

SAIL

Studies in American Indian Literatures

Series 2

Volume 5, Number 2

Summer 1993

Special Issue

COMPENDIUM OF SAIL SERIES 1, 1977-1987

INDEX: SERIES 1, VOLUMES 1-11, AND SERIES 2,

VOLUMES 1-4, 1977-1992

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"A Wilderness Unlittered by Academic Trash"

Rodney Simard

For the title of my second editorial note for *SAIL*, I again borrow from an admired colleague, this time a phrase from Karl Kroeber, Editor of Series 1, an image he used in an interview appearing in the first issue of Columbia University's *Dispatch* after it absorbed *SAIL* in 1987 to describe one of the enticements he found in the study of American Indian Literatures. Like its author, the line is bold and provocative, and like the acronym for the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures (ASAIL, which Professor Kroeber was instrumental in founding), it is also purposefully aggressive and challenging. I hope to borrow some of that same spirit along with the words themselves.

In addition to the visual changes you may have noticed in the last issue, the dozen selections from Series 1 that follow, as well as the indexes through 1992 that are included here, seem to me to be an effective (and I hope useful) means of marking the editorial transitions in the journal, simultaneously a culmination and a setting forth. When I first discovered *SAIL*, I was lucky enough to be able to secure copies, now radically depleted, of all issues of Series 2, from 1.1 (Summer 1989), edited by Helen Jaskoski, Daniel Littlefield, Jr., and James W. Parins, through 1.3-4, when Robert M. Nelson joined Helen as General Editor and the editorial offices shifted from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to the University of Richmond (California State University, Fullerton, Helen's campus, remaining constant), until the present. I read them all greedily, both beguiled and frustrated by my new knowledge of the existence of Series 1, 41 issues edited by Karl Kroeber from 1.1 (Spring 1977) through 11.2 (Spring 1987). Try though I might, I couldn't find copies anywhere, and even inter-library loan failed me for all but the rare item. Most tantalizing were three brief descriptions of these elusive volumes that appeared in Series 2: Jarold Ramsey's "For Karl Kroeber" 1.1 (Summer 1989): 23-24, Larry Evers' "On the Creation of ASAIL: Comment and Response" and

Arnold Krupat's "Response to Larry Evers" 2.4 (Winter 1990): 16-19. Only recently did I secure a full set, and reading through them proved to be both a joy and an education. The issues spoke eloquently of the history of our discipline—indeed, becoming integral elements in its evolution—and new discovery was followed by original insight again and again as the journal moved into its second decade, when, alas, it was briefly absorbed into *Dispatch* before its hibernation and re-emergence two years later as Series 2. While often of uneven quality in reproduction and in various configurations of form and format, the original *SAIL* is lamentably rare in extant copies, and this special issue is a small step toward correcting the resulting unfortunate neglect.

While many contributions to Series 1 (or "New Series," for yet another incarnation preceded even this one) were eventually revised and reprinted elsewhere, much serious criticism and scholarship of enduring value has fallen into obscurity from unavailability and unfamiliarity. Reading through again in preparation for this issue, I initially made a list of 30 essays and reviews that deserved wider dissemination and a contemporary audience—such narrowing being a difficult decision—but so many inclusions would be impossible for a compendium issue of any scholarly journal. My second review forced further cuts, down to 17, and only with great anxiety did I settle on the dozen included here; I am deeply grateful to their authors for their dual contributions to our discipline: original and reprint. I've tried very hard to avoid a "best of" collection, striving instead for intrinsic merit, a representative sampling of the range of thought that filled *SAIL*'s pages from 1977 to 1987, contributions by both established and emerging writers, both students of American Indian Literatures and authors whose own works now belong to the canon, a mix of criticism, scholarship, and review, essays that range from textual explication to conceptual polemic, dealing with both traditional and contemporary literatures from a variety of cultural and theoretical perspectives. Also included in this issue are a dozen illustrations by Richard Glazer-Danay (Mohawk), current Rupert Costo Professor of American Indian History at the University of California, Riverside, and Professor of Art at California State University, Long Beach. I know you will find much that will enlighten and please (and possibly provoke) in what follows, and I most sincerely hope that this sampling will send you back to all 41 original issues. Already, I have received frustrated requests from those in search of a reference to Series 1, and now that we do have a complete set in the editorial offices, we will be able to honor reprint requests as time allows (unfortunately we must charge for duplication expenses), but eventually we hope to be able to offer the full set in microform, so that each of you growing number of *SAIL* subscribers will not only

persuade your home libraries to subscribe to Series 2, but also to secure the complete Series 1 in due course.

With gratitude to Professors Ramsey, Evers, Krupat, Jaskoski, and Nelson, I here attempt to synthesize what I've been able to glean about the roots of the Association and the journal—and I'll be grateful for any and all additions and corrections; partially obscured by time and neglect, this information tells much about the literatures we read and study, in many ways ironically paralleling the marginalizations and confusions surrounding the Native texts themselves, both oral and written, surprisingly, given the brief history of our discipline as a field of intellectual and aesthetic inquiry.

ASAIL was founded in 1971, according to Kroeber in order to raise consciousness and extend "Red Power," by a small group of scholars, spearheaded by Paula Gunn Allen and Robert W. Ackley of Navajo Community College, who gathered at MLA for the first time in 1972. By the following year, membership had blossomed to 40, and at least five *ASAIL Newsletters* were published pre-Kroeber: a three-page issue dated 12 January 1973; one page in October; eight pages in January 1974, including Evers' "On Anthologies of Native North American Literatures"; a fourth, undated, including Wayne Franklin's "A Review of Indian Bibliographies"; and a fifth, a single page dated 19 December 1975. By 1976, an American Indian Literature Discussion Group was a part of MLA, and a summer seminar on Native Literatures in Flagstaff the following year did much to advance both interest and participation.

Newsletter of ASAIL (Series 1, or New Series) appeared in the Spring of 1977, edited by Kroeber with A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff as Bibliographer, published at Columbia. In his *Dispatch* interview, Kroeber states that the initial purpose was "simply collecting information and functioning as a resource" with an emphasis on being "a resource for teachers." He hoped that the journal would support and sustain the handful of scholars working in the field, and, further, that it would give "authenticity, legitimacy to disempowered people"; however, he also notes that at the time a "canon" of only a dozen or so authors hardly qualified as a true academic "field," even though he wanted *SAIL* to "pioneer . . . dialogue between cultures, between ethnicities. . . ." By 4.1 (Winter 1980), the name shifted to *SAIL: ASAIL Newsletter* (the final name *Studies in American Indian Literatures* debuting with 6.1 [Winter 1982]), and an editorial board was identified: Paula Gunn Allen, Gretchen Bataille, Joe Bruchac, Larry Evers, Vine Deloria, Dell Hymes, Maurice Kenny, and Robert Sayre (Gerald Vizenor was added in 11.1 [Winter 1987], the penultimate issue of the Series).

Totaling 1,238 pages, Series 1 attempted and accomplished many projects and innovations, such as special issues on *Hanta Yo* and *Seven Arrows*; on American Indians and Film, guest edited by Gretchen Bataille; issues devoted to Allen, Vizenor, and Erdrich, among others; a supplement of bibliographies; and even a monograph, Paul Kleinpopper's "Some Notes on Oliver LaFarge" 10.2 (Spring 1986). While Kroeber and Ruoff remained constants, various other scholars joined the effort for periods of time: 6.1 introduced Jarold Ramsey as Book Review Editor, a position assumed in 7.3 by Mary V. Dearborn, who served until 8.3-4, when Linda J. Ainsworth took over those duties, also serving as Assistant to the Editor, which became Assistant Editor by the next issue and Associate Editor with 10.2, when Marianne Noble became Assistant Editor.

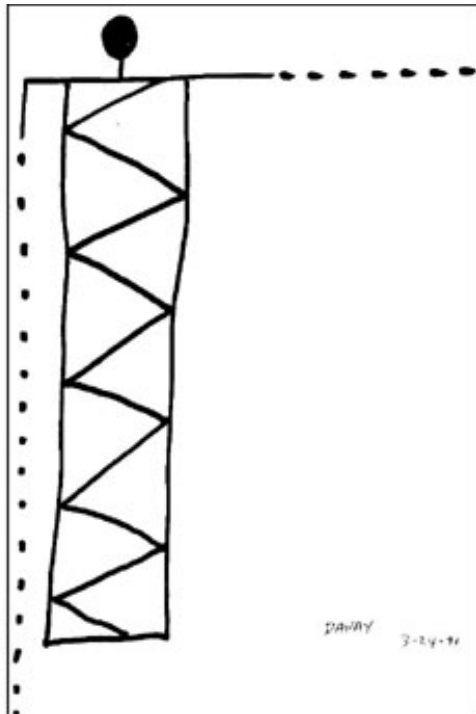
The Index by Issue in this issue of *SAIL* charts many of these efforts, and the history of Series 2, also indexed by issue here, is much more clearly documented and available for its first four volumes. With my selection as General Editor of volume 5, editing has shifted to my campus, California State University, San Bernardino, while production is still accomplished at the University of Richmond under Bob Nelson's direction, with the generous support of both institutions, ASAIL, and an invaluable group of Patrons and Sponsors. This year also marks the creation of an MLA Division on American Indian Literatures, which will convene for the first time at the international convention in Toronto in December. The discipline, the Association, and the journal have all now fully come of age, indeed even moving into the very center of current literary, cultural, and theoretical concern.

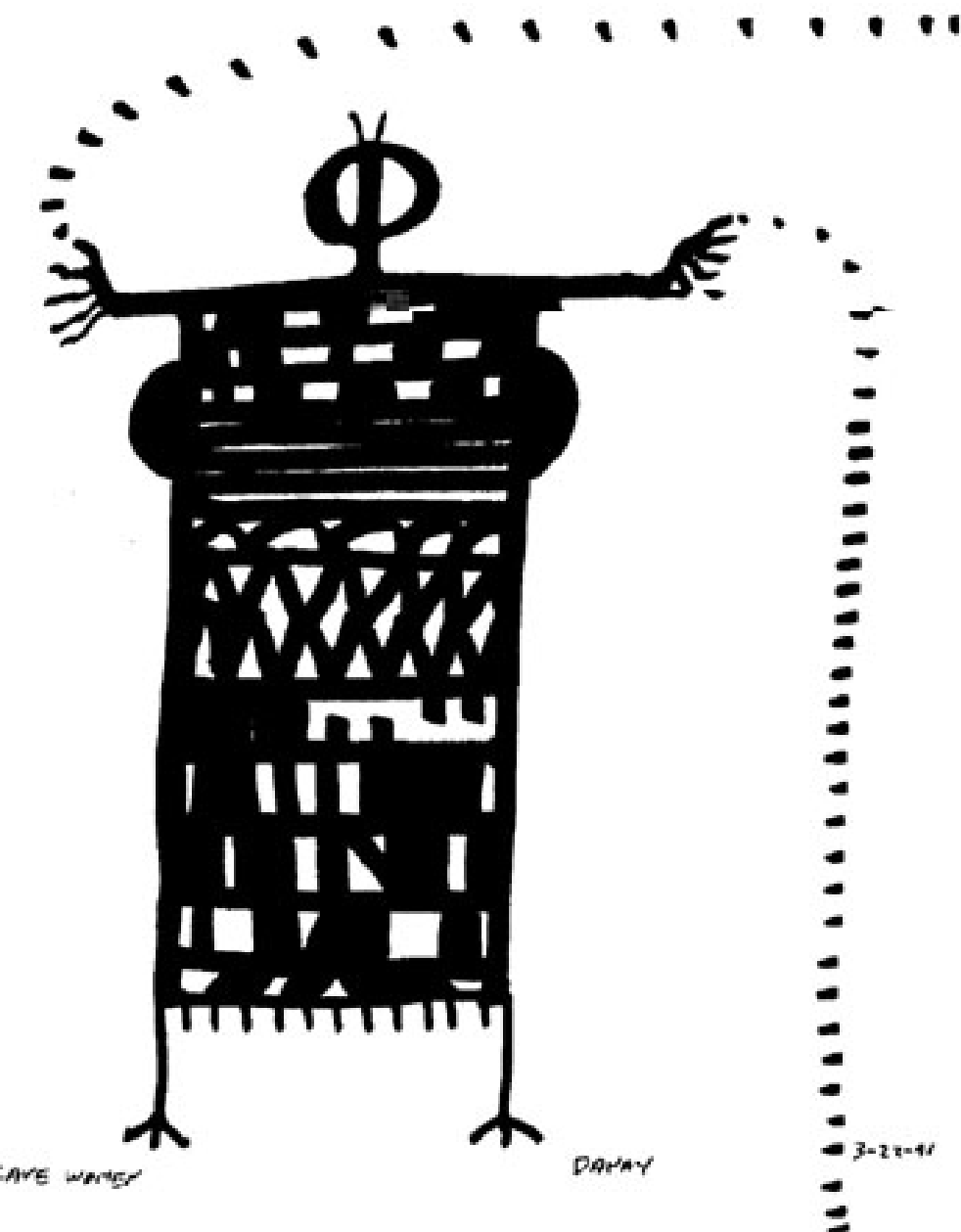
In editing the twelve essays that follow, representing the first and last issues of Series 1 and much in between, I have tried to avoid attempts at wholesale regularization or update, striving primarily to silently correct obvious errors and provide missing information; I believe they speak well for themselves—and their authors—even after as long as 16 years. The terms, documentation, and assumptions of these essays remain largely those of their individual time and place (including such discarded references and implications as those embodied in the generic "he" or generalizations about "The" Indian). What unites them is their representative excellence, insight, and significance.

The index that follows is in three basic sections: by individual issue, all of Series 1 and the first four volumes of Series 2, listing significant contents, both essays and reviews, and noting special issues and features; and an index of contributors through 1992, listing appearances of individual writers in the pages of *SAIL* by (Series No.) Volume.Number: and inclusive pagination. Again, we have tried to research such factors as changes of names and the like, and we would

be grateful for any corrections, additions, misassumptions, or clarifications that readers may discover.

While the editorial shift has certainly posed some difficulties, *SAIL* appears to be beginning to adapt to its new home and rhythms, if a bit slowly here at the beginning, and I apologize for any delays you may have experienced and I solicit any and all suggestions. If current plans unfold as expected, 5.3, guest edited by Susan Gardner, will be on "Feminist and Post-Colonial Approaches," and 5.4 will be another special issue on "New Directions in Contemporary Film, Drama, and Theater." Already well underway for next year are issues on contemporary theory, European criticism, and literary history, among others, and the special volume, edited by Joe Bruchac and published with the University of Arizona Press and the NEA, of the proceedings of last year's "Returning the Gift" Festival will appear late this year or early in 1994 and will be distributed to all 1993 subscribers. Finally, please let me know if you are interested in manuscript, book, and/or film reviewing; I welcome the widest possible participation from all who study, create, and take pleasure in Native American Literatures.





Indian Literature and Critical Responsibility

Elaine Jahner

1.1 (*Spring 1977*): 3-10

More and more literary critics are discovering that their most challenging calls are coming from across cultural boundaries and American critics are realizing that the cultural boundaries within the geographical confines of the United States can mark literary terrains that require added critical equipment and revised critical attitudes. Bernth Lindfors has described the attitude that should characterize a cross-cultural critic who must recognize personal limitations, fortify himself or herself with every scrap of cultural information available, and then inch warily but instinctively into the area.¹ It is advice that critics of Native American Literatures do well to heed. Today's Native American writers are compelling critics to probe into the cultural foundations for a developing literature. It is an exciting task but it is also a sensitive one because most of these writers have established and depend on an especially close relation between the writer, the work, and the traditional community—a relation that determines the contextual semantics of the work and therefore shapes the author's options regarding text structure. Comments like Leslie Silko's "I grew up at Laguna Pueblo. . . . This place that I am from is everything I am as a writer and human being"² illustrate a writer's perceptions of her artistic debt to the traditional community. Then we have the challenging statements by N. Scott Momaday, who speaks of aspects of the traditional lore of his people as being "in a sense definitive of the tribal mind" and of his notion that literature is "the end product of the evolutionary process, and the so-called oral tradition is primarily a stage within that process, a stage that is indispensable and perhaps original as well."³

If Momaday's and Silko's statements have any theoretical significance at all, they must be examined in relation to the work of other writers, and to do that we need conceptual tools and a critical vocabulary for discussing just how it is that one's local tradition, seen as

somehow definitive of the tribal mind, provides a set of optional approaches to form and content that a writer can employ to develop the tradition's dynamic potential. One convenient way into the text is to group authors according to the way they utilize a particular tradition to develop structurally active or significant elements of a text. But before I describe this approach, I want to clarify what I mean when I refer to the "traditional."

Momaday's assertion that certain symbolic events are "definitive of the tribal mind" is one that I take seriously. I assume an identifiable process of cultural adaptation that members of any culture both consistently participate in and criticize, so that what is definitive does not become deterministic. The process is the historical development whereby social structures and values progressively define the semantic features of certain basic cultural and linguistic categories. The semantic ambit of these categories is articulated through basic symbols that function to structure many forms of cultural expression. We can illustrate with the well-known example of the way that similarity of structure in relationship among family members, the body politic, and the cosmic community of animate and inanimate beings is expressed in many tribes through the use of the circle as multi-vocal symbol expressing unity in diversity. When people know the vital link between the symbols and social realities, they are prodded to critical thought about society and the discrepancies between the ideals toward which the symbols point and the realities of the historical situation. In traditional societies of all kinds, we find that the link between symbol and situation is dramatized in oral literature, which has always had an important part to play in shaping the way people view the nature of their own historical development. Within the context of a story or an oral history recital, people examine the dynamics of the struggle between change-resistant and change-oriented social forces. The link between basic symbols and the social realities they refer to remains dynamic as long as the symbol is not cut off from its own results and prevented from evoking thoughts of yet unrealized possibilities. The traditional role of the artist in tribal societies has been to keep alive the people's perceptions of the link between basic symbols and social processes. It is a role that many Native American writers continue to assume and that non-Indians writing about Indians often try to emulate. In this paper, therefore, "tradition" does not refer to a static body of historical facts but to a symbolic process of comparing an historically conditioned notion of what ought to be with what is. This process provides the contextual matrix for works of literature and can be a structuring force for specific texts. I will discuss four different ways in which Native American literary efforts reflect the process through

intrinsic structure and significance.

The first approach involves adopting oral literary forms and adapting them to employ some of the structural characteristics of the oral tradition within a written mode. This is difficult to do well, because oral narrative experience is multisensory and dependent on a specific context. The most successful example is Momaday's legend collection, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. By using three narrative voices, the mythical, the historical, and the personal, he can show something of the dynamics of audience participation in an oral literary context. Features of the mythic recital trigger historical and personal associations for a listener who emerges from the recital with a richer knowledge of who he or she is in relation to the community and its accumulative self-articulation through the story-telling process that links personal response to communal images.

Jerome Rothenberg has also tried to capture the multisensory impact of oral poetry through translations that are not merely translations. Rothenberg says of his method: "Since tribal poetry was almost always part of a larger situation (i.e., was truly intermedia), there was no more reason to present words alone as independent structures than the ritual events, say, or pictographs arising from the same source. Where possible, in fact, one might present or translate all elements connected with the total 'poem.'"⁴ If we accept the validity of what Rothenberg has tried to do, then evaluating how well he succeeded requires relating his commentaries on the original context of the poems to his "re-creations" in order to determine whether his reworking presents what he calls the "total poem," or whether it removes the poem from any possible relation to an existing Native American tradition.

Another controversial artist who attempts to adapt oral forms is Hyemoyohsts Storm. The controversy over Storm's work dramatizes how strong the tie between the oral forms and the original social context continues to be.⁵ Storm tried to reinterpret that bond and in the process he obscured specific tribal references. The response of some Cheyenne people (as well as critics like Rupert Costo) shows that one cannot so reinterpret with impunity. Storm assumed the storyteller's prerogative to adapt to an audience, and he expanded the social context of his work to include a world-wide audience. He adapts some Cheyenne stories and he writes new stories based on oral forms. In order to evoke the sense of performance he has used such stylistic devices as capitalized letters to indicate the storyteller's inflections. Storm's example is instructive both in its failures and in its successes.

The second use of tradition differentiates more sharply between oral and written literary forms because it uses a form distinctively part of the written tradition, the novel. It uses an Indian setting and Indian

characters, but it does not use Indian aesthetic and philosophic traditions to shape the novel's basic structure. The text conveys only those levels of meaning that are familiar to a non-Indian audience or that can be explained through descriptive data incorporated into the novel. The problems of the method are many. There is risk of either an overload of descriptive material or superficial coverage of differences between Indian cultures and other cultures. A frequent flaw in these novels is inadequate character motivation. One early work that demonstrates the approach and deserves attention is Adolf Bandelier's *The Delight Makers*. Bandelier succeeds better than most with the delicate task of incorporating ethnographic explanations for plot action. Many popular novels that non-Indians have written about Indians are less successful.

The third use of tradition shows adoption of Native American categories to define the nature of the style and the character motivation. The author taps the unique stylistic resources of a tribal language to create an English style with powers of expression that are dependent on the tribal language. Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell's autobiographical novel *Miracle Hill* derives most of its impact from the English style being created by the dialect of those for whom Navaho is a first language. A sensitive artist like Mitchell can show that the English language is much more flexible than many English speakers believe.

To bring character motivation into line with an integral worldview is to show something of the individual's vital links with culture. All writers try to show these links, but only a few succeed well enough to merit attention to their means. A work that depends on the author's perception of differences between the characters' motivational matrix and the readers' is Frank Waters' *The Man Who Killed the Deer*. Waters' Native American writings stem from his preoccupation with the way that a culture can affect personal freedom, and in criticizing his work we need to remember his effort to understand relations between culture and personality.

The fourth structural use of tradition is the most important and the most deserving of attention. It employs the traditional as a substratum or as an infrastructure: the story being told can only be grasped fully in terms of its likeness to or difference from some underlying structure of action. The underlying structure refers to formalized traditional patterns and expectations that are generally celebrated through ritual and festivity. Authors can forge a theme by establishing a dialectical relation between the change-resistant and change-oriented elements of the actual society they are describing. Time, place, and character unfold in a modern setting informed by the traditional in such a way that the relation between old and new is the organizing center of the

work. Images can activate parallel images from the past, thereby making the past a living presence in the contemporary consciousness. Traditional oral narratives, song, and prayers can be used to present an emotional structure derived from a particular way of life. As novelists give expression to the contemporary meaning of these emotional structures, they parallel the role of the ancient storyteller who tells the people who they are. Perhaps the best example of a novelist who consciously assumes this role and uses the conventions I've described is N. Scott Momaday. As most readers perceive and most critics explain, his novel is informed by the cultural meanings surrounding the *Night Chant*, from which the title, *House Made of Dawn*, is taken. Momaday manipulates the various levels of meaning by three narrative voices, the mythical, historical, and personal. We can study the evolution of the principle of narration by comparing his *the Way to Rainy Mountain*, which is organized so that the three voices gradually come together in the course of a symbolic personal journey, which also informs the novel. But in the novel the principle of narration results in greater complexity. Juxtaposition of expressions of each voice is a major device of the novel (just as it was in the legend collection), but in the novel each voice must be intricately interwoven with the others to develop the plot. The personal voice is presented through the protagonist, Abel. The historical voice narrates events in the lives of Abel's grandfather and the village priest, while the mythical is presented through descriptions of the rituals and the meaning of the land. Through this structure Momaday can involve all of his characters in patterns of movement toward understanding, regeneration, and reintegration. The result is a novel remarkable for the perceptive depth of its statements on what it means to be a member of an integral, conservative culture in a world that threatens all such cultures.

It is easy to see how Momaday's works employ narrative techniques that relate to southwestern mythologies and cultures, but it is more difficult to see similar patterns in James Welch's novel, *Winter in the Blood*, which at first reading seems to be structurally independent of its ethno-historical foundations. Yet Welch effects transformation of thematic structures and images that derive from Blackfeet culture. One thematic structure involves the levels of meaning that the Blackfeet assign the notion of distance. In every integral culture there are activities that express something of the culture's fundamental meaning and uniqueness. Images from Welch's poems and from his novel indicate that he uses the Blackfeet race over the hills to the hunt as such an emblematic activity. The hunt brought back what the people needed. It is a journey that makes distance meaningful. Once such cultural overtones are perceived, the reader sees clearly that in the course of his novel Welch has effected a transformation from a negative

distance that keeps the hero from self-knowledge to a positive, creative distance that could be a means for the hero to relate to self, nature, and society. Welch's use of cultural-semantic features enables him to show that while the world remains cockeyed and greedy, possibilities of growth exist within the traditional way of life. It is important to recognize that the possibilities are linked to a tradition's *particularities*. The particular and unique features of each tradition exist because of a unique history, and the critic must be specific about any author's references to the sources of strength in each tradition.

The four approaches outlined here are a means of generating questions that lead a reader to the specific textual qualities that result from the way the real world affects intrinsic aspects of a text. Native American writers have opened discourse to new possibilities of meaning. By examining the imaginative possibilities present in each writer's approach to the traditional, the critic can work hand in hand with the creative writer in showing how to move in a direction defined by tradition without falling back on the past as the solution to present-day problems. Critics must avoid the temptation to confine dynamic literary works to static categories that *seem* to characterize Native American Literatures. They must try to understand how each really good work of these literatures both fulfills and transcends a growing, developing tradition. In its fulfillment the work relates directly to a specific audience and its struggle. In its transcendence, the work becomes universal in its implications. The best examples of local literature become world literature.

Notes

¹Bernth Lindfors, "Critical Approaches to Folklore in African Literature," *African Folklore* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972): 224.

²Leslie Silko, "Notes by Contributors," *Man to Send Rain Clouds* (New York: Random House, 1975): 176.

³N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words," *Indian Voices: The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1970).

⁴Jerome Rothenberg, *Shaking the Pumpkin* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972): xxii.

⁵The argument over the relative merits of *Seven Arrows* was published in *Wassaja*, the newspaper of the American Indian Historical Association, April-May 1974 and August 1974. Vine Deloria reviewed the book in *Natural History* 81.72: 96.

A Good Day to Be Alive: Some Observations on Contemporary American Indian Writing

Joseph W. Bruchac III

6.4 (Fall 1982): 1-6

American Indian contemporary writing is now, I feel, at a very interesting crossroad. There have never been as many good American Indian poets writing in English and being published regularly in magazines as there are now. In addition to the writers of my own generation, those born in the late '30s and early '40s, a whole new generation of Native American poets and fiction writers are beginning to produce substantial work—many of them students of such people as Joy Harjo. Philip Yellowhawk Minthorn, a Nez Perce poet still in his early 20s with a book of his poems forthcoming from Strawberry Press, is one example. A graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, he has grown up with more of a feeling for the acceptability of American Indian contemporary writing, perhaps, than have many of those Native writers in the late '30s and '40s who found themselves in public schools or BIA schools where THE Western Literary Heritage was all they were ever shown. For the younger American Indian writer today, perhaps, some things are easier and clearer and those dual myths of the "Melting Pot" and the "Vanishing Redman" may not have been so omnipresent. They may not have had to deal with the confusion and self-hatred of friends and families who wanted to lose or deny an American Indian heritage. At least I hope this is so.

With the reissue of Geary Hobson's *The Remembered Earth* by the University of New Mexico and the reissue in paperback of *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*, we have been assured of at least two major (and excellent) anthologies of contemporary American Indian Literatures that we can draw upon as teachers of literature and creative writing. However, the response I received from a major publisher who was interested (I was told) in publishing a new anthology of American Indian contemporary writing, is interesting. Yes, they do want to do

such a book, but only if they can find a well-known American Indian writer to edit it since the material, they felt, would not sell without a recognizable name. I was clearly not the person to do it—which left a field of perhaps two or three people they felt were well known enough, N. Scott Momaday or (and here their real interest lay) Jamake Highwater.

When I look over the list of the most recent new books of poetry published by American Indian writers, I note this same lack of interest of major publishers in anything but the "recognizable" writers. In the last three years the only American poet to be published by something other than a university or small press is Ray Young Bear, whose superb collection *Winter of the Salamander* was published by Harper and Row in 1980 as a volume in their "Native American Publishing Program." (At least one American poet I know was asked to contribute a volume to that series. When he refused and said he'd only send to their regular series, not one in which he was earmarked as an "Indian," they agreed to consider a book. That book was rejected as not being "up to their standards." The implication he read into it was that he was only good enough to be published as an "Indian" since "Indian" writing isn't as good as "real" literature.) The controversies about certain volumes by supposed Indians in the Harper and Row series still go on and I don't want to comment any further on those controversies. I would like, though (not that I mistrust Harper and Row, especially since I just got a royalty check for paperback sales of *Carriers of the Dream Wheel*) to know just how and where, specifically, their Native American Publishing Program's profits are (as advertised) being "used to support projects designed to aid the Native American People."

Some of the other important American Indian writers to have books published in the last three years include Simon Ortiz—with volumes from Thunder's Mouth Press and the Institute for Native American Development, Jim Barnes with his important *The American Book of the Dead* just published by University of Illinois, and Maurice Kenny's epic treatment of Isaac Jogues and his relationship to the Mohawks, *Blackrobe*, brought out in 1982 by North Country Community College Press. Paula Gunn Allen's new book of poems will soon appear from UCLA's American Indian Studies Center and Luci Tapahonso's *One More Shiprock Night* was published in 1982 by Tejas Art Press. Those are only a few examples and there are many others—all from small or university presses.

Before going further, of course, I should point out that it is a problem shared by *all* American writers, not just those of ethnic minority background. America's "major" publishers want big names and the big money. Literary fiction, poetry, and short story collections

are not being published as they once were. Without the small and university presses they'd hardly be published at all. And since the small and university presses pay little (if anything at all) in the way of cash to those who publish with them, it is clear that writers find it harder than ever to support themselves by their writing.

Which means, of course, it is even harder for the Native American writer. I have been told that the "theme" of Indians is still hot with the major publishers. They want "Indian" books. By this, however, is meant *Sacajawea* or *Hanta Yo*. They do not want books by Indians but about them. About Indians who bear the same relationship to the American Indian writers and people of today as the "Natives" in the old Tarzan films do to Chinua Achebe or Leopold Senghor. The American Indian writer has a double cross (pun intended) to bear.

In viewing the field of writers and publishers, I note several encouraging things. One is the continuance of several important small presses that have nurtured American Indian writers—often at the very start of their careers. The two most important of these presses are Brother Benet Tvedten's Blue Cloud Quarterly series and Maurice Kenny's Strawberry Press. By supporting American Indian writing and by consistently publishing strong work, they have done an incalculable service. The second is the move on the part of a number of new or already established small presses to publish work by American Indian writers—not because they are American Indians, but because their work is good. Here, too, most of the books are books of poetry. We have yet to see small presses devoting themselves with some *consistency* to the publishing of American Indian stories, long fiction, or plays. Perhaps the publication of Bruce King's play *Dustoff* by The Institute of American Arts in Santa Fe is a start in that direction and perhaps certain university presses that have a long history of publishing predominantly non-literary works devoted to Native American Studies will see this opportunity and step in—University of New Mexico, perhaps, or University of Oklahoma. Cross Cultural Review is a small press in Long Island that I have been assisting in the role of a contributing editor and they have begun a series of bilingual chapbooks by American Indian writers that I feel are especially important. With the Native language facing the English, these chapbooks range from 12 to 40 pages and are beautifully printed and well distributed. The first three in the series are *Rounds* by Carroll Arnett, *Horned Snake* by Louis Oliver, and *In a Dark Mist* by Lance Henson. (Anyone with ideas for further bilingual chapbooks should contact me.)

Indiana University Press (Bacone) is also undertaking a bilingual format book with the forthcoming publication of Robert Conley's poems *The Rattlesnake Band* in Cherokee and English. Since the survival of American Indian languages is, in a way, the survival of

cultures, I have hopes that such bilingual publications will occur elsewhere in the country.

Two projects that I have been working on myself might bear mentioning here. The first is an anthology I have put together of poems by 36 different American Indian poets. There is a great interest in Native American Peoples in Europe and also a great lack of knowledge about them there. To create an interest in further translations of works by individual authors and to give them a taste of the real American Indian writing, I've been working on placing that anthology in various European nations for translation into their native languages. Thus far, it has been translated into Macedonian in Yugoslavia (where it will be made available at the great international Struge Poetry Festival this August [1982]) and is being translated into Sicilian. I'm now working on contacts in other European nations and elsewhere throughout the world. I'll also be working on a larger version of that same anthology (which is called *Songs from Turtle Island*) that will be published in this country in English—probably by a small press, perhaps by our own Greenfield Review Press.

The second project is a major study of American Indian contemporary writing and *survival*. I've received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to do this and will be interviewing American Indian poets throughout 1982 and 1983, doing a good deal of travelling to do so. (Last year Geary Hobson received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to do a major study of Cherokee writing and I consider the granting of two such fellowships to people working in contemporary American Indian writing a good sign.)

Survival is, I feel, the key. American Indian writers are surviving and their survival and growth are related to the reawakening and growth of Native Peoples throughout this hemisphere. It is a good day to be alive.

Ray Young Bear: Tribal History and Personal Vision

Gretchen M. Bataille

6.3 (Summer 1982): 1-6

Ray Young Bear, born and raised on the Mesquaki Settlement near Tama, Iowa, is among a growing number of American Indian writers who have transmogrified the oral traditions of their people into written forms accessible to those outside of Native American cultures. Still, Young Bear's poetry is elusive, punctuated by images and characters unfamiliar to many readers. In the prefatory statement to the book, Young Bear acknowledges the obscure style and content of his writing: "There are no elucidations or foresights [merely] experiments with words." It is poetry of visions and dreams, surrealistic interpretations of Indian experience.

Such a collection as *Winter of the Salamander* presents many difficulties in its execution and its acceptance. Although the contract for the book was signed with Harper and Row in 1975, Young Bear admits it took him years actually to put the collection together. Fear of the reaction from "university English professors," and an astute awareness that he needed carefully to scrutinize his work to avoid publishing material that tribal members might find too intimate for general dissemination, prolonged work on the book. But the final collection, described by one tribal member as Ray's "grandmother speaking," should still any fears about its acceptance. Young Bear *does* consider himself his "grandmother's messenger," an emissary whose function is to "preserve and collect the language of the Mesquaki."

The many references to the seal are a direct response to a story told to him by his grandmother, a story that he has made his own in several poetic versions; and he is working on the translation of his grandmother's autobiography to preserve her stories in an even more direct way. The first poem of the collection, "grandmother," is a dedication to the woman he sees as preserver and transmitter of tribal ways:

if i were to see

her shape from a mile away
i'd know so quickly
that it would be her. . . .
i'd know
and her words
would flow inside me. . . .

Young Bear's references to his own grandmother link him to tribal members everywhere who believe that the grandmother earth is the soil from which they were created. The Mesquaki call themselves "the red earth people," having been formed of the rich red clay, the blood of their spiritual lifegiver:

i walk over her head and remember
of being told that no knives
or sharp objects must pierce
inside her hair,
this is her hair.
another grandmother whose hair
i am combing.

Unlike some other American Indian writers, Young Bear does not consider himself part of the "contemporary American poetry scene"; he prefers the label "American Indian poet." He describes *Winter of the Salamander* as the "first step a child takes," the beginning of a long career that will include more poetry but also fiction and non-fiction.

He is anxious to work on an anthology of literature and criticism by American Indian writers to test his assumption that American Indian critics react differently from non-Indians.

On a topic that continues to be discussed in both fiction and non-fiction, the place of mixed bloods or halfbreeds within tribal societies, Young Bear responds that "mixed blood" is not a negative term for him, that what mixed bloods have lost in blood quantum they can compensate for by participation in tribal ceremonies and rituals. He has no time, however, for those who come:

. . . claiming to be at least a good 64th
grabbing and printing anything
in scrapbook form
dedicating poems to the indian's loss
writing words and placing themselves
within various animals they knew nothing of

But of mixed bloods, he writes:

. . . they are told
to absorb themselves into religion,
to learn and to outdo some drunken

fullblood's life.

There are specific poems that can be directly tied to Mesquaki oral tradition. In "doors" the explanation of the coming of death is a brief summary of the longer story of the Mesquaki trickster character and culture hero, who knew that the world was not big enough for all people and so was forced to keep the spirit of his own brother from entering the lodge, resulting in death rather than eternal life for all people. In "catching the distance" there is an oblique reference to the tradition of ritualistically throwing lost baby teeth to ensure the growth of replacements. References to clans—bear, thunder, eagle, fox, fish, and wolf—appear throughout the poetry as do specific references to medicine and curing herbs, sweat baths, and menstrual taboos. The Mesquaki story of a boy who fasted too long and became a fish is re-experienced in "it is the fish-faced boy who struggles." Throughout the poetry the traditional stories are seen in all their relationships and possibilities; they are examined in their literary, psychological, cultural, and historical contexts.

Although Young Bear's poetry is infused with oral materials, it reflects contemporary experience as well. Young Bear acknowledges his often bitter tone, questioning himself about what may be "perhaps too much anger," but aware that the anger is real, nurtured by years of living on the edge of a white midwestern community that still knows little about its Mesquaki neighbors and generally avoids the dirt road through the Settlement. "in viewpoint: poem for 14 catfish and the town of tama, iowa" compares the Mesquaki "unparalleled / respect for the iowa river" with the actions of their white neighbors:

farmers and the local whites
from the nearby town of tama and surrounding
towns, with their usual characteristic
ignorance and disregard, have driven noisily
over the ice across our lands
on their pickups and snowmobiles,
disturbing the dwindling fish
and wildlife—

In the poetry, the specific encounters of the Mesquaki with their Tama and Montour neighbors and the local laws are alluded to—the hunting rights case, ice fishing out of season, conflicts over land use. And Young Bear links his community with the larger Indian community, referring to the murder of an Indian in Gordon, Nebraska, and the Indian student's experiences in colleges and universities. In the end it is "community" that matters:

they can't seem to leave us alone.
until they learn that the world and time

has moved on regardless of whether they still
believe and harbor antiquated ideas and notions
of being superior because of their pale light skin
alone, and until they learn that in their paranoia
to compare us to their desensitized lives,
they will never progress into what they
themselves call a community,
or even for the least,
a human.

In Young Bear's poetry there is a sense of the mystery of life as it still exists, of the spiritual powers that continue to guide, to thwart, and to inspire. He tells stories and recounts personal visions that reinforce his relationship with his people, putting himself within the circle of existence that includes the first people of red clay: his grandmothers, both real and mythical, and those people, animals, and places of his worlds.

(This essay is based on an interview with Ray Young Bear on June 3, 1981.)



American Indian Literature: A Tradition of Renewal

Peter Nabakov

2.3 (*Autumn 1978*): 31-40

I

"In the earliest times when both people and animals lived on earth," the Eskimo storyteller relates, "a person could become an animal if he wanted to and an animal could become a human being. Sometimes they were people and sometimes animals and there was no difference."

The primordial paradise is a precondition for most Native American mythologies. This almost-heaven on earth featured absolute equivalence between man and beast. Both enjoyed equal access to the conjuring potency of words. "All spoke the same language," the storyteller continues. "That was a time when words were like magic. The human mind had mysterious powers. A word spoken by chance might have strange consequences. It would suddenly come alive and what people wanted to happen, could happen. All you had to do was say it. Nobody could explain this. That's the way it was."

The compelling influence of this mystical realm, when, as the Duwamish of Washington say, "mountains and stars and rocks were living things," is the bedrock of tribal American memory. There the supernatural was commonplace. Ambiguity reigned serenely. Animals and people shifted identity with hardly a whisper; an animal would push up its muzzle or a bird its beak—"like a mask," the Eskimos describe it—and suddenly assume human form. Fluid interchangeability, an atmosphere entirely tranquil yet infinitely mysterious, immortality, language an instantaneous mode for casting spells on events, these characterized this timeless "pre-human flux" when heaven was so close you could practically stroke it. This age had no need of shamans or storytellers; it was the stuff their performances and tales would be made of in the next.

II

Then culture came to North America. Man's second generation proudly dubbed themselves Human Beings, First Men, Spontaneous Men, The People, and up to 1492, the rest is oral folklore.

Culture's mixed blessings brought tribal differentiation, social institutions, status, strife, insecurity, fear, death, the irrevocable breach with animals, the loss of magical speech, and the compensatory powers of imagination and symbolization. Man turned on his brother; he became hunter and farmer and devourer. The Cherokee say that animals retaliated, visiting sickness upon them. Thereafter a Cherokee's manhood was fulfilled by apprenticeship to the passive kingdom of plants that would, if he were assiduous, yield antidotes to specific ills turned loose by the aggressive animal world. A shaky balance was restored. Tribal man across the continent learned what was to be his destiny: forever restoring balance in his world, using his symbolizing imagination to renew, renew, renew—ceaselessly, cyclically striving to revisit paradise and taste its healing powers. Historians of religion have offered a beguiling phrase for traditional man's abiding feeling of primal loss, they call it "nostalgia for paradise."

Although tribal man's choice of culture was irreversible, animals, mountains, rivers, and rainbows retained their divinity together with their ancient powers. If tribal man worked terribly hard at it, he found they would grace him with ecstatic glimpses of his former state. Now human beings returned to the natural world as supplicants. Untainted by presumptions of culture, animals were custodians of the old mysteries. Talking animals would inspire the first tribal stories. People sought animal wisdom to nourish their spirits as they hunted animal flesh to sustain their bodies. They resolved this paradox through propitiating animal spirits with elaborate, precarious, ritualized strategies that would occupy half their waking and sleeping hours.

The Indian's oral tradition kept him mindful of his cosmic origins and religious duties. Enacting his mythology brought that tradition to life. Some ceremonies became, in essence, great theatrical visitations from that earlier realm, played out symbolically by entire communities. Whether his incantations originated from his own solitary vision quests or were handed down as traditional chant, language helped tribal man woo spirit. When medicine men learned to throw themselves into a trance, they often acquired secret animal languages reminiscent of olden times; animal helpers taught them spells and songs to cure their patients.

Oral tradition often took place within a prescribed mixed-media setting. Costuming, animal impersonation, floor painting, masking, mnemonic devices, song, incense, musical instruments, pilgrimage,

hand gestures, dance, physical suffering, hallucinatory plants—all could be chosen as part of the expressive choreography that would most effectively transport men back to the magical atmosphere when their fate was in their own hands.

Oral tradition filled many different needs and came in various forms. Tribes collectively celebrated their group lineage from animal ancestors. Each time an individual opened a medicine bundle containing talismans of his visionary experience, he celebrated his personal oral tradition. If potent enough, it could become part of his people's inventory of legends. Everybody practiced storytelling: winter night raconteurs, hunters and warriors, shamans, priests of high ritual dramas, parents. Through stories of demi-god heroes and anti-heroes, trickster figures and witches, the young were instructed in social behavior, kinship relations, tradition, and taboo. When chronicles of tribal meanderings were passed on, they were moral lessons as well. A tribe's well-being rested on the continuity of its institutions. Objectivity was irrelevant in this form of history. They sang and told stories about what they valued.

Its intrinsic risk factor lent an immediacy to oral tradition. It was transmitted face-to-face like a relay race. Oral tradition was always one generation away from extinction. Though the "storyline" would remain fixed, literary embellishment was encouraged. The only quality-control factor for myth recitations, songs, chants was whether their present form *worked*. Indians were ingenious at adorning their oral tradition with all manner of sympathetic, hypnotic, repetitious, and onomatopoeic phrases and imagery to insure that they did.

Like a giant conduit of cultural continuity, oral tradition transmitted its restorative messages from the people to the forces around them and back again. As moral guardians of the tribal universe, medicine men and storytellers worked hand in hand. As their healing words assuaged everyone's nostalgia for paradise, the lines between them and audience blurred. The collective voice of the tribe was telling its people who they most truly were.

III

Then, from beyond the rim of Turtle Mountain, a new human being appeared, and up to the present day, the rest is written history. Europeans launched one of mankind's most prolonged efforts by one culture to obliterate another. The white man considered his own civilization a step above the Indian's culture. Among his imports was the printed page. The oral tradition that had ensured cultural continuity now confronted an impressive competitor. Literacy would introduce a screen between second generation tribal man and the post-contact Indian. Everywhere Indians recognized writing as one of the white

man's greatest medicines.

Transferring thoughts from memory to script seemed to suggest that the risk factor in oral tradition could be eliminated. Yet when white diplomats tried to revise "outdated" treaties, Indians learned that print was not so permanent, and the diplomats themselves ran up against two strengths of oral tradition. It developed keen memories. The Native leaders demonstrated a disturbing ability to recall the precise wording of the old treaties that had vowed—on paper—to keep their promises forever. Second, Indians had considered treaties more as moral oaths than legal documents. Why should written words lack the enduring sanctity of spoken ones? Wasn't the "power" that was the peril and purpose of utterance still in force when words were used for promise-making as well as for spellbinding? What the Indians did not realize yet was that the white man's genius for specialization had infiltrated his uses of language. Poets manipulated it to bring readers to tears. Historians wrote "objectively" to build constructs of "true" facts. Legalists and politicians used it in a paper game of persuasion and deception with little bearing on truth. When treaty-makers' consciences were pricked by Indians insisting that mutually agreed, written promises had no age limit, they could only say apologetically, "That was then, now is now."

Unlike oral tradition, print was marked by the impersonality of its transmission. Whereas oral tradition saw two or more gather together in the name of communication and interaction, written words allowed the scholar to spend his life in archives without human contact, or the newspaper reader in the subway to share no news with the riders beside him. Print helped to make the white man as alienated as an old Indian once described him: "You are each a one-man tribe."

Nor were there any traditions or taboos to protect print from misuse. Once information was set in print, no consensus governed its moral application. The white man might try regulating it, but print was too promiscuous. Manipulative uses of language flowered. Before long the world would be so inundated with suspicious, coercive words that decent folk would shrink from their daily bombardment.

Print also sapped words of their magical potency as it turned the esoteric into the public. Free speech and equality of different viewpoints were not the creeds of small-community tribal man. Indeed, the Indian came to realize that the white man premised his worldview on the wordy constructs of his intellect. As Chief Moiese of the Flathead contrasted their separate realities, "Before the Black Robes came and we lived in this valley, each year we used to choose a boy and send him to the top of the mountain and he fasted there and made medicine for the people. Then he came back and we were well. That was all

the studying we had to do then. The valley was our home. If we had not learned to think, we would not have been driven out."

For Native peoples, literacy pushed paradise further into the past. The white man frowned on his mythologies and the ceremonies that enacted them. As Indians were diseased, killed, exiled, and relocated, their beliefs were insulted, the rituals that reunited them with animal spirits were outlawed. What might be called a nostalgia for "the nostalgia for paradise" then began overwhelming many of the survivors, creating a host of adaptive religions: the Handsome Lake movement, the Ghost Dance, the Native American Church, the Indian Shakers. The era when animals and men were brothers was kept alive only among those tribal enclaves whose ceremonial chambers had the thickest walls. For many, it receded beyond recovery. The contemporary Pawnee/Otoe poet, Anna Lee Walters, writes, "Before the Grandfathers ruled is a space in time we never speak of. We know nothing of it. We should not flatter or shame ourselves by pretending to know what we do not."

Word magic was now made by rhetoric or factual accumulation. Replacing the belief that words spoken in right order, repeated according to magic formulae, accompanied by painting and song, could literally alter events, was the faith in them to entertain, persuade, argue, and manipulate. Even traditional Indian oral tradition was not exempt from being turned into literature to meet the insatiable appetite for written material. Adaptor of Indian song and liturgy William Brandon confesses in his *Magic World*, a collection of rewritten Indian songs and poems, "In the buffalo songs, for instance, it would not only be wearisome to follow faithfully all the magic numbers, but we might also, who knows, materialize a buffalo. We don't really want the buffalo. We only want the feeling of earnest repetition, the feeling of hypnosis, of the marvelous emerging, the feeling of the magic. All that we want from any of it is the feeling of its poetry. Let the ethnologists keep the rest." A fine division of the spoils for ethnologists and readers of poetry, but where does it leave the modern-day inheritors of Indian oral traditions?

IV

Survival has always been an Indian specialty; they adapted whatever materials were available to satisfy their needs. After the Cherokee encountered print, a remarkable man named George Guess, popularly known as Sequoyah, created a Cherokee alphabet. What is interesting is that the Tribe first applied this invention to preserving traditional Cherokee spells. The shamans who learned Sequoyah's script wrote magic books, then hid them in tree trunks and attics to prevent exploitation.

Post-contact Indians have tried to absorb written language into tribal catalog just as they have taken on the pickup truck and the chain saw. A growing band of gifted Indian writers are striving to safeguard the moral and spiritual purpose of oral tradition during its conversion to an alien form. The theme that seems to preoccupy all of them is psychic renewal. The traditional respect for storytelling as a curative art form that can bring about renewal represents a phenomenon in contemporary American literature.

The conversion from spoken story to written literature has its problems, as Laguna Pueblo novelist and poet Leslie Silko seems well aware. In a recent interview she admitted, "One of my frustrations in writing, you know, is that unless you're involved in this, in these stories, in this place [Laguna], you as a reader might not get it. I have constantly to fight against putting in detail and things that would be too tedious for the 'outsider.' At the same time I have to have some sort of internal integrity there in the piece. . . . In describing places and directions, there are stories that identify the place. These kinds of things make condensing a problem. It all depends on how much you want to make the stories acceptable to communities outside this one. I condense, but I try to be very careful to preserve the essential quality that stories have that makes them stories. If that is out, then you've ruined the whole thing."

Perhaps because he is principally a poet, Simon Ortiz of Acoma does not seem to find any contradiction between Indian song and written poetry. When he articulates the creative process, he could be describing the traditional Indian visionary beseeching spirits for aid: "the poet is complementary to whatever the source is, the source giving him the energy, the source providing him the substance or content, for what he is saying. The poem is complementary to that which is outside and away from you. Then you *together* have that single voice."

The first American Indian novel to gain nationwide acclaim was N. Scott Momaday's 1969 Pulitzer Prize *House Made of Dawn*. It is a powerful story of a modern Indian's struggle for spiritual balance. Abel, part-Jemez Pueblo, has recently returned from the horrors of World War II, an experience that traumatized many Native Americans. He becomes a basket case in Los Angeles. A skid-row Indian revivalist, Tosamah, lectures to Indian castoffs how the white man "talks about the Word. He talks through it and around it. He builds upon it with syllables, with prefixes and suffixes and hyphens and accents. He adds and divides and multiplies the Word. And in all of this he subtracts the Truth. And in his presence, here on his own ground, you are as children, mere babes in the woods. You must not mind, for in this you have certain advantages. A child can listen and

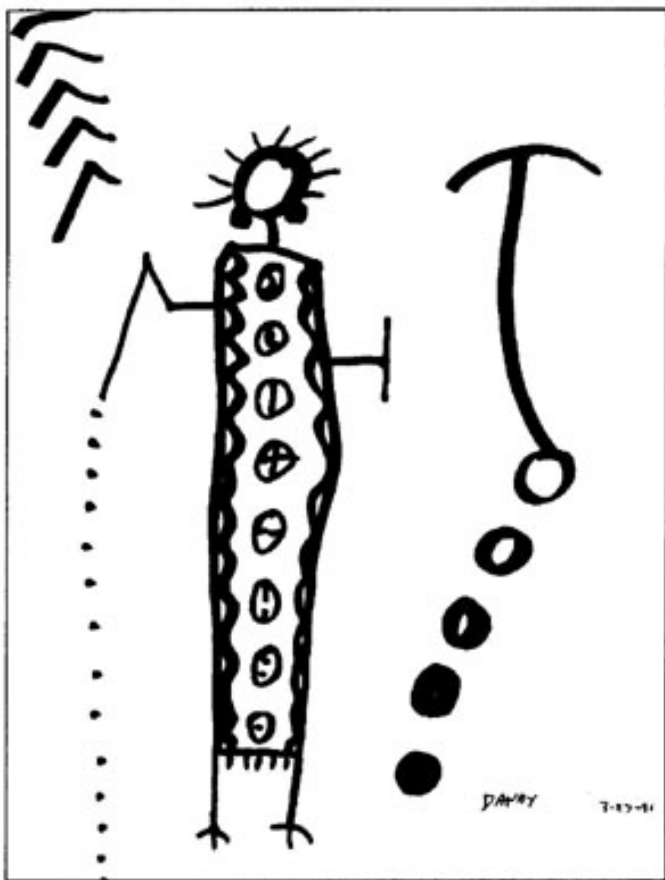
learn. The Word is sacred to a child." Tosamah lets Momaday make such contrasts between written literature and oral tradition. Eventually Abel rejects the destructive bitterness of Tosamah's articulate insights. Along with his bitter tales, Tosamah has also told of his own pilgrimage to his Kiowa roots. This tale hands Abel the possibility for his salvation. He returns to the piñon landscape of his birth. After Abel buries the grandfather who raised him, the novel closes with a ritual race for good harvest and hunting, for reintegration. Abel is running, breathlessly chanting, toward a traditional Indian resolution. Momaday's recent autobiographical *The Names* employs the pilgrimage far more personally as a medium for self-restoration.

The superb novel of modern life on the high Montana plains, *Winter in the Blood*, by James Welch, has no apparent resolution for its unnamed hero's alienation. But at the heart of the novel is a gem of oral history. Amidst his aimless bar-hopping, the existential hero first tells us of his grandmother's nineteenth-century life—the only resurrection of traditional Indianness in the bleak book. Before the story ends the hero learns new facts about her from an old blind man who was her secret lover for twenty years. The novel's last sentence has the narrator throw the grandmother's old tobacco pouch into her grave. This can be seen as closing the door on dead tradition. But the novel is held together by this one account of a meaningful human connection conducted secretly beneath the white man's eyes, and oral tradition told it to us. The pouch in the grave has the heightened impact of haiku imagery; it can be saying that such tenuous continuity and respect is all that makes life worthwhile.

Leslie Silko's recent novel *Ceremony* makes no secret of its celebration of the mind-and-body restorative powers of oral tradition. Indeed, it is both a dramatization and lecture on that theme. Like Momaday's Abel, Silko's Tayo is a Pueblo World War II vet on the skids. His recovery calls for new ritual forms served up by an iconoclastic Navajo healer, Old Betonie. Old Betonie could be talking as much about oral tradition as about ritual when he argues to Tayo, "at one time the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong." Silko believes the same holds true for storytelling. As she says of *Ceremony*, "This novel is essentially about the powers inherent in the process of storytelling. . . . The chanting or telling of ancient stories to effect certain cures or protect from illness and harm have always been part of the Pueblo's curing ceremonies."

An abiding devotion to the traditional tribal past by Indian writers is no empty exercise in sentimentality. It is an extremely urgent

attempt to recover in print the function of oral tradition. Simon Ortiz is especially gifted at combining traditional Indian forms and modern American contexts. His eulogy to an Indian victim of modern times, "Beauty Roan Horse," is a masterpiece of spiritual renewal. As the chanted refrain builds in our ears, we are drawn together to the graveside of a man dead from alcohol and reservation hardship. While social outrage is here, our feelings move beyond. As Ortiz sings out for blessings upon this man's spirit, we look around at what we share with him. We find the world's wholeness strengthening as we appeal to it. We discover ourselves participating in a prayer.



Blue Stones, Bones, and Troubled Silver: The Poetic Craft of Wendy Rose

Andrew Wiget
7.2 (Summer 1983): 48-54

1973. Ten years ago. The mind struggles to remember how it was. "Peace with honor." Wounded Knee was on everyone's lips. For those of us just then coming to care about it, Momaday was Indian literature. Jim Welch was a poet. Leslie Silko and Simon Ortiz were secrets, and only they had heard of Paula Allen or Joy Harjo. There were no anthologies really, except for John Milton's special edition of *South Dakota Review* from 1969. And a small press in upstate New York brought out the first chapbook of a young California poet, Wendy Rose.

There is something to be said for time. It sifts, it sorts, it makes demands. I'm not talking about the artificial demands created by fads or trendiness. The literary world of ten years ago, like that of the present, had its share of fads, which only served to highlight those "relevancies" that are ultimately external to the life of a poet. The real demands of time are more substantial, internal ones: to extend oneself into new relationships, to deepen the shadow of the present by appreciating the past, to discover not only the possibility but the inevitability of a future. These tasks face us all, but the poet, in the process, must also continually supplant the well-worn, familiar language with newer language, until he or she begins deliberately to develop a distinctive voice while coming into conscious possession of a unique self. Ten years isn't long for this purpose, but already the decade is littered with those who have turned aside after a first appearance in an early "Indian" anthology or a single chapbook. Wendy Rose continues to write and to be read, it seems to me, because she has not flinched from the most painful aspects of her growth as a person nor from the poetic task of translating that growth through vital, affecting, language into a shared vision.

It seemed her task from the beginning. On the back of that first

chapbook, *Hopi Roadrunner Dancing*, Rose included in a biographical note a pseudonym, "Chiron Khanshandel." Today such a gesture might be graciously chalked up to adolescent fascination with centaurs. Though centaur motifs recurred in Rose's painting for several years—the same theme, I would argue, she has now transposed into her kachina motif—the pseudonym itself never reappeared. Perhaps this is because she has so deeply internalized what the motif signifies. One could speculate that the centaur's noble combination of graceful power and aspiring vision, far from being an empty object of youthful fantasy, provided Rose with her first image to fuse two alien forces through an act of imagination. To appropriate such an image to herself so personally as to take it for a name was, I believe, to recognize in it both the critical issue of her bicultural identity and a fruitful strategy for creating a future. "Indian is how I was born," she has written, "Poetry is what I do." As she indicated elsewhere in a *Book Forum* article, this has made her adamant about labels like "Indian" literature, which can mislead the reader by directing attention away from art to inheritance. "My work is no more or less 'ethnic' than anyone else's." Everyone's work is saturated with ethnicity because our backgrounds are contexts for our work. "There is only literature written by people who are Indian and who, therefore, infuse their work with their own lives the same way that you do." For Rose, creating poetry is simultaneously and paradoxically an act of self-discovery and self-creation.

Lost Copper (Malki Museum Press, 1980), which collects poetry from her four previous volumes together with some new material, focuses this activity through the image of a journey of coming home to one's self. The book is framed to highlight the principle of creating identity via art, with a frontispiece affirming the rootedness of the poet's childsongs in Mother Earth and Hopi and an epilogue poem asserting her participation in an emerging community of voices: "Silko and Allen and Harjo and me" (129). On almost every page of *Lost Copper* Rose marks out a path of increased self-knowledge in the discovery of affinities, a visceral identification with particular places and moments. Something leaps out in us in response to a familiar voice calling from behind the mask of experience, a mask now transparent and permeable, which only a moment ago was opaque and impenetrable. What continually brings me back to Rose's poetry is that she knows things intimately, tells them over and over like beads, and fleshes them out with words of weight and color and substance and energy. In doing so, she gives body back to spirit and rescues the truth of the moment from the oblivious rush of experience.

The organizing principle of *What Happened When the Hopi Hit New York* (1982), Rose's most recent volume, which features poems

based on her travels, is the inextricable association between place and self. In Vermont she writes, "Here, too, the skin has been red" (27), and in New Hampshire she finds herself "Comparing kinds of desert" (28). In both cases she accepts the experience but measures it against an inchoate knowledge. She cannot be brought to identify herself with the place. The same is true for her visits to Iowa City, where her alienation and objectification through other, prejudiced eyes force her to "Maintain / without willing it / an Indian Invisibility" (16), and her hunger for substantiality forces her back to earth, to "swallow the river / that saves your life / endlessly brown and smooth" (13). So central to her person and art is the fact of this response to place that it is frequently imaged in terms of internalization. "Inlaid fragile on my bones / morning dips and shines" (9). Alienated in Ivy League Hanover, New Hampshire, she looks down to her lap to see her hands "moving back and forth, palms down / and fingers curled on cool stone, / dreaming the metate / and the maize within" (28).

But place, of course, is inseparable from time, and Rose's clock is always poised to measure the space between the tickings.

I am accustomed
with my western eyes
to extremes; the very ancient
or things new enough
to smell like carpet glue.
like that I have
balanced my bones
between the petroglyph
and the mobile home. (*What Happened* 26)

Bones. They are everywhere, scattered like runes or dice, the signature of the poet-archeologist. In one moment they represent her most essential self, the most basic structure of her being both as a person and as a poet. A slight change of perspective, however, reveals that the essential self is the historical self, that which remains after having endured the brutality of ages. Look again and the focus shifts to the very act of parting the bone and the flesh, as the bone comes finally to fix itself as the residuum of pain and calls up complementary images of flesh: "I expected my skin / and blood to ripen / not be ripped from my bones" (*Lost Copper* 14).

Bones are ubiquitous in Rose's poetry because they provide a metonymic locus for relationships to place and time that can then be caught up in a larger, coherent imagery of Body, both body as resource and body as residuum. Each aspect of body imagery complements the other. As a resource, it is visceral knowledge, felt pain or pleasure that motivates her poetry. "I began as a song or an agony, / a buzz

from the mother of tongues." "These words must be remembered / as butchered things, as bits of life / thrown down" (*Lost Copper* 69). As residuum, the fear of death is expressed as a fear that the poetic self, having become the self-consuming artifact, will exhaust itself or be annihilated by masks that smother its uniqueness and vitality:

death came carried by words
in weakening meter, in the false welcome
of parentheses, in the open mouth
of another dead poet's anthology. (*Lost Copper* 62)

The urgency of purpose with which this understanding of art endows Rose's writing is responsible in no small part, I think, for her great attention to her craft. Her poetic skills are evident on every page and are one of the greatest sources of pleasure in her work. Look, for instance, at how she accelerates the rhythm of "Potsherds" (*Lost Copper* 58). Note how the first period doesn't come until the end of four long, quiet lines: then come eight shorter lines, five of which have strong punctuation breaks to quicken them further; then comes the final solitary thirteenth line, which skates off on sibilance into infinity. Rose also has an excellent ear for sound. She can subtly modulate between back-vowel sounds: "You sang and murmured, water over stone, / a tumble of flute and drum and bamboo clacker" (*Lost Copper* 76).

Ironically, despite the vitality that the act of writing stimulates, because a poem is finally a made thing, a writer who identifies closely with the act of writing can feel that publication is a kind of death, a final chilling into print, the displacement from the made to the maker. In "The Poet as Unclaimed Corpse" she traces the life of the poet and poem:

I began as a song or an agony
a buzz from the mother of tongues,
I end like that, laid out in diagrams,
to be buried in a strange land. (*Lost Copper* 62)

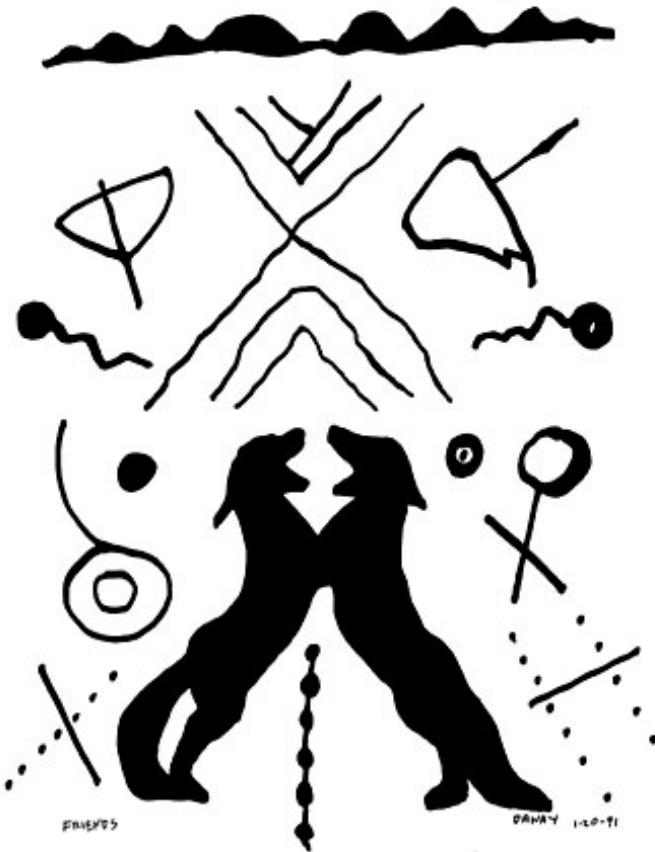
I suspect that the continual revision that marks Rose's poems when they reappear in subsequent volumes is an attempt to reaffirm the poetic self in a strategy of continual remaking that defeats the closure of print.

Wendy Rose is an energetic, continually active poet of rich and various gifts. One obviously does not exhaust such a voice in so small a space as this. There has been no room to talk about her wit, for instance. Take a look at the double reference for "Fault creep" in the third part of "Builder Kachina" (*Lost Copper* 124), or the way in which she as Indian-anthropologist reverses the cultural microscope to interpret the runic graffiti the "savages" have left on the New York City subways. One ought to consider more carefully the way she

adapts rather than adopts elements of her Hopi heritage as resources for her poetry. She resists summary and paraphrase, but in a poem she wrote about the buckeye tree (*Lost Copper* 69), a central resource to the Native Peoples of California, she has provided us with the best image of herself:

Survivor
Singer
Feeder
Doctor

And her art? Subsistence poetry, good medicine, food for the long journey home.



Paula Gunn Allen's "The One Who Skins Cats": An Inquiry into Spiritedness

Mary TallMountain

7.3 (Fall 1983): 69-75

It is true that the Native women of America have a unique quality of mystery. It is true that a Native woman is able to intuit the spirit lives of her blood sisters more deeply than are others. Paula Gunn Allen has done it notably. "This Wilderness in My Blood" clearly synthesizes the kinship of a spiritual catalyst working with the poetry of each of five Native American women poets. She reveals the source of this catalyst thus: "The sense of connectedness of all things, of the intelligent consciousness of all things, is the single most identifying characteristic of American Indian tribal poetry. . . ." She goes on to connect it with tribally inspired poetry of the world.

Such intuition is this poet's apprehension of a new, partially unpublished series encasing a triad of poems that explicate the roles and obligations of three famous Native women: Pocahontas, La Malinche, and Sacagawea.

The series is designed to call attention to the spiritedness that guided these and other Native women of American history, the true motives of women who comprehended and aided destiny and were misunderstood, even by their own people. In the alchemy of the latest and only long poem of the triad, she distills from the crucible of Sacagawea's life an elixir no less heady because of its spiritual thrust (though subtle and heretofore unsung) than any other we have found. Here is a dram of that elixir: Tom Rivington, a boy whom Sacagawea had influenced, says:

She never liked to stay or live where she could not see the mountains, for home she called them. For the unseen spirit dwelt in the hills, and a swift-running creek could preach a better sermon for her than any mortal could have done. Every morning she thanked the spirits for a new day.

Earth was her strength:

I am Chief Woman, Porvivo . . .
I am a grandmother of the Sun . . .
I am the woman who knows the pass and where
the wild food waits to be drawn from mother's breast.
I am Slave Woman, Lost Woman, Grass Woman, Bird
Woman—
and I come and go as I please.

There's more than one way
to skin a cat. That's what they say,
and it makes me laugh. Imagine me,
Bird Woman, skinning a cat.

Gunn Allen enters the secret life and thought of the fabled Shoshone "guide" of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with greater insight than have the historians who bestowed upon that life not only improbable motives but their typical suicidal concept of Western-Cowboy bravado. She contradicts the historians:

I didn't lead the whitemen, you know. I
just went along for the ride. And along the
way I learned what a chief should know
and because I did,
my own Snake people survived.

And what I learned I used. Every bit
of the whiteman's pride to make sure
my Shoshone people would survive
in the great survival sweepstakes of the day.
Maybe there was a better way to skin that cat,
but I used the blade that was put in my hand—
or my claw, I should say.

The fundamental quality of Sacagawea's existence was this: she was a woman of the people, who were the essence of the land called America: a woman of Earth. It was alive. It breathed into her. It spoke to her in infinite whispers and cries. It directed her destiny. The poet intuits that Sacagawea's spiritedness gave life to actions more probable than those ascribed by purported authorities. The quality of spiritedness underlies Allen's inquiry and speculations.

Such speculations concern attitudes of white women and the reactions of the tribal people (then and now). As she almost certainly did say at some point about white women, Sacagawea says here:

. . . those white women, suffragettes,
made me the most famous squaw in all creation.
You know why?

... they was tired of being nothing
themselves. They wanted to show how
nothing was really something of worth.
And that was me. Indian squaw,
pointing the way they wanted to go.

And about her people:

... so many of my own kind
call me names. Say I betrayed the Indians
into the whiteman's hand. They have a point,
but only one.
There's more than one way to skin a cat,
is what I always say.

... the things my Indian people call me now they got
from the white man, or, I should say, the white women.
Because it's them who said I led the whitemen into the
wilderness and back, and they survived the journey with
my care.

It's true they came like barbarian hordes after that, and
that the Indian lost our place.
We was losing it anyway.

Do you know my people laughed
when I told 'em about the whale?
Said I lied a lot,
said I put on airs.

Well, what else should a Bird Woman wear?

If her "own kind" called her liar then, if they rebuffed her, what would they say after a hundred years? No matter. Though she had been a slave child to the Hidatsa, had been taken from them by the gross and lusty backwoodsman Charboneau, had in turn been enslaved and buffeted by him, and had no obvious reason to do a favor for the Lewis and Clark Expedition, we see that her soaring vision grasped the immensity of past and future.

Akin was the motive of Malinal, by her people derogatorily dubbed La Malinche, in guiding Cortes:

... you,
paltry in your barbaric splendor, alone
could ride across the jungles and the hills
to the heart of Atzatlan.
Did you never wonder who it was that led
you, let you in? Did you never wonder why?
The hour is late, Cortes. And as I stood

and watched you strip my lovely king
great Montezuma of his gold, as I stood,
guiding your words and your soldiers
with my eyes as I had guided them with my
many-flavored tongue, I stand now
silent, still, and watch with great
Ciacahuatl as your time runs out.

The drive of Pocahontas was subtle, yet served the greater design:

Had I not cradled you in my arms
oh beloved perfidious one,
you would have died.
And how many times did I pluck you
from certain death in the wilderness—
my world through which you stumbled
as though blind?

. . . Tobacco.

It is not without irony that by this crop
your descendants die, for other
powers than you know
take part in this and in all things.

It is easy to surmise that, when she was freed, she avoided her people because they ridiculed and rejected her for cohabiting with Rolfe.

Similarly beaten down, Sacagawea insisted on rising. This is the path of the truly heroic. They forge past petty disbelievers toward the obligation, the commitment. It is as though they are possessed. As surely they are. This is the nature of those possessed by spiritedness.

The voice of Sacagawea sounds faintly out of the time of "great survival." But it carries a warning tone. An ironic tone. A humorous tone. Again we observe that the prophet's voice is not truly heard in her own country, nor in her own time, nor by her own people. Yet the prophet stands between the ages. It is necessary to reiterate truth in each succeeding generation. One truth is that for peoples of the world to come to harmony, we should hear attentively the cautionary words of poets and prophets. We need to hear the far, threadlike voice of a Sacagawea, and the more timely catalytic tones of a Gunn Allen, even through the dark needle's eye of time.

Sacagawea marched ahead of her people, behind the explorers. Wise enough to see that the way would be found in any event, she saw too that someone must point the way. Her eyes ranged beyond moonwalks, the space race, beyond nuclear fission.

She was a key to the wilderness. She kept faith with both peoples. Primarily she kept faith with herself and her obligation to the task that was hers. At that moment in history, she saw her obligation to point

the way without losing her private mystique: the mystery of mountain, creek, and spirits.

As Gunn Allen says about the five Native women poets and their blood sisters, "There is a permanent wilderness in the blood of an Indian, a wilderness that will endure as long as the grass grows and the wind blows, as long as the rivers flow and one Indian remains alive."

This permanent wilderness is a unique freedom and spiritedness. Such spiritedness pervaded the lives of these powerful women who showed us the way.

(This discussion focuses on "This Wilderness in My Blood: Spiritual Foundations of the Poetry of Five Indian Women," in *Coyote Was Here*, ed. Bo Schöler [University of Aarhus, Denmark, 1983], with reference also to work in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, both 6.3 [Fall 1981] and the special Native American Issue, "A Gathering of Spirit" [Summer 1983], treating Sacagawea, Pocahontas, and Malinal.)



Gerald Vizenor: Compassionate Trickster

A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff

9.2 (Spring 1985): 52-63

Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwe) is one of the most prolific Indian authors writing today. To have published so extensively in so many genres is a remarkable achievement for any author, Indian or non-Indian. Now primarily known as a prose writer, Vizenor began as a poet, publishing early in his career such volumes as *Raising the Moon Vines* (1964), *Summer in the Spring* (1965), *Empty Swings* (1967), and *Slight Abrasions* (1966; with Jerome Downes). His *Seventeen Chirps* (1965; unpaged) has rightly been praised by Louis Untermeyer as Haiku "in the best tradition" (book cover). Divided into poems on the four seasons, this collection contains such strikingly beautiful images as "Spider threads / held the red sumac still / Autumn wind" or "The quick wind / Drags the leaves like sled runners / Down the tin roof."

The major thrust of Vizenor's work—whether poetry, prose, or drama—is the examination of the interrelationships between the tribal and non-tribal worlds. His commitment to the traditional origins of his own Ojibwe heritage is reflected in two books: *anishinabe nagamon* (1965) and *anishinabe adisokan* (1970). The former is a collection of traditional Ojibwe songs that Vizenor reinterpreted, using Francis Densmore's literal translations and incorporating Ojibwe words. His delicate rephrasing is exemplified in these lines from a dream song:

sound of thunder
sometimes
i pity myself
while the wind carries me
across the sky, across the earth
everywhere
making my voice heard (54)

Vizenor focuses the reader's attention on the beauty of individual lines by placing each stanza on a separate page. Both *anishinabe nagamon* and *anishinabe adisokan*, reprinted in 1981 as *Summer in the Spring*:

Ojibwe Lyric Poems and Tribal Stories, are accompanied by notes, Ojibwe pictographs, and vocabulary.

anishinabe adisokan is a collection of traditional stories about Ojibwe life, customs, and religion originally published in the White Earth reservation newspaper *The Progress* (1887-88) edited by Theodore Beaulieu, Vizenor's great uncle. A valuable collection in itself, *anishinabe adisokan* is also important because it introduces several myths Vizenor incorporates into his own creative work. Among these is the myth about the origin of the most sacred Ojibwe rite, the midewiwin ceremony, that elucidates Vizenor's frequent references to the bear, cedar, and task of the culture hero. Another myth Vizenor uses in his later work is "Manabozho [The Ojibwe culture hero] and the Gambler."

Much of Vizenor's work deals with the struggles of the Ojibwe and other tribal peoples to cope with the dominant society. His poems published in *Voices from the Rainbow* (1975; hereafter VR) and *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back* (1983; hereafter Songs) voice themes that dominate his prose. In "Indians at the Guthrie," Vizenor vividly portrays the lives of contemporary urban Indians:

Once more at wounded knee
sniffing glue in gallop
sterno in bemidji
cultural suicides
downtown on the reservation. (VR 31; Songs 264)

As "Tribal Stumps" reveals, Vizenor's own father was destined to become one of these cultural suicides:

My father returns
with all the mixed bloods
tribal stumps
from the blood soaked beams of the city. (VR 32)

Vizenor vividly describes these struggles in four collections containing his news articles, essays, and stories: *The Everlasting Sky* (1972), *Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies* (1976), *Wordarrows* (1978), and *Earthdivers* (1981). The first two books consist primarily of Vizenor's news articles about contemporary Indian life on the reservation and in the city. The last two are fictional accounts of Indian-white relations organized around specific themes. In *Wordarrows*, Vizenor describes the "cultural word wars" in which "the arrowmakers and wordmakers survive the word wars with sacred memories while the factors in the new fur trade separate themselves in wordless and eventless social and political categories" (viii). In *Earthdivers*, he focuses on the modern earthdivers, descendants of the mythic earthdivers who dove below the

water to find a bit of earth to place on turtle's back. By blowing on the earth and casting it about, the Ojibwe culture hero created the world. For Vizenor these modern earthdivers are mixed-bloods, "tribal tricksters and recast cultural heroes, the mournful and whimsical heirs and survivors of that premier union between the daughters of the woodland shamans and white fur traders" (ix). These earthdivers "dive into unknown urban places now, into the racial darkness in the cities, to create a new consciousness of coexistence" (ix).

These four books contain memorable portraits of real people who defied yet finally were overcome by the dominant society. In "Buried in a Blue Suit" from *The Everlasting Sky* (reprinted in *Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies*), Vizenor pays tribute to John Ka Ka Geesick, traditional Ojibwe trapper who was both humiliated and immortalized by a white society that dressed him in a blue suit, turkey feather headdress, and green blanket for an official souvenir postcard photograph, and, after his death at age 124, insisted that he be buried in the same suit and given a Christian funeral service.

Especially moving is "Sand Creek Survivors" from *Earthdivers*, which describes the circumstances surrounding the death of 13-year-old Dane Michael White (Sioux), who hanged himself in a Minnesota jail. White had been jailed as a runaway for 41 days because the courts denied his request to live with his grandmother and could not decide where to put him. To emphasize the continuing assaults on tribal people by the dominant society, Vizenor intersperses his account with passages describing the massacres of the Cheyenne at Sand Creek and the Blackfeet at the Marias River and Black Elk's vision of destruction.

The case that fascinates Vizenor most is that of Thomas White Hawk, a Sioux premedical student originally condemned to death and then sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering an elderly white man and raping his wife. Vizenor suggests that White Hawk was driven to violence by cultural schizophrenia. White Hawk, neglected by his Indian parents and orphaned at 12, became the foster son of a rigid white guardian who set high goals for the young Sioux and abandoned him after his arrest. In *Thomas White Hawk* (1968) and *Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies*, Vizenor reprints his news articles on the case. In the "White Hawk and the Prairie Fun Dancers" section of *Wordarrows*, he recreates his investigation, providing vivid portraits of White Hawk, haunted by his crimes; the sheriff, determined to protect his prisoner from mob violence and his country from such Communist-front organizations as the Civil Liberties Union; and the minister's wife, infatuated with the imprisoned White Hawk. These portraits are some of Vizenor's best work.

Satire, however, is the genre Vizenor most frequently uses to convey the conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal worlds (Vizenor

uses the word *tribal* rather than *Indian* because it suggests a "celebration of communal values which connect the *tribal celebrants* to the earth" [*Earthdivers* xxi]). The closer Vizenor's satire is to reality the more effective it is. His stories in the "Downtown on the Reservation" section of *Wordarrows* chronicle the word wars between tribal peoples and the dominant society, wars Vizenor understands as a mixed-blood Ojibwe, who was raised both in Minneapolis and on his father's White Earth Reservation, and as the former director of a Minneapolis Indian Employment and Guidance Program. "Laurel Hole in the Day" vividly depicts the futility of such programs. The well-meaning director, presumably Vizenor, finds jobs and an apartment for an Ojibwe family newly arrived from White Earth, only to realize that his action has started them on the road to failure in the big city. Aware that their tribal friends and neighbors are eating them into the poorhouse, the couple moves to a white neighborhood, where loneliness drives them to the tribal bars for companionship. The wife, abandoned by her husband who has been fired for absenteeism, returns to her tarpaper shack on the reservation, where she is reunited with her husband and gives up her dream of urban paradise.

Vizenor's descriptions of the cultural wars ring true because he accurately depicts both the underlying causes of these wars and the nature of the wounds suffered by tribal peoples. Many of these wounds are self-inflicted, as Vizenor makes clear. In "Sociodowser" from *Earthdivers*, Vizenor describes the efforts of an Indian center to locate its vans, purchased with federal funds to transport Indians to industrial education classes but impounded by the state because they were used by center staff and clients for travelling bingo games and other businesses. Rallying to the cry of "Give us back our land and our vans," the center board hires a shaman to help in the search. For Vizenor the center has become "more like a colonial fort dependent on federal funds, than a place for visions and dreams in the new tribal urban world" (143).

Such self-destructiveness is not limited to tribal centers, as Vizenor demonstrates in his stories about the fate of tribal studies programs in academe. One of Vizenor's best stories in *Earthdivers* is "The Chair of Tears," which describes the efforts of Captain Shammer to auction the Department of Tribal Studies for sale to the highest bidder. Hired without interview, application, or academic credentials because the department wanted an unknown mixedblood, Shammer is renowned as the founder of the Half Breed Hall of Fame. Vizenor deftly satirizes the blood-quantum issue in such departments by describing Shammer's plan to hire Old Darkhorse as skin-color consultant. Founder of the *California Half Moon Bay Skin Dip*, Darkhorse darkens light-skinned

mixedbloods by dunking them in his Skin Dip.

Shammer is first to realize that rumors "about tribal troubles in higher education are the structural substitutes for adventures on the mythical frontier" (7). The character types who mount the assault are those who led the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s: Sarah Blue Welcome, a self-named white feminist and the first uninvited guest speaker at student protests for control of the tribal studies department; Four Skin, her full-blood Indian male hand puppet; Bad Mouth; Touch Tone, famous for long-distance calls to reservations; Fine Print; and Token White. Vizenor all too accurately depicts the administrative and student pressures that have led to the destruction of such departments.

Entrepreneurship is not limited to tribal studies programs. Ingenious mixed-bloods establish business empires in the city and on the reservation. One such entrepreneur is Martin Bear Charme, a Turtle Mountain Ojibwe from North Dakota, who hitchhiked to San Francisco to study welding under a federal relocation program. After he abandoned welding, he hauled refuse to a worthless mudflat, where he established his own Landfill Meditation Reservation, now worth millions. A philosopher as well as businessman, Martin also teaches a seminar on Landfill Meditation.

In Vizenor's unpublished screenplay *Harold of Orange*, Harold Sinseer exhibits similar enterprise. Previously successful in persuading a foundation to finance his miniature orange grove (a potted orange tree), Harold now seeks \$200,000 to grow a coffee grove (a potted coffee tree). Harold predicts that coffee will revolutionize the tribal world. He persuades his warriors that reservation coffee beans will saturate the world market and disrupt international coffee markets, and he convinces foundation board directors that coffee will both block the temptation of tribesmen to drink alcohol and foster radical political discussions in reservation coffee houses. Harold has cast off the role of street radical and speaker in church basements: "The money was good then, but the guilt has changed, so here we are dressed in neckties. . . . The new tribal entrepreneurs of the oranges and pinch beans . . ." (11). Harold asks only that the foundation give him funds to "market pinch beans in peace . . . as long as the rivers flow and the grass grows . . ." (17). As one of the foundation directors realizes by the end of the play, Harold, with his fry bread, oranges, and coffee, is really in the traditional breakfast business. Vizenor's screenplay won the Minnesota Film-in-the-Cities award and has been made into a 30-minute film starring Oneida comedian Charlie Hill in the title role.

The most complex of Vizenor's works is *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978), a satirical and allegorical epic cycle that combines elements of classical and Western European epics and American Indian

oral narratives. The protagonist is the culture hero/shaman Proude Cedarfair. In his quest for ritual knowledge, Cedarfair journeys across the United States, whose culture has been destroyed by the disappearance of energy resources. Cedarfair moves backward in time to achieve harmony with nature. Vizenor's descriptions of the four worlds of Indian people combine the emergence and migration myths of Southwestern tribes with the flood myths of the Algonkin-speaking tribes. Cedarfair begins his journey in the third world, which evil spirits have filled with contempt for the living and fear of death. He must reach the fourth world, in which these spirits will be outwitted by using the secret languages of animals and birds. Accompanying Cedarfair on his journey is a bizarre collection of followers who represent various figures from Indian mythology, as well as human vices and virtues. Episodes in the novel denote stages of the ritual quest and incidents occur without explanation, as they do in American Indian hero cycles.

In his books and in his screenplay, Vizenor uses many other aspects of American Indian oral traditions. He embeds traditional myths in his novel and his stories. For example, in *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, the epic battle for life waged between Belladonna Winter Catcher and Cedarfair and the evil gambler Sir Cecil Staples, monarch of unleaded gasoline, is an updated version of the Ojibwe myth "Nanabozho and the Gambler" that Vizenor includes in *anishinabe adisokan*. Vizenor uses an animal-husband myth in his stories of Lillith Mae Farrier's sexual relationship with her boxers, included in both *Wordarrows* and *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*.

Vizenor also uses the traditional Indian motif of transformation. This is exemplified in his novel by Bishop Omas Parasimo's penchant for wearing "metamasks" of other pilgrims' faces. Animal, especially bear, transformation appears more frequently than any other form. Vizenor makes clear the significance of this to his work by citing *Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere*, in which A. Irving Hallowell states that animals are believed to have essentially the same sort of animating agency as man: "They have a language of their own, can understand what human beings say and do, have forms of social or tribal organization, and live a life which is parallel in other respects to that of human societies" (quoted in "Sociodowser," *Earthdivers* 145). Vizenor's emphasis on bear transformation is explained by that animal's role as the renewer of Ojibwe life in their mide ceremony. In *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, two characters possess bear power: Cedarfair, who speaks with the voice of the bear and takes on bear form permanently after he reaches the fourth world, and Zebulon Matchi Makwa (Wicked Bear), a talking writer and drunken urban

shaman who offends everyone with his foul stench. In *Earthdivers*, those with this power are Martin Bear Charme and Father Berald One, the shaman who dreams of blue birds and bears, dresses as a priest, and wears an overshoe on one foot.

The trickster/transformer figure from Indian oral literatures pervades Vizenor's recent work. Although the trickster as mixed-blood entrepreneur is one of Vizenor's favorite subjects, Vizenor also creates characters who reflect other aspects of the trickster. For example, in *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, Beneto Saint Plumero (also known as Bigfoot) possesses the enormous genitals and sexual appetite of the traditional trickster. Vizenor even portrays himself as a compassionate trickster. In both *Earthdivers* and *Wordarrows*, the author often appears as Clement Beaulieu, wise fool, truth speaker, and storyteller, or as Erdupps MacChurbbs, "shaman sprite from the tribal world of woodland dreams and visions" (88).

Vizenor prefers to appear in his work as an observer rather than as central character. An exception to this occurs in one of Vizenor's best works: "I Know What You Mean, Erdupps MacChurbbs: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors" in *Growing Up in Minnesota: Ten Writers Remember Their Childhoods*, edited by Chester Anderson (1976). Vizenor reveals episodes from his childhood and adolescence that provide insights into his sensitivity to the plight of urban Indians who suffer and sometimes die (as did his father) in the back alleys of Minneapolis-St. Paul. Because so little has been written about the problems of Indian children in the city, the essay is an important contribution to our understanding of how an urban mixed-blood survives youthful traumas. The essay also reveals Vizenor's early ability to create characters to act out his fantasies. The advice to Vizenor from his imaginary companion MacChurbbs captures the author's stance in much of his prose: "You have given too much thought in your life to the violence of terminal believers! Show more humor and give your self more time for the little people and compassionate trickery."

Vizenor's work demonstrates considerable range. The strength of his work is his ability to depict with accuracy and humor the contrarities in Indian-white relations. In Vizenor's view, whites invented "Indian" as a new identity for tribal peoples in order to separate them from their ancient tribal traditions. To survive this cultural genocide, tribal peoples responded by inventing new pan-Indian creeds, ceremonies, and customs that have blinded them and whites to their true tribal heritages. Only through the visions and dreams of tricksters and shamans can both Tribal Peoples and whites be led to truth. As a compassionate trickster, Vizenor sees his literary role as that of illuminating both the sham of contemporary "Indianness" and the power of vision and dream to restore tribal values.

Blackening the Robe

Maurice Kenny

4 (Fall 1985): 153-58

Writing historical novels is not an easy task, yet Walter Edmonds, Thomas Berger, Willa Cather, John Neihardt, and now Bruce Burton are among a few of the writers who have been successfully teased. Walter D. Edmonds' classic, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, is not only a good read with solid characters, credible accuracy of research, but, and most important, continues to fascinate new readers with its lively narrative and fresh and vivid language. Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* is doubtlessly a comic-satire masterpiece. In these works the reader is not only carried along by depth of character, conflict, and plot, but also by the accurate information about historical setting. The ease with which the wheels turn in such fiction is deceiving, however, and the reader often forgets the struggle and the sweat an author of an historical fiction must endure to produce a work of art. With novels by Edmonds, Cather, or Berger you never pause and think about their source material. It has all been thoroughly examined, digested, and re-produced artistically.

Which brings us to Brian Moore's newest fiction, *Blackrobe*. Moore is a Catholic Irishman who emigrated to Canada some years back but now spends much of his time living in California. He has written fifteen other novels, including the internationally acclaimed *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and *The Luck of Ginger Coffee*, both novels of genuine interest and strong characterization, somewhat short on plot but good studies of human frailty. With *Blackrobe*, he prods into the dark past. He admits in a preface that while reading the essays of Graham Greene he discovered a Jesuit priest by the name of Chabanel who struck his fancy and carried his thoughts into researching Parkman for additional information. Parkman's *Jesuits in North America* sent him scurrying deeper into the prime source itself, the Jesuits' famed *Relations*. Ah, the treasures he discovered, some so brilliant and smoldering: hot coals from a village fire that Parkman had

not dared to retell and legitimize in his histories except through smutty suggestion. Moore discovered the "lascivious Savage" (his words), his scatological word usage, his penchant to lust and his wallow in blood, human and animal. Moore also discovered the Indian's intelligence, his disapproving, often obscene, comments on the European and the Jesuit in particular, and the Indian's distaste for the European's chicanery, greed, and physical weakness, among other lesser attributes. He discovered the Indian lied to the whiteman but would not lie to his own. The life of the village, the Nation, totally depended upon truth. The life of the European, the French, the Normans, or the Jesuits were unimportant to the Indian. He came only for furs and the pleasure of their women's flesh. Then he would return to his land in "wooden islands" as soon as both needs were satisfied. But Moore, I fear, was as duped by the Jesuits' *Relations* as the Jesuits were duped by the French Crown and the Indian caciques. Moore obviously became enthralled with the Jesuit records and mainly those that established for the Church the "lascivious Savage," his lust, his total lack of inhibitions, and his craze for cruelty—even admitting, which Moore does admit, that the Indian took special care not to harm his children, not a hair of the head or a cheek of the rump.

Blackrobe contains the most impossible characterization since the dime novels of the Nineteenth Century. The dialogue is as flat and un-human as Walt Disney animated animals—if you can imagine Pluto and Minnie Mouse using four-letter words. And here there is an oddity. Brian Moore allows only his Indian characters to use obscene profanity that might make a Brooklyn dock-worker shudder. His Europeans are utterly saint-voiced. They may think obscenities but never give them life by lip or tongue. In his reading of the *Relations*, Moore states in the Preface, he discovered that all the Indians of the Americas often spoke scatologically. To quote, "As for the obscene language used by the natives at that time it was a form of rough banter and was not intended to give offense." Here is a sample of the speech Moore puts in the mouths of the Algonquians:

"You're a great little fart," Neehatin said.

"What a fucking wonderful mind this man has," Ougebemat said.

"Have you told that fart of a Blackrobe? . . . He's going to shit himself."

"Fuck the Blackrobe," Neehatin said.

Instead of coming off as rough banter, this comes off offensive.

An excellent occasion for having Father Laforgue (the name Moore uses for Chabanel for unknown reasons) use obscenities is during a scene when the good Jesuit is observing his young companion with his

intended girlfriend in the bush. The boy sodomizes the young Indian girl. The priest is on his knees and his thoughts are presented to us. As the boy thrusts his flesh into the flesh of the girl, Laforgue is riveted to the action:

And Laforgue, peering through the leaves, saw it all, saw her nakedness, her pointed breasts almost touching the ground, her face contorted as though in pain. And as he saw it he tried to still his own agitation. He watched and watched, afraid of being seen, his mind flooded with this vision of lust. He felt his penis swell and stiffen until it hurt. He moved his head a little, peering in, not wanting to miss the next thrust of the boy's loins. And to his shock and excitement it was as though he were the boy, rearing above the Savage girl. . . .

What comment is Brian Moore attempting here? Such a passage seems purposefully pornographic. It may sell novels. The ploy worked with Ruth Beebe Hill's *Hanta Yo*, so why not try it again with a Jesuit priest? All is fair when making money.

But the most bothersome feature of *Blackrobe* remains the dialogue. There is little doubt today that in the traditional, ancient languages of all tribal peoples of all times, there was "rough banter" of speech, obscenity used in play or ridicule. Romans used it in their poetry. Catullus shows the Egyptians had phallic sculpture and temple wall drawings, suggesting they, too, could speak bluntly. Obscenity is even found in the Bible. In 1985 we realize cursing is common, and we expect to find it in our literatures, whether in novels by James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, William Burroughs, or Brian Moore. Four-letter words are now accepted and expected. But Brian Moore does commit a sin with his peculiar use of such language, the sin of omission, of stereotyping, of racial discrimination, in trying to shore up weak dialogue. This bespeaks the weakness of the whole novel.

It is flagrantly wrong to compare Moore's *Blackrobe* to the novels of Edmonds, Cather, or Berger. This is a novel that should be embarrassing to white readers and red readers alike, even though it has been highly praised in both *The New York Times* and *Time Magazine*. For shame.

Topic of Transformation: Some Aspects of Myth and Metaphor

Susan Lepselter

10.3 (Summer 1986): 148-60

Emerson wrote, "Man is an analogist and studies the relations in all objects. He is placed at the center of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him." To some extent, our idea of the artist, and especially of the poet, is as a superior analogist who draws connections between nature and the psyche, and between discrete objects in nature. It does seem likely that art arises, in part, out of the desire to respond to what Wallace Stevens called "resemblances" in the world. Even the most basic form of authorship—dreaming—makes sense of experience by identifying seemingly random objects with one another. A world constructed of analogy is the opposite of chaotic, and the artistic process is an attempt to defeat chaos. We order the world by elaborating on the patterns we perceive and by making new patterns in stylized works of art.

How does analogy function in the literatures of cultures whose perspectives are highly different from our own? The assertion that "man is placed at the center of beings" would most likely seem off-center to an American Indian. Paula Gunn Allen has observed, "No Indian would take his perception to be the basic unit of consciousness in the universe." Radical distinctions between our cultures' worldviews obviously appear in the respective literatures, and I want to begin to look at some of these distinctions as literary differences.

However, it is also possible to explore similarities between what I will call the "Western" and the Indian traditions. The "mythical" and the "metaphoric" imaginations seem to share some essential features, and their common ground produces an interesting model for reading the literatures of both worlds. In the first part of this paper, I want to raise some general comparisons between myth and metaphor. In the second part, I will attempt a reading of the Zuni Emergence Myth, remaining aware of the foreignness of these comparisons but using my

experience of the literature of my own tradition as a preliminary entryway to understanding.

Although it is often said that Indian texts do not use metaphor, I want to look at an Indian chant and at part of a narrative that betray a sophisticated mastery of metaphoric vision. Neither text uses metaphor directly, but each produces an effect that is related to it.

The Wintu chant below uses visual analogy to arrive at a cosmological vision:

It is above that you and I shall go;
Along the Milky Way you and I shall go;
It is above that you and I shall go;
Along the Milky Way you and I shall go;

It is above that you and I shall go;
Along the flower trail you and I shall go;

Picking flowers on our way you and I shall go.

In this poem, the Milky Way and the flower trail are paths that "shall" be walked at some unknown, future time. The repetition of the first line, and the subsequent, sudden change of the line that follows it—from "Along the Milky Way you and I shall go" to "Along the flower trail you and I shall go"—identify the flower trail with the Milky Way. Like the Milky Way, its location is "above." In other words, the poem calls the Milky Way a flower trail, and it is an easy image to envision, the path of stars strewn out like flowers.

This metaphor is highly suggestive, establishing a connection between the celestial and the earthly. While the first two lines are concerned with the heavens, the last line, "Picking flowers you and I shall go," is entirely earthly; indeed, it is the only line in the poem *not* preceded by "It is above." Nevertheless, this final line returns to the high register of the first, "celestial" stanza when it is sung—an effect that probably helps the listener to associate picking flowers on earth with walking the Milky Way. The beauty of the earthly activity is thus instilled with the significance of the cosmic one; there is no radical split between the pleasures. The rather abstract image of walking the Milky Way becomes concrete and familiar, embodied with the color and aroma implied in the final line. The chant, finally, links heaven and earth through the resemblance of the Milky Way to a trail of flowers.

The visual analogy and identity that are common to mythical narratives are similarly akin to metaphor. For example, the Blackfeet Genesis Myth tells us that:

Old Man . . . lay on his back, stretched himself out on the ground, with his arms extended, he marked himself out with stones—the shape of his body, head, legs,

everything. You can see those rocks today. . . . He . . .
 stumbled over a knoll and fell on his knees . . . so he
 raised up two large buttes there, and called them the
 Knees, and they are called so to this day.

This mythical episode is clearly a response to the shape of a landscape. To the Blackfeet imagination, the land looks like a human form. A poet of the Western tradition, similarly struck, might write a line such as "the buttes are knees." Both devices—the metaphor and the myth-story—engage in transformation; in each case, a bare landscape changes into a human shape.

Like metaphor, mythical transformation evokes a variety of meanings, based on the specific images that are used. For example, the Sioux genesis, like many genesis stories, conceives of the earth transformed into a human form as the origin of the species. A 1933 version of the myth contains a self-conscious awareness of the multiple levels of the tale. The last line of that version is "we are of the soil and the soil is of us." Identifying land with a human body is a comment on the relationship between human beings (in this case, specifically Sioux) and the earth.

In the Western tradition, the *poem* transforms the natural world into images, and the poet's imagination is the "center" through which the "rays of relation" pass. But the mythical imagination does not present the mythteller as the center. Although the teller shapes the narrative, his individual influence creates a *relationship* between him and a pre-existing—indeed, sacred and ancient—text.

Just as the current telling of the myth exists in relation to past tellings, the myth re-enacts transformations that happened "once" or "long ago." The mythical image, presented as having "happened," relies on temporal language to evoke the past. However, ritual tellings recreate the events and transformations of the myth, so that the past transcends itself and reoccurs in the present. Metaphor, as well, transcends time in making its transformations.

We do not repeat metaphor ritually; it remains atemporal within itself. We understand Toelken's confusion when he asks whether the jaguar really had amber eyes; however, no one would ask a poet, "Are your lover's lips *really* roses?" We accept the metaphorical statement as both figurative and true; we even acknowledge that some poetic truths are "deeper," somehow, than those that can be expressed unmetaphorically. However, we depend upon metaphor to express our conventional division between that which is "image" and that which is "occurrence." Perhaps the imagery of myth—imagery that occurs—is, in a sense, poetic language that fully believes its own transformations, its own power.

The treatment of time and transformation in the Zuni emergence

myth is especially rich. I am familiar with three versions of the myth: translations by Ruth Benedict in her *Zuni Myths* and Ruth Bunzel in the *47th Annual Report of the Bureau of Indian Affairs* and by Dennis Tedlock in *Finding the Center*. I will base my discussion largely on the translations by Benedict and Tedlock. However, it is worth noting that while each of the three versions differs in detail and in tone, they all share a basic model: that the ancestors of present Zuni emerged, slimy and physically unfinished, from the fourth world, a region of chaos and utter darkness. As Tedlock notes, the tiered structure of the universe exists before the beginning of the tale. The people of the fourth world have apparently been living in chaos forever. However, the static frame of the myth is continually placed in relation to motion and process.

Birth imagery is strong in each of the versions. The People emerge from a place that is womblike, dark and without personal boundary, and once they arrive in the "daylight world" they are as helpless as infants, ignorant of all social custom. Significantly, in the Zuni language, according to Bunzel, the word for "daylight"—*tekohanane*—is the word for "life." And a Zuni commented to Tedlock that the emergence of the Moss People suggests the process of human evolution. Since this teller of the myth in 1965 was most certainly aware of evolution, the relevance of the concept is worth serious consideration. In both the Bunzel and the Tedlock versions, people change into water animals and then back into human beings; though the plasticity of species is common in myth, here the imagery seems to possess special importance. It adds to the image. An idea evolution can incorporate is the birth of the infant and its development into a nostalgic adult, the birth of the people Zuni, and a spiritual evolution from chaos to harmony. These themes are intertwined inextricably in the Zuni emergence myth. It would be artificial to select one strand from this weaving, instead of allowing the idea of "birth" to retain the fullness of all its dimensions, as it does if we admit some kind of evolutionary theme as central to the myth.

Certainly, the theme of evolution is most apparent in the Tedlock version of the myth, which may, therefore, reflect the impact of Western ideas upon the Native reading. In Tedlock, we learn that the first three "rooms" of people failed the Sun: they did not appreciate his divinity, neglected to offer him cornmeal, and were, therefore, not allowed to survive. It is as if only the children who work their way up from darkness are able to appreciate the Sun and their debt to him; in other words, the *process* of their emergence is essential to their final state. This process is long and deliberate. At each level of ascent, the People must pause for four days (years); they have to adjust to the

light, to incorporate each stage of enlightenment, before they can continue to the next.

In the Tedlock version, the idea of process is repeated in the Ahayuuta's activity within the fourth world. The twins are markedly different here from those in the Benedict version, where they are more simply drawn hero figures. The Benedict Ahayuuta descend to the fourth world out of pity and heroic impulse, and though prayer is essential to their success in bringing the People up to daylight, their journey is not particularly arduous. Though Benedict's myth tells us that the twins "need" the priests, they themselves know how to ascend to the daylight world.

In the Tedlock version, however, the twins must engage in a formal and lengthy process of preparation for the ascent. After their descent—undertaken not of their own impulse, but because the Sun commanded it—they have no idea how to find the way back up. They are supposed to lead the People, but they cannot find the "road." They must go from priest to priest, repeating the same words; they seem to be rousing the priests from a long sleep. Each priest is approached in a pre-ordained, particular order: "You were the next to be spoken of," they say.

The repeated activity at the priests' houses has at least three effects. First, it establishes the power of the priests. Their knowledge is magical and indispensable to the emergence. According to Bunzel's ethnographic report, the priests are the most powerful figures in the Zuni social structure; they are "the real political authority of the tribe." The role they play in the emergence, then, expresses and reinforces their political authority.

The second effect of the Ahayuuta's journey from priest to priest is to comment on the power of ritual chant itself. The Ahayuuta's words are a ritual chant within the chant of the Beginning, and it is the process of the Ahayuuta's ritual—"the WORD of some importance"—that, along with the prayer-sticks, will be crucial to bringing the People up out of chaos and darkness.

The third effect is clearly to align the twins with the Moss People. Blinded and confused, their quest and peril are as urgent as those of the people they must guide. "Extraordinary persons we are not," they insist. Since their own birth was a "sprouting," they are like these people of the fourth world, these seeds pushing their way up through the earth—and also like chant itself, which "sprouts" in "strings of song" at the end of the chant. There is a moment in the myth when the twins have just entered the fourth world, and, in the instant of light, before they are forced to extinguish their torch, they glimpse a stooped, slime-covered man. We can imagine the terror and confusion of the twins, who were born and bred in sunlight. It seems that they have

descended in order to re-emerge themselves, as well as to guide the People. Their journey thereby acquires a resonance that a westerner must regard as a kind of inner redemption.

In the fourth world, the People urinate on each other, step on each other, and are blind; the priests live in isolated houses; the Moss People have no mouths or anuses, and their hands and feet are blocked with webbing. The impression is of people who are hermetically sealed, radically cut off from natural rhythms and social intercourse. Without the rising and setting of the sun, this fourth world is an embodiment of static time, nontime as well as hermetic space.

Time and reciprocity are introduced with the People's entrance into the daylight world. They are forced to look into the sun, and the tears that flow from their eyes become flowers, which emerge from the earth like the People themselves. The People's vision of the sun has the effect of including them in the natural processes of the earth. The flowers are the products of their bodies; they have been engaged in the growth of plants and have thereby entered into a "magical" relationship with nature. At this stage, they are still innocents, in a period of transition between the fourth world's darkness and a time when they will become "used to" the rising and setting of the sun.

The image of the People as sealed, without mouths or anuses, is destroyed when the twins cut them. The People are literally and figuratively opened up, given organs that allow them to ingest corn and to expel it. The cutting initiates them into the cycle of earthly production and makes them dependent on the earth. Eating and expelling, they become intensely corporeal figures; it is evident that mortality will soon be introduced.

Their fingers, newly freed to pound cornmeal, intensify the imagery of fluidity. The pounding of cornmeal, as opposed to the simple gathering of food, is a fundamental sign of Zuni ordered social life. Perhaps relatedly, cornmeal is also the food that is sacrificed to the Sun. Thus, stasis, isolation from nature, and social disorganization are parallel conditions, as are, conversely, fluidity, integration with nature, and social order. Life is expressed by boundaries; no one steps on a neighbor in the daylight world.

The present world, as a state of detail, immediacy, color, and distinction, is presented as desirable, a condition that had been dreamed of and was attained with effort. The longing for the sun, for life, is deeply rooted, even fundamental—it is what makes the Moss People seem human in the fourth world. The Zuni vision of the current world as the outcome of an *ascent* contrasts sharply with the Judeo-Christian idea, in which the static, atemporal realm is a pinnacle from which we fell into the present world. One is similarly struck by the contrast with

Plato's allegory of the cave, which envisions the present world as dark and unreal, something like the fourth world, from which we must still strive to emerge. The Zuni idea, however, positions mortal life as the brightest and most desirable condition.

In fact, it is difficult to distinguish between the pre-birth world of the Moss People and the world of the dead. The people in the fourth world are below earth, covered with dirt and ashes, and slimy as if they were beginning to decompose. In addition, the twins' descent to the fourth world, and their mission of bringing the People up to daylight, suggests a relationship between the emergence myth and the Indian Orpheus myths. It seems most accurate, therefore, to place the fourth world not as strictly "before" (or "after") life, but rather as *opposed to life*. The darkness of the fourth world is the antithesis of *tekohanane*.

However, it is impossible to ignore the dark undercurrent within the myth, the intimation of the fourth world that slips into the daylight. The myth recognizes what might simultaneously be called *thanatos* and the desire to return to the state before birth. One is reminded of the Nez Perce Orpheus myth, in which Coyote enjoys the death lodge and does not want to leave; in that story, Coyote's attempt to return suggests that he longs not only for his wife, but for the entire death-world he had discovered. Analogously, in the Zuni beginning, the child who dies must live at the place of emergence.

In the Zuni emergence myth, birth leads to separation. Birth is not the estrangement of the fourth world, which is a sealed-off confusion, but is rather the pain that accompanies consciousness and distinction. The second part of the emergence myth presents an emotion that is very like the ambiguous and free-floating nostalgia of lyric poetry. Something is missing; the people are "lonely." The myth recognizes a desire for symbiosis, and also, I will suggest, offers a remedy for existential loneliness.

The separation anxiety that follows the emergence is experienced as abandonment by the Corn Mothers. This is expressed as the fault of the children, who were "irresponsible" and "lost sight of" the Mothers, and it is the children who must restore the bond. There is an urgency to *return*, not to the fourth world, but to a perfect condition that in fact *has never occurred in the myth*. The feeling that human beings are insufficient without the Corn Mothers, and the desire to create a tie to divinity, appear in the chant as unmediated loss and nostalgia. These emotions are finally resolved through ritual itself. The People fast and pray, and they follow the directions for "the way you will live." They are thus able to find their mother. "Because this happened," the narrative tells us, "The Corn Mothers came back." The Zuni people maintain "the way" in the present to sustain a relationship

with the Corn Mothers. The chant is thus both a chronicle of, and a vehicle for, the development from unconsciousness to a painful consciousness, and finally to establish and sustain a mutually reciprocal relationship with nature and the divine.

The ritual itself thus offers reparation. Its words and gestures first allow the People to emerge into daylight, and afterwards it is ritual that makes daylight tolerable. The chant of the beginning thus recharges itself with each telling: its words create a center that each of the Zuni need to find, again and again.

To suggest such a metaphorical reading of the Zuni emergence myth as this is not to suggest an allegorical one. Rather, such a reading assumes that the myth's details are many-leveled, expressive of various planes of emotion and experience. It considers the myth as an artistic, as well as religious, endeavor.

The anthropologist Malinowski writes that myth is "not an . . . artistic imagery" but rather a charter of "a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants and moral questions." Certainly these myths address religious apprehensions. However, we must question Malinowski's automatically assumed distinction between "aesthetic" and "religious." Even in the poetry of secular cultures, such a distinction is often unclear, and many Indian myths are powerful because "aesthetic" and "religious" often appear as aspects of a common desire: the human urge for order and for connection, or what might be thought of, in fact, as cosmological analogy.



Earth's Mind

Roger Dunsmore

10.4 (Fall 1986): 187-202

The idea of earth's mind comes from a statement made by Chief Joseph, Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekht, Thunder Traveling to Loftier Mountain Heights, in early May 1877, at the last council between the Nez Perce Indians and representatives of the U.S. government before the outbreak of what has come to be called the Nez Perce War. What was at issue were conflicting claims to the land. The government was there to "encourage" the Nez Perce to give up life on their ancestral homelands, including the Joseph Band's beautiful Wallowa Valley, for survival on the Fort Lapwai Reservation. Joseph, not a major spokesman at this council, made this statement:

The earth and I are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies is the same. . . . If I thought you were sent by the Creator I might be induced to think you had a right to dispose of me. Do not misunderstand me, but understand me fully with reference to my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with as I chose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who created it. I claim the right to live on my land and accord you the privilege to live on yours.

"The earth and I are of one mind"—this powerful statement comes toward us across the barriers of translation and time. It raises questions for us: how is it that the earth has mind? How is it that a man might share in that mind, or have "one mind" with the earth? What is that one mind that both Joseph and the earth are of? What is "mind" anyway?

After nearly twenty years of working with American Indian materials, I am clearly aware of one rule. In order to understand American Indian cultures, as well as American Indian experiences of

the world, it is necessary to take their statements seriously. Men like Joseph all over this continent, both in the past and at the present time, mean what they say and say what they mean. Translation difficulties aside, and these are no small matter, they speak from a highly developed oral tradition of which they are masters. Masters! And they speak from circumstances in which absolutely everything that they know and love and are is at stake. It is not "romantic primitivism" or political rhetoric or poetical metaphor that we get from these speakers. It is the power and spirit and mystery of voice, primal voice, raised to its highest, finest level, in defense of ways of life that include not only oneself and one's people, but one's ancestors, the unborn, the land itself, and all the various forms of life through which the land expresses itself. It is a voice in defense of all this and much more that we do not begin to understand at a historical moment when it all is about to come under the domination of a numerically and technologically superior people who, according to their own testimony, have lost their souls.

We think Joseph didn't really mean to say that the earth has mind. We think he talked in that way for effect—that it was just his way of indicating his deep connection to the earth. "Metaphorical" is our modern term that *explains* how it is that Joseph thought or spoke this way. We miss him.

The earth and I are of one mind.

It is axiomatic for me that our explanations of how other people think are laden with our own values. Such thinking does violence to other people's experiences. Our explanations are exhibitions of how we think other people think—not examples of other people's thinking. The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, near the end of his brilliant essay "The Thing," tells us that the first step towards the sort of "vigilance" that allows the things of this world to be themselves again "is the step back from the thinking that merely . . . explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls."

It is interesting to note that in most historical reconstructions of the last council of the Nez Perce and the U.S. government, Joseph's speech is omitted. Recently, I ran across a newer text in which it was included, but the opening statement, "The earth and I are of one mind," had been excised. Always, the tendency is to leave out and ignore that which we do not want to understand because it does not meet with our assumptions about what is real. The failure of white society to understand what it is that Indian peoples all over this continent have been and are still saying to them lies in our inability to step back from our explanations of their statements and cultures and take them at face value. We don't want to understand "The earth and I are of one mind," because for us the earth does not have mind. We have put

great stock both in the special province of the human mind's superiority over any and all other so-called manifestations of it and in the anticipation of our future in outer space (being in the process of totally defoliating the earth in order to construct larger, more sophisticated machines, eat higher on the food chain, and engage more continuously in petty, but massive power struggles).

All this leads us to consider just what we mean by *mind*. What is mind? And who has it? What does it mean to have mind? John Swanton, an Alabama Creek Indian and anthropologist writing early in this century, sheds some light on this experience of mind to which Joseph speaks:

The world and all it contained were the products of mind and bore everywhere the marks of mind. Matter was not something which had given birth to mind, but something which had formerly been mind. Something from which mind had been withdrawn, was quiescent, and out of which it might again be roused. This *mind* was visibly manifested in the so-called "living things" as plants, and . . . animals. . . . This might come to the surface at any time and it did so particularly to the fasting warrior, the knower, and the doctor. Indeed, the importance of these last two types of people lay in their ability to penetrate to the human life [or mind, I would say] within the mineral, plant, and animal life of nature and to bring back from that experience knowledge of value in ordering the lives of their fellow human beings. . . . Mind was . . . recognized as everywhere of the same nature.

Swanton is clear in his assertion that matter and mind are not separate—"matter was something which had formerly been mind"—and in his statement of the ability of certain types of people to go within the matter of the world, to link there with the mind in things, and to bring back from that experience or journey "knowledge of value in ordering the lives of their fellow human beings." Mind is not, in this world-view, the special province of human beings, and human beings must not isolate themselves from the mind residing in "the mineral, plant, and animal life of nature," lest the human mind so isolated become impoverished and imbalanced. Species extinction, then, can be seen as a permanent form of impoverishment of our own conscious possibilities, i.e., our very domination of other forms of life cuts us off from potential sources of renewal, redirection, and order. We are left at the mercy of our own self-created orders.

This journey out into the mind that resides within the mineral, plant, and animal lives of nature is actually a union of two journeys taken simultaneously. It is also a journey inward, for in our vast

evolutionary journey to ourselves we have travelled through other life forms. Our oldest ancestors, back through other mammals and reptiles and fish, are not absent. We carry within ourselves all the forms of life through which we've journeyed in becoming human, and when Swanton speaks of the ability to go out into the "mind" in other forms of life, and when Joseph refers to sharing the mind of the earth, I think they also mean that they have journeyed to the spider, rock, and reptilian consciousness residing within themselves and within all of us. Hail to the reptilian brain still residing underneath the lush growth of cerebral cortex encasing it! When we deny other life forms, we deny those parts of ourselves that were formed in our journey through them. Who has not emerged from the dark world through a hollow log?

But we have not worked with the question of what we mean by mind. What is it, this mind that we place so much stock in, and that Joseph shares with the earth? Turning to Webster, we find that *mind* derives from the old Indo-European base word *mem*, "to think." And what does that mean, to think? Again from Webster, we find the Indo-European base word *tong*, "to thank." In the origins of our own culture, then, we discover the ancient connection between *think* and *thank*. How are we to understand that linkage? Is true thinking thanking? Is thanking the primal form of thinking? Is the thinking that constitutes mind in our own origins the recognition of all that to which we are indebted for our bones, our skins, our tongues? To lose this primal linkage between thinking and thanking, between mind and thankfulness to all the powers of the world that engender and sustain us, is to usher in the culture of ingratitude.

American Indians have always been shocked by the sheer ingratitude that permeates the basic structure of our society. It is why so many Indian terms for whites translate literally as "fat grabber" or "grabbing creature." It has been clear to them that we have broken with the great cycles of reciprocity that connect us with all things and all things with all other things. Here is another Indian statement that gives powerful voice to that difference between the cultures:

The Indian believes that he is a cannibal—all of his life he must eat his brothers and his sisters and deer and corn which is the mother, and the fish which is the brother. All our lives we must eat off them and be a cannibal, but when we die then we can *give back* all that we have taken, and our body goes to feed the worms that feed the birds. And it feeds the roots of the trees and the grass so that the deer can eat it and the birds can nest in the tree. And we can give back. But today we can't even do this, you know. They poison our bodies and we can't bury our

people. We have to be put in boxes to wait for some life, you know, that's going to be. . . . We are all going to rise up, which is so . . . different from the way we feel about our bodies and giving back.

Here we see expressed the understanding that the deep sense of kinship Indian people feel with other forms of life, together with the need for feeding off their bodies in order to live, *necessitates* a reciprocity, a giving back, a gratitude of which it is unthinkable to be ignorant. The thinking here is thanking, and to have constructed a culture of ungratefulness is *literally* to have lost our minds.

Here I want to quote in full Gary Snyder's version of an old Mohawk prayer:

Gratitude to Mother Earth, sailing through
night and day—
and to her soil: rich, rare, and sweet
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Plants, the sun-facing light-
changing leaf
and fine root-hairs; standing still
through wind
and rain; their dance is in the flowing
spiral grain
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Air, bearing the soaring Swift and
the silent
Owl at dawn. Breath of our song
clear spirit breeze
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers,
teaching secrets,
freedoms, and ways; who share with us
their milk;
self-complete, brave, and aware
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Water: clouds, lakes, rivers,
glaciers;
holding or releasing; streaming through
all
our bodies salty seas
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light
through
trunks of trees, through mists, warming

caves where
bears and snakes sleep—he who wakes
us—
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Great Sky
who holds billions of stars—and goes yet
beyond that—
beyond all powers, and thoughts
and yet is within us—
Grandfather Space.
The Mind is his Wife.
so be it.

Surely the old etymological connection between thinking and thanking in the origins of our own tradition places us within hearing distance of at least some of the resonances of this gratitude and of Joseph's "one mind" with the earth.

The person chosen by the Nez Perce to be their spokesman at the May 1877 council with General Howard and the other U.S. government representatives was Toohoolhoolzote, the old Dreamer, prophet, and medicine man, whose name means "sound, such as is made by striking any vibrant timber or metal with a hard substance." Lest we become too abstract in our consideration of earth's mind, Toohoolhoolzote's words give us a sense of what it means to share earth's body too.

Toohoolhoolzote came to the council as spokesman for a nation that knew these were *their* lands, to work out arrangements whereby the Nez Perce could live peacefully with the white settlers in their territory. General Howard chose to refer to him as a "cross-grained growler" and a "large, thick-necked, ugly, obstinate savage of the worst type" (Josephy 502-04) and placed him in the guardhouse at Fort Lapwai for one week during the council because he refused to give up his ancestral lands and go onto the reservation. One can imagine the reaction of the U.S. military if Toohoolhoolzote's counterpart at this council, General Howard, the spokesman for his nation, had been taken by the Nez Perce and held for a week at the height of the negotiations between them.

Toohoolhoolzote emphasized his connection to the land on which he lived with statements such as:

But I belong to the earth out of which I came. The earth
is my mother. (Josephy 500)
You white people get together, measure the earth, and
then divide it. . . . Part of the Indians gave up their land.
I never did. The earth is part of my body, and I never

gave up the earth. (Josephy 503)

Toohoolhoolzote extends the sense of the body referred to in the quotation from Armstrong—the sense that the body is not separate from other bodies, those of worms, fish, corn, deer, trees, etc., but that the body is mingled with other bodies as these other bodies are taken inside our own as food, and that if there is to be a balance in the world, then in the end our bodies must be eaten too, taken inside the worms, birds, grasses, etc., and mingled with them. We are them, they are us, and it is the soil itself with its processes of decay and growth that is the medium through which this endless transformation between one form of life and another goes on. He extends this beyond the linkage to other forms of life to the earth, land, soil itself: when we ask Joseph or Toohoolhoolzote or any people of the land to come onto the reservation, to give up their homeland, we ask them to give up a part of their own bodies. Their bodies have been formed out of that particular land—all the life through which it has expressed itself—and the soil of that land is itself rich with the bodies (and spirits) of all their ancestors who have gone down into it before them.

Dwamish Chief Seathl makes this clear in his 1855 council statement to Governor Stevens:

Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being.

Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove, has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished. The very dust upon which you now stand responds more lovingly to their footsteps than to yours, because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch.

We need to understand that Chief Seathl does mean what he says and says what he means—that the touch between his bare feet and the literal soil on which they actually are standing is mutually responsive touch in which the Dwamish feet are conscious of the lives (the spirits) of their ancestors present in that soil, and in which the soil itself is responsive to them, lovingly, and they can feel that. The failure to take seriously on a literal level this experiential reality of the American Indian represents our failure to understand both the Indian and this land, this continent of which the Indian is a part. When we asked them, forced them, to give up their lands, we *actually* took a part of their own bodies, as well as their spirits, their ancestors. The reality of that! They actually do feel, *if we believe them*, in the soles of their bare feet, the sympathetic touch of their ancestors residing in the soil, the dust. To reduce that to the level of metaphor is to fail to "under-

stand them *fully* with reference to their affection for the land."

Frederick Turner, in his "Introduction" to *Geronimo, His Own Story*, puts it this way:

The Chiricahua, indeed all the Apache, had the priceless inheritance of those who live so close to the natural world that they cannot ever forget that they are a part of it and it is a part of them.

Here is the approved Chiricahua method for the disposal of afterbirth: the mother wraps it up in the piece of cloth or blanket upon which she has knelt during labor and places it in the branches of a nearby fruit-bearing bush or tree. This is done because "the tree comes to life every year, and they want the life of this child to be renewed like the life in the tree." Before the bundle is placed in the tree the mid-wife blesses it, saying "May the child live and grow up to see you bear fruit many times." Thereafter that place is sacred to the child and to his parents. The child is told where he was born, and if possible the parents take him back to that spot a few years later and roll him on the ground to the four directions. Even adults, when they chance to be once again in the area where they were born, will roll themselves to the cardinal points in symbolic communication with the great wheel that turns everything with it, "whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere." This is why Geronimo begins the story of his life with a careful description of the place of his birth and why, at the end of that story, he says that the Apache are dying because they have not been allowed to return to their homelands. To the Indian mind, a man's attachment to his homeland was not a romantic nostrum but a vital necessity. A man sickened and eventually died—a whole people might die away—if cut off from the life-source of the land itself. And so Geronimo, that "bloodthirsty savage," ends his autobiography with a plea that has the unmistakable dignity of profound conviction: he asks the Great Father, Theodore Roosevelt, to return him and his people to their Arizona homeland. (32-33)

I would argue with Turner in his characterizing the Apache communication with the natural cycles as "symbolic," but that plea, to be returned to their ancestral homelands, is deep and pervasive among Indian peoples. It is an appeal to be returned to their ancestors, their lives, their bodies, their unborn, to the spirit that is them and is their land. But that homeland to which they appeal to be allowed to return

so that they may live is so altered by mining, logging, damming, or nuclear testing that it is unlivable or unrecognizable. One thinks of the reports of children on Rongelap in the Marshall Islands playing in the white fallout as if it were snow after the 15-megaton Bravo hydrogen bomb test of 1954. That bomb was 1,000 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb, and the Marshallese had no warning of the dangers of radiation.

Last, I'd like to note one way in which this deep identity between land and human beings that we see expressed so powerfully by American Indians is suggested in a submerged way in the Euro-American culture. And that is in the root meaning of an essential word in our language—the word *human*.

The word *human* is derived from the Latin word *humus*, "soil." And the word *humble* comes also from this old word, *humus*. To know who we are, as humans, is to know that we are humus, soil itself, with a mind and the ability to walk about. Humility is integral to that self-knowledge, thus linking the roots of our own understanding of being human to the land in a way that is similar to the fuller, explicit expression of that primal connection in American Indian cultures. When I once put the *human*, *humus*, *humble* connection on the blackboard in my class, one of the students, a Crow Indian man, said something in his own language and explained to us that among his people they have a saying for someone who is having too high an opinion of himself.

He translated the saying as "you're just dirt," and added, "it doesn't mean the same as if a white person said it—dirty; it's like that humus-human-humble on the board."

This recovery of the understanding that to be human is to recognize that we are humus, that the name of the first man, Adam, in our tradition means "red clay," that true thinking is thanking, and thanking is truly thinking—all these are a beginning from which to understand Joseph's and the other voices of American Indians as they express Earth's mind.

Charles Simic expresses similar thoughts in a poem entitled "Stone."

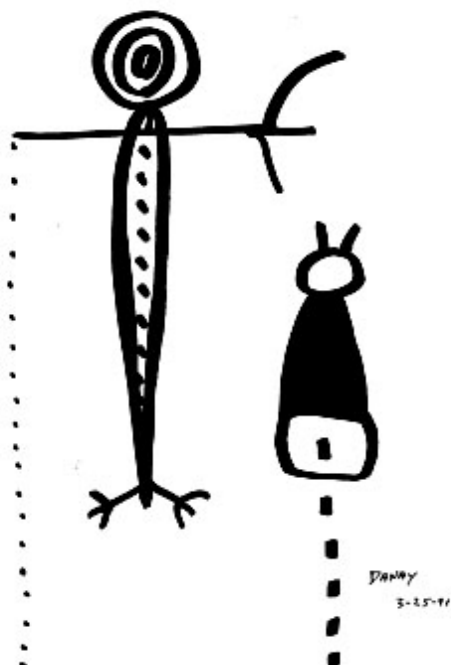
Go inside a stone.
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger's tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river;

The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.

The remark, "to knock on it and listen," seems to me a precise statement of the task the industrialized nations have before them regarding their survival in the natural world. Our ethical tradition still is in the mode of listening to the stones, of "knocking." It would behoove that tradition to stay in that mode for some time before attempting to make decisions on, say, the rights of trees or fish—knocking.



Bha'a and The Death of Jim Loney

John Purdy

11.1 (Winter 1987): 17-24

Readers and critics alike have been quick to point to the bleak ending of *The Death of Jim Loney* and bewail the loss of Native cultures, but few have recognized Loney's lonely stand as the creative act that Welch himself has called it. And of these few, only Kathleen Sands has carefully drawn the connections between Loney's actions and his Gros Ventre heritage. In "*The Death of Jim Loney: Indian or Not?*" Sands traces Loney's final hours and argues convincingly that his actions after Pretty Weasel's death are contemporary manifestations of those of a warrior in the Gros Ventre tradition. He gets the shotgun from his father (as the young warrior would get arms from his), tells him where he is going (which amounts to a public declaration), and prepares to meet his enemy—the police and the world they represent—in a place of his own choosing. "Like an ancient warrior, he [Loney] takes a position from which there is no retreat, and waits for the attack, even taunting his enemy and revealing his position" (Sands 8). Sands' insights are telling, and they fit clearly into the progression with which Welch has structured his novel. Despite Loney's seeming isolation and alienation from his mother's people and their ways, he is a man with a vision, and the novel depicts—as do oral literatures—the ways by which his vision is translated into action in a world that has changed vastly from that of his ancestors.

Although Welch purposefully shrouds Loney's affinity for his people, their land, and its beings, his connections to them are continually suggested by two seemingly unrelated devices: Loney's physical appearance and his memories of specific places in the landscape. Throughout the novel, Loney is described in wolf-like terms by various characters. The old Cree woman at the airport sees his face as "wolfish." Kate echoes that description when she arrives at the same airport. Pretty Weasel describes Loney's face as looking like a "hungry and predictable" mongrel (82). And Rhea—as she opens her

door for Loney on his last visit after Pretty Weasel's death—sees "Loney's thin face in the moonlit night. His nose and cheekbones were silver and his eyes were dark caves" (151). His close identification with an animal is heightened by Loney's revelation, quite early in the book, that he believes his mother was a member of the Westwolf family. These associations are important because they imply an inherited relationship between Loney and the land beyond Harlem—the world "out there" as Loney's mother tells him in a dream—and therefore with the traditions that have always enlightened the Gros Ventre perception of their world.

Although the wolf may have a set of negative connotations for the "white" characters in the novel, including Kate and Pretty Weasel, it has a completely different set for the Gros Ventre. The Wolf Society is one of the two traditional soldier, or warrior, societies and as such it has a respected place in the ceremonial life of the people; its members may gain knowledge and personal power through kinship with the wolf or through an intimate relationship with other power beings established by a vision quest. Sands' insights about Loney's warrior-like actions are accurate; however, the basis for the behavior she describes may be understood only if one recognizes his almost instinctual relationship with traditional sources of power in the Gros Ventre world.

All the major characters, with the exception of Loney, want either to leave northern Montana or, like Pretty Weasel, transform the land into some personal image of what they think it should be. Loney, however, wants only to understand who he is, and, although he realizes that memory—the past—is usually the way to one's identity, his memories seem to be dead ends. They are confused, incomplete, and chaotic; they have no central frame of reference to control them; however, as he thinks about his past he continually encounters memories of not just people, but of other beings and the land itself. They are intertwined somehow, and he tries to separate them. He believes that his memories of people hold the key to his present state, but gradually one sees that the landscape itself and certain animals that inhabit it are more a part of Loney's identity than he realizes. Just as Welch obscures the connection between Loney's movements and those of a traditional Gros Ventre warrior, he makes subtle connections through Loney's memories of Snake Butte (where he imagines his own face among the pictographs) and the Little Rockies, but most of all through the place he chooses to die. Mission Peak in the Little Rockies was at one time a source of Sweet Pine, a key ingredient for the Feather Pipe ceremony given to the People by Bha'a, sometimes called Thunderbird or Ruler of Storms. Bha'a also is said to inhabit the crags

of mountain peaks, and the final scene of Welch's novel is set in the crags of Mission Canyon. But there is further evidence to mark the influence that Bha'a has on Loney's behavior.

Very early in the novel, Loney tries to think, to unravel his memories and identity, and alone, sleepless, and beyond drunk in his kitchen in the early morning, he has a vision. In several ways his isolation is reminiscent of the isolation practiced by the seekers of visions and power in the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre traditions. Like them, Loney's fasting, crying, smoking of tobacco, and watchful waiting have the result of providing him with the enhanced perception necessary to communicate with forces in the world unavailable to most people:

And again, as he had that night after the football game, he saw things strangely, yet clearly. The candle, the wine bottle, the letter before him, all burned clearly in his eyes and they had no reality in his mind. It was as though there were no connection between his eyes and his brain. And he saw the smoke ring go out away from his face and he saw the bird in flight. Like the trembling, the bird was not new. It came every night now. It was a large bird and dark. It was neither graceful nor clumsy, and yet it was both. Sometimes the powerful wings beat the air with the monotony of grace; at other times, it seemed that the strokes were out of tune, as though the bird had lost its one natural ability and was destined to eventually lose the air. But it stayed up and Loney watched it until it reached into the darkness beyond the small candlelight. (20)

After it disappears, Loney reacts in the only way he knows how at this point in his life; he drinks a toast to "his" bird. Something is happening to Loney; a significant event has occurred, but we are left as puzzled as Loney when he tries to interpret the event, to judge its significance and the appropriate way to react to it. The vision could be attributed to the wine—the bird a drunken hallucination—but if one recognizes that Loney's actions shadow those of a traditional vision quest, then another interpretation becomes available.

Loney later states that he has never seen a bird like his before in the surrounding country. The dark bird, however, bears a number of similarities to Bha'a, one of the most powerful beings in the world of the Gros Ventre. Like Coyote, or Sinchlep of the Salish and Na'pi of the Blackfeet, he is the most powerful agent of the "Supreme Being," and as such his influence is far-reaching. He is most commonly associated with summer thunderstorms, and in this connection a ceremony and a story have evolved around him. The Feather

Pipe—one of the two most powerful pipes in Gros Ventre ceremonialism—is said to have been given by Bha'a to a boy who was unlike any of the other children in his village. Although there are different versions of the story, they can be seen to relate to Loney. The boy who receives the pipe does not play with the other children but instead stays to himself; he is told in a dream that he is going to be given something so he moves his lodge away from the others in the village, and he is visited by Bha'a, who takes the boy's lodge and everything he owns but leaves him with the pipe (Flannery 446). Isolation, alienation, and vision are directly connected in the story to the power gift of Bha'a; the loss of material possessions and human companionship results in the gift of something immensely more valuable for individual and community alike: knowledge of new ceremonial actions and power derived from a relationship with a supernatural being.

Like the boy, Jim Loney develops a personal relationship with a very powerful force. Quite often, this type of relationship—between a guardian or helper and a man—emerges from a vision, may last a lifetime, and is present year-round. There are obvious parallels between Loney's actions and those of a vision quest, but there are also similarities between the boy in the story and Loney to account for his unintentional acquisition of a guardian. Moreover, there seems to be ample precedent: "While supernatural power was not explicitly sought from Bha'a he might occasionally on his own initiative have pity on a man and give him power to be a great warrior and even to make storms" (Flannery 12).

The actions that occur after the vision strengthen the identification of the bird with Bha'a and Loney's association with him. As Sands demonstrates, Loney becomes a warrior after he is given the shotgun—as he foresees in his vision—but he also becomes a maker of storms. When Loney walks to Rhea's later, she comments about the severity of the wind. Loney replies, "I think I might have something to do with it" (28). The possibility that he might be affecting the weather is never explored, at least overtly, but this slight and seemingly inconsequential statement says a great deal about Loney's vision of the bird, the image of which remains with him. As he stares into Rhea's fireplace, he sees it again, and either it, or his memory of it, arises to direct his actions throughout the remainder of the novel. The novel ends, as does Loney's life, with a reference to his vision; the sense of complicity lingers, as does the sense that any distinction between Loney's vision of the bird and Loney himself has disappeared: "And he fell, and as he was falling he felt a harsh wind where there was none and the last thing he saw were the beating wings of a dark bird as it climbed to a distant place."

Loney's death may be, and has been, interpreted as a bleak statement about the plight and supposed fate of Native cultures. However, as is so often the case in contemporary Native American novels, one may also see in it an affirmation of the traditional relationship between a landscape and a people, and an age-old way of perceiving the world through an understanding of the stories and traditions that speak of that relationship. Jim Loney takes control of his own life by responding instinctively to the forces that are told of in Gros Ventre literature, and although society at large may take Loney's death as suicide and therefore an act of desperation, one must consider the clearly deliberate and controlled ways that he works it. As Sands amply demonstrates, these are more than simple acts of an individual tired of his existence. As Welch once told Bill Bevis: "He [Loney] does orchestrate his own death. . . . He creates it, he creates a lot of events to put himself on top of that ledge in the end . . . he knows how his death will occur. And to me, that is a creative act and I think all creative acts are basically positive" (Bevis 176). Creative acts spring from knowledge and insight, and these are the gifts that may be derived from a guardian like Bha'a.

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Oral Narrative in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Karl Kroeber

11.2 (Spring 1987): 61-93

On August 2, 1968, a linguist from the University of Montana, Anthony Mattina, sat down in an abandoned farm house with a Colville Indian named Peter Seymour and tape recorded ninety minutes of a story Seymour told in Colville, a language Mattina at that time did not understand. Three days later Mattina taped another ninety minutes of the story, and on the following day Seymour completed the tale, which took almost another two hours of taping. The story translated by Mattina and Madeline deSautel, with a partial verbatim text, notes, and commentary by Mattina, and a Colville glossary, was published in 1985 by the University of Arizona Press under the title of Seymour's story, *The Golden Woman* (all page references in the following discussion are to this edition). The book is worth many times its price to anyone professionally concerned with Native American Literatures, principles of narrative, and the relation of oral art to the spreading hegemony of Western technological culture, as well as to linguists and folklorists. I believe *The Golden Woman* will come in time to be regarded as a classic of American Literature.

I

The continuous free translation of *The Golden Woman* occupies about thirty pages and can be read in under half an hour. This ratio of better than ten to one between speed of hearing and speed of silent reading seems to me a fair measure of the difference in normal speed of reception of written and oral literatures. A tale that can be read in a few minutes may have taken nearly an hour to tell. But temporal comparison is complicated, or enriched, in the case of *The Golden Woman*, because its form is what folklorists, borrowing from music, call a "round," a story that repeats a part or parts of itself at one or more points. The central repetition of *The Golden Woman* is not

included in Mattina's book—understandably, since it must have taken the better part of an hour's telling. Written literature never uses so much verbatim repetition, for a written text can easily be re-read. But in oral performance only literal repeating makes possible re-evaluations parallel to those possible through re-reading.

Seymour's long repeat cautions us to think more carefully about the circumstances of this telling. Seymour, who had met Mattina for the first time only a few days before, spoke into a tape recorder operated by the linguist, who, because he didn't understand Colville, couldn't know what Seymour was telling. Seymour's only audience was the tape. So what kind of a story did he tell the tape? A round, which, since he was in effect talking to himself, may have been an appropriate choice. Yet Mattina's account of his subsequent friendship with Seymour suggests that the peculiar circumstances of the telling were necessary ones, for Mattina is sure that had he "organized a story-telling session with audience, atmosphere, the works, Seymour wouldn't have performed" (2).

Seymour was aware that his children and grandchildren were not interested in long stories. Other elders never listened to his tales. So one may suspect that Seymour's telling is about his situation as a Colville storyteller in 1968. *The Golden Woman* is a European fairy tale transferred into a western American setting that perhaps ought to be read as a commentary on the overwhelming of the Colville by white culture. Formally as well as substantively, Seymour's *Golden Woman* tells us about the conditions in which he now must tell. Late in the story the "king," wanting a crowd at his wedding, tells "all the telephone operators. . . . You telephone to all the kings like me here on earth . . ." (44). This amusingly updates fairy tale style, but the anachronism also suggests something of the complexity resulting from the superimposition on oral discourse of devices of modern technology. Telephone and tape recorder testify to how the range and durability of speech have been increased by technological civilization that jeopardizes oral literary traditions founded on the simple and direct relations manifested in fairy tales. Ethnologists and folklorists have for years congratulated themselves on the benefits to their work of tape recorders. Peter Seymour may be the first Indian recitalist to exploit opportunities offered by this piece of modern technology to increase the recursive significance of a traditional telling, and thereby to open to literary critics new insights into how narrative art may insert itself in complex socio-cultural situations.

Seymour and Mattina discussed the potential soporific effects of storytelling, mention being made of a story "so long that those listening to it went to sleep before it was concluded." This reminds us that we need to think carefully about the aesthetics of the time required for oral

performance. For instance, wherein lies the satisfaction to Peter Seymour, speaking into a tape recorder, to repeat himself for an hour? Or, to what in a story that contains so large a repetition as *The Golden Woman* are those who don't sleep attentive? Sheer length is a more critical issue in oral than in written literatures. It doesn't matter, really, whether *Clarissa* is three or four volumes, and Charles Dickens could publish novels serially over a period of eighteen months without losing his audience. That option seems foreclosed to the recitalist.

And Mattina deserves credit for reminding us of the self-isolating aspects of fine artistry, even in oral performance, that even in a communal society the artist is to a degree a loner. However sustaining of his culture, and however supported by it, a master teller in shaping his stories endows them with qualities we now term aesthetic, which term, if it means anything, must refer to attributes not fully defined by specific cultural constraints and inspirations. We rather overlook the fact that in societies that don't, as ours does, distinguish a separate domain of "the aesthetic," an artist's self-conscious artistry is strongly isolative. The apocryphal blindness attributed to Homer may be symbolic of how even the founder of a great tradition works in and through an essential loneliness.

Some awareness of the complexities of Seymour's situation may lie behind his self-deprecating references to his storytelling as "BS-ing" (2). Given the condition of Colville culture in 1968, what can the Native teller do but BS? Is he telling us that he is now reduced to mere fairy tale telling? May there not be a deeper irony, and a bitter one, beneath the obvious irony in the Indian's consciousness of telling the white man a story from the white man's culture made ludicrous by its transposition into terms and situations of a white-corrupted Indian culture?

Answering such questions with assurance isn't easy, because the narrative skill of a teller such as Seymour tends to conceal painfully probing questions beneath an easy, charming metacommentary, as in his remark on how in this genre information gets picked up quickly: "that's fairy tales for you, it travels fast and it's got no feet" (37). More important disguises are the adaptations of motifs, plot devices, and formulaic situations to purposes congenial to an Indian critique of familiar conditions of our contemporary world of telephones, airplanes, and radios. What the Indian has been "teaching" Mattina (at the end of his recital Seymour observes to the tape recorder he has been a teacher to Mattina) is how a fairy tale may be utilized for aims presumably remote from those in which the genre originated, including comment on how the white culture of fairy tales has intruded into the narrative traditions of Seymour's people.

In discussing the problem of what language is appropriate for translating Seymour's story, Mattina pays little attention to how that story constantly involves itself in problems of genre translation. It calls attention to difficulties in making use today in western America of a "king," of magic birds, of seeking one's fortune, the last of which in Seymour's telling becomes finding a job as a carpenter, house-painter, or dishwasher. If we knew more about how Seymour learned the tale we could assess more accurately the significances of its translations. He learned the tale, he told Mattina, from someone named Lisette, about whom Mattina could find out nothing. So all we can say is that *The Golden Woman* is a Colville transformation of a European form only obscurely connected to any Colville "tradition" of telling. Though Mattina lists motifs that connect the tale with others of European origin, he of course can't cite a specific source that the mysterious Lisette might have adapted for Seymour to change. Nor can Mattina suggest ways in which this story might link to Colville narrative traditions—for the reason that scholarship has not yet addressed even the possibility of such a tradition existing. Yet just as the marvelous pictures on the walls of Lascaux could not have been created by anyone who had not *learned* an extraordinary skill, so Seymour's fine narrative art must owe something to a traditional storytelling art. In a peculiarly vivid fashion, *The Golden Woman* tells us how much we still have to learn about the Native aesthetics of our continent.

II

Like most readers of the Arizona volume, I do not read Seymour's language but the English translation, which appears to be primarily that of a bilingual Colville woman, Mary Madeline deSautel. Her translations, Mattina says, "were loose—certainly not morpheme by morpheme, and not even word by word. She translated Colville into the English she normally spoke, and I wrote it the way she spoke" (9). Mattina's forthrightness and clarity in confronting the hazards of his decision to use this translation are admirable. The decision to accept deSautel's "Red English," a "substandard" English characteristic of many Indian speakers, is reasonable, if only because the story itself is a Colville version of a European fairy tale and is partly about the interpenetrating of European and Indian cultures. But the "continuous translation" of deSautel differs significantly from the incomplete verbatim text taken from the tapes of Seymour's telling, and some difficulties arise when the two are compared. As example of detail: the Colville word translated in the first paragraph (and elsewhere) as "chief" is usually (though not always, for instance line 370) translated as "king" when applied to the protagonist's "boss." A more subtle question is posed by metaphors, remarked on briefly but helpfully by

Mattina (65): there does seem to be the possibility of a systematic correlation in Seymour's telling—but not in deSautel's translation—of physical heights and depth with psychological states of pride and envy.

A thorough critical commentary on *The Golden Woman* would have to confront such issues as well as analyze parallels and differences between Seymour's text and deSautel's. In general, deSautel adds a great deal, mostly, I should judge, for the purposes of explanation. Thus the second paragraph of her translation more than triples the length of Seymour's original—in the following quotation of it I have added emphasis to what is essentially identical with Seymour's words to illustrate the expansion.

They told him: "Father, you're the chief, and we're going to tell you what we're thinking. Well, father, we're going to leave you." Their father said to them: "And why, is there something you're angry about and then you're leaving us? I thought I treat you children real good, I respect your feelings, you're not hard up, and I baby you. And now you're thinking of leaving me."

His sons told him: "No, don't think that way. It's for good [reasons] that we're leaving you, we're not mad at anything. *Now we're out of school, and it'll be some time before we get back to school. We're done with this here grade school, and even if we stay here, we'd be staying here with you, and we won't learn nothing that way, just books. All you do is baby us, coax us around, you never send us to do anything for us to learn how to work. We're going to have our own experience, whatever we learn. We don't know yet what we're going to experience, but maybe if we travel around the world we'll look for a job, and maybe we'll learn work, and we'll practice, and that's why we ask permission to travel around.*"

And their father asked them: "And where will you be going?" And they told their father: "You know that we never get of your sight since we're born. We don't know anything about the country, and we'll just go, for nothing, no direction, in the open country, we'll get somewhere. Wherever we are facing, that's the direction we're taking. *But this is what we are telling you, it'll be exactly one year, the same day that we're gone, and if we're still alive we'll come back. Not yesterday, but today next year, when it's exactly a year, we'll come back, me and my brothers. We don't know where we're going, and we don't know what we'll do, maybe we'll be all together when we get a job, or maybe not, we'll scatter and get a job each by himself. If one of us doesn't come back,*

that's the sign he's dead. If we're lucky we'll stay in one place and then we'll see one another in the evening. We're still together yet." *Their father said: "OK, if that's what going to please you, and this is what you want, travel around, go on."*

This passage suggests how far apart continuous translation and verbatim text may be, and although in commenting on *The Golden Woman* I cite from deSautel's translation, when I come to the passage that is the narrative's climax I use the verbatim translation of Seymour's words, because deSautel's rendering seems to blur the most interesting complexities in the passage. I pass by in silence here the fascinating topic of the relation of Seymour's telling to deSautel's rendering of it, a matter, as Mattina is at pains to point out, of considerable importance. Mattina's comments center on the fact that Seymour's story is unmistakably a work of literary art, and that the colloquialism of deSautel's rendering may obscure not merely "elegant and formal" qualities in Seymour's Colville narration but also subtleties and complexities in the original language contributing significantly if unobtrusively to the story's artistic success. Something more than the well-known difficulty in any translation is at issue here. Dell Hymes' studies over the past decade, for instance, have raised the possibility that many Indian stories in fact are organized according to definable patterns of measured language, more-or-less equivalent to what we think of as poetry. A "Red English" translation is bound to conceal such characteristics.

Seymour's narrative style seems to me marked by an intriguing combination of terseness and complicated deployment of words usually translated as "well," "then," "so," in the Colville, *ixi?*, *way*, *ut*, to set up rhythmic patterns of telling. My brief study of the text, however, leads me to doubt that Seymour uses the kind of rigidly formal structuring Hymes discerns in some of his Oregon texts. And this kind of formal ordering, as Hymes himself emphasizes, is but one component of a work's artistry. Patterns of language texturing, such as I suspect *do* play some role in Seymour's telling, are significant to the degree that they are shown to be congruent with various macro-structuring. For the ordinary reader of *The Golden Woman*, larger thematic features give easier entry into Seymour's art because his narrative, unlike those Hymes has analyzed, reworks fairy-tale elements with which we are familiar. The primary narrative characteristic of *The Golden Woman* is its transposition of European original into Colville rendering and I'll here concentrate on this issue.

III

The Golden Woman tells how the youngest of four sons, with the

aid of a magic horse, rescues his brothers from certain death after they have left home to seek their fortunes. Jealous of, rather than grateful to, their little savior, the elder brothers plot to destroy him. They maneuver him into being sent to steal a pair of golden birds from the man-eater who nearly killed them. The boy succeeds and presents the birds to the king of the country to which the brothers have come, but his siblings then have him sent to capture for the king a strange sea creature, the Golden Woman. The boy does capture her, but she falls in love with him. She schemes to have the golden birds tell a story at a gathering the king has convened to celebrate his marriage to her. The birds tell exactly the story we have heard, of the younger brother rescuing his elders. Hearing the story awakens the youngster to his worth and the Golden Woman's love for him. She poisons the king, marries the youngest son, and returns with him, in company with his forgiven brothers, to his father's house.

Mattina identifies this as story type 531 in the Aarne-Thompson classification scheme, but analogues are less important to this tale than Seymour's skillful interplaying of realism and humor, launched by his first sentences:

One tribe of people was sitting around, it's one town, one big town, but I don't know the name of the town. It's nothing but a fairy tale. And they have a chief in that town, they have a big chief, and he's important, and he's got more than one son, four of them, all boys. It's early spring and the snow is all gone, school was over, and the three oldest went to see their father. (19)

White and Indian confront in the opening sentence with its "town" consisting of a "tribe of people sitting around," a confrontation self-reflexively deepened by the apparently deprecating comment, "It's nothing but a fairy tale." This remark is also functional in setting up conscious interaction between what people who call themselves narratologists call *histoire* and *recit*, events told of and telling, for that interplay is a central dynamic of Seymour's performance. He consistently brings into question the authority of his narrative. One aspect of this self-contestation is his intersecting of literal and metaphoric at crucial junctures, as when, later, we're told that the protagonist is "in a good track" though he is literally wandering in a storm. Beneath all rhetorical and figurative interpenetrations is the fundamental one of the white fairy tale being reworked through a Colvillian telling into the white man's recording machine to teach the white man something he does not know. After the father agrees to let his boys travel, he orders his hired man to equip them with the best horses, saddles, spurs, and so forth, and gives them money, because,

You don't know where you're going, and you don't know the country, and then you won't know the people when you get there, and maybe you might get hungry. And this is what I give you for your grub. And if you get to a town then you'll have money, and if you go to an eating place you can eat, and you can camp at a hotel, and you can put your horses in a barn. You have some money and you can pay for that. But if you don't have money you'll have a bad time. (21)

Throughout the telling this kind of practicality accompanies sardonic comments by the narrator, especially on white ways, and incongruities between the systems of contemporary Western life and the system of fairy tales. It is casually suggested at one point that airplanes originated from the example of the flying horse (39). When the youngest brother gets into the saddle of the magic horse, the narrator reminds us that just a few sentences earlier he had been described as too small to get into the saddle by himself (23). But the profoundest incongruities are more than just amusing.

When the three elder brothers have ridden off, the youngest boy is told, to his distress, he's too little to go with them. His mother suggests to his father that he be given a lunch bag, a few pennies, and an old pair of chaps, and he is set on an ancient horse that can scarcely walk. This will make the boy happy; he can't get far and "then he won't get feeling bad, he won't get sick over it" (22). Sure enough, the old horse barely gets over the first ridge before collapsing. In frustration, the boy whips and beats the animal, who says to him: "Please have pity on me little boy, I'm not doing this on purpose. It's not my fault I'm to the limit with oldness, my breath is all out of me, and I'm weak-boned" (22). When the boy, angry and crying, continues to beat the horse,

All at once something spoke to him from above: "Leave that poor thing alone, pity your horse, I'll pity you." He raised his head, gee, he seen a beautiful horse, pretty as a picture. . . . That beautiful horse told him: "Hurry, get on, or you'll be too late to save your brothers. They're just getting to the man-eater. . . . If you take your time they'll be dead. You keep staring at me. Let's get close to their heels. Hurry and get on." (23)

The establishing of a ground for parallelism here is adroit, as it is whenever Seymour exploits the age-youth motif. The frustration of the genuinely helpless boy *invokes* the magic horse. Later, the boy's frustration at the failure of the horse's magic leads him to drive the horse away. From that point on, this fairy tale is not so magical.

Fairy tales move fast without feet, Seymour is telling us, but they carry you only so far. After having beaten the magic horse, the boy reflects with bitter self-accusation: "I'm disgusted with myself," he says; "it's all caused from my bad temper that put me in bad. My horse left me because I licked him. Now I'm disgusted of myself" (40).

As the boy cries and wanders about, all at once,

he got on a good track, and then it started to rain. It rained and the wind blowed close to the shore, and there were waves. It was on a good track, and he ran into some baby eagles, just hatched, two of them. They didn't have a feather on their body. They was just a-shivering from the cold. He felt sorry for them. He started to gather pine needles, anything to make a fire, and he started building a fire for the baby chicks, the eagle babies. And they got warmed up. (40)

Once again the boy hears a sound from above. This time it is the parent eagles returning—they had been delayed by the storm. In gratitude to the boy for saving their children they encourage him to try once more to capture the Golden Woman. Taken captive at last, she begins to take charge of the story. With her capture the surprises of magic are replaced by more realistic wonders. She suggests, "We just as well get married. You're the one that took me" (42). She thinks, "He isn't for nothing, this little fellow is something to grow for, or he wouldn't have caught me . . . this here outstanding kid got me. He must be smart" (42). So he takes her to the king, who observes, "now that I see you, I am a well-satisfied king" (43), and,

he told all the telephone operators: "You telephone operators, you telephone to all the kings like me here on earth, and the important people, they'll get here also. And you send an invitation to all those around here. There's no old or young. Everybody is going to gather here tonight." (44)

Only the boy refuses to go to the party, telling the king's cook for whom he washes dishes as a regular occupation that he is too "pityful" and dirty and possesses only old clothes. But the king wants everybody, and two sheriffs are sent for the boy, who protests, but, in an action that recalls his capture of the Golden Women, "They grabbed him by the arms, he tried to squirm around, they walked off with him" (45). With everyone present, at the Golden Woman's behest the golden birds tell a story, which is exactly the story we have heard of the brothers' rescue from the man-eater. But this telling is marked by some by-play between rooster and hen. There is a question of which should tell the story, with a sharp dig at white men's sham politeness

to women (46). Of course the rooster is the one to tell the story, but he occasionally questions the hen: "Am I telling it right?" And the hen answers, "Yes, you're telling it right. That's just what you done" (47). This large "round" comes to an end in a passage I cite from the verbatim translation. It is a moment at which, starting a new tape, Seymour consciously "splices" his story, that is, connects one tape to its predecessor as the two tellings, one within the other, dovetail. This is the crucial moment in the narrative, because here the story finally breaks its repetitive patterning. And this narrative transformation is expressive of the decisive maturation of the protagonist. This dramatic utilization of narrative form within the story is the result—within the narrative—of stage-managing of narrative by the Golden Woman. Her scheme is to have the boy, through hearing the account of what he had done, awoken to what he may be qualified for, not least herself.

- 611. Well, as they say in my language, in Colville I am going to splice my fairy tale, the *Golden Woman*.
- 612. That's where I stopped telling my story; he was telling his story the rooster with the hen, the golden birds.
- 613. And the rooster is telling a story, to all the people, and indeed that's what the boy did, that's what he's telling.
- 614. He's telling what he did; and the boy like he forgot what happened to him.
- 615. And she thought of a plan the Golden Woman, because to the boy that caught her, that's where her heart is, that's who she wants to marry.
- 616. And the king is too old; and that's why all of this she thought out.
- 617. When he's telling his story the rooster, maybe he'll wake up (and) remember the boy what happened to him, and then they'll get married.
- 618. That's what is told to the people, and he tells the rooster (to) the hen, "Is it true what I've done?"
- 619. Then she winks at him the woman, the hen, she winks at him the hen, and she says, "Yes, yes, yes, that's what you've done.
- 620. Certainly I know this is what you've done, and if I had told the story, I wouldn't have everything known that you've done.
- 621. And always I love you, I want you to marry me."
- 622. The boy like he woke up.
- 623. "I have done that, what he's been telling about me."
- 624. He woke up, and he thought that's he whose deeds they're telling to all the people.
- 625. Not ever do birds talk to one another, or just talk;

- these are the man-eater's birds, that's why they talk
(and) tell about themselves.
626. Well, this boy as soon as he realized that it's his
deeds (being talked about) by the rooster, he disap-
peared.
627. They didn't realize it, and just to the birds they were
listening.
628. Then they missed the boy, he's gone, he must have
slipped out.
629. Then his brothers got the belly ache.
630. He told them the king: "Don't anybody go out."

The repetition of the earlier part of the narrative is "justified" and made meaningful by this passage because it is only through hearing *as a story* what he in fact had done that the boy becomes aware of the meaning of his acts, the qualities of his true self. If the first decisive step into maturation is his compassionate aiding of the young eagles, the second is the subtler and more profound recognition of himself as a worthy person, above all else as a person worthy of affection, qualified for love. *Within* Seymour's story such recognition comes from hearing the story. Implicit in the recursive pattern is a definition also of the complex preciousness of storytelling: it creates consciousness of the meaning of what has happened to us. So, too, *The Golden Woman* articulates an understanding of what has happened to the Colville Indians, specifically that they now find viability only by making use of the mechanisms of the white American culture that has overwhelmed them. Seymour tells *their* story into *their* recording device so as to preserve *his* way of telling.

In so sustaining his heritage by means of the very force destroying it, Seymour exploits a primary, if not *the* primary, function of narrative. Events occur in the natural world, and even sequences of events, but not stories. Stories are human tellings about events, their principal aim being to give shape to events, that is, a human meaning. The recursiveness within *The Golden Woman* reminds us that for someone hearing the story for the second or the tenth time, the narrative as a whole is a repetition. The longest repetition of the story is the total story. Such repeating, which the tape recorder mechanically facilitates, is valuable (among other reasons) because it makes possible new meanings, renewed assessments, evaluations, judgments of the human meaning articulated. The story repeated is a means not only of sustaining but also of changing established evaluations of a personal life, the life of a society, the life of our kind.

An awareness of narrative function so perceived is made a significant thematic element *within The Golden Woman* by Seymour.

The boy's unwillingness to come to the king's party expresses his sense of his unqualifiedness, even though we judge that as the one who captured the Golden Woman he is most qualified. He does not judge well the quality of his character and behavior because, though he has done remarkable things, he has not yet defined himself to himself through his acts. Maturity, this tale seems to imply, depends not merely on acting responsibly but possessing the ability consciously to assess one's actions, because only then is one's responsible behavior meaningful, that is, made capable of being deliberately used as a model, repeated, or modified.

IV

In most of what he does in the first part of the tale the boy simply follows the directions of the magic horse. This is one reason why his actual activity at the man-eater's is not described. The horse tells him beforehand what he *should* do and tells him in the most complete detail. These instructions, which of course we the listeners "overhear," are substituted for an account of the actions when they "actually" occur. When the horse's instructions are finished, we are told: "and that's what happened" (27). If anyone needs proof that Seymour's repetitions are carefully purposeful, it is right here, where there is an opportunity for repetition superseded by a gigantic prolepsis.

This proleptic telling, in fact, illustrates what I find to be American Indian narrators' consistent preference for prefiguration over suspense. Indian storytellers know what reception theorists like Stanley Fish seem regularly to forget: stories are always retold. The important part of any audience for a tale already knows the story. For them, for anyone who returns to a narrative, prefiguration takes account of this knowledge, is the means by which an informed listener is enabled to re-enter the telling. Prefiguration allows the imagination of the informed to reshape what has for them already happened at least once. Storytelling is repeating, and prefiguration serves in a narrative a function analogous to the act of storytelling, which gives a "new," retrospective order through its reiteration of events that have occurred previously in a linear sequence, at the *end* of which telling *begins*.

Under the conditions of oral narration, of course, the only way the protagonist of a story such as *The Golden Woman* can arrive at the self-awareness provided by narrative is through hearing of himself in an "oral" tale within the tale, which allows its auditors to appreciate fully the significance of his transformation, because for them the inset tale is a repetition: they know what has happened and can concentrate on what it may mean. Yet the effectiveness of such a repetition would seem to depend on our emotional involvement with the subject of the tale. To someone who doesn't care about the boy in *The Golden*

Woman, who isn't concerned with his fate, the repetition can only be boring. Repetition of this scale brings to the foreground a fundamental principle overlooked or underestimated by virtually all narratologists: narrative works through emotion. Stories have affects, and analysis of narrative that omits its emotional dimensions will be inadequate. When one speaks, as I am doing here, of "awareness" aroused by narrative or its achievement of "meaningfulness," we must remember that every aspect of its functioning is grounded in emotional biases it evokes. A good story is one that makes us care, and it is good so far as the evolution of emotional patterns it develops are integrated with the developing configuration of its plot actions and themes.

This principle is illustrated by *The Golden Woman's* focus on love. One of the man-eater's baits is her "granddaughters," and her house is, in effect, a brothel. There, finally, the "grandmother" is tricked by the boy into killing her granddaughters, the event dramatizing the house's violent perversion of genuine love. But genuine love, because more than mere sexual attraction, involves conscious decision, embodied in this story supremely in the Golden Woman's artifice at the wedding, interestingly contrasting with the hunting artifice by which the boy captures her. The Golden Woman's affection for the boy is inseparable from her shrewd assessment of his potential as a man, a potential, she recognizes, of which he himself is unaware. So she weaves a plot, having the golden birds tell a story within the story which is, in fact, the first part of the story. The golden birds' collaboration with her is revealed when the rooster asks the hen, "is it true what I've done," when he has been telling what the *boy*, not the rooster, did, and she winks at him when replying "yes, yes, yes, yes." This is a put-up job that climaxes with the hen's final "And I always love you. I want you to marry me." That statement wakes up the boy; the birds' dramatic representation attains its desired effect, arousing him to his capacity for love, just as *within* Seymour's telling fairy tale is used to alert us to possible significances (some highly problematic) of fairy tale telling.

The foregoing comments raise several thematic questions. I'll here focus on a simple but important one, whether, as critics seem to take for granted, love is indeed the same the whole world over, whether there may be diverse artistic forms of expression for basic feeling and relationships and conditions, love, maturation, identity, for example, that are experienced differently in different societies thanks to divergences in cultural forms. In *The Golden Woman* the intersection of affection and awareness occurs most intensely in the word *deSautel* and *Mattina* translate as "pity." *Mattina* calls attention to the importance of this Colville root *qwǝn*, suggests the variety of its possible connotations, and notices that the term is significant throughout the

Salishan family of languages, citing Reichard's comment on a Coeur d'Alene cognate (66). To someone not versed in the languages involved, "compassion" might often seem a more appropriate translation of *qwǝn* words, since "pity" may have bad connotations of "sentimentality" for many today. But "compassion" lacks the common adjectival forms "pitiable" and "pitiful" that appear at critical moments in Seymour's story. A creature who is "pitiable" seems to be not only one who begs for sympathy but also is one worthy of receiving the benefit of intelligent emotional investment from another. The one who is pitiable is at best worthy because capable of responding appropriately to affection and generosity, so that "taking pity" opens the way to emotional reciprocity. One is tempted, therefore, to feel that "love" finally might be a truer translation than "pity," if only because both active and passive aspects of an emotional relation seem encompassed by the Colville usage. Interpretation is tricky, because our literature normally does not, as Indian Literatures I believe frequently do, give us characters representing themselves as "pitiable," that is, not merely requiring aid or mercy but with the connotation within such admission of vulnerability of being "lovable," with all its implications for reciprocity.

This particular issue has special importance in *The Golden Woman* because of its bearing on the theme of maturation. It seems to me that to become fully adult in many Indian stories such as *The Golden Woman*, one must become aware that one is *deserving* of love, for only one deserving love, lovable, will be capable of truly loving another.

I have raised this point both for its specific relevance to Seymour's tale and for its general significance to the study of American Indian materials as literature. Exactly what the words commonly translated as "pity" or its derivatives "really mean" can only be determined by a careful analysis of as many diverse uses as can be located, along with detailed investigation into the contexts in which they occur, for the definition sought in a literary work is of a Wittgensteinian kind, a determination of usage. Speculations like mine just presented are intended only to stimulate study of the data adequately to address such problems. I am only pointing out possibly useful directions for explorations into linguistic details. I am urging linguists to focus on a particular problem because it seems to be of interest to more than one discipline. Because only detailed linguistic analysis can finally give the factual basis needed for valid literary evaluations of the significance of Seymour's use of *qwǝn*, literary critics bear the responsibility of suggesting what are narrative cruxes, foci of structural or thematic development, essential to any assessment of work as literary artistry.

One further suggestion on this topic's significance for the comprehension of narrative form: I am ready to speculate that we might

read "pity" as "love" in *The Golden Woman* because it, like many Indian stories, is more intensely emotional and more focused on exploring problems of emotionality than has been recognized by anthropologists, folklorists, and even literary critics. Modern literary critics tend to minimize the emotional components in art, and folklorists and linguists have no special interest in the subtler emotive aspects of narratives. Yet these are crucial to the *art* of *The Golden Woman*, as to many Indian tales. Emotion unorganized by intelligence, so far as I know, is invariably presented in Indian stories as something bad and dangerous. Admirable emotionality always includes, as in the case of the boy with the baby eagles, intelligent judgment. And reciprocal love, as appears ultimately in the relation of the boy and the Golden Woman, almost invariably implies intelligent consciousness of the various dimensions of a relationship genuinely reciprocal—the kind of understanding of self and self in relation to others that allows someone to present himself or herself honestly, not sentimentally as "pitiable." Indian stories such as *The Golden Woman* seem to emphasize more than do European ones *lovability*, the capacity to receive as well as give emotion, and the difference has important effects—still awaiting serious investigation—both on the form of narrative in itself and on how it is shaped by its reception, the context of telling.

V

Whatever the value of the foregoing speculations, *The Golden Woman* unmistakably represents love as not possible for someone who is immature, as, in reverse, "magic" is no longer available to someone who has become mature. This is why in the crucial "splicing" passage quoted above, as soon as the boy "wakes up," he disappears. A few sentences later he returns as a man—the Colville words now applied to him are different from those used earlier. The boy is *ta-twit* (1.622), whereas the man who enters (with what seems oedipal speed) immediately following the king's death is *qel-tmix* (1.649), the same word used by the Golden Woman about him and translated by deSautel as "husband," that is, "my man." There is, one may observe parenthetically, a lovely touch in this scene of the returner transformed: the Golden Woman does not at first recognize the handsome young man in good clothes, the very reality produced by her device for "magical" transformation.

Seymour's story gives emphasis to the commonplace yet always mysterious process of maturing by which a boy vanishes into a man by dramatizing the violence of the older brothers' reaction to the golden birds' telling and the Golden Woman's last scheme. The older brothers, as the younger brother vanishes, fearing that the birds will

continue with the story of their career and so expose their jealous machinations, get what Seymour calls "the belly ache." Ready to shit in their pants, they make the obvious plea to be excused, but the king denies their request, telling his working man: "Go and bring in the big tub. Put it right on the floor, whoever gets the belly ache, he can use it. Don't nobody go out" (49). But the brothers, in fact, are not publicly exposed; the story has stopped rounding on itself, because the Golden Woman, having attained her goal of awakening the boy's self-awareness through the birds' story, says to the king:

There's very different in our age, you're old and I'm just a girl, and don't you think, if we get married you'll be very sorry, you'll always be jealous, jealous hearted because you're old?

Admitting she has a point, the king asks if she knows "a good medicine to make me young again." She sure does. She

pulled out of her clothes a bottle, a little bottle. She told him: "You drink this, drink it at once, and then you'll be back ten years younger, towards a boy. And then we'll be even. Take it." She gave it to him he took it down at once. Must be just a little spoonful, just one swallow, and it's gone. He did like that, the king has spasms, he let go and fell on his back, he just quivered. The people and the kings all rushed to him on both sides, there was a doctor there, but he didn't have no medicine. They rushed him to the hospital, but he never come to, he's dead. He's still dead. (49)

Among marvelous reports of the death of kings, this for me ranks alongside that of Babar's predecessor. But one should recognize that this king's fate is exemplary of a childish—as distinct from a child's—belief in magic, a foolish faith in the possibility of reversing the fundamental order of things. Through the magic of the fairy tale, through the true magic of art, the story retold by the golden birds, the young protagonist is awakened to the truth of his being. I take it that true narrative is true to human desires and needs. That is why in fairy tales, as in children's "make believe," magic power is not so much sought as given, for "magic" is the validation of desire. I believe that enchantment of all narrative art lies finally in its parallel gratuitousness, as *The Golden Woman* brilliantly illustrates. In seeking a literal, merely physical magic to make himself young again the king asks for a lie, and he gets it. He's still got it.

Although, as Jean Paul Sartre said, we live in one direction but tell of our lives in the other, the authentic magic of narrative art seeks not to deny natural facts but to improve on them, to transform them into

a natural-human reality, which implies a social reality. Although the protagonist in our story must himself begin the process of his maturation, to complete the development he requires help, as we all do, because we are social creatures needing the fulfillment of friends, a lover, a community. Assistance comes to our young man in the form of a story of his adventures, for although the story is only a telling, it is not untrue, less because it is accurate than because it serves to reveal, as only story can, the human significance of events.

The Golden Woman's self-reflexivity, then, is not merely decorative, not merely structural, not merely traditional, but thematically functional. Seymour conveys to us through the *Golden Woman's* mode of awakening her lover what Percy Shelley articulated more abstractly in his "Defence of Poetry" when he observed that "neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which resembles itself." Shelley went on to argue that by showing our minds to ourselves literature teaches us not only "self-knowledge" but also "self-respect." Shelley, of course, was a Romantic poet, born two centuries ago. Twentieth Century critics, particularly those prominent today, have nothing to say about art fostering self-respect. In part their silence results from commitments to a conception of human psychology that does little to encourage self-respect, but in part the silence results from critics' unwillingness to study in detail how art makes its way into processes of social development or deterioration. We prefer to explain the context of art from the perspective of the context; we prefer to analyze art in terms of the non-artistic. But there is much to be learned about both the nature and the functions of art by examining how it enters itself, unasked, into a socio-cultural context and from evaluating the contexts of an artwork from the perspective of *its* act of creative intrusion.

I believe we miss the possibility of valuable insight, as well as poignant experience, if we fail to observe how Seymour's *The Golden Woman* slides into our literature to confirm the self-respect of Colville culture in the hour of its dissolution. Seymour uses Western technology to encyst within our culture an exemplification of how a Colville imagination could transform one of *our* narrative forms. He thus teaches us, among other things, that our kind of progress destroys modes of imagining. Yet Colville imagining, through Seymour's reshaping of a European fairy tale, is now part of *our* heritage. Seymour used a tape recorder to save for his people what they could no longer save for themselves, including a critique of what destroyed them.





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"Our purposes are to facilitate the exchange of information among those teaching American Indian Literatures and to promote appreciation of the literary accomplishments of American Indians."

Elaine Jahner

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[After this issue, *SAIL* merged with Columbia University's *The Dispatch*, a
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