all of whom were second-generation Jacobson students. I am not in that group, but as a student of West and through my identification with the Kiowa style, I consider myself a practitioner of their legacy.

CF: Ruthe, you describe the traditional style and its practitioners in great depth in your article “Like Being Home: Oklahoma Indian Art,” so I would like to refer those interested in more detail about this style to your article. In it you include Dick West’s painting *Dream Shield* (ca. 1965) (fig. 1). Stylistically it is characterized by its flat two-dimensionality and its focus on an individual figure. There is



Fig. 1. West, Richard (Dick). *Dream Shield*. ca. 1965. Gouache on paper, 18H X 24W in. Bacone College, Muskogee, OK. With permission from Rene West.

also a decorative quality to the painting, created by the attention to detail in the renderings of the war shield, headdress, and other spiritual objects surrounding the central figure. Also, the subject matter relates to the traditional style in its focus on an important cultural or spiritual event in a man's life, in this case a vision quest. As our discussion of your work will reveal, the Bacone style is grounded solidly in this tradition. But at the same time, each artist coming out of Bacone—like you—has freely interpreted this style so that it continues to evolve today.

RBJ: Bacone is perhaps the only college where this kind of curriculum is offered. And, yes, we are aware of the critique of this style for what has been described as its “Bambi” aspects (Traugott 40), which implies that the work is formulaic, unoriginal, and focuses only on “safe” subject matter. But in spite of this criticism, we proceed.

CF: Ah, the “Bambi style.” A term generally used in a derogatory way and applied to tourist-oriented art that focuses on Indians engaged in ceremonial activities and, as you explain, is perceived as

derivative of the flat, decorative style that came out of the Oklahoma and the Santa Fe Indian Schools. It was a style encouraged by white teachers such as Dorothy Dunn at Santa Fe. But there is so much more to the Bacone style of painting.

RBJ: Yes, and this term is further complicated by the fact that some Indian artists were actually employed by Disney. This includes Acee Blue Eagle. His stylized little blue deer—Bambi—is the subject of his children’s book titled *Echogee*.

MDP: May I add that Rennard Strickland, an Osage/Cherokee lawyer, academic, and art critic, embraces the conflict stirred up by the “Bambi” school of criticism in an essay from his book, *Tonto’s Revenge?* He writes that this historic controversy began after World War II and continues to a certain extent today. Arguing that the conflict was based on faulty assumptions by curators and art dealers who valued only certain styles and images—deer, bear, bird—as “authentic” Native American art and, at the same time, appraised that style as insufficiently avant-garde, Strickland controverts the double bind to a series of questions:

The question for the artist became: What does a Native American painter do when he or she wants to say something about the deer or the deer people or the deer spirit? Is the work only “Bambi art?” Can it be more? Or, on the other hand, what is to be the fate of the American Indian painter who finds all of this about the deer or buffalo to be a great bore unrelated to his or her present-day life as an Indian and wants to paint about law school or video arcades or motorcycle symbols or bars and drunks? . . . Indian art is an art of thought which, even in the simplest of the so-called “Bambi paintings,” asks difficult questions. What do the two deer prancing past the aspens know that we do not know about God’s stewardship? About bluebirds overhead? About the clouds in the sky? (74–75)

In the context of the “Bambi” dilemma, Strickland also notes that centuries of Asian drawings and paintings of “swimming fish and mysterious felines” have not elicited such contentious evaluations (74). Instead, the art is more accurately understood as having changed

slowly over hundreds of years so that the symbol of the fish/feline is refined and rearticulated. Likewise, as Cynthia has said, there is so much more to the Bacone style of painting, Ruthe. From my perspective, Strickland's questions give language to what I see and how I feel about your work, situated in our piece in the middle of other Oklahoma Indian artists and writers.

RBJ: In some ways I suppose that "Bambi" criticism adds a dimension to our endeavor. As for me, anyway, the quickest way to get me to do something is to tell me that I can't do it or that what I want to do is somehow out of favor or frowned upon.

Another aspect of the Jacobson legacy has to do with the Annual Indian Art Competition at the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa, which took place during the years 1946 to 1980. I call this period the "golden age" of Indian painting because this competition provided the premier showcase for Indian art and many collections were formed from the annual event. Jacobson artists were consistent award winners, and the sales of their works at the annuals formed the nucleus of prestigious national and regional collections. In addition to the Bacone artists Blue Eagle, Woody Crumbo, Dick West, Terry Saul, Solomon McCombs, and Fred Beaver, other artists from the annual were Oscar Howe (Sioux), Blackbear Bosin (Kiowa/Comanche), Alfred Momaday (Kiowa), Allan Houser (Apache), and Archie Blackowl (Cheyenne). There were also Franklin Gritts (Cherokee), Franklin Fireshaker (Ponca), Albin Jake (Pawnee), Cecil Murdock (Kickapoo), and Doc Tate Nevaquayah (Comanche). Later came the works of social commentary in T. C. Canon's (Kiowa/Caddo) opera themes, self-portraits, and other artistic expressions, the likes of which were never seen before or since.

All of this is a peek at the delicious stew that is Indian art in Oklahoma, especially in connection to Bacone.

CF: Like you, Ruthe, I have a craving for the rich flavors of that "delicious stew" of Indian art in Oklahoma. So let's continue our dialogue of the ingredients that make up this "stew" of Oklahoma creative expression with a more focused discussion on our chosen themes and the individual works that we have spotlighted. For the artists and writers we have selected here, Oklahoma as a place res-

onates with meaning that ultimately transcends the limitations of state lines. With this idea in mind, our theme of travel seems like a good place to begin.

TRAVEL

MDP: I'll start with Craig Womack, Creek/Cherokee scholar, novelist, and literary critic, because he characterizes travel as a key marker of Creek life and identity. He means travel to include literal movement, of course. However, he also uses the word as an apt description of intellectual search, migration, and spiritual journey. In his book of literary criticism *Red on Red*, Womack argues for an analysis of Native American literary production that is tribal-specific rather than Eurocentric and, in that frame of mind, takes us into the heart of Creek intellectualism. In the "Introduction," Womack discusses Creek poet and philosopher Louis Oliver and explains that "a central feature of Oliver's creative work is an intense journey toward understanding what it means to be a Creek intellectual" (18). He then positions the beginning of Oliver's journey squarely within a Creek migration story. For Womack, the singularity of Oliver's rendition has to do with the way in which Oliver begins his intellectual search by linking Creek origins "to a scientific inquiry (and from a Creek viewpoint, given the centrality of fire in ceremony, a religious one as well) in their search for where the sun originated" (190). Womack quotes Oliver in *Chasers of the Sun*:

We came pouring out of the backbone of this continent like ants. We saw for the first time a great ball of fire rising out of the earth in the east. We were astounded at the phenomena, but we had no fear of it. We held council and made a decision to go and find the place that it lived. (Oliver 3; qtd. in Womack 190)

And go they did. The "we" of Oliver's story follow the sun as far as possible, to the East coast, and, having satisfied their inquiry, turn back to settle "along the Okmulgee River in Alabama" (190). In other words, intellectual inquiry, physical journey, and ceremonial movement—setting out and coming back home—are multiple, complex

aspects of Creek identity even now and, I take it, also make concrete what Revard is suggesting to “Gert.” But history intrudes. The forced relocation and genocide of untold numbers of Native Americans makes for a paradoxical understanding of “home” as simultaneously the place of location and dislocation.

CF: As you point out, Maria, for those with ties to Oklahoma the notion of travel cannot be separated from the historical conditions surrounding the Indian Removal Act of 1830. As a result of this forced migration, Oklahoma became the home of Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creek, and Seminoles who formerly lived in the East. By the mid-nineteenth century, Kiowas, Kiowa-Apaches, Wichitas, and Osages had also moved to this area. The convergence of such a wide variety of tribal groups, from the East, South, North, and West, shaped native cultural traditions in Oklahoma.

RBJ: Yes. But besides forced removal, Indian people now just like to “go,” and they like to talk about it. One of the things that has always interested me about the way we travel around is the number of Indians named Andrew Jackson. Go figure!

MDP: Ruthe, any Indian who is named Andrew Jackson does make you wonder and even laugh at that kind of in-your-face survival humor.

CF: I’d like to focus for a few moments on the Trail of Tears, since this is a subject that has been treated by a variety of artists and writers over the years. As you know, the Trail of Tears refers to the horrendous experiences of those thousands of people forced to migrate to Oklahoma and its surroundings. Countless people died because of the appalling conditions under which they were moved. One of the most popular—and stereotypical—symbols of the Trail of Tears is James Earle Fraser’s *End of Trail* (1915), a sculpture of a lone, vanquished Indian on his horse, head bent downward as a symbol of his defeat. Oklahoma artist Steven Deo (Creek and Euchee) provides an alternative view of this subject in his sculpture *End of the Trail* (2000) (fig. 2), in which he emphasizes the continuation of native culture rather than its demise. Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Deo received his MFA in painting from University of Oklahoma while studying under internationally recognized artist Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds



Fig. 2. Deo, Steven. *End of the Trail*. 2000. Mixed media, shoes, 18H X 26W X 10D in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Steven Deo.

(Cheyenne and Arapaho), who is currently on the faculty there. *End of the Trail* is a sculpture in the form of a suitcase composed of more than eighty shoe tops. Travel is suggested not only by the suitcase but also by the association of the shoes themselves with walking. Deo describes the shoes as a “metaphor for travel and dislocation” (Deo, interview). Compressed in a small, restricted space, the shoes take on a claustrophobic quality, suggesting too many people crammed into a constricted space, just as the mixture of many different shoe types brings to mind the convergence of so many tribal groups in Oklahoma.

Shoes are a recurring theme in Deo’s art. Deo identifies the repeated use of objects like shoes in his sculptures as his “personal aesthetic,” relating the repetition of objects in his art to the repetition that characterizes the steps of the stomp dance and the lyrics of stomp dance songs. The shoe tops used in *End of the Trail* were the shoe remains from an earlier work by Deo, titled *The Dance* (1996), in which the artist arranged over three hundred shoe soles in a spiral



Fig. 3. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Guineas in the Road*. 2002. Acrylic, mixed media on canvas, 24H X 40W in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.

formation to simulate the spiraling movement of dancers around a fire in a Creek/Euchee stomp dance. Deo collected many of the shoes included in these two sculptures from family, friends, and friends' children, but he also purchased some of the shoes from a local Goodwill Thrift Store. According to Deo, both the purchased shoes and the shoes he collected from people he knew personally represent the community of which he is a part, suggesting an inclusive notion of community that extends beyond immediate family and friends. The shoes are all in present-day styles, which remind us of the survivance of Indian people, to use Gerald Vizenor's term for survival and resistance, challenging earlier representations of the Trail of Tears as the complete decimation of Indian culture. In 2003 Deo participated in the Biennale of International Contemporary Art in Florence, Italy, where he exhibited *Trailway Baggage* (2003), a sculpture comprised of two pieces of luggage and a guitar, all composed of shoe tops.

Ruthe, your painting *Guineas in the Road* (2002) (fig. 3) provides

another example of travel. Like Deo, you explore the significance of travel today with your subject of two women traveling in a car. Your choice to focus on what these women see—the dashboard of the car, the road ahead—heightens the emphasis on going somewhere.

RBJ: Yes, in *Guineas in the Road*, my acrylic collage/painting, I have said I was amusing myself—like Heap of Birds, whose work we'll discuss later in this conversation, is doing sometimes. And of course my piece does speak of travel. My cousin Reed was driving late at night and said, "Ruthe, there were big guineas on the road!" We laughed and I filed a mental image that I have rearranged here. I made the travelers female, which I like to think is visual representation of poet Laura Tohe's "Joe Babes."

CF: In her poem "Joe Babes," Tohe (Diné) portrays "Joe Babes" as rebellious women resisting pressures to assimilate into the mainstream. As Tohe describes them in her poem, they "laughed too loud / and were easily angered / when they got drunk" (26–28). Most importantly, their rebelliousness was tied to their pride in being Indian. Again, Tohe explains,

These were the ones who stood in corners
for speaking Indian

.

They sang in Indian Clubs
and danced at pow-wows. (15–16, 18–19)

Ruthe, you have absolutely captured the free-spirited nature of Tohe's "Joe Babes" in your painting. The two women you have depicted are in control of their destiny, and they are having a wonderful time at it as they maneuver down the road. We know that their adventures will be filled with unexpected events—like guineas in the road!

RBJ: Yes, they could be "Joe Babes," going along with Kiowa Saynday stories, for instance. To elaborate further, my redhead's name is True Love, and she appears now and again as a recurring image in my contemporary paintings.

CF: *Guineas in the Road*, and Ruthe's work in general, exemplifies for me the limitations to academic categories that have been applied

by Western art historians to Indian art. Western constructs of Indian painting would exclude *Guineas in the Road* from the category of “traditional” Indian painting, where the expected subjects historically have been men engaged in so-called Indian activities like hunting or participating in religious ceremonies; women, more rarely represented, have historically also been depicted in “Indian” activities like pottery making and cooking fry bread. Instead, Ruthe paints the “nontraditional” subject of two women traveling in a car. But the painting’s roots are clearly in the style of the Bacone School of Art, with its flatness of form accentuated by the monochromatic color and its focus on the individuals’ experiences. At the same time, many of Ruthe’s works that are “traditional” from the perspective of subject matter—for instance, her paintings of dancers at powwows—show a clear and direct engagement with non-Indian artists of the twentieth century. We’ll talk a bit about that later. The point here is that these constructed categories of Indian art ultimately collapse when we begin to recognize the multitude of influences that converge in works of art like Ruthe’s.

MDP: For me, a trickster shift happened the instant I saw Ruthe’s painting: two young women, seen from the backseat of a car, on a road trip. The paraphernalia of travel is visible everywhere—music tapes on the dashboard, sodas in the space in between the front seats, cigarettes available, the open road in full view from the front windshield—and we viewers just see the road, not the destination. All of this said to me: coyote was going there—going along—maybe it was rabbit or a couple of Harjo’s crows. In any case, *Guineas in the Road* really made me smile because when I looked at it, I felt the rhythm of life. To put it another way, Ruthe, the playful poses of your travelers suggested to me “the need for a comic disposition to ensure any semblance of cultural or physical survival” (Ryan 280).

Then, too, Cynthia, I see a link between Steven Deo’s varied use of shoes and the kinds of textured meaning that Womack derives from the Creek voices that he includes at the end of each of his chapters in *Red on Red*. Culled from literary and oral traditions, these community voices comment idiomatically and satirically on the preceding chapter content and academic style of language. In the

form of fictional letters that are filled with stories, jokes, comic situations, extended spoofs, and sometimes wildly scatological remarks, Womack ensures that tribal voices have a say in the making of meaning. For instance, at the end of a penetrating reading of Joy Harjo's work, the voice of Stijaati interprets Womack's analysis to mean that contemporary Creek writers like Harjo are drawing from a long and rich Creek literary tradition—"a body of literature unto itself, part of what it means to be a Creek Nation, I reckon" (269). But Stijaati doesn't come to that conclusion until after several of the other characters have transformed Harjo's famous poem—"She Had Some Horses"—into an irrepressibly comic revision now called "She Had Some Whippoorwills" (266–67) and, on top of it, presented the revision in a whacky Hitchcock film, which somehow morphs into a movie about Creek travelers and writers. Hilarious, outrageous, polyvocal, comedic energy that affirms life and simultaneously circulates and roots Womack's critical narrative about literary sovereignty: yes. The point is that as two ways of speaking—academic and "Okfuskee District"—crisscross, Womack invokes the history and practice of Creek intellectualism to be rooted in community, to be dynamic, sophisticated, analogical, and, unlike most literary criticism, very playful.

LOSS

CF: Indeed. Let's turn our attention to the next theme, which is that of loss, because it emerges from our discussion of travel. With travel there is always implied loss, of loved ones left behind, of one's lost connection to a specific geographical landscape, of one's roots to a place called home.

MDP: The subject of loss reminds me of what Winona LaDuke has said in speeches across the country: "Indian people are suffering from five hundred years of historical grief." In such a context, how do we talk about "loss" that really isn't lost? And, furthermore, how does the art of Oklahomans engage loss as a primary marker of the human condition? Cynthia and Ruthe, do you remember what LeAnne Howe revealed to us in her presentation at the NEH Summer

Institute? She was talking about growing up in her Choctaw community with a sense of time as unbroken. To illustrate that concept, she gave two examples: for one thing, she told us that she “didn’t know when growing up that Andrew Jackson wasn’t alive,” and, for another, she said that the women in her family taught her “how to stand up and pee—to walk that way—because that’s what women learned to do on ‘The Trail of Tears.’”

The merger of chronological and unbroken time that Howe’s examples demonstrate are powerful because they are literally embodied stories of the past that have contemporary resonance. For instance, in the second example, loss is part of the way you walk; it is a bodily function, a concrete practice that remembers the requirements of survival. As for the first example: we *do* see Andrew Jackson’s big face spread across our twenty dollar bills—visually reiterated, ubiquitously exchanged—as he circumnavigates the global economy. But that is probably not what Howe meant. I think, instead, that she connected the dots for us. To experience time as unbroken is, among other things, to be alert in the present tense, to be proactive against brutalities, and possibly, therefore, to make the future better.

RBJ: Yes, and this reminds me of hearing stories so often growing up that it sometimes seems as if they are my stories, as if I was there. My mother’s Delaware people came from Kansas in the late 1800s to Oklahoma, and there were people still alive who spoke of those times and things from first-or secondhand experience. As we children became so engrossed in the story told partly in Delaware and partly in English, we asked questions of our mother, who would say, “I don’t know, I wasn’t there,” referring to removal or even Christopher Columbus! I also recall hearing Allan Houser speak at conferences about similar things. He heard songs and stories of Geronimo on a daily basis as his grandfather traveled with him.

MDP: Ruthe, isn’t that amazing? Even though your mother would say “I don’t know,” in fact, because of her and all your storytelling relatives, you do know. Your family’s stories and Howe’s become a good way to carry your ancestors and to understand viscerally the charge between the personal and the political. Indeed, Howe often plucks out and dramatizes particular events from a series of devas-

tating colonial catastrophes in order to move toward what Joy Harjo identifies as revelatory: meaning, I think, a certain mix of suffering and comedy that reveals a truth.

RBJ: It has been said by American blacks that “we laugh to keep from crying.” I apply that saying to American Indians. It relates of course to Indian humor and also to the way that humor recontextualizes loss.

MDP: Ruthe, your comparison is so true. In Howe’s award-winning novel *Shell Shaker*, for instance, the story moves back and forth from the 1730s to the 1990s and connects past history to current problems. Early in the novel Howe’s comic deftness manumits us into contemporary Indian/Euroamerican relations. We readers are in a setting familiar to academics: we are at a lecture. The venue is the Oklahoma Historical Society. The audience is comprised of “New Agers, academics, and Oklahoma City’s business elites” (45). Auda Billy, a Choctaw character with a doctorate in history, is the lecturer. During her talk she mentions the fact that the Choctaws also walked the Trail of Tears. That comment elicits the first audience question: “I thought only the Cherokees walked the Trail of Tears” (43). Auda responds with a detailed and graphic depiction of this walk, which ends: “Dead women lay in the road with babies dried to their breasts, tranquil, as if napping. A sacred compost for scavengers” (43). Adair Billy, one of Auda’s sisters, is in the audience, and just as Adair remembers that “she’d forgotten how angry whites can become when their history is used against them,” the fur begins to fly:

“So how many died?”

“Four thousand.”

“Excuse me?”

“Four thousand Choctaws.”

“The total number of Indians?”

“Thousands.”

“Ouch. But how do you know that for sure?”

“Andrew Jackson’s government took a census before and after.”

“Census takers make mistakes.”

“Yes, ma’am, exactly right, it could have been more.” (43)

By the time Auda compares “the removal of American Indians in the Southeast to the removal of Palestinians from their homes in Jerusalem” (45), all bets are off. Suddenly, an intervention: readers can almost see a lectern, a performer, and a long cane moving out from the wings as Auda is whisked off the stage.

Clearly, the adversarial and incredulous responses of the audience in this scene represent a comedic intervention in the presentation of American history as understood by the settler culture. By definition academics are supposed to be the most open-minded and thoughtful of people, but Howe satirically exposes a closed-minded group that is also aggressive and rude and thoughtless. There is another layer to Howe’s artfulness. Besides the comic exchanges, both Indian and non-Indian readers are allowed entry into the suffering of the past; we can hear voices speak, we can see unspeakable horror. In short, we are invited to bear witness to the particulars of *Choctaw* loss. And if we understand the act of bearing witness as a transaction that involves apprehending something about loss at the deepest level, then transformation is possible. Now we know. Now we can affirm precisely the nature of loss as LeAnne Howe conjures it and simultaneously corroborate a tribal view of American history. And ultimately, as Ruthe has confirmed, laughter can move us through disaster.

CF: Humor is clearly an important survival strategy. It plays a significant role not just in Howe’s book but in the works of many American Indian artists and writers. In 1995 there was an exhibition of wonderfully ironic and often downright funny art. The exhibition, organized by American Indian Contemporary Arts in San Francisco and traveling to ten venues in three years, was appropriately titled *Indian Humor* and included works by thirty-eight artists specifically selected for their hilarious messages and biting sarcasm. But there are also works of art that force us to stay in that place of pain and sorrow around loss, providing us with no relief—and that is precisely their power.

MDP: Cynthia, the power you point to in works of art that pull us into the painful experience of loss is restated in Gloria Steinem’s introduction to Wilma Mankiller’s book, *every day is a good day*. Steinem reiterates what she has learned from Mankiller about the



Fig. 4. Heap of Birds, Hachivi Edgar. *Building Minnesota*. 1990. Mixed media temporary installation. With permission from Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds.

lasting consequences of violence: “*One act of violence takes four generations to heal*” (xx). From Mankiller’s perspective, some of our Oklahoma artists are clearly engaged in rendering/writing of anguish that has not diminished. As you say, that is precisely their power.

cf: Several works by Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds can be characterized in this way. Currently on the faculty of the University of Oklahoma, Heap of Birds settled in Oklahoma after graduate school in the late 1970s. As Heap of Birds describes, while studying at Royal College of Art in London, he “got totally confused about being Cheyenne,” which resulted in his return to Oklahoma (qtd. in Abbott 44). He created *Building Minnesota* (1990) (fig. 4) as a memorial to forty Dakota men who were executed by order of the U.S. government for their participation in an 1862 uprising. The incident is considered a travesty of justice, since many of the Indian warriors captured by the U.S. militia were sentenced to death in trials that lasted less than five minutes. President Lincoln approved the execution of thirty of the original 307 sentenced to death by the initial court, and pardoned the rest. President Jackson authorized the execution of two more during his presidency.

As Heap of Birds explains, *Building Minnesota* was inspired by the song “Water in the Rain,” written by his cousin, Mitch Walking Elk, and Larry Long, a singer in Minneapolis (qtd. in Abbott 33–34). Chronicling the events of the 1862 uprising, “Water in the Rain” honors the executed Dakota warriors. The song includes a Dakota elder reading in his native language the individual names of each executed man. In Heap of Birds’s installation, forty metal signs commemorate, in Dakota and English, the individual names of each man hanged. Heap of Birds intentionally designed the signs in the form of billboards to establish a clear and direct relationship between commerce and the death of the warriors. At the same time, he subverts the standard function of a billboard for commercial advertising to convey a powerful political message. As Heap of Birds explains, “I got to thinking about why would the government be so vicious. It was the largest mass execution in America’s history. . . . Then I thought about the wheat and the land and shipping, the business aspect of it. . . . Commerce was always at the bottom of these situations” (qtd. in Abbott 34). To further emphasize the role played by commerce in the deaths of these forty Dakota men, Heap of Birds selected the granary area of Minneapolis, with its large flour mills, located by the Mississippi River, through which most of the world’s grain was shipped in the mid-nineteenth century. He bought forty pounds of Pillsbury flour and drew a four-hundred-foot arc with it; the posts for the signs were positioned within the arc of the flour. For Heap of Birds, the site also held spiritual significance. Since Heap of Birds himself has lived without water as a participant in a four-day ceremony to renew the earth, he imagined that these warriors might have participated in similar ceremonies and hoped that they would respect that their commemoration was placed by the river (35).

Ruthe, you’ve done paintings that also memorialize the dead and are equally compelling in their ability to capture the profound sadness of loss.

RBJ: My painting *Death Robe* (1996) (fig. 5) relates a Cheyenne custom following a funeral. The speaker or the one conducting the rites talks about the deceased and tells everyone they must go on. Immediate survivors are individually called forward and completely

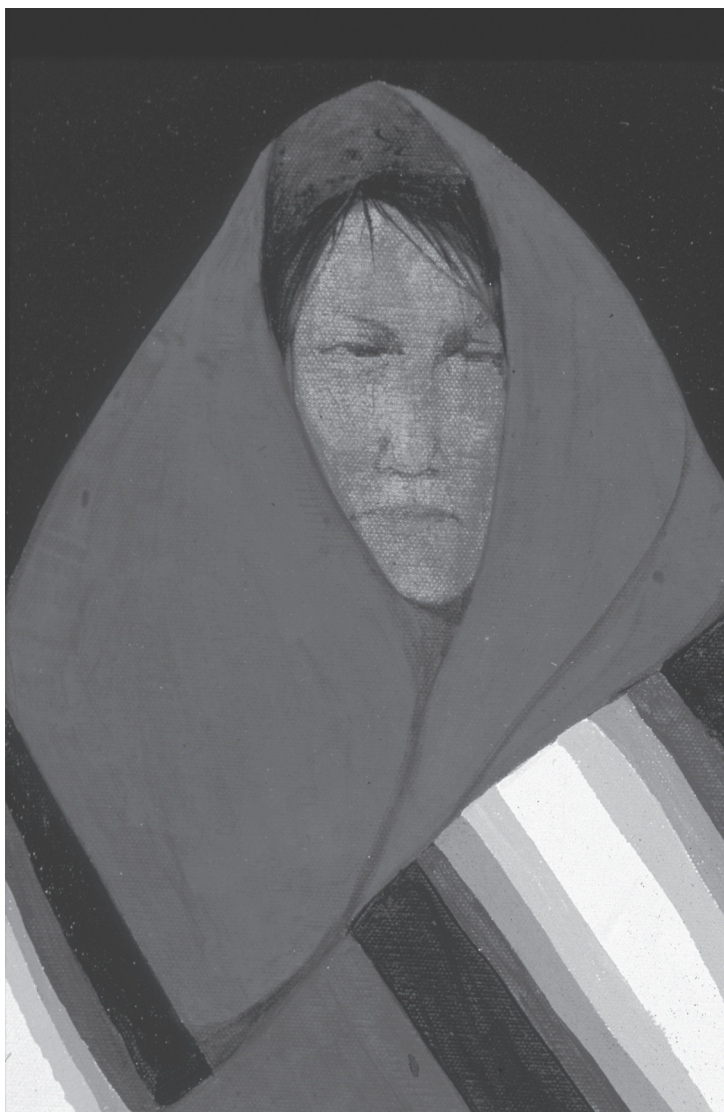


Fig. 5. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Death Robe*. 1996. Acrylic on canvas, 20H X 16W in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.



Fig. 6. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Grandfather Blalock*. 1996. Acrylic on canvas, 20H X 16W in. Private collection. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.

wrapped in a Pendleton blanket or star quilt—a “death robe”—from head to foot. While wrapping the person, the speaker tells of their special relationship to the deceased and concludes by telling that person not to be sad but to go on. In simple terms, it is a giveaway. I have taken artistic license and shown the face of the recipient to make a more interesting composition.

MEMORY

CF: Ruthe, both you and Heap of Birds have created powerful memorials to the dead. When we memorialize these individuals, we are also memorializing America’s disregarded history by documenting losses that are largely missing from public monuments that commemorate the dead. To remember what we have lost is so profoundly important. It constitutes a form of survivance.

RBJ: In thinking about the relationship between loss and memory, I am reminded of the Kiowas who were descendants of Fort Marion ledger artists and of Oscar Jacobson. He said, “Unlike the artists of the West, they never use models but paint from memory all the subtle and complicated rhythms of bodies in action” (28). Similarly, *Grandfather Blalock* (1998) (fig. 6), sometimes simply called *Shawnee*, is of my grandfather, who died before I was born. It is a compilation of memories, of stories around the kitchen table and camp, and of my father (his son), who seemed to me to resemble him. With apologies to Jacobson, I also relied on a faded tin-type photograph.

CF: Ruthe, your description of *Grandfather Blalock* is striking in the way you are able to transform memories into visual form. Your choice to sometimes title this painting *Shawnee* leads us into a consideration of the relationship between personal memory and cultural memory. While the man depicted in your painting has personal meaning for you because he is your grandfather, his image also serves as a reminder of his identity as a Shawnee. Like this painting, there is often a dynamic relationship between cultural memories and the personal memories of individuals creating works of art. This relationship is especially vital for Indian people, where cultural survivance is at stake.

The visual artist C. Maxx Stevens (Seminole) raises the question of identity as it relates to personal and cultural experience. She asks, "What makes us individuals and also collectively together as Native people?" (Stevens, "Artist's Statement" 21). Indeed, it is through her art that she successfully explores both individual and collective identity, explaining that her art "is my way to share my beliefs and philosophy, my world, my past, my family, and my culture, the Seminole nation" (21). All of these are inextricably intertwined in her art. The interplay between cultural and personal memory plays a central role in her installation *Aunt Nelly* (1994) (fig. 7). Born in Wewoka, Oklahoma, but raised in Kansas, Stevens holds Oklahoma as an important place in her memories. As she describes, "I had a strong connection to Oklahoma because I would go there in the summer. I always remember the Oklahoma summers, partly because of my Aunt Nelly. She was my favorite aunt and an important member of the family and tribe" (qtd. in McMaster 153). The installation *Aunt Nelly* simulates the experience of sitting in her aunt's kitchen. It is comprised of a square-shaped table set with a bowl within a bowl in the center and four cups for the imagined individuals gathered there. Wild onions, an annual delicacy in Oklahoma, tie the installation specifically to an Oklahoma kitchen, just as the title relates the installation to Stevens's aunt. Each cup is filled to varying capacities with coffee, and the dark stains evident on the inside of each cup suggest that these cups have been used repeatedly over time for similar gatherings evoked by the installation. The viewer is impelled to imagine the intimate conversations of four individuals talking at this table, lingering over their coffee and sharing their life experiences. The bowl in the center of the table serves as a unifying element, reminding us of the connections between this imagined group of coffee drinkers.

In *Aunt Nelly* Stevens commemorates her aunt on both a personal and cultural level. The installation is a personal tribute to a woman whom Stevens personally loved. However, Stevens also pays homage to her aunt for her role as an important member of the Seminole Nation. As Stevens explains, "She showed me how the Native community was like a family and how sharing times with others was



Fig. 7. Stevens, C. Maxx. *Aunt Nelly*. 1994. Mixed media temporary installation, 5 X 8 X 8 ft. With permission from C. Maxx Stevens.

important and spiritually nourishing” (qtd. in Harlan 32). Similarly, a book placed casually on a bench by the table includes poems about Aunt Nelly that recognize her capacity for humor, which Stevens personally appreciated, and that acknowledge how special she was to her tribe (Stevens, e-mail). Thus, personal memories of a deceased aunt are eloquently combined with cultural memories of the Seminole Nation as a whole.

MDP: “The heart is constructed of a promise to love. As it distributes the blood of memory and need through the body its song reminds us of the promise—a promise that is electrical in impulse and radiation” (Harjo, *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* 48). So says Joy Harjo. Muskogee Creek, Tulsa born and raised, mother, grandmother, musician, painter, filmmaker, Joy Harjo is—simply put—among our finest living poets. In the above quotation, memory is visceral, and, like Creek culture, it circulates throughout the body of her work. And it is precisely the visceral that she often taps into to make the kind of connections between identity, culture, and

memory that Cynthia has mentioned. Also, like C. Maxx Stevens, Harjo writes about the significance of remembering daily activities and everyday items: "The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat / to live" (*The Woman* 68).

CF: Ah, the kitchen table. The kitchen is the origin, in part, of Ruthe's memories of her grandfather and of Stevens's memories of her aunt. What we ingest and digest at that kitchen table, of course, is not just food, but thoughts, ideas, and memories.

MDP: Precisely. The kitchen table appears in the work of so many women artists. Moreover, Harjo's ability to link past thoughts, events, and ideas to the ragged edges of present, often urban realities is a defining characteristic of her work. With a stunning mix of overlapping images and juxtapositions that so often mark her poetry as prophetic, painterly, and, as Womack argues, Creek in subject matter and sensibility, it is no surprise that Harjo likens her writing to the art of her friend, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Flathead Salish). According to Harjo, "Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's paintings are rich with levels of dream stuff intermixed with hard reality" (*The Woman* 59). "Levels of dream stuff" rub up against reality in the body of Harjo's work too, and therefore her memory takes many forms. In some of her poems, memories are worn by children, in some they are carried by the land itself or by our human bodies. In other poems memories are sparked by encounters with street people—like that man from Jemez, "curled in the snow on the sidewalk" (*She Had Some Horses* 15)—or in Los Angeles, "a crazy boy teetering there / on the sidewalk against morning traffic / too far gone to even ask for a / quarter" (*How We Became Human* 192). And of course the ancestors arrive. As Harjo has said of her horses, they just show up. Often they show up not to "serve as a quick, romantic, ancestral moment" (Womack 233) and not even always as a particular one or ones remembered, but almost the reverse. They remember us: "they do not forget us in the concrete and paper illusions" (*The Woman* 29).

CF: Maria, your discussion of the Harjo/Quick-to-See Smith connection and Harjo's reflection on ancestors and memory brings to mind Quick-to-See Smith's collagraph titled *Celebrate 40,000 Years of American History* (1995). The title is stenciled onto an image of

variously sized rabbits inspired by ancient petroglyphs. These images engraved on rocks have been found throughout the Americas and, as Quick-to-See Smith reminds us, date as far back as 40,000 years ago. Quick-to-See Smith's collagraph takes note of the 40,000-year history of indigenous peoples in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans. At the same time, it is a cutting reminder of how Western constructs of "American" history have rendered these ancient roots invisible. Anyone interested in the Harjo/Quick-to-See Smith connection should take a look at *Subversions/Affirmations*, a 1996 exhibition catalogue that surveys Quick-to-See Smith's art. The catalogue includes an essay by Harjo in which she continues to reflect upon the artist's insight into American Indian history and culture.

MDP: Harjo and Quick-to-See Smith do appear to be twin souls, Cynthia. The closer they get to the ancestors, the more contemporary and, as you aptly point out, cutting their work becomes. For Harjo in particular, Muskogee ideas about the importance of memory are evocative, and she uses them "to decenter the idea that things European are normative" (Womack 242). For her, as for many other Oklahoma artists, memory is a proactive vehicle in her work, an expression of the desire for fair play in this country of ongoing imperialism. By activating memory in language, the poet resists historical erasure, makes cultural connections, thwarts chronology, and demonstrates how to be in time that is timeless. "Skeleton of Winter," an early poem from *She Had Some Horses*, clearly depicts the value of being in unbroken time. It's a quiet piece, not much remarked on by critics. Like the images in Quick-to-See Smith's collagraph, Harjo's speaker interacts with ancient petroglyphs:

I did dance with a prehistoric horse
 years and births later
 near a cave wall
 late winter (26–29)

Before the speaker can dance with the prehistoric horse, however, she must break away from the icy silence and stagnation of chronology:

These winter days
 I've remained silent
 as a whiteman's watch
 keeping time (1–4)

Tied to the tic-toc of the Western clock, her days are cold and dark and empty. How can there be vitality or meaning in a world that moves mechanically, in one direction only? Even in the opening stanzas, though, there is a glimmer of memory, another way of being, which in turn creates the possibility of vision. Not surprisingly, the breakaway moment comes with Rabbit:

Rabbits get torn under
 cars that travel at night
 but come out the other
 side, not bruised
 breathing soft
 like no fear. (14–19)

With one quick pivot, we're on the move. By recalling the Muskogee trickster figure of Rabbit, the speaker reconnects herself to her culture, to Creek time, really, and that connection activates a sense of self that is enlivened by memory. She can breathe. As the ending stanzas reverberate with sound and light and motion, she pulls us into a world that swings to the rhythm of creation where all life exists at the same time, where she dances and the sun sings. The ancient is alive because she is alive and because she remembers.

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 (35–41)

Her experience of the rhythm of time, of time that remarks on the past and that is full of dreams and stories, moves us out of the chron-

ological into that which is “electrical in impulse and radiation” (48). We exist, finally, in the presence of meaning.

TRANSFORMATION

MDP: Obviously all of the categories that we are discussing overlap and intermingle. However, in our collaborative search for the power and diversity of Oklahoma artists and writers, the idea of marked change, of transformation, stands out as a constant. It is all over the place in Oklahoma Indian country, literally, literarily, and artistically.

RBJ: Of course transformation means many things to many people in Indian country. The most obvious connotation is that which refers to or suggests the supernatural, a change from human form to something else or vice versa. Shape-shifters is another name and is mentioned often in song and storytelling. My painting *Delaware M'ising Figure* (1994) (fig. 8) depicts a male tribal member wearing a bear robe and a carved mask, portraying the supernatural being of the twelve-day Delaware Big House Ceremony. The ceremony was put to sleep following World War II, when no one was left to sing the songs and recite their visions.

The last complete ceremony was held in Oklahoma in the 1920s, although an abbreviated five-day form of the ceremony was held during World War II to pray for the servicemen. And, by the way, when Indians pray, the prayers are always for “everyone, everywhere”—“for the whole world,” they always say. Sadly, the house where the ceremony was held was allowed to fall into ruin, and the carved posts and other equipment were placed in museums. The half red-half black carved mask is in the National Museum of the American Indian. The red refers to life or good, while the black relates to death and bad or evil. The one who wore this outfit recounted that he “felt stronger, he could run, jump fences and bushes,” so in a sense he was transformed.

MDP: Ruthe, Paula Gunn Allen talks about transformation just like you do, as a total change that involves the supernatural: “Transformation, or more directly, metamorphosis, is the oldest tribal

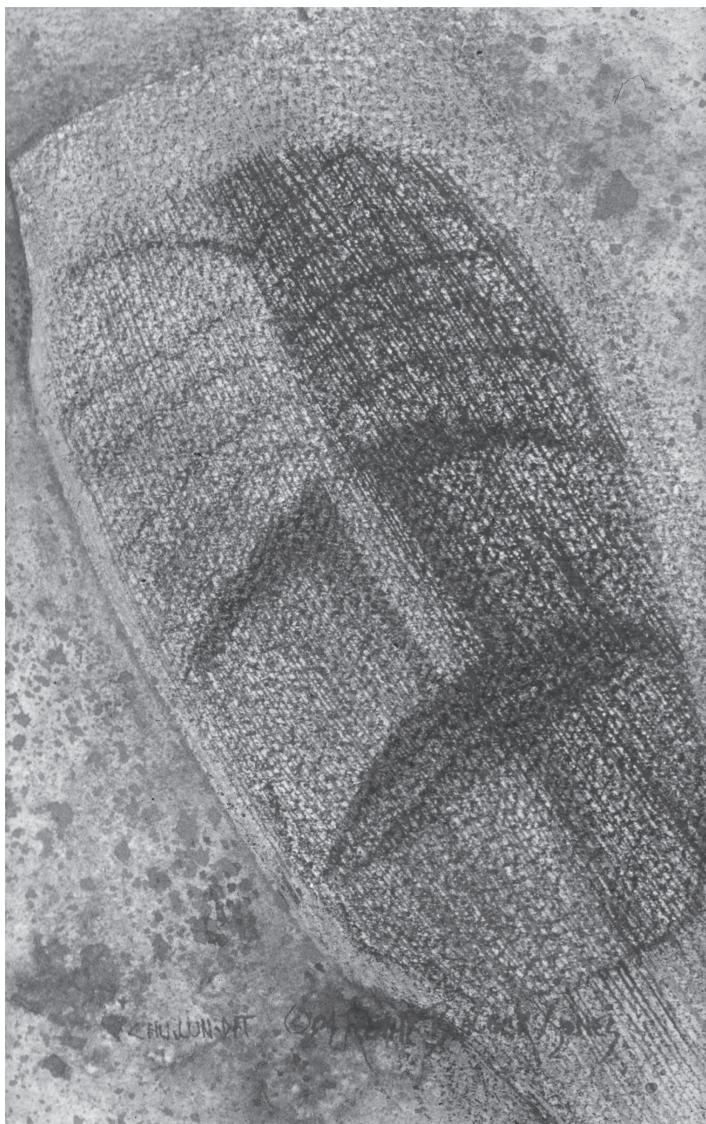


Fig. 8. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Delaware M'ising Figure*. 1994. Gouache on paper, 10H X 8W in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.

ceremonial theme" (162). If we browse through the titles of Harjo's poetry we can see its flare: "Deer Dancer," "Death Is A Woman," "The Place The Musician Became A Bear" (and anyone who knew Jim Pepper knew he was a bear). Or, remember the fragility and power of Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan's presentation at the NEH Summer Institute? She told us during her visit that she wants to make beauty in the world, and she showed us in her novel *Power* that transformation often requires a long struggle. Hogan's sixteen-year-old narrator, Omishto, struggles throughout the story to sort out the difference between what she believes and what she knows. Finally Omishto is able to change her mind. She moves away from a Western way of knowing to a tribal consciousness that her mentor, Ama, has modeled for her: "It has always been Ama's skill to live with the world and not against it" (47).

To live with the world and not against it requires some doing. Paula Gunn Allen again provides helpful directions: "Within the American Indian poetry of extinction and regeneration" are "poets who have located a means of negotiating the perilous path between love and death, between bonding and dissolution, between tribal consciousness and modern alienation" (162). The negotiation that Allen refers to resembles an energy transfer. For writers, that transfer needs the right words to be seen and felt. Joy Harjo and LeAnne Howe find the right words. For instance, in a stunning piece by Howe entitled "IT Geography," the *we* of the poem do more than live with the world. They make it.

When we leave our body,
the sound is so potent
it cracks open the stars
and our momentum ricochets around (1-4)

The intransitive verbs in this first stanza—"leave" (1), "cracks" (3), "ricochets" (4)—impel us into the action and sound of sexual, sensual creation during which "our mind is space unbounded / everywhere we are, everything is" (7-8). This is it! The extravagance of this coupling is so powerful that in English and in Choctaw, the stars

(fichik) crack themselves open. Death, too, plays a part—"as rivers of ash collide with memory" (11); never the end, but always already part of the drama of creation. "We circle. . . . We blush. . . . We are hot. . . . we spasm. . . . We are born" (14, 19, 24, 29). Unexpectedly, joyfully, the speakers make and remake us and rejuvenate the earth—the whole quivering mystery of it.

Another idea about how to make transformation happen occurs repeatedly in the body of Joy Harjo's work and is expressed as the need to praise the imagination: "The imagining needs praise as does any living thing" (*The Woman* 18). I clearly remember LeAnne Howe standing in the Longhouse at Evergreen State College, calling on Kierkegaard to remind us that the more preposterous an idea is, the less support an idea has, the greater the resolve to believe it. Harjo and Howe engage the preposterous. They inculcate hope. Harjo imagines a world without colonialism: "We have seen it" (*In Mad Love* 1). She imagines a world where there are tables of food for everyone, and in fact she imagines the world restored to the indigenous consciousness that Omishto dances into at the end of Hogan's *Power*. The writers are suggesting, of course, that we have to imagine change in order to make it happen.

Finally, in "The Story of America: A Tribalography," Howe truly enlivens our thinking about the ways in which language and transformation are intimate partners. As you mentioned Ruthe, stories about shape-shifting abound in Oklahoma. However, Howe's depiction of a merger between two previously independent life forms, or, to put it another way, her analysis of the ways in which Choctaw language and storytelling alter physical reality, has sumptuous hermeneutical implications. Stories of the warrior who changes into a deer, for example, or her grandmother's story about an event that led to her own transformation into a bird and then back into her human form, can be interpreted to suggest, among other things, "a biology lesson about creating kin with people and things who are different than us" (35). As Howe points out, each story like this is "nukfokechi" (32) because "It brings forth knowledge and inspires us to make the eventful leap that one thing leads to another" (31).

What we have here is a theory of power: the power of a tribal

philosophy, literally embedded in the Choctaw language, to spark interaction, cooperation, and the liberating sense of mutual dependence. “I am saying that tribalogy is a story that links Indians and non-Indians” (46). Howe’s grandmother’s stories of birds are connected to the latest scientific discourse on evolution and symbiosis; which is connected to the Iroquois Confederacy’s contribution to colonial thinking about what constitutes good governance; which is connected to a contemporary Navajo story about uninvited guests; which is connected to Dakota author Susan Power’s comment in the essay that “Every track and trace of the American experience runs through our communities, our culture” (qtd. in Howe, “The Story” 45); which is connected to the very last sound Howe left resonating in our ears as she ended her talk at the NEH Summer Institute—she sang, twice and beautifully, the lines from a song known all over the globe: “because the world is round / it turns me on.”

CF: Maria, you have beautifully described through Howe’s writing that a profound recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings and things leads us to a place of transformation. I’d like to turn our attention to the clay artist Anita Fields (Osage and Creek) because she so powerfully expresses that potential for transformation through an investigation of her spiritual and cultural traditions. Indeed, I would like to suggest that she visually expresses Howe’s notion of tribalogy. Fields was born in Oklahoma and lived there through the first grade. Although her family then settled in Denver, they returned to Oklahoma regularly to visit relatives still living there and ultimately returned there when she married. Fields received her BFA from Oklahoma State University and currently lives and works in Stillwater, Oklahoma. She explains that in her art she is “searching all the time for the truth.” That search for truth has often led the artist to what she describes as “the strength that I see in women” (interview). *Regarding the Elements of Being #2* (2002) (fig. 9), one of her most compelling representations of female power, is composed of three six-foot female figures standing in front of giveaway bundles placed on small platforms. The title of the work is derived from an Osage prayer that ends with the instruction to “take care of the elements of being.” Although inspired by real women in the artist’s life,

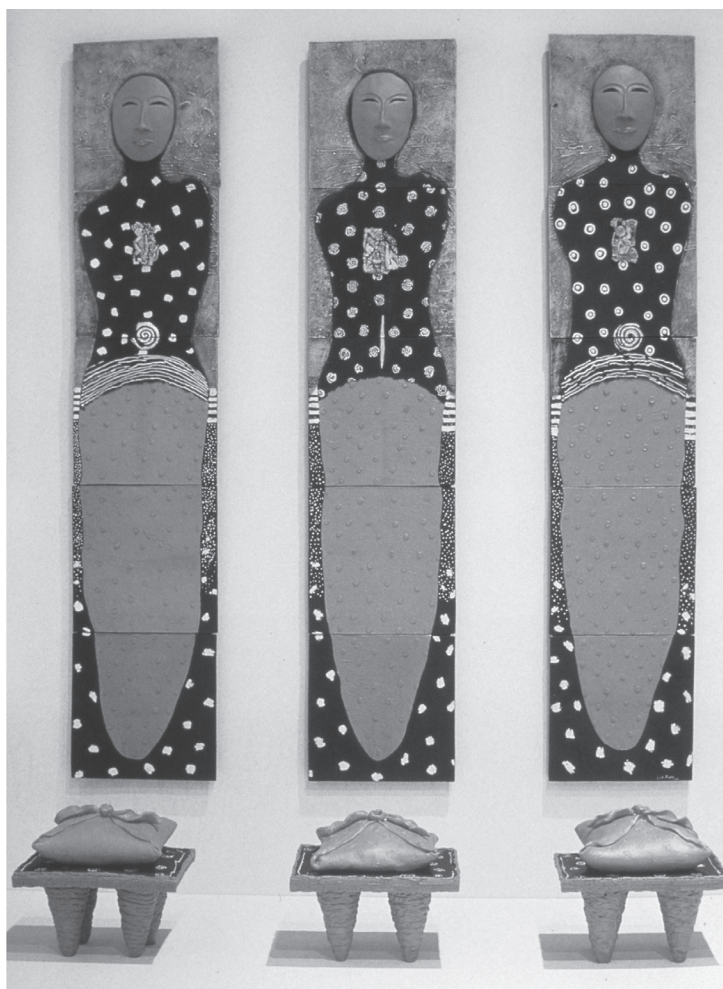


Fig. 9. Fields, Anita. *Regarding the Elements of Being #2*. 2002. Clay slips, mixed media, terra sigillata slips, 7ft. X 5 ft. X 25 in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Anita Fields.

these three female figures move beyond individual portraits, as their masklike faces and their generalized features transcend references to specific individuals. All three figures appear as if to emerge from the earth, their lower bodies like roots embedded in the stratified earth. Solidly grounded in the earth, these monumental figures stand confidently in front of their bundles, conveying strength, determination, and power. The bundles refer to the Osage tradition of the giveaway, in which gifts wrapped in bundles are presented at celebrations and ceremonies as a means to both honor the recipient and share material belongings. Fields explains the symbolism of the bundles, stating, "They are the bundles of my grandmas. They are universal, especially for women, in the way we carry our important things, the things we keep and the things we give away, and how we prepare for our journeys" (qtd. in Shown Harjo 71). Coming full circle from the topic of travel discussed at the beginning of this conversation, Fields returns us to a focus on the journey. However, in this instance, the journey refers to a spiritual quest for truth, a transformational experience inspired by knowledge and understanding of Osage spiritual and cultural traditions.

DANCE

CF: In our exploration of the themes that we have selected for our discussion, Fields makes clear for us the connection between transformation and travel. Ruthe, your beautiful collection of dance paintings most eloquently ties all of the themes together. Dance can be celebratory, transformational, healing. What else?

MDP: Yes, Cynthia, "what else?" is the question. As for me and dance: Ruthe, I keep a copy of your painting called *Dancing Girls* in my office as a reminder of the beautiful places where language cannot go. Joy Harjo took an entire audience there this year when she performed at Powell's Bookstore in Portland, Oregon. I do mean that she "performed." Rather than read her selected poems, she literally sang each one. At the end of her reading, she—and all of us in attendance—danced around the bookshelves to a Creek stomp dance song. Everybody was smiling.

RBJ: Of course there are probably as many reasons or explanations for dance as there are dancers. For me it is a form of renewal. After a dance I am able to return to the everyday world. Dance is also a form of validation, and it is a frequent and favorite subject of my work. Figures in my work are composites or representative types. Nevertheless, it is a high compliment when Indian people like my work. When viewing my work, people have said such things to me as “I know that guy” or “I used to go with her.” Allan Houser said a similar thing at the 1999 Shared Visions Conference, when he recounted the experience of an elder viewing his work who said: “I know all those men.” For Houser, that was a supreme compliment. I/we Indian artists who feel this way are sometimes criticized because “Indians don’t buy art,” which is a way of saying that we don’t paint for the market.

Just as I do not do portraits, I also try to paint composite or representative outfits and not copy real or existing ones. It’s a way of respecting the makers or owners. One’s outfit is very important and personal and is actually an extension or part of the total person—in Indian country, that is. The saying that “imitation is the sincerest form of flattery” does not apply in Indian country. The copying of a design or an outfit of another person is an insult, not a form of flattery.

Besides the paintings I have previously discussed, I would like to add one of my dance paintings, *Princess NEI* (2001) (fig. 10). It is acrylic on canvas with mylar and teeth. The “NEI” in the title means “Not Ellis Island,” and the girl in the red dress has a gold tooth. I was amusing myself, but my daughters tell me that I date myself because gold has not been used for a long time to fill teeth. But I wanted/needed to do it for the painting, so I did. I am also convinced that some Indian Health Service dentists out in remote areas continue the outmoded practice, although I am told it is becoming fashionable again. *Buckskin Dress* (1998) (fig. 11) is a Masonite cutout that I consider my homage to Jim Dine and his bathrobe “self-portraits,” which are flat images of bathrobes collaged or stenciled onto the canvas. I said it could also be related to James Luna’s (Luiseño) photo



Fig. 10. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Princess NEI (Not Ellis Island)*. 2001. Acrylic and mylar on canvas, 24H X 30W in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.

blow-ups of himself in his performance piece *Take a Picture with a Real Indian* (2001).

cf: Ruthe, I don't want to dilute our discussion of dance, but I'd like to briefly comment on *Buckskin Dress* in relation to pop artist Jim Dine and performance artist James Luna. Once again, we see a Bacone artist expanding the school's tradition, taking it in new directions by engaging the ideas of artists not directly related to the school. In all three works—yours, Dine's, and Luna's—clothing is used to raise questions about identity. Dine takes an everyday object—a bathrobe—to create his self-portrait, while you present a more formal buckskin dress. But in both cases, the viewer is left to consider the meaning of this clothing, what it signifies, since no specific individual is wearing the bathrobe or the dress. In *Take a Picture with a Real Indian*, Luna presents himself wearing three different forms of clothing to suggest that the Western idea of a "real"



Fig. 11. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Buckskin Dress*. 1998. Acrylic on Masonite cut-out with satin hanger, 36H X 24W in. Private collection. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.



Fig. 12. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Round Dance*. 1992. Gouache on Fabriano, 20H X 17W in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.

Indian is a social construct based on markers like clothing. Like Luna's work, *Buckskin Dress* is also maker of Indian identity. I'll stop here so that we can get back to the subject of dance. But I want to emphasize my point that there is nothing "traditional" about your work in its engagement with pop and performance art, except that it reminds us that the Bacone style has historically been, and continues to be, a dynamic, changing style.

RBJ: Agreed! But now back to the subject of dance. Another piece, *Round Dance* (1992) (fig. 12), portrays the movement, stateliness, and dignity of the ladies' Southern style of dance. We are sometimes teasingly called "walkers" by the Northern tribes, who dance in a more spirited fashion.

I could go on and on about dance and dancers, but I will stop with a comment that describes my last piece, *Men Dancers Coming In* (1998) (fig. 13). One of my students, an accomplished dancer, winner of many competitions, said this to me about the gourd dance: "When I am dancing, I am not tired, not conscious of anything or



Fig. 13. Jones, Ruthe Blalock. *Men Dancers Coming In* (Grand Entry series). 1998. Gouache on Fabriano, 20H X 17W in. Collection of the artist. With permission from Ruthe Blalock Jones.

anyone around me. My feet do not even seem to touch the ground.” And his description beautifully describes *Men Dancers Coming In*, from my grand entry series. At the grand entry, dancers enter the arena according to their dress and style of dance. They are led in by the flags, eagle staff, veterans, head staff, princesses, and tribal dignitaries.

One of the most thrilling things to me at Indian gatherings is the realization that among the singers at the drum, the dancers, and in the audience are educators, physicians, attorneys, judges, executives, and other professionals. We are artists, teachers, and entrepreneurs; yet we are still singers, dancers, storytellers, shell shakers, stomp dance leaders, and medicine men. We are road men, bead workers, cooks, and ball players—and against all odds, we are still here. By all accounts, we should have disappeared, assimilated into the dominant culture and become extinct. But like our ancestors, the artists before us, we honor those who have gone on as we record for our descendants our ceremonies and our reaction to the forces of American politics and society. We are still here. We are still here!

CONCLUSION

CF: Ruthe, your words are a powerful recognition of Indian survivance and a perfect place to end our conversation. But I will add one more thing, just to plant our feet, so to speak, back in Oklahoma, that special place from which our discussion originates. In a 1991 interview, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds described his installation *Is What Is* (1992). He said, "It's a directional kind of installation, kind of how I sit here in the middle of America, in Oklahoma, and things are moving around me" (qtd. in Abbott 53–54). Heap of Birds's reflections on Oklahoma suggest its position as a focal point of art and literature. Inarguably, a significant group of writers and artists have emerged from Oklahoma to gain prominent positions in the national and international arena. I hope we have provided an alternative perspective on Indian artistic and literary production, positioning this work not outside the mainstream but in one of the centers—Oklahoma—created by native artists and writers themselves.

MDP: So, Gert. Whaddya think?

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“The Way I Heard It”

Autobiography, Tricksters, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller*

LYNN DOMINA

Buried near the end of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Storyteller* is a statement that begins as straightforward fact and concludes with a tongue-in-cheek reference that serves both to taunt readers and to clue them in on a means of interpreting the book. In “Toe’osh: A Laguna Coyote Story,” the speaker asserts:

Some white men came to Acoma and Laguna a hundred
years ago
and they fought over Acoma land and Laguna women, and
even now
some of their descendants are howling in
the hills southeast of Laguna. (237)

Among those descendants is, of course, Silko herself, whose great-grandfather, Robert G. Marmon, was a white man who married a woman from the village of Pagate in Old Laguna. After this woman’s death, Marmon married her sister, Marie Anaya, whom Silko identifies as her great-grandmother. As a person of mixed-race ancestry, Silko metaphorizes herself in the quotation above as a coyote, the quintessential trickster. When a narrator presents herself as a trickster, especially within a text that can be classified as autobiographical (even if somewhat equivocally), readers should proceed with more than their usual caution, assuming that the autobiographical pact is being manipulated if not actually broken. For although *Storyteller* includes numerous stories that may be fictional and that clearly do

not situate Silko as protagonist, I will be treating this book as autobiography; among my goals here will be to examine the relationships among the more obviously autobiographical sections and the passages that could also be classified as myth, legend, or fiction. I am not so much out to argue that *Storyteller* is autobiography but rather to examine how our reading practices shift when we treat it as life writing.¹

Since a capacity to shift shapes is among the most prominent and universal characteristics of a trickster, mixed-race identity almost inevitably provides one with a precondition for trickster ability. Within the terms of *Storyteller*, mixed-race identity is analogous to, if not invariably identical to, shape shifting. The “misfortune of Trickster,” according to Andrew Wiget, is “to embody two or more social and ethical domains,” and “that creates his dilemma and our crisis of interpretation” (92). According to which social or ethical norms ought we interpret a given text? Although Silko positions herself most firmly on the Indian side of the Laguna-white hyphen, her trickster’s ability to shift shapes is mirrored in the generic indeterminacy of her text. The hyphen linking yet separating Laguna and white camouflages a lacuna of identity. Such a hyphen asserts that a person is neither absolutely Laguna nor absolutely white, yet it also functions as a fulcrum, permitting a shift from one to the other, especially when identity is perceived through cultural performance rather than physical appearance. Many members of Silko’s audience will be her ethnic peers and other Native Americans educated in Native traditions. Yet because Silko is also writing to some extent across that hyphen, from a Laguna context to a white audience, an audience educated according to traditional Western conventions, her transgression of conventional Western generic boundaries will confound those readers who will not quite know how to classify this particular collection of writings—and by confounding classification will implicitly interrogate the idea of classification itself.

Like many books written by Native Americans and published during the second half of the twentieth century, *Storyteller* is composed in both poetry and prose, but more crucial to my purposes are the additional generic distinctions that can be drawn within it. The

book contains several short stories that may or may not be grounded in fact, as well as mythology, ritual material, an excerpt from a letter, and photographs. Some pages read as much like a scrapbook as like a book. Additional passages consist of apparently straightforward autobiographical information, and although these passages comprise only a minority of the book, it is nevertheless *Storyteller's* place within the broad category of life writing that I wish to consider.

The characteristic of Silko as trickster superimposed on the figure of Silko as narrator informs the mixed-genre nature and structure of the text. According to Paula Gunn Allen, mythology is among other things "a shaped system of reference that allows us to order and thus comprehend perception and knowledge" (105). Mythology, in other words, serves to impede chaos, even to render chaos invisible. Yet tricksters disrupt order, revealing it as a constructed rather than natural element of life—even as they are also credited as "the establisher of culture" (Radin 125). According to Claude Levi-Strauss, myth is precisely what is not lost in the translation; it is "infinitely translatable"—that is, accessible across cultures—but even if the story itself can be translated, a reader must be at least moderately assimilated into the myth-making culture to interpret the story sensibly (Krupat, *For Those* 2). Even in these cases, tricksters defy that sort of translation, entertaining and instructing insiders while thriving on the confusion of outsiders. Mythology explains the world; tricksters declare every explanation insufficient. Myths about tricksters perhaps attempt an impossible synthesis of order and disorder yet also deflect the anxiety that proceeds from chaos. But what of stories in which a trickster is not only the protagonist but also its narrator, whether or not protagonist and narrator refer to the same character?

A conventional definition of autobiography asserts that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist of a given text are identical. The "I" used by each refers to the same person. The various selves each claiming reference in "I" locate themselves in the roots of their composite term: "auto" referring to the self who writes, the author; "bio" referring to the self living in history, the protagonist; and "graph" referring to the self who is written, who is created by

the text, the narrator.² In addition, according to Philippe Lejeune, the relationships among these three selves are founded in a pact the author implicitly makes through the narrator with the reader: to tell the truth about the protagonist (13). The mixed-genre nature of *Storyteller* complicates the relationships among its various narrators and protagonists to such an extent that the category of “autobiography” becomes a site of interrogation. That is, autobiography then permits interrogation not only of the protagonist but also of itself as a category of knowledge. And by classifying herself as a trickster, Silko confirms that she is writing from a culture that has not signed this pact, that anticipates a different type of relationship between narrator and audience, that approaches the category of “truth” through teasing, taunting, and humor. Yet it is precisely Silko’s competence as a trickster that permits her book to stake its claim within the territory of autobiography.

In his analysis of earlier Native American life writing, Arnold Krupat describes such autobiographies as “bicultural composite composition[s]” (*For Those* 31). By this, he refers to texts that originated in oral narrations produced by Native informants in a language other than English, that were translated, most often by a bilingual Native translator, and that were then transcribed and arranged by an English-speaking anthropologist or ethnographer who became the text’s “author” and/or editor. The “Native American subject of the autobiography . . . provides its ‘content’ and its Euramerican editor . . . its ‘form’” (Krupat, *Ethnocriticism* 219). A contemporary Native American who remains bicultural such as Silko provides both the content and form of her text yet may decline to provide either the proper content or form of a given genre. *Storyteller* contains material that would be unlikely to occur in a more conventional autobiography, and it also lacks bits of information that readers might expect to find, as I will discuss below.

Most often in these early autobiographies, communication by the informant and the “author” was mutually unintelligible. Obviously, many cultural cues would have been overlooked or misinterpreted during these encounters. One easily imagines informants adopting the habits of tricksters, imagining themselves as “Mr. Coyote,”

overtly misleading the ethnographer, who might never recognize the joke's cues.³ Among the most crucial sources of misunderstanding was the Western assumption that the self exists as a deep, unique, individual entity. The "self," although it may be influenced by the life, is nevertheless separate from the life. If the life is external, empirically verifiable, active, the self is reflective, contemplative—its truth is internal and can only be determined by what it reveals, intentionally or not.⁴ And perhaps most crucially, the self as an internal entity is irrevocably linked to the self as individual. Only the product of those terms, internal and individual, produces a traditional autobiography. In earlier Native American life writing, however, informants tended not to perceive the self according to these terms. Instead, the self was communal and exterior, linked to deeds rather than to contemplation. Autobiographies were not confessional. The self was not a transparent eyeball coincidentally observing a particular life but rather a direct reflection of that life. A contemporary author who wishes to examine these assumptions regarding the self may do so through a narrator who remains identified as "I" and who tells the truth (who is, therefore, reliable) yet who perceives and situates the truth in what are, to the Western mind, unconventional, even unreliable, texts—such as mythology and folktale. Since the trickster figure is linked more closely to imagination than to fact, and in that sense to the interior life more than to the exterior, life writing narrated by a trickster would emphasize a life as it might have been imagined rather than as it might be empirically verified; tricksters contribute to the fictive character of autobiography, assisting in its move out of the house of history (Krupat, *Ethnocriticism* 230).

Some of the materials (namely, the photographs) in *Storyteller*, however, do serve as empirical verification, though still not quite as one might expect in an autobiography or memoir. Many of the photographs seem to confirm the sections of the book that are most conventionally autobiographical, and they might initially seem to undermine the portions of the book that are more mythological—for photographs directly documenting the mythic sections are conspicuously absent. Yet Silko also seems to use the photos to verify stories that read as fiction. Immediately following "A Geronimo

Story,” which I will discuss at some length below, Silko places a photo of the Laguna Regulars, a band of Laguna men who had participated in the Apache Wars. Nothing in the text surrounding “A Geronimo Story” indicates that this story has been told to Silko by any member of the Laguna Regulars, yet the placement of the photo suggests that its subjects testify to the contents of the story, even if it has emerged predominantly from Silko’s imagination.⁵ The men in the photo, in other words, assert the reliability of a storyteller’s imagination. The function of this photo, an image of real men testifying to the truth of fiction, assists us also in interpreting others, particularly a concluding photo of Silko herself, staring back over the contents of her book.

Photographs do function analogously to myth, in declaring certain experiences important, in organizing knowledge pertaining to a life or lives. In many families photography is deployed specifically to confirm the family’s mythological structure; the camera is taken out when the family is all together, at holiday time, to mark occasions as special. In addition to photographs that include Silko, *Storyteller* includes pictures of her father, grandfather, great-grandparents, sisters, aunt, and others. Yet the photographs don’t actually verify the text, for much of the time the text concerns the stories these relatives told, stories that can’t be verified through documents because the stories exist beyond the realm of history. That is, the photographs don’t verify the words of her relatives that Silko reports. Part of the point of *Storyteller*, however, is that disciplinary boundaries separating myth and history create a false dichotomy. Therefore, the photograph of Silko’s Aunt Susie, for example, evokes the stories she tells.

On the opening page of *Storyteller*, Silko describes a Hopi basket containing “hundreds / of photographs” that bear particular significance to the book she aims to write. These photographs “have a special relationship to the stories as I remember them. / The photographs are here because they are part of many of the stories” (1). A still photograph is precisely not a story, however, since it lacks narrative, actions related through cause and effect. Any given still photograph could comprise a moment of exposition, complication, climax, or denouement in a number of different stories. Although

Silko's statement here is suggestively vague—which of the stories? how can they be traced? what kind of special relationship?—she does assert that the photos themselves “are part of” the stories, not that they simply illustrate the stories. Nor do the photographs merely remind her of the stories; their significance isn't linked only to the process of memory but more crucially to its product. In other words, the stories would be incomplete without the photos and the reader's interpretation of them.

Although individually the photographs are not particularly unusual—while the photographers demonstrate compositional skill that belies the casual demeanor of many of the subjects, the photographs themselves often exhibit the mood of snapshots.⁶ Rather than grouped together in the middle of the book and arranged more or less chronologically, as occurs in many biographies and autobiographies, they are scattered throughout the text. Their relationship to the surrounding text is often, but not always, clear. Silko herself is the subject of comparatively few—three, as I interpret her commentary on the photos. They initially seem to lack captions, until one turns to the back of the book, where they are listed immediately preceding the peculiarly placed Table of Contents. If one were to read *Storyteller* as it is arranged, therefore, initial apparatus for interpreting the photographs would consist only of the primary text. Only after all of the stories had been read would one receive more direct instructions on interpretation. The final photograph occurs within the captions and hence appears to comment on, or be part of, no particular story. And the captions themselves often form new stories, with Silko not simply naming the subjects but also detailing context, describing the events that preceded and/or instigated the photograph.

Readers will interpret the photographs as evidence of something, though what exactly the photographs testify to is as debatable because Silko's introduction of them—that they “have a special relationship” to the stories—is vague (1). Susan Sontag describes this dilemma:

Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. . . . A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a

given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. (5)

Timothy Dow Adams argues that both photography and autobiography “conceal as much as they reveal”; both contain “built-in ambiguity” because of “their natural relationship to the worlds they depict, which always seems more direct than it really is” (xxi). Both genres seem to (even if they don't mean to) reproduce, or at least produce images of, reality. Initially the photographs in *Storyteller* seem merely to illustrate the particular storytellers rather than to actually form part of the stories. Such a statement, however, illustrates a Western bias toward distinguishing between the self and the life, the teller of the tale and the events narrated or experienced. In fact, the photographs document the truth of legendary time in addition to historic time, for *Storyteller* illustrates how historic time is subsumed in legendary time. A photograph of Aunt Susie, for example, doesn't simply prove that she lived—for why would we need such proof?—but testifies to her words, which themselves sometimes reveal that a story's apparent topic isn't the point at all.

To the extent that the photographs confuse as much as they enlighten, or at least fail to confirm facts that might be in question, or on re-reading especially appear to confirm a variety of truth whose veracity is reliant upon something other than empirical fact—just to that extent do the photographs also assist Silko in her goals as trickster. In another context, Silko has herself suggested that the most intriguing function of photographs within print text is not direct illumination of that text:

I am interested in photographic images that obscure rather than reveal; I am intrigued with photographs that don't tell you what you are supposed to notice, that don't illustrate the text, that don't serve the text, but that form a part of the field of vision for the reading of the text and thereby become part of the reader's experience of the text. (*Yellow Woman* 169)

The stories in *Storyteller* that Silko declares “can be traced in the photographs” can be traced as one traces events across a “field” (1). We

don't see in these photographs what we expect to see in photographs, yet we do see something. By refusing to fulfill expectations of "what you are supposed to notice," the photographs (as well as much of the other content of the book) refocus our attention on details that we might otherwise overlook. Rather than simply reduce the text to particular illustrations of it, the photographs produce a proliferation of meaning as text and image respond, if obliquely, to each other.

Silko introduces Aunt Susie as a woman who is conscious of her role and responsibility within the transitional generation; she recognizes that traditional knowledge and cultural practices will inevitably be overwhelmed by Western interpretations of the world. Yet Aunt Susie does not simply oppose Laguna tradition to mainstream American culture, with one designated desirable and the other undesirable. She has been educated at the Carlisle Indian School and Dickinson College, and she values knowledge acquired from books. She exploits the technology of writing, however, not because she has converted to the content of Western interpretive strategies but in order to preserve traditional knowledge. She still conveys knowledge orally, though, whenever Silko asks a question. The story Silko tells in the voice of Aunt Susie begins with a little girl running away over what seems to be a fairly trite reason—her mother is unable to make her *yashtoah*, a cornmeal crust. After the girl gathers enough wood so that her mother can make a fire and eventually the *yashtoah*, the girl's sticks turn into snakes. Offended, the girl threatens to drown herself. At this point, the story could seem to embody any number of themes: look at what happens to little girls who lack patience, look at what happens to little girls who aren't careful enough with their chores, look at what happens to little girls who demand too much of their mothers.

But the story doesn't end here, nor are any of the details that have been presented so far the most engaging to Aunt Susie. When the girl's mother discovers her daughter's plans, she quickly prepares the *yashtoah*, gathers the girl's clothes, and chases after her. Just as the mother is about to catch her daughter, the girl drowns herself. Here again, we could stop to consider the story's themes, but Aunt Susie continues. The mother spreads out the girl's clothing, and it turns

into colorful butterflies. For Silko, Aunt Susie's tone here at the end of the story is most memorable. Initially she speaks as a maternal presence, until the clothing transforms into butterflies; "then her voice would change and I could hear the excitement and wonder / and the story wasn't sad any longer" (15). Aunt Susie's awe emerges from the conjunction of her vision of beautiful, delicate creatures with the explanation of their presence, one that originates in grief and tragedy. This story is not told in historical time, with verifiable dates (though like many teleological myths, it is set in a verifiable place), but it is told by a woman who recognizes history, whose formal education has left her "particularly" engaged in history (3). Aunt Susie, therefore, can't be dismissed as primitive, savage, or ignorant. Her appreciation for this story must be taken seriously even by those inclined to dismiss its content.

As a character Aunt Susie links historical to legendary time; she embodies the belief systems of both. The photographs of her, then, cannot be interpreted simply as testimony to the myth of progress. The photographs of Aunt Susie—and, by extension, those of other characters—testify not to the triumph of technology but to the infinitely expansive narrative web woven of legend, history, and prophecy. The photographs are "part of" Aunt Susie's stories because the stories themselves are continuous, undifferentiated by Western disciplinary boundaries. The stories that Aunt Susie tells and the stories that Silko tells about her contribute to one complete story—that also consists, of course, of many other elements—and the photographs convey the characters' identities as created both in and of the stories.

In telling stories of Aunt Susie, Silko is also telling stories of herself, for Silko as a child elicited the stories from Aunt Susie, and her memory of herself asking questions elicits the stories once again, this time for a community of readers. Throughout *Storyteller* Silko's emphasis when she reveals the most unequivocally autobiographical material is on her membership within a family and her family's membership within a culture. Hers is not the story of a heroic individual whose unique significance validates her autobiographical impulse. To emphasize the significance of her cultural inheritance,

she relies on the mythological stories that she's been told rather than on events from the historical past; even when she tells stories set in the contemporary moment or the recent past, their meaning is revealed through traditional belief systems. As a narrator Silko achieves a place in her community that replaces the traditional autobiographer's goals: to evade mortality through text, to write the story of a life in which no death is possible, to conclude the story of the protagonist before the life has ended. For in terms of plot, the major difference between biography and autobiography is death, which may loom but may never appear at the climax of an autobiography. In *Storyteller*, however, the protagonist sometimes emerges as Silko's community rather than Silko's ego; the narrator achieves immortality through communal membership and hence need not emphasize her individuality to achieve the same goal. Such a communal identity on the part of the author significantly affects the role of her community of readers. *Storyteller's* readers are brought into Silko's community, and the two communities merge, whereas when a community of readers enters the privacy of a writer's interior self as generally occurs in more conventional autobiographies, that community grows diffuse as each reader is isolated by the boundaries of the authorial and narratorial ego.

In the narrative poem "The Storyteller's Escape," placed near the end of the book, the narrator's particular identity is unclear, as is the storyteller's. In this poem the storyteller demonstrates the function of stories, particularly autobiographical ones, in facilitating immortality. Here, the storyteller's "escape" initially seems to refer to her success in fleeing with her people from an unnamed enemy. The storyteller's responsibility during these escapes is continuously to look back in order to notice who perishes where, so that she may commemorate their lives later. During this escape, however, she herself falters. Sitting down and closing her eyes to the sun, she worries that no one will see where she has died, that no one will be able to tell her story completely or correctly, that she will, in other words, fully die. True to her calling, she makes up a story in which a child does look back and understand the storyteller's thoughts. The storyteller is consoled paradoxically through the grief that she imagines

others will feel. Although this escape story seems to conclude with the storyteller's vow to "die just to spite" the enemy, to be dead before they can arrive to kill her, the child lives on in the storyteller's mind (251). Her enemies never arrive, so four days later, when the people return, she tells them the story that she has imagined, the best one yet, how the people mourn her death because of her ability with stories, although she is, of course, still alive. Once again, she has escaped not only the enemy but also death.

The language and tone of this story indicate that it is set in legendary time. Explanations of tradition are prefaced with the phrase "in those days" (248). Characters are referred to through their physical characteristics—"the pregnant woman / the crippled boy"—rather than by name (248). Even the village remains unnamed. And of course, the action is broken into two periods of four days each. Yet other details connect "The Storyteller's Escape" both to Silko and to her Aunt Susie. After the storyteller has imagined her own death scene and the child who will carry the story of her death into the future, "the sun lifted off from her shoulders like a butterfly" (252). Earlier, the sun is described as the storyteller's shawl, and now this shawl bursts into butterflies, just as the little girl's clothing in Aunt Susie's earlier story had been transformed into butterflies. In the earlier story, it is this mystical act, as I have discussed, that so awes Aunt Susie. Although the storyteller never names the child she imagines, she refers to her as "A'moo'oooh," the term, Silko has already disclosed, used as an endearment toward small children. Silko was apparently called "A'moo'oooh" so frequently by her own grandmother that she believed the expression was Marie Anaya Marmon's given name. Grandma A'moooh, as Silko most often calls her, retains traditional practices, using yucca roots for shampoo and grinding peppers on stone. These links among the characters in "The Storyteller's Escape" and the characters in *Storyteller's* more overtly autobiographical passages permit, perhaps even encourage, readers to identify the storyteller as a blend of Aunt Susie and Grandma A'moooh and the imagined girl, the one who will carry on the storytelling, as Silko.

Legendary time once again becomes fused with the contemporary moment. Yet the story also confirms my earlier suggestion

that communal membership assures immortality, for the storyteller asserts that she will live on when one member of her village repeats her story to the others—not that she is sending out the story of an isolated individual into the anonymous world, as is more often the case with conventional Westernized autobiographies. Explaining her purpose, the storyteller says,

In this way
we hold them
and keep them with us forever
and in this way
we continue (247)

The operative word in this sentence is not so much "continue" as it is "we." The people don't continue because individual ancestors bequeath genetic material to individual offspring; rather, the people as a whole remain alive by virtue of the community's stories. The syntax of the sentence would indicate not simply that the ancestors remain alive through remembered stories but, more intriguingly, that those biologically alive in the present "continue" because they continue to "hold" and "keep" the ancestors present. A given culture continues because its members acknowledge the continuous presence of the life and lessons of their ancestors—not the other way around. Ancestors don't depend on the memory of their descendants for life, but the communal identity of the descendants does depend on their memory of the ancestors.

As in much of *Storyteller*, Silko's function vis-à-vis the author/narrator/protagonist triad in "The Storyteller's Escape" is ambiguous. Clearly we can consider her the author of both if we take her name on the spine of the book as conclusive evidence, yet the legendary quality of "The Storyteller's Escape" indicates that she isn't the originary author of the story even if she is the legally copyrighted one. Delineating her the narrator is equally problematic, for many of the pieces in *Storyteller* are told from an outside and apparently omniscient perspective. When the point of view is personal, the narrator is not necessarily the clearly identifiable "I" that we have come

to associate with autobiography. The fact that Silko is or can be read as a character in more of these stories, including "The Storyteller's Escape," than might initially seem obvious and the fact that her presence when we sense it is in some of the stories unstable are among the reasons why I identify Silko as the trickster narrator of her autobiographical text.

Immortality, however, can extend in both directions, defining a character for whom both death and birth are irrelevant. This variety of immortality frequently applies to trickster figures. They have no definitive beginning: "Coyote was going along," the stories usually begin, casually taking for granted the elaborate structure of metaphysical concepts, ethical principles, and social customs that a complex tribal mythology has labored for centuries to articulate" (Wiget 86). Similarly, they outwit death, regardless of how blatantly they may seem to court it; a trickster "lurks on the margins of history, carefully evading mortality" (Wiget 86). A trickster "is often represented as an old man. Yet *old* must not be taken too literally here. It seems to imply ageless, existing from all time" (Radin 165). Although Silko does reveal many details of her family history, as do most autobiographers, she neglects the most traditional statement of all: "I was born." As the tricksterish storyteller, if not as the biological individual, Silko would find her birth irrelevant since she is "ageless." While the fact of a writer's birth may seem so obvious as to negate the necessity of a direct statement, knowledge of the circumstances of one's birth is nearly always demonstrated in autobiographies.⁷ The fact that "I" entered history at a particular moment and in particular circumstances is crucial to the meaning of many autobiographers' lives. Silko doesn't simply enter history; she also enters legendary time, a tradition of storytelling. The stories that she transmits maintain the world and its meaning. Her stories are not private but rather communal property.

For example, Silko occasionally includes a story that she acknowledges is not her own. She attributes the story of "Uncle Tony's Goat" to Simon Ortiz, who has narrated it for its entertainment value. Her attribution of the story to Ortiz, however, indicates that the genre of *Storyteller* is something other than fiction, since attributions made by

fiction writers generally occur either in the introductory apparatus of a book or in extraliterary material such as an interview. Despite the attribution, Silko's inclusion of this story in a book "authored" by herself demonstrates the fluid nature of "intellectual property" in Pueblo culture. Her inclusion of Ortiz's story does not constitute theft because the story already belongs communally to Silko. In attributing the story to Ortiz, Silko introduces it with the peculiar detail that Ortiz told the story during a 4 a.m. phone conversation about goats. This goat shares some characteristics of a trickster (his ability to escape from a carefully locked pen, for instance), yet he is more willful and malicious than many tricksters. As Uncle Tony pursues him, the goat taunts him, pausing if Uncle Tony gets too far behind, remaining consistently visible. Yet at the end of the story, Uncle Tony is more entertained than annoyed by his frustrated attempts to capture the goat.

Given Silko's direct statement that "Uncle Tony's Goat" is from a story that Ortiz has told her, readers can assume that Silko relates the story virtually as Ortiz had, that Silko expands the audience to include all of her readers rather than herself exclusively. The narrator here—Ortiz played back by Silko—reveals that at least one of the jokes is on himself (while another might be on Uncle Tony), rather than on another character who would thereby be excluded from Uncle Tony's community or solely on the audience. That is, while the goat might be malicious, the narrator is not. The various communities affiliated with Uncle Tony, Ortiz, and Silko expand through the manner in which this story is told to include the audience. The goat gets away, and although the boy—presumably Ortiz—suffers a blow to his pride early in the story, the story itself does not proffer ridicule. We are all among the tricked.

Other stories, however, rely on trickster figures to both produce and reveal exclusion. "A Geronimo Story," narrated by Andy, a Laguna boy, concerns in part a failed attempt to capture Geronimo. The indefinite article in the title indicates that Geronimo stories constitute virtually a genre of their own; there would be many other such Geronimo stories, nearly all ending with the frustration of the United States cavalry.⁸ In this story Geronimo outwits his pursuers

not simply by impossibly disappearing, as he does in some other stories and as tricksters so often do, but by never having been where he is reported to be. This particular Geronimo story, in other words, concerns a title character whose presence in the story exists exclusively by virtue of his absence. Unlike in "Uncle Tony's Goat," wherein the goat remains just visible enough to taunt Uncle Tony, here it is simply the name "Geronimo" rather than the man himself who taunts the cavalry. The Laguna characters accompanying Captain Pratt, who is designated by whites as a "Squaw man" for his marriage to a Laguna woman, know that they will not find Geronimo where he is reputed to have been—even Captain Pratt knows that Geronimo is nowhere near them—but the Laguna men go along anyway, for amusement as much as for other, more practical motives (215). Major Littlecock, whose name itself suggests the vulgar amusement of many trickster stories, is determined to follow all leads and insists on maintaining firm boundaries to separate himself from any of the Indians. This insistence will garner him insults that he is precluded from comprehending.

First, Major Littlecock expresses confusion at the fact that Laguna scouts do not have identical preferences as the Crow scouts with whom he is more familiar. When Siteye, the narrator's uncle, explains that they wear the thick wool uniform only during cold weather, Major Littlecock can only comment, "Our Crow Indian boys preferred their uniforms" (221). Because he collapses both Crow and Laguna into "Indian," he projects the subsuming category "Indian" back onto the Laguna, assuming that his abstraction thereby erases any real cultural differences. The military uniforms would, of course, further erase Laguna cultural characteristics since the uniforms would affiliate the men specifically with the United States rather than with their own nation. When no one responds to Littlecock's comment, Captain Pratt suggests that the scouts sleep in the kitchen, where it will be warmer than in the barn. Major Littlecock refers to regulations, themselves based on the most classic of stereotypes: "I regret, Captain, that isn't possible. Army regulations on using civilian quarters—the women . . . you know what I mean" (221). Then he speaks to the scouts directly: "You boys won't mind sleeping with

the horses, will you?" (221). Siteye responds directly, too, though he speaks in Laguna: "You are the one who has a desire for horses at night, Major, you sleep with them" (221).

Because Captain Pratt declines to translate this comment for Major Littlecock, the joke here excludes the major even as he has sought to exclude the scouts. Yet the audience has been reading sympathetically with the narrator, Siteye, and Captain Pratt all along, and since Siteye's comment is printed in English and only described as spoken in Laguna, the audience is also in on the joke. Although Siteye does not embody the trickster in this story in the manner that (the disembodied) Geronimo does, Siteye's comment, as well as his willingness to assist the major in wasting his time, upends the power dynamic between the major and the remaining characters who are ostensibly subordinate to him. Both "Uncle Tony's Goat" and "A Geronimo Story" achieve their effect in part because they elicit the admiration of the audience for the trickster figures, whether or not the audience feels among the tricked. The more important difference between the two stories regarding the audience, however, is tone. "Uncle Tony's Goat" is generally lighthearted. While readers will also laugh during "A Geronimo Story," their laughter will be tinged with disdain; readers will not include themselves within the object of their laughter, as they will in "Uncle Tony's Goat." One can, of course, imagine situations in which the audience would be reflected in Major Littlecock. Silko's success as trickster-author here lies in part with her ability to seduce (white) readers into identifying themselves as among the Laguna scouts, into laughing at Major Littlecock and their own impotent cultural modes of dominance. This effect reverses the more common manipulation produced by mainstream popular culture, when classic Hollywood westerns, for example, persuade Indian children to root for the cowboys. In other words, "A Geronimo Story" shifts the shape of any culturally dominant members of its audience. This portion of the audience then is tricked by the story, though likely with much less conscious awareness of the process than with "Uncle Tony's Goat."

Storyteller concludes with one of its most complex trickster tales, "Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hand," a story that consolidates

several of the motifs that I have discussed. The protagonist, identified only as “he” except for the one time his mother addresses him as “Sonny Boy,” initially presents himself as maligned by his community through misunderstanding. The others don’t take his health problems seriously because the symptoms of liver and back problems are invisible. The other men believe that he is simply lazy, so lazy that he won’t even perform sexually and hence has driven his girlfriend into the arms of a Hopi man. Readers initially position themselves with the other Laguna men, smirking at the protagonist’s feeble excuses: “they were all swimming at the river and he hurt his back in a dive off the old wooden bridge so it was no wonder he couldn’t do the same work as the other young men” (259). The protagonist’s obvious self-pity only reinforces the story’s apparently ironic tone.

By the end of the story, however, when the protagonist impersonates a medicine man and persuades an entire clan of women that he must massage their thighs, the allegiance of the story’s readers has shifted to the protagonist. We’re amused at the expense of the women rather than at the expense of the protagonist. This shift in the readers’ sympathy coincides with the major turn in the story, when the trick that Mrs. Sekakaku has played on the protagonist is turned against her. Although Mrs. Sekakaku has been sending the protagonist perfumed letters and has hinted that his presence could alleviate some of the loneliness in her home, she feigns surprise when he arrives, indicating to her companions that he is so desirous of her that he can’t stay away. The protagonist has in fact been fantasizing about the pleasures that he will experience in the company of Mrs. Sekakaku, but he believes he has arrived at her invitation. Although he has not otherwise seemed particularly ambitious, he surrenders to opportunity when Mrs. Sekakaku frets that her aunt Mamie has been suffering dizzy spells. After falsely identifying himself as a medicine man, he “could feel a momentum somewhere inside himself—it wasn’t hope, because he knew Mrs. Sekakaku had tricked him—but whatever it was it was going for broke” (262). By the end of the story, not only has he manipulated all the women of the Snow Clan into offering their thighs to him, but he also has garnered two shopping bags full of pies and bread in appreciation for his services. Traveling

back to Laguna, he plans to bestow one of the pies on the postmaster who has spurned his earlier advances and complained of the perfumed letters that he has received. "[M]aybe this Laguna luck would hold out a little while longer," the story concludes, as the protagonist fantasizes that he may once again get lucky (265). Readers, of course, occupy positions analogous to the women of the Snow Clan; somehow they've been persuaded to root for a man they'd been laughing at only a few pages earlier, somehow they have "understood just what kind of man he was" even if his more immediate audience, especially Mrs. Sekakaku, has not (258).

The book seems to conclude here, too, with this suggestion of "Laguna luck." Yet a turn of the page reveals a smiling Leslie Marmon Silko. The final bit of information before the notes describing the photographs and the table of contents is a photograph. Several passages in "Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hand," however, serve to interrogate this photograph. Unlike the photograph of the Laguna Regulars that immediately follows "A Geronimo Story" and that might be read simply to substantiate the story, here the story and the photograph share an opposite relationship. The story comments on the photograph, but not necessarily to substantiate it. As the story opens, the protagonist is flipping through a *Life* magazine, but none of the photographs is intriguing enough to hold his attention. In his own pocket, however, he carries a wallet whose plastic pages are also filled with photographs. Yet he intends the photos to convey a life greater than the one he has actually lived:

He believed in photographs to show people as you were telling them about yourself and the things you'd done and the places you'd been. He always carried a pocket camera and asked people passing by to snap one of him outside the fancy bars and restaurants in the Heights where he walked after he had a few drinks in the Indian bars downtown. He didn't tell [Mrs. Sekakaku] he'd never been inside those places, that he didn't think Indians were welcome there. (261)

The relationship between the photographs and his life is in one sense direct—he actually has stood in front of the bars where he is photo-

graphed standing. Yet he intends the photographs to be interpreted through their implications rather than through their literal images. He believes in photographs, therefore, not because they testify to the truth but rather because they assist him in his perjury—he has, after all, already asserted that he would make a good lawyer because “he was so good at making up stories to justify why things happened the way they did” (259). Yet despite a reader’s initial tendency to assume that the photograph of the Laguna Regulars included after “A Geronimo Story” simply illustrates the story, this photograph can now be similarly reinterpreted. The Regulars confirm the false nature of their mission—they did participate in a Geronimo hunting mission, yet they knew enough about Geronimo to understand that they weren’t really hunting for him.

The protagonist of “Coyote” takes a similar souvenir away from Mrs. Sekakaku’s house: “He graciously declined any payment but the women insisted they wanted to do something so he unzipped his jacket pocket and brought out his little pocket camera and a flash cube. As many as they could stood with him in front of the fireplace and someone snapped the picture” (264). Each time the protagonist gazes at this picture, he will again be holding a full house in his hand, and the photograph will serve to extend the trick temporally as well as linguistically.

So when readers turn from this story immediately to a photograph of Silko herself, author if not always narrator or protagonist, we must wonder what her gaze suggests. What sort of “Laguna luck” is she hoping for as readers close her book? In terms of the entire book, this photograph of Silko functions analogously to the photographs described in “Coyote Holds a Full House in His Hand” and to the photograph of the Laguna Regulars immediately following “A Geronimo Story.” The photo confirms her participation in the stories that she has told, not only as author but also as actor. Yet the fact of the photograph should not be read as testimony to the facticity of the book, as the inclusion of photographs in many more conventional autobiographies intends. Rather, her gaze confirms the coyote identity of narrator and protagonist. Paul Radin suggests that trickster stories accumulate such that “at the end of his [trickster’s]

activities a new figure is revealed to us and a new psychical reorientation and environment have come into being" (168). I suggest that *Storyteller*, through its multiple-layered reliance on trickster figures, each section commenting on the others, similarly reorients the environment of life writing.

Many members of her audience have been reading according to rules of interpretation that don't necessarily hold for this text. We are inclined to read the apparently fictional and autobiographical portions separately, to believe that we know a genre when we see it—as confidently as we feel when we see the reality a photograph captures. Reading *Storyteller* as autobiography and reading its various episodes as commentary on each other forces the trickster elements of the entire collection into the foreground. Because readers of this text, however, cannot assume that the autobiographical pact functions identically to similar pacts made with more conventional autobiographers, they must continuously interrogate their own positions vis-à-vis the stories. As readers of autobiography, we spot Silko here and there, just far enough away to keep us in pursuit, just as close as Uncle Tony's goat. Like Geronimo, Silko's presence simultaneously expands and recedes. Her voice saturates the text, yet she's speaking from afar, a coyote off "howling in the hills" (237).

NOTES

1. Timothy Dow Adams expresses some reservation about classifying *Storyteller* as "life writing," though he doesn't elaborate (xx). His hesitation is understandable, for according to most standard definitions of autobiography, which I will outline below, this text does not qualify.

2. This point is rehearsed by several theorists of autobiography. See, for example, Benstock (19), Olney (19), and Smith (47).

3. See Silko's comments in regarding the reliability of ethnographic reports specifically because they have been received from a "Charlie Coyote type" (Evers and Carr 14).

4. Walter J. Ong attributes much of the self's interiorized unity to a culture of literacy. The early Native American autobiographies that Krupat describes were produced through the interaction of an informant whose assumptions about the nature of the world were established through an oral

culture and an anthropologist whose assumptions were established through a literate culture. Contemporary Native writers obviously also view the world through their experience in a culture of literacy, though they may aim to represent an oral culture in their work. In *Storyteller* Silko interrogates some of the assumptions produced through a culture of literacy, such as the nature of an interiorized and individualized self, even as she also participates in a world interpreted through literacy.

5. For a fuller analysis of this photograph, as well as discussion of the Laguna Regulars, see Fitz (111).

6. Many of the photographs are attributed to Lee H. Marmon, who was indeed an accomplished photographer. By referring to them as "snapshots," I do not mean to dismiss their quality, only to comment on the mood and subject matter.

7. Autobiographers who have been deprived of such knowledge often comment on the loss. See, for example, Frederick Douglass, who describes his inability to state his date of birth as dehumanizing (15).

8. Silko suggests that Geronimo always outwitted the United States military, even after he was reputedly captured, for the captured one must have been someone other than Geronimo (Work and Cowell 41).

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Refiguring Legacies of Personal and Cultural Dysfunction in Janet Campbell Hale's *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter*

JORDANA FINNEGAN

Janet Campbell Hale's *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter* employs the motif of captivity to depict contemporary Native American experience in the American West. Hale's text challenges nineteenth-century American captivity narratives that portray "Indian capture of whites as a mindless, brutal, and savage act" (Namias 15). *Bloodlines* instead represents the brutal colonial domination of Native peoples and shows the multiple forms of "captivity" that entrap American Indians both physically and culturally in the post-World War II West. The memoir explores the process through which Native peoples internalize dominant assumptions of disappearance and defeat. Through "the telling and hearing of communal stories" (Weaver 45), Hale attains a deeper understanding of the legacies of dysfunction that shape the relationships connecting her "bloodlines."

The memoir retraces the "bloodlines" that link Janet Campbell Hale to her ancestry in order to come to terms with the legacy of racial ambivalence and internalized prejudice that haunts Hale's mixed-blood family. Hale was born in 1946 in Riverside, California, to Nicholas Campbell, a full-blood Coeur d'Alene Indian, and Margaret Sullivan, a Kootenai Indian with Irish and Chippewa ancestry. On her mother's side Hale recounts the history of her great-great-grandfather Dr. John McLoughlin, the officially proclaimed "Father of Oregon," and his daughter-in-law, Hale's Kootenai grandmother, Annie Grizzly. On her father's side Hale identifies with her Coeur d'Alene grandmother, Pauline, who was caught in the infamous Nez

Perce flight from the U.S. cavalry in 1877. As the only one of five siblings to be born off of the Coeur d'Alene reservation in northern Idaho, Hale's alienation from her tribal homeland is initiated at birth, although she discovers that patterns of exclusion extend far back along her bloodlines, beginning with the discrimination suffered by McLoughlin's mixed-blood descendants.

Bloodlines examines the personal and cultural struggles that plague mixed-blood Native Americans who are cut off from tribal land and traditions in the postwar, urban West. As an estranged member of the Coeur d'Alene tribe, Hale traces her family's history in an effort to recover ties to her people. *Bloodlines* contains eight autobiographical essays, each of which focuses on the different branches of Hale's bloodlines that shape her sense of identity. These essays depict her father's first wife's struggle with gender oppression; Hale's own harrowing upbringing with an abusive mother and her later struggles as a single mother on welfare; and the cultural prejudice endured by all members of Hale's family, including those (like her mother's relatives) who consciously reject their Indian heritage. These meditations on family history culminate in Hale's eventual return to the Coeur d'Alene reservation with her daughter in the concluding essay, "Dust to Dust."

Like Hale's earlier works of fiction, *The Owl's Song* and the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*, *Bloodlines* earned generally favorable reviews and received the American Book Award. While *Bloodlines* reflects the tendency in much of Hale's work to express "Native American thoughts and concerns . . . in thoroughly Euro-American forms" (F. Hale, *Janet Campbell Hale* 17), its autobiographical focus marks a significant departure from Hale's earlier fiction. In light of these autobiographical concerns, *Bloodlines* emphasizes the ways in which Hale's individual identity remains "broken-off" from her people (*Bloodlines* xxxiii). This approach remains foreign to Native American personal narratives such as Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* and Simon J. Ortiz's *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land*, since autobiography "is not an indigenous form of literature for American Indian peoples" (Sands, "Indian Women's Personal Narrative" 270).¹ Hale

writes in the tradition of autobiographical individualism in order to emphasize the loneliness of her childhood and its alienating effects on her adult life. At the same time, the text challenges conventional autobiographical notions of unique and autonomous selfhood by locating Hale's individual identity within a collective context. Hale thereby laments and works to overcome her solitude rather than celebrating it, evoking Paula Gunn Allen's conception of an "individualized—as distinct from individualistic—sense of self [that] accrues only within the context of community" ("Border' Studies" 44).

In drawing parallels between cultural and personal history, Hale's collective version of autobiography challenges the (often destructive) political effects of the genre of Indian autobiography since its origins in the nineteenth century. As Arnold Krupat notes, "as-told-to" Indian autobiographies since *The Life of Black Hawk*, edited by J. B. Patterson, purport to represent an "authentic" Indian voice despite the fact that they are transcribed, compiled, and edited by non-Indians. Published beginning in the era of Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act, texts like Patterson's functioned largely as "testimony to the inevitable replacement of 'savagery' by 'civilization'" (Krupat 47), ostensibly in an Indian person's own words. From its inception, then, Native American autobiography has tended to corroborate the ideology of Manifest Destiny by sanctioning cultural assumptions about the "inferiority" and inevitable disappearance of Native peoples.² While the nineteenth-century narration of Native lives by non-Native editors often rationalized western expansionism, twentieth-century Native writers, through the narration of their own lives, perform a very different (yet politically necessary) function by asserting the continuance and dynamic transformation of their lives and communities.

Like many nineteenth-century "as-told-to" autobiographies, the conventional captivity narrative tended to legitimize conquest. In pitting savage, Indian male aggressors against vulnerable, white female victims, captivity narratives polarized Native American "savages" from "civilized" whites and thereby functioned as "a major vehicle for the representation of hostile, foreign peoples" (Sayre 11). Yet in *Bloodlines*, captivity becomes a metaphor for Euroamerica's

material and ideological domination of Indians. Thus, Hale asserts that "all Indians had in common a powerful enemy who had conquered them and would now hold them *in captivity*" (*Bloodlines* 154; emphasis added).

These representations revise the work of the captivity narrative genre, which "juxtaposes Euro-American suffering to Native American aggression, subtly inverting the process of dispossession of natives by colonizers that was in fact the context for most narratives" (Salisbury 55). Instead, Hale emphasizes the dark realities of Euroamerican colonialism by recounting the many injustices inflicted on the Coeur d'Alene people, including the army's deliberate spreading of smallpox; the imposition of Catholicism and eradication of tribal rituals; and the poverty that plagues Indians on and off the reservation. Yet in contrast to D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*, in which the protagonist Archilde Leon is "helpless to alter his fate or that of the Salish people" (Allen, "'Whose Dream Is This, Anyway?'" 104), Hale resists drawing an entirely tragic picture of captivity.

While Hale accounts for her present suffering in light of the colonial past, she also attempts to *transform* understandings of this past in order to reimagine relationships between Native women in her family. Paula Gunn Allen argues that the writing of women of color ought to move beyond contesting and subverting dominant narratives. Subversion, Allen contends, "is only the first step in the generation of something yet unborn" ("Border' Studies" 41). Instead women of color must write from "the position of creativity rather than from that of reactivity . . . [because] the way to liberation from oppression and injustice is to focus on one's own interest, creativity, concerns, and community" (41–43). Indeed, *Bloodlines* not only emphasizes the marginalization of Native women in order to expose the dark realities of colonialism but also refigures conventional understandings of Native American history. Hale's memoir thereby attempts to shift the center of Euroamerican, patriarchal narratives by focusing on the interconnected life stories of multiple generations of Native women.

Bloodlines explores the ways in which these life stories are shaped

by struggles with class, gender, and race. These categories are powerfully combined in the figure of Hale's first husband, an educated, middle-class "white man who clearly looked down on me" (93), treating Hale with condescension and eventually violence because of deep-seated racial, gender, and class prejudice. Hale points out the ironic disparity between her husband's concern for social justice issues and his prejudice toward her. While "he and his similarly white and college-educated friends marched against U.S. involvement in Vietnam and picketed Bank of America in protest of its discriminatory hiring practices" (94), Hale's husband insults her as "a no-class welfare bum . . . a loser" (98). Although Hale notes that her husband's political sympathies fail to translate into compassion in his personal life, she admits that his belittlement successfully indoctrinated her to believe in her inferiority, that "this was not a marriage of equals" (94). Through the figure of her first husband, Hale shows how the fusion of colonialism and patriarchy contributes to the domination of Native women.

This demeaning treatment recalls the Jesuit missionaries' religious colonization of the Coeur d'Alene people in the nineteenth century. Hale's father, who was of "that first generation born after the conquest and the advent of the reservation system, the first generation of Indians to have Christianity forced upon it" (150), experiences the effects of religious coercion firsthand. Hale notes that her father Nicholas resisted the Church's "civilizing" process and was beaten for speaking his traditional language (151). Hale recounts her father's punishment for his refusal to speak English at the mission school: Nicholas was "put into a dark, windowless space above the chapel in the church building. The opening was boarded up and nailed closed. He didn't know if they would let him out at all. He thought he might die there . . . suffocate or die of thirst or starve to death" (173). Nicholas's painful experience casts the Church as a cruel agent of captivity, one that literally keeps him "boarded up" in a confining and oppressive space.

Hale's pervasive sense of alienation and disconnection is linked to her father's experience of physical and cultural confinement. Hale and her mother find that searching for "a fresh start . . . somehow

never pans out" (27), because "There is nothing but what was and is and we're all stuck with that and have to struggle to do our best with the hand we've been dealt" (xxxi). This grim portrait of entrapment, exclusion, and isolation deviates from the plot conventions of noted works of the Native American Renaissance, including N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, which emphasize a protagonist's return to a community that in some cases renews identity in the context of revitalized traditions.³ By contrast, *Bloodlines* emphasizes that colonization has "captured" her family in pervasive cycles of dysfunction.

These dysfunctional patterns are exemplified by Hale's role as involuntary captive to the whims of her mother, Margaret, in the pivotal chapter, "Daughter of Winter." The emotionally raw confessions throughout the chapter recount the grim years of forced relocation and emotional abuse that characterized Hale's life with an alcoholic father and an embittered, arthritic mother. "Daughter of Winter" reveals that Margaret's patterns of "follow[ing] a rambling course all over the Northwest" in the 1950s have left Hale with a haunting sense of dislocation, an awareness of her literal lack of place (30). In addition to the fact that Margaret suffered from mental illness and debilitating arthritis, Hale reveals that this tangled web of emotional dysfunction and forced mobility results from struggles with poverty: "We're so poor, Mom and me, so damned, damned poor. Sometimes I'm hungry. . . . I remember being hungry at school, feeling faint. My hands tremble and I get headaches a lot when I'm little. Nosebleeds too" (30). Poverty in turn leads to ill health, leaving Hale bereft of the emotional sustenance and physical stability that a family and cultural "home" can provide.

The loss of a cultural homeland haunts Hale throughout her life, beginning with her first memory: "I first saw the light of day in California, but the first place I remember is our home in Idaho" (xviii).⁴ These ties to a homeland are never allowed to develop, however, when at the age of eleven Hale is whisked away by Margaret on a long sojourn across the Northwest that is marked by a series of displacements: "I attended twenty-one schools in three states before

I dropped out of school after eighth grade” (34). Just as Hale recognizes that for American Indians in a geographical sense, “There is no other place. North America *is* our old country” (xx), she is psychologically haunted by her mother’s words that “no matter what you do or where you go, you can’t get away from what you really are” (55). Hale thereby grows up feeling “trapped . . . by my own body as well as by circumstance” (37). Similarly, Hale notes that when her father would return home drunk, “Mom was there and couldn’t get away from him. . . . She had no place to go” (44). These legacies of captivity fuel Margaret’s desire to abandon the Coeur d’Alene homeland in order to rid herself of her crippling arthritis and stagnant marriage, “running . . . on the move, on the road, not tied down” (45).

Margaret’s pursuit of a fruitless dream of freedom ironically confines Hale to a childhood of entrapment. As the family’s youngest child, Hale is defenseless against her mother’s anger and frustration; the more that Margaret isolates them by running from place to place, the more confining Hale’s condition becomes. Hale remains simultaneously trapped within legacies of abuse while she is devalued and intentionally excluded from full participation in family life. In another fulfillment of the family’s legacy of dysfunction, Hale’s three older sisters replicate Margaret’s attacks by ostracizing Hale from the family. While Margaret, “an absolute master” of verbal abuse (61), continuously mocked and insulted her (40), Hale’s sisters collaborated in and fueled these attacks (39–40). Just as Margaret commands Hale not to come to her funeral because “I don’t want you there” (42), so too Hale’s older sister refuses to allow her to enter her house in Wapato, Washington, forcing her to endure the stifling summer in a storage shed behind the house (48). This was a banishment that Hale’s parents “condoned by refusing to withdraw their support” of her sister’s family (49). Hale endures a kind of physical captivity through an involuntary exclusion that, sadly, actualizes Margaret’s claim that “Nobody wants you around. Nobody” (63).

Hale’s alienation from her family is not an individual phenomenon, however, as Hale discovers that her suffering is the product of an ongoing pattern of dysfunction that originated in past generations. On her deathbed Margaret recounts how her own mother and

sisters "mocked her . . . the way she walked . . . the way she talked. (I never heard her say this before. I wonder if this is true, or if she got mixed up and began to think what she'd done to me was done to her instead.)" (59). The revelation that this pain has been passed down through succeeding generations ignites Hale's quest "to understand the pathology of the dysfunction" (xxii), but it inevitably leads to fruitless questioning: "Why did they—with Mom as their leader—excommunicate me from the family?" (60).⁵ To a certain extent the particular cause of this behavior is never clarified, although the cycles of abuse are clearly fueled by the internalized racism that reaches back along Hale's bloodlines.

The internalization of prejudice is perhaps the most insidious effect of the dysfunction that is passed on to Hale by Margaret, who views Indians (and thereby herself) as inferior to Euroamericans. Margaret insists that "White people respect good Indians. . . . Good Indians are clean and neat, hardworking and sober. . . . White people look down on the other kind, the bad ones, the drunken, lazy louts." Significantly, Margaret's conception of a "good Indian" is "the kind white people approve of." Hale notes that she immediately rejected her mother's claims, that "I didn't care to be a good Indian" (a "futile endeavor," Hale recognizes wryly, given General Sheridan's infamous remark that "the only good Indian [is] a dead Indian") (113).

Margaret demonstrates this process of internalization through an intentional denial of her Indian heritage. Margaret takes pride in the fact that she is the great-granddaughter of Dr. John McLoughlin, chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, a symbolic founding father of the American West who is known officially as the "Father of Oregon" (111). Although admittedly ambivalent toward this ancestor whom she bluntly admits "[h]elped settlers steal land" (125), Hale also reclaims her identity as the descendant of John McLoughlin. By identifying herself as McLoughlin's descendant, Hale complicates the "threat" of miscegenation by representing herself as the product of a complex union of diverse cultural traditions and backgrounds (who nevertheless identifies primarily as an American Indian).⁶

Despite Hale's rejection of Margaret's beliefs and ambivalent identification with John McLoughlin, childhood encounters with

prejudice fuel her desire to “make myself acceptable enough” (140).⁷ This desire is particularly apparent when the white students at an elementary school “refused to touch my brown Indian hands” (139), prompting Hale to soak her hands in bleach in order to whiten them. This memory suggests that the problem extends beyond Hale’s beliefs themselves, originating in the destructive institutionalized racism that pervades both the educational system and the home. Trapped in situations where there was literally “[n]o escape” (113) from systematic expressions of racist beliefs, these messages contribute to Hale’s sense of exclusion from mainstream society and complicate the text’s effort to expose dark histories while retaining optimism for the future.

In the text’s introduction, Hale’s comments to a group of Coeur d’Alene schoolchildren reflect her inability to reconcile the hope for cultural recovery with the reality of her family’s dysfunction. Rather than reveal the dark truth of her poverty-stricken upbringing, Hale claims that

being a tribal person is something special, something non-Indian Americans don’t have and it can be a source of strength. It can provide a sense of continuity, of being connected to the land and to each other. . . . I didn’t say anything about the poverty, the lack of employment opportunities, the high crime rate, the many social problems that plague modern reservations. (xix)

Hale’s approach with the schoolchildren contradicts the text’s candid revelations about the depressing conditions that many modern Indians face, conditions related to the fact that “Some families will, if they can, tear you down, reject you, tell you you are a defective person” (xxi). Similarly, when reminiscing with her daughter about the past, Hale chooses not to reveal “the whole truth” (168). The story that Hale tells her daughter is one marked by “order” and “continuity,” revealing her still-unfulfilled desire to find “a place where I belonged.” This benign version of Indian life, Hale insists, “was not a lie” (169) but rather an ideal that her narrative seeks to realize by interpreting the fragmented memories of a rootless childhood.

Hale's search for a resolution to this fragmentation, alienation, and loss clashes with her admission that "Nothing ever happened to set things straight. (Maybe nothing could.) Their family, the one I was born into, was a troubled one" (xxvii). Hale's recognition of her family's dysfunction exists in tension with her dream about a sea turtle that grows larger and stronger before her eyes. Hale realizes that the sea turtle, as a symbol of her family's people, the last members "of the once powerful Turtle clan that was one of the Water People" (xviii), "was only an expression of my longing" for a stronger people (xxxi). The desire to belong to a strong and vibrant people shapes the narrative's exploration of the troubling roots of personal and cultural dysfunction. Because she is unable to rely on tribal traditions as a stable foundation, Hale must retrace her ancestry to recover the tribal experiences from which she has been cut off and to uncover the origin of the internalized racism that shapes her contemporary urban life.

In the process Hale recalls painful memories that include, as Frederick Hale has noted, derogatory depictions of Indian culture that potentially rationalize dominant assumptions about Native Americans as a defeated people.⁸ For instance, when describing her mother's sisters, Hale notes, "They were loud and aggressive and argumentative. My mother spoke softly (most of the time). They did not. They were rude and crude. They smoked and drank. They swore and said 'shit' a lot. They made stupid, snide remarks about Indians, too, whenever they could" (116). Similarly, Hale's full-blood Coeur d'Alene father Nicholas is described as "(at times) a vicious, brutal drunkard [who] beat [Hale's mother] when he got drunk" (44). These dark portraits of Indian life exist in marked tension with Hale's expressed desire to find a positive connection to the historical past.

The question of whether *Bloodlines*'s dark depiction of Native American culture reinforces stereotypes remains a point of contention for critics. While A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff claims that the text "emphasizes that Indians are becoming stronger" (Book Review 131), Frederick Hale argues that *Bloodlines* promotes harmful stereotypes of Native American people without offering a productive lens

through which to understand them, “painting a generally gloomy group portrait in which alcoholism and verbal abuse stand out as dominant characteristics” (“In the Tradition” 73). However, Julia Watson maintains that rather than publicly shaming her Indian heritage, the narrative “makes a case for the need to undo others’ powerful stories in order to claim one’s own” (123). Watson points out that Hale must remember the narratives that negated pride in her heritage in order to move beyond them.

Hale’s recollection of dominant and often inaccurate views of Native Americans recalls the narrative strategies of earlier Native American autobiographies. As Malea Powell argues, nineteenth-century Native writers Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Charles Alexander Eastman “‘consume’ and reproduce nineteenth-century ‘beliefs’ about Indians in order to create ‘something else,’ a new kind of Indian-ness” (405). Similarly, Hale invokes stereotypes of drunkenness and self-hatred in order to understand the destructive nature of internalized racism. This understanding loosens the pervasive grip of intracultural prejudice and enables the emergence of a different notion of Native identity, one that is based upon a renewed understanding of the “bloodlines” that shape familial and cultural relationships.

While seeking to understand the roots of dysfunction, Hale relates her mother’s rejection of Indian identity to the prejudice internalized by her maternal grandmother, Gram (Angeline) Sullivan, in the chapter “The Only Good Indian.” In searching for an explanation for Gram’s apparent rejection of her, Hale realizes that Gram has internalized American society’s hatred of Indian culture, which she then projected onto her family. In uncovering this explanation, Hale finds that personal patterns of dysfunction cannot be separated from the historical events that shape personal identity. Hale draws this connection by noting that when “Gram was a year old, in 1876, General Custer led the 7th Cavalry to the Battle of the Little Big Horn, which not one white man survived. Sitting Bull fled to Canada, where he was granted political asylum. Never were Indians more unpopular in the United States of America than in 1876 after Custer’s Last Stand” (131). Similarly, “[i]n 1879, when Gram was four years old, Carlisle Indian

School" was first opened, "the first attempt to assimilate Indians, en masse, into mainstream society" (131). Through a study of Gram's life, Hale traces the unfolding history of Indian-white relations and finds that significant events in American Indian history are linked to and partly responsible for the vexed positions in which members of her family find themselves.

Hale's recovery of these buried connections culminates in the discovery that the captivity and massacre at Wounded Knee is intrinsically related to Gram's own narrowly defined sense of Indian identity:

When Gram was fifteen years old, in 1890, the slaughter at Wounded Knee occurred. Surely she was aware of it. . . . What did she think when she read about all those Indians in South Dakota who had been shot down like dogs because they, unarmed and all penned in, had been singing Indian songs, Ghost Dance songs, that made the white soldiers who guarded them nervous? (132)

The captivity that characterizes Indian history, the sense of being "all penned in" by the dominant culture, is reimagined in terms of her grandmother's own experience.

Drawing links between personal and cultural history provides a way to understand the internalized racism produced by these events, leading Hale to focus finally on their personal implications: "What did Gram think of, way back then, when she looked at me? At my Indian face, which was rather like her own" (140)? The chapter concludes that there is "[n]o escape" from "Indian blood . . . Indian looks. . . . Who did I remind Gram of if not herself" (140)? In retracing the past, Hale finds that Gram's hatred of Indianness reveals the successful indoctrination of dominant anti-Indian sentiments; the colonization of American Indians is therefore ideological as well as physical, economic, and spiritual in its implications.

The problems of dysfunction are never entirely resolved at the end of *Bloodlines*; as Hale admits, "In the end there are no resolutions. Only an end" (86). However, by forging a connection with her paternal grandmother through memory and writing, Hale attains a

sense of belonging and cultural identity that she lacks at the beginning of the text, which she attempts to pass on to her daughter. In "Return to Bear Paw," Hale refigures past histories of entrapment through an imaginative connection to her grandmother. "Return to Bear Paw" traces the motif of captivity back to the literal captivity of her grandmother, who was caught in the Nez Perce's unsuccessful flight from the U.S. Army. As Hale travels through Montana at the end of a speaking tour in the dead of winter, her driver takes her to the site of the Bear Paw massacre, in which 419 Indians were killed and Chief Joseph surrendered to Generals Howard and Miles of the U.S. cavalry.

Personal and cultural histories converge at this site, where Hale claims, "I saw her, my grandmother, the young girl she had been in 1877, more and more clearly. I drew closer and closer to her" (152). The bitter frost of winter facilitates this identification, as Hale speculates that the "last days of the Great Flight were in September, and that year it was, as it often is, very cold in Montana, maybe as cold as the time of my own journey" (154). By drawing imaginative links between her own situation and the historical event, Hale is "compelled to complete the journey now, to close the circle" (155) and thereby move toward a new understanding of history as well as a sense of familial and cultural belonging.⁹

Hale's return to the site of the Bear Paw captivity and massacre presents the symbolic culmination of her broader narrative. At the massacre site Hale locates the source of generations of personal and tribal suffering, with the realization that in spite of the fact that her grandmother knew that the Nez Perce "were not in any way *her people* . . . they were Indians and all Indians had in common a powerful enemy who had conquered them and would now hold them in captivity and would not tolerate any defiance" (154). The broader domination of all Indian peoples by the U.S. government in some ways eclipses intertribal differences and conflicts.

Importantly the historical violence of the Bear Paw massacre is revealed to be an ongoing phenomenon. At the site of the massacre, Hale observes bullet nicks scarring the famous words of Chief Joseph's surrender speech: "From where the sun now stands I will

fight no more forever" (157). Noting that the bullet nicks cover only the bronze figure of Chief Joseph rather than that of the white soldier, Hale writes, "It took a moment for it to sink in, to imagine good old boys up here drinking beer and getting in a little target practice and expressing themselves. After all these years Indians aren't generally very popular in Montana" (157). This wry understatement suggests the degree to which violence against Native Americans is a continuing phenomenon, one that is still tolerated and accepted in contemporary society. It is therefore significant that "They shot only at FOREVER, the Indian. Not the soldier" (157). This instance provides a material example of the socially sanctioned violence that takes on many forms, including an epidemic that began "when the Coeur d'Alene people, no longer permitted to go to Montana to hunt buffalo, were given smallpox-infected army blankets" (159). The statue's bullet nicks are linked to the government's deliberate spreading of smallpox, another example of the pervasive violence that marks the relationship between Native peoples and colonial agents of power.

At the site of the massacre, Hale discovers the contemporary relevance of an event that is conventionally perceived as emblematic of a tragic history. In identifying with her Coeur d'Alene grandmother, Hale recognizes that

I was with those people, was part of them. I felt the presence of my grandmother there as though two parts of her met each other that day: the ghost of the girl she was in 1877 . . . and the part of her that lives on in me, in inherited memories of her, in my blood and in my spirit. (158)

This moment of identification refigures the conventional history of Native American tragic defeat by emphasizing the continuity between past and present. At this pivotal juncture Hale briefly finds the historical connection for which she yearns, forging a link between her family's journey over the past hundred years and her present circumstances in "that hard Montana country, [when] on a cold day in May 1986, I would, at last, return to the Bear Paw" (160). Hale imagines that her family's return to this significant place will end the patterns to which they have been captive, enabling them to move beyond

“conflict and devastation . . . [and toward] transformation and continuance” (Allen, “Whose Dream Is This, Anyway?” 121).

However, Hale’s connections to the past fail to serve an entirely liberating function. While Hale reconnects with her grandmother’s memory, this moment does not enable her to imagine a possibility beyond her (and, by extension, her people’s) present captivity. Rather, this moment stands as a powerful experience of historical remembrance that ultimately remains temporal and transitory. As Hale notes, “At length the spell broke. I could take the cold no longer” (158). The freezing temperature jerks Hale back to the present reality that she cannot fully escape.¹⁰

Significantly, Hale remains estranged from her homeland in the last essay, “Dust to Dust,” where she finally accepts that she can never again live on the Coeur d’Alene reservation, the site of so many years of pain and exclusion. When Hale returns with her daughter to the reservation, she experiences a sense of extreme dislocation, noticing, “Now the streets are paved. There’ve been a lot of changes. . . . the house is gone. I can’t even tell exactly where our house used to be” (175–76). She is also unable to locate her family’s plot in the community cemetery (181). These experiences affirm Hale’s conception of herself as one of the “broken-off pieces” of a once-powerful tribe and family (xxxiii). Thus, the persistent problem of Hale’s personal alienation can only be partially remedied by acts of remembering and writing.

This sense of uprootedness exists in tension with Hale’s acknowledgment that “Home is the place where your people began, and maybe where your family began and your family still is” (171). Although Hale’s sisters have returned to the reservation with their families, Hale realizes that this ancestral land “is their home; it can never be mine. I will remain, as I long have been, estranged from the land I belong to” (185). A sense of acceptance tempers this loss, however: “It should be different. But it isn’t. . . . It’s all right. I’m glad I got away from them and out of all that too” (185). The only way to break free of the dysfunction, Hale realizes, is to physically live elsewhere, although she still retains “the stories, the history, who we came from” to pass on to her daughter (185). Personal and cultural identity is

preserved and transmitted primarily through memory and writing rather than lived experience within a tribal community.¹¹

These stories reframe the past within a narrative of continuity and hope. In the very act of passing family stories on to posterity through writing, Hale envisions the need for cultural survival and continuance in the face of "the white society that had super-imposed itself onto North America" (103). The desire to escape the captivity imposed by this history of colonization establishes, for Hale, the foundation for "a reimagined Indian-ness" (Powell 418) based upon "the possibility of my own bloodline continuing down through the ages" (*Bloodlines* 103).

NOTES

1. For studies that concur with Sands's observation, see Arnold Krupat's *For Those Who Come After* as well as David Brumble and Arnold Krupat's selection on "Autobiography." By contrast, Hertha Wong's *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years* seeks to "expand the Eurocentric definitions of autobiography to include nonwritten forms of personal narrative and non-Western concepts of the self" (5).

2. Importantly, Kathleen M. Sands adds that "Native narrators resist the conventions and language of Euro-American autobiography. Their Indian voices persist even in the most oppressive collaborative works" ("Narrative Resistance" 4).

3. Louis Owens's review of Hale's novel *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* sheds light on *Bloodlines* as well: "Unlike her contemporaries Allen, Silko, Momaday, Vizenor and Welch, Hale does not rely on American Indian oral tradition as a unifying element. . . . Unlike protagonists in other novels by Indian writers, Cecelia Capture has no pueblo, no place, no sense of tradition to return to for strength. She alone of major characters in recent Indian novels confronts her displacement and alienation as an isolated individual" (306).

4. Hale's longing for a homeland parallels the Coeur d'Alene people's historic loss of ancestral territory. Restricted in 1885 from their original 4 million acres to 345,000 acres of land, the Coeur d'Alene today retain ownership of only 58,000 acres in northern Idaho (Arrington 1:259).

5. Hale's incessant search for an explanation for the abuse is consistent with behavior exhibited by survivors of trauma. As Cathy Caruth notes in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, the retrospective questioning of traumatic

events leads “belatedly” to “the repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it” (4). Hale’s “possession” by questions about her mother’s behavior is revealed by her “insistent return” (5) to the literal and psychological sites of trauma.

6. This approach moves beyond the conventional opposition of “assimilated” and “traditional/authentic” that fails to reflect the actual complexities of Native lives. Moreover, it challenges the “either-or” notions of individual identity central to Eurocentric thinking, the “opposition of us against them with multiple overlapping dimensions: European versus non-Europeans (geography), civilized versus wild/savage/barbarians (culture), Christians versus heathens (religion)” (Mills 21).

7. Ironically, Hale’s mother Margaret was called a “Stupid Siwash squaw” (119) by her white first husband. Hale’s own first marriage to an educated white man echoes this physical and emotional abuse (92), demonstrating another way in which Margaret’s dysfunctional patterns are passed on to Hale.

8. While Frederick Hale regards Janet Campbell Hale’s perpetuation of stereotypes as the mark of her memoir’s literary failure (“In the Tradition”), Julia Watson contends that the fact that Hale “tells on” the family by revealing its dark secrets serves an important purpose. These dark portraits reveal the condition of colonial “captivity” that shapes Hale’s life, whereas a more uplifting narrative might fail to emphasize this point.

9. As Julia Watson notes, Hale “reframes the linear movement of history into a circle of return that knits past and present into one story of the bloodline’s ongoing fulfillment” (130). This cyclical view of history culminates in Hale’s pivotal moment of awareness in “Return to Bear Paw.”

10. Unlike other critics, I argue that this does not signal a complete failure of *Bloodlines*’s political project. Rather, it serves the text’s goal of political critique, since complete liberation or resolution would deflect attention from the ongoing problems of Native peoples and communities.

11. Interestingly, Hale’s realization of the importance of memory and language evokes N. Scott Momaday’s central concerns in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *The Names: A Memoir*, in which Momaday recalls the Kiowa past as a solitary individual. Yet while Momaday’s reflections keep the past “in the past,” viewing Native culture primarily as part of a lost or vanished era, Hale refigures this ancestral history for the future when she declares that “I want to share these memories with my daughter” (164). Hale also shifts focus away from Momaday’s masculinist persona by emphasizing relationships between women.

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Cycles

LINDA YOUNG

Cycles of
 bad medicine can visit
 a people
Cycles so short that they
 give the perception of
 constant inundation
Others stretch out
 to such length . . . you can
 almost think you're
 in the clear . . .
Cycles of pain
 Cycles of violence
 Cycles of deprivation
Twist together like a braid
 weaving through the fabric of my People
Cycles robbed me
 of my Grandmother
 made her bolt in pain and shame
 fled far from her native home
To birth . . . And vanish
The time . . . only 40 years off the Plains
 Victimized . . . Marginalized
Leaving Mother to be
 raised by white people who
 didn't get

What it means to be Native
What it means to be connected
 to Earth
 to Sky
What the winds mean
Mother grew . . . learned . . . loved . . . aged . . .
 and passed through
 the Western door
With no knowledge
 of the Cycle that begat her
 or the identity of her People
Cycles came round again
 to claim her child
 pain
 violence
 shame
Moment of decision . . .
 do the Cycles define you . . .
or
Does the SEEING
 set you free?

Heartspeak from the Spirit

Songs of John Trudell, Keith Secola, and Robbie Robertson

KIMBERLI LEE

These survival songs
put us back together
Qwo-Li Driskill

For centuries Indigenous peoples in this hemisphere have raised powerful voices of resistance to the unjust treatment and outright genocide they have received at the hands of colonizers. This resistance has been, and continues to be, manifested through a variety of rhetorical venues: speeches, stories, poems, songs, and at times, when other avenues were exhausted, outright confrontation. But it is song that I am interested in exploring here, specifically the genre of contemporary Native music of the last fifty years. Since the early 1960s, Native American music has been bringing a unique fusion of the written word and oral traditions while also syncretically blending traditional instrumentation with modern electronic technologies. While the forms and styles of contemporary Native American music are always changing, the medium of song still serves, as it has for millennia, to transmit and process information important to Native communities: histories, philosophies, political concerns, social values, and stories. Likewise, they may be sung as expressions of joy, sadness, victory, defeat, love, or anger—any emotional or spiritual feeling can be addressed in song. As Simon Ortiz (Acoma) points out, “the substance [of a song] is emotional, but beyond that, spiritual, and it’s real and you are present in, and part of it. . . . A song is

made substantial by its context—that is its reality, both that which is there and what is brought about by the song” (240). Let’s think about that for a moment—the context and how that becomes a song’s reality. Honor songs, prayer songs, love songs, and encouragement songs are all sung with powerful words meant to *do* something significant for the People. Not only are songs “texts,” but they are also active sites that can and do bring about change. I view them as valid Native texts for serious study in a variety of academic venues, from the classroom to national conferences. While some may think of these songs only as entertainment or amusement, their purposes are more complex if one really takes the time to listen. In fact, these songs contain viable educational elements—sometimes subtle, sometimes direct.

Excellent Native musicians are active in all genres of the industry: jazz, blues, heavy metal, hip-hop, rock, country, punk, powwow, pop, folk; the list is endless. There are many innovative, creative Native songwriters contributing to the contemporary Native music scene these days. Award-winning artists such as Buffy St. Marie, Joy Harjo, Jim Boyd, Joanne Shenandoah, Rita Coolidge, John Trudell, Keith Secola, and Robbie Robertson are dedicated musicians whose work is a testament to the variety of excellent music available today. In this essay, however, I’d like to focus on the work of Trudell, Secola, and Robertson. All three are songwriters who incorporate viable messages of resistance into their songs designed to make us think and give us strength, demonstrating how Native oral traditions are evolving and continuing to function for Native people. Additionally, these songs can be excellent sources for engagement in Native American studies classes.

JOHN TRUDELL

Dakota activist, artist, actor, poet, prophet, and free thinker, John Trudell has led an extraordinary life dedicated to Indigenous human rights, land, and language issues, carrying on evolving Native American oral traditions and keeping them alive so that we may all learn from them. Born in 1946, Trudell spent his early years living on the Santee Reservation in northern Nebraska. After serving in the

U.S. Navy from 1963 until 1967, he briefly attended college, thinking that he would go into radio and broadcasting. In 1969 Trudell became deeply involved with Indians of All Tribes and the takeover at Alcatraz, putting his broadcasting skills to use by hitting the airwaves on "Radio Free Alcatraz." This period is when he first attracted national attention—from both the public and the U.S. government; the FBI began a file on Trudell that now exceeds 17,000 pages. In 1973 he became the national spokesperson for the American Indian Movement, a position that he held until 1979, when Trudell suffered the loss of his wife, Tina, three children, and mother-in-law on the Shoshone/Paiute reservation in Nevada. Trudell and many others believe that the house fire that killed them was deliberately set to intimidate and silence both him and Tina (who was a powerful activist in her own right). Trudell describes it as an "act of war." Since that time, he has been giving voice to his pain and the politics that brought it on through writing poetry, or "lines," as he called them during a March 2005 interview with me. His poem in honor of Elvis Presley, entitled "Baby Boom Che," has recently been anthologized in *Reading Our Histories, Understanding Our Cultures* (McCormick 2002). Additionally, he occasionally works in film, playing roles in such feature films as *Thunderheart* and *Smoke Signals*, as well as the documentary releases *Incident at Oglala* and *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*. In 2005 a documentary about his life entitled *Trudell*, directed by Heather Rae (Cherokee), debuted at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival. Now a recognized international spoken word recording artist, Trudell is still speaking out for decolonization and continued resistance to the oppression of Native peoples. Interestingly, he blends these spoken lines with musical backgrounds—both contemporary sounds and traditional Native music. Through his recordings, speeches, and published materials, Trudell powerfully fuses written literature and oral traditions and brings that fusion into the twenty-first century.

Foremost among the topics that Trudell returns to in his discourse is the Earth and our relationship to Her. For example, in his song "Listening/Honor Song," Trudell highlights the significant connection between human beings and the Earth, but the political message to stay active and involved can't be missed.

Mother Earth embraces Her children
 in natural beauty to last beyond oppressors' brutality . . .
 we are the spirit of natural life
 which is forever
 the power of understanding
 real connections to spirit is meaning
 our resistance, our struggle is not sacrifice lost
 it is natural energy properly used.

This story is told in order to promote and sustain people's connections to Earth, which is of ultimate importance to the survival of Native people. Indeed it is of paramount importance to the survival of all life. His are words of encouragement and fortification, not just empty talk of tree spirits, soaring eagles, or tipis by the river. Trudell speaks to our responsibilities toward Earth and helps us understand that it is not ours to do with as we please. Above all, he wants people to understand that we are an extension of Earth; the reality is that our human forms are made up of the same natural elements found in Earth, and whatever treatment we impose on Earth will ultimately be treatment we receive in return. As responsible citizens of Earth, people need to acknowledge and protect the intricate relationship shared by all life forms. We must understand on a fundamental level that we are *related*. Trudell states that we must move beyond human rights:

we must step into the reality of natural rights because all of the natural world has a right to existence and we are only a small part of it. There can be no trade-off. We are the People. We have the potential for power. It takes more than good intentions. . . . We are going to have to find a way to communicate our thoughts and our resistance and our consciousness that we will not accept the nuclearization of the earth; this struggle for our survival is absolute and complete. (qtd. in Iglori n.p.)

Trudell emphasizes that we must find a way to communicate to those who may not always be willing to listen; we must find "ways to *be* communication ourselves" (qtd. in Iglori n.p.). I interpret this to mean that we need to set examples and to use our intelligence at

every opportunity as teachers in our classrooms, in our homes, or anywhere we have the chance to convey the message that we have a responsibility to Earth and a responsibility to future generations. We must speak things into reality.

As Craig Womack reminds us in his introduction to *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*,

As often as not Indian writers are trying to invoke as much as evoke. The idea behind ceremonial chant is that language, spoken in the appropriate ritual contexts, will actually cause a change in the physical universe. This element exists in contemporary Native writing and must be continuously explored . . . language as invocation that will upset the balance of power, even to the point . . . where stories will be preeminent in land redress. (17)

We hear this type of invocation in many of Trudell's poems. For example, in "Rant and Roll" he identifies the daily frustrations brought on by the oppressive dominant society and suggests how to deal with these, calling upon us to "Rant and Roll":

Religions of men heavy with fear
 Industrial war against the land
 Every woman knows the fugitive
 Rich men keep living off the poor
 The soul is what's left after they eat your spirit
 When every act is an act of self-defense
 We have to do something or perish in the pretense
 Rant and roll
 Heartspeak from the spirit
 Say it loud so everyone can hear it
 Say what you mean
 Mean what you say
 Rant and roll when you feel that way.

This is a call to resistance; the poet advises that we should not be silent when these situations arise. We don't have the option to be

depressed and inert about these issues—to take that path is to perish. We must speak things into reality—we must act.

Trudell's songwriting also addresses kinship and gender roles. In "Shadow Over Sisterland," the poet talks about both, again advocating for resistance, this time to the male dominant society's violence towards women. He reminds us that women are still treated unfairly in the judicial system, because the "laws of justice are business decisions / gender and class [are] cut with surgical precisions." Likewise, in "See the Woman," Trudell reminds us to respect women:

She carries herself well in all ages
 she survives all man has done
 in some tribes she is free
 in some religions she is under man
 in some societies she's worth what she consumes . . .
 in all instances she is sister to Earth
 in all conditions she is life bringer
 in all life she is our necessity . . .
 see the woman spirit daily serving courage with laughter
 her breath a dream and a prayer.

In this song, several different societal views of women are presented, but at the end, Trudell suggests that we need to retrieve traditional Dakota views of women and uphold them. And as we know, in most precontact Native societies across the Americas, women were honored for their contributions as nurturers and conservators of cultural values. Trudell is calling for a recovery and reassertion of this honoring. Recovery of this kind of traditional thinking and action will help all women, especially Native women, to survive and thrive in such diverse situations as the home, the business world, and the academy. Trudell freely acknowledges that in the past women have been kinder to him than he has been to them; and perhaps, as he has matured, he seeks to make amends and remind others of the importance of women in our societies (Caldwell 3). We must think of women as our relatives, as our necessity; they are spiritual beings, not just as sexual objects who are under men.

Language is a topic that Trudell returns to repeatedly. He approaches language respectfully and chooses his words carefully, as one would expect a poet to do. He thinks about words, language, and the construction of both. Trudell composes his songs in English, for the most part, although there is occasion where a Dakota word serves where it seems appropriate. He advocates understanding the words we speak, reminding us that:

If we really look at the words, not just frivolously use them as a convenience, . . . if we really take time to look at the language we speak, and take some time to identify ourselves, we can use the information and we can create the way we need to go. . . . we need to pay attention to the systems we are surrounded by . . . [There is a lot of talk] about freedom of speech, but what about freedom of thought or being? (qtd. in Igliori n.p.)

Many well-known Native authors and scholars have addressed the power of the spoken word; among them is Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday, who writes in *The Man Made of Words*:

In the oral tradition one stands in a different relation to language. Words are rare and therefore dear. . . . Words are spoken with great care, and they are heard. They matter and must not be taken for granted; they must be taken seriously and they must be remembered. . . . Perhaps the most distinctive and important aspect of oral tradition is the way in which it reveals the singer's and the storyteller's respect for and belief in language. (15)

Momaday's thoughts on language seem to apply directly to the work that Trudell is doing through his spoken word lyrics. Trudell's words are powerful expressions advocating for resistance and decolonization. If we listen to him carefully, we cannot help but sharpen our awareness of the situations that we need to address in Native studies. As he has said many times, we need to use the power of our intelligence responsibly—in the most clear and coherent manner we can realize—to bring about positive change in our realities. Knee-jerk reactions will do us no good, he related to me in a March 2005 con-

versation; we need to think clearly about how we resist oppression, so that our motion isn't just motion—it has a direction and a force.

In his twenty-three-year recording career John Trudell has worked with many prominent musicians, both Native and non-Native, including Jackson Browne, Jesse Ed Davis, Jeff Beck, and Robbie Robertson. He continues his work in contemporary Native music and is slated, along with Keith Secola, for the forthcoming Peter LaFarge tribute project. Designed by Cherokee journalist Sandra Hale Schulman, this project is still in the “finishing phase,” but several well-known Native artists have signed on to cover some of LaFarge's all-but-forgotten songs (a topic to which I will return later in this piece). Additionally, Trudell has just completed *Madness and the Moremes*, a new work with his current band, Bad Dog. Concerts, speaking engagements, and promotion for the documentary *Trudell* (now available on DVD) have kept him on the road quite a bit these days; however, Trudell still finds time to write lyrics that challenge us to think about and express our lives.

KEITH SECOLA

Bois Fort Band Anishinabe songwriter and musician Keith Secola deals with several issues that affect Native communities through his songs. Born in Cook, Minnesota, in 1957, Secola was raised in the nearby Mountain Iron area. Encouraged to take up a musical instrument early in his life, Secola, along with his siblings, would later join the Mountain Iron High School band. Since that time music has been an integral part of his life. Although Secola never strays far from his Indigenous roots, his music is actually quite eclectic, spanning a wide range of musical styles: blues, jazz, folk, country, and rock. Into this mix Secola successfully blends traditional elements including tribal drum, chants, and the occasional forty-nine tune or perhaps a flute instrumental. Add to this the powerful lyrics Secola pens, and his work makes quite an impression. He has won multiple awards and has toured extensively in both Europe and North America since the early 1990s with such notable artists as the Indigo Girls, David Bowie, the Neville Brothers, and Pearl Jam. Further, his work has been fea-

tured in several Native films and documentaries, including Norman Jewison's *Dance Me Outside*; Chris Eyre's *Skins*; the Philomath documentary about homelessness on Pine Ridge Reservation, *Homeland*; and Plutte and Fortier's *Alcatraz Is Not An Island*. He is also a featured musician in *Rockin' Warriors*, a little-known documentary about contemporary Native American musicians. An artist and activist, Secola truly works for the good in Native communities—especially while touring—often holding music workshops for youth on and off reservations. Additionally, he regularly performs benefit concerts throughout North America to raise awareness about Native issues and environmental concerns.¹ Secola holds a highly respected position on the Native American music front, although he remains virtually unknown in popular American mainstream music.

Land claims, racism, imprisonment, cultural and intellectual property rights, and other Native realities are just a few of the many topics that Secola addresses through his songs. All these are serious issues that continue to affect Native people in the western hemisphere today. And while these issues are formidable ones, Secola sometimes uses humor and wit as a vehicle for getting his message across. He says that rather than “being overcome with anger when hearing of the history and situations of American Indians,” he wants his audience “to get to the deeper meaning of his words” and perhaps initiate a healing process (Personal interview, April 2005). In fact, Native peoples have often used humor as a form of survival and resistance. Vine Deloria Jr., arguably one of the most prolific Native survivance writers/scholars of the twentieth century, dedicates an entire chapter in his celebrated *Custer Died for Your Sins* to humor:

Humor has come to occupy such a prominent place in national Indian affairs that any kind of movement is impossible without it. . . . The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it. Satirical remarks often circumscribe problems so that possible solutions are drawn from the circumstances that would not make sense if presented in other than a humorous form. . . . Often people are awakened and brought to a militant edge through [humor]. (147)

“Humor,” says Secola, “warms the blood and lightens the heart, and encourages a higher level of thinking” (E-mail correspondence to the author 2005). There are insightful truths to be found and pondered in such language and laughter, truths that appreciate with time.

One such song that employs humor to deal with the serious issue of land claims is from Secola’s CD *Wild Band of Indians*, entitled “Wide Open Spaces.” Embedded within the song is the story of a Native American man who gets involved in a radio talk show, debating with the host about the concepts of ownership, fences, signs, and land. After giving a Native perspective on these issues, the narrator is met with a long period of silence, and then the talk show host “pontificates”:

What’s the matter man, are you some kind of commie?
This here’s America,
Land of the Atlanta Braves, Home of the Washington Redskins.
Red, White and blue, America, and if you don’t like it here in
America,
why don’t you just get back to where you came from?

The narrator replies: “So I did. I camped out in his backyard!”²
The song’s chorus continues:

From the land of the blue sky water
there’s a voice calling out to you
your soul needs refreshing
souls need regressing, too—
Wide open spaces
Wide open heart
Back to the spirit
Back to the start.

This part of the song significant because the radio show host’s attitude toward the Native caller is something that many American Indian people face every day of their lives—denigration, racism, ignorance, and disregard for their rights in this country. When

Secola sings the phrase, “Red, White and blue, America,” the listener may first think of the American flag—but there is another, more nuanced feeling one gets as well: that the existing dichotomy and polarization between “Red” and “White” is making America blue. We must *never* forget the past, but we need to enact a new future: open our hearts (and our minds), refresh our spiritual selves, and move forward. This song is a persuasive call for unity and alliance building. This song is designed to make people think and act to change the status quo, while the interplay between seriousness and humor helps heal and refresh our souls. I view this as a manifestation of what Cherokee writer and scholar Marilou Awiakta calls “art for life’s sake” (qtd. in Justice 109).

Yet Secola maintains a serious side as well, as we see in his rendition of Peter LaFarge’s graphic song “Crimson Parson,” a song that addresses the Sand Creek massacre of 1864. Penned in the early 1960s, years before Native American civil rights issues were brought to the attention of mainstream America, this song is a powerful indictment against the dominant narrative that often spoke of the “battle” at Sand Creek as a U.S. military victory. Peter LaFarge was on the forefront of what we might call “contemporary Native musicians.” Of Narragansett descent, Peter was the son of Oliver LaFarge, the author of *Laughing Boy* and a trained anthropologist and writer who lobbied for Native rights during the horrific termination years of the 1940s and 1950s.³ In his short career Peter wrote many songs that addressed American Indian issues and historical truths, and “Crimson Parson” stands strong among them. LaFarge spared no details in the song; it is part history lesson, part social critique, and full-on protest song. Secola’s version is a “softer” one—more melodic with expanded instrumentation and a few lyric and tune changes. But the historical truths still resonate:

They call him the Crimson Parson
 The Rev’rend Chivington
 History books don’t recommend him
 For all the trouble he’d begun
 Make die, take out Indians

Was his battle cry
 The Rev'rend Colonel Chivington
 With a bible by his side.
 In the valley of the Sand Creek, lived a peaceful tribe
 Chivington knew them for their peace, but glory was his pride
 In the middle of the night he fell upon the place
 Commenced his victory dance in disgrace
 The Rev'rend Colonel Chivington
 With a long knife by his side
 All the way up to Sitting Bull
 They told their mournful tale
 War pipes smoked like they hadn't smoked since
 They cut the Oregon Trail
 For the next twelve years
 Indian wars scattered across the land
 The Rev'rend Colonel Chivington
 Started all with his little band
 They call him the Crimson Parson
 The Rev'rend Chivington
 History books don't recommend him
 For all the trouble he begun
 Make die, take out Indians
 Was his battle cry
 The Rev'rend Colonel Chivington
 With a Bible by his side.

The massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho families at the hand of Chivington and his vigilantes remains vivid in the minds of many Native people today, although a majority of Americans have never heard of the traumatic ordeal that precipitated the Plains Indian wars. Contrast this with the amount of attention garnered by the U.S. military's attack on the camp at Little Big Horn, which had a decidedly different kind of ending. Historians reveal that just after the Sand Creek massacre, Chivington and his "100 days men" were celebrated and toasted throughout Denver; the "militiamen" were later mustered out with honors. Although he was later investigated

for the murders he perpetrated there, Chivington was never charged with war crimes. Interestingly, the only man who called attention to the atrocity, Lieutenant Silas Soule, would soon become the victim of an unsolved homicide himself in the streets of Denver after he testified against Chivington.

One thing that I like about this song is that it isn't all about the Cheyennes as victimized people. It portrays them as agents in their own survival and resistance. Yes, the massacre was devastating, and yes, hundreds fell victim to Chivington's psychotic violence. But the survivors found allies and retaliated—they did not vanish or fade off into the sunset. The song also points out that Chivington, a Methodist minister, was really a murderer of women and children, a man who did so “with a Bible by his side.” This song has impact and certainly gives students something to think about besides a pretty tune or poetic language. In the documentary film *Making a Noise*, Cherokee singer and songwriter Rita Coolidge points out that “many of our truths are yet to be told. If we can tell these truths and stories in songs, then that's how we'll do it.” “Crimson Parson” is an outstanding example of how these truths can be told through song.

Another issue that Secola addresses that reveals his resistance to the oppressive status quo in America is his support and honoring of American Indian Movement leader and political prisoner Leonard Peltier. Peltier is a member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewas who has been incarcerated since 1976 on fallacious murder charges. These charges stem from federally supported violence and intimidation that took place on Pine Ridge Reservation during the mid-1970s. Whatever may have occurred at Oglala, South Dakota, that day in June, Peltier's actions were clearly self-defense. Peltier's struggle for a fair trial has been successfully thwarted for almost thirty years by the U.S. government, but he has not been forgotten, thanks in part to many Native American musicians such as Trudell, Secola, and Robertson, among others. In “Innocent Man,” Secola honors Peltier by singing of his dedication to traditions amid the confinement and isolation of a federal prison:

There wasn't a microphone
 But he felt like singing
 To a pale moon, hear him singing.
 He's an innocent man
 He's an innocent man.
 In the ancient rain, hear him saying
 That the price you pay
 Ain't worth the taking.
 He's an innocent man
 He's an innocent man.

This song resonates for many because Peltier has taken on something of an iconic status as an activist symbolic of Native resistance and endurance. But the imagery and the reality presented in this song are worthy of serious study—especially in the context of Native American oppression and the fact that Native American inmate populations are rising dramatically nationwide. And, even though this song is dedicated to and focused on Leonard Peltier, the expressed sentiments can apply to all who suffer from emotional, psychic, or physical imprisonment.

In “Kokopelli’s Blues” (a 2002 Native American Music Award [NAMA] winner), Secola takes on the issue of Native intellectual and cultural copyright. This song speaks to the fact that the image of Kokopelli has been so thoroughly appropriated that his real identity and purpose have become unrecognizable for most mainstream Americans. In the bluesy-shuffle, Kokopelli sings that he has the blues because of all the “cheap imitations out there.” He tells us that hucksters are “using [his] image to depict a new age,” and no one really wants to know about the “real cat.” And, indeed, that is the case. Most people think of Kokopelli as a whimsical little cartoonish character who brings happiness by playing his flute, but for many tribal people he is a revered deity of fertility. We find the image of Kokopelli plastered on everything from oven mitts to high-dollar jewelry, with little or no respect for his Hopi origins or the true meaning of his image. Secola addresses this trivialization of Kokopelli with insight and humor, yet he never loses the focus that this appropriation is wrong.

Secola is probably best known for his song “NDN Kars,” which some people have called a Native American anthem. This song, which was highlighted in the film *Dance Me Outside*, has become a favorite in Indian Country and is a poignant testimony to resisting dominant culture values and celebrating modern Native realities. Again, Secola draws us into a serious (and some would say sad) situation through humor and good feelings; it’s a situation that almost anyone can relate to on some level. The song tells the story of a poor powwow singer out on the “powwow trail,” in his ramshackle “rez car”:

I’ve been driving in my NDN car
 The sound of the wheels drumming in my brain
 The dash is dusty, the plates are expired
 Please Mr. Officer, let me explain
 I got to make it to a powwow tonight
 Singin’ 49s down by the river side
 Lookin’ for a sugar, ridin’ in my NDN car

 My car is dented; the radiator steams
 One headlight don’t work
 But the radio screams
 I got a sticker; it says NDN Power
 I stuck in on the bumper; that’s what holds my car together

The song starts off with a familiar musical refrain—something on the order of the old “Indian Drumbeat Song” that everyone has heard at one time or another. And for a moment, one wonders if this song is going to be some sort of musical stereotype. But upon the first crunch of the electric guitar punctuated with a powwow beat, the confusion dissipates and the song resituates that old tune into something new and decidedly Native. Secola has a knack for imagining new spins on old themes. As the song progresses and the story comes to light, the listeners are drawn into a “circuit of an Indian dream / We don’t get old / We just get younger / Flyin’ down the highway, ridin’ in our NDN cars.” This song is about the richness of cultural connections, the restorative power of music, and the ability

to make the most of what one has. It is about surviving and resisting in a dominant society that, in large part, measures success and happiness with materialistic gauges—people are most often valued for what they consume and how much money they spend. It also addresses the class system that has segregated the “haves” and the “have-nots,” an issue that needs further attention.

Now based out of Arizona, Secola is currently recording and touring extensively. His CD of new work, entitled *Native Americana*, was released in March 2006 and won three 2006 NAMA awards. His work with Karen Drift, *Anishinabmoin*, has been nominated for two NAMA awards in 2007.

ROBBIE ROBERTSON

Robbie Robertson is best known for his work (some would say legendary) in American mainstream music, but only a few people know that he is of Haudenosaunee or Mohawk descent. Robertson was born in Toronto in 1943, and like Secola, he was encouraged early on to become involved with music. As a child he spent his summers with his mother's people on the Six Nations Reserve, and that is where he began learning guitar from his relatives. Robertson relates in the documentary film *Making a Noise* that the “whole family” was musical in some form or another, and that the guitar skills he learned there were largely blues based. By age sixteen Robertson was writing original music and had begun as lead guitarist for Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks, the core group that would evolve into The Band. By 1965 Robertson and The Band were touring with Bob Dylan, a relationship that would span several years and produce many critically acclaimed works that are now considered classics. After The Band disbanded, Robertson began a lengthy and productive collaboration with film director Martin Scorsese, scoring the music and soundtracks for *Raging Bull*, *King of Comedy*, and *The Color of Money*. In 1994 Robertson was asked to score a soundtrack for Turner Broadcasting Company's documentary *The Native Americans*. For this effort, Robertson brought together a virtual who's who of contemporary Native musicians, a collective known as the Red Road

Ensemble. Artists contributing to this project included John Trudell, Rita Coolidge and Walela, Floyd Red-Crow Westerman, Bonnie Jo Hunt, Ulali, and Kashtin. This project would bring Robertson back in touch with his Indigenous roots and serve as a catalyst for his efforts to recover and reclaim his Mohawk relations. After an absence of thirty years, Robertson returned to the Six Nations Reserve to renew and re-educate himself in Haudenosaunee ways. This experience was the impetus for his critically acclaimed recording, *Contact From the Underworld of Red Boy*, a work that contains songs that also address Native concerns. Robertson continues as an activist and advocate for Native people, in part by promoting new and unknown Native musicians as well as by lobbying on their behalf in the music industry.

Robertson's approach to concerns such as land claims is a bit more confrontational than Secola's strategy, and it contains some serious resistance themes. For example, the groove-driven song "Making a Noise" advocates for Native unity and strong presence. Robertson sings in the chorus:

Making a noise in this world
 Making a noise in this world
 You can bet your ass I won't go quietly
 Making a noise in this world.

He then confronts the dominant society:

I don't want your promise
 I don't want your whiskey
 I don't want your blood on my hands
 Only want what belongs to me.
 I think you thought I was gone
 I think you thought I was dead
 You won't admit that you was wrong
 Ain't that some shit that should be said?

No vanishing Indian here; on the contrary, we have a forceful Native voice addressing the heart of the issue, resisting the status quo. *New*

York Rock critic Jeff Apter writes that “Making a Noise” is a “beat driven celebration . . . without a trace of World Music condescension” (2). This comparison to “World Music,” a favorite category of aging new agers reminds us that mainstream American music critics still view Native American artists as something other than American. Perhaps the hard truths are difficult to deal with directly.⁴ Interestingly as well, Robertson includes a portion from a Sherman Alexie poem during a spoken word interlude within “Making a Noise.” In fact Robertson credits Alexie and Joy Harjo for inspiration on *Contact from the Underworld of Redboy*; both are successful “bridges” between literature and music.⁵ This is a trend that I would predict we’ll witness more in the coming years—Native literary artists blending “borders” between genres (music, poetry, art, all creative ventures).

Like Secola, Robbie Robertson calls our attention to Peltier’s situation in a song aptly entitled “Sacrifice.” At the center of this song is the voice of Leonard Peltier, telling his own story of the events that led to his imprisonment. Robertson and Peltier collaborated in this by recording a phone conversation that Robertson later underscored with music. Robertson relates that the phone call from Peltier ended with a sacrifice as well: “He didn’t call me back for some time after [that] and I was [later] told that his phone privileges had been taken away for 90 days. I don’t know if it was because they had monitored our conversation” (Hollywood and Vine 1). During the song, Peltier reminds us that Native people have long been making these sacrifices:

The sacrifice I have made, when I really sit down to think about it, is nothing compared to what our people of a couple hundred years ago, or fifty years ago, or twenty-five years ago have made. Some gave their lives, some had to stand there and watch their children die in their arms. So the sacrifice I have made is nothing compared to those. I’ve gone too far now to start backing down.

This song has been described by various music critics as “tragic” and “haunting,” but in my view, it is a powerful piece of spoken

word artistry that every student of Native American literature should experience. It is a statement of the power of Native voice and “survivance.”

Perhaps Robertson’s strongest statement of survivance comes in his song “Ghost Dance,” from the CD *Songs for Native Americans*. This song deals with the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 in which at least three hundred Lakota men, women, and children were shot down by the U.S. military on a cold December morning. In Robertson’s hands, this song addresses one of the darkest, deadliest days in Native history, yet he reminds us that this was not the “last day” or the “end” of a culture. I quote here at length because Robertson actually gives a miniature history lesson that can become the impetus for larger discussion:

Crow brought the message
To the children of the sun
For the return of the buffalo
And a better day to come
You can kill my body
You can damn my soul
For not believing in your god
And some world down below

Chorus:

You don’t stand a chance
Against my prayers
You don’t stand a chance
Against my love
They outlawed the Ghost Dance
They outlawed the Ghost Dance
But we shall live again
We shall live again

My sister above
She has red paint
She died at Wounded Knee

Like a latter-day saint
 You got the big drum in the distance
 The Blackbird in the sky
 That's the sound that you hear
 When the buffalo cry

[Chorus]

Crazy Horse was a mystic
 He knew the secret of the trance
 And Sitting Bull the great apostle
 Of the Ghost Dance
 Come on Comanche
 Come on Blackfeet
 Come on Shoshone
 Come on Cheyenne
 We shall live again
 We shall live again
 Come on Arapaho
 Come on Cherokee
 Come on Piegan
 Come on Sioux
 We shall live again
 We shall live again

[Spoken]

We used to do the Ghost Dance
 We don't sing them kind of songs no more

At first, many may find these lyrics incongruous with the prevailing narratives of what happened at Wounded Knee—love, prayers, and life connected with such devastation? But for myself and many others, this song is an affirmation of life and living—why should we dwell on the darkness of that day? This is not to say we should ever *forget* what happened there, but we need to dismantle the dominant narrative of Wounded Knee as the “end” or “last days” of “authentic-

traditional" Indian life, as many non-Native historians would have us believe. In *Red on Red*, Womack points out that "[t]he process of decolonizing one's mind, a first step before one can achieve a political consciousness and engage in activism, has to begin with imagining an alternative" (230). This song imagines and promotes that alternative. It speaks of love and prayers as spiritual forces—active resistance to hate and despair.

The song also points out significant historical facts—that the Ghost Dance was done in order that the participants might survive the intense starvation (both physical and spiritual) that they were facing and that the dance had indeed been outlawed (as had all "Native" ritual and practice; participants were routinely arrested and jailed). Nicholas Black Elk relates in Raymond DeMallie's *The Sixth Grandfather* that Ghost Dancers did in fact use red paint, a signifier for healing and happiness in Lakota culture. And even though Crazy Horse did not directly participate in the Ghost Dance (he had been murdered in 1877 at Fort Robinson, Nebraska), he was known to have gone often to "lament" or cry for visions in order to help his people.⁶ Sitting Bull, on the other hand, was a physical participant in the Ghost Dance early on, and even though in time his enthusiasm for the dance began to wane, he knew that the dancing helped sustain the People's hope. It was in response to Sitting Bull's assassination that Big Foot's band of Mniconjous were fleeing for sanctuary in Red Cloud's camp at Pine Ridge in December 1890 and were "apprehended" at Wounded Knee. By including pertinent facts such as these, Robertson reminds us that what happened at Wounded Knee was not an event that happened in isolation—it is a reality linked to the past events as well as future ones; it is something we must remember.

Near the end of the song, there is a sort of "pantribal" call for unity and cultural renewal among Native nations—many of whom had their own variations of the Ghost Dance in their communities and perhaps still do. I like to think about the possibility of songs and dances to pray for resurgence, renewal, and a new Native world to come.⁷ At the end of the song, there is a spoken segment: "we don't sing them kind of songs no more." This may seem to be the "last

word” on such a possibility—but isn’t Robertson’s own Ghost Dance song here evidence to the contrary?

Native American music has been studied in some capacity since contact; however, most people wanted to analyze it for its exoticness or “primitive beauty” rather than to listen for the stories or lessons it might teach. Numerous books on Native music exist, but most researchers (many of whom are non-Native) tend to concentrate on the older songs, the more “traditional” music.⁸ Most believe that “authentic Native music” is only the old war songs and honor songs that are sung in tribal languages. And certainly, study in that venue is valuable. In fact, calls for inclusion of Native American music in college curricula have been made before, but almost invariably the call was for study of “authentic” or “traditional” music or chants.⁹ My contention is that many Native studies scholars are overlooking or ignoring the most accessible music—that of current contemporary Native musicians. They are a resource that we need to pay attention to and respect. I see them as “alter/native discourses” that are not only vital to our study of Native literatures but also important texts in thinking about decolonization. As Native scholar Malea Powell points out in her essay “Listening to Ghosts,” writing alternative discourses and listening to them are acts of survivance (21).

Trudell, Secola, and Robertson are just three of the many Native musicians who are currently releasing new work that we can use in our classrooms. These singers are sending their voices into the vibratory universe, as Native singers have done for millennia. They are addressing important issues that concern Native people today, issues that *should* concern every American citizen. But beyond that, these works function as texts of Native literature and should be given serious consideration as such both in academic conferences and, perhaps more importantly, in the college classroom. These texts will work well on several levels in any Native American studies classroom—especially in any Native American literature (indeed, any American literature) classroom for a variety of reasons.

First, and perhaps most important, these songs teach students to really listen to what is being said. Listening is quickly becoming a lost art. We do not want to take the time to listen and think—we are rushing our lives away, hearing only about half of what is being said

and rarely taking time to think about what it is we are hearing. We often encourage our students to speak in class—to participate in discussions, add their voice—and this holds a fundamental place in our pedagogies. It is tremendously important that we also teach them about listening to words as well; we need to show them that listening and contemplating the words they hear is worth the time it takes to consider what is being said. We need to slow down a bit and think about the words and language we are hearing.

Second, I find that students relate well to this kind of “poetry” because it is more accessible to them, blended as it is with music. As we know, music is a major concern for many of our students—they pay attention to it. We witness this every day, students all around campus with iPods or walkman earphones practically cemented in their ears. And, it seems to me, we can implement their love for music to remind them that music and poetry are actually relatives in the creative realm. Listening to these works can also encourage them to listen to their own favorite kinds of music in new ways as well. These kinds of texts can aid students in learning about evolving oral traditions and the rhetorical strategies that are inherent in such endeavors.

Additionally, many students seem to find these kinds of texts less intimidating than some other forms of poetry or literature simply because music is a part of their daily lives. I find that if I incorporate contemporary Native musical forms such as the songs of Trudell, Secola, or Robertson into my teachings, our transition into other Native writers is accomplished more smoothly; many students will spend more time with the texts and will engage with them on a new level. The students are more receptive and begin to read poetry and literature differently, relating to it with more immediacy; they become aware that they are “listening” to the words printed on the page rather than just reading them. Equally important, however, is the fact that these texts acquaint students with crucial Native issues,—such as cultural survival, decolonization, and resistance. Studying song texts like these encourages critical thinking about those issues. As many Native scholars already know, songs are alive and powerful, and we can be listening to, thinking about, and learning from these texts.

NOTES

1. This information is included in Secola's press kit from Akina, his production company.

2. I am not certain, but I think this particular joke was used from collaborating with Native comedian Charlie Hill.

3. See Darcy McNickle's biography *Indian Man: A Life of Oliver LaFarge*.

4. Although not well known in the United States, many Native American musicians have a global following; they regularly headline venues and festivals in Europe. In America, they only seem to get airplay on tribal radio stations or public radio stations.

5. Alexie has collaborated with NAMA award-winning musician Jim Boyd (formerly of the Native band XIT) in writing songs (see Soundtrack for *Smoke Signals*). Harjo performs regularly with her band Poetic Justice, and her new CD, *Native Joy For Real*, won a NAMA award for 2004.

6. See Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: Strange Man of the Oglalas*.

7. Along with others, I am confident that the current revitalization in Native languages and cultural practices is the manifestation of prayers offered by the ancients long ago. They prayed for the People to live and know their ways, and I think we see this coming to fruition, even against long odds.

8. The list here is quite lengthy, and these books focus on powwow music or "traditional" songs and are mostly written by anthropologists or ethnomusicologists. See, for example, Frances Densmore's *Teton Sioux Music and Culture*, Alice Fletcher's *Indian Story and Song*, William K. Power's *War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance*, Judith Vander's *Songprints*, and Severt Young Bear and Ron Theisz's *Standing in the Light*. Contrast this with works on contemporary Native music, most written by music journalists: Sandra Schulman's *From Kokopellis to Electric Warriors* and a one-page essay by J. Poet in *American Roots Music* (the 2001 publication that accompanied the PBS documentary of the same name).

9. For example, see Olsen.

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The Nineteenth-Century Garden

Imperialism, Subsistence, and Subversion in Leslie
Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*

TERRE RYAN

Gardens are “the most political thing of all—how you grow your food, whether you eat, the fact that the plant collectors followed the Conquistadors,” Leslie Marmon Silko told Ellen Arnold on the eve of the publication of *Gardens in the Dunes*. “You have the Conquistadors, the missionaries, and right with them were the plant collectors” (Arnold 164). *Gardens in the Dunes* is a subtly crafted history of nineteenth-century European and American imperialism. Silko intertwines the stories of heretical scholar Hattie Palmer, her botanist husband, and Sand Lizards Indigo and Sister Salt to demonstrate the ways in which white European and American men have sought to dominate all other human beings and all of the earth’s landscapes. Imperialism in *Gardens in the Dunes* is as intricately rendered as the spiderwebs that readers encounter in Silko’s other works; it encompasses the conquest of the Americas, botanical piracy, genocide, forced Christianization, and acts of violence against women, indigenous peoples, and the earth. “Genocide . . . starts at home,” Jane Tompkins warns in *West of Everything* (204). Silko’s gardens demonstrate that imperialism begins in our own backyards.

Gardens in the Dunes returns to themes that Silko develops in her earlier novels and in her nonfiction. “In *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko revisits the American mythos of the conquest of the continent from a Native American vantage point,” asserts Rachel Stein (193). Set at the end of the nineteenth century, *Gardens* fixes the reader’s attention on the years following the open-combat phase of the Indian wars. In *Gardens* Silko uses the image of the garden to

illustrate imperialism on international, national, local, and domestic levels. She accomplishes this by pointedly contrasting nineteenth-century American gardening aesthetics and ideologies with the Sand Lizards' subsistence farming. In doing so, Silko reaffirms the authority of Native lifeways—what Stein, referring to *Ceremony*, calls the tribe's "compact of reciprocity with nature" (203). And by conjoining the stories of Hattie and Indigo, Silko describes the ways in which both Native and white women survived by circumventing a system designed to subjugate or destroy them.

THE ELEMENTAL SACRED

Gardens opens with Sand Lizard survivors Sister Salt and Indigo laughing and tumbling naked over the dunes, delighting in the delicious gift of rainfall. The girls' names signify their elemental relationship with their ancestral home. *Salt*, a mineral essential to life, betokens the dry earth of the Sand Lizards' native desert habitat. *Indigo*, the name of a desert plant, alludes to the younger girl's spiritual rootedness in her native ground. Indigo's name also suggests her relationship to the sacred. Later in the novel, when Indigo is invited to Susan James's annual gala, "The Masque of the Blue Garden," Silko notes, "Indigo understood immediately: blue was the color of the rain clouds" (177). As in *Ceremony*, rain clouds in *Gardens* are sacred; Indigo understands that they carry the spirits of departed loved ones as well as the power to nourish the people and their crops. Clouds, in a whirlwind of snowflakes, also bring the Messiah, whom Indigo will seek throughout her travels. Even in the midst of Susan's party, Indigo is thinking of the Messiah. The moonlight and white blossoms remind her "of the Messiah and his family and all the [ghost] dancers in their white blankets all shimmering in the light reflected off the snow" (196). Indigo is never spoiled by material comforts or distracted from her goals: to return home to her sister, seeds in hand, and to find her mother and the Messiah along the way.

Much later in the novel, Silko demonstrates Indigo's relationship to the sacred when the girl glimpses the Messiah and his Mother in a vision on a schoolhouse wall in Corsica. "She could make out the

forms of the dancers wrapped in their white shawls and the Messiah and his Mother standing in the center of the circle—all were in a beautiful white light reflecting all the colors of the rainbow” (319). The term “rainbow,” used here to indicate the Messiah and his family, recalls Indigo’s beloved parrot, Rainbow, which the girl carries like an angel on her shoulder.

“The notion that nature is somewhere over there while humanity is over here or that a great hierarchical ladder of being exists . . . is antithetical to tribal thought,” asserts Paula Gunn Allen. “The American Indian sees all creatures as relatives (and in tribal systems relationship is central), as offspring of the Great Mystery, as cocreators, as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole” (59). Edward perceives Indigo as far beneath him; he refers to her as Hattie’s maid. Hattie, however, sees Indigo as a younger equal in need of help, and Indigo considers herself equal to Hattie, Rainbow, and Hattie and Edward’s monkey, Linnaeus. By casting a rainbow on a Corsican wall, Silko emphasizes Hattie and Indigo’s receptivity to the sacred, demonstrates a rich hybridity of spiritual traditions (Christian and non-Christian), and illustrates the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman creatures.

While Hattie and Indigo stand transfixed before their colorful vision of the Messiah, Edward is busy pretending to photograph citrus groves while stealing cuttings of *Citrus medica* to smuggle back to the United States. The origins of *Citrus medica*—also known as citron—are uncertain, “but seeds were found in Mesopotamian excavations dating back to 4,000 B.C.,” observes botanist Julia Morton. “The armies of Alexander the Great are thought to have carried the citron to the Mediterranean region about 300 B.C.” (Morton par. 3). As its name implies, *Citrus medica* has several medicinal properties; it has been used to treat intestinal troubles as an antibiotic and, in Africa, to “drive off evil spirits” (Morton par. 35). *Citrus medica* historically has had sacred connotations as well. “The Jews adopted the citron to serve in the religious ceremony of the feast of the tabernacle,” note authors Daniel Zohary and Maria Hopf (173). Yet by the 1890s, Americans and Europeans coveted *Citrus medica* for its rind, which was candied and blended into cakes and other

sweet treats; Edward plans to cultivate his cuttings for this purpose. Edward arrives in Corsica via Genoa, Italy, presumed birthplace of Christopher Columbus. A French territory, Corsica is also the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte, and the region's recorded history is primarily one of conquest by larger powers. By incorporating this plant and these locations into her narrative, Silko offers a microcosmic history of ancient conquest, European imperialism, and modern botanical piracy, while demonstrating commercial trivialization of the sacred.

SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE AND REPUBLICAN GARDENS

The Sand Lizards engage in subsistence agriculture, an ancient practice that Grandma Fleet painstakingly teaches the sisters. Because their crops are indigenous to the local environment, they thrive despite the harsh landscape. Save the grandmother and the two girls, all of the remaining Sand Lizards have relocated to reservations; Grandma Fleet hopes that the remote location of the old place will keep the girls safe from kidnappers and marauding outsiders. As long as they can remain in the dunes and plant their crops, Grandma Fleet reasons, her granddaughters will survive.

Grandma Fleet's practices look simple compared to the botanical theatrics that Indigo later encounters in the Northeast, but her efforts demonstrate a highly sophisticated understanding of desert agriculture and the continuation of agricultural traditions that had been in practice for thousands of years. According to Gary Paul Nabhan, "Evolutionary ecologists believe that certain Native American crops truly coevolved over hundreds of years of . . . intercropping" (*Cultures of Habitat* 215). Ethnobotanist Suzanne K. Fish observes, "Although dispossessed of many prime arable locations first by Hispanic and then by Anglo encroachment, Native American enclaves of historic times continued to follow a legacy of agricultural lifeways stretching back more than three millennia" (117). Fish further notes that agricultural practices varied substantially among southwestern peoples, who farmed in accordance with the geographic conditions of their respective habitats by cultivating

those crops their regions would allow (118–19). Some southwestern peoples, Fish adds, were cultivating beans as much as 3,000 years ago and squash and pumpkins perhaps 2,800 years ago (124). Like the Hopis, who “watered fields with springs that tapped upland aquifers, and . . . farmed sand dune plots overlying shallow water tables that were fed by runoff from surrounding mesas,” Silko’s fictitious Sand Lizards had traditionally occupied the dunes and farmed in concert with their region’s seasonal availability of water (Fish 122). And the grandmother’s practices are rooted in ancient spiritual traditions in which the people received corn and other plants from their creator, along with instructions for “planting, harvest, and storage rituals” (Fish 154).

Silko likewise emphasizes the ecological sophistication of Native peoples in *Ceremony*. The rancher Josiah is baffled by Tayo and Rocky’s agricultural textbooks. “The problem,” as Josiah understands, is that “the books were written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with” (75). Josiah dismisses the textbooks, adding that he will write his own, “*Raising Cattle on Indian Land*, or how to raise cattle that don’t eat grass or drink water” (75). The highly refined agricultural methods that Josiah and Grandma Fleet practice are now the subject of the emerging discipline of agroecology, a holistic science that “incorporates the sciences of agriculture and ecology with anthropology and sociology” in an effort to promote sustainable systems (Block and Byrd par. 2). By describing the Sand Lizards’ subsistence practices in *Gardens*, Silko subtly reaffirms Native authority and constructs an eloquent foil for the extravagant practices of the novel’s Euroamerican gardeners.

In *Gardens*, notes Joni Adamson, “the garden is a powerful symbol not only of nature but of livelihood or the right of humans to derive a living from the earth” (181). But we understand that, for the Native Americans in this novel, this is a vulnerable right, and it is one that may be all too easily violated, as Indigo learns when she meets the Matinnecocks in New York. Even the plot of land at Road’s End, which the sisters’ friends, Maytha and Vedna, have legally purchased from their aunt, will likely be seized by their white neighbors, whose

land has been flooded by the construction of the dam. When Sister Salt finds Indigo in tears with Maytha and Vedna, her first reaction is to ask the twins, "They took away your land?" (456).

As Gary Paul Nabhan observes, "Between 1887 and 1934, 60 percent of all tribal trust and treaty lands . . . passed out of Native American hands as a result of the Dawes Act, a bill designed to promote the assimilation of Indians into the dominant society" (219). Nabhan adds,

Between 1910 and 1982 the number of Indians owning, running, or working on farms in the United States dropped from 48,500 to 7,150 despite an overall increase in the Indian population. And as native farmers were forced or lured off the land, centuries-old traditions of planting their families' heirloom seed stocks came to an end. (*Cultures of Habitat* 219)

The subsistence gardens are essential to the Indians' survival; to seize their land is to hasten their extermination. And to destroy one region by damming and flooding in the service of another region is simply a necessary consequence of progress.

Silko introduces gardens of local imperialism when she sets Indigo loose among the gardens of Long Island's aristocracy. Despite the patronage of her indulgent benefactress and her travels among wealthy whites, Indigo never ceases to interpret the world from a Sand Lizard's subsistence perspective. When she walks through a grassy meadow, she wonders how white people obtain food if they leave their fields uncultivated (165). She questions how Mr. Abbott's servant, Lloyd, manages to tend his own livestock when he must spend his days looking after the goats and pigs of his employer (180). She hoards seeds and bits of string to use when she returns home (185, 189). When she is deposited in the Matinnecock village, she asks her protectress where her gardens are located (169). The Matinnecock gardens, Indigo learns, no longer exist because the Matinnecock land has been appropriated by white settlers. The Oyster Bay Indians have been squeezed off the land onto the margin of the ocean, where they live along the salt marshes. They can still harvest food from the sea, but their diets are restricted now; their farms have been overrun by exotic mansions, elaborate gardens, and decorative meadows.

Gary Paul Nabhan reports in *Coming Home to Eat* that such dietary restrictions would have drastic health consequences for Native Americans (246–47). As Nabhan notes, his neighbors, the O'odhams, “now suffer the highest incidence of diabetes of any ethnic population in the world,” an effect that Nabhan attributes directly to the dietary changes that accompanied forced assimilation (290).

The gardens cultivated by Hattie's father, Mr. Abbott, and by Edward's sister, Susan James, exemplify America's nineteenth-century gardening ideologies. In his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote of the spiritual benefits of agricultural labor. By the mid-nineteenth century, this idea had evolved into gardening as a form of moral calisthenics. According to historian Tamara Plakins Thornton, in the 1820s “[h]orticulture entered the mainstream of American life . . . as a movement [that] promised . . . moral benefits to an entire nation” (190). What gardening offered, Thornton observes, was a close encounter with the divine. “In the contemplation of God's works,” Thornton continues, “the horticulturist would be brought to an appreciation of divine beauty and perfection, thus purifying his soul and refining his sensibilities” (190). While such language seems to intimate Emersonian Transcendentalism, the Adamic act of gardening infuses this experience with Christian ideology. Nineteenth-century gardeners viewed their avocation as a moral exercise particularly beneficial to the wealthy. “[I]nvolvement with horticulture was seen as an antidote . . . to the greed then rampant in this country,” Thornton adds. “The more money one had, therefore, the more one could benefit from horticultural and rural pursuits” (189).

Further, by the 1890s, thanks to the early-nineteenth-century efforts of America's premier landscape gardener, A. J. Downing, and, later, British gardening authority Gertrude Jekyll, landscape gardening had achieved the status of a fine art (Thornton 190; Bisgrove 19). It was in 1893 that historian Frederick Jackson Turner announced that the American frontier was “closed” (Morgan 31). With the continent entirely conquered and settled and its Native peoples more or less incarcerated on reservations, the American landscape garden provided a blank canvas on which the gardener could impose con-

trol and exercise his or her fine art, all in the service of a higher spiritual authority.

In Silko's novel, Mr. Abbott, who steadfastly supports his daughter throughout the crisis over her heretical thesis, hardly appears to play the role of the devout Christian. Nevertheless, Hattie's father embraces one branch of the dominant ideology of nineteenth-century landscape gardening—he assumes the role of the philanthropic gardener. "Having used horticulture for their own moral improvement, the upper classes then turned their attention to the plight of the . . . urban poor and the great numbers of newly arrived 'foreigners,'" observes Thornton.

Horticulture, it was thought, would instill virtue and rid people of many vices associated with poverty and the "laboring classes." . . . To be sure these projects did much good but their motivation was a belief that horticulture taught republican virtues: hard work, thrift, and the sacrosanct worth of private property. (Thornton 189)

Kindly Mr. Abbott busies himself with agricultural experiments; he hopes to relieve hunger among the poor of the city he has fled (179). Yet horticulture, as Mr. Abbott practices it, is a means of implanting American ideologies into the minds of the arriving immigrants—a microlevel exercise in nation building.

So preoccupied with the struggles of the urban poor, this philanthropist seems oblivious to the fact that he and his neighbors are responsible for the displacement of the Matinnecoeks—so heedless that his own daughter, who grew up in Oyster Bay, never knew there were Indians on Long Island (170). But perhaps Mr. Abbott is not unmindful at all; perhaps, as is typical for his times, he simply feels entitled to live wherever he pleases, even if that means displacing a community of indigenous people from their ancestral homeland. He is kind to Indigo because Hattie is so attached to her. Were it not for his daughter's fondness for Indigo, Mr. Abbott might well be indifferent to the little girl. This gentleman-farmer is sincere, in his way, about his philanthropy, and he is serious about his agricultural experiments. If he wants to look at flowers, he says, he simply walks across the grass to the gardens of his neighbor, Susan James (178).

THE GARDENS OF THE QUEEN

In *Ceremony*, Rachel Stein observes, “nature is ‘objectified,’ ‘enslaved,’ and ‘disposed of,’ in a manner analogous to the white-skin ‘deadening’ of the natural world and native peoples in Silko’s witchery poem” (202). In *Gardens* nature is grossly manipulated by Euroamericans in landscapes that are designed to bolster the egos of their owners. Through the character of Susan James, Silko constructs gardens of domestic imperialism and subversion. Susan’s manipulations of the earth around her home are mild compared to those of realtor Leah Blue, who plans a version of Venice, Italy, complete with lakes and canals, for late twentieth-century Arizona in *Almanac*. Silko packs the “Susan scenes” with images evocative of genocide and the conquest of the American continent, and she embeds the text with the subnarrative of Susan’s discreetly subversive actions. When Susan dismantles her Italian Renaissance garden, the marble figures are scattered across the ground and heaped in a wagon like so many bodies after a battle: “The arms of the women statues were flung upward in fear, or maybe that was to show off their breasts to the men. The statues of the men appeared more calm, looking away as if they did not yet realize the destination of the wagon” (190). A twenty-first-century reader cannot help but see this as a snapshot of the battlefield at Wounded Knee, where the bodies of 144 Lakotas were dumped into a mass grave just a few years before the action in *Gardens* occurs. This image also foreshadows the transport, forty-odd years hence, of European Jews to German concentration camps and gas chambers. Yet the scene, with the men’s eyes averted from the women’s breasts, also suggests Edward’s sexual coldness and perhaps the behavior of Susan’s husband, Colin.

Susan’s behavior is antithetical to the Pueblo idea of relationship to place that Silko describes in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*. “Ancient Pueblos took the modest view that the thing itself (the landscape) could not be improved upon,” Silko observes (27). “The old-time people believe that all things, even rocks and water, have spirit and being,” the author continues. “They understood that all things want only to continue being as they are; they need only to

be left as they are" (64). Susan leaves nothing as it is, and her immoderate actions contrast starkly with the novel's earlier scenes of the subsistence gardening practiced by Grandma Fleet and Sister Salt. The "old-time people," for Susan, are Renaissance Europeans; just as early settlers attempted to reconstruct Europe in the New World, Susan imposes her favorite images of Europe on the James estate. She orders her gardener's crew of workmen to raze the Italian gardens and to construct, in their place, an English countryside. The scene occurs a few days before the ball: "The newly created hills were bright green with new turf the workers unrolled to fit seamlessly; large azaleas and mature dogwoods were transplanted, but the new hills needed something more to give the appearance of maturity" (182). What they need, Susan and her Scottish gardener decide, are an old pair of sixty-foot beech trees, which they uproot and transplant from a local farm to the Jameses' property. The scene of the transportation of the trees illustrates the anthropocentric, Judeo-Christian tradition of human control over nature, with the Edenic man (the Scottish gardener) serving the wishes of the woman. It is a staggeringly violent image, evocative of human mutilation and bondage: "Wrapped in canvas and big chains on the flat wagon was a great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by its companion; the stain of damp earth like dark blood seeped through the canvas" (183).

"It's the conspicuous consumption," Silko told Ellen Arnold of the tree scene. "You're supposed to be grossed out" (Arnold 181). The tree scene also conjures images of the forced relocation of America's indigenous peoples from their native lands and of Indigo's displacement. For much of the novel, Indigo is a transplanted exotic, as are her best friends—the parrot, Rainbow, and Hattie and Edward's pet monkey, Linnaeus.

Hattie is embarrassed by her sister-in-law's excessiveness. Even Edward is puzzled by his sister's failure to appreciate her surroundings: "Why bother with an English landscape garden when the wooded hills of the island were quite lovely themselves?" (190). Susan obsesses over the selection of plants for the night of the ball. But if she is practicing the fine art of landscape gardening, such choices are

critical to her artistry and her finickiness is hardly atypical, even if the effect she seeks will be rendered null by the darkness. Writing of the British landscape gardening diva Gertrude Jekyll, historian Richard Bisgrove observes that “[f]or Miss Jekyll, the choosing of plants, and especially the weaving together of plant groups, had a special fascination. ‘Slowly,’ she said in her first book, *Wood and Garden*, ‘comes the power of intelligent combination, the nearest thing we can know to the mighty force of creation.’” (42).

Susan’s baroque theatrics are a grotesque example of Victorian extravagance, yet they also indicate that what she wants is power. “Unless they were exceptionally talented in their arts, [women] had few ways, other than begetting children, of making a mark upon the world,” observes historian Jennifer Bennett (133). Gardens provided women with just such a socially acceptable medium. “‘These are my conquests,’ Josephine, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, is reported to have said of the roses and lilies in her renowned garden showcase,” Bennett writes (133). Like Hattie, Susan does not fit comfortably into nineteenth-century society. We know nothing of her relationship with her husband, Colin, except that Susan finds it unsatisfactory. Hattie finally chooses exile. Susan chooses to remain; if she cannot control her own life, she can still make the earth move.

Susan’s behavior toward her garden is no less imperial than that of Josephine, whose “horticultural ambitions were unrestrained,” observes Bennett. “She would spend as much as 3,000 francs on a single rare bulb and constantly expanded the area devoted to cultivation, hiring a series of expert gardeners” (135). Perhaps Susan imagines that by refashioning her surroundings in the image of an English countryside, she can purchase—without sacrificing her wealth or status—some secret measure of independence. After the construction of her English garden is completed, the garden will need maintenance, so Susan can keep her lover, the Scottish gardener, on retainer at her husband’s expense. And since gardening is perceived as a virtuous act, Susan can subvert the constraints of American society behind the protective blind of the moral ideology of American landscape gardening.

Even the name of Susan’s annual party, “The *Masque* of the Blue

Garden,” suggests that its true purposes are hidden. The ball provides Susan with the opportunity to play the role of a Renaissance queen with the power to orchestrate every detail of her environment—save the sacred rain clouds, which she cannot control—to reflect upon her, morally and physically, in the most flattering light.

Susan masterminds this annual gala to support the Bishop's Aid Society, and the bishop offers Mass to thank God, Susan, and the other ladies of the Bishop's Aid Society for raising this money to support an organization actively engaged in the oppression of women and Native Americans. Given the cultural milieu in which Susan and her guests operate, none of this is surprising. As historian Willard Hughes Rollings points out, “Christians were culturally conditioned to seize, control, and consume nature. With an ethos centered on social, natural, and supernatural worlds shaped by reciprocity, Indians never understood European ideologies of human domination and nature's submission” (122). In *Ceremony* Tayo suffers at home because of his mixed blood and his illegitimate birth—legacies made shameful only by the “missionization” that Paula Gunn Allen calls the “incarceration of tribal peoples” (195). Tayo and Ts'eh plant a garden, an act central to Tayo's healing (Stein 203). In *Gardens* Silko repeatedly exposes the stifling power of the Christian patriarchy, which provided much of the justification for the conquest of the Americas. Hattie's thesis is rejected by the clergy; Indigo and Sister Salt's mother disappears after ghost dancing; and Indigo is sent to an Indian boarding school to be Christianized and “civilized.” By placing the innocent Indigo amid this extravagance, Silko highlights the differences between indigenous and Euroamerican attitudes toward the cosmos, reaffirming the former. While the novel's indigenous peoples practice subsistence agriculture wedded to ancient spiritual traditions, Silko's Euroamerican gardeners engage in ego-based machinations draped in false morality.

Just as Mr. Abbott seeks to transmit American values to the nation's poor immigrants through his agricultural practices, Susan's efforts further support American landscape gardening ideology by serving as an example to all of Long Island's residents, thereby elevating and refining the local level of taste. Judith K. Major, biographer of American landscape designer A. J. Downing, notes that

a collection of sylvan and floral treasures surrounding the country residence of the man of taste . . . would provide eloquent models for emulation; the tastes and treasures would “creep beyond the nominal boundaries of the estate, and reappear in the pots of flowers in the window . . . of the humblest cottage by the wayside.” (27; qtg. Downing)

For Silko, the conquest never really ends. Even at the conclusion of the Indian wars, the imperial conquest of Indian cultures continues on a local level. Perhaps we may consider Susan’s gardening efforts truly successful if the Matinnekocks begin placing blooming flower pots beside the doors and in the windows of their salt marsh shacks.

THE BLOOD OF ORCHIDS

“In a 1992 seminar,” notes Joni Adamson, “[Silko] explained that she wants readers to see rape and murder ‘side by side with what’s been done to cultures and populations and geography’” (164). *Almanac of the Dead* is permeated with stories of human depravity and the violence people inflict upon one another. In *Ceremony* the most violent stateside scenes take place in the barroom and at the uranium mine. James Tarter points out that the uranium mine links the exploitation of Native peoples and their environment with the atomic violence of the Second World War (98). Lee Schweninger notes that in *Ceremony*, “[o]ppression of nature, Silko suggests, goes hand in hand with oppression according to race, gender, or class” (51). Silko reiterates this argument in *Gardens*. Plants “come from all over the world, and they’re also another way of looking at colonialism, because everywhere the colonials went, the plants came back from there,” Silko told Ellen Arnold (Arnold 181). In *Gardens* plants are exquisite tokens that signify the international imperialism behind the botanical piracy in which Edward and his employers engage. What the orchids that Edward collects do not reveal is their bloody history. “Now, the Indians knew the value of wild orchids, but frequently white brokers came upriver and demanded their entire stock of a species to corner a market,” Silko’s omniscient

narrator observes. "Indians who did not cooperate were flogged or tortured, much as they were at the Brazilian and Colombian rubber stations" (133). Edward embarks on his Para River expedition—a venture that nearly costs him his life—for the eponymously named Lowe and Company. Edward, who will later use his wife and Indigo as a screen on his trip to Corsica, is himself a blind for his corporate sponsor; his companions are secretly collecting cuttings of blight-resistant rubber plants on behalf of Britain's Kew Gardens. This is an illegal operation, we learn, since the British had earlier smuggled enough rubber plants to establish plantations in their Far Eastern colonies, thereby decimating the Portuguese and Brazilian rubber trade (129).

After Edward has secured the necessary cuttings of *Laelia cinna-barina* and Mr. Vick has secretly harvested the contraband rubber plants, Lowe's thugs set fire to the wild orchids and leave the injured Edward behind. Like *Almanac, Gardens* is a novel about capitalism, observes Ellen Arnold. Silko notes that capitalism is "in the forefront of the destruction of community and people and the fabric of being . . . of the tribal people of the world and the animals" (Arnold 180–81).

The jungle scenes portray acts of gross violence in which the indigenous peoples and the land are murderously exploited in the name of commercial imperialism. The pilfered cuttings, we know, will be propagated and planted by the subjugated peoples of Britain's Far Eastern colonies.

As Adamson notes, Silko wants readers to see the relationship between interpersonal violence and cultural violence. Annette Kolodny contends that European and Euroamerican men, historically, have dominated the landscape in the same ways in which they have dominated women (4). Writing of the botanical explorers who preceded Edward's generation, Mary Louise Pratt notes that "the image of Adam in the primordial garden is an image of Adam before the creation of Eve. . . . [T]he desire that takes [the naturalists] abroad involves a choice . . . against heterosexual conjugal life and women" (56–57). The acts of violence in the novel's jungle scenes mimic the fate visited upon Hattie by all of the men, other than her

father, whom she encounters. "The way it is now is generally very different from the way it was," observes Paula Gunn Allen. "[T]he devaluation of women that has accompanied Christianization and westernization is not a simple matter of loss of status. It also involves increases in violence against women by men, a phenomenon not experienced until recently and largely attributable to colonization and westernization" (202). Hattie is assaulted by a classmate, silenced by the clergy, and neglected by her husband, who takes all of her money and leaves it vulnerable to his partner's exploitation. And when Hattie's parents ask her to come home, she decides that "she'd rather wander naked as Isaiah for years in the wilderness than go back to Oyster Bay to endure the stares and expression of sympathy. She refused to serve as a living example to frighten young girls judged too fond of studies or books" (452). Sadly, in one of the novel's most pointed images, Hattie, whose very name suggests her cerebral nature, is brutally raped and robbed by a Needles thug who succeeds in cracking the skull of this highly educated woman. This, Silko wants us to see, is what men do to women, and this is what men do to the world. Unlike in *Almanac*, where violence surfaces indiscriminately among genders and races, in *Gardens* violence is a manifestation of the imperialistic greed of white men.

There are yet other facets to Edward's relationship to orchids. The first cuttings that Edward sells commercially, early in his career, are of the lovely *Brassavola nodosa*. It is with this species of orchid that Edward plans to make his financial comeback after his failed attempt to smuggle *Citrus medica* back to the United States. Edward makes his marketing decision in an instant when he spies the orchids on a dockside pallet.

On impulse he lifted a bundle from its pallet for a closer look. Here were dozens of Guatemalan orchids—robust specimens of *Brassavola nodosa* with huge white birdlike blossoms of a heavenly fragrance. They'd be just the orchid to win over the public. Sun priests of the Maya reputedly held the orchid sacred because it invariably bloomed on the autumnal equinox. Flowers of the gods! He could imagine the ads in magazines now. (371)

The sacred means nothing to Edward beyond its commercial value; one imagines he would sell the blood of Jesus Christ if he could obtain a vial of it. In Silko's work, Adamson observes, "when greed or jealousy drives people in pursuit of their own interests, they exhibit little respect for the sacred and accept no responsibility for their communities or for the surrounding environments" (165–66). Edward does not realize that, to the Maya, these "flowers of the gods" have souls of their own and are not to be treated carelessly (Erdos par. 25). Edward's patrons, Lowe and Company, practice this cut-and-burn or cut-and-run philosophy, as do the British in their quest for South American rubber. Edward also thinks primarily of his own pockets; he eagerly enters into partnership with Dr. Gates, pilfering meteorite fragments from an ancient Pueblo burial ground. If he can promote his cuttings of *Brassavola nodosa* as "flowers of the gods," he will do so.

EXILE AND RETURN

Like *Ceremony* and *Almanac*, *Gardens* concludes with the exiled returning home. Indigo, Sister Salt, and the little black grandfather are installed in the Sand Lizards' ancestral dunes. But the ending of *Gardens* is far more ambiguous than the conclusions of Silko's earlier novels. In *Ceremony* Tayo completes his healing ceremony and returns to his community and to the fellowship of the tribal elders. In *Almanac* Sterling is able to return, even if he lives on the periphery of the community. *Gardens* concludes with the news that Hattie is living in Europe; she can live more comfortably in exile than she can in her own country. At the dunes, the daughter of the slain snake returns to the spring; Indigo's flowers bloom, her corn ripens, and green shoots sprout from the violated apricot trees over the grandmother's grave. It is a promising image in an era when the girls' chances of surviving the tidal wave of Manifest Destiny appear particularly bleak. Yet this optimistic image is tempered by those that precede it. The location is not so remote that it is inaccessible to outsiders; when the girls first returned, they found the snake slaughtered and their trees devastated. Had Indigo, Sister Salt, and the little

black grandfather arrived at the gardens a few months earlier, they likely would have shared the fate of the rattlesnake and the apricot trees. Unlike Tayo and Sterling, they have no community to support and protect them. They will thrive in their gardens only as long as they remain isolated—or until their stream is dammed upriver to divert water to white peoples' farms and cities. The hopeful message that the final image offers is that this family, like their desert plants, will be hardy enough to survive even the harshest conditions.

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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 and 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 United States, Canada, or Mexico, while others are not recognized 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 Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, 235 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1033, or send an e-mail to sail2@msu.edu.

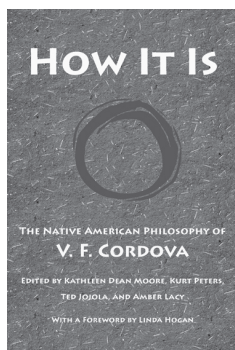
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How It Is

The Native American

Philosophy of V. F. Cordova

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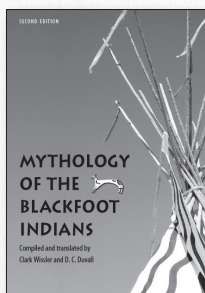
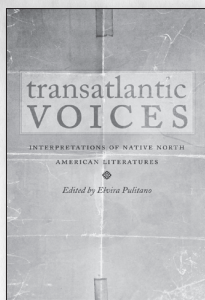
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