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Helen Jaskoski  
*SAIL*  
Department of English  
California State University Fullerton  
Fullerton, California 92634

Creative work should be addressed to  
Joseph Bruchac, Poetry/Fiction Editor  
The Greenfield Review Press  
2 Middle Grove Avenue  
Greenfield Center, New York 12833

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# SAIL

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**"IDENTITY" AND "DIFFERENCE" IN THE TRANSLATION  
OF NATIVE AMERICAN ORAL LITERATURES:  
A ZUNI CASE STUDY**

William M. Clements

Transformations of Native American oral literary performances into European-language texts have tended to reflect the translators' preconceptions about "the Indian" and about literature. For example, early nineteenth-century textmakers such as Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and his contemporaries perceived in Native American oratory, narrative, and song the raw materials for "real" literature. Consequently, they focused their translation efforts on the imagery from nature, figurative tropes, and patterns of rhythm which they believed inherent in Indian literary expression, embellishing and codifying these "very decided beginnings of a literature"—in William Gilmore Simms's phrase (137)—in whatever ways were necessary to produce texts that met the Euramerican literary conventions of their day (Clements). These translators' successors, the "scientists" of the Bureau of American Ethnology and of Boasian anthropology, also operated with preconceptions about Native American oral literature; they emphasized its documentary function, its role as a source of data about language usage and other aspects of culture (Powell, "Report" xx; Boas 393). Hence, their textualizations stressed the importance of accurate preservation of Native-language originals, even their so-called "free translations" highlighting semantic correspondences and ignoring, for the most part, indigenous esthetic features. Early in the twentieth century, enthusiasts for Native Americana such as Natalie Curtis and Mary Austin imposed still another preconception on their translations and interpretations especially of American Indian oral poetry (that is, songs without music): the idea that this poetry represented the primitive phase in the evolution of true literature and that a genuine American literature must base itself on aboriginal strivings at verbal artistry in the New World (Castro). Their translations portrayed Indians as primitive Imagists, whose art anticipated modern trends in literature.

During the three and a half centuries that Euramericans have been translating Native North American oral literature, many preconceptions have colored their work. While a careful examination of each set of preconceptions must precede full appreciation of available translations, a sense of their general tendencies can emerge from Fredric Jameson's dichotomy between "Identity" and "Difference" (43-45). The "peculiar, unavoidable, yet seemingly unresolvable alternation" between the poles of this dichotomy poses a dilemma whenever we confront alien cultural products, according to Jameson. If we perceive in these products that with which we can identify—that which is accessible through "our own cultural *moyens du bord*"—we may overlook or minimize their otherness through what may become "little better than mere psychologi-

cal projection." But if we focus on the alien cultural products' Difference, we cut short hopes of comprehension and appreciation (43).

Jameson exemplifies the alternation between Identity and Difference by surveying responses to classical culture. Invoking the principle of Identity, we have found in the symmetrical formality of Greek classicism parallels not only to our own esthetic values but also to our sociopolitical ideals. Yet when a recognition of the oversimplification inherent in this view prompts a turn to the principle of Difference, a perception of the Greece of antiquity as "a culture of masks and death, ritual ecstasies, slavery, scapegoating, [and] phallocratic homosexuality" emerges which is just as conditioned as the earlier perspective (44). Jameson's point is not that we should attempt to resolve conflicting views engendered by the Identity–Difference dichotomy, but that we should be aware of these principles as mediators between us and alien cultures.

Arnold Krupat has introduced Jameson's ideas into the discourse on Native American oral literature in a review of Karl Kroeber's *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian*. In terms of the ongoing Native American–Euramerican encounter, Krupat notes, Identity and Difference reflect the poles of response which contact with Indians has produced in Euramericans. For the Puritans, Native Americans, subhuman denizens of "howling wilderness," epitomized Difference, since they were leagued with Satan in opposing the kingdom of God in New England. The eighteenth century also stressed ways in which Indians embodied Difference and placed investigations of their history, philology, and ethnology under the rubric of natural philosophy. On the other hand, the romantics' idealization of the Noble Savage generated a perception of Native Americans in terms of Identity, as some Euramericans saw in the Indian what they would themselves be without the trappings of civilization (4).

Extended to translations of Native American oral literature, the principle of Identity has meant that textmakers have assumed they could translate orations, narratives, and poems in ways that would make them readily accessible to Euramerican readers—that adding rhyme and regularized meter to poetry or presenting oral narrative as paragraphed prose, for example, legitimately represented Indian oral literature. Exponents of the Identity principle might cite Susan Hegeman's timely reminder, "If one did not acknowledge Anglo-American textual conventions to some extent, then there would be no translation" (20). Yet while the translation enterprise must at least acknowledge the principle of Identity, textmakers who recognize the alternative, Difference, have emphasized the dangers of using literary conventions of one culture to represent the true verbal artistry of another and of transforming the oral text into the written. For them, Difference

manifests itself in two ways: linguistic/cultural and semiotic—in the materials' languages and cultural matrices and in their media of expression. Adherents of the Difference principle would probably agree with Irving Goldman's caveat about textualization of Kwakiutl cultural expression: "As a matter of simple caution, we should assume that if the mode of thought of primitive peoples, as revealed by the ethnographic records, sounds all too familiar notes of recognition in the western academic mind, something is seriously wrong with the rendition" (334).

The Identity-Difference dichotomy offers an approach to making sense of the textualization, translation, interpretation, and critical understanding of Native American oral literature. A reader can evaluate the "authenticity" of a particular piece in terms of its translator's choice of one principle or other. Furthermore, the dichotomy provides a useful basis for comparing and contrasting translated texts, especially those representing the same Native literary heritage. This latter function may be sampled effectively by examining work done with the oral literature of Zuni, a pueblo in western New Mexico.

Since Frank Hamilton Cushing's residence of four and a half years beginning in 1879, Zuni has continued to attract anthropologists. James Stevenson, leader of the Smithsonian expedition of which Cushing was a member, also studied the community's culture. His wife, Matilda Coxe Stevenson, involved in the research from its beginning, continued the work after her husband's death in 1888. Elsie Clews Parsons spent considerable time at Zuni between 1915 and 1930, A. L. Kroeber visited the pueblo during the summers of 1915 and 1916, Leslie Spier did archeological research nearby in 1916, Frederick Webb Hodge returned to Zuni periodically for almost forty years between 1886 and 1923, and Franz Boas was there briefly in 1920. Ruth Benedict and Ruth Bunzel came to Zuni in 1924, the latter returning for several subsequent summers. More recently, Omer C. Steward, John Adair, Stanley Diamond, Dennis Tedlock, and M. Jane Young among others have done anthropological fieldwork at Zuni (Pandey). While most of these researchers paid some attention to oral literature, many of them producing translations, three stand out as representing the principles of Difference and Identity particularly well. At one extreme, Cushing's work reflects Identity, since his comments about Zuni oral literature and his translations suggest a belief that the material could legitimately be rendered according to Euramerican literary conventions. Bunzel, on the other hand, recognized the principle of Difference when she commented on her translation efforts. But her actual translations reflect Identity more than Difference. Tedlock has worked more consistently from Difference, since he has stressed not only the linguistic and cultural gap between Zuni and English, but also the distinction between

orally performed literature and literature crafted within a tradition of writing.

Cushing published two major collections of translations from Zuni oral literature. "Outlines of Zuñi Creation Myths," brief cosmogonic and etiological narratives, appeared in 1896 in the *Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE). *Zuñi Folk Tales*, longer examples of what John Wesley Powell called "discredited mythology" ("Introduction" viii), came out posthumously in 1901. Though Cushing's published comments about his methods of translation are scanty, they reveal his acceptance of the principle of Identity. For example, in the introduction to "Outlines" he writes of the songs which appear in some of the myth texts: "In the originals these are almost always in faultless blank meter. . . . I do not hesitate . . . to tax to the uttermost my power of expression in rendering the meanings of them where I quote, clear and effective and in intelligible English" (374). Cushing found Zuni songs so like poetry in English that he could apply a generic term from the latter ("blank verse") to them. Moreover, he had no qualms about waxing literary in a Euramerican mode when translating them. Powell's introduction to the folktale collection includes some telling comments about Cushing's "scriptorial wand," which the translator waved to make Zuni oral narratives "a part of the living literature of the world." Cushing was especially equipped to accomplish this since he could "think as myth-makers think, . . . speak as prophets speak, . . . [and] expound as priests expound" (ix). In other words, Cushing recognized Identity between what he might express in English literary prose and what the Zuni verbalized in oral narration.

Cushing's devotion to the principle of Identity probably arose from two sources. The first was his deeply personal involvement in Zuni culture. While some may dismiss such antics as his signing correspondence as "First War-Chief of Zuni" (Woodward) and being photographed in Zuni dress as manifestations of Cushing's idiosyncratic personality, they do reveal his sense that the Zuni and he—a "civilized" Euramerican—were not all that different, even though at disparate stages in the scheme of cultural evolution which he espoused. This scheme, a second source of the Identity principle for Cushing, enjoyed the support of most anthropologists of the late nineteenth century. Proposed by Edward Burnett Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan and field-tested by Powell's BAE, it posited human psychic unity (read "Identity") and the notion that cultural forms at various evolutionary stages had genetic connections that presupposed at least traces of Identity. Fieldworkers such as Cushing might see cross-cultural equivalences, even when they were lacking, because of the force of evolutionary theory—hence, Tedlock's criticism that Cushing's "metaphysical glossing" of his texts stressed a monotheism indicative of "the



theoretical preconceptions of nineteenth-century anthropology rather than Zuni belief" ("On the Translation" 58).

Cushing's opinion that Zuni oral narrative resembled Victorian prose closely enough to warrant his use of the contemporary Euramerican esthetic colors his renderings of the Zuni material. For example, consider how he handles a description of the twin war gods in a myth text to which he assigned the title "The Origin of the Twin Gods of War and of the Priesthood of the Bow":

Lo! dwarfed and hideous-disguised were the two gods Áhaiyuta and Mátsailema, erst Uanamachi Píahkoa or the Beloved Twain who Descended—strong now with the full strength of evil; and armed as warriors of old, with long bows and black stone-tipped arrows of cane-wood in quivers of long-tailed skins of catamounts; whizzing slings, and death-singing slung-stones in fiber-pockets; spears with dart dealing fling-slats, and blood-drinking broad-knives of gray stone in fore-pouches of fur-skin; short face-pulping war-clubs stuck aslant in their girdles, and on their backs targets of cotton close plaited with yucca. Yea, and on their trunks, were casings of scorched rawhide, horn-like in hardness, and on their heads wore they helmets of strength like to the thick neck-hide of male elks, whereof they were fashioned. ("Outlines" 422)

The initial interjection and reversal of word order suggest an attempt to be "literary" according to Victorian standards. The interminable length of the first sentence, though perhaps reflecting the formulaic quality of oral *poetry* (which most contemporary translators consider Native American oral narrative to be [e.g., Hymes]), more likely draws upon European epic literature which Cushing could have known in a variety of Victorian translations. Cushing also adopts a stilted formality in vocabulary, which, though it could be an attempt to reproduce the mythopoeic diction of Zuni narrators, probably derives from the fad for conscious archaizing that characterized Victorian literature set in the past (Basnett-McGuire 72–73).

Cushing translated poetic passages in myths into Victorian verse. For example, he treated the words of one of the "Ancients" summoned to assist the war gods in their maturation as follows:

"Why call ye, small worms of the waters  
And spawn of the earth and four quarters,  
Ye disturbers of thought, lacking shame;  
Why call ye the words of my name?" ("Outlines" 421)

The use of rhyme introduces a feature of English poetics absent from Zuni. Bunzel, in fact, chided Cushing for this "inexplicable blunder" of rendering Zuni poetry in "regular short-lined rhymed English stanzas" ("Zuñi Ritual Poetry" 620).

Cushing's treatment of the final paragraphs of a folktale he entitled "The Maiden and the Sun" offers another example of his approach to translation:

And ever since then [the events of the story], my children, the world has been filled with anger, and even brothers agree, then disagree, strike one another, and spill their own blood in foolish anger.

Perhaps had men been more grateful and wiser, the Sun-father had smiled and dropped everywhere the treasures we long for, and not hidden them deep in the earth and buried them in the shores of the sea. And perhaps, moreover, all men would have smiled upon one another and never enlarged their voices nor strengthened their arms in anger toward one another. (*Zuñi Folk Tales* 474)

This lengthy summary and explicit, garrulous statement of the story's moral exemplify what Tedlock regards as the "most serious difficulty" with Cushing's folktale translations: his embroidery of the originals "with devices, lines, and even whole passages which are clearly of his own invention and not mere distortions" ("On the Translation" 59). As Brian W. Dippie has noted, Cushing was "more adept at conveying a feeling for myth" than at recording it with exactitude (285), but his sense of the essential Identity between the Zuni and himself and between their literature and his granted him the license to cast Zuni oral literature in a Victorian mode. Unlike some translators who transform what they perceive as exotic, esthetically remote literature according to the esthetic conventions of the target language in order to create texts with reader accessibility, Cushing did not regard Zuni oral literature as remote. He converted it into Victorian prose and poetry because he sensed its Identity with them.

Ruth Bunzel, trained by Franz Boas and initiated into fieldwork by Ruth Benedict, had no use for the cultural evolutionism of Cushing's generation of anthropologists. Instead, she accepted her mentors' doctrines of cultural diversity and cultural relativism—in other words, of Difference and respect for Difference. Unlike Cushing she recognized the obstacles in translating from Zuni into English, but like him she often chose vocabulary and stylistic constructions for her texts that made them immediately accessible to readers of English, thus representing them in terms of Identity. The major collections of Bunzel's translations are "Zuñi Origin Myths" and "Zuñi Ritual Poetry," both of which appeared in 1932 in the *BAE Annual Report*, and *Zuñi Texts*,

published in 1933 by the American Ethnological Society.

"Zuñi Ritual Poetry" contains most of Bunzel's commentary on her translation procedures. While Cushing was confident that Zuni and English evinced the principle of Identity to such an extent that he could easily translate from one to the other, Bunzel noticed some very real difficulties. In vocabulary, for instance, she cited problems produced by the "obsolete or special" language used in ritual texts (620) and the abundant word play in those texts (619). The latter included double entendres and deliberate verbal and grammatical ambiguity, but even ascertaining "how much is word play, how much metaphor, and how much is actual personification" sometimes mystified her (619). Bunzel also identified grammatical differences between English and Zuni, the Native American language's reliance on inflection being most significant.

Other grammatical features of Zuni which caused translation problems for Bunzel included its use of long periodic sentences, its typical word order (subject, object, verb), and its use of participial or gerundive clauses to express temporal or causal subordination ("impossible in English," she lamented) (618-19). She regretted her inability to carry these aspects of Zuni grammar over into English and the resulting loss of "effective stylistic feature[s]" (619). Bunzel was also unable to retain the rhythm of Zuni ritual poetry in her English texts (though she could preserve "its irregularity, the unsymmetrical alteration of long and short lines" [620]). Finally, she believed her translations suffered "greatly from loss of sonority and vigor" because of her inability to transfer Zuni patterns of accent into English (620).

Clearly, then, Bunzel recognized the principle of Difference, but she did not represent it fully in her translations. Perhaps she believed that doing so would have rendered her texts inaccessible to English readers and, like many other translators, opted to sacrifice features of the source language original for the sake of target language readability (Basnett-McGuire 23).

Whatever the reasons, Ruth Bunzel created poetic texts that read—by her own admission—more like the blank verse of Milton or the free verse of the King James translation of the Psalms than Zuni oral poetry ("Zuñi Ritual Poetry" 620). Notice her treatment of the ending of one of the prayers of the War Cult:

On roads reaching to Dawn Lake  
May you grow old;  
May your roads be fulfilled;  
May you be blessed with life.  
Where the life-giving road of your sun father comes out,  
May your roads reach;  
May your roads be fulfilled. ("Zuñi Ritual Poetry" 689)

Aside from the reference to "Dawn Lake," nothing in these lines suggests that they originated in the oral literature of a culture as removed from that of most readers of English as the Zuni. In fact, their stately measure and litany-like parallelism fulfill expectations, shaped by Judaeo-Christian scripture and liturgy, of what ritual poetry should be. Bunzel has not added these features; they exist to some degree in the Zuni text published alongside her translation. But she has not translated that text in a way that suggests the Difference her commentary recognizes.

Bunzel's translations of Zuni oral narrative assume the same approach. The first paragraph of her translation of "Tale Concerning the First Beginning" is a straightforward rendering that only hints at Difference:

Yes, indeed. In this world there was no one at all. Always the sun came up; always he went in. No one in the morning gave him sacred meal; no one gave him prayer sticks; it was very lonely. He said to his two children: "You will go into the fourth womb. Your fathers, your mothers, k̄æto-we, tcu-eto-we, mu-eto-we, le-eto-we, all the society priests, society pekwins, society bow priests, you will bring out yonder into the light of your sun father." Thus he said to them. They said, "But how shall we go in?" "That will be all right." Laying their lightning arrow across their rainbow bow, they drew it. Drawing it and shooting down, they entered. ("Zuñi Origin Myths" 584)

Though they would realize this is a translation, of course, because of the terms left in Zuni and probably because of culture-specific references such as "society bow priests," readers of English would again find nothing to indicate that this is a passage of *oral* literature (and poetry instead of prose, according to many contemporary students of Native American oral narrative [e.g., Hymes]) in a language whose structures differ substantially from the Indo-European. A clear sense of Identity emerges despite the translator's recognition of Difference.

Dennis Tedlock's translations of Zuni oral narratives—most of which were originally published in *Finding The Center* in 1972—reflect more clearly than Bunzel's their common sense of the Difference between Zuni and English. Tedlock also goes farther than either of his predecessors by stressing that an important distinguishing factor between the original performances and their translated textualizations involves the media through which they are realized. Difference figures prominently in Tedlock's handling of Zuni oral literature because it is Zuni and because it is oral. Influenced not only by the continuing emphasis in anthropology on Difference as represented by cultural

pluralism and relativism, but also by the emergent "ethnography of communication" in the 1960s (Gumperz and Hymes) which emphasized the complexity of communicative activity and the need to record all its aspects—not just the text-message—Tedlock has written extensively on the translation practices of his predecessors at Zuni and his own methods. Many of these writings were collected in the volume *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* in 1983.

Critical to Tedlock's assumption of Difference as a basis for translating Zuni oral literature is his statement that "Those who have sought to transform the spoken arts of the American Indian into printed texts have attempted to cross linguistic, poetic, and cultural gulfs much larger than those faced by translators who merely move from one Indo-European written tradition to another" (*The Spoken Word* 31). Particular problems which Zuni presents when one attempts to transform narratives composed in it into English, according to Tedlock, include some of those identified by Bunzel: word order and use of special vocabulary, for instance (*Finding the Center* xxvii–xxviii). He also notes (as Bunzel's translations show that she also recognized) that some Zuni words—interjections, proper names, opening and closing tale formulas<sup>1</sup>—defy translation into English (*Finding the Center* xxviii–xxx). Moreover, he stresses how the principle of Difference affects the general perception of the stories he has translated. What Zunis "picture" when they perform or hear oral literature differs from what Euramerican readers might visualize. Tedlock admits, "[N]othing I could do would make them experience . . . [oral literature] precisely as a Zuni does" (*Finding the Center* xxxi).

Meanwhile, like Dell Hymes, Tedlock also argues that prose translations of oral narrative obscure its nature: "[P]rose has no real existence outside the written page" (*Finding the Center* xix). Consequently, he suggests Difference in medium of presentation by rendering Zuni oral narratives poetically, equating line breaks with pauses of one-half to three-fourths of a second.

Tedlock's translation of the conclusion of a folktale entitled "Coyote and Junco" offers a glimpse of his technique. The narrative picks up after a two- or three-second pause by storyteller Andrew Peynetsa:

Coyote said, "QUICK SING," that's what he told her  
[Junco].  
She didn't sing.  
Junco left her shirt for Coyote.  
He bit the Junco, CRUNCH, he bit the round rock.  
Right here (*points to molars*) he knocked out the teeth, the  
rows of teeth in back.  
(*tight*) "So now I've really done it to you."  
"AY! AY!" that's what he said.

THE PRAIRIE WOLF WENT BACK TO HIS CHILDREN, and by the time he got back there his children were dead.

Because this was lived long ago, Coyote has no teeth here  
(*points to molars*).

LEE———SEMKONIKYA. (*laughs*)

(*Finding the Center 83*)

In addition to the pacing of the oral performance, marked by line divisions, Tedlock's translation indicates precise features of how Peynetsa told the story through words printed completely in upper case (spoken more loudly), italicized comments in parentheses (tone of voice, gestures, audience reactions), and a long dash following a vowel within a word (lengthening of about two seconds). In other passages, Tedlock signals such lengthening by repetition of letters. He also uses typography to mark softening of voice (small type) and changes in pitch (superscripting and subscripting words or syllables).

While Difference in medium emerges from what amounts to typographic manipulation, Tedlock does little more than Bunzel to suggest linguistic/cultural Difference. In this passage, he leaves the closing formula—which Cushing usually handled as "Thus shortens my story" (e.g., *Zuñi Folktales* 92)—untranslated. Elsewhere, he does the same with opening formulas (Cushing's "In the days of the ancients" [e.g., *Zuñi Folktales* 65]). He also attempts to match the tone and level of Zuni diction by using the relatively formal "prairie wolf" for the penultimate occurrence of "coyote." Occasionally, Tedlock creates the same effect by translating Zuni interjections with English archaisms. The formulaic "that's what he told her [said]" also represents the Zuni (printed on facing pages only for "Coyote and Junco") and may help to communicate Difference, but the major factor in creating this effect is the appearance of the text on the printed page. Tedlock's translations do not look like most textualizations of oral narratives in paragraphed prose; they are poetry, but poetry which incorporates constant reminders of the relevance of the principle of Difference in the media of presentation.

Superficially, applying Fredric Jameson's dichotomy between Identity and Difference to the translation of Native American oral literature may seem simply a restatement of the tension that has characterized translation theory and practice for centuries. Every translator must choose if his or her completed work will preserve elements of the source language (SL) original even when they are obscure and ineffective in the target language (TL). The alternative is to sacrifice SL for the sake of readability in TL (Bassnett-McGuire 68–72). Most translators have taken the latter course and produced translations—like Alexander Pope's rendering of Homer in heroic

couplets—which their readers can appreciate. But the Identity–Difference dichotomy involves more than a choice of whether to favor SL or TL. For instance, in creating his texts translated from Zuni which favored TL, Cushing—if his and Powell’s published comments are sincere—did not believe he was sacrificing SL at all. He saw such Identity between Zuni and English that there was no reason to indicate Difference. At the other extreme, Tedlock, who would seem to favor SL at the expense of TL, does not really do so. His translations, though preserving some of the Difference he perceived in Zuni oral narrative, were originally published by a trade press and are readily accessible for readers willing to deal with the typographic manipulations, which are products of Difference in medium, not of the translator’s favoring SL. Of the three translators treated here, only Bunzel may have been influenced by the translator’s conventional dilemma of favoring SL or TL. Like Pope, she recognized the essential Difference between SL and TL and produced a text that favored the latter, but unlike him she may have done so because she believed there could be no other way to bring the Zuni into English.

Moreover, I am using the Identity-Difference dichotomy to apply also to media of presentation. Neither Cushing nor Bunzel seemed to perceive that the orality of Zuni literature made it Different from written prose and poetry, so neither did anything to suggest the original orality in their translations. Only Tedlock recognized and marked media Difference in his translations.

Consequently, Identity and Difference—extended to the principles governing the translation of Native American oral literature from Fredric Jameson’s original conceptualization—offers a handle for dealing with the ways translators have worked. The Zuni case study provides an illustration of what might be done on a larger scale with the entire history of Euramerican textualizations and translations of Native North American oral performances from the Jesuits in New France through the current ethnopoetics movement. Looking at textmakers and their translations in terms of the dichotomy does not presuppose that those designated as adherents of Identity have produced less "authentic" texts than exponents of Difference or vice versa. An advocate of Identity may err by forcing Native American material into Euramerican conventions, but a translator emphasizing Difference may unnecessarily exoticize the material. The dichotomy, though, does provide better consumer information. Readers will have a clearer idea of how and why particular translations came about.

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Further study of Zuni allowed Tedlock to translate the conventional opening formula as "Now we are taking it up" and the closing formula as "Enough, the word is short" (*The Spoken Word* 65–66).

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## **NOBODY IS AN ORPHAN: Interview with Luci Tapahonso**

Sylvie Moulin

In the past few years, Luci Tapahonso has become one of the most powerful voices of her generation. She was born in Shiprock, New Mexico, and her style combines the strength of the Navajo tradition with the vivacity of a modern, concise, dynamic language. She is the author of *One More Shiprock Night* (1981), *Seasonal Woman* (1981), and *A Breeze Swept Through* (1987), and she has a fourth book in preparation. This interview was done in Luci Tapahonso's office at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, on June 18, 1989. Luci is now teaching in the English Department of the University of Kansas.

**SM:** Luci, what is your background?

**LT:** I'm from Shiprock, New Mexico, and I'm Navajo. My mother's clan is To dǫ́ ǫ́vhiǫ́ and my father's clan is To dǫ́ chíniǫ́. I grew up in Shiprock. I went to boarding school when I was small, and then to public school.

**SM:** When did you start writing poetry?

**LT:** Probably in high school.

**SM:** What does poetry mean to you? Why didn't you choose another art to express yourself?

**LT:** I didn't really choose it, I think it just happened. I guess I really like poetry because it's concise, it's short, and it has a rhythm to it. It's almost like singing. It's very visual and it has a lot of impact.

**SM:** You also use songs and chants in some of your poems.

**LT:** Yes.

**SM:** Has the Navajo tradition a great influence on your poetry?

**LT:** It just depends what kind of work I am doing at the moment. But I think the influence of the Navajo tradition is very strong because that's what I am. In the way that I think, in the way that I talk, it's already there, it's already properly Navajo just by itself. So when I write that's the way it is, because poetry is an oral kind of expression and you can't really separate yourself, the voice that you are, from what you write.

**SM:** Did you grow up speaking mainly Navajo?

**LT:** Yes. Until I went to school I spoke Navajo more than I spoke English, although I knew English already. As I went to school I spoke English more. Now I speak English a lot more than I speak Navajo because I'm not around Navajo people as much as I used to be.

**SM:** A lot of writers and artists claim to be influenced by the Southwest. Do you think the environment, the scenery, have a strong influence on you?

**LT:** It influences me because of where I live and also the way I was raised. When I was growing up they used to say that nobody is an orphan, that everybody has a mother and that your mother is the Earth and your father is the Sky. So you are always between the two and they are always looking over you. Those kinds of things can't be separated, because that's the way Navajos talk and think. It's not a separate issue. At least I don't think about it consciously. And I believe that a lot of Navajo people, a lot of Indian people, think that way. When I talk with Indian people we always talk about the same thing and it's always about the land in one way or another.

**SM:** In your poetry you often mention your family relations, your children. Is that a major source of inspiration for you?

**LT:** It is, because to me it's very personal, and I don't write about things that I'm not familiar with. Poetry is very good because it allows me that form of expression. And I think it's universal even though it's my family, my children, my brothers and sisters or whatever. I know it's a universal feeling. And when people hear the poems, they don't know a thing about my family, they don't need to know anything about it, but they think about how it relates to them, and so it's universal in a sense.

**SM:** You also talk a lot about women, friends or women who are important in your life. And I know you hate to be called a feminist. So how do you feel when people say that you are a feminist writer?

**LT:** (Laugh) I think our society is not really used to women being vocal or showing appreciation of other women. But I grew up in a matriarchal culture and it's not necessarily that women are more important, but it's just that women have a better status in the Navajo society and in the Navajo family. So I think I'm a typical Navajo person and I think Navajo men feel the same way I do about women because there is a strong sense of respect that the Navajo people have raised for women. The whole family and the home are centered around the woman. They say that the woman is the center of the home and that through the woman all beauty and all good things come out from the center of the home. So everything women do is very important, even the way you dress, the way you fix your hair. The status that the woman has in the Navajo culture has always been there.

But it's unusual in a non-Navajo society because women have not been treated well for the most part in western societies. They have not been treated the way they should have been. So when people see that

in my work, perhaps they think I'm a feminist. To them overthrowing the men is feminism, overthrowing men or becoming better than men. But in the Navajo society it's not that, it's being equal and it's having a status that's different from the one non-Indian people have.

There's also a problem of terminology. What does the word feminist mean? It means to value or appreciate, to have respect for the individual regardless of the gender. It doesn't mean women having an equal status with men. It's a word that people throw around and it starts having some negative connotations, but it has a different meaning behind it. It's like people saying "she is a real libber." That's not good because then you think about burning bras, hating men, that kind of stuff.

**SM:** What are the most important topics for you?

**LT:** I don't know if I really have inspirational things. I'm just writing all the time. I have a journal that I write in every day, and I write all the time. Some things turn into poems and some things don't, it just depends. I know that I'm really observant. I really watch, notice things a lot. I listen to people a lot, more than I talk, probably. Sometimes something will happen that will make me really think and work to turn it into a poem. For the most part it comes together over a period of time, maybe three days, maybe two weeks.

**SM:** Do you sit down every day at the same time to write?

**LT:** No. I wish I had the luxury of sitting down at the same time. I just write whenever I have a chance, and I never know when that will be. Sometimes I say that I'm going to take a nap, and then the kids know that they have to leave me alone. Then I write instead of taking a nap. (Pause) Most of the times I take a nap. (Laugh) It just depends on what my schedule is.

When I'm traveling I don't write in my journal as much as I write poetry. When I travel I write a poem a day. Writing a poem is a lot of work for me and I really want to make it succinct and powerful and get as much as I can without rambling on and on. So when I travel and write a poem a day it really makes me work but I like it. So wherever I go I make sure that I have poems from that time because things there are different from what they are afterwards. When I'm not traveling I usually have twenty things to do all the time, and then it's just a matter of finding that time to word it. Then I write more journal.

There is no formula; it's just something that comes together. Maybe I hear something that someone says and it's a good line. So I keep that and I keep working on it. And I can really write poetry anywhere, anytime. It's not the act of writing as much as it is to create it and formulate it in my mind. I really like to drive because it gives me that freedom to write as I am driving. I can do it anytime, when I'm

cooking, when I'm mopping the floor. It gives me a nice escape instead of getting impatient in the grocery line. I don't have to be there. I mean, I'm physically there in the line, but in my mind I'm writing poetry. It's nice, it's like a place I can go to anytime, and I don't get upset by these little things that I might otherwise mind.

**SM:** One thing that has always fascinated me in your poetry is the number of texts about driving. A lot of people see driving as a pain, a struggle, but I drive a lot myself and find it very inspiring, too. I remember a poem from *A Breeze Swept Through* about your driving back to Shiprock . . .

**LT:** Yes, and I think it's very common in this area. I was talking to somebody over the weekend and she was saying: "To me the most important is a full tank, a car in good condition and a good sound system. Then I'm all set." That's the way I feel. I have my box of tapes and a big Diet Coke and I'm happy.

**SM:** What do you listen to when you are on the road?

**LT:** All kinds of things, mostly country western music. It's kind of depressing, but one or two of them are really cute. I listen to some tapes I got when I went to Hawaii, jazz, classical. I don't listen to rock too much, but my kids do. (Laugh)

**SM:** Do you think you reach a broad audience or mainly people from the Southwest?

**LT:** I think it's pretty broad. I know it's Southwestern in terms of the land and the landmarks. But the emotional content can be read pretty much all over the country. The only thing they don't understand is the land, the desert. Like in Hawaii, they think we can't open the door without looking to make sure there is not a snake waiting to come in. Really, they think we are just plagued by snakes. It's funny. (Laugh)

**SM:** How do you see your future as a poet?

**LT:** Well, hopefully I'll have another book published and I'll get a grant to take some time off from teaching and just write.

**SM:** Are you still doing storytelling?

**LT:** Not really. I do more poetry than storytelling. It's hard to get paid at least half of what you should get. I got to the point where I do five or six benefits a semester, that's it. It takes a lot of energy to do a good job, and people think that you just go there and do it. (Pause). I also have a children's book coming out at Northern Arizona Press. That's a good area to go into.

**SM:** Do you plan to write a novel?

**LT:** Maybe. I have that story I gave you that is a fiction [Luci was

referring to "What I Am"]. That might just happen. It came together really quickly and I don't know what I'm going to do with it. But at this point I don't see that happening. I don't really like to write fiction. Poetry is better for me. I think I'd like to try writing scripts. Wouldn't it be nice to get paid to write from 8:00 to 5:00? It would be wonderful.

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### THREE VIEWS OF *POWWOW HIGHWAY*

#### Easin' on Down the *Powwow Highway*(s)

Rodney Simard

That American Indians have always been a staple of the film industry is news for no one; suburban adolescent and Native ethnographer alike have been awash in largely stereotypical images, both positive and—primarily—negative, since the first silent two-reelers and serials until the current primacy of television and video. From the beginning, the "Western" has been a primary film genre, embodying and reflecting a romanticized notion of American ideals: potentiality, individuality, recreation, primal heroism, manifest destiny, savagism and civilization. But it has also been a genre not bound by national borders, appealing instead to a geography of the mind; witness the birth of the "New Western" in Italy in the 1960s and the enduring popularity of these films in Europe and the Orient.

Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., asserts, correctly I believe, that the enduring film images of Indians are derived from the captivity narratives, the earliest American literary genre, as transmuted through the novels of James Fenimore Cooper and pulp fiction, to current fiction and the mass media (104). As a genre, the Western has developed its own conventions and formulae, to which the Indian character has been made to conform; the resultant images, the stereotypes that emerged from earlier media, are generally polarized as two extremes described by Michael Hilger: "the blood-thirsty savage and the noble but doomed savage as fictions to emphasize the superiority of . . . white heroes, to comment on contemporary political issues or to serve the needs of the western genre" (1). Hilger goes on to note that "even such great directors as D. W. Griffith and John Ford portray the Indian as always too good or too bad; as such they are often the most extreme fictions in the western, a genre which seldom comes very close to reality" (1). Note that *savage* is the operative word in this explication, echoing the brilliant paradigm of the American consciousness outlined by Roy Harvey Pearce.

Images of Indian blood thirst in film are countered by considerably fewer hand-wringing laments about vanishing Red nobility (Hilger's filmography lists 830 films through 1984; he also reminds us of the central importance of the techniques of cinematography in creating and perpetuating stereotypes, 3–5). Most frequently, positive depiction of Indians in film is equally stereotyped, from the Viet Nam parables inherent in *Little Big Man* and *Soldier Blue* to the "pseudofactual mélange of anthropological blunders and white supremacy" of *A Man Called Horse* (Stedman 260).

To its credit, *Powwow Highway* avoids the usual polarities and the stereotypes attendant upon them. It is a very good film, but it is decidedly not David Seals' excellent novel, *Powwow Highway*, upon which it was based with a high degree of fidelity—and an equally high degree of quite odd interpolation and omission.

The greatest strength of the film is in its performances. As Philbert Bono, Gary Farmer is a casting director's dream: his size, with its suggested power and gentleness, is exactly Philbert's, and his seraphic expression captures precisely Philbert's unusual mixture of the inspired and the dim. The scene of his waking in the Denver condominium, as he nakedly luxuriates in the absurdly small child's twin bed, conveys with imagistic precision the narrative description of Seals' novel (231–33). Farmer's performance is perfection; he *is* Philbert. Too often in the novel, Seals' ironic tone seems to diminish the fundamental importance of Philbert's epiphany and quest as the author attempts to put Philbert's vision in the correct perspective of his limited intelligence. Farmer's laconic performance never suggests any such disjunction between the high and the low, fusing the two instead into a seamless and consistent whole.

More problematic is A Martinez as Buddy Red Bow (why the shift of the family name from Red Bird?), not only in terms of ethnicity, but also in his tentativeness in the role. Largely convincing and effective, Martinez does seem uncomfortable with his Indianness, but this may indeed be Buddy's problem as well; still, such hesitation and discomfort are amplifications of the novel. Joanelle Nadine Romero as Bonnie brings a startling beauty to her character, one inherent in the character of Bonnie, but Romero is madonna-like in her physical presence, emphasized throughout the film, and particularly in the shot of her in jail as she awaits Bunny's arrival. Many of the lesser roles, most evidently cast with Indian actors, are also convincing and effective, infusing the experience of the film with a necessary mixture of reverence and humor.

Even with considerable reshaping of the source, the film is effective in its own terms. Indian material is not slighted—even if it is frequently distorted. The value of *Powwow Highway* is that it is an organic, effective film and, more importantly, that it attempts to present Indian material from an Indian perspective, something that few of the products of Hollywood (and other points) have ever even attempted. Still, it bears evidence of conformity to the genre. For example, the film ends in a predictable car chase, for no reason apparent other than the formulaic expectation of such an event. Not only is this a distortion of the event from the original narrative, but it also tends to eclipse the essential motivation of the work: Philbert's vision quest and his acquisition of his tokens for his medicine bundle. In fact, his quest is



completely forgotten in the last segment of the film as the rescue-of-the-maiden motif dominates entirely. More disturbing is the inflation of the role of Chief Billy Little Old Man. In the novel, aware of Buddy's deviation from his appointed task of buying bulls with tribal money, he waits patiently and hopefully for the return of the prodigal, an important factor in the future of the tribe. But in the film he goes to Santa Fe, the very portrait of the wise and stoic chief, albeit in contemporary manifestation. He is even the agent by which the final escape is effected. Again, a stereotypical elder, the embodiment of patience and wisdom, is offered to counter the excesses of the young "bucks."

More importantly, complexity of character is diminished, edging uncomfortably close to stereotypes, and the broad political canvas of the novel (Seals was a member of AIM) has been reduced to a simple polarity. Granting that elision and compression are necessary in most cases of transferring a narrative from one medium to another, particularly from novel to film, one cannot avoid the implications of many alterations in this script. Examples abound: drug ingestion has been radically reduced from the novel, but perhaps the filmmakers were trying to avoid the stereotype of the "drunken Indian." Lester and Doris, their subplot and their involvement in the main plot, have been excised. The violence and anger attendant upon Buddy's attack on the Radio Shack have been contextualized and rationalized. Most details of family relationships have been streamlined and/or distorted. Discursive cultural details in the novel have been translated into simple images. Philbert's theft from the Santa Fe police station has been reduced by 90%. Bull Miller has been portrayed as a figure familiar to the newest revival of film noir. The very Indian party in the Denver condo is missing. And the like. Perhaps solid reasons underlie all these alterations—and many more—but speculation does suggest a few very familiar and unfortunate possibilities. Without the direct testimony of the filmmakers, perhaps the best position is suggested by a paraphrase and elaboration on the famous remark by Gladstone: a reasonable person does not want to know how sausages, laws, and movies are made.

Inescapable and more insidious, to me, are two other aspects of the film. First is its anti-feminism and, in context, anti-Indian portrayal of women. Romero does make an exquisite Bonnie, but she is not Seals' tough and intelligent survivor. By making her into a madonna, the film shears away her battle scars, for the character in the novel, while beautiful, is hardly a saint. Bonnie has been and continues to be a promiscuous drug dealer, qualities that add depth, complexity, and humanity to her character. She is precisely not the stereotypical "Princess," but rather a very real woman who can, for the most part,

ably take care of herself as she explores and expands the restricted range of potentiality offered to Indian women in the world today. Similarly, her youngest child, Jane, has been made older than her brother, Sky, and neither child acts with the admirable self-reliance of her or his counterpart in the novel. To make the women and children of the film ineffectually reliant on men distorts many of the realities of both historical and contemporary Indian cultures, however desirable or "safe" such a depiction might be from a Hollywood perspective.

A second problem is the complexity of the antecedent action of the novel being reduced to a simple opposition. Philbert's quest having given way to the rescue plot, the film encapsulates the antagonists into the targeted "apple," Sandy Youngblood, who has become the representative of a mining company that wants reservation rights. Bonnie is framed in order to lure Buddy away during a critical tribal vote. Immediately alarming is the notion that Buddy is the sole savior of his people, who, without his wayward but paternalistic presence, will yet once again sell away their lifeblood because of their child-like trust (more alarming still in the context of that symbol being portrayed by a non-Indian actor). But also disturbing is the reduction of the tangles of political and criminal nets that the original narrative is enmeshed in. AIM, the FBI, the Mafia, the BIA—all the purposefully vague and confused political factors of the novel, all of whom contribute to a complex, sinister, and insidious atmospheric feeling—are conveniently, too conveniently, rolled into a familiar force: a materialistic and exploitative white corporation that can, by means of a simple trick, rob the Indians of their possessions. This stereotype is obviously reductive, however convenient it might be in terms of film explication and plot development, and it also strips the novel of an important dimension of Indian truth. The forces of opposition are and always have been many and multifaceted, alien to the point of obscurity, and a consistent state of vague paranoia is not necessarily a pathological condition. It is a reality, one that the film distorts. To reduce the complexity of the plot is to reduce the Indian experience.

I could quibble about lesser points of sanitization or distortion, like the impression of humor the movie generates. Much that is comedic is inherent, both verbally and physically, but by removing such scenes as the party in the Denver condo, the particularly holistic sense of Indian humor is missing, the ability to see both sides of a situation simultaneously. Still, *Powwow Highway* is a good film and it is an important film for the advances it makes. Euramerica can find much to learn from it. One stills hopes, however, for the validity of future efforts. Several projects have recently been announced in the press (significantly in Hollywood itself); perhaps soon audiences will be exposed to an Indian world-view, complete in its own holistic complexity and integrity.

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### **Culture Isn't Buckskin Shoes: A Conversation Around *Powwow Highway***

Toby Langen and Kathryn Shanley

I have seen *Powwow Highway* over a dozen times, mostly in the company of students in my classes. Perhaps because of the classroom venue, I find myself doing two things at once: enjoying the film and disapproving of it. Kathryn Shanley has the same kind of divided reaction, though hers seems to be more complex, incorporating as it does an interest in the intersection of Indian and non-Indian points of view at the level of popular culture. What follows is the abridged transcript of a conversation we had about *Powwow Highway*. In addition to shortening the transcript, I also did some rearranging, so that all our remarks on a given topic show up now in the same vicinity.

T.L.

**KS:** One of the things that interests me most is how Indian humor intersects with, overlaps with and remains separate from non-Indian humor. I'm interested in places where Indians laugh because they share knowledge of particular ways of life and laugh for different reasons than in a knee-jerk, Hollywood situational kind of comedy. And one of those places, I would say, has to do with the business of the signs Philbert has to find. He finds a piece of ice which melts, and it's comical that he finds something that is going to evaporate. I could see

why Indians would laugh at something like that, because Indian people like to tease each other a lot.

When people get to know a person and what that person is characterized by—say, cynicism or naivete or optimism or whatever—people will then tease them, find ways to tease them on the basis of who they are and their personality. It's not stereotyping people. It's really finding ways to identify them: in some respects to test them and, in other respects, to embrace them. Howard Norman's *Wishing Bone Cycle* makes that evident. In all of those stories, there's a gap between how the individual sees himself or herself and imagines that a name is going to be earned, because the individual wants to be called a certain something. So pride is the initial trigger to some kind of adventure, and then the person ultimately gets another name. Sometimes the name is somewhat mocking about the initial pride, but the way that seems to work is that we're never what we think we are. This is very much a part of my own philosophy—we are, in fact, defined by others every bit as much as we're defined by ourselves.

So when you have Philbert going off and collecting these little things, it's funny: it's sweet, and he believes it, and so on. But to an Indian person, it's funny in a different way.

That was what originally led me to want to talk about this: why Indians would like a film like this, but why I would find a lot politically objectionable. I think a white audience would laugh at Philbert because he's a big, fat, dumb Indian. Given the fact that this is the only Indian movie I can think of with Indian actors in years and years—where they play the lead roles—it just gets into that kind of political crunch. If there were more representative films, maybe I wouldn't feel so defensive about this one.

**TL:** Some of my students had an interesting reaction to Philbert when they first saw him. They had gotten the film from the comedy shelf at the video store, so they had a certain set of expectations. One of my students said it starts off showing you a junkyard and a bar full of drunken Indians, and then here's this guy who's none too swift sitting at the bar, and she almost turned it off right there. She said, "I don't want to watch something that stereotypes Indians like this."

**KS:** Is she a non-Indian?

**TL:** Non-Indian, yes.

**KS:** Well, I just taught *Earth Power Coming* in an advanced short fiction course. That was the first text of the course, because there are many stories in there that are traditional, and I wanted to make that connection. But Gerald Vizenor's "Reservation Cafe" is also in there. The class was composed of fifty students, including one Black student, one student who was Puerto Rican and Filipino, and one Indian student.

And many people in the class had trouble granting that Gerald Vizenor was making fun of Indians. I went back to the definitions of satire and explained that nothing is sacred to satirists. Then we could finally open the discussion to something real about what was going on in that story.

Similarly, I think I could see where it would be hard for a non-Indian to get past the junkyard and so on, because there's a desire to be politically correct. People are attempting to live out of the kind of sensitivity to how others might feel in being portrayed that way. I think that happens a lot with non-Indians.

**TL:** We had trouble with the first story in *Love Medicine*, the same trouble, where June walks off to her death. People responded to that by saying they didn't see how anyone who was trying to be politically conscious could present a spectacle like that to a readership of non-Indians.

**KS:** I personally kind of agree.

**TL:** Do you?

**KS:** Yes. I found I was not a great fan of *The Color Purple*, either. I had a similar sense about it. There is some kind of sensationalism going on when you begin that way. There are many ways to begin: why begin like that?

**TL:** About *Love Medicine*, I wonder whether starting out with an image that collects all kinds of negative things, and then going on and telling everything else, so that by the time you get to the end that first image is now something very different, whether you're then enabled to see through that first image to more things than just the negative.

I thought of the movie as playing with the first image of Philbert and leading you to change your mind. For a non-Indian, I think it's a good thing to be forced, or given a chance, to take a second look at an Indian who is not idealized.

**KS:** One of the things I think that Indians are up against in trying to be real and to present themselves in any real way, is all these expectations that they are more noble and so on and so forth.

There are characters in *Powwow Highway* that are just as bad as any characters could be in any culture. The auntie trying to pretend that this was an old Indian saying that Dull Knife had told her father: "Get your pony out of my garden." That was funny, but to an Indian I think it would be funny in a different way than it would be to a non-Indian. There were a couple of other characters, like the guy who wants to go to Billings and get pussy—he seemed true to life to me.

But, on the other hand, I think that ultimately some of these things fuel anti-Indian sentiment, especially Treaty Beer kinds of organizations. "Look, there are no real Indians left." You can look at a movie

like *Powwow Highway*, and what do you have when you're finished? You have somebody like Philbert. Is he going to hold a tradition together? Is Indian religion reduced then to this one big, sweet, lovable dumb guy?

Then you have the activist, Red Bow: he's going to go off with a feisty Texan blonde, his sister hadn't talked to him for ten years, and her kids don't know that they're even Indian. You're not left with any sense that anything Indian survives. You're left with the same old Hollywood dichotomy: Big Brother is trying to get the Indians, and the Indians become heroes you cheer for. There is a catharsis, and then you go home. You're no better off for having seen that film. Politically, I don't think anyone will be better off for having seen that film—and I'm saying that as someone who really likes it.

**TL:** Well, some of my students, anyway, took it as a lesson that even though things might not have survived and you can't get all the information that people used to have, yet it's still possible to get back in touch with a belief system by yourself and go after something that you didn't get handed down through the family but that you want for yourself. It was a message of hope, not in a tribal way, but in a personal way, for them.

**KS:** Okay, that's fine. But that's not Indian. Vine Deloria said one time that it's fine for people to do the various things they do in the city, to sit in sweat baths and so on together, and maybe there's a very, very small sense of community and a personal sense of cleansing. But it's not the ceremony that it is at home in an Indian community, on the land, in that place.

I certainly wouldn't begrudge anyone any amount of hope they can find any place in this world. But, on the other hand, I'm talking in terms of what works politically for Indians. It's just such an interestingly Hollywood approach. For example, one scene that worked the worst and the best in the film for me was when the goons came into the gym at the Christmas powwow. The goons were so unrealistic, I felt. They came out of *West Side Story*. There was nothing about that encounter that rang true at all. Then, in the bleachers when he's talking to the Vietnam vet, Buddy says something to the effect that dancing on a basketball floor doesn't make culture. The vet just cries. I found that absolutely touching. Culture isn't a matter of having buckskin shoes or whatever. It really is a spirit of getting together and being together in a way that is ritually agreed upon as meaningful. So the way in which Red Bow is gradually persuaded to be more than simply political was, I thought, pretty powerful.

**TL:** So for you, then, there's something unfortunate in the emphasis on Philbert as a solitary seeker. You mentioned that guy who wants to

go get pussy: he treats Philbert just as badly as a non-Indian might. So that scene establishes the fact that Philbert isn't a highly regarded person among his own people, and by going on this quest, if you want to describe it that way, he's not forging a way into the community for himself.

**KS:** Yes. To ask for real time and real space in film is ridiculous, but there's no sense that Philbert has a livelihood or a place. What is he going to do? He has no connection anywhere. On the other hand, the kind of politico that Red Bow is, which strikes me as essentially Marxist and atheistic—his transformation is actually more powerful as an image of return to some kind of belief. It makes more sense. But then, in the end he goes off with that feisty Texan woman; it seems to pull the whole thing back into American mainstream. If he went back to an Indian woman, it would have been a more separatist act, and then it would have given the movie more of a revolutionary sense.

**TL:** I felt that whole theme of the love interest between Red Bow and the woman was irrelevant, that it took away from the direction in which they had been trying to develop his character, which was to get back in touch with some practices and a different way of thinking, to expand his set of values beyond the political. Also, at the point where Philbert pulls down the jailhouse wall, I got to feeling, "This movie is no longer what it started out to be; now we're in a Western."

**KS:** I think in contemporary Indian politics that kind of feisty, angry activist that Red Bow is existed only briefly. The AIM-type Indian political people have a certain turf. People like Russell Means can get the national ear; they can be interviewed in *Penthouse*, but their place in Indian politics on the reservation is very questionable. There are many hard-working Indian people who are very serious about getting the job done, not the Red Bow kind of hothead.

**TL:** Did it bother you when Red bow appropriated the money for his own use? I don't know why we always have to think of everything that every Indian character does as then representative of the whole universe of Indian people, but I guess that's what we're worrying about. If Red Bow, who is pursuing certain practical goals, yet is so irresponsible as to take the money for the bulls and go and use it for personal projects, is that something one wants to have people look at if they're not already friends?

**KS:** It's an interesting thing, now that you mention it. I was trying to remember in the film what day of the week these things happened. He got the call from his sister on a Friday, and the bull thing was actually happening on Saturday when the bank was closed. So I think he might have felt that at the beginning of the next week he could get some

money somewhere when the banks were open. What disturbed me more was what he did with the money, the fact that he bought the stereo and so on.

So, yes, it was interesting. But again, every single image was undercut in the film: the image of spiritual quest, of wisdom from the elders; then here is this committed, political individual who does something against the tribe. About the only character in the film who comes off as truly exemplary is the tribal chairman.

**TL:** When you say all these characters are undercut, do you see that as a conscious agenda aiming toward a statement that's then made successfully by the movie?

**KS:** I think it is a conscious agenda, and I think that's what makes a comedy—incongruity. That's really how it functions, by incongruity, and that's fine. But politically—sometimes I think it works and sometimes I think it doesn't. I don't think there's anything wrong with making fun of Indians; Indians make fun of themselves. But when you have a cultural context in which it's an appropriate kind of humor, then it's not degrading or undermining. I mean, it's time that, in certain respects, Indians weren't taken so damn seriously. On the other hand, maybe Indians need to be heard before that happens.

**TL:** Yes. Do you think it wasn't time yet to make that movie?

**KS:** No. I don't believe in censoring. After saying all this, I really don't. I teach books that I don't agree entirely with, because the books sometimes are an occasion for discussing all kinds of things. Similarly, this movie is an occasion for discussing.

**TL:** I guess I don't know how seriously to take the movie. Was it a gimmick or a serious strategy to have Philbert get the piece of ice, the thing that will melt, just when he has a vision of Dull Knife?

**KS:** I'm hesitant to say, because I do believe in visions and I believe that they have powerful effects on people's lives and in communities. So the question then becomes: Why have a vision in a film? What does somebody in mainstream America see it as? Maybe if it's seen as humor (the piece of ice that melts), there's something redeemable in it.

**TL:** Were you made uncomfortable by the scene where Philbert gives the Hershey bar? I thought a lot of people would get the wrong impression from that scene: all you have to do is be in a good mood, and you will achieve enlightenment.

**KS:** My response to that is complicated. Given the fact that the New Age people these days are so interested in Indian religious stuff, I wonder if it isn't a good thing to present something relatively ridiculous, like the Hershey bar.



**TL:** My class didn't think of it as ridiculous. They thought it was sweet and touching.

**KS:** I don't know what to say to that. The last shot, when the Hershey bar is propped up against the rock and you look down over into the Black Hills, struck me as Andy Warhol, pop-culture art. The Indian in pop culture . . . I can imagine a critical approach to this movie that says just that: this is all pop-culture stuff. What do they know in pop culture about Indians? And then the movie just takes one thing after another and mocks them. The Hershey bar would simply be one of those things. If people have heard anything about Indians, they've heard about vision quests and so on, so the movie just makes it somewhat ridiculous with the mixture of the Hershey bar. That's my individual response.

**TL:** I'm sure my class didn't take it in at that level at all. They saw no irony whatever. I did have one dissenter, who was an Indian student, who said that that was the place that made him the saddest of all; he thought the movie was a comedy running over a level of sadness because of all the things Philbert didn't know. He took the scene as being essentially sad, with the comedy as icing: the sadness feeding into the quality of the laughter.

You know, this is what happens in my classes when we try to talk about "authenticity" in regard to ways of presenting oral literature in print. Everyone has such divergent ideas about what is authentic, what needs to be prized in the original or privileged in the print version, that it becomes difficult to remember that what set us off was presumably a single text that we all read or saw. I guess I never till this moment thought of this movie as itself a translation.

\* \* \* \*

### ***Powwow Highway in an Ethnic Film and Literature Course***

Marshall Toman and Carole Gerster

A course in ethnic film and literature allows teachers to present theories of racism and to ask students to apply these theories to films, literature, and their own lives; to examine the construction and attempted deconstruction of stereotypes; to realize for students "forgotten" history or neglected contemporary reality; to foster the ability to read film and literature critically; and to contrast the dominant

culture's representations of ethnic groups with those groups' own voicing of their experience. *Powwow Highway* is an excellent film to use in the Native American segment of such a course because, in addition to students' enjoying the film, it provides a contrast to many standard media depictions of Indians, raises topical issues of crucial importance, and, while remaining faithful to contemporary Indian experience, also asserts this contemporary relevance from a traditional Cheyenne perspective.

Jonathan Wacks' 1988 film *Powwow Highway* helps set the agenda for the Native American portion of our team-taught course on Ethnic Film and Literature. We teach this film in conjunction with clips from the film series *Images and Indians* and the PBS *Frontline* documentary *The Spirit of Crazy Horse*, and with Louise Erdrich's "Dear John Wayne," Paula Gunn Allen's "Grandmother," Elizabeth Sullivan's "Legend of the Trail of Tears," and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, in a semester course that also includes films and literature by African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos. We have found that *Powwow Highway* helps raise student consciousness about topical issues important to the Northern Cheyenne in particular and to Native Americans in general. Told in contemporary as well as traditional tribal terms, the film dismisses stereotypes, retells the cowboy-Indian conflict from a Native American perspective, and demonstrates the dual importance of reclaiming a traditional tribal identity and continuing the political struggle for justice. Based on David Seals' 1979 novel, the film *Powwow Highway* depicts the interconnected ceremonial and political journey of its two protagonists—Philbert Bono (Gary Farmer) and Buddy Red Bow (A Martinez)—to become itself both ritual event and political act.

Two of the important topics raised by the film are the Internecine struggles involving the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the poisoning of reservation drinking water by uranium mining. *Powwow Highway* affords teachers the opportunity to acquaint students with one of the most important manifestations of political dissent in this century of United States history. Buddy and Wolf Tooth are veterans not only of Vietnam but also of Wounded Knee (WK) II. Wounded Knee, South Dakota, was the site, in 1890, of the massacre of 300 unarmed Lakota men, women, and children by the U.S. cavalry, and, in 1972, of the largest armed conflict in the U.S. since the Civil War (Locker).

Philbert's virtual ignorance about WK II ("You weren't in Wounded Knee with us? Or Ogalala?") "No. But I remember hearing about it.") underscores one of the main tensions within the movie: Philbert is politically naive while Buddy—although he is of the reservation—has negotiated the Anglo world and can apply legalistic, bureaucratic solutions to Indian problems.

Good sources for the background of WK II and AIM include the article-length analysis by Roos *et al.* and the book-length study by Stephen Cornwell, but one of the best ways to present the material to a class is to introduce the background information with excerpts from the 1990 *Frontline* production *The Spirit of Crazy Horse*, narrated by Milo Yellow Hair. In *Powwow Highway*, Imogene tells Buddy that the reason the family must leave Pine Ridge is that "There's a shooting a week"; *The Spirit of Crazy Horse* includes an interview with the Richards family, real victims of a Dick Wilson-sanctioned, drive-by shooting. In *Powwow Highway*, when Miller is thwarted in his attempt to beat up Buddy, Miller yells that "All you AIM sons-of-bitches are going to rot in prison, just like your friend Peltier." *The Spirit of Crazy Horse* interviews Peltier, asserts that he was framed by the federal government and used as a political scapegoat, and in general provides the background for his "rotting in prison."

In order for students to fully appreciate the import of the lines from the film about Wounded Knee, Pine Ridge, and Leonard Peltier, we sketch the salient background. WK II began in February of 1973. A year previous to the occupation, on February 20, 1972, Raymond Yellow Thunder was killed in Gordon, Nebraska. AIM, until then largely an urban group, was called in to obtain justice; when two white men were eventually found guilty of second degree manslaughter, AIM was credited (Roos *et al.* 90). With growing support, AIM criticized the Pine Ridge Tribal Government, headed by Dick Wilson, as corrupt and subservient to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Wilson armed his supporters, harassed AIM leaders, and suppressed public assemblies and political debate; Wilson's measures were countenanced by federal authorities.

On the night of February 28, 1973, the American Indian Movement led a band of rebels into Wounded Knee, just miles from Pine Ridge. They captured the town, sacked the general store, and barricaded themselves against the police. It was an audacious stand to gain national attention. The 300 insurgents were immediately surrounded by combat-trained federal marshals, F.B.I. agents, and Wilson's vigilantes. The next morning the world woke up to reports of a new Indian war. (Locker)

The occupiers' demands (which were varied and not always clear) included the removal of Wilson; the return of treaty lands, particularly the sacred Black Hills; the investigation of treaty violations; and an increase in money and employment for the Lakotas (Roos *et al.* 90).

After the long, bitter, two-and-one-half month siege, AIM surrendered when investigations were promised; however, no substantial

action was ever taken. Internecine strife continued for the next thirty months with over 60 people being murdered in the Pine Ridge area, most of them AIM supporters (Locker). Finally, in June of 1975 Leonard Peltier organized several cars of AIM members to return to Pine Ridge to protect AIM supporters. He became involved in a day-long shoot-out in which one Native American and two F.B.I. agents were killed. After his trial, which sentenced him to life imprisonment despite an F.B.I. document that was later released proving that the agents could not have been killed by his gun,<sup>1</sup> the worst of the violence subsided; AIM was exhausted, Wilson was defeated in tribal elections, and his vigilantes were disbanded (Locker).

In the film, Buddy represents resistance to accommodationist/assimilationist policy—as AIM did on Pine Ridge—and Sandy Youngblood and Miller reproduce the cooperation with the government and policial suppression that Wilson and his "goon squad" (Locker) carried out on Pine Ridge. Early on, the movie underscores the difference between Buddy and Sandy with an allusion to the Fort Laramie Treaty. Sandy wants to bring a mining company onto reservation lands, and Buddy resists the initiative as exploitive. When Sandy argues in favor of the mining company by saying that "Our employment contracts are a matter of public record," Buddy counters with "Oh, yeah, yeah. I read your contract. I read every damn contract since the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. And it's always the same deal, ain't it? You get what you want, and we get the shaft." The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty reserved all of what is now South Dakota west of the Missouri River, including the Black Hills, for the Sioux (Roos *et al.* 91). But then gold was discovered in the Black Hills, and in 1889 the government carved up the Greater Sioux Reservation into six smaller tracts so that gold mining could take place (Irvin 91). Buddy's point is that you can't trust such contracts. Nonetheless, for what are shown to be personally selfish reasons, Sandy continues to cooperate with the federal government to help Overdyne exploit the reservation. Buddy, late in the film, characterizes Sandy's attitude as corrupt, rotten, when he cautions a woman Sandy is speaking to in a bar that "sometimes you got to bite the apple to see worms." The characterization of Sandy as an "apple" is appropriate: he's red on the outside but "white" underneath (see Seals, *TPH* 114, 203).

A second topic of importance alluded to in the film is the poisoning of reservation drinking water by the mining of radioactive materials. Philbert doesn't recognize the green bottle of Perrier handed to him in Wolf Tooth's home. Wolf Tooth explains the presence of the "yuppy bullshit" (as Buddy refers to it) in his comparatively impoverished surroundings: "Uranium mines have poisoned the White River from here to Cactus Flat." Such a line affords us an opportunity to tell

students that to obtain 2.24 ounces of yellowcake (appropriate nuclear fuel) a ton of rock must be mined. The ton, minus the 2.24 ounces, is discarded as mill tailings which resemble fine sand and contain 80% of the rock's original radioactivity. Thorium 230 (half life 80,000 years), Radium 226 (1,630 years), and Radon 222 exist in this sand which is now subject to wind and water erosion. The extraction process yields liquid wastes and a mud-like by-product called "slime," both highly radioactive and disposed of by dilution and dumping into a stream. "In 1962, 200 tons of radioactive mill tailings from the Edgemont mill site [near Pine Ridge in the southwest corner of South Dakota] washed into the Cheyenne River." Three-and-one-half million tons of tailings lie on the banks of Cottonwood Creek and the Cheyenne River as a result of Uranium mining in the 1950s and 60s (Irvin 90–93).

In March 1980, WARN (Women of All Red Nations) "published a privately researched report [on health problems on Pine Ridge Reservation] showing that radioactivity levels in Red Shirt subsurface water tested at 15 picoCuries per liter (pCi/l). The Federal Safety Standard is 5 (pCi/l)." A new well (to solve the problem) tested at 70 (pCi/l), 14 times the safety standard (Irvin 91). Health problems in this area included "(1) a marked increase in spontaneous abortions [7 times the national average—page 96]; (2) an increase in pregnancy complications; (3) an increase in congenital defects traditionally unknown among the Lakota (club foot, heart defects, and cleft palate); (4) infant respiratory problems; (5) a high incidence of infant mortality, cancer, and diabetes" (Irvin 91–92). The issue is urgent. Its seriousness is acknowledged in the film with the hope that the issue will insinuate itself into the minds of a broad audience.

*Powwow Highway* also raises student consciousness about various forms of stereotyping in standard media depictions of Indians. Two scenes focus on the broken English spoken by Hollywood movie Indians as they confronted manifest destiny, as if they were incapable of language or civilization. The first scene shows a television advertisement for used Mustang and Pinto cars, with a non-Indian salesman in full Indian headdress who says, "How, folks. This old cowboy is on the warpath with heap big savings. All our choicest stock. Come on down off the rez or the ranch and pick out your pony today." The ad depicts Native Americans as easily exploitable: Anglo America has appropriated Native American culture in naming its cars Cherokees and Winnebagos and in wearing Native American headdress, and it now wishes to sell back what it has appropriated—in used form. The second scene occurs at the Hi-Fi electronics store, with an Anglo salesman's condescending remark to Philbert and Buddy: "No gettum special deal on this one, chief." In both scenes white America is trying to sell Native Americans a used or inferior product, as if it were especially

suiting for them, using the broken English they will supposedly understand as their own. However, the film's intent is to dismiss, not repeat such stereotypes. In line with the film's revisionary humor, in both scenes the broken English is put back into the mouths of media people who originated and continue to perpetuate it. Instead of making white males the protagonists who provide the audience with an entry into Native American life, this film's two white salesmen are depicted as arrested in their development; they see twentieth-century Indians only in terms of movie stereotypes about nineteenth-century ones.

Other revisions include the characterizations of the two protagonists and the standard cowboy-Indian chase plot. Buddy and Philbert are portrayed as superficially akin to standard media depictions of the hostile savage and the noble savage only to revise those images. Though Buddy is certainly hostile, his behavior and the way he is treated by white society clearly show that he is not a twentieth-century manifestation of, in Paula Gunn Allen's words, the popular media view of nineteenth-century "Indians as hostile savages who capture white ladies and torture them, obstruct the westward movement of peaceable white settlers, and engage in bloodthirsty uprisings in which they glory in the massacre of innocent colonists and pioneers" (*Sacred Hoop* 5). Buddy's friendship with his sister's white woman friend, Rabbit, and *Powwow Highway*'s direct reversal of the old plot (epitomized in John Ford's *The Searchers*) contradict the first part of the stereotype: here white males have captured an Indian woman and torture her by refusing to release her to be with her children until after Christmas. Also, Buddy's efforts to stop Overdyne Mining Company from taking remaining tribal resources without benefit to the reservation, his earlier AIM efforts at Wounded Knee II and Ogalala, and his personal problems because of the FBI's persecution (arresting his sister to remove him from the reservation before the tribal vote on the Overdyne mining proposal), all explain his hostility and portray him as opposite each aspect of the bloodthirsty-savage-attacking-innocent-white-settlers stereotype.

And although Philbert shows a reverence for the earth and its creatures, he is not, to use Allen's definition of the currently popular stereotype of the noble savage, "The appealing but doomed victim of the inevitable evolution of humanity from primitive to postindustrial social orders" (*Sacred Hoop* 4). More than a victim of European invasion and industrial colonialization, and far from doomed, Philbert acts on his traditional beliefs in order to deal with the contemporary cowboys who have falsely jailed Buddy's sister. Philbert's trickster story prepares us for a revised cowboy-Indian chase scene. When the Sante Fe police, the FBI agents, and Sandy Youngblood all take seats in police cars with the words "Let's cowboy up. We got work to do,"

we are ready for Philbert to perform the role of trickster and, as he has promised the trickster will do, to "play a little trick on the white man."

In the face of media stereotypes, Buddy and Philbert define themselves: Buddy in terms of militant political activism that he has both adapted from and uses to deal with white society, and Philbert by the inherited ritual traditions of his tribe that he learned from his Uncle Fred and uses to gain a tribal identity. They demonstrate that no two Native Americans, even those from the same tribe, can be lumped together as one type. They are, however, both Cheyenne warriors on a parallel, if rarely merging, journey to Sante Fe and back. Disregarding the individual, the individualistic, hero of western literature, *Powwow Highway* has dual protagonists to represent dual concerns, and to show the need for each man to understand and work with the other. The powwow they both attend, Philbert's trickster story, and the film's final dream vision all show that the powwow highway they travel together serves as a metaphor for the necessary continuance of both tribal traditions and the political battle for Native American justice that the two men represent. Against the backdrop of federally sponsored economic exploitation and general apathy as well as reductive definitions of Native Americans, the film presents Native Americans defining themselves and taking action against economic and cultural imperialism.

The film shows the powwow as a gathering place for Native Americans of different tribes and differing lifestyles to come together in friendly competition to gather strength and support from one another. At the Pine Ridge powwow, which Buddy is reluctant to attend on the premise that beads and feathers do not comprise a culture and that they need to go directly to Sante Fe, he encounters Miller and his goons. Buddy is saved—from both physical removal and a thrashing by Miller's goons—by the well-aimed knife of a fellow Vietnam vet, who then tells Buddy to join in the dancing. Philbert, on the other hand, has insisted that they attend the powwow, for he seeks a path of ritual transformation that will put him in harmony with supernatural powers and the earth, and his path involves recovering Cheyenne history and traditions. As Philbert beats the sacred, animating drum, Buddy is moved to dance within the interrelated circles of Native Americans. In the character of the Vietnam vet, Buddy's protest politics and Philbert's tribal consciousness merge to show the necessity of each. From these powwow scenes, students come to understand the powwow as a return to roots that provides a way to resolve contradictions in order to ensure both physical and cultural survival.

The film shows how the oral storytelling tradition is an important means to keep a culture alive. Philbert tells the story of Wihio the trickster, over Buddy's protest that it's "too bad those stories don't tell us how to keep our reservations" or "our coal, our oil, our uranium,"

and receives Wolf Tooth's praise that he "should be tribal historian." But Philbert does not merely wish to reflect the story of the Vanishing American; he seeks an alternative to it. Unlike Wihio, who foolishly sought plums reflected in the river rather than the real ones hanging right over his head, and thus "never did get any plums," in his role as trickster Philbert makes use of whatever he finds right in front of him (whether reflection or not) and gets exactly what he needs. Taking his clue to rip out Bonnie's jail cell window with a rope tied to his car (Protector the War Pony) from the reflected television image of an old William S. Hart cowboy movie, and retrieving Rabbit's bail money and Buddy's bull purchasing money from the open jail vault he passes by, Philbert allows them (at least momentarily) to escape one specific instance of the political imprisonment, the forced removal from one part of the country to another, and the economic hardship that reflect the historical Native American experience. The trickster takes many forms, sometimes mocking and imitating others, and always bringing about change. In answer to Buddy's protest politics, promising Buddy that "the trickster will play a little trick on the white man," Philbert has transformed traditional story into political action. Chief George, who has come from Lame Deer to Sante Fe to find out what has kept Buddy from his bull-purchasing task, is also involved in trickster efforts, as he spills cattle onto the road to end the cowboy chase.

The dream visions that comprise much of the film provide Philbert, and the film audience, with images of his Cheyenne ancestors. Throughout the film, intercut visions disrupt the storytelling unities of time, place, and action, to reflect the interconnectedness of past and present. Toward the end of the film the final dream vision also reflects the interconnectedness of vision and action. We share Buddy's vision of himself as a warrior with a tomahawk in hand, as he actually thwarts the police chase by throwing the broken window of Philbert's car at a police car in chase. After Philbert has enacted the role of trickster to rescue Bonnie from jail, Buddy envisions himself as an ancestral warrior to help the group escape from the police. When the story ends with Philbert, Buddy, Rabbit, and Bonnie and her children all walking down the road together, students understand that political activism and ritual tradition have become meaningful counterparts and that the unfinished business of America's native peoples involves both.

A vivid way to demonstrate to students the dual aspect of the journey, a contemporary journey on traditional grounds, is to chart it on a transparency map. From Lame Deer, Montana, on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, we follow Buddy and Philbert to Sheridan, Wyoming, where they stop at the electronics outlet; then down Interstate 25 to its juncture with Interstate 90 where Philbert decides to swerve to the east to visit the sacred mountain Noahvose or Bear Butte



("Sweet Butte" in the movie); then south and east to Pine Ridge, to Wolf Tooth's home and the powwow; then, resuming the journey to Santa Fe, west on U.S. 18, jogging south to U.S. 20, and following east along 20, stopping at Fort Robinson where the film intercuts the 1879 Cheyenne march through the snow after Dull Knife's last fight (Sandoz 276); then to the junction with Interstate 25 (again) and south to the lunch stop at Wheatland, Wyoming, where Philbert tells his trickster tale against the backdrop of the United States' largest energy plant belching smoke; then south, still on 25, to Denver and finally to Santa Fe (Seals, *TPH passim*). Not coincidentally, we notice that this route takes us over the traditional homeland of the Northern and Southern Cheyenne.<sup>2</sup>

When we taught the film, it came in the second week of the Native American section of the course. We had studied *Ceremony* during the first week. Such a juxtaposition allows for several connections to be explored. Both Leslie Marmon Silko's novel and Jonathan Wacks' film show the trauma suffered by Native American veterans (by Tayo and by Jimmy, Graham Greene's character). Both allude to poisoning of the environment with uranium, either through the development of the atomic bomb or through mining. Both involve theft of Native American land, in the fenced off ranch lands of *Ceremony* and in the allusion to violated treaty rights as well as in the manipulations to exploit the mineral resources of the reservation in *Powwow Highway*. Both allude to a prominent Native American symbol for the creator of the universe and spiritual sponsor, the spider: *Ceremony* begins with the poem about Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman, the spider; *Powwow Highway* shows Philbert reverently saving the tarantula. Both depict the internecine struggles of Native Americans. Both demonstrate the need for and power of stories: *Ceremony* is the story of creating new and healing stories, and Philbert assures Buddy that the old stories show us how to live in the contemporary world. Finally, both works depict an extended ceremony. Tayo goes to Betonie, who starts a process that extends over many weeks. Philbert's whole journey to become a worthy warrior is a type of ceremony. Both works thus show that life should be a series of ceremonies, ultimately, a continuous prayer. Trusting in that process works—both for Tayo, the wounded and suffering hero of his people, and for Philbert, the unlikely comic hero.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Robert DeNiro is producing a film about Wounded Knee II and Leonard Peltier, and Robert Redford has funded a documentary about Peltier (Seals, "Custerism" 638).

<sup>2</sup>Enlarging by approximately 130% the pertinent portion of the United

States map from the 15½" by 11" *State Farm Road Atlas* (2–3) will yield a scale about that of the map of the Cheyenne territory in Peter J. Powell's book (xxvii–xxix). If transparencies are used, the journey can be outlined on the United States map, then the Cheyenne territory map can be shown, and finally the one can be superimposed over the other to graphically illustrate the nearly coterminous aspect of the film's journey and traditional Cheyenne territory.

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## COMMENTARY

### From the Secretary-Treasurer

Current *SAIL* subscribers may recall from the announcement in *SAIL* 3.1 that the Association for Studies in American Indian Literatures (ASAIL) will be incorporated with a dues-paying membership beginning January 1, 1992. Membership in the Association is open to all individuals and institutions interested in furthering the goals of the Association. Rates are:

Individual membership: \$25

Institutional membership: \$35

Limited income membership: \$16

Sponsor: \$50

Patron: \$100

Benefits of ASAIL membership will include a subscription to *SAIL*, a subscription to the newsletter *ASAIL Notes*, and special rates at conferences sponsored by the Association; donations at the Sponsor and Patron levels will be acknowledged in the concurrent volume of *SAIL*.

As a result of this change in the status of the Association, we anticipate that subscribers to Volume 4 of the journal will typically be dues-paying Association members. Those wishing to subscribe to the journal without becoming members of the Association may contact Bob Nelson, *SAIL*, Box 112, University of Richmond VA 23173 for 1992 rates.

In order to help control mailing costs within the organization, **we urge all potential 1992 ASAIL members and *SAIL* subscribers to join/resubscribe as early as possible.** Dues received prior to January 1992 will be credited towards 1992 membership. We also encourage all to attend the ASAIL business meeting at MLA and cast their votes for the next President, Secretary, and Treasurer of ASAIL.

Elizabeth H. McDade

### From the Editors

One of the pleasures of this column is the opportunity to acknowledge contributions to the continued publication of *SAIL*. This time the pleasure is mixed: our editorial assistant at Fullerton, Sharon Dilloway, is leaving us, and her presence and gifts will be much missed. Sharon first offered her services to *SAIL* in the fall of 1989, and since then has worked many hours each week with unfailing generosity, reliability and good humor: she has managed the book review cycle, tended to correspondence, formatted and distributed hundreds of information sheets at conferences, made her way through the CSUF Foundation bureaucracy, and (very important) listened with a sympathetic ear—all for the sole compensation of a campus parking pass. *SAIL* would not have been possible without Sharon, and on behalf of all our readers as well as myself, I extend our thanks to her and best wishes on her future projects.

After two issues focused on special topics, classical oral literatures in translation and teaching American Indian literature, we are pleased to present a highly eclectic collection of papers. William Clements' lucid and astute analysis of translations from Zuni will be welcomed by both seasoned critics of American Indian literatures and newcomers to the field, while the interview with Luci Tapahonso explores important themes for a writer who is gaining wider recognition. The views put forward by the five contributors to the discussion of *Powwow Highway* represent widely varied approaches and positions as well as a first for *SAIL*: much-needed analysis of media "texts." We invite readers to join in this symposium with your experiences and critiques of this film—and your views of other texts, including *SAIL*.

This issue goes to press in early summer, and we are already planning for next year's Volume Four. Several projects for 1992 are noted in the announcements below: we call attention especially to a new special issue on creative work.

Another *SAIL* project for 1992 is support of "Returning the Gift," a gathering of Native North American writers for workshops, celebrations, networking and performance. *SAIL* is submitting a proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts to fund a special issue devoted to conference proceedings; this grant requires matching funds, and we are offering our readers an opportunity to participate in the endeavor by becoming or finding supporting patrons for it.

We welcome additional suggestions and submissions from readers. *SAIL* belongs to its readers and subscribers; please tell us what you think.

Helen Jaskoski  
Robert M. Nelson

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### **1992 Continued**

*We received one response to our query in the spring 1991 issue about the response of SAIL to the 1992 anniversary. Joe Bruchac forwarded the results of a survey undertaken by Cornell University; the preliminary results are reprinted here.*

Since April, 1989, Cornell University's American Indian Program has supervised a survey of American Indian opinion leaders, community chiefs, college program directors and assorted other individuals on their responses to the upcoming 1992 Columbus Quincentenary. We disseminated a survey hemispherically to some 700 potential respondents, eliciting 74 responses thus far. As part of the same project, some two dozen oral interviews were conducted with North American Indian opinion leaders. The preliminary results from this research are offered here as a way of establishing an information base on the American

Indigenous perception of this hemispheric event.

The 500th anniversary of contact between European and American cultures in 1992 will provide a rare hemispheric opportunity to review the history as well as the contemporary social conditions of American Indian peoples. This is the principal message and concern of Indian respondents to the survey. The second concern—that Indian perspectives would be drowned out once again.

Respondents expressed a range of opinions to most of nine basic questions in the questionnaire, and were most uniform in having a negative idea of "celebrating" the event. The Assembly of First Nations, a national Canadian Indian organization, conveyed a formal resolution stating "For the First Nations to celebrate the near destruction of our culture and identity would be insane." "October 12, 1492," wrote a Mohawk elder, "is the date when the Dark Ages descended on the Indians of America."

Facing a choice of five answers to the question, "In what way would you characterize the Quincentenary?," 70% of respondents described it either as 500 years of Native People's resistance to colonization, or as an anniversary of a holocaust, while 20% described it as a commemoration of a cultural encounter, and only 6% as a celebration of discovery. Sixty-four percent consider the Quincentenary a unique historical event, 74% see it as an opportunity, while 15% would ignore it. In terms of activities to commemorate the event, 78% chose educational conferences and festivals as opposed to the 19% who preferred protests and legal actions. Personal participation was predicated on the goals of: public education about Native issues—43%, advancing legislation to protect Native rights—27%, increasing communications networks—20%, and demands of public apologies from Western states and churches—3%.

Respondents stressed the importance of not shying away from reviewing the realities imposed by the clash of cultures and by the wars, diseases and accommodations of American hemispheric history. While there was suspicion expressed at the term "cultural encounter" as euphemistic, there was outright hostility at the concept of "discovery." "How can it be a discovery if we were already here?" wrote an Abenaki man. The overarching mandate is to give adequate response from the Indian perspective. "We owe it to our ancestors to tell their story," writes Dianne Longboat, Coordinator of Indian Health Careers Program at Six Nations Reserve, in Ontario. And to Beatriz Painquco, Mapuche Indian from Chile, the Quincentenary "is an opportunity to publicly expose our vision and to put our voices together." Indian author N. Scott Momaday had this to say: "I have very mixed feelings about celebrating this event . . . but at the same time, the Indian has just as much right to celebrate the occasion as anyone else. If the Indian excludes himself from it, that's a negative thing. If he can find a way to celebrate it on a real basis, that's positive . . . he stands to teach the rest of the world something." And Tewa anthropologist,

Alfonso Ortiz: "Mutual assessment would be the best thing to do and there is no one else whom to bounce questions off of except the indigenous people of the Western Hemisphere . . . I say that the U.S. Indian should take the lead because we've got the intellectual resources."

The Quincentenary events that culminate (and germinate) in 1992 mark a decisive moment in the history of American Indian peoples. 1992 is generally seen by Indians as a moment in time when consciousness about the Indian history of the American continent and public recognition of Indian communities' continued existence in the contemporary world could be presented to a substantial audience.

### **Call for Creative Work**

We are seeking submissions—previously unpublished poetry, short fiction, drama, essay, autobiography—for a special issue in 1992 on new creative work. *SAIL*'s new, larger format, made possible by the increase in our subscriber list during the past two years, should enable us to publish more prose than we were able to print in the last creative issue. Poets, fiction writers, autobiographers, playwrights, essayists: we welcome your submissions, and hope you will also pass our invitation on to other Native American authors who may want to submit their work.

We project publication for the winter issue of 1992; deadline is 1 February 1992. Please send submissions, typed and double-spaced, with SASE for return of work, to Helen Jaskoski, Department of English, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634.

### **Update on "Returning the Gift"**

As we go to press Joe Bruchac has announced that the University of Oklahoma is co-sponsoring this festival of Native North American writers. Additional funding has also been received from the Bay Foundation, and other grant sources are being pursued. Writers interested in participating are encouraged to contact Barbara Hobson, address at the end of this announcement.

*What:* A four-day literary event for North American writers (fiction and non-fiction writers, poets, playwrights and literary critics) of Native (American Indian) descent. The first two days will be exclusively for the Native writers themselves. The third day will bring in non-Native supporters of Native writing, including critics, publishers, and teachers of Native American literature. The fourth day will be open to the general public. The agenda for the festival will include writing workshops, panel discussions, seminars, working sessions, readings and performances.

*When:* July 8th–11th, 1992

*Where:* Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education  
The University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma

*Who:* Literary writers of North American Native descent, including writers of American Indian, Inuit (Eskimo), and Aleut ancestry, from Canada, the United States, Mexico and Central America. Approximately 80 recognized Native writers will be invited to attend with all travel and other expenses paid and an equal honorarium of \$600 each. These already published writers will each take part in one workshop, panel discussion, or seminar and give a public reading of their work. They will also serve as mentors for an additional 80 Native writers who are at the start of their careers. These additional "apprentice" writers will also attend the conference free of charge and be provided with room, board and transportation expenses. The total number of Native writers attending, mentor and apprentice, will be approximately 160.

*Project Coordinator:* Barbara Hobson, University of Oklahoma, Department of English—Room 113, 760 Van Vleet Oval, Norman, OK 73019; phone 405-329-7729 or 405-325-6277.

### **Opportunity for Benefactors**

Readers and subscribers of *SAIL* are invited to become benefactors for the special issue of *SAIL* that will publish proceedings of the "Returning the Gift" conference. The proceedings will include symposium transcripts, position papers, creative work in fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction prose. We hope to upgrade our production with photographs and offset printing, to provide the best medium possible for this important publication. This issue of *SAIL* is expected to set the agenda for Native North American contributions to literature and literary study for the opening of the next century. We invite you to become a part of this important undertaking by contributing as a benefactor to the initiative. We have made a grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts to support the project; to be eligible for the grant, we must raise a minimum of \$2000 in matching funds. We hope to find at least 20 people who can be generous enough to make donations of \$100 to *SAIL* for this special issue. If you can contribute, we welcome your gift. If you are able to help other benefactors reach us, we hope you will do so. Contributions of all benefactors will be recognized in the issue.

Checks should be made to *SAIL/1992* and sent to Helen Jaskoski, Department of English, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634.

### **Invitation to Reviewers**

*SAIL* receives many books for review, and publishers pay attention to what *SAIL* reviewers say. We try to assign reviews on the basis of what we know, or sometimes guess, about a potential reviewer's

expertise and preferences. We are especially in need of people who can review translations and dual-language texts, but we welcome reviewers in all areas of literature and scholarship. If you would like to review books and/or media materials for *SAIL*, please send us a letter informing us of your areas of expertise and interest; include a resume or curriculum vitae if you have one. Send materials to Helen Jaskoski, Department of English, California State University, Fullerton, CA 92634.

### **Directory of American Indian Writers**

A directory of Native North American Indian Writers is being compiled in connection with "Returning the Gift." Writers are invited to submit information to be listed in the directory. Publication is projected for spring 1992; writers should submit entries as soon as possible. For more information, contact Barbara Hobson, University of Oklahoma, Department of English—Room 113, 760 Van Vleet Oval, Norman, OK 73019; phone 405-329-7729 or 405-325-6277.

### **AICA Tour**

The American Indian Contemporary Arts Gallery, 685 Market St. (Monadnock Bldg., 2nd Floor), San Francisco, will host a tour of their exhibit of Native art during the December MLA Convention. Sara Bates, Curator of the AICA, will lead the tour. All ASAIL and MLA members are invited to attend. Tours will be held on both December 27 and 28 at 5 p.m. Contact Sara Bates at [415] 495-7600 or Larry Abbott at [802] 273-2663 for more information.

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## REVIEWS

*American Indian Literatures: An Introduction, Bibliographic Review, and Selected Bibliography.* A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1990. 308 pp. ISBN 0-87352-192-7.

The first thing likely to strike the reader upon opening LaVonne Ruoff's new volume is the range, variety, and richness of American Indian literatures. The reader who has just recently approached the subject, the book's target audience, should get this impression especially. This work is a comprehensive examination of the subject, intended as an aid to teachers and students who are not aware of the contributions of American Indians to American literary history. But it goes beyond that.

Organized logically into three major sections, *American Indian Literatures* begins with a discussion of the history of Native Americans living in what is now the United States from the time of first contact to the present. While necessarily brief, this essay provides a good overview that is supplemented by a list of important dates in American Indian history from 1500 to the present. The remainder of Part One is devoted to an extensive discussion of genres and major figures.

Appropriately enough, Ruoff's remarks begin with an examination of oral literatures, including chants, ceremonies, songs, rituals, narratives, and oratory. In addition to the discussion of various genres and their roles in Native cultures, the author cites problems of textual transmission, gives examples of representative types (e.g., trickster tales, creation myths), and mentions important scholarly works. Ruoff then turns to autobiography and life histories, discussing major examples of these, including works by William Apes, Charles Eastman, George Copway, John Joseph Mathews, and N. Scott Momaday. This section is followed by a history of written literatures that traces the development of imaginative writing and other forms in English. Here, the material is divided into three chronological periods, beginning with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, followed by the 1900s to 1967, and ending with the period since 1968. The early period includes information on sermons, protest literature, tribal histories, and travel accounts; starting with Samson Occom's work in the eighteenth century, the section continues with nineteenth century writers such as John Rollin Ridge and the only writer from Canada who is treated extensively, E. Pauline Johnson. Native writing in the earlier part of the twentieth century is examined next. Here, Ruoff traces some major figures who were writing poetry, fiction, and drama—Alexander Posey, Will Rogers, D'Arcy McNickle, John Oskison, and Lynn Riggs are examples—but she includes less known figures as well. The discussion of contemporary literature is, appropriately, the largest. Major figures are treated at some length; the works of Momaday, Leslie Silko, Louise

Erdrich, James Welch, and other writers receive significant attention. But here again, Ruoff is careful to call attention to other important, if lesser known figures.

Part Two is a bibliographic review. This essay identifies and comments on research materials available to students of American Indian literatures, including bibliographies and guides to research. It also looks at collections and anthologies, scholarship and criticism, author studies, sources of background information, and teaching aids. The arrangement of the review is helpful, especially to the newcomer, as it follows the same general structure as Part One. The review also identifies works that are concerned with specific topics, such as ethnohistory, women's studies, and the image of the Indian. This topical breakdown should be welcome to students approaching the subject for the first time.

In the third part of her work, Ruoff provides an extensive selected bibliography arranged in sections. Here, the standard categories appear—bibliographies, anthologies, criticism and scholarship, and author studies—but the compiler also includes sections on teaching American Indian literatures, background studies, and films and videotapes. Part Three is followed by a list of important dates and an index of persons, organizations, important bills and acts, and some topics. The index seems to complement the selected bibliography well.

*American Indian Literatures* is well conceived and well executed. It will be welcomed by students and teachers who are approaching the subject for the first time. But this work is more than an aid to this audience; it serves as a general guide to the field, one which will find extensive use among seasoned scholars. Ruoff's work is important in that it shows the variety and range of the study of Native literatures as well as chronicles the growth in this area since the late 1960s. It is also revealing because it demonstrates the need for basic scholarship in many areas of the field. While some important things have been done, including this fine work, LaVonne Ruoff has made it clear that much more abides.

James W. Parins

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*Wolverine Myths and Visions: Dene Traditions from Northern Alberta.* Compiled by the Dene Wodih Society. Ed. Patrick Moore and Angela Wheelock. xxv, 259 pp. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1990; ISBN 0-8032-8161-7. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, ISBN 0-88864-148-6.

The members of the Dene Wodih Society (along with the editors) are to be congratulated on the recently published collection of tradition-

al Slave texts from northwestern Alberta, *Wolverine Myths and Visions*. Their book is a most valuable contribution to the growing body of texts printed in the indigenous languages of Canada. It is an essential aspect of this book that it presents both the original Slave texts and a free translation into English—even though the latter is unaccountably titled "English Texts [*sic*]." Welcome for its traditional myths, this volume is extraordinary for the inclusion of prophetic texts of the transitional period.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of this book is the fact that it results from a communal effort by the Dene Wodih Society of Assumption, Alberta, supported by their Band, an Oblate priest, various academics and, ultimately, the Yukon Native Languages Centre. Among the Dene Dháa of northwestern Alberta, the Slave language is still spoken by children of all ages, and children were amongst the original audience for all but one of these texts (no. 12). The texts are mainly in the Xewónht'e dialect of Assumption and Habay (with texts 4 and 7 told in the Kegúnht'u dialect typical of the adjacent North West Territories); they are printed in a practical orthography.

The narrators are named in the preface, and their names deserve to be repeated here: Louison Ahkimmatchie, Elisse Ahnassay, Willie Ahnassay, Sr., Willie Denechoan, Harry Dahdona, Alexis Seniantha, Emile Sutha, Jean Marie Talley. It is remarkable that none of these authors—nor, indeed, the Dene Wodih Society as the collective translators—should have been included in any form in the all-important Cataloguing-in-Publication entry of the Library of Congress.

The book includes three useful maps and is embellished with watercolours (and some pencil drawings?—the reproductions are black-and-white, and the medium is left unidentified) in a largely naturalistic manner by Dia Ahnassay Thurston, whose name echoes that of the chief translator, the late George Ahnassay, to whose inspiration we owe this splendid volume.

The texts themselves are of the greatest literary, ethnological and historical (and, of course, linguistic) interest; any attempt to summarise either the "Traditional Stories" or the "Accounts of the Prophet Nógħa" would not only be futile but risk offending against the proprieties which the editors invoke so eloquently at the end of their introduction.

The substance of the book is divided into twice two parts: first (1), the free translation, then (2) the original texts with their interlinear translation; each of these in turn consisting of ten myths (a) and five accounts of the prophet and his prophecies (b). The preface (ix) and a general introduction (xi–xxv) are supplemented, somewhat asymmetrically, by a special "Introduction to the Dene Prophets" (59–70) preceding the free translation of part 1b, and by a survey of "The Dene Dháh (Alberta Slave) Alphabet" (89–101) appearing a bit unmoored at the head of Part 2.

The introduction outlines the provenance of the texts and the settings

in which they were told; it also provides geographical and historical background. Its most important section is a survey of genres, followed by all too brief remarks on performance. The editors bravely address the thorny question of prose vs poetic presentation of orally performed texts and conclude in favour of the former, explicitly deferring to their Slave translators who "were not comfortable with the extent of analysis used by translators such as Hymes, except for narratives which are specially structured, such as prayers" (xxiv).

The *ad hoc* introduction to the prophetic texts contains ethnographic and historical information of considerable interest along with some corroborating comments from the ethnological literature. On a few occasions in Part 1 (the free translations), comments of a pragmatic nature are given in footnotes, but the editors make a virtue of the fact that "notes are used sparingly" lest they "violate the protocol" prohibiting "extensive analysis of written stories by academics" (xxv). That there should be only three footnotes to accompany the 154 pages of original Slave text with its interlinear translation—not exactly an inviting format in any case, despite its surpassing value—is a matter of regret. But who would argue with editors who evidently have striven with some success to acquire the "fine sense of etiquette concerning traditional narratives and elders" (xxv) of the Dene Dháa.

It might well be a question of propriety, then, which lies at the root of the most puzzling omission: that none of the 15 texts is ascribed to a particular teller even though all eight are listed in the preface (and some might be identified on the basis of internal evidence provided in the texts themselves). Whatever the reason for this decision, it is not only subverted by the attribution of quotations (e.g., xvi) but also seems to be in conflict with the traditional practice which is explicitly enunciated as follows: "Dene storytellers usually start by naming the people who told them the stories" (xvi).

Respect for the texts and their tellers might also have dictated another printing of the Slave originals, unencumbered by the interlinear translation; in a situation where the language is widely spoken by children and in a book intended at least in part for use in the schools, such a running text is of prime paedagogical importance.<sup>1</sup> It is curious, finally, that a collection of texts recorded and printed in the Slave language should be published under a title that is monolingually English.

These texts raise issues of a philological and editorial nature which may be less than obvious to the literary reader even though they form an integral part of the book, and hence of this review. (In some journals, such comments would be set in smaller type.)

*Where Does a Text Begin and End?* It is an intriguing feature of this book that the prefatory remarks preceding texts 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9 (and, remarkably, none of the prophetic texts) are set in small italics while the appendices which follow texts 1, 2, 7, 9 appear in ordinary type and are subheaded "Storyteller's Commentary." Do these typographical

conventions signal a distinction in the status of these materials?

There is no discussion of the prosodic or proxemic or other (textual?) diagnostics which led the translators and editors to identify certain sections of the text as exordium or epilogue,<sup>2</sup> and there are certainly some opening paragraphs which, to this non-Athapaskanist reader, seem plausible candidates for proemial status even though they are printed in ordinary type:

Yes, long ago when I was a child Grandmother told me this story. (text 10, page 49)

My Grandmother told me about Wolverine long ago when I was a child. "Grandmother, tell me a story," I said, and she spoke with me. (text 8, page 40)

I know the stories in so many ways. Long ago people told about this. (text 2, page 7; cf. text 1, and note also that this paragraph in text 2 is preceded by a section printed in small italics)

With fifteen texts told by eight narrators, this is one of the points where it would be important to know the identity of the narrator—if only in code.

The question of narrative status also applies to the rhetorical questions or explanatory asides presented as parenthetical insertions (as in text 3, page 16):

He fed the baby fat mixed with animal brains, and in that way he cared for his son. (Well, in those days where would you find a store? They didn't exist.) The man went along carrying the baby, [ . . . ]

Are such anachronistic asides, spoken directly across the proscenium, as it were, not analogous in status to the matter preceding or following the text in the narrow sense?

Finally, there is the more general question: Were these texts told in isolation, or do they form part of a larger set, perhaps a cycle? This edition contains only the tantalising remark that "Most of these narratives were told with [*sic*] several other stories, [ . . . ]" (xxi).

*How Are the Texts Structured?* In many instances the paragraphs of the free English translation do not match those indicated in the original Slave texts. Such discrepancies occur both in the myths and the prophetic texts (e.g., text 12, pages 219, 72). In text 8, the free translation (41) shows a paragraph before Wolverine meets his end:

*free:* ¶ And so Wolverine sat down by the fire, lifted his breechcloth, [ . . . ]

while none appears in the Slave text (181):

*Detthoné xónla, [ . . . ]*

*i-l:* His-[Wolverine's]-breechcloth like-this-he-did-[lifted]

Conversely a paragraph may be indicated in the Slave text (no. 5, page

147):

¶ *Nóghe éhsán "t'ong" wodi* [ . . . ]

*i-l:* ¶ Wolverine then [spraying-sound] he-makes-sound-  
[Skunk]

but not in the running translation (24):

*free:* He raised his tail and was ready to spray. "T'ong!" The spraying sound was already coming from Skunk's spray hole, [ . . . ]

There is no discussion of what linguistic or discourse features the paragraphs might reflect.

*Free Translation or Re-telling?* Inconsistencies in paragraphing aside, there are analogous discrepancies between original text and free translation with regard to parenthetical insertions—and, perhaps, also with respect to the translation itself (text 8, pages 123, 13):

"[. . .] *Sehndadzūin at'in,*" *kudi éhsán; mbetsóné éhsán at'in. Ye gha dene andat'ính úh sóon?*

*i-l:* "[. . .] My-son-in-law it-was," she thought then; her-feces then it-was. What for person appear-to-be and then?

*free:* "It must be my son-in-law [ . . . ]," [she] thought [ . . . ]. (However, the man who appeared to her each night was really a product of her own imagination.)

A close comparison of these two passages and their context suggests that the "free translation" might, in fact, better be interpreted as a re-telling, a paraphrase.

In another instance (text 9, pages 116, 9), the "free translation" appears simply to omit the questioning aside,

(*Góon xéwondeh éhsín? Nóghe nelin.*)

*i-l:* (Question you-do-like-that maybe? Wolverine you-are.)

in its entirety.

The translation of words which may be taboo (or offensive, or at least highly marked) in one or both of the languages in question is an especially thorny problem.<sup>3</sup> The two translations match sometimes but not always (text 8, pages 180, 40; 181, 41):

*Yebé t'á eledz* [ . . . ]

*i-l:* Its-stomach in he-[Wolverine]-would-urinate [ . . . ]

*free:* He urinated into the stomach of [one of the beavers, . . . ]

[ . . . ], *gitl'éh eghendihdi ínyá.*

*i-l:* [ . . . ], in-his-crotch they-shoved-it and-then.

*free:* [ . . . ], and then shoved it between Wolverine's legs.

In some cases, the gulf widens (text 5, pages 147, 24; text 2, pages 116, 9):

¶ *Nóghe éhsán "t'ong" wodi*

*i elé éhsán, yetsónék'é éhsán,  
xónht'e éhsán yígé.*

- i-l:* ¶ Wolverine then [spraying-sound] he-makes-sound-  
[Skunk]  
that where-he-urinates it-must-have-been, his-anus then,  
like-that then he-bit.
- free:* The spraying sound was already coming from Skunk's spray  
hole, when Wolverine bit it shut.

*Xoniá dúhde se'e detl'eh ts'ín.  
(Góon xéwondeh éhsín? Nóghe nelin.)  
Jon se'e detl'eh ts'ib éhsán.  
Kón, mbéhts'ehththenlih, [ . . ]*

- i-l:* Suddenly right-here really her-crotch toward.  
(Question you-do-like-that maybe? Wolverine you-are.)  
Here really her-crotch toward then.  
Fire, with-it's-struck, [ . . ]
- free:* [ . . ], at last finding a small flint between her legs,  
tied right there, high on her thigh.

(As noted earlier, the insertion does not appear in the free translation.)  
Such passages are inherently problematic in any cross-cultural situation.

But even in non-controversial areas, the distance between the  
interlinear and the free translation seems to be substantial. In the  
following example (text 1, pages 102, 3), the free translation simply  
seems to omit all repetition, whether only of the noun meaning  
"animal" or of the whole phrase:

*Wonlin nde-áh, wonlin ní'á di díeh k'eh lint'onh.  
Wonlin, wonlin, ndáhtheghon, wonlin nechi, lint'onh.*

- i-l:* Animals He-tricks, animals He-tricked this land on all.  
Animals, animals, He-killed-them, animals giant, all.
- free:* He tricked all the animals that lived on this land;  
he killed all the giant animals.

It seems worth inquiring about the stylistic value of such repetitions.

Such discrepancies raise serious questions about the nature of the  
free translations presented in the first half of this book. That the  
interlinear translations can, in the nature of things, be little more than  
rough approximations goes without saying. But to what extent have the  
free translations been rewritten and smoothed over? If they were as far  
removed, in general, from the original as these few instances suggest,  
we might have to reconsider the border which divides free translation  
from paraphrase, summary or, indeed, re-telling.<sup>4</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>4</sup>While linguists and philologists have an abiding interest in variants, slips  
of the tongue, false starts, insertions, textual notes, glossaries, etc., these  
seem of little concern to most fluent speakers (and may for some be a

source of irritation); but a running text, unimpeded by interlinear matter (or even by a translation printed *en regard*), is essential. (On this point cf. especially pp. 106–107 in my review article, "Ojibwa Texts," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 53: 103–111, 1987.)

<sup>2</sup>There is also no mention of the reason for dividing text 5 into two parts.

<sup>3</sup>For a more general discussion of this issue à propos of traditional Cree texts, cf. my "Taboo and Taste in Literary Translation," W. Cowan, éd., *Actes du Dix-septième Congrès des Algonquistes* 377–394, 1986.

<sup>4</sup>Postscript to the Publishers: This book exhibits a number of editorial flaws which should clearly be laid at the feet of the publishers and their shoddy copy-editing (if any); the following examples are intended as representative, not exhaustive:

- place-names like *Bushie River* or *High Level* which are discussed on page 94 but do not appear on the facing map;
- variable spellings of the name *Slave* which are not accounted for by Rice's convention (96*n*);
- infelicities in the introductory matter (e.g., *C. Marten* [65] for what can only be *see Marten*, or the gratuitous awkwardness of using *revealed* [90] as a phonological term in a book of prophetic texts);
- the omission from the bibliography of many titles referred to in the body (e.g., Howard 1963, Moses 1972, Rice 1983, Voudrach 1965);
- the omission of subtitles for Preston 1971 (which is cited in the form of an unpublished dissertation even though it was published in 1975, and with a changed subtitle) or Ridington 1978;
- the obliteration of several lines of text by an illustration on page 41.

In a book of lasting importance, such lack of ordinary editorial care insults authors and readers alike.

H. C. Wolfart

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*California Indian Nights*. Compiled by Edward W. Gifford and Gwendoline Harris Block. Introduction by Albert L. Hurtado. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1990. 323 pp. \$9.95 paper, ISBN 0-8032-7031-3.

In 1930 Edward W. Gifford and Gwendoline Harris Block published *California Indian Nights Entertainment*, an anthology of over eighty California Indian stories. Gifford and Block, both scholars of California Indian cultures, selected and adapted the stories from various publications, such as the University of California *Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnography* and the *Journal of American Folklore*, where the stories collected from the California natives by anthropologists first appeared in print. Now, sixty years later, Bison has reissued



the anthology with the same stories and introduction by Gifford and Block and with a new introduction by historian Albert L. Hurtado.

Gifford and Block include stories from many of the over one hundred California Indian tribes. As a result, the reader can begin to appreciate, or at least be reminded of, the many Native peoples who populated all regions of California. Gifford and Block not only identify the tribe from which each story comes but also the county in which the tribe lives, or lived at the time the respective story was originally collected. Thus, we have stories from the Hupa, Karok, and Wiyot Indians of Humboldt county in northern California as well as stories from the Juaneño and Luiseño Indians of Orange, Riverside, and San Diego counties in southern California.

The stories are presented in English, edited by Gifford and Block, as Hurtado notes, "to give them broader appeal without unduly damaging their authenticity." The sparsity of human motivation and narrative detail characteristic of these stories is typical of much oral literature of tribal cultures in translation and is oftentimes problematic for Western readers with certain narrative expectations. Also, the ambiguous nature of characters, such as Coyote, in many of the stories may prove confusing, contradictory to these same readers.

In the Karok story, "How Coyote Got His Cunning," Coyote is both foolish and wise, and, as demonstrated by his actions, possessed cunning, or a certain amount of it anyway, before he obtained it in the story. In many of these stories people, even in the form of animals, and features of the landscape are already in existence and may be characters themselves and may or may not be remade by the actions of the principal character(s) in the stories. Unlike the Christian version of creation, which is linear and definitive, the creation as portrayed in many of these stories is dialogical, ongoing, perplexing. Good intentions or deeds may bring about an unfortunate outcome, and vice versa. In "Chipmunk, The Giant-Killer," a central Miwok story, the characters are saved by the same tactics their enemies used against them.

These features of the stories and their oftentimes unique formats, where stories seem to open and close arbitrarily, while perhaps disconcerting to some readers, do not make for uneasy or inaccessible reading. The stories are fun, often very humorous, and any difficulty with them should point to, and raise questions about, the differences between the reader's expectations of a narrative and what the stories present.

It is the question of the reader, specifically, that prompts a more critical examination of this anthology. While the stories and Gifford and Block's introduction are the same, a reader today is likely to be quite different from the reader in 1930. Certainly readers today will have questions about the stories, if not about their translation and production then about the cultures from which they come and how they work or function in those cultures. Hurtado notes that "A much more detailed

picture of Indian history has emerged since this book was first published." (Hurtado has written a comprehensive history of California Indian history, *Indian Survival on the California Borderland Frontier, 1819–60*, which covers the periods of Spanish, Mexican, and American invasion.) Yet Hurtado is not aware of, or fails to acknowledge, the questions that inform current study in the fields of anthropology and folklore, specifically those questions dealing with the translation and presentation of oral materials from persons of one culture by persons from another, usually dominant, culture.

Contemporary readers are likely to question the context in which the stories were first told to recorder-editors and the nature of the translation from the Native language into English. What were the circumstances of a Native Californian telling an anthropologist a story? How might those circumstances have affected the narrative form and meaning of the story? What is lost or gained in the translation from one language to another? These questions suggest a wider, more complex understanding of and appreciation for the stories.

Among my own Pomo and Coast Miwok people I have seen how storytellers will alter narratives, both in terms of content and form, for ethnographers and linguists. Essie Parrish, for example, used formal frames to open and close the stories she told Robert Oswalt for his *Kashaya Texts*. She customarily opened by saying "This is a story of" or "Now I am going to talk about" and closed with "This is the end of that." I have never heard Mrs. Parrish or any other Kashaya Pomo use formal frames when telling a story or anything else. The point here is that the texts in *California Indian Nights* are not raw, authentic stories that, as Hurtado suggests, "illuminate Indian culture and history." The stories are bicultural products that may, as a result of certain narrative forms or whatever, raise questions not only about the rich and varied California Indian cultures and histories, but also about the nature of those cultures and histories as they are recorded, translated, and presented by anthropologists and the like.

Rather than explore these questions, Gifford and Block, typical of anthropologists of their day, closed discussion of them with definitive descriptions of the Native cultures. In their lengthy introduction to the anthology, Gifford and Block provide a general ethnography that purports to describe the cultures of northwestern, central, and southern California in order that readers have a wider sense of, or a context for, the stories. Readers learn, for example, that in northwestern California "there were no chiefs" while "everywhere else in California there were chiefs." Whether or not readers find this material interesting the material serves only to frame the stories in given ways, and ultimately says as much about Gifford and Block as it does the California Indians they are describing.

Gifford and Block continually assess the Indian cultures in terms of their own. Hence, they note "musical instruments were but poorly developed" and that "the southern California creation story which began

with a void is the most logical. . . . So, from a logical standpoint, it was the Luiseño of southern California, with their void, who had gone the farthest and had reasoned the origin of the matter back to nothingness, and who had realized the significance of maleness and femaleness as creative principles." Further, Gifford and Block say nothing about their decisions to divide the stories categorically in given ways (i.e., Coyote Stories, Star Stories, Adventure Stories, Miscellaneous).

Hurtado, in his introduction, notes a few of Gifford and Block's biases, or what he calls "idiosyncracies," such as their use of the word *primitive* and their oversight of "the exceedingly fine basketry that was found throughout the state." Unfortunately, he condones, perhaps unwittingly, the essentially ethnocentric nature of Gifford and Block's introduction by saying: "Understandably, in the ensuing sixty years there have been advances in the field, but on the whole their [Gifford and Block's] introduction still stands up."

Gifford and Block observe: "A good narrator clothes that [narrative] skeleton with flesh, and employs the literary devices known to his people." Anyone would agree. But from their introduction we learn nothing of the literary devices used by the Indian narrators, with other Indians or with outside recorder-editors, and nothing of the ways the English translation, which has reduced over one hundred distinct languages to a common denominator, may or may not have compromised those devices. The narrative forms of the stories may be unique and perplexing and the motifs different from those in Western narratives, but how are they understood and meaningful to the respective Indian narrators and their communities? I doubt many of these Indians discuss their stories in terms of Western narratives, say in contrast to linear Christian versions of creation. For Western readers a comparative/contrastive approach may be a starting point, but the readers must again be cognizant of the likely culture specific terms of their approach. After all, Gifford and Block compare and contrast.

I mention this, in fact I have spent so much time talking about Gifford and Block's introduction and Hurtado's introduction, because together the introductions not only frame the stories in given ways but do little, if anything, to raise crucial questions about the stories and their production, so that they might be seen as something more than voiceless relics that are understood from only one cultural perspective, in this case not the California Indians!

The stories are fascinating, complex, and raise important questions about cross-cultural communication. They must be read for these reasons, and Gifford and Block, as well as Hurtado, must be read as readers with culture specific understanding of the stories and the California Indian cultures from which the stories come. The day has passed when it was enough to see without question and concern the other in terms of ourselves alone.

Greg Sarris

***Bighorse the Warrior***. Tiana Bighorse. Ed. Noël Bennett. Tucson: U Arizona P, 1990. ISBN 0-8165-1189-6. 113 pp. \$14.95 cloth.

"It's important to the Navajos when you know these kind of stories. They can keep you going. These are brave stories, and knowing them can make you brave" (xxvii). So says Tiana Bighorse, daughter of Gus Bighorse (c. 1846–1939) and keeper of his survival stories. In this lovely book, Tiana Bighorse, with the assistance of her collaborator, Noël Bennett, reconstructs her father's life history—a series of moving stories about an heroic and compassionate man—and the sufferings and endurance of the Navajo people. Retelling her father's stories in *his* voice, Tiana Bighorse emphasizes how she heard the stories as a child, how the past continues to live in the present, and how history shapes community. Gus Bighorse's life story begins with the serenity of family and community living peacefully on their own land, raising peaches and corn and children. Through his daughter's words, he narrates how as a young man he helped his people through the painful years of the Long Walk, and how as an elder he is heartbroken when the government destroys his horses in the stock reduction program of the 1930s. Although Bighorse told these stories over fifty years ago, they continue through the storytelling voice of his daughter. This is not just Gus Bighorse's story, though. It is also the story of how the Navajo people fought for their land, how his daughter came to tell a man's story, and how bicultural collaboration can work gracefully and well.

Gus Bighorse's daughter was born near Mt. Taylor, one of the four sacred mountains of the Navajo world. A member of the Deer Spring Clan, Tiana attended boarding school from the time she was eight years old through the 9th grade. Taught weaving by her mother from the age of seven, she has earned her livelihood through weaving. In 1968 Noël Bennett went to the Navajo reservation to study with Tiana Bighorse. Her apprenticeship lasted many years, and the friendship between the two women has deepened over twenty years. In 1971 they collaborated on *Working with Wool: How to Weave a Navajo Rug*, a collection of Tiana's mother's stories intended for Navajo girls and the general public. Almost twenty years later, at Tiana's insistence, they collaborated on a second book, this time retelling her father's stories. The result is *Bighorse the Warrior*.

Bennett provides a clear and readable historical context (99–106), what she describes as "a chronology of significant events in Navajo and American history and in the life of Gus Bighorse" (99), but she does not offer much cultural context or any indication of the performance aspect of storytelling. In the Preface, though, Bennett describes the collaborative process, her own editorial decisions, and her relationship with Tiana Bighorse (who is a friend and teacher, not an "informant"). "My foremost thought was to protect the integrity of the Navajo voice," Bennett explains; "these would be *her* words and thoughts, not mine" (xv). Bennett knows how difficult a process that can be. Although she

does not cite scholarly theories of ethnographic translation (along the lines of Dell Hymes or Dennis Tedlock), she is sensitive to the cultural and linguistic pitfalls of an outsider's attempt "to protect the integrity" of another's voice. She describes how Tiana spoke the stories in English with an occasional word in Navajo. Since Navajo has no tenses equivalent to those in English, the question of tense becomes a key issue. In order to do justice to Tiana's spoken language, Bennett decides to use what some have called Red English, in this case the English spoken by a speaker whose first language is Navajo. In discussing these issues, Bennett suggests reweaving as a compelling metaphor for translation. She describes how she reweave an old Navajo blanket to look "brand new," but in the process, the blanket's "historical integrity" was lost (xxii). Similarly, in translating, "correcting" (i.e., changing the words to "fit some conventionalized scholarly Anglo form" xxii), erases the speaker. Bennett's compromise was to standardize verbs in the present tense, to edit subject-verb agreement, and to alter "disorienting words" (xxiii). She decided against "correcting" grammar. What remains is clarity and the eloquence of the spoken voice.

In the Introduction, Tiana Bighorse explains how she, rather than her brothers, came to be the recipient of her father's stories, a man's stories intended for boys and men. As a little girl, she would lie in bed and listen to her father telling stories to her brothers. "They don't want me to listen," she explains, "because it's just the men that are supposed to be listening" (xxvi). Even after her father tells her the stories are not for her, she cannot help herself. She pretends to be sleeping, but listens all the while. When her father discovers her, he decides that she is the only one who is "really listening," the "one who is remembering the stories" (xxvi). Someday, her father tells her brothers: "if she has kids, then she'll tell them stories she heard from me" (xxvi). Tiana retells her father's stories not just for her own children, though, but for the people. "I want the people to know the warriors are brave to fight with the enemies. I want the world to know that the Navajo warriors were heros [sic]. . . . They pay for our land with their lives. I want everyone to remember how the Navajo got this big reservation. They will tell their grandchildren, and our warriors will not be forgotten" (xxvii).

In the 1860s the Navajos were forced from their land by federal troops led by their former friend Kit Carson. After finding his parents murdered by U.S. soldiers, sixteen-year-old Gus Bighorse joined those who escaped to hide in the mountains. Over the next few years he would become acquainted with renowned Navajo resistance leaders like Ch'il Haajiní, Dághá Yázhí, and Dághaa'íi, better known today as Manuelito, Barboncito, and Delgadito. It was Manuelito, in fact, who gave Bighorse orders to move his group of non-captured Navajos to the Colorado River behind Navajo Mountain and to plant food. While the resisters hid in the canyons and mountains, the captured people were

forced to go on The Long Walk (1864–1868). Around 9,000 men, women, and children were forced to walk over 325 miles from Fort Defiance in Arizona to Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico (located within a 30-square-mile area known as Bosque Redondo or Hwéeldi to the Navajo). "The Long Walk is a tragic journey over frozen snow and rough rocks" (34), remembers Bighorse. Over half of the people died. "People are shot down on the spot" if they claim to be sick or tired or if they linger to help another (34). "There are bodies here and there and everywhere along the trail" (34), Tiana recalls her father saying. Bighorse describes Hwéeldi as it was described to him by the messengers who reported regularly to the non-captured Navajo. Once they had arrived at Hwéeldi, they explain, the people were not provided with sufficient food or shelter. Starvation, cold, deprivation, and sorrow all took their toll on the people. They were harassed by Comanches who stole what little they could gather and by soldiers who forced the Navajo to work as slave labor. They had no shelter, no firewood, no livestock. In place of blankets they wrapped themselves in gunny sacks. "Everybody so cold, hungry, and thin," says Bighorse. "They don't even look like themselves" (51). Many more died during their four years of imprisonment. In addition to narrating stories from the Navajo holocaust, Bighorse tells of how he was "captured by Mexicans and taken to Mexico" (104), how he married twice and had nine children, how he raised the largest and most beautiful horses (hence his name) before they were destroyed by the U.S. government.

Designed, in part, as a complement to the collection of her mother's stories published in 1971, *Bighorse the Warrior* reflects the vitality of oral traditions, the heroism of a generation of Navajos who fought for their land, and the friendship and collaboration of Tiana Bighorse and Noël Bennett. *Bighorse the Warrior* should appeal to general readers, students, and even to many scholars. This book is a lively contribution to the collection of published Navajo voices. The stories must be told, insists Bighorse. Many "people died of their tragic story," explains Bighorse, but by telling the stories "we wake ourselves up, get out of the shock. And that is why I tell my kids what happened, so it won't be forgot" (82). Tiana Bighorse's eloquent retelling of her father's stories highlights how the storytellers of every generation bear witness and insure survival.

Hertha D. Wong

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*Wigwam Evenings: Sioux Folk Tales Retold*. Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa) and Elaine Goodale Eastman. Intr. Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1990. 253pp. ISBN 0-8032-6717-7.

*Wigwam Evenings* ostensibly draws upon the stories Charles Eastman recollected from his childhood in a traditional Dakota camp. In 1874 at the age of 15 he left Manitoba, where his Santee family had gone to escape the 1862 Minnesota war, in order to become indelibly "civilized" under the tutelage of Dr. Alfred L. Riggs at the Santee Agency in northeastern Nebraska. From there he went on to Beloit College, Dartmouth, and Boston University medical school. As a young man he served as agency physician at Pine Ridge and was a witness to the aftermath of Wounded Knee as well as a persistent advocate for Lakota victims of agency graft. For the rest of his life until his death in 1939 Eastman articulately defended the spirituality and egalitarianism of his people in eleven books, numerous articles, and lectures, implicitly presenting himself as a model of adaptation, preserving the Dakota heritage while taking up only the best of what the white man had to offer:

I am an Indian; and while I have learned much from civilization, for which I am grateful, I have never lost my Indian sense of right and justice. I am for development and progress along social and spiritual lines, rather than those of commerce, nationalism, or material efficiency. Nevertheless, so long as I live, I am an American. (*From the Deep Woods to Civilization*)

To be an American of stature in his day, one had also to be versed in the best of thought, the Greek and Roman classics that American educators revered. Inevitably, perhaps, his "Sioux Folk Tales Retold" were so classicized that modern readers should be warned against accepting them as oral narratives of the type Eastman is likely to have heard as a child. The concluding morals emulate Aesop, and the Victorian prose in which they are truncated and recast gives us a familiar just-as-good-as high culture message rather than stories of substantive cultural or literary value. As an adult Eastman apparently regarded the oral narratives he heard as a child as tales for children and represented them in print as simple parables. The frame of each story includes a group of "real" children receiving prefatory explanations from the storyteller, Smoky Day.

The best way to appreciate the assimilative quality of these "Sioux Tales" is to compare a representative one, in this case an episode of "Blood Clot Boy," to the Santee version transcribed by David Grey Cloud and translated by Stephen Return Riggs *circa* 1881 for *Dakota Grammar, Texts, and Ethnography* (1893; rpt. American Indian Culture Research Center, Blue Cloud Abbey, Marvin, South Dakota, 1977: 95-104).

Since the story is about an innocent character's loss of his home, Eastman emphasizes the snug warmth of the children's clothing and their "frolicsome ride through the brightly lighted village" to Smoky Day's tipi where they will learn not to take their health and comfort for granted. While Eastman had lived in a tipi (not a wigwam), Smoky Day's protagonist, the Badger, "lived in a little house under the hill and it was warm and snug" with the mother Badger and the little badgers who were "fat and merry," primarily because "gray old Badger was a famous hunter." Smoky Day adds that "folks said he must have a magic art in making arrows" (*Wigwam Evenings* 64).

From the beginning Eastman carefully ascribes belief in "magic" to some people but leaves open the possibility for early 20th century readers that other Dakota were not as superstitious as these "folks." The Grey Cloud-Riggs narrator, on the other hand, makes the Badger's "power" the immediate focus of attention. The Badger has a hunting practice that incorporates technique and inspiration. When his buffalo "surround" or corral is full, he stands behind the herd and sends a single arrow through all of them. In both stories a hungry Bear arrives, and after Badger sends him back with food for several consecutive days, the Bear returns with his whole family and drives the Badger with his wife and children from their home.

Grey Cloud-Riggs emphasize the unexpectedness rather than the injustice of the act. The Badger has extraordinary powers for hunting and has offered hospitality tantamount to kinship, but he cannot stand up to the Bear who bullies him into the slave-labor of hunting and butchering and then keeps all the meat for himself. Smoky Day-Eastman supplies a rational explanation for the Badger's inability to resist—the Bear confiscates the Badger's magic arrows. Grey Cloud-Riggs allows the Badger to keep his single arrow but not the meat it provides. The Grey Cloud-Riggs version may be an adult reflection on historical exploitation. Victims do not lose their abilities but are denied the fruits of their labor. Smoky Day-Eastman fills in a realistic detail but misses the narrative's symbolic center.

In the rest of the story Smoky Day-Eastman omits the restoration of the Badger's courage and health through ritualized symbolic expression. In the Smoky Day-Eastman version repetition is eliminated to conform to Western literary practice. The hungry Badger is reduced to begging the Bear for food, and the Bear family laughs at his misery except for "the smallest and ugliest" cub who later sneaks food to the Badgers to keep them from starving. The situation is redeemed by a *deus ex machina*, the "Avenger who sprang from a drop of innocent blood." The hero is neither described nor explained. He simply arrives and chases away the mean Bear, chivalrously sparing his wife and children: "He ran as fast as he could, looking over his shoulder from time to time." Smoky Day-Eastman concludes: "There is no meanness like ingratitude" (*Wigwam Evenings* 69).

Grey Cloud-Riggs does not have the Badger beg the usurper.



Instead the Bear comes to the Badger and commands him to hunt (three times in the story): "You Badger with the stinking ears, come out, your surround is full of buffalo." Then after the Badger has dressed the meat, the Bear prevents him from taking any, first by verbal threat, then by action: "You stinking eared Badger, get away, you will trample in my blood" (i.e. the buffalo blood that the Bear wants for himself; this is spoken twice in the story).

The story's repetition emphasizes not only that the Badger is being starved for food but that he is being kept from the "blood," the power to defend and perpetuate his children. In the Smoky Day–Eastman version, the deliverer suddenly appears as in a saintly visitation. In Grey Cloud–Riggs the potentiality of "blood," apparently belonging only to the bear, is realized for the Badger through a Dakota ceremony. After he secretly brings home a blood clot from the butchering place, Badger's building of an *iníti* (sweat lodge) is carefully described. The blood clot is purified by placing it on a bed of sage, and after the stones are heated the ceremony revives the courage and competence of a dispossessed people. This reversal does not occur inexplicably as in Smoky Day–Eastman but gradually, as a development requiring trust and patience: "Suddenly the Badger heard some one inside sighing. He continued to pour water on the stones. And then some one breathing within said, 'Again you have made me glad, and now open for me.' So he opened the door and a very beautiful young man came out" (Riggs 102).

Blood Clot Boy tells his father to "say" sequentially that his son shall have clothes, weapons, and food, and the words bring about the reality. The vitalizing effect of symbolic expression is emphasized. Then again, patience through ritual repetition is realized in the actual killing of the Bear: "'Now, father, do just as I tell you to do.' To this the Badger said 'Yes.' Then Blood Clot Boy continued: 'In the morning when Gray Bear comes out and calls you, you will not go; but the second time he calls then go with him, for I shall then have hidden myself'" (Riggs 103). Grey Cloud–Riggs does not spare the Bear's family except for the one who used to "play" with a buffalo leg before casting it away to the Badgers. He is allowed to live but only as a captive. Smoky Day–Eastman subtracts this "cruelty" to the enemy, thereby missing the story's hard lesson. Grey Cloud–Riggs is not concerned with the Bear's ingratitude (Eastman's moral) but with the Dakota means of "living" through ritual and storytelling. Instead of being condemned or forgiven, both the Badger's fear and the Bear's vice are scrupulously scourged at the end. Christianization is evident in Eastman's resolution of a profound problem by the intervention of a savior rather than through the shaping disciplines of ceremony.

The rest of *Wigwam Evenings* contains many oral tradition motifs, but all are embedded in a well meant, misleading attempt at cultural public relations. Most suspect are the familiar characters and events made to subserve "Creation" and other "origin stories." Eastman gives

his people a mythology in the Western sense but denies them the distinctive voice that would complement rather than reflect his adoptive culture.

Julian Rice

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***Dancing on the Rim of the World: An Anthology of Contemporary Northwest Native American Poetry.*** Ed. Andrea Lerner. Tucson: Sun Tracks and The U of Arizona P, 1990. 266 pp. Cloth \$37.50, ISBN 0-8165-1097-0; paper \$15.98, ISBN 08165-1215-9.

*Dancing on the Rim of the World* comes along, handsome, well-edited, and timely, to announce to the world that a Northwest Native American literary movement has not only begun, it is well underway, a significant new regional flourishing within the larger flourishing of Indian writing now. Let this collection be entered alongside other fine regional anthologies of Native poetry and prose, including the *Sun Tracks* series from Arizona, and Joe Bruchac's Iroquois and Alaskan collections.

Interesting notion, *regional*. Some critics who should know better, having fought their way clear of New Critical biases otherwise, still sneer at it as a trivial element of literary identity, whether in Anglo writing or in Indian myth-texts. Thus Arnold Krupat inveighs against the "unself-conscious twaddle about . . . the poetry of place" that, to him, disfigures the critical studies of "literary pragmatists" working on Indian texts (*For Those Who Come After* xiii).

One wonders what Krupat would be able to make of the intense imaginings of Northwest places that run through the 137 selections by 34 poets that Andrea Lerner has chosen for this anthology. In their eloquent introductory essay (a manifesto that constitutes one of the book's special distinctions), poets Elizabeth Woody and Gloria Bird assert the importance of place, of *region* in the fullest sense, in their own poetry and that of their contemporaries. "The making of symbols and images are directly entwined with our Northwest homeland, family, their graves, teachings, and specific sites that mark our tenure" (5).

What Woody and Bird define as the Northwest, "the rim of the world" in one of Earle Thompson's poems ("Spirit" 214), is a huge domain as much defined by cultural tradition and imagination as by landform and climate, including "southern Alaska, southwestern Canada, Montana, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, western Nevada, and northern California" (1). Such is both the rich diversity and the felt *community* of the poetry here collected.

In her work as editor, Andrea Lerner has cast a fittingly wide and

systematic net over the territory, and gathered together impressive evidence of the new vitality of Northwest Indian writing—both in the selections by established writers, and in those representing newcomers. The distinguished Klallam poet and editor Duane Niatum, for example, is represented here by several new, hitherto-unanthologized poems, including a lovely address to his son, "Son, This Is What I Can Tell You" (143–45)—a subject Niatum has taken up intermittently throughout his long career, but never with such clarity and grace:

. . . So my son who takes a different road  
Away from the red cedar and yellow pine,  
the road that brings me to my gnarled elders,  
the earth and shore of my Klallam family—  
try remembering when your anger is lifted  
like fog from a coastal storm,  
I cannot call you back, cannot offer what  
wasn't theirs, the popping fire  
and butterfly dancers of this place. (145)

Likewise, Janet Campbell Hale, a well-published writer (Coeur D'Alene) who surely deserves wider recognition, offers an extraordinary essay, "Autobiography in Fiction," amounting to a personal myth of writing, full of allusions to her experience as an American Indian from the Northwest, but wonderfully suggestive and wise about How It Is with writers of all backgrounds and purposes. Readers who take up *Dancing on the Rim of the World* consciously or unconsciously expecting to find unsophisticated writing would be well advised to begin with Hale's very savvy essay.

And then go on, thus fortified, to survey the bounty of new, aspiring, mixed talent that it is this book's chief purpose and distinction to exhibit. What's represented here in the work of emerging poets like Elizabeth Woody (Wasco/Navajo), Gloria Bird (Spokane), Gail Tremblay (Onondaga/Micmac), Dian Million (Athabaskan), Victor Charlo (Interior Salish), Robert Davis (Tlingit), and Earle Thompson (Yakima) is a vitality becoming aware of itself and its responsibilities, connecting "tradition and the individual talent" in a way that T.S. Eliot never dreamed of. As Woody and Bird put it in their manifesto, "By pulling away from a trusting status with the United States and its imposing definitions of blood quantum, we are all in a sense 'half-bloods,' a metaphor for walking in two worlds. In writing, we are taking back control of our tribes and our lives" (4). And not only in writing, one might add, noting how many of the writers in this collection are also serious artists in other mediums: photography, painting, sculpture, carving, and so on. Judging from this anthology alone, the creative energy now stirring in the Indian Northwest is going to assert itself in many styles and in many forms.

Inevitably, as Andrea Lerner acknowledges in her preface, a pioneering anthology like this one is going to overlook some writers of

promise, and include others whose careers will peter out. No matter—the former will survive being overlooked here, and the latter will at least enjoy this much notice. What matters most in *Dancing on the Rim of the World* is the generous recognition this book gives now to the arriving fact of Northwest Indian writing. Here it comes! And if one poem can be allowed to stand, out of such a wealth of material, for what's coming, let it be Victor Charlo's lovely, echoing "Flathead River Creation," written for his English and Kootenai students in the Two Eagle River School:

You say  
old days fold into one another  
and new days seem the same  
Yet each moment shifts with sun,  
nothing will be the same as this:

when wind breathes the Flathead alive,  
you are the center this instant  
for all, you are the creation  
of the universe one more time. (27)

Jarold Ramsey

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*The Indian Lawyer*. James Welch. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 349 pp. \$19.95. ISBN 0-393-02896-8.

Among little known facts about Native Americans is that of the existence of Indian lawyers. Among the better-known of these are Thomas Sloan, an Omaha from Nebraska who served as an attorney for the American Indian Federation in the thirties, and Charles Curtis, a Kaw known for hastening allotment for his tribe and others as well as being elected Vice-President under Hoover in 1928. Among the lesser-known are myself, a Gros Ventre attorney, albeit non-practicing, and a number of others of the present time doing the necessary work of the law for Native American peoples across the country. And necessary it is, for in the words of Big Bear, in the end the great cage was made of words.

*The Indian Lawyer* is the first significant imagining I am aware of related to all this, and James Welch does his usual fine job of it. The voice of the book is genuine, and therefore right. There is honesty in that voice, as well as James Welch's signature final modesty, an ever-present realization that we triumph and fail at the same time. This is important. As N. Scott Momaday has said, "We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves.

Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and *that* we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined."

In this regard *The Indian Lawyer* marks a turning point in Native American literature. James Welch has imagined an empowered, enfranchised, successful individual who not only does not leave the reservation only to return disillusioned, but who also picks his way cannily through the complexities of life on the outside. Frustrated as Native Americans and others are with the stasis and occasional backsliding of American life, this documents some of the amazing incidents of success of a culture that refuses to die.

Sylvester Yellow Calf, Blackfeet attorney; Harwood, powerful but self-destructive; Patti Ann, the essential female; Lena, the lonely Crow woman teaching among the Blackfeet; and Sylvester's accurately depicted traditional grandparents show the polish James Welch's style has attained. The characters and story line are a slick and sophisticated vehicle for yet another hungered-for message about an enigmatic part of all our lives.

The richness of the book comes from real stuff—James Welch served on the Montana Prison Board of Pardons for 10 years and was recently on the majority side of a 2–1 decision to recommend commutation of a death penalty. Though he has since retired from this position, it is clear that the experience gave him the material to create a realistic and vivid imagining of the prison setting. It is fascinating to get an insider view of the closed prison subculture, and James Welch does it well.

Casting Sylvester Yellow Calf as Indian basketball star is further evidence of James Welch's ability to isolate and treat with the genuine metaphors of modern Indian life. Racked by alcoholism, poverty, and unemployment; victimized by cheating, broken treaties and sell-outs; robbed of some 37 million acres of land guaranteed by the U.S. government; the Indian has taken back basketball from the whites and made it into a way of continuing traditional ways. Though Indians constituted only 7% of Montana's population, their schools won 10 Class A, B, and C state high school basketball titles between 1980 and 1990. Dale Spotted, Star Not Afraid, George Yellow Eyes, Floyd Cross Guns and Don Wetzel are legends in Montana. This may not mean much to Corporate America, but it bespeaks a better reality, then and now.

Sylvester Yellow Calf is a new Native American hero, and he exists in his success as well as his isolation. His team-mates turn away from him, but he sustains. This is a powerful evocation of what the future can hold for a once vanishing breed.

Sidner Larson

\* \* \* \*

*In Mad Love and War*. Joy Harjo. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan U P, 1990. 65pp. paper, ISBN 0-8195-1182-X.

Story tangles in these poems the way electricity does in a storm—makes your hair stand up, gives an ozony smell of strange powers moving in your world. But then, if you try to read the words by their occasional blinding strokes to you-ward, you may get awfully frustrated. Well, YOU may not—certainly *I* did. I kept peering into the dark and dazzle, trying to see just who the *you* might be that the *I* of a given poem might be addressing: whether a friend or friends unknown to me, or me and other readers, or all of us. The *you* and the *I* were up there in that high dark hailstony whirling, where the power that blinks redeyed hours into our clock radios might at any second kill our time—and I was down in this small bulb-lit room trying to make out what the voices of hail and thunder were saying.

Sometimes a story flashed and in its flare were deer dancers and deer magic in an Indian bar in the Southwest ("Deer Dancer"); then it was old daylight time in Tulsa ("Death is a Woman"), and a sleek whiskey-breathed father dancing with his peroxidized Death-In-Life in Cain's Ballroom. Well, I recognized Tulsa time and place and people, though the words make them symbolic as hell: I could look up unblinking into that flashlit cloud because way back in grade school we used to listen to country music on the air from Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa.

So I like Joy Harjo's Okie thunder, because I like to know where any whirlwind is taking me. There's one tornado in the book ("Autobiography") that touches down *both* in Tulsa and what feels like Santa Fe, but I can ride it as calm, almost, as Elijah when *that* sweet chariot swung low for him—because I know the tracks, in Indian territory, of "doom's electric moccasin" (thanks, Emily!), so if Joy "lived next door to the bootlegger," I know her address, since my folks bought whiskey there before she was born. I may find it hard to follow her through the dark Indian country she explores with so many different stories and powers, but when she says ("Autobiography") of Oklahoma, *The Sooner State glorified the thief. Everyone and no one was Indian*, she is exactly, horribly right. It's the best brief word on the matter—though a picture by Richard Ray Whitman has hammered the point home as strongly: that one of his "Street Chiefs" series which places a REAL Indian (*one that tourists would never approve as "Indian"*) beneath a great billboard on which, beside the logos of a Sioux-bonneted Indian and a Marlboro cowboy, there is the legend BUY OKLAHOMA.

Everyone and no one was Indian. I have old friends with as much or more Indian blood than I have, who never dance or in any way regard themselves as anything but whites with some Indian blood. But I have a nephew who is a quarter Osage and has blue eyes and redgold beard and long hair—and when he danced at the Sun Dance on the Rosebud, he was called Yellow Hair (in Lakota), a name that has its

echoes for Custer and Buffalo Bill freaks. His Ponca daughter was this year's Ponca Powwow Princess at White Eagle, Oklahoma. To be "Indian" in Oklahoma and many places now involves no fewer shades and varieties of being and seeming than to be "white" or "black"—however surprising and dismaying that must be to those looking for Real Indians in warbonnets leaving a Trail of Tears in the red Oklahoma dust.

But in this as in other books Harjo writes many more songs of love than of Oklahoma. Some are bluesy notes of pain and loss ("Unmailed Letter," "The Bloodletting"), some wildflower embraces, intense and respectful—"Rainy Dawn" for her teenage daughter, "Crystal Lake" for her grandfather, "A Winning Hand" for Richard Hugo. Some are of passion and love ("Desire," "City of Fire," "Crossing the Water"); others of passion and hate ("If I Think About You Again . . ."). And the poems open up to worlds outside these United States—to the powers and images of Egypt ("Hieroglyphic," "The Book of Myths"), to the Reaganauts and Bushwhackers of Central America ("Resurrection," "The Real Revolution is Love"). Harjo keeps cool about Nicaragua: hates what was (and is) being done to people there, but reminds us that talking politics is different from living values.

The poems open also to the music of music. Harjo plays saxophone, and hears with her heart—so her poem to Charlie Parker ("Bird") has the power of shared love and pain:

To survive is sometimes a leap into madness. The fingers of  
saints are still hot from miracles, but can they save themselves?

Where is the dimension a god lives who will take Bird home?  
I want to see it, I said to the Catalinas, to the Rincons,

to anyone listening in the dark. I said, Let me hear you  
by any means: by horn, by fever, by night, even by some poem

attempting flight home.

Another poem of crackling voltage is "Strange Fruit," words written for Jacqueline Peters, lynched in Lafayette California in June 1986. Maybe the hardest to bear of all the book's poems is "Legacy," which needs quoting entire because it shows Harjo's capacity to face the worst human facts and hold a sense of hope:

In Wheeling, West Virginia, inmates riot.  
Two cut out the heart of a child rapist  
and hold it steaming in a guard's face  
because he will live

to tell the story.

They know they have already died  
of unrequited love

and in another version  
won't recognize the murdered





Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky  
In wind, swept our hearts clean  
With sacred wings.  
We see you, see ourselves and know  
That we must take the utmost care  
And kindness in all things.  
Breathe in, knowing we are made of  
All this, and breathe, knowing  
We are truly blessed because we  
Were born, and die soon within a  
True circle of motion,  
Like eagle rounding out the morning  
Inside us.  
We pray that it will be done  
In beauty.  
In beauty.

Carter Revard

\* \* \* \*

*The Invisible Musician*. Ray A. Young Bear. Duluth, MN: HOLY COW! Press. P. O. Box 3170, Mount Royal Station, Duluth, MN 55803. \$15 cloth, ISBN 0-930100-32-8; \$8.95 paper, ISBN 0-930100-33-6.

Mesquakie poet Ray A. Young Bear is acknowledged by poets, critics and students of American Indian literature as one of the nation's foremost contemporary native American poets.

His first book, *Winter of the Salamander* (Harper & Row, 1980), brought together a powerful grouping of poetry notable for a startlingly atavistic yet modern word way. Courses in American Indian literature soon adopted his book. In the wake of national accolades and attention, Young Bear was invited to teach in Southwestern and Far-Western schools and universities.

With the publication of *The Invisible Musician*, Young Bear is destined for even wider recognition—as a national treasure. Here is a true native son who has already brought much honor to his Mesquakie settlement, his "Red Earth" family and his fellow Iowans. As he hits his maturity, he promises during the new decade to become even more "visible," especially among general readers.

It is imperative to mention the ironic discrepancy that exists between Young Bear's esteemed national status in poetry circles and his relative "invisibility" in Iowa and in the American popular mind. For invisibility (dare we tag it "insensitivity" or "ignorance"?) of various kinds—

artistic, cultural, racial, ethnic, ecological—is a major theme, a tonic chord in the 40-odd poems that make up *The Invisible Musician*.

Anyone who lives in our media-enhanced world knows that poetry is a hard sell. And yet—and this is part of Young Bear's beautiful concern in *Musician*—poetry is as close as our heartbeat, as portentous and invigorating as an approaching storm.

And if the essences of more primal, aboriginal connections and rhythms are drowned out by today's automotive and industrial machinery, no wonder that the native American way and its earth-rooted reverences, myths, dreams, ceremonies and songs are relegated to stereotype and stylization. All the more reason to listen, to tune in, to hear Young Bear and his anguished longing to relearn the old songs and perpetuate them among his own Sac and Fox people, and share them with those of us more removed from primal doings.

Young Bear's own attempts to relocate and recenter the invisible melodies and words, the voicings and intonations of his ancestral Mesquakie music have not been without struggle. The marginality of contemporary Indianness is much documented by sociologists.

Young Bear's gift is to sing—at times in celebration, often in lament—of assimilations accepted and thwarted. He is at once of this country, its citizen, and before it—there, standing beside his grandfathers, letting their hopes and dreams, their superstitions and songs of wisdom and prophecy guide him back to "memories" of his own past and extrapolated future.

Less completely, Young Bear's music and his role as musician reaffirms the more general, Anglo-European American myth that is inextricably linked to the aboriginal voice, to what William Carlos Williams, whose own modern verse owed much to American Indian oral traditions, called the "satyric dance."

The late Richard Hugo once observed about Young Bear that he spoke with a voice thousands of years old. In part this is attributable to Young Bear's conceiving the world poetically—imagistically, rhythmically. In part it is attributable to Young Bear's bilingualism, his ability to think of his poetry in his ancient Algonquin tongue and speak it or translate it into the accessibilities of English.

In *Salamander* and again in *Musician*, the effect is a transportation that allows modern non-Indian readers to catch a glimmering of pure Word, pure language, in a kind of atemporal, projected, eternalized moment. There is a feeling when we listen to Young Bear listening to his ancient and primal urgings and melodies, of transcendence, of sacrality. It is a feeling of and for the sacredness of Word. In this special sense, *Musician* is not just another book of poetry, it is an awe-inspiring event in honor of the human mind and soul and heart.

Such profundity in Young Bear's verse is often itself invisible. Many of his poems are five and six pages long—and divided into intriguingly complex parts; some poems, especially his Mesquakie love songs, are quite short—and disarmingly simple. Here is one such song:

*Ne to bwa ka na,  
bya te na ma wi ko;  
ne to bwa ka na,  
bya te na ma wi ko;  
ne to bwa ka na,  
bya te na ma wi ko.*

*My pipe,  
hand it over to me;  
my pipe,  
hand it over to me;  
my pipe,  
hand it over to me.*

*Ne a ta be swa  
a ta ma  
sha ske si a.  
Ne to bwa ka na,  
bya te na ma wi ko.*

*I shall light and inhale  
tobacco  
for the single woman.  
My pipe,  
hand it over to me.*

In the beauty of its tribal sound and rhythms, "Mesquakie Love Song" sings out strong and vibrant, as if from some settlement powwow or some more ancient, now encoded and repeated love yearning and resolve.

Such ancient up-datings are complemented throughout *Musician* by contemporary dirges a propos of the angst of modern American–Indian and non-Indian. In "Wa ta se Na ka mo ni, Viet Nam Memorial," a poem that reflexively reiterates the volume's title, Young Bear bridges the ancient and the modern as only an atavistically contemporary vision and voice can do:

*Last night when the yellow moon  
of November broke through the last line  
of turbulent Midwestern clouds,  
a lone frog, the same one  
who probably announced the premature spring floods,  
attempted to sing,  
Veterans' Day, and it was  
sore throat weather.  
In reality the invisible musician  
reminded me of my own doubt.  
The knowledge that my grandfathers—  
were singers as well as composers—  
one of whom felt the simple utterance  
of a vowel made for the start  
of a melody—did not produce  
the necessary memory or feeling  
to make a Wa ta se Na Ka mo ni,  
Veteran's Song.  
All I could think of  
was the absence of my name  
on a distant black rock.  
Without this monument  
I felt I would not be here.  
For a moment I questioned why I had to immerse myself*

*in country, controversy, and guilt;  
but I wanted to honor them.  
Surely, the song they presently  
listened to along with my grandfathers  
was the ethereal kind which did not stop.*

So too is the music, the poetry of Young Bear, the "ethereal kind" that links us all to the old verities.

Robert F. Gish

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***Medicine River***. Thomas King. New York: Viking, 1990. 261 pp. \$18.95 cloth, ISBN 0-670-82962-5.

Thomas King's first novel, *Medicine River*, will remind many readers strongly of two other works, James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* and David Seals' *Powwow Highway*, and, taken together, they form an effective contemporary triptych of Native humor and compassion. All three are very funny (if one's taste runs toward the wonderful absurdism underlying the superficial bleakness of Welch's novel), and all three are decidedly Indian.

To think of them together, however, is also to think of Seals' recent review of Welch's new novel, *The Indian Lawyer*, which appeared in *The Nation* (26 Nov. 1990, pp. 648-50). Praising and damning Welch simultaneously, Seals offers an anti-aesthetic manifesto for the contemporary Indian novel, one with some interesting and disturbing implications; given the similarities of their novels, Seals' comments about Welch's style might very well apply to King—and since King is very close to Seals himself, the manifesto could also very well come full circle to ensnare its own author.

Seals laments "a failure of many native writers trapped in the mainstream morass . . . who have lost sight . . . of the sublime spirituality bursting like the new buffalo herds all over the Western prairies" (648). Also including Louise Erdrich, he continues to assert that the novelists' characters lack "the transcendent visions," the "secrets" that have sustained many in the face of "genocide" (649). This lament over broken cultural continuity and the compartmentalization of tradition is familiar stuff, essentially, if questionably applied to Welch and Erdrich; however, this point is only the springboard for Seals' next condemnation: "The storytelling is very 'American,'" by which he seems to imply non-Indian, and he continues to assert that he feels "that polished prose is not inherently where 'Indian literature' comes from. . . . We speak in the second person and the grammar ain't as good as when we're speaking it" (649).

To Seals, Joyce and Proust are "so-called great writers" (an

astonishing remark), and Welch and Erdrich have broken "the barriers into New York publishing" (649), which seems to be a very different thing from having written Indian novels. "I can see the professors cringing now at my (deliberately) weak grammar in this article" (649), he boldly says (but this particular professor found little weakness here, other than the one sentence cited above, and I admire his prose style here as I do in *Powwow Highway*, a novel I teach for its style, among other qualities). That Welch is also a professor "shows" in his novel, and Seals postulates that Welch "seemed to be struggling to find his tribal voice" in *The Death of Jim Loney*, but it was probably "choked off" by "some goddamn editor" (649). We expect iconoclasm and distrust of authority, particularly of the white literary establishment, from a former member of AIM, but here Seals produces less a piece of criticism than a grouse—or a whine.

His final assertion makes another leap in reason. Concluding that *The Indian Lawyer*, although a "good book" (if "a little alien to Indians"), is "slick and sympathetic," it is also an artifact of fad and fashion ("Indians are 'in' this year") and somehow inauthentic, possibly even hypocritical. He closes, "Why do we have to write polished prose to make it in America?" (650), an odd question from a polished and accomplished novelist. Is Seals calling for a postmodern Indian prose of inarticulation, much as Tom Wolfe, in his recent manifesto, called for a return to realism in the novel? Or has Seals spotted in Welch too much of himself, something perhaps not altogether politically correct, however aesthetically and literarily satisfying and praiseworthy (and if so, how is it incorrect)?

I reject Seals' criteria and criticisms, not simply because I find them odd and disturbing—although I do—but because they have implications for the state of the contemporary Indian novel, misleading ones, that are belied by Welch, Erdrich, King, and Seals himself. While bold in neither subject nor approach, *Medicine River* is a fine debut. Its fatherless, passive, displaced protagonist, Will, is a familiar figure in a first effort (Silko's Tayo in *Ceremony*, among others, is also an heir of Momaday's Abel in *House Made of Dawn*); its narrative is familiarly fragmented, defying location on any time continuum; its conclusion is tentative, in the contemporary Indian manner; and its humor is bittersweet, laced with many of the undeniable, ugly realities of Indian life today. These are the qualities that invite comparison with other novels, but *Medicine River* does not suffer by that comparison, for it has its own spin, its own contributions and rewards.

Perhaps foremost, in addition to its gentle humor, is its pervading sense of compassion, a knowledge of and fondness for the small triumphs and failures of life, all of which can be endured if not surmounted by bonding with other people: if one accepts foibles, eccentricities, and special gifts, if one resists being judgmental, if one allows the embrace of community. The novel, in its main plot and in flashbacks, charts how half-breed Will (with no family name offered)

comes to adopt Medicine River, a small town in Alberta bordering a Blackfeet reserve, as home, finding both place and self in the same efforts. Equally, it is the story of another Blackfeet, Harlen Bigbear, perhaps King's most wonderful accomplishment. Will says, "Harlen Bigbear was my friend, and being Harlen's friend was hard. I can tell you that" (11), and the true hero of the novel may well be their friendship, for "Harlen had a strong sense of survival, not just for himself but for other people as well" (2). His generosity and sweetness of spirit are infectious; he is someone who can be "smiling inside, and it was leaking out the sides of his mouth and his ears" (28). Another flawed and endearing character, David Plume, is a gentle caricature of an AIM activist, excessively proud of his red movement jacket, who chides Will: "A person should do something important with their life. You should think about that" (200). Will does think about such things, too much, but Harlen can put it all in healthy perspective for him: "'A jacket,' said Harlen 'is a poor substitute for friends and family'" (255).

Will is also troubled by his inability to connect with his family, and, by extension, his people: his long-since-vanished father, for whom he makes up exotic professions; his alienated brother, with whom he broke emotionally when they were boys; and his dead mother, whose stoic philosophy of life, "That's the way things are," haunts and paralyzes Will. But with Harlen's pushing and maneuvering, Will's innate kindness and sense of decency emerge incrementally, and he comes to see that he can form an alternative family with the determined Louise Heavyman and her purposefully illegitimate daughter South Wing; further, the people of Medicine River and the reserve are also "family," in the truest tribal sense, as are the fumbling but supportive fellow members of his basketball team. After 40 years of displacement, passively being led through white cities and relationships with Anglo women, Will comes to a point of integration, of place, and of identity.

He is a photographer by accident, and Will's art is static and voyeuristic until he is led slowly to see the bigger "picture," one that includes him, as when he offers a flat rate family portrait special during lean times and Joyce Blue Horn takes him up on it. He learns that all 38 people who show up in his studio, and the dozens more who appear when the session evolves into a picnic by the river, are indeed family in a variety of senses. He has to take 24 shots, because the Blue Horn family insist that he be in the picture with them, both literally and metaphorically.

Oddly, while Indianness pervades the novel at every point and in every manner, ethnicity is not the critical issue and, while pervasive, is unobtrusive; this is a story of Community that does not require its Native references and sensibility for its integrity but is much enriched for being Indian. Perhaps Seals would consider this a mark of compromise or inauthenticity, but many more readers will find this quality to be its strength; a fully Indian novel that transcends its Blackfeet (and mixed blood) context, one that enriches the Indian perspective without

being dependent on it. Particularly since it is published by Viking, King's novel is likely to appeal to and find a wide readership.

*Medicine River* is a gentle and lovely novel, another prismatic view of the same sort of world as in *Winter in the Blood* and *Powwow Highway*. It is a fine contribution to a healthy and rapidly growing body of contemporary Indian fiction, Seals' pessimism notwithstanding, and it promises much of value to come from Thomas King.

Rodney Simard

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***Chasers of the Sun: Creek Indian Thoughts.*** Louis Littlecoon Oliver. Greenfield Review Press, 1990. 105 pp. \$9.95. ISBN 0-912678-70-4.

At 86 Louis Littlecoon Oliver is the venerated elder among active Native American poets and writers. He is a Muskogee-Creek fullblood born in Koweta Town, Indian Territory (now Coweta, Oklahoma). Of his previous books, *The Horned Snake* (Cross Cultural Communications 1982) was a bilingual chapbook of short poems, and *Caught In A Willow Net* (Greenfield Review Press 1983) featured four prose pieces and several poems. A few poems from that book are reprinted in *Chasers of the Sun: Creek Indian Thoughts*, a collection deep in the traditional wisdom of Littlecoon's heritage. In poems, essays and stories he imparts some of the Creeks' indigenous southeastern ways and beliefs, despite the fact that they were removed westward in 1832. Their forced migration did not loosen their memory of home, however.

The predominance of West-of-the-Mississippi Indian writers can be misconstrued to be the whole of Native American literature, and it is true that many outstanding "southeastern" writers are Oklahoma Cherokees. Louis Oliver's writings can be described as reflecting his traditional sensitivities and are distinct in acknowledging the presence of mysteries like the Sleep Maker, the high regard for snakes used by medicine people and when encountered on walks, and how Creeks regard the little people. The short poem "Mind Over Matter" depicts his grandmother's power over a tornado by her using an ax. "Medi-care" speaks to the power of belief in Native healing:

I'm going to see old Nokose  
for him to diagnose my illness.

.....  
Two big Indian dogs came out  
to sniff me over.

.....  
They are a part of the mysticism  
of their owner.

And old Nokose, trancelike,  
    . . . spoke of entities in the spirit  
            world.  
The slimeless snail, the legless ant  
    the microscopic demons  
    the little blue-winged hunter  
        wasp.  
Much beyond my understanding. (45–46)

Oliver has stated on other occasions that he began writing not too long ago, and years of careful listening make him sensitive to sound devices that are associated: "Nokose" with "diagnose" and "slimeless" with "legless."

For all his serious themes, a subtle humor lives in his work. The poem "Hoot Owls Roast an Indian" records and interprets a conversation among owls about lovers at a camp. "Poetry Dead?" chides "The forked tongue of Anglo Saxon linguists/ Articulating like rocks down a chute." Part Three of the book, "Creek Indian Humor," contains many brief stories that might appear mildly amusing to non-Indians, but "Baseball Game," "An Indian Dog" and "Hotdog Question" possess the understated humor found in daily situations. His people, Oliver relates in his essay, "Native American Wit and Humor," "cannot discuss any serious matters without allowing humor to intervene . . . There may be an old stonefaced Creek leaning on his cane as people pass by. Be assured he is smiling inwardly of something funny he saw. When he tells it to his friends, there will be, in unison, a thunderous roar of laughter" (54).

*Chasers of the Sun* has a special importance for the sagacity of its author, Louis Littlecoon Oliver, who knows that he too, at almost 90, is but one Creek poet who can recall and revere another among his people, Alexander Posey from the nineteenth century. Oliver is here with his gifted voice; his wit and keen insight should be respected by all readers.

Ron Welburn

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*Simple Songs*. Vickie Sears. Ithaca NY: Firebrand Books, 1990. 160 pp., \$8.95 paper, ISBN 0-932379-81-8; \$18.95 cloth, ISBN 0-932379-82-6.

Vickie Sears' particular talent is the evocation of the plight of foster children, the double victims of abandonment and abuse. Their experiences are gruesome. In "Grace," a story which features the only loving set of foster parents in the collection, the child Jodi Ann



remembers making friends with a wild kitten in the fields outside the orphanage. When the matron discovers the affection between the child and the animal, she kills the kitten and hangs it around the child's neck, claiming that Jodi Ann killed it and that this is her punishment. In the story "Connie," a sadistic matron handles the orphan in this way:

Already the offense Connie had committed was forgotten in her quaking mind as she waited to see how else Mrs. Cornell would punish her beside beating her hands red with the metal edge of the ruler.

"Now," Mrs. Cornell said, proffering a long green bottle with one hand and a shot glass with the other, "this will make both your hands and your insides feel good, you sweet child."

So the amber fluid went hot down Connie's throat and a burning poured over her skin. It began. Days of punishment and days of drinking . . . (47).

Sears' collection of fourteen stories centers on familiar themes: the struggle for a stable identity that honors the mixture of Indian and other blood; the child-narrator reliving a painful past; the struggle around alcoholism; the celebration of lesbian culture and consciousness; the positive role and influence of the grandmother figure; the presence of tribal magic in the midst of city; the contrast between superficial New Age awareness and the enduring stability of ancient belief systems. Although other issues inform some stories, the idea of the tormented child infiltrates every one.

In "Keeping Sacred Secrets," Mary Ann learns to stay out of her white mother's way. When her Indian father dies, part of her world collapses, and "Everything she thought she had carefully tucked inside herself tilted in her belly pot and burned" (10). The emotional separation she feels from her mother and stepfather is represented physically; she lives in their converted garage. Sears presents the clash between Indian and Anglo culture by aligning the Indian with the vulnerable child and the white with the blind, arrogant adult. When her mother tells her to throw away sacred Indian objects, Mary Ann, drawing on the healthy experiences in her Indian grandmother's home, devises a ceremony to bury them. Her anguish is immense, but she feels some solace by remembering her grandmother's words: "All you do with a good heart is enough" (16).

"Keeping Sacred Secrets" is troubled by some technical problems that plague the whole collection. It is difficult to recreate the world of the child without infecting it with adult perceptions, and there are lapses. For example, Mary Ann explains herself to her mother in this speech:

"I made up my mind. I'll use his name and I won't tell anybody you're divorced. People can think I'm his kid so you'll be happy. But I won't say I'm Italian. I won't say

I'm Indian either, unless they ask. Then, if they do, I'm gonna say they have to get answers from you. I think that's a whole bunch, so don't ask for nothing else. I can't be what you want. I'm already me." (17-18)

It rings false; I hear the jaws of the character-puppet clicking as she speaks the author's lines. This is not the kind of speech that most of us, in our fear and vulnerability, gave when we were children.

Similarly, in "A Fact of Light," two politically astute and artistic lesbian lovers converse with each other like this: "Is being a marginal woman like patriarchal oppression?" (36). They are not being ironic. This is a Theme Story, and ordinary ideas seem burdened with political weight. Meta notices that her Anglo friend Rory is wearing crystal earrings:

"Aren't they great? They're such an energy draw. I mean, I can just feel them pulling positives toward me ..."

"Those are healing stones in my tribe. They require a lot of respect and cleaning."

"I respect them, Meta. I feel their power. Do you think I don't?" (33)

Things don't go much more smoothly between Meta and her lover Shelly; their conversation is as stagey. Miraculously, the basic warmth of the relationship between them still comes through, despite the stilted dialogue that passes for conversation between them.

Another example of Sears' strong but uneven skills is her handling of the internal emotional state of the main character in "Connie." An alcoholic woman asleep in the Farmer's Market in Seattle awakens, dizzy with nausea, and begins an alarming interior monologue which begins "You silly old thing" and does not improve. The reader wants to be inside the character as she unravels her feelings, but instead the experience is like reading a billboard. Then Sears ends her character's speech this way:

Connie began laughing. She fell back into the grass, rolling onto her stomach. She laughed until she dreamt. (47)

The seamless laugh-into-dream sequence is unique, a surprise, and it suggests a promising lyrical imagination still working its way up through some narrative uncertainties.

This narrative uncertainty comes through again in "Flower Spirits." Elizabeth Jane steals flowers from a cemetery and sells them around town, earning enough for a softball uniform. It is satisfying to watch the child outsmart her bossy mother and her racist coach. More interesting, however, is the crematorium in the middle of the flower-filled cemetery. The caretaker is speaking:

"There's the noise from the fire itself, but it's the people who make most of the noise. They bend and fold, and there are gasses trapped in the body, organs that pop, bones and

all. They make a lot of sounds, but they don't hurt. They're already dead, so it isn't anything for you to worry about."  
(59)

An image this striking demands attention, but, unaccountably, it is abandoned, its potential unrealized.

Several stories move away from the core experiences of violence and neglect. Except for some self-conscious poetic diction "Music Lady" moves successfully down a very fine line separating tenderness from sentimentality. The forty-five year old narrator remembers a part of her childhood when she hung shyly around a record store in the days when you could ask to try out a tune in a soundproof booth. The Anglo owner, sensitive to the Indian child's undeclared needs, arranges for her to have a booth to listen in, and encourages her to keep writing poetry. Many years later, the narrator returns and the owner, now a very old woman, remembers her. It's a sweet moment; the two women have honored each other with memory and affection. The long thread of the shopowner's generosity sutures one of her many psychic wounds.

Some of the stories are intended to be amusing. "Flower Spirits" and "Pasta Saturday" (the nude noodle-making grandmother is unforgettable) have a gentle, rueful humor. "Bra One," the most complex story of this group, dramatizes an important first purchase, but, expectedly, the comedy loops back to the abused-child theme. The humorous dimension shows the process of being prodded, rearranged, and stuffed into serious white undergarments:

I slipped my arms into the holster, bent down to sag my breasts into the cups, and began to snap up. The bra covered half my stomach. It seemed as though there were thirty hooks. Finally harnessed, I looked at the monstrosity in the mirror. (84)

The child, embarrassed, suddenly cannot fit into children's clothes, and the mother, brutal in her lack of empathy for her daughter's adolescent self-consciousness, announces that it will now be necessary to shop in a maternity store for a top that will fit. Identity and self-esteem issues around body images were poorly understood by ordinary people during the time when this story is set, but the reader is left with the sense that the mother would have found something even more punishing to say if this easy target had not been available.

The strongest story, "Letting Go," dramatizes a psychotic break. It is not perfect; shifts between the point of view of the woman experiencing the break and the narrator describing the woman experiencing the break prevent perfect empathy between character and reader.

Sears' subject is important and not easily captured; the terror and monotony of madness has eluded accurate description for centuries. But she has a talent for it. In an earlier story, "A Fact of Light," she shows that she can capture the disorientation of waking from a dream: "There were half-shadows from the tree outside the window. Normally

peaceful, their sliding over the walls now seemed a fearful crawling" (27). "Letting Go" takes it further: "There is a scream resting on my tongue and my thumb is its guardian" (95). In this story, the strands of Sears' life come together, and the power that is created is impressive. Writer, therapist and teacher, she uses her experiences and her Cherokee-Spanish-English background to create a character whose break with reality is vivid. Autistic repetition and rhyme, alien as they are in discourse, are logical here. Extreme dissociation results in mangled self-awareness, as in this description of her tongue:

It is too thick for my mouth. It swells with air. Pushes out between the teeth. Swells up to press on my nostrils. It has a scream locked inside it. It would come out if someone had the sense to pop the tongue-balloon. (108)

Despite a relatively weak ending (an abrupt transition into the present tense and the mind of the now-functional adult narrator), the story succeeds on the strength of its subject: the sexual abuse of a child, the resulting chronic denial of feelings, the ensuing confusion of cultural identity, and the added pressures of full-time work and single parenthood. The madness of the abused child that expresses itself in the psychosis of the adult woman is a subject that perhaps cannot be exhausted.

This is a collection in which the stories draw power from each other by virtue of their placement in the group. Singly, their difficulties threaten their strengths. It wasn't until nearly the end of the collection that I could ignore Sears' habit of dropping the subjects of some but not all sentences in a paragraph, an affectation that produces a bumpy syntactical ride and makes this reviewer think about grammar, not characters. Some of the stories serve more therapeutic and political than artistic ends. Still, the voice coming out of them is honest, courageous, and powerful, and the representation of childhood trauma inflicted deliberately or accidentally is an important addition to our understanding of the process of individuation in any culture.

Rhoda Carroll

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***A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of Chief G. W. Grayson.*** Ed. W. David Baird. Norman and London: U of Oklahoma P, 1988. 164 pp. ISBN 0-8061-2103.

Although appearing at first glance to be just one more Civil War memoir, this book is actually a highly interesting Indian autobiography. Or perhaps I should say Métis autobiography, for as the editor says in the Preface, Grayson was a member of that "elite subgroup among the

Creeks." Grandson of a Scottish trader who went into the Creek territory of modern-day Alabama in the 1790s, Grayson had dark red hair and a complexion that was "quite white." He went to Arkansas College in Fayetteville, was a nineteen-year-old Captain in a Creek Confederate regiment, and later was tribal treasurer and secretary. As a partner in Grayson Brothers, Eufaula, Oklahoma, he had interests in retailing, cattle, cotton-ginning, and rental properties and was a rich man. With fellow Creek leaders, he made trips to Washington to oppose dissolution of the Creek Nation. But when it happened, he remained influential, finally being tribal chief from 1917 until his death in 1920.

But the life-story alone is not what makes his autobiography so remarkable. More important is the sense of self that Grayson exhibits, both as a dignified tribal leader and patriarch and as the maker of his own rules in the writing of an autobiography. "I have no recollection of ever having read an autobiography written by anyone else," he announces on his first page, "and hence have adopted no model by which to be guided in my effort, and supposing that it would probably be conceded that each such writer may justly be a law unto himself, I have proceeded to write in my own way, and as suits me best." He is writing, he goes on, just for his family ("of whom I expect the widest charity in their estimates of my numerous shortcomings"), and he is going to write about what he chooses and say what he likes.

Of course, Grayson is not the first autobiographer to announce such assumptions, and the further we read him, the more we realize that he was not so original as he claims. His style is often florid and Victorian and sometimes tedious, with phrases like "the dim and hazy past," "his trusty musket," or "our artillery . . . belching forth its death-dispensing contents." He also seems unconsciously victimized by inconsistencies in his allegiances to both his Creek and his Scottish ancestry. He praises his grandfather for "belonging to that class of useful pioneers ever found in the van of progress, boldly and openly blazing the way for advancing civilization and empire"—even though in the end it was "civilization and empire" that destroyed the Creek Nation.

But proud, independent and "a law unto himself" Grayson still believed himself to be, and the result is an autobiography that in a sort of stodgy, bewhiskered way is wonderfully idiosyncratic and both playful and profound.

The first freedom which he thinks autobiography grants him is the freedom to talk at length about his genealogy, and so chapter one, as the editor has organized the unbroken manuscript, is nearly twenty pages of it. We hear about Robert Grierson, whose name was changed to Grayson, Grayson speculates, because "unlettered persons and Grierson's own negro slaves" pronounced Grayson for Grierson. ("If there was anything in a name," he reflects, "I would move for a return to the original.") We hear about his Creek wife Sin-o-gee, and we hear about their wealth and their children. Footnotes also refer briefly to

collateral ancestors who have been cut from the manuscript, either "at the request of Grayson's heirs" or to shorten it, the editor says. What we don't hear much about is Grayson's mother's genealogy, because "it is my misfortune to know scarcely anything about it." But whether from age (he wrote the autobiography in 1908, when he was 65), his Indian heritage, his Southern heritage, family pride, or the combination of all of them, ancestry meant a great deal to him. He was proud of being Métis.

The second great influence in his life, as he saw it when he wrote, was his education, starting with "old Asbury," a "Manual Labor School" near Eufaula, run by missionaries. Though often made to wear "the *dunce cap*," he studied hard, preparing for "the battle of life which I have subsequently engaged in." Later, at Arkansas College he "spoke not a word of Indian" and liked mingling with "well dressed people."

But it was Grayson's Civil War experiences which were most vital to his sense of self. As a young officer, he learned to shoulder responsibility. For his later life, it gave him experiences, encapsulated in a large stock of stories, to share with his fellow veterans, his family and business partners. As we read these reminiscences, we sense that by 1908 Grayson had told them hundreds of times, so that even if a "law unto himself" in written autobiography, in oral discourse he knew all the rules—and all the tricks. Speaking of his colonel's address, in Indian, to the troops before a battle, he even says that it was "the finest war-speech I ever heard." Grayson was a connoisseur of talk!

One of his own best tales is of trying to find his way back to his regiment and encountering another lost soldier who wanted to ride with him. "I had no excuses to urge against his becoming my traveling companion," Grayson says, "except that he was a blond—blond hair, eye lashes, moustache and gray eyes, in fact blond all over. I cannot explain why, but I am not partial toward, but on the contrary have to confess to having always as now rather a repugnance to blonds of all degrees." But feeling that this prejudice should not matter, Grayson rode with the man. Soon they encountered two sleeping Union soldiers, and the man wanted to shoot them with his pistol. But Grayson noted that the pistol was corroded and might not fire, and so advised against it. During the next few days Grayson's common sense and good woodsmanship saved their lives several more times. Yet when they finally reached headquarters, "my blond friend, now somewhat bronzed by his exposure," took all the credit for their survival. So Grayson reflects what this might mean and what he should have done, explaining that only here, in an autobiography intended just for his family, does he confess his annoyance. Finally, forgiving the man, whom he has never seen since, Grayson says, "If dead, peace to his ashes; if alive still, abundant success to comrade Washington."

This concluding identification of the man as "Washington," named after the great white father himself (as too was George Washington Grayson!), seems like a telling bit of Indian irony. Grayson the

redheaded Creek had saved "Washington." Most of his other stories have similar twists, emphasizing his strong sense of independence, dignity, and humor. If there were conflicts in his inheritance, there were also subtle dual perspectives, lurking resolutions.

But the greatest of his ironies is in his protest over the dissolution of the Creek Nation. "Here we, a people who had been a self-governing people for hundreds and possibly a thousand years, who had a government and administered its affairs before such an entity as the United States was ever dreamed, are asked and admonished that we must give up all idea of local government, change our system of land holding to that which we confidently believed had pauperized thousands of white people— . . ." Thus does Grayson begin his lament, in a sentence too long to quote in full. This book is a real find, a unique addition to the small number of bona fide, early, Indian-white, Métis autobiographies.

Robert F. Sayre

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***Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present.***  
Ed. Penny Petrone. Toronto: Oxford U P, 1991. 184 pp. \$19.95 paper, ISBN 0-19-540796-2.

The book cover proclaims this the "first critical study of the literature of Canada's native peoples" and the author herself describes it as a "pioneering" (8) work. These are rather exaggerated claims given the amount of scholarship that is taking place in the field of Native Canadian literature. To name only some of the recent releases will demonstrate the interest in this area: Heather Hodgson (Ed.) *Seven Generations* (Theytus Books), Agnes Grant (Ed.) *Native Literature in the Curriculum* (University of Manitoba) and *Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature* (Pemmican Publications), Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Nance (Eds.) *Native Women of Western Canada: Writing the Circle—An Anthology* and Beth Brant (Ed.) *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*.

*Native Literature in Canada* does, however, have a major difference. Petrone has painstakingly researched Native writers from the earliest to contemporary times and has put their work in historical context along with data and anecdotes about the authors' lives. The book is arranged in chronological order beginning with an undated period of oral literatures, 1820–1850, 1850–1914, 1914–1969, 1970–1979 and 1980–1989. If a disproportionate amount of time is spent on 1820–1914 it can be excused because this is the author's area of expertise. Her excellent 1983 publication *First People, First Voices* (University of Toronto) made a very important contribution to an

understanding of that time period.

This book leaves the reader with feelings of considerable unease, because it perpetuates the generally negative attitudes towards Natives that have long prevailed. The author's encouraging comment: "I have endeavoured to reveal a richness and complexity that are worthy of serious and enlightening examination" (8) is overshadowed by the negative imagery and examples she uses and by her emphasis on Native literature arising from political and social realities while aesthetic and creative aspects are all but ignored.

The book is clearly written by a non-Native scholar for other non-Native scholars. Of Basil Johnston's work she says,

. . . (the stories) are told as fiction but are based in fact and give life to a world of comedy most of his readers would never have seen or heard. (126).

With this statement she dismisses the wide Native readership Johnston enjoys and the numerous Native literature courses that utilize his work.

The Introduction (1–8) relies largely on historic sources, though Paula Gunn Allen, George Cornell and Basil Johnston are mentioned. One wonders at the need for the author's aside when she says,

There were even some Canadians who believed that the Indians were a degraded and hopeless race, incapable of any mental progress, and possessed of so little that was human that even compassion was wasted on them. (2)

When one reads that George Copway was imprisoned for embezzlement of missionary funds one wonders at the connection between this information and Canadian Native literature.

Petrone concedes that there are problems with translations of oral literatures, but her chapter on "Oral Literatures" relies largely on the old sources—Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Edward S. Curtis, Frances Densmore, Diamond Jenness, David Bayle, Natalie Curtis, Franz Boaz, Horatio Hale and the Jesuit Relations. There is a brief reference to Paula Gunn Allen and Alexander Wolf, but otherwise, recent scholarship in this area is largely ignored. She does, however, include commentary by George Copway which adds valuable information from a Native perspective.

The chapters on contemporary writing include an exhaustive list of "who is who" in Native literature today. There are good summaries of the works that exist which can serve as guides for prospective buyers. Petrone's attempts at critical commentary on literary qualities are less successful. Her comments on Basil Johnston's short stories include:

Many of the protagonists of these stories are stereotypes—the welfare bum, the comic drunk, the shiftless and irresponsible—but Johnston exposes the absurdities of his characters with such good-humoured teasing caricature that the reader forgets about their stereotypical behaviour and



enjoys them as human beings. (24).

Petrone misses the point that Johnston, like many other Native writers, uses stereotype as trope or that it is used to "make faces" at non-Native society, as pointed out by Kate Vangen, in Thomas King, Cheryl Calver and Helen Hoy, *The Native in Literature* (Hignell Printing, 1987).

Her commentary on contemporary writers consists largely of summary statements, which perhaps is fortunate, since few writers escape her sharp criticism. Jordan Wheeler is a "singular new voice in short fiction" (145) but his novellas are "often awkward and disjointed" (148). Basil Johnston resorts to "overblown rhetoric" (150), Lee Maracle is accused of "heavy preaching" (151), Jeanette Armstrong "gets mired in factual data, lengthy explanations, and bewildering digression" (142), and so it goes. Some writers, however, do meet with the author's unqualified approval. Thomas King "demonstrates his skill as a writer" (144), Jean Crate displays "an astonishing mastery of technique and of supple and evocative prose" (143) and Beatrice Culeton's work "is elevated from the melodramatic cliché by its daring honesty and energy" (140). Petrone's commentary on Native poetry and drama shows greater insight into Natives as literary artists and makes for more enjoyable reading.

The conclusion of this book is disquieting. It is full of generalizations and contradictions. Earlier, for example, the author acknowledged the role of the trickster in Thomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*, but in the conclusion she dismisses the trickster as an "archetypal" figure and Highway's work a movement into the surreal. Highway himself says

[the trickster is] as pivotal and important a figure in the Native world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology

and again,

We believe [the trickster] is still among us—albeit a little worse for wear and tear—having assumed other guises. Without him—and without the spiritual health of this figure—the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (*The Rez Sisters*, Fifth House, 1988).

Though it may be difficult for non-Native readers to understand the role the trickster plays in Highway's plays, it is definitely not an archetypal figure in the Western literary sense.

The conclusion leans heavily on the assumption that Native literature has arisen from a political and social need. This is certainly true, but to ignore the aesthetic and creative needs of a people does them an injustice. The conclusion abounds with negative phrases—"debasement experiences," "excesses of emotion," "victim syndrome." The author says,

A resurgence of Indian cultural and religious values has

made these writers realize that they are heirs to a wealth of traditional oral literature upon which they can draw inspiration and direction. (182)

Yet earlier in her book she carefully documents those Native writers who wrote but could not get published until recently. To suggest that Native people have not had their own knowledge and values is offensive, especially from an author who has carefully documented how expression of this knowledge was not permissible.

Is there a place for a book such as this in the canon of Native literature? It serves as a source of historic information and impeccably researched data. It includes a comprehensive, twelve page bibliography of largely Canadian Native authors or commentary on Native writing which is a very useful source of information. As a "critical study" of literature of Canadian Natives, however, it falls short of its objectives.

Agnes Grant

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**Paula Gunn Allen.** Elizabeth I. Hanson. Western Writers Series, Number 96. Boise: Boise State University, 1990. ISBN 0-88430-095-1.

It is surprising that the work of Paula Gunn Allen, often quoted and always referred to in recent studies on American Indian literature, hasn't received more critical attention. There are articles on aspects of her work and interviews with her available, but, to my knowledge, there is no book-length study of Allen yet. Elizabeth Hanson's short study of Paula Gunn Allen is the first attempt then to pull the disjointed material together and to offer important personal data and background material that the reader of her work would find difficult to obtain.

Hanson's division of her material into sections—"Short Biography," "Literary Criticism," "The Early Poetry," "Feminist Poetry," "Shadow Country," "The Woman Who Owned the Shadows," and "Conclusion"—provides easy access to specific information. Particularly useful are the sections on poetry, since readers are most likely familiar with individual poems from anthologies of American Indian poetry and literature. These encounters with single poems do not facilitate the reader's recognition of metaphors and themes that run through Allen's poetry. Hanson's discussion of the body of Allen's poetry in the sections "The Early Poetry," "Feminist Poetry" and "Shadow Country" makes that information accessible and provides a reading, by necessity partial and fragmented, of key poems. While Allen's poetry is available it is difficult to obtain a copy of her one novel, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983); here Hanson provides a short summary of the novel, a short reading of the same and attempts to place it within the context of her other work. It is unfortunate that Hanson does not

refer the reader to Allen's own reading of her novel in *The Sacred Hoop* (1986) which would add an additional, and very interesting, dimension to Hanson's reading of the novel.

In *Paula Gunn Allen* Hanson experiences the same problems as other writers of the Western Writers series whose subjects were prolific and important contributors to literature; it is impossible to do justice to the amazing scope of Allen's work as a critic, poet, novelist, and academic in the prescribed number of pages. Hanson attempts to solve that problem by imposing a frame on Allen's work, the "breed persona." In the first paragraph of her study Hanson states: "To stand outside, to be and yet not to be, becomes, at least in Allen's case, a source of subtle self-exploration as well as extraordinary art" (5). This theme, the mediator between cultures, runs through the entire study, and everything is subjected to it. While the problem of the breed is a theme that occurs in much of contemporary American Indian literature, it cannot replace other themes that are just as important, e.g., the sense of place. The reader finishes the study with the sense that Allen is excluded from the American Indian part of her heritage because of her status as a "breed," has no part in the "racial memory" as N. Scott Momaday called it in his essay "The Man Made of Words." In *The Sacred Hoop*, however, Allen regards herself clearly as part of the American Indian community that used to be a gynocracy before the advent of the whites. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac in *Survival This Way* (1987) she also speaks of other themes, themes that are as important to her as the one Hanson chooses to emphasize: ". . . it [*House Made of Dawn*] brought my land back to me. . . . Part of what I was going through was land sickness—loss of land" (11; her emphasis). Forcing Allen's work into the framework "breed" denies its richness and accords one theme an importance that Allen herself does not give it. As the Introduction to *The Sacred Hoop* shows, she considers herself a participant in a number of communities, not merely a mediator between the white and American Indian communities.

The space restrictions also lead to sweeping generalizations that do a disservice to the literary criticism of American Indian literature. In "Literary Criticism," for example, Hanson deals primarily with Allen's two book-length studies of American Indian literature, *Studies in American Indian Literature* (1983) and *The Sacred Hoop*. There can be no doubt that *Studies* is as important a contribution to the field and as valuable to those who teach American Indian literature as Hanson claims. Hanson's discussion of *Studies* implies, however, that the collection of critical essays and course designs edited by Allen provides the reader with an exclusive American Indian viewpoint on the study of American Indian literature and seems to deny the validity of white criticism. A great number, perhaps the majority, of contributions come from white scholars in the field, e.g., Larry Evers and A. LaVonne Ruoff. The work of these white critics has shown that sensitivity to cultural differences and the knowledge of history, anthropology, etc.,

that, according to Hanson, Allen demands of critics. Only those familiar with *Studies* know that the contributors are mostly white critics. The reader of *Paula Gunn Allen* feels encouraged to dismiss all white criticism, instead of developing a sensitivity of his own that permits him to judge literary works and their criticism by their merits.

Elizabeth Hanson manages in her study to give the reader a sense of Paula Gunn Allen's wide range of achievements as critic, poet and novelist. Hopefully, her study will serve as an incentive for others to write the full-length study of her work or the bio-critical study her work deserves. Meanwhile, Hanson's *Paula Gunn Allen* provides the reader with some very necessary general information and a first glimpse of the person Paula Gunn Allen.

Birgit Hans

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### **Briefly Noted**

The winter-spring 1991 number of *Tamaqua* is a special Native American issue edited by Joe Bruchac and featuring new fiction by Ralph Salisbury and Lisa McCloud, poetry by Barney Bush, Charlotte DeClue, lance henson, Will Sanders, Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya, Jim Barnes, Maurice Kenny, H. E. Erdrich, Bob Gish, Jean Starr, Gloria Bird and Roberta Whiteman, and non-fiction by Joe Bruchac and Bob Gish. A generous selection of art and an article on American Indian art also enliven the issue. For information on how to order, write to *Tamaqua*, Parkland College, 2400 W. Bradley Avenue, Champaign, IL 61821-1899.

Paul Zolbrod has written a thoughtful introduction to the University of New Mexico reprint of Franc Johnson Newcomb's collection, *Navaho Folk Tales*, originally published in 1967. As Zolbrod points out, even supposedly bowdlerized versions of stories can be important in the total scope of an oral literature. Another important reprint comes from University of Oklahoma Press: Michael Castro's *Interpreting the Indian* now in paper with a foreword by Maurice Kenny; Castro's book is the most thorough treatment to date of the interaction between modernist and Native American poetics.

*Campeño: The Diary of a Guatemalan Indian* prints the diary of the pseudonymous Ignacio Bizarro Uzpan from 1977-1984, as translated and edited by James D. Sexton (University of Arizona Press). This fascinating document is rich in cultural, political, psychological and historical insights; it offers an opportunity for challenging comparisons with diaries like those of Samuel Pepys or Samuel Sewall, or with other autobiographical texts elicited in written form (e.g., *Sun Chief*, *Crashing Thunder*). Unfortunately, the political and human-rights situation in Guatemala, all too amply described in the course of the

author's everyday life, has changed little since publication of the book in 1985.

Cree storytelling is the subject of a monograph in the series *Voices of Rupert's Land*, edited by H. C. Wolfart. Titled "*Now then, still another story—*": *Literature of the Western James Bay Cree, Content and Structure*, the pamphlet prints the 1988 Belcourt lecture delivered by C. Douglass Ellis. In his discussion Ellis explains categories of Cree oral song, oratory and storytelling art forms, and discusses important story cycles and motifs.

Memoirs 2 and 5 in the Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics series offer Cree and Ojibway stories for those seeking to maintain or improve language competence. Memoir 2, titled *kiskinhamawâkan-âcimowinisa*, is Cree stories written by Cree students and printed in Cree syllabics, Roman alphabet transliteration, and English; the editor and translator, Freda Ahenakew, has also included a Cree-English glossary. Number 5 is *pisiskiwak kâ-pikiskwêcok / Talking Animals*; these are tales told by L. Beardy and edited and translated by H. C. Wolfart. These works are also printed in tripartite syllabic/Roman/English parallel texts. A third offering from the same publisher is *The Moons of Winter and Other Stories* by Norman Quill, printed in syllabics. For more information write to Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics, Fletcher Argue Building, 28 Trueman Walk, WINNIPEG, Manitoba, R3T 2N2 Canada.

Another monolingual text comes from the Native Languages Programme in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba. *The Stories of Alice King of Parry Island* were transcribed by Jean Rogers and edited by John D. Nichols; they are printed in Roman type and intended for teachers and students of the Ojibwe language.

The Centre for Research and Teaching of Canadian Native Languages at the University of Western Ontario has begun a series of monographs reprinting important texts. Number 1 in the series is a bilingual edition of "*Statement Made by the Indians*," a petition drawn up by the Chippewas of Lake Superior in 1864. Number 2 is *An Ojibway Text Anthology* edited by John D. Nichols. The series addresses the needs of linguists as well as language learners and teachers; volumes are hard bound, texts are printed in parallel Ojibwe (Roman alphabet) and English, followed by interlinear translations; apparatus includes glossaries, introductions, some critical commentary, and bibliographies.

*Amerindia* is the journal of the French Association for American Indian Ethnolinguistics; North American contact is Guy P. Buchholtzer, Department of Linguistics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6 Canada. *Chantiers amerindia*, a special supplement in the 1990 volume, prints "BAX<sup>w</sup>BAK<sup>w</sup>ALANUSIWA / Un Recit Haisla / A Haisla Story" as told by Gordon Robertson; this is a story about the central figure in traditional northwest coast winter ceremonies. The

multilingual edition prints the story first in Haisla orthography; this text is followed by French and then English translations; additional sections of the monograph offer a commentary and a linguistic analysis with interlinear translations. Notes and a bibliography complete the apparatus.

Another important scholarly resource comes to us from Mexico: *Tlalocan: Revista de Fuentes para el Conocimiento de las Culturas Indigenas de Mexico* publishes articles in Spanish and English and texts in the indigenous languages of Mexico. Volume XI (1989) contains a modern poem written in Nahuatl together with Spanish translation; the original and translation (into English) of a Spanish document written in 1835 by a Pima tribal leader; and several articles including texts and translations from Native languages into Spanish. Editors: Miguel Leon-Portilla and Karen Dakin, Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas, Ciudad de Humanidades, Ciudad Universitaria, 04510 Mexico, D. F.

Helen Jaskoski

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Rhoda Carroll** is Director of the Integrating Studies program at Vermont College of Norwich University in Montpelier, Vermont. She has published poetry, fiction and reviews in a wide variety of periodicals.

**William M. Clements** teaches at Arkansas State University. His publications in Native American studies include *Native American Folklore, 1879-1979: An Annotated Bibliography* (with Frances M. Malpezzi), *Native American Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, and a recent essay on Schoolcraft's translations.

**Carole Gerster** and **Marshall Toman**, assistant professors of English at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, presented their paper to the National Association for Ethnic Studies. They have given presentations on "Teaching Multicultural Literacy through Film" for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English and on "Curriculum Development: Ethnic Film and Literature" for the University of Wisconsin System's Institute on Race and Ethnicity. Gerster's paper "From Film Margin to Novel Center: Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" will appear in *West Virginia University Philological Papers*, Fall 1992. Toman is director of ethnic studies at River Falls with special interests in film and short story.

**Robert F. Gish** teaches in the Department of English at the University of Northern Iowa, where he instituted a general education course in Native American and Chicano literature. He is a contributing editor to *The Bloomsbury Review*. His latest book is *William Carlos Williams: The Short Fiction* (G. K. Hall, 1989).

Dr. **Agnes Grant** teaches Introductory Native Studies, Native Literature, Native Education and Women's Studies courses at Brandon University, Manitoba, Canada. Most of her teaching takes place in isolated and remote communities where Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP) trains Native teachers.

**Birgit Hans** has a Ph.D. from the University of Arizona with emphasis on American Indian literatures. She is preparing an edition of the short fiction of D'Arcy McNickle for publication. She will edit a special issue of *SAIL* devoted to European criticism of Native American literature.

**Toby Langen** writes about Puget Salish language and literature and teaches in the extension program at Northwest Indian College.

**Sidner J. Larson** (Gros Ventre) is a mixedblood raised on the Fort Belknap reservation of northcentral Montana. He has published poetry and critical articles in numerous literary magazines. He is currently at work on his Ph.D. dissertation, concentrating on issues of identity as they apply to Native Americans in American literature, at the University of Arizona.

**Sylvie Moulin**, Associate Professor of Languages at Regis College in Denver, holds a Ph.D. in Latin American studies, an M.A. in Comparative Literature, and a B.A. in English from the Université de Paris-Sorbonne. Her research focuses on Spanish-American literature and literature and civilization of the American Southwest; she is writing a book on Luci Tapahonso.

**James W. Parins** is director of American Native Press Archives and Professor of English at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. His most recent work is *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works* (U of Nebraska P, 1991).

**Jarold Ramsey**, born and educated in the Northwest, is Professor of English at the University of Rochester. His work includes *Coyote Was Going There* (1977), *Reading the Fire: Traditional Literatures of the Far West* (1984), and four books of poetry, including *Hand Shadows* (Quarterly Review Poetry Prize, 1989). He is currently a member of the MLA Committee on the Literatures and Languages of America.

**Carter Revard**, born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, was given his Osage Indian name in 1952. He teaches at Washington University, St. Louis.

**Julian Rice** teaches in the Department of English at Florida Atlantic University. He is the author of *Lakota Storytelling: Black Elk, Ella Deloria, and Frank Fools Crow* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) and *Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing its Lakota Purpose* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1991).

**Greg Sarris** is an Assistant Professor of English at U.C.L.A. He has published numerous articles and essays on American Indian literature and cross-cultural discourse. His recent fiction will appear in the forthcoming *Paper Leaves* as well as other journals and magazines.

**Robert F. Sayre's** early study of American autobiography, *The Examined Self*, was recently republished by the University of Wisconsin Press. He is also the author of *Thoreau and the American Indians* and is editing an anthology of American autobiographies. He teaches American Indian Literature at the University of Iowa.

**Kathryn Shanley** (Assiniboine) teaches American Indian literature at the University of Washington. She is presently completing a book on the work of James Welch.

**Rodney Simard** teaches in the English Department at California State University San Bernardino and has been active in promoting American Indian studies throughout the CSU system. He is also general editor of the American Indian Studies series from Peter Lang Publishing.

**Ron Welburn** teaches in the English Department at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury. He is of Conoy and Cherokee descent and has contributed to *SAIL's* previous issues.

**H. C. Wolfart** has authored and edited numerous publications on languages and literatures of the First Nations of Canada.

**Hertha D. Wong** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley where she teaches American literature, Native American literature, and autobiography. She has published essays on Native American autobiography and her book, *Sending My Heart Back Over the Years: Traditions and Innovations in Native American Autobiography*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.