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# SAIL

## *Studies in American Indian Literatures*

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### **Feminist and Post-Colonial Approaches**

Susan Gardner, Guest Editor

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## ***Post-Colonial Literature and Hawaii: Teaching Ethnic American Literature in a Colony***

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Ann Rayson

Hawaii, once as a monarchy, then a U.S. Territory, and now a state, is the marginalized other. Perceived as the exotic primitive, Hawaii itself has been represented as the land of the lascivious hula, once banned by New England missionaries, the land of lotus-perfumed nights, warm breezes. This unreality is promoted by the Hawaii Visitors Bureau in conjunction with the state government because tourism is the foundation of Hawaii's economy; tourism depends on the successful rendition of Hawaii as the exotic other, the dusky feminine, the not-American aloha land where brown races still graciously cater to vacationers mostly from the U.S. mainland and Japan. Hawaii has not moved from colonialism to neo-colonialism, as has most of the world since 1945, despite Hawaiian activists who work with increasing voice to demand reclamation of land and power. The colonizer, the U.S. government, did not leave this indigenous country to its own devices. Instead it co-opted and incorporated Hawaii under the umbrella of America beginning in 1819 when the first missionaries arrived, while at the same time treating it as the dark other, the exotic primitive as twentieth-century post-Freudian noble savage.

Hawaii is literally off the map in national newspapers and weather reports. At the 1992 National Democratic Convention, Hawaii's roll call was immediately interrupted by commentators talking of something unrelated, but "the great state of Alabama" was heard in excruciating detail as were other mainland states. Nothing, it is thought, ever happens in Hawaii or changes there, "there" as opposed to "here." Hawaii fulfills the role of America's Shangri-la, seemingly far removed from the divisive racial tensions and domestic problems of the "real" America.

Hawaii itself is ambivalent about its position, hence tensions arise.

To survive economically, Hawaii must be, remain, and perform as the alluring other with an aloha spirit. Local people, however, chafe at the pressure to perform as stereotypes. To eat, they must smile and dance, since Hawaii is now dependent on a tourist economy, but there is a falseness beneath the aloha facade, the double voice and mask of the colonized. At the same time, the Hawaiian Renaissance, a cultural and political movement begun in the early 1970s, has reintroduced traditional dance, music, crafts, and language in a quest to recover the "authentic" past. Hawaiian history is taught as a course in the 4th, 7th, and 11th grades of the statewide public school system. There are now several Hawaiian language immersion schools. Kupunas (elders) visit all school classes to teach traditional arts, and hula halaus compete and perform regularly everywhere. The current cultural direction is away from Don Ho's "Tiny Bubbles" and back to ancient hula. And authenticity sells; locals find that traditional Hawaiian arts are more appealing than kitsch to the more sophisticated tourists of today. While recapturing authenticity, Hawaiians paradoxically still find themselves entertaining colonials.

Within Hawaii there is class and caste struggle. Haoles (once "stranger," now "white"), representing the colonizer and owning disproportionate wealth, are one-quarter of the population, a minority. Japanese Americans, also one-quarter of the population, largely control the state government and public education. Chinese Americans, a small percentage of the population (4%), have much wealth and influence. But Caucasians and Japanese Americans are the two "land-and-power" (see *Land and Power in Hawaii*) target groups for the smaller percentages of other ethnic groups, particularly for the activist Hawaiians. Yet the Governor, John Waihee, is Hawaiian, and the Lt. Governor, Ben Cayetano, Filipino. The word "local" refers to the mixed culture of Hawaii. Locals are of all ethnic backgrounds, but usually not white (excepting Portuguese), although there is the "local haole." Because the Portuguese were brought to Hawaii in the Nineteenth Century to work the plantations, often as overseers, they were seen as a group separate from the white planter class. This difference remains in the way "Portagee" and "haole" are used today. The "local haole," having established a certain right to be here by circumstance of birth and family roots, has more clout than the mainland haole, often labeled an opportunist. Stephen Sumida in *And the View from the Shore* (1991) says that "'local' is usually thought of as nonwhite," but "the term 'local' does not itself denote race" (xiv-xv). Hawaii's racial mixture diffuses tensions in that tensions exist among all racial groups; the black-white dichotomy of many American populations is here more varied and complex. The situation in Hawaii of multiple ethnic groups under the stereotypical white male leadership (also Japanese-American

male, in Hawaii) presages the situation that will exist on the mainland as Hispanic and Asian immigrant groups change the original black-white division into a many-faceted multi-cultural reality. These changes have been occurring in America's large cities and are spreading to suburban and rural areas as demographics change.<sup>1</sup> Hawaii best represents itself as the vanguard of racial mixture in America, and what defines or applies to Hawaii will have increasing relevance for the rest of America. In Hawaii racial jokes and ethnic humor are popular and accepted because every group gets targeted in the absence of a dominant group. In a place of many others, all citizens of Hawaii at one time or another are made to feel other by "the mainland," as we in Hawaii call it. In this multi-cultural state it becomes impossible to separate geography from history from politics from education and from literary study.

As a white professor, I represent the colonizer, but as a female, the other; as a WASP the colonizer, as a resident of Hawaii the other—both to the mainland and in a state dominated by a non-white, Asian-Pacific population. Recognizing and using the interplay of these realities in the classroom enriches our readings of texts as we try to compare, place, and learn from ethnic writers from contexts like ours. As Trinh T. Minh-ha says, "The challenge is thus: how can one re-create without re-creating domination?" (329). Imported to teach at the University of Hawaii in 1976, I embody familiar class/race divisions on the campus. While the faculty is overwhelmingly white and male, the student body is largely non-Caucasian and more female than male. In one sense the students, ethnic, female, and local, are colonized by the faculty—white, male, and from the mainland.<sup>2</sup> This structure echoes the political history of Hawaii, a monarchy from 1795 to 1893, when Queen Liliuokalani was overthrown by American colonialists with help from the U.S. Marines. Although President Cleveland condemned the overthrow, nothing was done to redress it. Now, a hundred years later, Hawaiians mock both the quincentennial of Columbus and the centennial of Hawaii as part of the United States. Indeed, a full-page advertisement from "King Kamehameha VI" appeared in *The Honolulu Advertiser* on June 5, 1992, as a public announcement and "A Message from the King," the would-be king of today had not the United States usurped the legitimate government of Hawaii. The current "King" announced members appointed to his cabinet, Supreme Court, and House of Nobles, proclaimed ownership of the land, told the public to gather for a morning of prayer, and offered a prayer. The entire announcement, however, was in English, not Hawaiian, but under the caption, "Kingdom of Hawaii Restored." Ironies include the juxtaposition of the colonials with democracy and the colonized with monarchy. In a national acknowledgment of guilt

and acceptance of responsibility for the taking of Hawaii, on November 23, 1993, President Clinton signed the resolution that had been passed by the House and Senate formally apologizing for the overthrow of the Hawaiian nation on January 17, 1893. Hawaiian leaders both applauded and scoffed at this apology.

The Hawaiian movement has struggled consistently and sometimes successfully to prevent economic development in certain areas, to recapture legitimate Hawaiian Home Lands, and to collect rent due Hawaiians for leased Hawaiian Home Lands (Hilo Airport is one well-known example). This movement is lobbying for the return of Hawaii to the Hawaiians, a return of land stolen, sold, and given away in a series of exchanges not sufficiently understood by Hawaiians in the Nineteenth Century. Early Hawaiians used, but never owned, land, the concept of individual ownership of land being unknown. The U.S. government is not going to return native lands, i.e., the entire country of Hawaii, although on May 7, 1994, the federal government did formally sign over Kahoolawe, the island used for years as a naval bomb target, to the state's Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission. The ceremony was observed by many Hawaiian sovereignty groups. Yet, Kahoolawe will remain under the aegis of the state. Unfortunately, the "us and them" language and politics still continue. At a recent Unitarian Church service in Honolulu on Hawaiian Redress, a concerned woman asked speaker Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell what she could do to help the Hawaiians. He answered, "Give us your house." While the crusade to regain Hawaiian land seems largely doomed to fail, except for the Hawaiian Home Lands, the mission grows in strength and vehemence despite some battles within the Office of Hawaiian Affairs itself and contention among various Hawaiian sovereignty organizations over what Hawaiians want.

The creation of the Hawaiian Home Lands in the early Twentieth Century can be compared to the establishment of Indian reservations on the mainland, although the HHL are not set aside and reserved as sovereign nations the way reservations are. There is a sad history of abuse and misuse of the Hawaiian Home Lands in this century now requiring attention and redress. Davianna Pomaika'i McGregor summarizes this history in her *Ka Leo O Hawai'i* letter to the editor, "Rent for Native Hawaiian Ceded Lands is Past Due," as follows:

When a system of private property was established in 1848 under The Mahele, the "ceded lands" were made the property of the Crown and Government of the Hawaiian Kingdom. The Provisional Government confiscated these lands when it illegally overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy with the backing of U.S. naval forces in 1893.

When the Provisional Government set up the Republic

of Hawaii as its successor, it turned control of these stolen lands to that government. In 1898, the Republic of Hawaii illegally ceded 1.8 million acres of the Crown and Government Lands of the Kingdom of Hawaii to the U.S. government.

In 1921, the U.S. Congress set aside 200,000 acres of Crown and Government Lands for exclusive homesteading by Hawaiians of half-Hawaiian ancestry or more.

At statehood, the U.S. government kept 400,000 acres of these lands for their own use (military bases, post offices, etc.) and mandated the State of Hawaii to manage the remaining 1.4 million acres (including the 200,000 acres of Hawaiian homelands) for the Native Hawaiians and the general public. This is called the "Ceded Public Lands Trust."

In 1980, the State of Hawaii began to turn over 20 percent of the revenues generated from these lands to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs to use for the betterment of the conditions of native Hawaiians. . . . The Hawaii State Constitution clearly states that there are two beneficiaries for the ceded lands: the native Hawaiians and the general public. Yet, native Hawaiians received only 20 percent, rather than 50 percent of the revenues.

Native Hawaiians seek complete restoration of all the national lands of the Kingdom of Hawaii, the entire 1.8 million acres that was illegally ceded to the U.S. government. (4)

These political and colonial issues enter my classroom in various ways and affect attitudes students bring into the classroom. The 1992 L.A. riots broke out in the middle of a Senior Seminar on Ethnic American Literature. The tone of hope and amelioration established through the discussions of Jewish-, African-, Asian-, and Native-American texts was shattered by this event, which seemed to proclaim that America had not progressed on racial and economic issues since the upheaval of the sixties. Had the civil rights movement been for nothing? I was eighteen and living in L.A. when the 1965 Watts riot exploded; now my students were grappling with the same experience. These riots were a sobering event for them, born in the early seventies and never having experienced this part of American history.

In my Honors Colloquium, "The American Melting Pot: Myth or Reality?," students write an original research paper on family history and present an oral report on their findings at the end of the semester. Using books and articles from the colloquium along with outside sources (interviews, photos, original documents) and reading, they are to construct a concept or theory of ethnicity and nationality in America



based on family history, knowledge of American history and culture, and insights gleaned through literature and autobiography. Texts we read in this colloquium include the following: *The Immigrant Experience* (ed. Thomas Wheeler), *Yekl*, *Giants in the Earth*, *Christ in Concrete*, *Maus*, *Black Boy*, *The Woman Warrior or Typical American*, *Farewell to Manzanar*, *Love Medicine*, *Hunger of Memory*, and *Jasmine*. In addition, we read essays on immigration history and theory and see documentary films, for example "Who Killed Vincent Chin?" and "Ethnic Notions." This course is limited to twelve junior and senior honors students who invariably submit outstanding papers combining research, family history, and autobiography with original theories about the ethnic American experience based on their own. One student and her family were illegal immigrants from China and lived in terror of discovery for several years in Hawaii, working menial jobs at night for below minimum wage, unable to afford even the daily quarter for the public school lunch. Another student from Thailand grew up in a parochial central Illinois community before moving to more polyglot Honolulu for college. Others have had relatives in World War II Japanese-American internment camps or in the Japanese military, sometimes both. Many are from mixed racial and cultural backgrounds and are looking for understanding of their own identities. Working with students in Hawaii has been a rewarding and stimulating experience. The richness of students' backgrounds provides an endless source of material that bears on any discussion of ethnic American literature.

A cause celebre on campus two years ago was the public debate between Haunani-Kay Trask, Director of Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawaii, and Joey Carter, a white student from the mainland, over racism. In a university newspaper editorial Carter had complained of the racist treatment he had received in a certain Honolulu neighborhood because he was white, to which Trask replied that if Carter didn't like it, he could go back to the mainland and that Hawaii could do with one fewer haole. The university and larger community jumped on this debate and argued free speech and administrator-student issues for a year with little resolution. Trask (half white, half Hawaiian herself) maintained that a person of color can never be the oppressor. As many Hawaiians opposed Trask as supported her; many "politically correct" haoles championed her.

This campus controversy illustrates part of the racial dilemma of Hawaii. Hawaii, however, seems not to have entered the post-colonial world since the Hawaiian activist movement is still working to overthrow the American colonialists. The centennial of January 1993, mourning the overthrow of the monarchy, was quite a series of events. Governor Waihee even flew the American flag at half mast for five

days at the state capital. Hawaii's social structure has been further complicated by the growing presence of Asian Americans and other Pacific Islanders. Since the mid and late 1800s, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Filipino workers were brought in to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations to the extent that now in Hawaii non-whites are 3/4 of the population. Hawaiians, like Native Americans, were decimated by diseases brought in after first contact in 1778 and through the Nineteenth Century. Native Hawaiians still have the worst position on any set of health, social, or economic statistics—life span, infant mortality, heart disease, alcoholism, drug abuse, obesity, prison population, income, educational level; the list continues and compares to statistics for Native Americans, the sad history of the colonized so demoralized as to be largely unable to recover as a group. At the same time a good number of Hawaiians are well educated and financially secure. Ancient Hawaiian culture consisted of distinct social classes organized in a caste system, and remnants of class divisions survive. The ancient ruling class continued as the Hawaiian monarchy; many descendants are social and political leaders today and traditionally intermarried first with Caucasians, then with other immigrants.

It is this milieu that university classes must address, particularly classes in ethnic American literature. I find myself teaching Native American texts, for example *Love Medicine* and *Black Elk Speaks*, not in a post-colonial environment, but in what still can be termed a colonial environment. Most of my students are non-Hawaiian, although most of them are also non-Caucasian. They, too, have usurped Native Hawaiians as have the haoles. As new immigrants always seem to do, they have, through past generations, moved up the economic and educational chain to carve solid places in this society, while traditional Hawaiians continue to question the value of education in the Western sense. Concerning employment, what Jason DeParle says, paraphrasing William Julius Wilson, of blacks and immigrants has relevance for Hawaiians: "Many immigrants, fleeing lands of desperate poverty, find even bad jobs a step up. By contrast, he said, many blacks—men, in particular—are frustrated by falling wages and sensitive to employer slights. 'And the more they complain,' he [Wilson] said, 'the more they reinforce the image that they're less desirable as workers'" (E7). Hawaiians who don't perform for tourists may reject jobs immigrants are glad to take. Because Hawaiians originally rejected plantation labor, owners had to bring in cheap and willing labor from Asia. Over the past hundred years the imported laborers have succeeded economically while the native Hawaiians have been left behind. As a result the chasm between rich and poor, non-Hawaiian and Hawaiian, widens despite high rates of intermarriage across all ethnic groups. Often the pull of "local" ethnicity discourages students from doing well, i.e.

"acting like one haole." A student who excels may be criticized for trying to "make A" or be white; this situation reinforces existing stereotypes of class and ethnicity while it puts local students in a quandary. To succeed they need to be literate or at least bilingual (speak Pidgin as well as "talk like a haole") but then can be perceived by peers as going over to the enemy. Thus caste and class differences are reinforced. Lorene Cary recently addressed this pattern in the *Newsweek* essay "As Plain as Black and White": "Cornel West . . . has said that because of stereotypes, black people 'rarely get free of the fear of white gaze, the fear of black put-down, the fear of stepping out on their own . . . .' At the same time, there is a fear of failure, because your stereotypical image is that black people are always failing; there is also a fear that if you are too successful you will be too alienated from black people, since you have failed to fall into a stereotype" (53). The fact that whites are a minority in Hawaii helps to put this cultural dominance in perspective, since various ethnic groups dominate different aspects of society, yet ambivalence about embracing Western values does reinforce stereotypes. Ted Jojola makes an important point about stereotypes and authenticity:

Native societies have a complex pluralistic human settlement history, and are characterized by subtle cultural transformations and the constant adaptation of new artistic traditions among distinct communities. Many of these transformations have emerged from the interaction of diverse indigenous and Euro-western communities. The ability of people and their communities to adapt outside traditions has been ignored as a result of image-making intended to portray 'authenticity.'

There were two distinctive and often parallel aspects of this image-making. One was promulgated by social scientists in the fields of anthropology, ethnography, and history. The other was developed by entrepreneurs of the tourism and film industry. Among social scientists, native peoples became a 'living laboratory.' Among entrepreneurs, native peoples became a 'living backdrop.' In both instances, however, the investigations were dominated by outsiders who were looking for their own affirmation of a primitive and exotic humanscape. (3)

As educators, we must be wary of both racist and politically correct stereotyping.

In a new graduate course, *Race in American Literature*, I am placing traditional canonical texts alongside texts by ethnic writers to read for conscious and unconscious racial encoding and the subversion of this encoding of Black and Indian characters in white texts by

African-American and Native-American writers themselves. The emphasis in this course is on the dark other in American fiction, the Indian and the slave, and how racial encoding has enabled American literature to express two contradictory themes, the striving for individualism along with an acceptance and justification of subjugation by race, class, and sex. Toni Morrison, in her new critical work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, sets up a theoretical structure for looking at American literature in a new way. Morrison asks, in her preface, "how is 'literary whiteness' and 'literary blackness' made, and what is the consequence of that construction? How do embedded assumptions of racial (non racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be 'humanistic'? . . . Living in a nation of people who *decided* that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom *and* mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer" (xii-xiii). This course assumes and expects that students have read enough of the classic American novels to build a context for this approach to the traditional canon and will read works by ethnic American writers to determine what differences in language and racial encoding exist and why they exist. We move from the encoding of the Indian and slave to the encoding of the Hawaiian and Polynesian in American fiction. Here Stephen Sumida's *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawaii* (1991) is helpful as an introduction to American and local literature with Polynesian reference. While I do not want to list texts, readings, and sources here, I do want to explain this course as an attempt to address postcolonial approaches to American Indian literatures (including Hawaiian and local literature) and describe the context of the culture in which I am teaching such a course. There are always more questions than answers, and, of course, the process, the journey towards an education that fosters interest, awareness, critical thinking, and self-examination is the goal, which is why we won't tire of asking and trying to answer questions about race, class, sex, and ethnicity. I invite and welcome correspondence from other people teaching courses in ethnic American literatures.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For example, the April 1994 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* has the feature article, "The Ordeal of Immigration in Wausau" with this summary: "The flow of immigrants into Wausau, Wisconsin—mostly Southeast Asians—was turned on in the late 1970s and has yet to be turned off. The result: a preview of the

tensions that may soon afflict many other American communities." Wausau is small city of 37,500 ninety miles south of the Chippewa reservation I spend summers on. I was able to buy a Hmong quilt at the "Musky Jamboree" in Boulder Junction, a town of maybe 5000.

<sup>2</sup>Entering University of Hawaii freshman in the Fall of 1993 consisted of these percentages: 28.1 Japanese, 13.8 Filipino, 11.1 Caucasian, 10.8 Hawaiian/Part Hawaiian, 9.1 Chinese, 5.2 Korean, 9.5 mixed, and 12.3 other. 57% were women, 43% men (Office of Admissions and Records, University of Hawaii). In addition, the UH Manoa campus was 29th in the U.S. in number of foreign students; 2,130 comprised 11% of enrollment, one of the highest in the nation (UHPA Faculty News). Of full-time University of Hawaii-Manoa faculty, 72% are male, 28% female. Caucasians number 70%, minorities 30%. Of minority faculty, 29% are Asian-Pacific with only 1.9% of these Hawaiian (UH EEO office, Mei Wantanabe).

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## ***White Men Can't Teach: Native Authors, White Teachers, and Classroom Authority***

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Burns Cooper

I was hip and progressive. I was on the side of Good in the canon wars, for multiculturalism, for feminism, for the marginalized and oppressed against the central and oppressive. I knew what was wrong with old paradigms of education and meant to do things the up-to-date way. I was also naive.

So when a colleague stopped me in the hall to ask me to volunteer to offer a new and impeccably-intentioned class, I agreed, with only the slightest hesitation.

This article is about some of the ways theory and literature can intersect in a particular classroom situation. It is a simple and unexceptional case study, but it has forced me to rethink the ways my teaching practice is affected, or not, by feminism, colonialism, liberation classroom theory, and theories of pedagogy in composition.

### **The Basic Story:**

In Spring of 1992, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, I taught an experimental section of our required sophomore composition course. In general, this has been taught as a rather traditional survey course that looks at poems, short stories, plays, and novels by "great authors." Mine was different only in that it was taught with a reading list composed almost entirely of Native American and Alaska Native authors. This was only the second time such a section had been offered. The first, taught by an instructor who was leaving, had received fairly positive, though mixed, student response. I modeled my syllabus after that one, but had some doubts about the way it was taught—it seemed a bit spoon-fed. I thought I could improve it by giving students more responsibility.

Some faculty members considered the Native American-Alaska Native reading list too "narrow" for a required, general-purpose, lower-division course. However, a majority of us considered this a

chance to put our principles into practice by moving literature that is often considered marginal into a central place in the curriculum. The precedent would also open the way for special sections using African-American literature, women authors, and so on. The fact that about 15% of our students are Alaska Natives made the issue more immediate.

The course went along in what I thought was a marvelous way until a little past mid-term when the whole class exploded into vitriolic controversy that divided the class along political, religious, and personal lines, and paralyzed its ability to work as a group. I'm not sure it ever recovered.

I still think that adding this section was a good idea, and I have since then taught it again. Yet I must admit that teaching it the first time brought up, in a forceful way, some issues that I had not thought through very clearly when I embarked. I hope that this account will encourage others to think about the same issues, and use their different expertise to go beyond what I am able to puzzle out.

### **The issues:**

#### **1. Authority and Liberation**

Paulo Freire's ideas about education and liberation, both as I have read them directly and as they have come to me filtered through other people's writings and speech, have had a powerful shaping influence on the way I think about teaching and learning. Because his ideas have become part of the common discourse of teaching theory, I believe most of my generation of university teachers have been influenced by him, directly or indirectly—whether they know it or not.<sup>1</sup> His criticism of "the 'banking' concept of education," in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the passive receptacles we call the minds of students, is deeply disturbing, and such "education" has seemed to me to be worse even than no education at all.

Freire's critique has both a positive and a negative aspect, for me. The positive has to do with my memory of being a student in some wonderful classes where the exchange of ideas among all participants seemed open and spirited and I truly felt myself gaining the confidence to be an independent, thinking adult—a responsible intellectual. I have never quite equalled this ideal in the classes I teach, but I have always subconsciously considered this a defect either in my teaching ability, the quality of my students, or the subject matter I have to teach.

It took a long time to occur to me that the experience of being a student is inevitably different from the experience of being a teacher; that while teaching can offer its own satisfactions, it can never present the kind of easy and frequent epiphanies that are available to an enthusiastic student, because once you graduate, there is no one

laboring many hours behind the scenes to provide those revelatory moments. This is part of the paradox of the way power works in education—the teacher may try to use her or his power to "empower" students; yet this exchange, if successful, cannot but increase the power of the teacher. The guru is inevitably more in control than the clerk. This leads to another ethical difficulty:

The negative result of liberation-style critiques is the fear of being an oppressor. If education is an institution operating to disenfranchise its clients by making them passive, if it merely replicates the unjust power structure of the society as a whole and works to preserve the status quo, then I do not want to be an agent of that institution. I want, at the very least, to do no harm, and preferably to be an agent of change working for justice. Most of us want that, I imagine; the problem is figuring out how to do it.

In some places in the world, including Freire's part of it, literacy itself is revolutionary. To educate those who have been forcibly kept illiterate is to empower them. However, all my students can read and write, at least to some degree. Liberatory education in Freire's sense—education for social change—cannot mean merely giving them the tools they need to do what they want; what most of them want is to be successful at their future jobs, and for many that will mean exploiting the mineral, organic, and human resources of the state, and blocking social change. I can move most of my students toward change only by changing what they want. That may be empowerment, but it may also be violence.<sup>2</sup>

My new class seemed to offer a good laboratory for exploring these questions. In the "banking" concept, "the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing"; "[the students] never discover that they educate the teacher" (59). Yet in this case it seemed not only undesirable but impossible for me to pretend to know everything. I am not a specialist in Native American or Alaska Native literature. I do read and think about Native literature, but my field is linguistics. I was deliberately open about admitting it whenever I didn't know the answer to a question.

Naturally, I also used all the other tricks I know to decenter the classroom: circular seating arrangement, small group work, creative writing assignments, student-determined grades, forcing myself to keep my mouth shut in discussions so students could talk.

This demotion from professorial omnipotence to fellow reader and writer had some very good effects on the class, especially because the nature of the class created an unusual mix of students. Only a few students had chosen the course at random to fulfill the composition requirement. Among the others were several Alaska Natives (Yup'ik, Inupiaq, and Athabaskan), several majors in Alaska Native Studies and



related fields (Native and non-Native), a couple of Women's Studies majors who chose the class because of the large proportion of women authors on the reading list, and a few interested others. A number were juniors and seniors who had put off taking the course earlier. Almost half the class had lived in Native villages. What this meant was that almost everyone had some particular kind of expertise relevant to the course, and could speak with more authority than others (and often than me) on some subject. This was crucially valuable for the kind of collaborative learning atmosphere I tried to foster. It further eroded my place as center and sole arbiter of knowledge—a situation which I welcomed, but which created some problems later on.

In practical terms, this arrangement produced some of the best discussions I have had in a lower-division class, and got some fairly alienated students attempting risky writing projects I do not think they would ever have tried in a less democratic setting. One very quiet woman wrote a term paper on masks in her home area, citing herself and her relatives as sources. Students began to refer to each other for help and information so habitually that I felt a little left out when they did not ask me first even about linguistic issues. "Finally," I thought, "a class that is going just how I want it to go!" Yet relinquishing authority ultimately means less, not more, ability to say how a class will go, and this logic had to surface eventually. When bitter controversy arose, I found that I could do little more than watch it play itself out, and try to mediate. In a class of true equals—that is, a class where everyone's voice is allowed equal weight—the narrow-minded and bigoted are at least as empowered as the thoughtful and generous.

## **2. What is Native Literature, and who gets to define it?**

The controversies I keep alluding to were triggered mainly by students being offended, for several different reasons, by the readings for the course. Although I would not, of course, have assigned any text I considered offensive without a strong rationale for doing so, what offends *me* was not the question. My students had their own sensibilities, and I repeatedly had to defend requiring them to read things they did not like. Making students read things they don't like is hardly an unusual problem, but in this case they had enough moral leverage and rhetorical strength that defending myself turned out to be not as easy as you might think.

A combination of fundamentalist Christian values (more about that later), lack of experience in reading literature, and understandable sensitivity about ethnic issues led to some touchy discussions, even early on. For example, several students were offended by Wendy Rose's touristic poems about Alaska and Eskimos, especially because the Alaskan poems were right next to one on Greenlandic (Inuit)

Eskimos and some students thought she was still (very inaccurately) trying to describe Alaskan (Inupiaq) Eskimos. But the more telling argument was that an "academic at Berkeley" has no right to speak for people here, or to use them to decorate her poems. My suggestions that all writers use other people for subject matter, and that perhaps Rose was also trying to lend her voice to people who aren't often heard, was taken as less than compelling—given Eskimos' and Indians' history of being spoken *for* more often than *to*. Of course, I was mainly arguing that writers have a right to write *about* other people, about whom their knowledge must be incomplete. But writing *about* is an objectivizing, analytical process; in a charged personal and political atmosphere, it tends to be taken personally. It is hard to understand descriptions of yourself as serving any other function than evaluation of yourself. That the author might be interested in examining *herself*, that she might be both an academic and a genuine Native American, and writing from that juxtaposition, seemed—not implausible, but irrelevant.

(This blurring of the boundary between storytelling and evaluation has shown up again recently in the controversy over the publication of Velma Wallis' *Two Old Women*, a Gwich'in Athabaskan tale of two women who are abandoned and work together to survive. I have not read of anyone questioning the authenticity of this story—the author heard it from her mother, after all—but some have questioned whether it was proper to present what could be considered an unflattering image of Native people, an image of abandoning elders.)

The paradigmatic example, both of students taking offense and of the processes which created this offense, occurred in reading N. Scott Momaday's *The Ancient Child*. Although several Native writers have written of the feeling of liberation they experienced when Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* came out and won the Pulitzer Prize,<sup>3</sup> and I subconsciously assumed this fact gave my choice of his more recent novel a kind of validity, my students did not necessarily share either those writers' feelings or mine.

The first day, several students, not very experienced readers of novels, expressed frustration with the difficulty of Momaday's structure, its jumps from Kiowa myth and history to the Anglo legend of Billy the Kid to two different contemporary points of view. This was expected, and I told them I considered it a useful and not insurmountable challenge for them. In the second class, we got to the Dwight Dicks rape scene, and without warning, one student began a vitriolic attack on the book, and was eventually joined by a number of others. It was criticized variously as being pornographic, misogynistic, badly written, and "not Native American literature, but just crap." I was criticized for selecting the book ("Did you even read this before

you assigned it?"), for requiring it, and for not issuing an advance warning about the explicit sex and sexual violence. The antagonists seized on the most salacious words and phrases out of context, and likened the book to *Hustler* magazine. The students who did not sympathize with this attack felt bewildered and silenced, and I felt betrayed and stunned and perhaps incompetent; I was visibly shaking by the end of the hour-and-a-half. The students who did participate felt confirmed in their antagonism and alienated from the goals of the class. The subtle balance had broken down. From that point on, everything, from the choice of every reading to the wording of assignments to the structure of grading, was not only open to argument but certain to be argued about. Several students simply ceased to contribute anything to the class except complaining. It also became almost impossible to discuss the subjects I had assumed were the relevant ones: plot structure, point of view, imagery, the appearance of mythic figures in contemporary narrative.

Now, not all that was going on here had much to do with ideology; or to be more precise, it's important to remember that emotional reactions generate ideology at least as much as ideology generates emotional reactions. As I later found out, two of the women involved were going through serious personal crises outside of class. Also, the angriest several students had done a very poor job of reading the book, to the point that they got crucial plot details wrong and conflated characters.

Still, there is a theoretical issue here: what gives me the right to tell them that they have to read this, and treat it as important (Native American) literature? Being White and male, I lack the visible authority of heritage or experience to give my judgments authenticity. Another thing that could have given me that right, the authority of expertise, was seriously undermined. I might point out that mine is not an uncommon situation; very few of my department's composition teachers are composition specialists, most of our graduate teaching assistants are creative writing MFA candidates and thus not specialists in any field of literary scholarship, and almost no faculty member is an expert on every genre and period that he or she teaches. No one would raise an eyebrow at my teaching a Hemingway story despite having read only a little scholarship on Hemingway. However, both colleagues and students seemed a little shocked at my frank admission that I was teaching this course because it was needed and because I knew a lot about reading, writing, and interpreting texts, not because I knew everything about the authors and their cultural backgrounds. Because the works I was teaching are largely relegated to specialty status, a different set of assumptions about expertise seemed to apply.

Besides, I had been arguing all semester that the students should

be making their own judgements and not passively accepting mine. They seemed to take this to heart more than the argument that they should also not passively accept anybody else's judgments (such as the church's or other students'), either. Freire argues that "the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (60), and I agree. However, the converse, that the less students work at storing deposits of information, the more they develop critical consciousness, decidedly does not follow.

Unfortunately, I believe that the students who were the most critical, by shutting themselves off from the possibility of sharing and synthesizing interpretations, were learning the least, and, by refusing to let the conversation proceed, were also disabling the learning of others.

While I was aware of this problem immediately, though, I found myself hamstrung by the question of how much I can impose my cultural values (however well-informed) on others. *The Ancient Child* clearly did not match up with the values of some of my students, both Native and non-Native, nor did Louise Erdrich's earthy, bawdy story of Old Man Potchikoo, nor did Wendy Rose's poems, nor did Dave Hunsaker's dramatic enactment of sometimes cruel, sometimes sexual Eskimo myths and fables. Acceptable to them was literature with very positive, heroic views of older times (such as Tallmountain's "The Sin of Niguudzagha") and realistic depictions of well-publicized contemporary problems such as alcoholism and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. To what extent can I, a White professor who grew up in Dallas, say that, yes, the former group of works are valuable and are genuinely Native? That my students' dislike of these writers is perhaps due to unfamiliarity with both European and Native literary traditions, or perhaps to an unwillingness to see Native American literature as something besides either harmless fables or a record of victimizations? That my efforts are not merely an attempt to force them to "understand it my way?"

Alaska has a long and ignoble history of Christian missionary activity, both Russian Orthodox and Protestant, as well as some Protestant fundamentalist communities established for purposes of White settlement rather than conversion of the Natives. Some of my White students come from backgrounds similar to the preacher's wife in Homer who was recently in the news for getting the Postal Service to ban all artwork from Alaska Post Offices because she claimed they were displaying "satanic" images (pyramids). While I consider this to be a misguided understanding of Christianity, that is my interpretive judgment. Is it religious intolerance to ignore their beliefs in my class?

Many of my Native students' grandparents went to mission schools

where they were beaten for speaking their native languages and subject to forcible religious training. While I consider this activity to have been colonialist exploitation, that is a historical judgment. In the present what exists is a group of students who hold very conservative personal values (though different in many respects from those of the White fundamentalists, as well as those of other, more liberal, Natives). Is it double colonialism to ignore those values now?

Even if you could arbitrarily decide to adhere only to the oldest Native traditions, that would not be simple. The very nature of reading a published novel or seeing a play is completely unlike hearing traditional stories in the context of a traditional village society. Dave Hunsaker had to choose just one version of the widespread story of the woman who put on a bearskin and turned into a bear; some of my students had heard other versions and thought his was wrong; for them, perhaps, it was. To present this play at all could be offensive to some Athabaskans who have strong taboos concerning women interacting with the bodies of animals, and here it is not just a question of hurt feelings but a genuine belief that bad events, such as ruined hunting, could result.

### **3. Feminism and representation**

This belief in the power of representation to affect reality makes the stakes significant, even in an English class. It is something that is perhaps most often associated with Native ceremonials, as in hunting rituals and curing chants, but it is actually much more widespread, both in Native and White cultures. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this belief, in my class, came when one of the women told me that she felt that she had actually been raped by having to read Momaday's rape scene.

Now, I do not hold with the anti-obscenity arguments and ordinances advanced by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon that any representation of the sexual subjugation of women constitutes actual (and actionable) civil harm to any woman in the society. This conception, which Henry Louis Gates, Jr., calls "hermeneutic harm" (902), is too extreme and too self-contradictory to be very useful. But, again in Gates's words, "And yet, and yet . . . because I want to believe that culture *matters*, I cannot refuse to contemplate that texts have effects as well as causes" (903).

Really, the argument my students were making was not so subtle. Two of them told me they had actually been raped in the past, and given the statistics we all know too well, the odds are that they were not the only ones. They felt they were being forced to relive their experiences, and that I had no right to make them do that. I wanted to argue that the transformative power of art was enough to justify their

pain, and that running away from the truth never helps. But who am I to make that judgment for them? What makes it worse is the fact that while I think Momaday does some excellent things in *The Ancient Child*, the rape scene is not his best writing, and in fact all his descriptions of women are problematic. (For example, he can't seem to describe an attractive woman without reference to "full, firm breasts.")

Of course, I had noticed these problems before and decided that what we could learn from the book outweighed them. In fact, I thought that discussing what I considered Momaday's sexism could be an enlightening activity—but the stakes were raised so quickly beyond a dispassionate discussion of ideology that we never did deal with that very coherently. In response to the students' anger at having to read this work, I pointed out the many instances of violent sexuality in our whole traditions, from Native myths to the Bible to Shakespeare to romance novels to Louise Erdrich to radical feminist novels, and said that it's an issue that one can't escape. The fact that White men sometimes rape Native women, another touchy issue, is also a fact of life here in Fairbanks, and it should be talked about. But all that's easy for me to say, isn't it?

### Conclusions

The problems I have described are at least partly an artifact of what I had originally considered an advantage: the fact that this literature was introduced into a lower-level, universally required, composition course. No doubt they could also arise in an elective Native American/Alaskan Native Studies course, but the dynamics would be rather different. For one thing, the fact that the course is required makes student charges of coercion more plausible. For another, the need to spend a good deal of time on issues of composition and basic literary terms meant it was not possible to provide nearly as much context for each work as would otherwise be possible. Finally, the usual emphasis of Sophomore English on formal concerns and the emphasis of Native literature on social responsibility are in competition. At a higher level, I would like to discuss the ways authors' social motivations affect the formal shapes of their writing. I am, as a linguist, a formalist through and through; I do not believe form and content are separate issues. But for students encountering questions of genre and style for the first time, it may be useful to have a little more distance from the subject matter.

Still, it is important not to think of everything I have brought up as a problem. Students who would not otherwise have read this literature were exposed to it. They were forced to decide what they thought about some very hot issues, to write and speak about them, and

to deal with other students who might feel quite differently. Even if the decisions they made and the interaction they took part in (or opted out of, in some cases) were not what I would have liked them to be, they genuinely belonged to the students. Perhaps that is the first step toward a truly liberating pedagogy.

I asked earlier how I could know that I am not just trying to get students to see things my way. In fact, I undoubtedly am, at least in part. Jane Tompkins has described how, while she was looking for historical background on White/Native relations in colonial New England, every historian she came across described that history in a different way, partly because what they were able to see was limited by the time and culture from which they wrote. She describes being almost paralyzed with indecision because it seemed impossible to find out what had really happened. But she also points out that not making a judgment is a luxury that one ordinarily can't afford: "One encounters contradictory facts and divergent points of view in practically every phase of life, from deciding whom to marry to choosing the right brand of cat food, and one decides as best one can given the evidence available" (118). This is the teacher's dilemma, too: There is no way I can completely reconcile my readings of the texts, my beliefs about social justice, and the incompatible world-views of my various students. But in the end my students were harmed not by my oppressing them, not by my force-feeding them the model of reality that "fits" into an oppressive society, but by my failure to vigorously articulate and stand up for a model that could serve as an alternative to the views that are already being pressed on them by angry fellow-students, fearful parents, and a society that doesn't, as a rule, care very much about them one way or the other.

I was focused on what I saw as purely social, rather than literary, issues; in fact I was frustrated at not being able to get to what I thought were the literary issues. But ultimately the most volatile differences among my students and me were hermeneutic: not only could we not agree on how to interpret the literature, but we couldn't agree about what kind of a disagreement this was, because we couldn't see that interpretation was the problem. Blaming "fundamentalism" is easy enough (at least if you were raised a left-wing Methodist like me), but it is more useful to see that fundamentalism is at its core a denial that interpretation takes place, not only in the Bible but in other texts and issues as well. In this sense the intractability of fundamentalism is not defined by conservative attitudes toward sexuality, or even toward sexual language or images. It is defined by an ultra-literal and anti-holistic (literal in the sense of letter-by-letter) method of reading texts, and for that matter reading the world. If I believe that a pyramid shape, no matter what the context, can stand for one and only one

thing—satanism—that is fundamentalism. If I read carefully selected, isolated passages from the Bible about sexuality, idolatry, women's roles, and so on, and call them God's word, that is fundamentalism. If I read carefully chosen, isolated dirty words from *The Ancient Child* and call them Momaday's word, that too is a kind of fundamentalism. Further, if I believe that any poem with Eskimos in it must be taken as a definitive, correct or incorrect, statement about Eskimos, rather than as a statement about a poet's limited and personal understanding, that is fundamentalism. And if I believe that a depiction of an act of rape is identical to the act itself, or that a dramatic representation of a violation of a taboo is identical to the violation itself, that too is akin to fundamentalism.

I do not intend to tell my students that this kind of interpretation is wrong. The truth is, I am (like everyone) prone to it myself at times. But I do owe it to them and to myself to try to show them that it *is* a kind of interpretation. And here is where my authority reappears—I have spent my adult life studying the nature of language, and how it is interpreted; I do have some things to say about it, and my students may benefit from hearing them.

### **Ironic Postscript:**

Here is the concluding paragraph of the first version of this article:

There are several changes I will make when I teach this class again, among them: providing more literary context earlier, having students work out more discussions in writing before beginning to talk, setting ground rules for turn-taking. But also, next time I will have enough respect for my students to fear them a little bit, to tell them when I think they're blowing hot air, and to realize that they may very well not believe me.

In the interval since I wrote that and sent it off to the editor for this special issue, I have taught the course again. I put all those lessons I thought I'd learned into practice. I also changed the reading list slightly: I replaced *The Ancient Child* with Erdrich's *Tracks*, both because I decided that *Tracks* is easier to read and more clearly illustrates the things I wanted to discuss about point of view and the use of history and myth, and because, quite frankly, I was afraid of *The Ancient Child*. In addition, the makeup of the class was quite different. For the most part, these students had less personal experience with Native cultures, and in any case were more inclined to write their concerns to me in reading responses than to speak them in class. Ironically, there was only one Alaska Native (a Tlingit) in the class this time, and he, like the other students, was reluctant to speak about



emotional issues, even when I brought them up. Sure enough, the problems I had the first time never surfaced. The class went smoothly and steadily. The all-important student evaluations of the course, on which my promotion chances depend, were higher. No one called me any insulting name all semester long. And the level of intellectual and emotional excitement was startlingly low. Frankly, it was rather dull.

The next step in the thought process I have been at pains to outline in this article is to figure out how to bring in the controversies that give a class stakes in the real world, without on the one hand inviting psychic injury to myself and some of my students, and without on the other hand diluting the class to the point where it loses its reason for existing.

I plan to teach this course again someday, but not right away. I have other things I need to do, and I need time to sort through this experience. It turns out that Experience, like all teachers, must be questioned. And it turns out that in teaching, as in texts, form may not be separable from content: I find I don't know how to teach conflict in a conflict-free class; I don't know how to introduce violence without feeling that violence turned back against me; I don't know how to pull the rug of assumptions out from under my students' feet without hitting the ground harder myself. These things may be just as hard as getting students to look at structure when they can't see past words, as hard as getting them to look at authors' and characters' points of view instead of their own.

And so I find I am not at any kind of end here. My questions, so far, only produce more questions. And yet, I suppose, that is what education is: an effort to identify the questions, and a willingness to follow them. The students educate the teacher, and the teacher educates the teacher. Just as I have learned from teachers who have wrestled with these questions in the past, I will follow with interest the efforts of other teachers to take them further than I have.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>An in-depth examination of Freire's influence is beyond the scope of this article. However, in addition to Freire's own fairly prolific writings, and the 15 or so citations that make their way each year into the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, one regularly sees other, less quantifiable evidence. For example, a classified ad in a recent issue of *The Nation* offers "Intensive Spanish in a Solidarity Environment. Paulo Freire's methodology. . . ." (CETLALIC).

<sup>2</sup>For another discussion of how Freire's ideas may apply in an economically privileged environment (a U.S. university), see Hochheimer.

<sup>3</sup>For example: Gunn Allen, Lockwood.

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## ***Working (In) the In-Between: Poetry, Criticism, Interrogation, and Interruption***<sup>1</sup>

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Jeannie Ludlow

. . . the mixed-bloods are between [worlds] . . . . And a mixed-blood must waver in the blood and it's difficult to waver the page. You have to find some meaning not in the sides but in the seam in between and that's obviously where a mixed-blood . . . must try and find all meaning, imaginative meaning. . . . Perhaps it's a blessing in a way that there aren't any fixed images of the in-between, so, as the deconstructionists might argue, the meaning is in the play; it's in the trace, it's in the difference, it's in what isn't there. (Gerald Vizenor, interview, 1990)

Because most [contemporary Native writers]—with few exceptions—are "breeds," "mixed-bloods," not reserve-raised, they aren't "traditional,"—whatever that might mean now. Some might say that writing is just their role. That's what breeds do. They stand in the middle and interpret for everyone else, and maybe that's so. That's what they are. But "identity" is never simply a matter of genetic make-up or natural birthright . . . identity is a matter of will, a matter of choice, a face to be shaped in a ceremonial act. (Rayna Green, Introduction to *That's What She Said: Contemporary Poetry and Fiction by Native American Women*, 1984)

Joy Harjo's "The Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window" and Louise Erdrich's "The Lady in the Pink Mustang" tell stories about the brutal reality of isolation for Native American peoples, and about the difficulty/necessity of ceremonial action, of shaping one's face, one's identity when one finds oneself in the in-between without a

choice, without a community, and often without will. This essay is intended as one interrogation of the in-between as a symbolic location for these poets, for Native American women, for readers, and for critics (especially for Western critics working with Nonwestern<sup>2</sup> texts). Each of these roles can be understood in terms of interpretation. An interpreter's work is always conducted in the in-between. Between Green's notion of the interrelationship among writing, interpreting, and identity and Vizenor's trickster-like emphasis on the play of the trace, on the in-between as the site of imaginative meaning, lies a location from which these poets are writing, and in which the deconstruction of oppositions (Indian/white, reservation/urban) not only occurs but necessarily results in constructions of new possibilities.

In her "Laugh of the Medusa," an extended manifesto on women's writing as necessary to undo women's silencing, Hélène Cixous, French feminist poet and theorist, writes:

*To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death—to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another.*<sup>3</sup> (883)

Cixous' location of writing *in* the in-between, her understanding of writing as working the in-between,<sup>4</sup> echoes Green's and Vizenor's statements, indicating that there is a relationship between Cixous' in-between (as a space for women writing in order to undo the work of oppression/silencing) and Native American writers' between (publishing poetry for multicultural audiences and, often, working within academic communities<sup>5</sup>). However, because these poets have often been objectified, denied subjectivity within American culture, Cixous' characterization of working (in) the in-between as "inspecting the process of the same and of the other" and as "dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another" must be problematized in relationship to their work, in much of which many locate (in) the in-between a site for the exploration/recuperation of that subjectivity. In other words, although Cixous' assertion that women have been silenced by Western civilization certainly holds true, her exhortation of women to write implies a simple causal relationship between writing and finding voice. This notion of writing beyond silence is inadequate to address the layers of oppression, of silencing, that women of colors in general (and, for the purposes of this study, Native American women specifically) have experienced.

At the same time, Cixous' unqualified, unnamed writing subject—an understood "you"?—extends the implications of her description of writing considerably. A critic writing could be said to be working (in) the in-between. A Euro-American feminist critic writing about works by Native American women must work (in) the in-between if she is to avoid critical colonization. You are writing; you are attempting to work (in) the in-between, to consciously create your criticism around the centralized poetic voices. The attempt to write as a deliberately decentered subject is an attempt to represent and problematize the relationships among various subject positions<sup>6</sup>: poet, critic, audience. In order to negotiate these various positionalities, you turn to the concept of the interstice. The interstice, as African American critic Hortense Spillers uses the term, is a "lexical gap," an "absence," a "missing word," a "negative [aspect] of symbol-making" providing for the possibility of representing the unrepresentable. Spillers locates the origin of the interstice in the "empowered[‘s]" encounter with what she experiences as "chaos" (in the form of a "black female" in her analysis), which "allows us to speak about and that . . . enables us to speak at all" (77). In a further development of this analogy, Third World (by her own definition) filmmaker and cultural critic Trinh T. Minh-ha locates her work in an interstice, in "that new in-between-the-naming space" via Roland Barthes' use of the term. She cites Barthes, for whom the interstice is a location of instability:

*Roland Barthes' ecriture is informed by the principles of Asian art, which he describes as "always seeking to paint the void," or better, as grasping "the representable object in that rare moment when the plenitude of its identity falls abruptly into a new space, that of the interstice."*<sup>7</sup> (112, Trinh's italics)

Thus is Trinh's notion of the interstice characterized by a "seeking" rather than the "allowing" that characterizes Spillers'. Spillers' interstice begins with and provides for a deconstruction of identity into "non-being," while Trinh's interstice is a space into which identity can fall (and, by implication, fall out of and into again), in which subjectivity can be captured only momentarily.

You seek to deconstruct your own location as critic/subject in this critique in order to resist being "fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death" (sequences echoing the history of conflict between whites and Native American peoples); you must find interstices to move among, from which to effect that "infinitely dynamized" and "incessant process of exchange from one subject to another." If subjectivity is defined as a (series of) position(s) into and out of which a subject can move, then a critic should be able to move

into and out of subjectivity in order to provide a space within the criticism for the subjectivity of the poet(s). This is especially crucial when the critic's relationship to the poets is politically and historically hegemonic. Although the deliberate occupation of an object position seems unlikely (if the critic is actually to write the critique), a movement to the side, a decentering of the critic's own subjectivity is desirable. In order to emphasize this movement, you choose to locate yourself in the second person, thinking that this might effectively serve as a linguistic representation of the interstitial relationship—a relationship that is both focused in and moving within the in-between, one that "allows [all parties] to speak about and that . . . enables [them] to speak at all"—which you want to cultivate with the poetry, with your writing, and with your audience.

"You" is the only personal pronoun that moves, unchanged, between the singular and the plural, between the subjective and the objective. Therefore, "you" might be more easily decentered. Perhaps you can allow "you" to be seen as working with(in) Spillers' "negative aspects of symbol-making," especially if "negative" is understood in terms of its photographic context as well as of "absence." The negative aspects of symbol-making, then, would imply both the deconstruction of another's identity (into, as Spillers says, "chaos" and "non-being") and the use of that negativity to reinforce one's own identity (as "the empowered"). A (photographic) negative of the negative aspects of symbol-making would invert this process, resulting in the deconstruction of one's (your) own identity and the reinforcement of another's (the poets') subjectivity. These contexts allow the "negative" to function as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has explained, as a "methodological presupposition," as the subject's "desire for/of [the power of the Other] that produces an image of the self" (203) as the writing subject.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps "you" can become a (non-)name, a "new in-between-the-naming" critical location. And the constant repetition of such an unconventional (in critical discourse) subject pronoun—a "missing word"—should serve to continuously decenter yourself, to jar your readers, reminding them of some of the implications of examining Continental philosophy and Western feminist theory along with Native American poetry.<sup>9</sup> The act of literary criticism—standing in the middle and interpreting for everyone else—locates you in between theory and practice; you work (in) the in-between.

"The Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window" by Creek poet Joy Harjo begins:

She is the woman hanging from the 13th floor  
window. Her hands are pressed white against the  
concrete molding of the tenement building. She

hangs from the 13th floor window in east Chicago,  
with a swirl of birds over her head. They could  
be a halo, or a storm of glass waiting to crush her.

.....  
She thinks she will be set free. (22-23)

You are struck by the starkness of the images of between: a woman hanging, dangling between life and death, between freedom and her lack of it. The "birds over her head" represent her position between life—invoked by the word "swirl," which implies flight, energy—and death, with the image of the halo invoking both the "life" of Christian afterlife (with its attendant angels) and the impending death of the "storm of glass." Even the window (between inside and outside) from which she hangs is an in-between. Popular folklore has it that most people are superstitious about the number 13, so many buildings do not have a 13th floor. This woman can only be located in the in-between, in interstices—in spaces between life and death, in a space that may be no place and is, in any event, certain to conjure up images of bad luck in you.

This particular interstitial positionality can not be seamed together and, therefore does not provide a space for a definition of the woman's identity. *Woman is a common noun for which no identity can be defined.*<sup>10</sup> Although most of the phrases of the poem begin with the words "She is," you never get a feeling that this woman's being in the in-between opens up a space from/in which her identity can be defined. In fact, all statements that might lead to a definition of her identity manage simultaneously to negate it. These lines indicate that she is always already defined in terms of others (' possession of her):

She is a woman of children, of the baby, Carlos,  
and of Margaret, and of Jimmy who is the oldest.  
She is her mother's daughter and her father's son.  
She is several pieces between the two husbands she  
has had. She is all the women of the apartment  
building who stand watching her, watching themselves.

She seems to belong to, but not with, these people.

Thus, the woman hanging from the 13th floor window elucidates<sup>11</sup> for you Luce Irigaray's concept of the specula(riza)tion of woman,<sup>12</sup> especially of woman as speculum—woman as a dilating instrument that allows others' identities to be examined and defined; woman as a mirror, which, in her ability (only) to reflect, provides for the discovery or reification of others' identities. *Is she, by nature, a being that exists for/by another?*<sup>13</sup> These lines of the poem, each descriptive phrase layered upon another, reveal the extent of her refraction as a specular woman, the extent to which she can only be defined from

within her relationships. *[S]he is already scattered into  $\underline{x}$  number of places that are never gathered together into anything she knows of herself, and these remain the basis of (re)production—particularly of discourse—in all its forms.*<sup>14</sup> As "a woman of children," the woman in the poem is necessarily defined in terms of (biological) reproduction at the same time that her (potential) identity as "mother" is secondary to her being possessed by and defined by her children. As "her mother's daughter and her father's son," she not only is possessed by these people but is de-gendered in order to more accurately mirror/represent their identities. As "several pieces between . . . two husbands," she can be *scattered into  $\underline{x}$  number of places* from which she reflects one specific (transcendent? *the primacy [of the (masculine) subject's (self-)identity] resides in the name(s) of the father, which is/are transcendent or immanent in his (as it were) natural development*<sup>15</sup>) aspect of these men's identities—husband-ness; without her reification of this husband-ness, these men would not even exist within the context of this poem. And the description of her as "several pieces"—reflected in the later image of "[h]er teeth break[ing] off at the edges," preventing her speaking—conjures up an image of a broken mirror (intensifying the sense of "bad luck" represented by the number thirteen), which is extended into the next lines: she is the mirroring device through which "all the [other] women" are able to stand "watching themselves." Thus she is *unnecessary in and of herself, but essential as the non-subjective subjectum*.

You re-read Irigaray's interrogation of the various layers of woman's specula(riza)tion:

*Is she the reverse of the coin of man's ability to act and move around in the physical world we are calling "place"? Is she unnecessary in and of herself, but essential as the non-subjective sub-jectum? As that which can never achieve the status of subject, at least for/by herself. Is she the indispensable condition whereby the living entity retains and maintains and perfects himself in his self-likeness? Despite the risks of falling down into the "infinite," or of uncontrollable movements in the "void."*<sup>16</sup>

The woman hanging from the 13th floor window is obviously unable to act or move around as she dangles there. However, there is no indication in the poem that she was able to act or move with subjective agency before she found herself hanging from that window ledge, thinking "she [would] be set free." In fact, when in the night she "hears voices," "sometimes they are gigantic men of light whispering / to her to get up, to get up, to get up, to get up." Obviously, she does not get up (one doesn't repeat a direction to someone who has already carried



it out)—she does not act—but instead, she wants: "[t]hat's when she wants / to have another child to hold onto in the night, to be able / to fall back into dreams." Again, she does not act on her wants. "And the woman hanging from the 13th floor window / hears other voices. Some of them scream out from below for her to jump," but she cannot even muster the agency (dubious though it would be) to do that: "she knows she is hanging by her own fingers, her / own skin. her own thread of indecision."

The repetition of the modifier "own" in these lines serves, by contrast, to emphasize that in the language of the poem, this woman has nothing. She "has" nothing that is external to herself: only her "own fingers" "own skin," and "own thread of indecision." In fact, she only "has" in her past, when "she was young" and "ate wild rice on scraped down / plates in warm wood rooms": "she was the baby then. They rocked her." When she thinks back on this time when she was a part of a community, she remembers being her "own": she is "crying for / the lost beauty of her own life." Because identity in a traditional Nonwestern culture is often closely tied to a sense of community and a sense of place, her identity was, indeed, beautiful in that other place ("It was in the farther / north"), that place of her people, of the "they" who rocked her and of the grandmother whose voice sometimes "come[s] to her in the night."

This short stanza describing the woman's life in that place is made more poignant by its contextualization between the stanza (quoted above) in which the woman is identified as having no identity, and the following:

She sees Lake Michigan lapping at the shores of  
herself. It is a dizzy hole of water and the rich  
live in tall glass houses at the edge of it. In some  
places Lake Michigan speaks softly, here, it just sputters  
and butts itself against the asphalt.

In these lines, the intersections between the woman and Irigaray's specular woman begin to multiply and become multiply-layered, permitting you to work toward a better understanding of both the poem, with its layers of meaning in between traditional consciousness and both Nonwestern and Western imagery, and of Irigaray's theoretical movements, which seem always to be glancing off one concept and onto another. The woman hanging from the 13th floor window is specular both as a "hole"/lake *this mirror . . . makes a hole*<sup>17</sup> and as the edge, the outline that provides a definition of what is reflected there, as the dilating "arms" of a speculum/dilator provide for the speculative (seeking) eye the outline/definition of a particular body cavity. In confronting this overlapping of meanings you, like Irigaray's

"subject," are *faced by another specularization. Whose twisted character is her inability to say what she represents.*<sup>18</sup> The woman is not granted an identity with the use of the pronoun "herself." Instead, this particular word, referring back to "[s]he," indicates that the woman can only conceive of herself/her self as the outline, a specular frame for the Lake and, referring back to "Lake Michigan," conveys the intermutability of the woman and the Lake. Thus is the Lake/woman both within the economy of specularization (a "hole of water" with "tall glass houses at the edge of it") and of speculation (a "dizzy hole," "lapping at the shores of / herself").

*[She] is vacancy of form, gap in form, the return to another edge where she re-touches herself with the help of—nothing. Lips of the same form—but of a form that is never simply defined—ripple outwards as they touch and send one another on a course that is never fixed into a single configuration.*<sup>19</sup>

"[L]apping at the shores of / herself," the Lake/woman elucidates this explanation of the specular woman's impossibly/multiply defined identity, echoing the image of the two lips that are simultaneously multiple and single, and are always already (self-)touching, untouched by another, a not-her.

It strikes you that Harjo's specular woman is, above all else, isolated. Although she can be read in terms of Irigaray's two lips, she cannot be read as belonging to a community, having a function/identity within a community. And this difference marks a location in which the intersections between Irigaray's theorizations of female subjectivity and the poets' break down. The woman hanging from the 13th floor window is a singular "she" throughout the poem, (like) other women and yet alone, as each of the other women is also alone. Although "[s]he is all the women," none of them can help her: "They would help her, like themselves" but cannot. The potentiality of suicide, you decide, comes from the danger of isolation for a Native American person. Allen points out that "[t]he horrors that visit an Indian who attempts isolate individuality" have "form[ed] a major theme in the oral literatures of all tribes" and in "past [traditional] as in present [written] narratives" (Allen, *SWG* 5).<sup>20</sup> Similarly, a ceremony is often employed to effect the individual's reconnection with the community and, thus, the survival of the individual ('s identity); one well-known example of this employment of ceremony is the story of Tayo in Silko's *Ceremony*. But Harjo's woman hanging from the 13th floor window is without community, without a ceremony. In fact, the poem gives only a glimmer of hope; interestingly enough, that glimmer is, again, interstitial, located in the in-between. In the last four lines of the

poem, Harjo maintains the interstices in her oscillation between two possible outcomes:

She thinks she remembers listening to her own life  
break loose, as she falls from the 13th floor  
window on the east side of Chicago, or as she  
climbs back up to claim herself again.

By expressing these two possibilities in one sentence—indeed, not even separating them with a line break—and invoking the image of "herself," Harjo leaves you (and the woman) in a state of interstitialcy.<sup>21</sup> And although interstitialcy opens up a space, a glimmer of hope that identity is not impossible for the woman hanging from the 13th floor window, identity is not constructed by/for her either. The woman hanging from the 13th floor window remains in a state of identity-lessness in Irigaray's terms because she is a speculum without a "subject." Since there is, in the poem, no remaining (male) "subject" whose identity depends on her reflection/re-presentation, she is doubly self-referential, always already reflecting her own reflection. And even if, within that reflection, she can "claim herself again," she is still isolated, without a community.

*Woman, having been misinterpreted, forgotten, variously frozen in showcases, rolled up in metaphors, buried beneath carefully stylized figures, raised up in different idealities, would now [under the subject's speculative gaze, aided by the speculum/dilator] become the object to be investigated.*<sup>22</sup>

An examination of the critic/interpreter/yourself as occupying a specular position might prove valuable. Certainly the "[literary critic-as-]interpreter's work is always conducted in the [specular] in-between: . . . between repetition and transformation." But what is your relationship to the "subject?" Which "subject?" The poet(s)? The patriarchal subject that is implied within the tradition of literary criticism? You find that African American literary critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. has written: "What all students of literature share in common is the art of interpretation." Gates does not, however, say (or even imply) that the "art of interpretation" involves occupying a location in the (specular) in-between—between a subject and that subject's subjectivity. In fact, Gates explicitly locates in literary criticism a political responsibility to be a subject working for change: "I have tried to work through contemporary theories of literature *not* to 'apply' them to black texts, but rather to *transform* by *translating* them into a new rhetorical realm." He charges:

It is only through this critical activity that the profession,  
in a world of dramatically fluid relations of knowledge

and power . . . , can redefine itself away from a Eurocentric notion of a hierarchical canon of texts, mostly white, Western, and male, and encourage and sustain a truly comparative and pluralistic notion of the institution of literature. (351)

Because you have made explicit your own desire to work for that redefinition of the profession and because, in working (in) the in-between, you work to invoke a "comparative and pluralistic notion of the institution of literature" (a notion of an institution that can encourage the simultaneous reading of Native American/marginalized literatures and Continental theoretical concepts), you must resist the rather desirable image of the critic as specular. Although a specular critic might seem, on the surface, to work beyond racist readings by practicing reflection/re-presentation of texts, the specular critic also, by definition, will practice racist readings because specular reflection/re-presentation is only possible within a denial of a critical subjectivity (the specular woman *can never achieve the status of subject*<sup>23</sup>) which, in turn, will lead the critic back to the assumption of objectivity and the pretensions of political neutrality on the part of the researcher that underlay New Criticism. This regression must be rejected in favor of a subject(ive)/critic who is capable of occupying various subject positions in the service of this political activity—the critic as mobile.

"The Lady in the Pink Mustang," by Louise Erdrich (Chippewa), tells the story of a woman as mobile, a prostitute who travels the highways in a pink Mustang, flashing headlights with truckers to convey interest, price, agreement. The title of the poem locates the prostitute in between: the woman is called a "Lady," a word usually reserved for white, "respectable" women, a word used perhaps only ironically to name poor women, prostitutes, or Native American women. In her (ironic) name(lessness), the Lady is between having and lacking identity. The image of the pink Mustang serves to emphasize the woman's socio-cultural position. The Mustang, the Ford Motor Company's (and Lee Iacocca's) marketing success as the "affordable" car for the working man (read: working and lower classes), certainly places the Lady within a subordinated class and draws the readers' attention to the economic elements of hooking as opposed to the sexualized elements. That the Mustang is pink serves both to cheapen and feminize it, echoing the image of the prostitute "[p]ainting her nipples silver for a show" near the end of the poem. The Mustang, the often romanticized wild horse roaming the Plains, contextualizes the Lady in relationship to stereotypical images of rugged individualism—the cowboy, who captured and tamed the Mustang, who eventually led to the wild horse's endangered status, who is a symbol

of the oppression of Native American peoples in the Western U.S. Between these two images of the Mustang is evidenced the woman's socio-cultural status as both marginalized and between.

It is important to emphasize that other than the allusion to the Mustang horse (often associated with Plains Peoples) inherent in the name of the car, there is no textual evidence that the Lady in the poem is Native American: this, however, does not invalidate your reading of the poem as an example of the difficulties surrounding the shaping of a Native American identity as Green has delineated them. This is not to say that the Lady symbolizes a Native American: the concept of symbolization is reductive (at best) of the complex relationship between the Lady in the poem and the poets' representations of attempts at shaping identity. Instead, because writing is "their role," as Green explains, they shape identity through writing, "becom[e] through writing" and writing is, for these poets, a ceremony—that "ceremonial act" within which "a face [can] be shaped" (7). Within this ceremonial context, the Western notion of symbolization" or "symbolism" is inadequate. As Paula Gunn Allen writes, there is inherent in traditional Nonwestern thought a mystical/psychical aspect that is not, as it might be in Western cultures, relegated to "special" circumstances (church services, for example, or poetry). And an understanding of symbolism is one aspect of that mystical/psychical aspect. Allen explains that "symbols" are "statements of perceived reality rather than metaphorical or poetic statements." She elaborates:

The symbolism in Native American ceremonial literature then, is not symbolic in the usual sense; that is, the . . . color red, as used by the Lakota, doesn't stand for sacred or earth, but it is the quality of a being, the color of it, when perceived "in a sacred manner" . . . . That is, red is a psychic quality not a material one . . . . its material aspect is not its essential one. (*SH* 68-70)

In this sense, then, the Lady in the Pink Mustang is not a metaphor of Native American women but is instead best perceived as being a woman subject(ed) to the difficulties of isolate individualization like those experienced by Native American women.

One of the characteristics of being in between as Rayna Green characterizes it is being on "the Road" (7), which would be antithetical to a more traditional, Nonwestern notion of identity, one that is characterized by connectedness to place, to community.<sup>24</sup> Being on "the Road" is about being no place, and often being alone. Although these conditions associated with being on the Road have been highly romanticized in Euro-American literary celebrations of individualism, they mean something quite different for Nonwestern peoples, for whom

a sense of community is essential to survival, as discussed in connection with Harjo's poem. Green's characterization of Native American writers as in between/on the Road, then, reveals the importance of that ceremonial act, which can be writing, to the shaping of identity.

Erdrich's descriptions of her life on the road place the Lady firmly in the in-between: this woman's story begins with a moment of transition. "The sun goes down for hours," the poem begins, thus locating her in a temporal in-between of timelessness. She has no past and no future: "Travel light. Don't keep / what does not have immediate uses:" "[s]he won't carry things she can't use anymore" but only "[t]hings she could leave anywhere." She, always traveling, in movement in her Mustang, is at a place that is no place, a time that transcends time:

There is a point in the distance where the road meets itself,  
where coming and going must kiss into one.  
She is always at that place, seen from behind,  
motionless, torn forward, living in a zone  
all her own. It is like she has burned right through time,  
the brand, the mark, owning the woman who bears it. (17)

The Lady in the Pink Mustang, in her in-between-ness, has no identity. *Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man . . . and himself.*<sup>25</sup> She has no name, aside from the title "Lady" which reduces her to (ironic) femininity. *But in fact that "femininity" is a role, an image, a value, imposed upon women by male systems of representation.*<sup>26</sup> Although—or perhaps because—she makes her living selling her physicality, her body, she scarcely has a physical identity left. *She "doesn't exist." She adopts the disguise that she is told to put on. She acts out the role that is imposed on her.*<sup>27</sup> Like Harjo's woman hanging from the thirteenth floor window, she does not "own" her body: "The body as disposable as cups." *In our social order, women are "products" used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, "commodities."*<sup>28</sup> Her body is merely a "bare lap" and silver-painted nipples, physical manifestations of its economic value:

Painting her nipples silver for a show, she is thinking  
*You out there. What do you know.*  
*Come out of the dark where you're safe. Kissing these*  
*bits of change, stamped out, ground to a luster,*  
*is to kiss yourself away piece by piece*  
*until we're even. Until the last*  
*coin is rubbed for luck and spent.*  
*I don't sell for nothing less. (18)*

But these last lines can indicate a possibility that Harjo's woman does

not have. The Lady's thoughts are more than merely defiant. She might be possessed of a kind of power, albeit a frighteningly limited and dubious power. This power is revealed in the language used to relate her thoughts: *Kissing these / bits of change, stamped out, ground to a luster.*" With the paint (which recalls the paints used by many Native American peoples, including the Chippewa [Ojibwa],<sup>29</sup> to decorate the body or face for war or celebration [Johnston 80-93, 146-47]), her nipples become "*bits of change*," like silver coins certainly, but also "*bits of change*"—small particles related to alteration of reality. "[S]*tamped out*" and "*ground to a luster*" may well describe the silver coins, stamped and polished at a mint, but the structure of the sentence allows for an ambiguity here. Perhaps it is the man who is "kissing these" nipples who is also "stamped out," extinguished like a fire and "ground to a luster" (reduced to a lust-er. one who lusts) by virtue of the woman's perception of her "control"—as seller—over the commodity he desires. Through its layered complexity, the language allows for the man/men to be reduced to economic value and then devalued, like the prostitute: "*to kiss yourself away piece by piece / until we're even.*" This use of language climaxes with the double negative in the last line: "*I don't sell for nothing less.*"

It would be a mistake, however, to see the Lady's (potential) disempowerment of the men as resulting in/from an empowerment of herself which might then allow for some shaping of an identity. It is clear from the images of commodification and exchange that are complicated but not negated in these last lines, that the Lady has not moved beyond (perhaps because she cannot conceptualize moving beyond) the economy of prostitution—within which she is disempowered—to a different context which would allow for her own empowerment rather than simply for the disempowerment of the men. [*When women's movements . . . aim simply for a change in the distribution of power, leaving intact the power structure itself, then [women] are resubjecting themselves, deliberately or not, to a phallocratic order.*<sup>30</sup> While the act of "[p]ainting her nipples silver for a show" invokes images of masquerading oneself—*In this masquerade of femininity, the woman loses herself, and loses herself by playing on her femininity*<sup>31</sup>—it might well invoke the Chippewa ceremonial acts of body decoration, thereby simultaneously embodying the Lady's un-masquerade-ing. The double negative in the last line, then, which encourages interstitiality on the part of the reader, turns upon and complicates itself as it represents the Lady's resubjecting herself to a patriarchal power structure while it proclaims the nature of her (potential) control as "between"—between power and not-power, between what she relinquishes (her sex) and what she does not, what she attempts to hold in reserve for herself, to hide behind her masquerade.

Within this interstitiality between the Lady's dislocation and reification of the power of the male(s), it becomes clear that this

woman's only chance for power lies in her remaining in the in-between. In contrast to Harjo's woman as specular—as having no subjectivity and no form that is not always already defined in terms of and used by others—Erdrich's is anamorphic. She is both subject and without subjectivity, with and without body/form, distorted, embodied and formed within place and time, again, anew.<sup>32</sup> *(The/a) woman is always already in a state of anamorphosis in which every figure becomes fuzzy, a state of cyclic discontinuity closing in a slit whose lips merge into one another.*<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Lady's (potential for) identity and power lie in the impossibility of (the men's) defining her if she remains in the in-between—when one attempts to define her, he will find that he can only "kiss [him]self away piece by piece / until we're even." Her in(de)finite nature will be her strength. *(The/a) woman refers to what cannot be defined, enumerated, formulated or formalized.*<sup>34</sup> Although she remains objectified in her "job"—allowed to speak (but not to speak aloud) only in the last few lines of the poem, without a source of self-empowerment—the Lady's (anamorphic) identity is (not) shaped (by the ceremony/masquerade of body painting) as in(de)finite.

Cixous' notion of writing subjectivity is of a mobile, anamorphic subjectivity, moving ("dynamized" rather than "fixed") through/among boundaries becoming "fuzzy," with the two (subject and subject) and the one (writing subjectivity) becoming contiguous and continuous though not identical (like the two lips in Irigaray's work):

*To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death—to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. (883)*

Erdrich's anamorphic subject-in-between emphasizes the limitations inherent in Harjo's specular subject-in-between. Erdrich's imagistic in-between creates out of oscillation a space of possibilities—possibilities for empowerment for the (potential) subject. Like Erdrich's, Harjo's in-between is primarily imagistic, but her images locate an unconstructed, isolated identity, with little hope for possibilities. You decide that the significant difference between Harjo's specular woman and Erdrich's anamorphic subject lies in the ability of the Lady in the Pink Mustang to recontextualize the material realities of her life within a Nonwestern valuation of the in(de)finite. Because Harjo's woman occupies an interstice that is separated from any community, she cannot be an acting, moving subject, cannot move among interstices.



Erdrich's Lady, on the other hand, has found her means to power within a wavering in the in-between. This power provides the basis for an acting subjectivity, an identity which has the (relative) freedom to move among interstices.

Perhaps a critical stance that would allow for politically active, mobile subjectivities, that would encourage the "comparative and pluralistic notion of the institution of literature" that Gates calls for, might be an anamorphic critical stance—the in(de)finite (dis-)location of objectivity/subjectivity which you/"you" can represent. In fact, the anamorphosis of a multiplicitous and simultaneous(ly) subjectified object/objectified subject might be your/"your" most powerful political asset. The power of the form(lessness) of anamorphosis (as opposed to the object-ivity, the form-without-power, of the speculum) would provide for the simultaneous decentering of the critical voice in favor of a centering of the poets' perspective(s) and a politically-defined criticism. The anamorphic critic would be able to want *the two* [the decentered voice and the political voice], *as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This essay is part of a much longer work-in-progress. Special thanks go to Ellen Berry, Bowling Green State University, and Cathy Peppels, University of Oregon, for their careful reading, encouragement, and friendship.

<sup>2</sup>I have chosen to represent the concept of "not-of-the-Western-tradition" with this term. The more familiar "non-Western" is unacceptable because it emphasizes the idea of Western as norm; the capital "W," the hyphen that separates the negation from a central concept, and the small initial "n" all reinforce the already-too-dominant idea that Western culture is a standard against which all other cultures can be compared. My rendering of this term with a capital "N," a small "w," and no separator, while certainly not without problems, serves to emphasize the negation of this normalization and of the often oppositional relationships between Western and Nonwestern cultures.

<sup>3</sup>In this paper, quotations from Cixous and Luce Irigaray, whose theories are interpreted/translated/transformed within my use of them, are italicized in order to visually represent the interruption of my work by their words, especially as that interruption has served as a point of solace/resistance for me—solace as it reifies my perceptions about my own experiences; resistance as the interruption reminds me of my own differences, as a hegemonic

feminist, from Nonwestern women (through its failure to delineate or address these differences). In order to preserve a textual flow, citations of Irigaray's texts will be provided in endnotes rather than parenthetically.

<sup>4</sup>In this repetitious construction, the reader may find an explanation of the simultaneity contained in Cixous' use of the parenthesized "(in)"—working (in) the in-between should be read as both locational (working in the in-between, at boundary-points) and thematic (working the in-between, using or manipulating those boundaries). Cixous' original construction will henceforth be used.

<sup>5</sup>This is a limitation inherent in my critique, one that speaks volumes about the politics of publication. However, it is also a self-imposed limitation—I am not willing to assert that Native American poets struggling to get published (or not) or writing within very different contexts are "working (in) the in-between" in the ways that I discuss it here.

<sup>6</sup>"Subject," here, is used in a Foucauldian sense—" [a] subject is the occupant of a subject position situated as such through discourse," as Jennifer Terry explains (57), an occupant who moves in and out, among various subject positions.

<sup>7</sup>Here, Trinh is quoting Barthes' essay "Caro Antonioni," published in the Australian journal *Art & Text* 17 (April 1985): 45.

<sup>8</sup>In this essay, Spivak is writing about the "negative" nature of the subaltern's influence over the subjectivity of the "elite," rather than of the kind of linguistic action that I describe here.

<sup>9</sup>Here I refer to the relationship between Western theoretical discourses and Nonwestern literature in regards to racism and applicability.

<sup>10</sup>Irigaray, "Volume-Fluidity," *Speculum of the Other Woman* 230.

<sup>11</sup>From the Latin *e* out + *lucidus* bright, to throw light upon, to clear up, to render lucid (from *lucere* to shine, bright, translucent, period of rest/sanity in the midst of confusion/acts of lunacy, reversion to a desirable condition, marked by clarity of reason); this term is more applicable here than "illustrates" or exemplifies," both of which would imply a movement from the theoretical moment onto/into the poetic moment (a one-way, hierarchical relationship) and, although it includes the traces of bright-ness, shine, and clarity that would make "illuminates" an especially apt verb to juxtapose with Irigaray's *speculum*, "elucidates" has a much broader connotation.

<sup>12</sup>Irigaray uses the configuration "specula(riza)tion" to represent the many levels of objectification of woman in relationship to the male subject within mainstream discourse: "speculation" indicates meditation and contemplation (woman as the object of male discourse) and a risky venture (woman as the unknown, the mysterious); "specularization" indicates the turning of woman into a *speculum*, a mirror (reflecting and thereby reifying the male subject's conceptualization of himself), an instrument for dilating an opening into the (female, discursive) body in order to better understand that body. Both words come from the Latin *specere*, to look at. It is important to remember that, in Irigaray's formulation, woman can only be "seen" in her utilitarian role, which allows man (society) to "look at" himself.

<sup>13</sup>Irigaray, "How to Conceive (of) a Girl," *Speculum* 165. This line is italicized in Irigaray's text. It is underlined and italicized here in order to

visually represent this (doubled) emphasis—in this text as explained above, and in Irigaray's text; in similar situations, other words/phrases will be similarly treated.

<sup>14</sup>Irigaray, "Volume-Fluidity" 227.

<sup>15</sup>Irigaray, "How to Conceive (of) a Girl" 167.

<sup>16</sup>Irigaray, "How to Conceive (of) a Girl" 165.

<sup>17</sup>Irigaray, "Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine,'" *Speculum* 144.

<sup>18</sup>Irigaray, "Any Theory of the 'Subject'" 134.

<sup>19</sup>Irigaray, "Volume-Fluidity" 230. It is, of course, this kind of statement that has made Irigaray so controversial among certain U.S. feminist circles and subject to rejection on the grounds of essentialism. The two lips of the labia(/mouth) can be read as both symbolic and surpassing the symbolic, in much the way Lacan reads the phallus. Irigaray, however, never insists on the separation of the symbolic "two lips" from the physical "reality" of the woman's body, the way Lacanian theory separates the phallus from the penis. The two lips, in their simultaneous inseparability and separation (by a "hole"), allow woman always to "touch herself" before anyone else ever touches her (and, in fact, being touched/entered by another—a not her—necessarily separates her from herself). Thus is woman different from man (who must use something—his hand, woman—to touch his "one" self, his phallic signifier) and, simultaneously, necessary to and excluded from his/the phallic order.

<sup>20</sup>Allen gives as two good examples of the "horrors" faced by those experiencing isolation from the community Silko's *Ceremony* and Hale's *The Jailing of Cecilia Capture*.

<sup>21</sup>According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in physics, an *interstitialcy* is a "kind of imperfection in a crystal lattice, characterized by an interstitial atom (the atom occupying the space between adjacent atoms or ions in a crystal lattice) able to displace an atom from an adjacent lattice position so that it becomes the interstitial in its turn, able to displace another atom." An interstitialcy, then, is a continuous displacement resulting from an imperfection. I do not intend to imply that Harjo's poem is or is not imperfect; however, the story it tells falls short of Western expectations for closure, expectations that in fact necessitate a discussion of the interstitialcy in the first place.

<sup>22</sup>Irigaray, "Any Theory of the 'Subject'" 144-45.

<sup>23</sup>Irigaray, "How to Conceive (of) a Girl" 165.

<sup>24</sup>Even among traditional nations that moved from one place to another throughout the year, there must (have) be(en) a sense of continuity and community, as the whole group moved from their winter home to their summer home and then back again.

<sup>25</sup>Irigaray, "Commodities among Themselves," *This Sex Which Is Not One* 193.

<sup>26</sup>Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse," *This Sex* 84.

<sup>27</sup>Irigaray, "Commodities among Themselves" 194.

<sup>28</sup>Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse" 84.

<sup>29</sup>"Chippewa" and "Ojibwa" are different names of the same nation of people. In my work, I have tried to name each writer's cultural affiliation according to the name she uses. For example, Erdrich uses "Chippewa" while Gerald Vizenor uses "Ojibwa"; I have maintained this usage.

<sup>30</sup>Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse" 81.

<sup>31</sup>Irigaray, "The Power of Discourse" 84.

<sup>32</sup>"Anamorphosis" is a term used by Irigaray. From "ana-" up, in place or time, back, again, anew (but also from "an-" not, on both sides + "a-" without) + "morph" body, form, an anamorphosis is a "distorted projection or drawing of anything, so made that when viewed from a particular point, or by reflection from a suitable mirror, it appears regular and properly proportioned; a deformation." As Irigaray uses the term, it includes traces of distortion, body-lessness, em-bodiment, and form.

<sup>33</sup>Irigaray, "Volume-Fluidity" 230.

<sup>34</sup>Irigaray, "Volume-Fluidity" 230.

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## ***Reclaiming the Lineage House: Canadian Native Women Writers***

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Agnes Grant

Indian women have rarely been included in historic portrayals of indigenous life styles, ceremonies and spiritual beliefs. In Canada the records of the Jesuit priests, the first missionaries to Christianize the eastern Canadian Indians, set the tone for European attitudes toward Indian people. Since the Jesuits recorded few impressions of women, they have largely remained an enigma until recently. Subsequent studies of early historic times have often used the Jesuit Relations as the primary reference source so information about the lives of women is rarely included. The journals of explorers such as Samuel Hearne and David Thompson, who wrote about Indian life in the late 1700s, are also frequently quoted; however, these men, too, wrote from a male, European, patriarchal perspective. Early sources of information, then, are highly unsatisfactory regarding insights into the lives of Indian women.

Only one example of the paucity of information about women is Penny Petrone's excellent book, *First People, First Voices* (1983). Petrone has searched original documents and presented Indian opinions during the various historic periods in an attempt to present a less biased version of history. In the first chapter (approximately 1600-1770) the only indication that women even existed is found in two traditional love songs. In the next chapter (approximately 1770-1914) there is also only one reference to women—a poem written by Jane Schoolcraft, the part-Chippewa wife of explorer and ethnologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Though more primary material is likely in existence, the work done by Petrone is illustrative of the difficulty historians, folklorists and ethnologists experience in presenting a comprehensive picture of early Indian life. Sylvia Van Kirk's 1980 book "*Many Tender Ties*": *Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* is the first comprehensive Canadian

book to examine the profound impact of Indian and mixed-blood women on Canadian history.

### **Native Women Writers and Feminism**

Today, Native women are telling their own stories. Native women are feminist in a way that women of other culture groups, other religions, rarely understand. Native women would have little opposition to Sheila Ruth's definition of feminism when she says, "We value women in and of themselves. . . . We value and prize the fact of being women as highly as we value the fact of being human. . . . We recognize that all characteristics (masculine and feminine) may appear in either sex. . . . We value autonomy. . . . We have been denied our rights as citizens and as human beings." (Ruth 4-5)

Where differences arise between mainstream feminists and Native women they centre around causes of oppression and particularly racism. Whereas mainstream feminists see the primary cause of their oppression as patriarchal society, Native women are more inclined to see their oppression as arising from racism and colonialism. Chrystos is an American Indian whose poetry has been published by Press Gang Publishers in Canada, so she is often included as a Canadian Native writer. She is an unabashed lesbian and stated at a feminist poetry conference in Winnipeg (1992) that homophobia among her own people has never presented the barriers that racism has presented in feminist circles.

Native women do not deny that they have suffered at the hands of their own men, as well as non-Native men, but they look to the causes of Native men's behaviour. The patriarchal organization of society was foreign to aboriginal cultures. It was imposed on them after European invasion and the subsequent subjugation of Native peoples. Native men were forced to act in accordance with the Indian Act, an act unparalleled in its power to regulate a group of people. Some Native men continue to act in very oppressive ways but it is only in recent years that Native people have regained even a small measure of control over their own lives. Some men are, of course, clinging to their patriarchal privileges, which is merely proof that absolute power does, indeed, corrupt.

One of the most discriminatory clauses in the Indian Act was a clause that stated that if an Indian woman married a non-Indian man she immediately lost her status as an Indian person, as did her children. If an Indian man married a non-Indian woman, however, she immediately became an Indian with all the rights and privileges, as did her children. This law was not questioned until the 1960s when individual women began to condemn it. In 1971 it was challenged in the courts but it was upheld. In 1976 women of the Tobique Reserve in Quebec

began a protracted battle to have the law changed and finally, in 1985, Bill C-31, a law eliminating sexual inequality in the Indian Act, was passed.

The women of Tobique have commented on their struggle in *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* (1987). There is ambivalence toward the feminist movement by many Native women writers, partly because of the Euro-Canadian penchant for appropriating other peoples' words, analyzing them from within another culture's paradigm and ignoring the intent of the original speaker. There is a lack of listening and a lack of understanding of the words that have been spoken by Native women. Feminists often wonder why Native women do not join them in their struggle to eliminate oppression. The women of Tobique offer unique insights into Native women's attitudes toward men and society as a whole. If feminists truly want to bridge the culture gap which exists they would do well to listen to the women's words.

Mavis Goeres:

We have had a long, hard struggle. I think what kept us going was our heritage and our sticking together . . . we all had one goal in mind—equality for women. We're just as good as the man. I think what really kept us going was our determination to seek out what is rightfully ours. And that *is* our heritage.

When I look back I see that we became more and more aware of the Indian Act standing behind a lot of our problems. Something I don't think other people are aware of, though, is the *hurt* that comes with it.

That Indian Act and the discrimination against women had such far-reaching effects. . . . (Silman 217-19)

Bet-te Paul puts it in a larger context:

We didn't come from a male-dominated society—it was matrilineal . . . the elder women were the ones to hold places in council and to guide the men. We had chiefs, but the elder women were behind the men; they were listened to and held in high respect.

As far as the clans went, the bloodlines went through the women . . . exactly the opposite of what the Indian Act imposed on us. See, that's what the government wanted to destroy. What better way to break up families and communities? (Silman 226)

Sandra Lovelace, the most prominent of the Tobique women, states,

When the men argued that they didn't want reinstatement for fear of the white men coming in and taking over, I



think it's really us women they were afraid of. They know we are persistent. If we believe in something, we will fight, we'll keep at it until something comes of it. Maybe the men are afraid of the competition! (Silman 244)

Rather than blaming men for their lot in society, Native women see their fight for equality as a struggle for *Native* equality within the larger Canadian society. Doris Young (Cree) explains why the struggle between the sexes as found in patriarchal societies is not found to the same extent in Native societies.

The people were governed from within their nations through a system that was handed down from generation to generation. Decisions were made and witnessed by people. While it was mainly the men who were at the council meetings, they carried to these meetings and spoke on the important matters as instructed by the women. In order to ensure the best possible leadership for the First Nations, the women carried the responsibility to raise, groom and instruct all children, one of whom would be a future leader. Women were the keepers of the culture and influenced all that transpired in our nations.

She recalls:

My father was chief of my community when I was young. I remember when he went to meetings, my mother and grandmother would give him instructions on what they thought was important for council consideration. Leadership was accountable to all the people. The word of the women was considered integral in the maintenance of our community. (Young 25-26)

Young explains how the system broke down. Residential schools were instrumental in the breakdown of the family, causing strain and mistrust as language barriers arose and children were taught to devalue their cultural traditions.

Upon leaving the school, there seemed to be little point to women participating in community politics. The role of the women to raise and groom the future leaders was diminished, and the role of the women in passing on instructions to the council was gone.

Women were ignored in the decision making process; their words were not respected as they once were. Women became strangers in their communities.

We became dependent upon another government and

systems which were meaningless to us. [The words of the Indian Agent] superseded all others in the community and most certainly excluded the word of the women. The band leadership was severely undermined. Full authority lay with the Department of Indian Affairs and instructions and decisions came from Ottawa. (Young 26)

Native women generally appear to consider government and colonialism, not male/female relationships, as the major obstacles to equality. Their attitudes toward mainline feminism vary widely. At the feminist poetry conference in Winnipeg (1992) Emma LaRocque stated that she had received more recognition and acceptance as a writer from the feminist community than from any other source. Books like *A Gathering of Spirit* and *Not Vanishing* are strongly feminist but *Writing the Circle*, for example, does not have an expressed feminist theme. In the preface, LaRocque discusses the themes found in the anthology.

Themes specific to Native women, are, of course, here: birthing, children, nurturing, a sense of vulnerability, fear of violence, wife battering, and sexual assault. And there is some allusion to the developing tensions between male-defined traditions at variance with the women's spirituality, suffering, and perceptions. [There are] issues such as loss of innocence, sexism, hypocrisy, personal foibles, sexuality, and even betrayal. (Perrault and Vance xxviii-xxix)

LaRocque comments on the broad spectrum of betrayal found in this anthology, ranging from parents who sent children to residential school or hospital to sexual assault by a trusted person. There is betrayal by protectors who did not protect. There is betrayal by mainstream Canada which allowed terrible things to happen. However, LaRocque also points out that there is "a remarkable lack of despair. Or rage" (xxix). Her own gentle poem sets the tone for the anthology; it acknowledges the particular sorrow of Native women but also recognizes that it is the sorrow of "every Native."

Brown Sister

O my beautiful brown sister  
your eyes are deep pools of pain  
your face is prematurely lined  
your Soul of Sorrow  
is the Sorrow of every Woman  
Every Native  
My beautiful brown sister  
I know you

I know you  
 you sweep sweetgrass over  
 the scars of my Exile (Perrault & Vance xxx)

The poetry of Chrystos is a stark contrast to writers such as LaRocque. Every page of *Not Vanishing* is an emotional experience, whether she conveys a lovely sweetness or lashes out in fury:

#### Sailing

in a boat of brambles our lips ripe  
 our purple tongues signal the full moon  
 in hot metaphors  
 Your long fingers slip  
 the sweetest berries into my mouth  
 I drink your juiciness  
 Rowing with soft strokes  
 bring one another home  
 Plant a future out of season  
 I promise pies  
 You promise plenty of fruit (Chrystos 10)

In sharp contrast is the following poem about her uncle, Jean LeMaitre.

#### Bitter Teeth

Rummaging in these old shoes rain clouds frost stars  
 worn out socks snarls of hair broken needs dead leaves  
 I heave to you any black hole No space deep enough or far  
 Every word we spoke Each kiss taken Years your cock  
 down my throat hissing nightmares Shape you pressed into me  
 concubine lying cheating warped commodity no future  
 looking at too may ceilings not enough air I ache  
 for your funeral Only safe place to see you again  
 I'll spit in your face for once  
 so young I . . . (Chrystos 63)

Beth Cuthand, a Cree writer, sees Native men as having adopted a "machismo gone haywire" in the absence of a deeper, more nurturing male role. She refers to Tomson Highway as a Native writer who "stands alone" in his courage in portraying both men and women in a way that reflects present realities. In speaking of his plays she says:

I know that a lot of Native women, Indian women, are sensitive about the way he portrays women. But I think he was very brave to do what he did in *The Rez Sisters*.

In *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, misogyny is right out in the open. In that play the Trickster is a woman, done up like a whore, and she is always manipulating the men. And in one part, one of the male charac-

ters says, "Fuck your woman's power!" But, as a reflection of the reality of our society, I think that he can't say, "Shut up! Don't talk about this!" I mean, that is not what the artist does. It takes guts to reflect your society the way it is. (Lutz 80)

In contrast to present realities, Beverly Hungry Wolf comments on happier times and explains what male/female relationships once were.

Let me say that in my culture the work of women was generally respected and honoured, for the men knew very well that they could not live without them. The people of the past thought it a great honour that the women should bear and rear the children, ensuring that there would be people in the future. Equally honourable was the women's work of creating the lodges that made the homes, taking them up and down when camp moved, heating them, and providing the bedding and clothing for the household members. In the social life of my grandmothers, a household was judged not only by the bravery and generosity of the man, but also by the kindness and work habits of the woman. (Hungry Wolf 110)

Rose Auger, a Cree Elder, expresses her viewpoint on the roles of men and women in contemporary society:

Indian people must wake up! They are asleep! . . . Part of waking up means replacing women to their rightful place in society. It's been less than one hundred years that men lost touch with reality. There's no power or medicine that has all the force unless it is balanced. When we still had our culture, we had balance. The women made ceremonies, and she was recognized as being united with the moon, the earth, and all the forces on it. Men have taken her over. Most feel threatened by holy women.

Men need to do research into their family trees and find out where the women fitted in, traditionally. . . . If they truly have power they will give guidance to discover the strength of woman and work with her again. And women will work with men, in balance. (Meili 25)

Emma LaRocque touches on the personal pain of family violence and suggests a typically Native way of dealing with it obliquely rather than through rage and accusation.

We don't have to divulge personal information or reduce discussions of injustice and oppression to "personal pain." We can deal with pain—like you deal with every aspect of

life—from a place of integrity, from a place of authenticity and particularly from a political place, from a politically conscious place. We as writers cannot escape the discussion of suffering. And for me that is where a lot of my passion comes from—my strong belief that we must confront oppression wherever it exists, be it in our homes or in white society . . . in terms of consciousness, you cannot be liberated unless you have articulated what the pain was about. (Lutz 196-97)

In common with feminists from all walks of life, Native women writers are writing about violence and abuse with great integrity, both on the personal and on the political level. Outstanding in this area is Ruby Slipperjack's memorable book *Honour the Sun*.

### **Native Women in History**

Though Rose Auger says that Native men have lost touch with reality in the last hundred years, Native women have been portrayed negatively since early contact times. Impressions of Indian women as beasts of burden, little more than the animals the Indians trapped for benefit of European fashions, pervades much early writing. Diamond Jennes quotes the Jesuits and early explorers copiously in his book *Indians of Canada* (1932). It has long been presented as the most comprehensive work available on Canadian Indians. Regarding women, he states:

Even among the Iroquois the women occupied an inferior position, and endured many hardships, although they enjoyed greater privileges and exercised more influence politically than the women of other tribes except perhaps the Eskimo. . . . It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the women accepted this inferior status without question, and generally found as much contentment in life as their sisters in more favoured communities. (Jennes 52)

Jennes' attitude toward women becomes evident when he describes the Iroquois Confederacy. He freely acknowledges that the political organization of the Confederacy was highly sophisticated and far more democratic than any government in Europe at that time but he sees the very important role the women played as one of the "limitations" which needed to be overcome. He calls the leadership of the matriarchs "despotic" and has no doubt that, had European colonization not disrupted their lives, as time went on the men would have freed themselves of this "supervision" by women (134-35).

Women have generally been invisible in all historical accounts and a great deal of compensatory research is being carried out to correct

this today. Native women are no exception. Beverly Hungry Wolf (Blackfoot) writes:

I think Indian history has often neglected the women. We get the impression that women did their daily work and drudgery and had nothing to look forward to or talk about. When I was young I used to think that the old-time Indian women were sold and treated like slaves, because that's what the books said.

Times have changed so much that we can barely imagine the daily challenges faced by our forefathers. For that reason it is pretty hard to make any judgements about the way we did things. (Hungry Wolf 109-10)

Just how badly persons from one culture can misinterpret what they observe is entertainingly illustrated when George Henry, an Ojibwa Methodist preacher, interpreter, and translator, went to Europe in 1844. He observed English gentlemen gallantly offering their arms to the women and reported, "The English women cannot walk alone; they must always be assisted by the men." And later, when he visited the English officers, he reported that "When the tea got ready, the ladies were brought to the table like sick women." He also described their chatter throughout the meal as being noisy as "ravens when feasting on venison"! (Petron 88-89)

Legends and myths, often a wealth of cultural information, are not generally a source for insight into the lives of women. Folklorists and ethnologists who collected the legends were largely male and it is highly unlikely that they considered women as sources of information. It is also unlikely that *any* collector would have been trusted with female esoteric stories, let alone a male folklorist. A few stories collected by Schoolcraft are credited to his Chippewa wife and deal with women's wisdom but the European education she had received dictated a certain prudery, so very little understanding of Native women's perspectives is gained. There is, however, an indication in these legends that stories told by women would have intrinsic differences.

A book like Evelyn Reed's *Women's Evolution* (1975) is useful in understanding how Indian societies might have functioned in pre-contact times. Reed's theory of evolution is that the patriarchy is not a natural phenomenon but a social construct that challenged women's roles in family since women, as the bearers of children, had a more influential role in tribal societies than men. This primary role of women is still greatly respected in all Native cultures today but this attitude toward women is often sadly misunderstood by people from outside the cultures. The devaluing of women that is found in Euro-Christian cultures finds no parallel in Native cultures.

Accurate insights into male/female relationships and attitudes are rare. Carolyn Niethammer carefully sifted through historic documents to compile her interesting book, *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women* (1977). She researched southern United States tribes for information on birth, menarche, menopause, widowhood, sexuality and many other topics not normally dealt with by earlier writers. Her sources, again, were historic but several modern women also provided information. Yolanda Murphy and Robert F. Murphy lived with the Mundurucu Indians of Brazil in order to write their book, *Women of the Forest* (1974). They attempted to balance the largely male anthropological writing by describing the fundamental role played by women in tribal societies. No comprehensive research of this kind exists on Native women of Canada, though one can assume that there would have been similarities with other tribal cultures.

Anne Cameron has recorded myths of the Canadian Northwest coast in two of her books, *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981) and *Dzelarhons* (1986). Cameron tells how, as a child, she heard stories from Klopinum, an old Salish woman. She suggested that Klopinum record her stories, but Klopinum replied, "Not me. Nobody wants these stories. . . . I'm just an old klooch. . . . Who listens to me? Who listens to us? Who listens?" and in the end she told the twelve-year-old listener, "Tell you what . . . I'll give them stories to you. You want it done, you do it" (Cameron 19). Anne Cameron is a superb storyteller but has recently been criticized because she is a non-Native writer telling esoteric Native stories.

Some glimpses of what life was like for women can be found in traditional poetry but it must be remembered that all poetry is available only in translation and the problem of accuracy is an ongoing concern. The drudges portrayed in the accounts of missionaries and explorers do not seem to apply to the women who sang the following songs.

From the Ojibway we have the following love charms:

1.  
I can charm that man;  
He is completely fascinated with me.
2.  
I can make  
That man bashful.  
I wonder  
What can be the matter  
That he is so bashful (Colombo 36)

The disappointment and disillusionment of the woman in the following song could come from any time, any culture, but it was recorded among the Blackfoot Indians in the early 1900s.

My lover looked like an eagle from a distance,  
but alas!  
When he came nearer I saw he was  
nothing but a buzzard. (Colombo 57)

There were songs for every occasion: songs to greet visitors, songs about divorce, songs about daily chores, lullabies, and many more. The Sekani mother in the following song teaches her boy-child his future responsibilities well.

Now my child is a helpless babe.  
A son in need of his mother's care.  
Soon he will grow to manhood and test his strength,  
Sparring the fish and hunting the bear.

Let him ever remember his mother Toulte! (Colombo 85)

The role of women in war is revealed to be the same then as it is now. The grief and despair they suffered is shown in the following song from the Ojibway:

In the place where the fight was  
Across the river,  
In the place where the fight was  
Across the river:  
A heavy load for the woman  
To lift in her blanket,  
A heavy load for the woman  
To carry on her shoulder  
In the place where the fight was  
Across the river  
In the place where the fight was  
Across the river:  
The women go wailing  
To gather the wounded  
The women go wailing  
To gather the dead. (Colombo 46)

The traditional singers were soon silenced by the Christianizing Europeans and it is only in recent times that the voices of Native women are being heard again.

### **Contemporary Native Writing**

1990 can be characterized as the year of the anthologies. Prior to 1990 Canadian Native authors were writing but few were published by mainline publishers. The work of Maria Campbell and Basil Johnston was available through McClelland and Stewart and Beatrice Culleton's books were available from Pemmican Publications. More often,



however, books were published in limited editions and were consequently out of print just as the reading public became aware of them. Interest in Native literature was developing (though it still has not found its way onto high school Language Arts programs or university Canadian Literature courses). It is used in Native Studies programs and a few Canadian universities have Native Literature courses. With a dramatic increase in the numbers of trained Native teachers and local school boards which choose their own teaching tools, relevant reading material is in great demand. There is also a much greater awareness on the part of feminists that they need to be pro-active in bridging racial barriers. Anthologies serve these needs.

1984 had seen the publication of *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women* edited by Beth Brant, a Mohawk writer who wished to provide a forum for Native lesbian and other feminist writers. She says of her work:

*A Gathering of Spirit* continues to shape and direct what I think, what I feel, what I know. The women in this book have challenged non-Indian attitudes about Indian women. We have inspired new attitudes among Indian people. We gathered our spirit and called it faith. We gathered our spirit and called it love and hope. We are a community. We are a nation. We are alive. We gather the spirit every day—giving it our names, our own languages. (Brant 15)

Though Beth Brant is from the Bay of Quinte area in Canada she presently lives in the United States, as do most of the poets represented in her anthology.

In 1989, the first Canadian anthology, *Seventh Generation: Contemporary Native Writing*, edited by Heather Hodgson, was published by Theytus Books, a Native publishing house. Three anthologies were published in 1990: *All My Relations: An Anthology of Contemporary Native Fiction*, edited by Thomas King, a Cherokee/Greek/German professor at the University of Minnesota who originally began his career at the University of Lethbridge in Canada; *Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature* was published by the Metis publishing house, Pemmican Publications, edited by Agnes Grant, a non-Native professor at Brandon University; and two non-Native professors from the University of Alberta, Jeanne Perrault and Sylvia Vance, edited *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, published by NeWest. Also in 1990, the premiere issue of *Gatherings: The En'owkin Journal of First North American Peoples* was released by Theytus Books. Oxford University Press published *Native Literature in Canada from the Oral Tradition to the Present*, a critical work by

Penny Petrone, and a special issue of the journal *Canadian Literature* was published by the University of British Columbia, entitled *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* and edited by W. H. New. 1991 contributed another critical work, *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors* (Fifth House), compiled by Harmut Lutz, a German scholar, and *Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta Native Elders* (NeWest), compiled by Dianne Meili, a Cree journalist. In 1992 another anthology was released by Oxford University Press, *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature* by D. Moses and T. Goldie.

Suddenly, a comparatively large body of Native literature is available for study and casual reading. To date, critical study of Native literature has been difficult for scholars coming from European literary circles but Native writers themselves are now beginning to point the way to how they would wish their literature to be approached.

### **Contemporary Myths and Legends**

Beth Cuthand (Cree), in commenting on future directions Native literature might take, said,

There are a number of us who are going back to the old stories and using them, or they are using us, as a means of telling a contemporary story. When we use myths, then the possibilities of the use of time just broaden, because in primordial times it was *times!* It was plural.

It seems to me that maybe at this time in the history of the world we need to go back to those. Because I see a big change coming in the world itself, and in the way humans relate to the Earth, to our existence here. (Lutz 40)

Contemporary Native writers are represented in all literary genre but some are working more specifically in the field of Native oracy. They are examining the dichotomy created by the holistic context of Native oracy and Western literacy. JoAnn Archibald (Sto:lo) examined various literacy hypotheses as well as First Nations oracy and arrived at the following conclusions:

First Nations have been engaged in reviving traditional cultural practices and knowledge which have application in the modern world. The younger generations then may have an opportunity to learn their cultural context . . . . We need to become the future storytellers! We also need to recognize that the form of storytelling for teaching is subtly practised today; and perhaps should be uncovered so that "outsiders" such as teachers become aware of these subtle forms for First Nations children in their classrooms. First Nations' orality must be recognized as

having intellectual as well as social benefits.

She goes on to say,

First Nations need to find ways to combine methods of orality and cultural context, and as well with the cultural forms of storytelling. . . . This pathway reflects the oral-literate world that is emerging today because of the increased interest in improving interpersonal communication; the improvements in communications technology; and the recognition of the limitations of alphabetic literacy. (Archibald 78-79)

Archibald points out that our present world of video, television and film has become a combined oral/literate/visual world and this has "exciting possibilities for First Nations because it is nearing the traditional Holistic approach to teaching and learning which is needed to heal our people who have been adversely affected by history" (79).

Ethel Gardner (Sto:lo) shows how this return to First Nations oracy may come to pass in her article "Ka-Im's Gift: A Sto:lo Legend" (with commentary) in *The Canadian Journal of Native Education* and in "Ach-koo's Song" in *Our Bit of Truth*. Another example can be found in *Writing the Circle* when Louise Bernice Halfe (Cree), a "self-proclaimed hag," uses the mythical Pagak, a Flying Skeleton, in her poem by the same name. The poem begins:

Flying skeleton  
 I used to wonder where  
 You kept yourself  
 I'd hear you rattle about  
  
 Scraping your bones  
 I opened the door  
  
 You grinned at me through a  
 Hollow mouth  
 Pierced my heart with your  
 Socket eyes . . . . (85)

For the uninitiated, a footnote explains the significance of Pagak in northern Cree culture.

Pagak, like any other spirit, is a paradox. She forces us to look within and confront and resolve our skeletons, the past that burdens and hardens our lives. To ignore her appearance is to run from our own frightful personal lives. When we view our skeletons and give them the food of respect, they strengthen our spirit, and emotional and spiritual healing occur. Our desire to live in harmony with others and with our Earthmother becomes

possible. (86)

### The Wisdom of the Elders

The teachings of the Elders are closely related to myths and legends. In the preface to *Writing the Circle*, LaRocque says, "the poignancy of 'taking on' the historical millstone of keeping our ancestors' memories alive comes through our unsettling dreams and visions" and she goes on to point out that "we share our humanity—over and over again. We share our dreams, our fears, our loves, our hates, our mourning for the dying of the grandmother, our culture, the Mother, our land, the Children, our future" (Perrault & Vance xxviii).

This theme emerges over and over again. Lee Maracle explains that she is only one in a "long chain of people" in her poem "Creation":

I know nothing  
of great mysteries  
know less of creation  
I do know  
that the farther backward  
in time I travel  
the more grandmothers  
and the farther forward  
the more grandchildren  
I am obligated to both (*I Am Woman* 8)

In *Writing the Circle* the wisdom of the Elders appears in contributions such as Bertha Blondin's (Dene) "Native Traditional Medicine: Its Place in Northern Health Care," Molly Chisaaky's (Dene) poem "The Elder's Drum," and numerous stories that honour grandmothers.

Several books are devoted exclusively to this topic. Beverly Hungry Wolf (Blackfoot), the forerunner in this area, explains why she wrote her book, *The Ways of My Grandmothers*, in 1982.

There are many women among my people whom I consider wise and good storytellers. I wish some of the younger people would follow my example and record what their grandmothers and mothers have to say before they leave us forever.

Each of the women who helped me felt that a book like this could benefit the younger generation of our people, who need to understand their ancestral ways to appreciate them. This book should also give those who are not of our tribe a better chance to respect and admire the ways of my grandmothers. (Hungry Wolf 9)

The book goes on to tell stories under such headings as "Who My

Grandmothers Are," "Myths and Legends of My Grandmothers," "The Dances of My Grandmothers," and "Around the Household." Hungry Wolf recalls her experiences when she began to write the book:

I recall that when I first started asking my grandmothers about their old ways they sometimes discouraged me and made me feel silly for having such interests. . . . Even though their belief in these traditions was very strong, they had been made to feel that there was no future in this world for their children and grandchildren if they didn't put these old ways aside.

But once my grandmothers saw that I was sincere in wanting to learn about their old ways they were very encouraging. . . . (9)

Dianne Meili, a Cree journalist, tells how she came to write her book, *Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta Native Elders*. Meili was looking for a spiritual vision like the Catholic saints of her childhood days. She studied exotic Eastern religions hoping to find a "wizened old Korean mudang [shaman] who would take me under her wing or a Tibetan monk who would recognize me as an old soul and teach me tantric Buddhism to speed my journey toward all-knowing" (Meili ix).

When she became editor of *Windspeaker*, an Edmonton based Native newspaper, she began to meet Elders who were involved in Native religion.

I noticed that whenever we ran a feature on an elder, I usually received letters from readers asking for more. Young readers, prisoners, non-Natives and Natives alike wrote to say how much they enjoyed reading these stories. Plenty of people were starved for cultural information. (ix)

For a year and a half Meili interviewed Elders and all were characterized by their prophetic vision. Meili summarizes what she learned:

I am part of God, so I could stop my search in trying to find Him/Her in someone else. I learned that God is love and love transcends all, even the passion of supernatural abilities. They invited me to stop pushing so hard and simply trust that God would bring me the experiences I needed to learn from. (xi)

There is a thread which runs through Meili's book, connecting the various speakers through their teachings. The Elders demonstrated a common belief in:

. . . a benevolent force higher than themselves, that all

things are alive and related, and that there is, indeed, life after death. The elders know behaviour in this world dictates what spiritual life will be like in the next world. And, finally, they know the ceremonies and the spiritual songs or prayers—they hold the key to our culture. (xi-xii)

The importance of the Elders is integral to all Native cultures and it is likely that Native literature of the future will develop this theme more fully as time goes on.

### **Conclusion**

Native writers are a combination of the old and the new. They speak of storytelling and being authors in the same breath. Anne Acco speaks of obeying "the muse"; Maria Campbell speaks of the muse as being the "Grandmother." Some have university training, have read widely the accepted Euro-Canadian canons of literature; others do not have this background but have exceptionally rich backgrounds in oral narrative; others still have a solid grounding in both worlds. Some Native authors are appearing in mainline publications, but more often they are published by smaller publishing houses and magazines, though these are usually feminist publications. Anne Acco has appeared in *Canadian Women Studies* and Annharte has appeared in *Contemporary Verse 2*. Many Native women have been anthologized.

Lee Maracle describes the importance of writing for Native women:

When we write, I believe that what we are doing is reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves, because I think we already have a spirit of cooperation that just underlines everything we do, and when you reclaim the self, there's no [literary] category. It's significant with the person. It's wonderment. Absolute wonderment. That's how we see each other's work, and we want to read each other, and see each other, and to experience each other, because the more pathways we trace to the centre of the circle, the more rich our circle is going to be, the fuller, the rounder, the more magnificent. (Lutz 176)

Maria Campbell as "Mother of them All" perhaps expresses the excitement all readers feel about this rapidly growing body of literature. She is, indeed, one of the grandmothers of our time and she says:

Writing from Native women has always been very exciting, right from the beginning, because that's where the political writing, the really analytical writing is. Men

are not prepared to be vulnerable in their writing. Part of it is the kind of oppression that we've been under.

But I'm certainly excited about the stuff that women have been doing. There's some really powerful women writers. . . . (Lutz 48)

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## ***Pocahontas: "Little Mischief" and the "Dirty Men"***

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Betty Louise Bell

She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. *He* spoke for and represented her. —Edward Said, *Orientalism* 6.

Pocahontas, the Indian princess in the American colonial romance, died without leaving a word about her life. In the year she spent in captivity in Jamestown she learned to read and write but no written word survives from her pen. This fact has not discouraged writing about her life; indeed, her silence has inspired others to speak for her. These accounts of historians and novelists from Pocahontas and her life, easily dismissed as romantic inventions, are interesting in what they reveal about the author, not the author's subject, and the extent to which a Native woman's silence encourages not an isolated query or speculation but a full biographical account.

The narratives about Pocahontas can be read as metaphors for the author's position on the colonial project. Most authors of Pocahontas tilt their colonial hands when they accept, without interrogation or skepticism, this Indian woman's silence and the motives and desires attributed to her by white male colonists, especially John Smith, as historical fact. And, in the hidden and ambiguous recesses of history and fact, they locate imperatives for the representation of her life. The story must be told! The most recent attempt to tell the story of the Indian princess is Susan Donnell's historical romance, *Pocahontas*. Donnell uses history and fact to sustain her through the writing of the novel, the doubts of an editor, and potential disbelieving readers: "But I persisted because these events are historical fact" (vii).

Fact and history have been cornerstones in the colonial project. The assertion of cultural or racial or sexual superiority is always argued as fact known through historical precedents. Without the validation of

fact and history, colonialism would be reduced to simply systems of power and violence. Its success would not be more than the violent projection of the values and beliefs of one culture onto another culture, the *creation* of dominant and subordinate races and sexes, and the *creation* of a cultural inversion in which the indigenous is transformed into the Other, while the colonist is identified as the vehicle for manifest destiny.

For the most part, (meta)narratives about Pocahontas are valorizations of conquest and, for the most part, these narratives are located in the genre of the romance, a patriarchal narrative which is, itself, dedicated to surrender and conquest. As such, the romance novel is an agent of colonialism, nurturing and perpetuating the fantasies of the dominant culture and sex, usurping the agency of its female writers, readers, and subjects, and transforming violence into mutual seduction.

Donnell describes Pocahontas's response to the arrival of the Tassentasses, Algonquian for "the dirty men," as euphoric (59). From the beginning of the colonists's arrival, she conspires to enter their New World. She has none of her father's or tribe's distrust or suspicion of the dirty men. And since this is a colonial narrative of education and not force, her eagerness to see the white men is interrupted, temporarily, by the menses. Her arrival into the New World and womanhood are simultaneous, her welcoming body becomes the ideological body of the romantic novel in its pursuit of female surrender and male conquest. She may protest and resist, now and again, but she is "Little Mischief," unable to detour the colonial narrative from its conquest and, finally, the savior of the colonial America (Donnell 59).

By every account Pocahontas was an extraordinary woman: her powerful father's favored child, the tribal ambassador to the Jamestown settlement, the mediator between British colonists and indigenous peoples, the first Native woman to convert to Christianity, the third Virginian Native woman to marry a colonist, the mother of a new mixed blood race, and the first Native American to be honored by the Court of King James. Yet, history tells us, she was not moved to set down words about her unusual life. We are told she was gifted in the languages, especially Latin and Greek, but "not particularly interested in history" (Donnell 370). Donnell speculates on how John Rolfe, Pocahontas's husband and teacher, would have explained her indifference to history:

He thought that perhaps it was too soon for her to relate past events in a culture that was still so fresh to her. And her own people had no tradition of oral or written history. (370)

When the colonists arrived in Jamestown in 1607, the Algonquian-speaking Powhatan Indians had been living in the Virginia Tidewater for over three hundred years. And Pocahontas, as one of Powhatan's children, was raised with an intense appreciation and respect for the ways of her people. Yet, as the above quotation demonstrates, she is represented as a historical and cultural cipher, a blank page receiving only the imprint of written words. Her identities as Pocahontas and Lady Rebecca, her experiences as Indian diplomat and Christian convert, do not provide her with a personal history necessary for the deciphering of either or both the Indian or white worlds. Without a placement in history, the languages Pocahontas studies do not carry the signs by which the world is known. Her languages, Greek and Latin, are rote memorizations, without nuance or cultural reference, used primarily for the study of the Bible. We are asked to believe that her relationship to language, including Algonquian, was literal, a miming of words as words, without an understanding of how cultures are embedded in language. As such, she is an innocent vessel of others's words and histories, alien to even her own language, and denied the powers of cultural comparisons or interpretation in her acquisition of language. Clearly, this powerful woman, who from the age of twelve or thirteen was a talented tribal diplomat and who, at just barely twenty years old, impressed the Court of King James with her charms and intelligence, needed someone else to speak for her. History asks us to believe that this powerful woman, who from the age of twelve or thirteen was a talented tribal diplomat, was transparent to the white male gaze and died silent.

The most influential writer on the life of Pocahontas was John Smith. He was her first teacher in the English language and culture and, he would have us believe, her teacher in sex and love. In his initial accounts of the Jamestown settlement, Smith said nothing about Pocahontas's rescue of him or her infatuation with him. Only in his writings of 1624, written in hard times and disfavor, did he write into his narrative the story of his rescue by the Indian princess. When he arrived in Jamestown in 1607, Smith was a dashing twenty-six year old soldier of fortune whose narrative already contained the conquests of Asia and Africa. This narrative precedes his introduction to Pocahontas. Donnell describes him, standing on the deck of the *Constant Susan* as the ship approaches land, wondering "if the naturals had women as comely . . . would they have lips as soft, breasts as round and succulent? And most important, would they be obliging?" (45-46).

And since this is historical romance, a genre privileging seduction over violence, Donnell finds in Pocahontas, at the age of twelve or thirteen, a reciprocal response:

She wanted to devour him with love. Her body acted as if it was no longer a part of the woman she knew. . . . She felt as if she were part of the man whose body gave her such joy, as if his skin were hers, as if their hearts were one. At other times she felt she would swoon with the deliciousness of her captivity. (235)

Her seduction and, later, her conversion are finalized in the same grateful gesture of dropping to her knees and stretching "her arms up towards the sky" in prayer to the "one true God" (401).

Smith's accounts of his rescue by Pocahontas were attempts at self-mythologizing as well as a mythologizing of the Other. In his writings on Pocahontas, he created and elevated the romance of John Smith. So, too, writers of the romance find in Pocahontas a subject that services their colonial narrative. Smith's final interview with Pocahontas in England, in which she was too overcome by emotion to speak, corresponds to her continued *speaking* silence in other writer's works. Her silence with Smith, often interpreted as anger at him, is freely interpreted by Donnell as romantic conquest:

The men were gentle. She could hear their worried voices, but although she wanted to speak, she could not. She willed herself to say a word, but not a sound escaped her lips. She knew only that John Smith's eyes and his touch had enveloped her, and nothing else mattered. (422)

Smith inverts Pocahontas's rescue of him into conquest; Donnell transforms romantic possibility into historical fact. There is no historical evidence, outside of Smith's account, that supports Pocahontas's rescue of Smith nor is there any evidence Smith and Pocahontas were lovers. Both Smith and Donnell appropriate the voice and body of Pocahontas as textual opportunity; both Smith and Donnell mythologize Pocahontas into silence and absence.

The Native American has always inhabited the nether space between truth and lie, self and false self. The word "mixed blood" refers as easily to identity as it does to truth. The Native American was physically removed from his/her land; existentially, this removal occurred in the removal of the Indian into mythology.

The creation and continued sustenance of a mythology is dependent on a removal from history and the referential world. The first step in colonial appropriation is the Natives's removal from their history and language, and the creation of a mythology to replace Native history and sensibility. The Native experience is repressed and distorted, colonized by the settler's imagination, and reduced to a silent and fixed image. In this way, colonists become the self-appointed interpreters of Native

self-apprehension and the inventors of a new world. The struggle for control of Native subjectivity and self-representation, so evident in post-colonial literatures, is absent from colonial narratives about Native life. These narratives are monologic, reducing the Native to a transparent and mythologizing silence. They are discursive projects dedicated to "the victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word" (Bakhtin 271).

Pocahontas is the first mythical Indian. The translation of her history and identity by European culture, the white ventriloquism of her motives and desires, have made her a metaphor for the colonizing of the native identity by the settler imagination. Her historical and cultural transparency and her silence were the primary sites of European conquest of Native Americans. The colonial appropriation of the body of America, its land and resources, was dependent on the appropriation of the body of Native identity. From the arrival of Columbus, who misnamed indigenous peoples "Indians," colonists appropriated the power of naming and interpretation. And these powers of naming and interpretation transformed Natives into textual and material products, as valuable to the romance of imperialism and discovery as tobacco.

As with the Indians named by Columbus, Pocahontas's names and their translations are assigned by the reader of her identity. She was given a secret name, Matoax, known only to her tribesmen and translated as "Little Snow Feather" (Woodward 20). Her father named her Pocahontas, variously translated from the Powhatan tongue as "Bright Stream Between Two Hills," "Playing with the Spirits," "Getting Joy from the Spirits," or "Little Wanton" (Woodward 20; Brant 42). With all of these translations available, Pocahontas, the nude prepubescent Indian girl who played in and on the edges of their settlement, was translated by the colonists as "Little Wanton" or "Little Mischief." In Powhatan culture children wore no clothing, except during the winter, but Pocahontas's nudity and playfulness was interpreted as frivolous and licentious behavior by the King's official colony recorder:

The Jamestown colonists, busy felling trees, clearing ground for gardens, and building their fort, first saw her playing in prepubial nakedness within their settlement, leap-frogging and turning cartwheels with four young cabin boys. (Woodward 4-5)

**"I shall never be free of my body."** (Donnell 94)

From first contact, Pocahontas was an object of the male colonial

gaze. She enters history as the sexual objectification of Native defeat and colonial conquest. Just over the age of ten, Pocahontas is identified as the promiscuous female body, as fecund and wild and seductive as the land. The body of Pocahontas and the body of America are the same contested site in the colonial enterprise. Both are feminized bodies of male occupation and dominance. The colonization of the Native woman is the psychic alienation from self, whereas the colonization of the land is the exploitation of its resources. Both Pocahontas and America carry the burden of female sexual stereotypes. They are represented as virgin and whore, innocent of history and identity but also a wild and corrupt challenge to the male colonial enterprise.

Everything we know about Pocahontas, including her silence, comes from the voices of others. She speaks in thousands of sentimental and popular novels, plays, and poems. As a symbol of the New World, an icon of Christian conversion, a representation of the fallen and redeemed woman, she is a legitimatizing image in colonial narratives. Her body is the site of the yielding exotic within the colonized space: the eager savage in colonial and Christian enterprises, the dark continent of female sexuality, her bronze nubile body yielding to the white settler's touch, and the woman as colonial savior.

When the colonists arrive, Pocahontas is already, at the early age of ten, a projection of male desire and a model for the identity of Native American women. The colonists's first glimpse of her is her naked, cartwheeling body and, without interrogation of the difference of place and culture, she is interpreted into the cultural and sexual structures of England. Her nakedness is seen as wantonness; her playfulness is known as seduction. Later, after her baptism and marriage, she becomes the Indian Princess, virginal and noble, a savior of men. Her conversion from savage to noble savage, from heathen to Christian, was a standard ploy of colonization. As Roy Harvey Pearce argues in *Savagism and Civilization*, "Savage inferiority is repeatedly, almost unconsciously imputed to Indians and then sentimentally or melodramatically ennobled out of existence" (43).

The romance of Pocahontas has been adapted to each culture's romance with Native and woman. The narratives that circulate her life, continually reinterpreting and reinventing her image, provide a cultural litmus test for the representation of Native and woman. Through these images of Pocahontas, we can see how Native and woman were appropriated and translated by an alien imagination, and we can see how white male writers and artists (re)produced the effects and affects of colonialization. In the Victorian age Pocahontas was represented as the Earth Mother, the angel in the house, and La Belle Sauvage. She is the Indian Princess, without the power of an Indian Queen, elevated

into rare heights of feminine royalty and elevating the men who claim to know her into those same rare heights. As woman and Native, she is eager for sacrifice and domination, a ready victim of the violence of imperialistic ambitions and a validation of its dominance. The Native, like the masochistic female, becomes a valorized accomplice, indeed an advocate, of her own destruction:

The old conflict between her loyalties was still there, but more and more she came to see the virtues of the strange people. She had always believed that the Powhatans and the English could live in harmony. They had much to give each other. In fact, she thought suddenly, that is exactly what I am doing, providing first one then the other with the products of each culture. (Donnell 193)

A strategy of colonialism is the subjugation of the subaltern's subjectivity through the appropriation of the Native voice and experience, but Susan Donnell, in this quotation from her recent romance, *Pocahontas*, has cannibalized the Native voice. Here, the consciousness of Pocahontas is located, without struggle or conflict, in the author. Here, a white woman writer, living in England in the late Twentieth Century, speaks through the voice of Pocahontas without the hesitancy of a conditional. This author, however, approaches the voice of John Smith from a polite distance. She enters his vision with the courtesies of "would have been" or "might have been." The result is that the scaffolding of the fictional framework is clearly seen in John Smith's representation but, in her representation of Pocahontas, Donnell insists on the hyperreality of a historical figure. One explanation for this is that, as a writer, she had to compete with Smith's own written words about his life. But another, more compelling, reason is the patriarchal structure of the romance narrative.

Susan Donnell presents her credentials for the authoring of *Pocahontas*: "I am a direct fourteenth-generation descendant" of the Powhatan princess (vii). We are informed she "used her family tree as the basis for *Pocahontas*" (publisher's note), leading the reader to expect her narrative to be interwoven with family stories about their great ancestor. In fact, Donnell's novel is, mostly, historically correct but not because of her family history but because of her reliance on the biography of *Pocahontas* by Grace Steele Woodward, a text that is, itself, compromised by the writer's own commitment to the colonial project.

Donnell's novel was created, she tells us, from heart and history. But, in fact, it originates in performance. Her novel is an extension of a childhood game reenacting the rescue of Smith by Pocahontas with her brother and cousins in Virginia. She dates the game from the age



of ten, Pocahontas's age when the colonists arrive in Jamestown. Donnell's memory of Pocahontas is reignited after her "deeply loved family home in Virginia burned and for many reasons could not be rebuilt" (vii). There are resonances here of Scarlett O'Hara and her beloved home, Tara. The impulse behind telling the story of the mythical Indian princess is the destruction of another American myth, the prelapsarian South. Like the settlers who recorded the "discovery" of America, like frontier and sentimental literature in the Nineteenth Century, Donnell's novel originates in a longing for an idyllic setting and story, the return to a place where there were "immensely healthy people who enjoyed a perfect environment" with "none of the prejudice that built up later after long years of warfare between them" (viii). It is represented as a return to Eden, to harmony and balance between the sexes and races when, in fact, it is a project of power and violence.

In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Gerald Vizenor calls for exchange of Columbus for the body of Pocahontas. She is a colonized body, filled with other voices and purposes, inseparable from manifest destiny and Native removal. The "real" and imagined stories of Pocahontas have served and continue to legitimize the colonialization of tribal cultures and their lands. Can we, in our dream of recovery, find more than a woman's silence and cultural betrayal in the history of Pocahontas? Or will we, like John Smith, only inscribe our own fantasies on her inert body?

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## *Beyond False Boundaries*

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Norma C. Wilson

May all walls be like those of the jungle  
filled with animals  
singing into the ears of night.  
Let them be  
made of mysteries further in  
in the heart, joined with the lives of all,  
all bridges of flesh,  
all singing,  
all covering the wounded land  
showing again, again  
that boundaries are all lies.

—From "Wall Songs" by Linda Hogan

Looking to nature as the model for a society that would be deeply responsible and completely related inside and out to this whole earth and to its inhabitants, Linda Hogan searches for new tools to dismantle and rebuild the society she lives in (Swann 244). Building on the foundation of her Chickasaw ancestry, Hogan says, "I think of my work as part of the history of our tribe and as part of the history of colonization everywhere" (233).

The colonizers of the Americas, who have exploited land, labor, indigenous spirituality, and women for profits, continue to destroy the environment and cultures indigenous to this place. Unemployment and rates of poverty are more severe among Native Americans than among any other racial group in the Americas. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey have written that women "have formed the very core of indigenous resistance to genocide and colonization since the first moment of conflict between Indians and invaders" (311). They point out that since the late 1970s, Native American literature has "assumed

a critical galvanizing role with indigenous liberation struggles in North America" (327), crediting Leslie Silko, Linda Hogan, Wendy Rose, and Joy Harjo with providing, along with others, "the muscle and sinew of the effort" (327). All four of these writers have Native and European ancestry, but identify with their indigenous culture. All four extend the indigenous visions of their cultures to consider the dangers and relationships shared by all interdependent inhabitants of earth. I think they would all agree with Silko's statement, "The community is tremendously important. That's where a person's identity has to come from, not from racial blood quantum levels" (Fisher 19). In the work of these authors, the definition of community has expanded from the local to the global. Their vision is one more sign of a consciousness in Native American art and literature that refuses to be bound by the colonial assumptions and expectations of the colonizer.

Creative ways of expressing human experience often require creative critical approaches. While we may find those approaches we have inherited from the new critics, feminists, deconstructionists and sociological and historical critics useful in our reading of the new literature, we always must combine these approaches with an open and thorough reading of the text and a careful study of the context.

Precedents for approaching Native American women's writing from feminist and post-colonial perspectives can be found in a continuum of literature, from the nineteenth-century social analyses of Fuller, Morgan, Marx, Engels, and Gage to those of present-day social critics and feminists, who have considered how we can most responsibly live in communities. Though the theories and observations of the nineteenth-century writers previously mentioned are not without fault, they have provided us with some valuable foundation stones.

In 1843 Margaret Fuller, author of America's first feminist manifesto, "The Great Lawsuit," condemned America's oppression of Native and African Americans: "I need not speak of what has been done towards the red man, the black man. Those deeds are the scoff of the world; and they have been accompanied by such pious words that the gentlest would not dare to intercede with, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'" (1516). Yet she was convinced that Americans would someday achieve a just society. "It is inevitable," she wrote, "that an external freedom, such as has been achieved for the nation, should be so also for every member of it" (1516). Yet her *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* reveals that Fuller did not expect Native American cultures to survive: "I have no hope of liberalizing the missionary, of humanizing the sharks of trade, of infusing the conscientious drop into the flinty bosom of policy, of saving the Indian from immediate degradation and speedy death" (121). Like most intellectuals of her time, lacking an understanding and

appreciation for their cultural strengths, Fuller viewed the indigenous Americans as a vanishing race. Yet, to her credit, she took the government and the churches to task for their misdeeds.

In the late 19th century, Lewis Morgan, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels and Matilda Gage studied Iroquois society to determine how people had lived before the emergence of the patriarchal capitalist power structure, in the effort to find a model for the socially equitable and sexually balanced society they considered humans capable of building. Morgan expected this new society to be "a revival in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes" (22) or matriarchal clan. *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1884, was based on Morgan's research, and the fruit of Marx's analysis and Engels' writing. Marx and Engels' study shows the advantages to the community, and particularly to women, of communal, matriarchal society in which family lineage is traced through the female birth line rather than through the male property line. While these writers placed too much faith in technology as a means of human liberation, their observation and analysis of the structure of Iroquois society and of women's place in that society are important in the development of thought critical to the responsible building of modern communities.

Suffragist Matilda Gage felt that women through the ages had been the victims of the Church. She left the Women's Suffrage Association when it merged with the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the effort to win the vote. In *Woman, Church and State*, published in 1893, Gage noted the respected role of women in Iroquois society and recognized the influence of the Iroquois League on the United States Constitution. Gage pointed out that among the Iroquois, no sale of lands was valid without consent of the women, and women possessed veto power over war. She believed that the government of the United States was borrowed from the Six Nations: "Thus to the Matriarchate or Mother-rule is the modern world indebted for its first conception of inherent rights, natural equality of condition, and the establishment of a civilized government upon this basis," she wrote, "while under their women the science of government reached the highest form known to the world" (10).

Having found their cause, as an outgrowth of their work in the Abolitionist Movement, white feminists such as the Grimke sisters recognized the common oppression African Americans and women were subject to as unpaid and unenfranchised laborers. However, as the speeches of Sojourner Truth and the well-documented study of Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, clearly show, there were many concessions to racism in the early feminist movement. Then as now there was a dichotomy. On one side were pragmatic middle and

upper-class women longing to enter the competitive and consumptive patriarchal arena of business and politics, and accepting the capitalist power structure; on the other were the idealists who saw a need for fundamental change in society before women and minority cultures could be freed from domination. African American women like Ida B. Wells who wanted to form a branch of the National Woman Suffrage Association were denied the opportunity as a concession to southern white women (Davis 111).

Today's direct involvement of African American and Native American women in the National Organization for Women is having an impact on feminist philosophy and action for social change. In an article written for the *National NOW Times*, Christine Rice, who is Blackfeet and Apache, recently stated:

For the Indigenous People of this hemisphere, 1992 is a year of celebrating the miracle of survival. Those who are here today celebrate the survival of their religions, their cultures, medicine and values. This year is a time to honor and remember those who did not survive. It is a time to educate and help the majority non-native American sisters and brothers come to grips with the past, take responsibility for the present and to begin to shape a future that acknowledges, respects, and celebrates the incredible diversity of this country. (10)

Similar statements of what we must do have been expressed in the literature of Native American women since the late 1970s.

Silko's novel *Ceremony*, published in 1977, takes a long look outward from the vantage point of Laguna Pueblo. This novel illustrates not the boundaries, but the relationships between indigenous people and the rest of the universe. No American novelist has accomplished a stronger weave of history, mythology and contemporary narrative than Silko. Finely crafted, and carefully unified, *Ceremony* achieves through its cyclic form and the consciousness of its Laguna protagonist a rare sort of balance at the end with the precarious beauty of a sunrise that is always in danger of being polluted by the destroyers, as Silko names them, but that will always survive our pitiful human greed. This novel exposes the lies American society has been built on and presents a vision of ways to reintegrate the individual into the community.

Tayo, *Ceremony*'s male protagonist, is a World War II veteran, thoroughly sickened by what he has seen of war. He comes home to Laguna a broken man who is only able to achieve peace and wholeness through a ceremonial rediscovery of his relationships to the immediate place, people and animals surrounding him. Crucial to his healing is

the understanding that he must not be lured into the violence that erupts from his fellow veterans who, having learned to torture and kill, victimize each other. The destroyers can be Indian or white; and crucial to Tayo's personal survival is acquiring the strength to refuse to become a killer, manipulated by the force of evil Silko calls the "witchery."

Tayo's lover, herbalist Ts'eh Montaña, helps him gain strength to resist the destructive influence of other veterans. She is a healer, a medicine woman, who has remained always close to the land, holding it sacred. Tayo's grandmother is also a strong influence in his life. Laguna women have a prominent place in their culture, which is matrilineal. While she has not been directly involved in the women's movement, Silko feels that it has benefitted her in undermining the "stereotypes perpetrated on all of us by the white men" (Fisher 23). In Silko's fiction, females are fundamental to the continuing circle of life that enables the community and the whole earth to survive.

The setting is near Los Alamos, New Mexico, where the first atomic bomb was developed, and the Trinity site, where the first atomic bomb was exploded. A veteran of the war that ended with the United States bombing Japan, Tayo comes to realize his universal relationships to all people, endangered by the Destroyers:

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things and even the earth, had been laid. . . . From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (246)

This concern about the "fate of all living things" links Silko's work to that of Hogan, Rose, Harjo, and women internationally who have been strong voices in the anti-war and anti-nuclear movement. Linda Hogan recognized the power of these voices in her book of poems, *Daughters, I Love You*, published in 1981. Feeling deep love and seeing the beauty and innocence of her own daughter, Hogan empathizes with the suffering of the innocent Japanese victims of atomic warfare:

In her dark eyes  
the children of Hiroshima  
are screaming  
and her skin is

their skin  
falling off. (7)

In another poem from a mother's perspective, Hogan considers how the mother of the American pilot who dropped the bomb may have felt:

The humming plane  
that dropped such destruction,  
Enola Gay,  
was named for the pilot's mother.  
She weeps in her pillow at night  
nightmares of children  
lost to power. (10)

In "Folksong," from a more recent book, *Seeing Through the Sun* (1985), Hogan recognizes the parallels between her Chickasaw culture and another colonized oral culture, the Latvian:

Our own songs are sweet  
me with my trail songs,  
you with your dainas.  
Beneath our voices are war songs  
though we sound harmless,  
our fists disguised as hearts  
because men are assembled  
with their yeas and nays. (8)

Hogan points out that women are engaged in a different sort of warfare from men, that they wage it emotionally, with their hearts. Hogan clearly identifies with other women and has been influenced by feminist theory. She says:

I read books of feminist theory, and often relate that to culture and class. The experience of being a woman has the same elements as being Indian, black, and poor, even though some of the strongest divisions seem to be cultural ones, and some of the most difficult forms of exclusion and misuse that I have felt have come from white women in the women's movement and in the academy where some women have, by necessity and for their own survival, perfected the language of dominance and entered into competition with one another.

I believe in the women's movement as another resistance struggle, not as entering into the ways of the bosses. (Swann 244)

In her poetry Hogan celebrates the international movement of women who have joined together to speak out against those bosses

willing to destroy anything in their quest for power. These lines are from "The Women Speaking":

And the Russian women in blue towns  
are speaking.  
The flower-dressed women of India,  
women in orange tents,  
dark women  
of the Americas  
who sit beside fires,  
have studied the palms of their hands  
and walk toward one another. (*Daughters* 18)

An international vision of the relationships between women is also evident in the work of Hopi-Miwok poet Wendy Rose. Rose's capacity for empathy with women of diverse cultures and in earlier times may have developed from her studies as an anthropologist. Combining her insights from being a Native American with facts she learned in anthropological studies and using a modernized dramatic monologue poetic technique, Rose imagined the words of a Lakota woman killed in the Wounded Knee Massacre in a poem published in her chapbook, *Academic Squaw*, in 1977. The poem opens with the woman speaking of her suffering:

I expected my skin and my blood  
to ripen, not be ripped from my bones;  
like fallen fruit I am peeled, tasted,  
discarded; my seeds open and  
have no future. . . . (n. pag.)

But the last lines of the woman's statement rise above her suffering to a statement of power and spirituality:

Now  
the ghost dances  
impervious  
to bullets. (n. pag.)

In a more recent book, *The Halfbreed Chronicles*, published in 1985, Rose's perspectives include those of Tasmanian, Japanese, Jewish, and Mexican women. Like her earlier Wounded Knee poem, "Truganniny," imagining the voice of a Tasmanian woman, is about genocide. In fewer than seventy-five years, the British exterminated the indigenous people of Tasmania, an island off the southeast coast of Australia where England established a penal colony in 1803. In her poem, Rose imagines the last words of the last full-blooded Tasmanian, a woman who has seen the body of her husband placed on display after his death:



Put me under  
the bulk of a mountain  
or in the distant sea,  
put me where  
they will not  
find me. (57)

Despite her last wish, which is confirmed in Tom Haydon's film, *The Last Tasmanian*, Truganniny's body was removed from its original hiding place in the basement wall of the penitentiary on the island and taken to the Tasmanian Museum at Oxford University, where Truganniny's bones were displayed until 1947 when they were removed and placed in a vault. Finally in 1974, largely due to the insistence of Australian aborigines, the Tasmanian government requested the return of Truganniny's remains, held a state funeral, and cremated her. Her ashes were cast into the sea (Haydon).

Rose's voices are defiant, whatever their suffering. They rise from the ruins, in the way of "Naayawva Taawi," her modern Hopi fight song about the miraculous survival of the indigenous people, who are able to use the leavings of European culture to rebuild their own. The poem ends:

See, Pahana  
how we nest  
in your ruins. (35)

*Pahana*, Rose explains in a footnote, means "whiteman" in the Hopi language and refers to "a way of life, a set of institutions, rather than to male human beings of European ancestry." She states the belief that "all of us, including such men, are victims of the 'whiteman'" (35).

But the point of the poem is that the Hopi continue to survive amidst the ruins of Euroamerican culture. As Joy Harjo so powerfully asks in her poem "Anchorage" from *She Had Some Horses* (1983): "who would believe / the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival / those who were never meant / to survive?" (15). The Native and non-Native people who fill her poems live and die on the precarious edge of American society. They range from her Creek ancestors to the villagers of Esteli in Nicaragua. To overcome colonization requires the courage that can only be achieved through overcoming fear of the oppressor. In her poem, "I Give You Back," Harjo exorcises her fear:

I give you back to the white soldiers  
who burned down my home, beheaded my children,  
raped and sodomized my brothers and sisters.

I give you back to those who stole the  
food from our plates when we were starving. (*She  
Had* 73)

While Harjo's poetry has evolved from her own experience, it has consistently moved toward something much larger. As Andrew Wiget puts it, "at her best the energy generated by this journeying creates a powerful sense of identity that incorporates everything into the poetic self, so that finally she can speak for the whole earth" (117). Paula Allen calls Harjo "a poet whose work is concerned with metaphysical as well as social connections" (*Sacred Hoop* 166).

Harjo's expansive social and spiritual vision is particularly evident in her book *In Mad Love and War* (1990). Writing amidst the gunfire of the U.S. contra war, Harjo set down the experience of survival in Esteli in her poem "Resurrection":

I have no damned words to make violence fit neatly  
like wrapped packages  
of meat to contain us safely. (17)

To find the words to convey the meaning of Esteli, Harjo and others must learn from the ghosts of those who did not survive:

We all watch for fire  
for all the fallen dead to return  
and teach us a language so terrible  
it could resurrect us all. (18)

That we can learn from the "fallen dead" to throw off colonization is Leslie Silko's message in her recent novel, *Almanac of the Dead*. The novel foretells a huge influx of Native people from the South who will join with the poor in North America to overthrow the Destroyers, who have injured the balance of nature. Fulfilling an ancient prophecy, twin brothers will lead these unarmed people northward.

The terrain of this book ranges from Laguna Pueblo to Tuxtla Guitierrez in Mexico and as far south as Colombia. Silko establishes the decadent context for revolution in great detail, prefacing the narrative with this statement adjacent to the map on the inside cover:

Sixty million Native Americans died between 1500 and 1600. The defiance and resistance to things European continue unabated. The Indian wars have never ended in the Americas. Native Americans acknowledge no borders; they seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands.

With its wide cast of characters and complex plot, *Almanac* tests the boundaries of fictional narrative. Yet, though the story line travels far from them at times, it comes back to two central characters, one

female, the other male. Seese, a young white woman, formerly addicted to cocaine, has sought out the help of a psychic Sonoran woman named Lecha, in the hope of finding her baby, who has been killed by a ruthless big-time drug smuggler named Beaufrey as a way of exerting control over the baby's father, David. Beaufrey, a homosexual, has taken David as his lover.

Seese becomes friends with Sterling, a man from Laguna, the other protagonist. Having been banished from the reservation for failing to control a Hollywood film crew, Sterling works as a gardener at the headquarters of Lecha's twin sister, Zeta, and Lecha's son, Serlo. They and some other Mexican Indians in Tucson, where most of the action is set, support themselves by smuggling drugs and weapons across the border.

The sixth and final section of the novel, titled "One World Many Tribes," begins with a meeting in Tucson, billed "The International Holistic Healers Convention." A diverse group dedicated to social change have come together. Angelita, a revolutionary, is there from Mexico, as the emissary of Wacah and El Feo, the twins who are sending through her an invitation to join them in their journey walking north. The brothers, who receive guidance from the spirit macaws, are prepared to wait, a hundred years if necessary, until the Europeans have been outnumbered and the Native people can retake the land peacefully. But Angelita thinks differently. In love with Karl Marx, she has attempted to explain to the mountain villagers in Mexico the distinction between Marx and Marxism as it developed into political theories and governments. This pragmatic woman has learned from Marx, but she has devoted her life not to an abstract concept but to the return of the land to the indigenous people. She hopes to make contact with people who have the shoulder-mounted missiles that could defend the religious pilgrims from air attacks by U.S. forces.

Also at the conference are Lakota poet-lawyer Wilson Weasel Tail, a Barefoot Hopi prophet, a group of eco-warriors called Green Vengeance, and an African American Vietnam veteran named Clinton. However, looking at the schedule, Lecha, the seer, notices that most of the new-age spiritualists are whites from the United States, presenting sessions, such as these: "Tilly Shay, colonic irrigation therapist, editor of the Clean Colon Newsletter, discusses the link between chronic constipation in the Anglo-Saxon male and the propensity for violence" and "The cosmic Oneness of Red Antler and White Dove (adopted members of the Abanaki Tribe). 'Feel the nothingness of being through the emanating light of the sacred crystal'" (717). While her description of the conference is clearly a spoof on the exploitation and absurdity that is typical of new-age spirituality and conventions in general, this section of Silko's book does recognize such meetings as

an opportunity for creative people to meet together, mostly behind the scenes.

Clearly, Silko sees both spirituality and resistance as essential in the struggle of indigenous people to take back the land. And this struggle spans history and races. The Barefoot Hopi gives Clinton a book by white Marxist historian, Herbert Aptheker, listing chronologically the resistance of African Americans to slavery between 1526 and 1862. *Almanac of the Dead*, like Yoeme's notebooks, the Aztec calendar, and the old Native stories, illustrates the continued relevance of cultural knowledge from the ancient past to the ongoing lived reality.

Silko ends the novel with Seese and Lecha heading for the secret headquarters of Wilson Weasel Tail in South Dakota and Sterling returning home to Laguna to find that a giant stone snake, sacred to his people, has reappeared near a pile of uranium tailings. Contemplating the meaning of this, Sterling realizes: "The snake was looking south, in the direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come" (763).

Silko's belief that the revolution is being and will be accomplished coincides with the visions of Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, and Wendy Rose. These Native American women are at the cutting edge of the world's literature in their insightful analysis and revelation of history and in their engagement in the transformation of consciousness that tears down the artificial boundaries, making it more possible for all ecocentric cultures on this earth to survive.

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## ***Uneasy Ethnocentrism: Recent Works of Allen, Silko, and Hogan***

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Janet St. Clair

Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Linda Hogan are in the awkward position of having formulated antidotes to twentieth-century cultural poisons, with no way to express them but in a language that often appears polemically ethnocentric. Their dilemma arises from the paradox inherent in a specifically ethnic spiritual tradition that teaches inclusivity and convergence. That which might identify the authors as ethnocentric—their single-minded commitment to tribal spiritual tenets—requires of them a multicultural embrace. The non-indigenous culture that American Indians have most immediately to embrace, however—that of Euroamerican white men—is one that they see as so spiritually impoverished, morally corrupt, and philosophically wrongheaded that its very touch contaminates the social and spiritual heritages of Native peoples. Inaction would ensure devastation: so powerful is the dominant culture that it threatens to suck the planet and all its inhabitants into its own destruction. It is both impossible and irresponsible to maintain a safe distance; it is equally dangerous to approach the contagious monster on his own fouled ground. The recent work of each of these three spiritually-engaged authors reveals her struggle through this paradox toward a transcendent feminist philosophical solution to the contemporary American crises of identity and injustice.

In a paper presented at the 1988 MLA Convention in New Orleans and again in an essay published in the Fall 1990 issue of the *American Indian Quarterly*, Paula Gunn Allen complains that Leslie Silko had ethically violated the legendary privacy of the Lagunas by including sacred clan stories in her novel *Ceremony*. "She must have been told what I was," Allen says, "that we don't tell these things outside" (383). Silko's revelations to a white audience, Allen contended, endangered

the author and betrayed flagrant disrespect for ancient tradition. She explains, "Among the Pueblos, a person is expected to know no more than is necessary, sufficient, and congruent with their spiritual and social place," and that dire—even lethal—consequences could be expected to befall those who inquired or told "about matters that were not hers or his to know or discuss" (380). To tell these secrets to whites compounded the crime, according to Allen, because whites not only lack respect for the traditions, they suffer "a nearly neurotic distress in the presence of secrets and mystery" and must therefore immediately set themselves to the task of spiritually eviscerating tribal stories (382).

Yet Allen's most recent book, *Grandmothers of the Light*, is a collection of sacred stories drawn from many North American tribal traditions, and is prefaced by an explication of women's shamanic influences from cultures throughout the world and across time. The pre-publication promotional brochure from Beacon Press quotes Allen as saying that her own spiritual guides have convinced her that "The time is right" for revealing these sacred stories; her preface to the stories suggests that her fundamental premise in offering the collection is to teach the power and universality of women's spiritual traditions.

Ephanie Atencio, protagonist of Allen's 1983 novel, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, perhaps presages the author's change of heart. Devastated and driven nearly to suicide by the ostensible oppositions of her mixed blood, Ephanie mends the warring halves of a divided psyche by acknowledging both her white and Indian heritages as parts of a seamless cosmic whole. Halfbreed daughter of a halfbreed daughter, Ephanie grows up ostracized from tribal participation, untutored and uninvited in tribal stories. As an adult, she flees her childhood community because Indians, "enraged with shame," beat their wives and children, persecute homosexuals, murder their neighbors, and drink themselves to death. The Indians she encounters in San Francisco seem even less spiritually centered, desecrating sacred dances by "preening and puffing, looking around to see who to score with, who to gossip about, who to snub, who to be sure to talk to" (55). Spiritual guidance is certainly not to be found among whites. Rather, they look to her for the wisdom they believe she must innately own as an Indian, then leave "disappointed in her lack of romantic appeal." "She was not noble, not wise, not exotic," "she always forgot to keep her eyes cast down, to say nature loving things," and "she didn't have a single portrait of an Indian leader on her wall" (66-67).

Ephanie, bereft of resources and support, must find her own spiritual path. She rejects the mystery-denying psychotherapy and life-denying Catholicism of white culture and the psychological tyranny of her Indian "hermano" Stephen in favor of tribal sacred stories of

powerful and creative women. But it is significant that her spirit guide—a woman who resembles both her Indian grandmother and a white lesbian nun from her convent school—is first introduced to her by her white friend Teresa. Ephanie rails against the genocidal arrogance and destructive greed of the white male tradition, but it is to Teresa she speaks, and her pronoun is always "they," not the collective "you." With the help of her spirit mentors, Ephanie reads, writes, meditates, chants, and dreams. In the end, she finds awareness within a local, tribal context. But, as prophet of conjunction and continuance, she, like Allen, moves toward a more inclusive spirituality that embraces a global coalition of like-minded women.

Silko, conversely, seems in some ways to be renouncing a tribally grounded affirmation of universal unity for a violent and vaguely focused exclusivity. *Ceremony*, almost holy in its spiritual elegance and moral simplicity, is both a novel of reconciliations and a manual of healing, reiterating in both story and structure the artificiality of separations. The novel's most dynamic characters, with the exception of the spirit woman Ts'eh, are hazel-eyed breeds who acknowledge and assume the delicate and urgent task of effecting transitions. It is true that the bad Indians, such as Emo and his friends, and the defeated Indians, such as Tayo's mother and the wretches who live in the Gallup arroyo, are morally corrupted and emotionally crippled by the destructive influences and attitudes of male-driven white culture. And whites, of course, are specifically delineated as the products of witchery who "fear the world" and "fear themselves" and "destroy what they fear" (135). Yet Betonie warns Tayo against sweeping condemnations. "'Nothing is that simple,' he said, 'you don't write off all the white people, just like you don't trust all the Indians'" (128). He observes that Indians' recriminations against whites—however just—only work into the hands of witchery to ensure further destruction. "You see, Tayo," he says, "we have done as much fighting as we can with the destroyers and the thieves: as much as we could do and still survive" (128). The ending of the novel reiterates its central theme: violence, even as defense against violence, cannot defeat violence; only indefatigable efforts toward peaceful integration can effectively resist the unrelenting forces of division.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, on the other hand, is a novel made of violence and recrimination. It portrays an abyss of savagery and corruption almost too ghastly to imagine. Its diabolical characters horrify; its snarled plots terrify: within its pages the unbelievably heinous becomes credible. And the despots, swindlers, thugs, and cutthroats are white males. Vicious, manipulative homosexuality and injurious—even murderous—sexual perversion become relentless metaphors of the insane self-absorption and phallogentric avarice of



god-forsaken Euroamerican culture. Typical among the characters are Beaufrey, who trades in torture pornography and snuff films but takes his greatest delight in driving his sexual partners to suicide; Trigg, who systematically murders homeless men as they are ejaculating in his mouth so that he can "harvest" their internal organs and sell them for fabulous profits; Judge Arne, who loathes the prostitutes he tortures and finds his most satisfying sexual gratification on the bodies of his mute basset hounds; and Serlo, who is disgusted by the stench and disease of man and woman alike, but who freezes and stores each opalescent drop of his aristocratic semen in order to repopulate his orbiting space stations after the final destruction of his moribund planet.

The pallid monsters of *Almanac* would seem to suggest the Manichean polarities of a particularly vicious ethnocentrism, except for the fact that Silko does not presume to balance this white Evil with some falsely exaggerated brown Good. While that which is European is as lethal and contagious as the AIDS virus unleashed by power-mad white men, the Indian leaders are also flawed. The novel opens upon a domestic scene poisoned by witchery. The mixed-blood Zeta stands at the stove stirring a simmering cauldron of dye the color of dried blood—the only color she'll wear. Her twin sister Lecha searches for a good vein as Seese, her white drug-addicted employee, fills a syringe with Lecha's afternoon Demerol. Ferro, the obese and neurotically needy son that Lecha had abandoned as an infant, glares at his mother in ominous loathing as he cleans the guns he uses in his drug-running business. Paulie, the silent live-in psychotic obsessed with Ferro, watches tensely, "coiled tighter than a mad snake." All of them are gathered in the kitchen, traditional heart of the home. Lecha—high, as usual, on drugs—nevertheless catches the irony: "She laughs and points at all of them together in the same room. No food anywhere. Pistols, shotguns, and cartridges scattered on the kitchen counters, and needles and pills all over the table. The Devil's kitchen doesn't look this good" (20). It is to Zeta and Lecha that their spiteful, long-dead Indian grandmother has entrusted the treasured pages of the almanac: such are the keepers of the sacred tribal truths and prophecies.

The only other well-developed Indian leader in *Almanac of the Dead* is Comrade Angelita La Escapia, student of Marx and organizer of the mountain villagers of Mexico. Her inspirations are tribal and her goal is to reclaim the land from the Death-Eye European dogs. But La Escapia—who names herself "The Meathook"—is a tyrant who loves the sophisticated weaponry, political intrigue, and uncontested power that emblemize her enemies' most heinous traits. She suffers no democratic qualms about deceiving her pacifistic fellow revolutionaries to effect her own political agenda, assuring herself that "what Wacah and El Feo didn't know wouldn't hurt them" (710-11). She decides

independently to kill her fellow activist Bartolomeo because he has outlived his usefulness and misplaced his sympathies; she then persuades the Indian villagers to try, sentence, and execute him, buying their loyalty with Bartolomeo's orange pop. Even her lover, El Feo, wisely gives Angelita a wide berth.

Imperfect Indians notwithstanding, *Almanac* frequently seems to betray a radically separatist ethnocentrism. The Indians, after all, are flawed by their contamination by white cultures. Various Indian characters tell and retell stories of white atrocities against Indians: of women slowly impaled on sharpened stakes, of lampshades made of human skin, of women and children lined up at the edges of arroyos and used for idle target practice by laughing soldiers. Zeta and Lecha's Yaqui grandmother, Yoeme, blames the blood of her villainous white husband for her sickly, weak-willed, and worthless children. The twins' white father was so empty within that he didn't even rot when he died. The mixed-blood Menardo repudiates his wise, kind, and engaging Indian grandfather to gratify the insatiable thirst for power, money, sex, and position that characterize successful white men. Afro-Americans, such as the Black Indian Clinton, might still recover an authentic connection with their tribal histories. But except for such wild exceptions as Roy, the homeless warrior betrayed by his own country, whites are typically portrayed as beyond redemption. Corrupted and spiritually strangled by a bloody and murderous religion, whites have long since succumbed to every evil and excess; the land and people can be healed only when "all traces of Europeans in America . . . disappear" (632). Indians are not paragons of goodness in *Almanac of the Dead*, but white men, almost without exception, are an unspeakably evil influence in the Americas. The Barefoot Hopi's religion "made no distinctions"; he "even talks to whites" (626, 617). But that handful of spiritually salvageable whites must either return to Europe and reestablish ties with their own spirits or utterly renounce all things European and convert wholeheartedly to Native American tribal principles.

But the apparently violent tribal bias of the novel is deceptive. It is subverted, to a large degree, by that same hopeful inclusiveness that lends *Ceremony* its abiding beauty. In fact, like *Ceremony* and *Storyteller*, *Almanac of the Dead* is a story that rises above its own tangled plotlines to reveal both the confluence of seemingly fragmented stories and the order that such confluence implies. The myriad plots are finally understood not as lines at all, but as great looping convergences that encompass more time, and more space, until time and space—those cornerstones of modern Western thought—become the eviscerated signifiers of a radically limited vision. And so, despite its ghastly brutality, *Almanac* is ultimately less an ethnocentric attack on

cultural decay than an attempt to understand and then transcend the fear and loathing that such decay inspires. The almanac, timeless chronicle of recurring histories, becomes a symbol of hope and continuance. As Silko remarked during the composition of the novel, stories function to reunify us during times of "violent emotional experience" by combatting humans' basic tendency "to run off and hide or separate themselves from others" (Baker 59).

Linda Hogan also struggles to resolve and transcend an awkward ethnocentrism in her 1991 novel, *Mean Spirit*. Based on documented evidence of crimes against Native Americans following the discovery of oil in Oklahoma, the novel typically characterizes whites by a greed so unbounded and abominable that it justifies for them the systematic mass murder of men, women, and children—almost invariably Indian. Oil baron John Hale, as treacherous as he is vile, is at the outset "known as a friend to the Indians" who had "always been generous and helpful to his darker compatriots" (21). But Hale, of course, is revealed as arch-villain and (perhaps synonymously) archetypal white man: opportunistic, exploitative, and devoid of conscience, compassion, and morality. He rapes the land, destroys everyone who stands in his way, and augments his wealth by persuading terminally gullible Indians to name him their beneficiary on the life insurance policies he buys them. The town of Watona, described as "a limbo between the worlds" of indigenous and alien cultures (6), is repeatedly rocked by underground explosions from Hale's oil wells that rip the earth and literally blast things and lives into unrecognizable shards. The hellish fires that continually break out foul the air, destroy land and property, and threaten the townspeople with imminent and omnipresent disaster.

The Indians, conversely, are drawn as peaceful, moral, family-oriented people who, stripped of social and political power, must rely on spiritual resources that whites cannot comprehend. The town Indians are clearly spiritually and morally inferior to the reclusive Hill People, but the source of their corruption has been their association with whites. The character Grace Blanket is a case in point. Born a Hill Indian, she is brought to Watona as a child by her mother Lila, a river prophet who believed that the Indians' only salvation from white encroachment was to learn white ways. Grace is seduced by the trappings of white society, and when oil is discovered on her property she spends her fortune on an enormous house with Roman columns, rooms full of heavy, ornately carved European appointments, and a grand piano that she hasn't a clue how to play. Her enthusiastic alliance with white cultural values, however, does not save her from being murdered in front of her daughter by John Hale, who is greedy for her oil-rich land.

Linda Hogan, though, also goes far toward subverting her own

ethnocentric separatism. Despite the obvious moral polemic between the good Hill Indians and the evil whites, the novel is deeply concerned with convergences. Protagonist Belle Graycloud, "a light-skinned Indian" who heads a family that includes a white son-in-law, a blond daughter, and fair grandchildren, functions as something of a mediator, although her methods are tribal and her wrath against whites is implacable. Her name itself suggest prophetic mediation: her voice, like a bell, is a herald; gray is the color of commingled opposites; clouds, the suspended mixture of water and air. She cares for those who have "fallen through the gap" between the opposing worlds, and protests the slaughter of eagles, creatures that live on the earth and in the heavens (262). In her despair over injurious divisions she looks for healing power in "bat medicine," which acknowledges the influence of creatures who traverse the borderlines of night and day, bird and beast, cave and sky. She intercedes to allow the Indian girl Lola to marry the white son of Lola's court-appointed guardian, and she is present when their mixed-blood baby girl is given the prophetically suggestive name of Moses. The novel ends with the greedy whites' total destruction by fire of the Grayclouds' home as Belle is recovering from an assassination attempt by the duplicitous white local sheriff. The family, however—including its white and mixed-blood members—remains intact and hopeful as it abandons Watona carrying "generations along with them, into the prairie and through it, to places where no road had been cut before them" (371).

A few white characters turn their backs on their heritage of greed and destruction, as well. John Hale's pampered but oppressed girlfriend China leaves town with Lionel Tall, an Indian who had come to help the Native townspeople, and his white driver. When the Indian preacher Joe Billy renounces his association with the Baptist Church, his white wife Martha eagerly follows him on "the good, red road" without "a single glance backward at her past" (300, 352). Even Father Dunne, the benign Catholic priest, tentatively betrays his vows and subjects himself to local ridicule for acknowledging that the holy spirit abides in everything, not merely "inside churches and cathedrals" (235). But again, as in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and—to a far gentler extent—Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, white characters are likely to find redemption only insofar as they renounce those unmitigated evils that are defined as "white" and accept instead the eternal principles of good that are identified as "Indian."

Linda Hogan's newest book of poetry, *The Book of Medicines*, reiterates *Mean Spirit's* fundamental fury against the historical destructiveness of white male culture, but forcefully affirms the possibility of healing. In "The Fallen," Hogan echoes Silko's assessments of whites:

whatever stepped inside their shadow,  
they would kill,  
whatever crossed their path,  
they came to fear. (42)

Though she refers to whites in "Sickness" as "the mortal enemy . . . living at the edge of sanity," she nevertheless ends the poem by noting that "these words are proof / there is healing" (63). As the title implies, healing is the central theme of the collection, and the book ends with the hopeful promise "that after the long sleep of seeds / all things will grow / and the plants who climb into this world / will find it green and alive" ("The Origins of Corn" 87).

Each of the three authors seems caught in an ironic dilemma: in order to nurture and protect a dangerously attenuated but potentially liberating spiritual philosophy founded on inclusion, they must to some degree exclude those who threaten its resuscitation and resurgence. In order to justify the exclusion, they tend to shape white people into a monolithic personification of witchery and white values and institutions into monstrous perversions of human ideologies. There is, of course, much to support their chilling interpretations of Western history and tradition: each woman knows and tells true and ghastly stories of whites' outrages against tribal people and against their own humanity. Allen's Ephanie is emotionally crippled by Catholicism's furious condemnation of love and whites' self-aggrandizing history of genocide and theft. Hogan bases her novel on historical evidence of whites' violence, greed, and indifferent destruction. Both of them have recounted in interviews incidents in which they and their families were brutalized or swindled by whites (Bruchac). Silko's characters recount atrocities of European conquest so heinous that the reader's eyes veer off the page in horror. And yet—as Ephanie understands even as she ruefully succumbs to them—such Manichean extremes are false, and serve to falsify the premises of tribal religion by merely restructuring the hypocritical and self-righteous moral hierarchies for which whites are condemned. Indians, she recognizes, tread on as hazardous a ground as whites in identifying themselves as the chosen people.

Although they condemn the oppression, destruction, and wanton self-aggrandizement that for them characterize Euroamerican philosophies and traditions, Allen, Silko and Hogan ultimately draw back from simplistic moral dichotomization. Perhaps it is because of their own mixed blood. If each is to remain whole, she must find a way to transcend the apparent oppositions of her nature: to choose sides, when she is in physical fact the merger of both, would be self-abnegation. The issue of their mixed blood is central to each author's consciousness: each speaks of both its horror and its potential for healing in

Joseph Bruchac's *Survival This Way*, Laura Coltelli's *Winged Words*, and elsewhere. Again, Ephanie, "half of this and half of that," illustrates the necessity of reconciling kinships rooted in enmity: locked in mortal combat with "a monstrous other" bent on her destruction, she is maddened by her inability even to know "which is me and which is the other" (3, 133, 136). But if, as these authors suggest, opposition is a destructive illusion—a manifestation of what Silko calls "witchery"—there is nevertheless a line of demarcation separating cultural philosophies that can be reconciled only through memory, will, and understanding.

That division, evident in the work of Allen, Silko, Hogan, and many other Indian authors, might be stated as the conflict between Cartesian duality and Native interrelationship. The search for truth within the traditions of European rationalism requires the isolation of entities, definition of boundaries, and assignment of classifications. The thinker becomes the sole subject, while everything else is perceived as isolate object. The individual, as a result, is not a part of anything. Alienated from any meaningful sense of social or spiritual community, he (and she, the authors suggest, through oppression rather than temperament) can see the rest of creation only in terms of utility, never in terms of integrative identity. This isolation has left white people homeless and amoral, in lonely, insatiable quest of a wholeness they cannot name and can only vaguely apprehend.

This philosophical chasm between individual and communal authority has yet to be imaginatively bridged in Native American literature. As LaVonne Ruoff has observed from time to time, mixed-blood characters who achieve a satisfactory adjustment to life do so by choosing their Indian side over their white. But such a conclusion seems to accept an unnecessarily ethnocentric and unfairly stereotypic premise, which is that Indians understand and value community and interconnection while whites don't and can't. Using the language of Werner Sollers' paradigm of descent versus consent in the definition of identity in America, the fictional mixed blood reveals another irony in Native claims to moral superiority. While ethnicity would logically be deemed an issue of descent, these characters in fact represent the triumph of consent over descent: they *choose* an ethnicity that is at least partly their own invention. Ephanie, damaged and divided, forges a self out of her own anguish and abandonment. The fair-skinned Belle Graycloud identifies herself as an Indian, while her best friend Grace Blanket, full-blooded daughter of a tribal prophet, indulges herself with every frivolous European luxury her American oil dollars can buy. Zeta and Lecha do not even know they have Indian blood until their maverick grandmother teaches them to value it above their spiritually toxic white blood. Menardo, on the other hand,

explains his flat nose as the result of a boxing injury, and lives in fear that his Indian lineage will be exposed and his white privileges revoked.

If identity is delineated on philosophical grounds (and philosophy is invariably the foundation of choice for those who decide to be "Indian"), then perhaps ethnicity is not particularly relevant: perhaps it is not ethnicity that is being chosen as much as a workable way of conducting one's life. Perhaps Allen, in her frequent dismissals of those she used to call "wannabes," was unfairly ethnocentric in implying that Native philosophies are generally intellectually inaccessible to whites, and elitist in suggesting that ethnic boundaries should be maintained to protect some jealously guarded philosophical "property."

It would be arrogant to dismiss Allen's suspicions of whites' innate limitations: granting that she (and others) possess a mode of perception culturally unfamiliar to Euroamericans, it is impossible to guess how accurately the Western intellectual imagination is able to comprehend it. But Indians are clearly not immune to such character flaws as excess, greed, depravity, violence, selfishness, exploitation, intolerance, and alienation (and none of the authors tries to pretend otherwise). And it seems altogether improbable that such flaws were rarely encountered before Indians were contaminated by whites, however evolved their sense of kinship. Similarly, a conception of community, harmony, and an apprehension of interrelationship is a human ideal, not exclusively a tribal one. Annette Kolodny, for example, describes early European settlers' vision of America as a place where they could effect "a return to primal harmony" where "the old European vulgar, striving, acquisitional self could die" and humankind could live again in spiritual kinship with the mother earth and all her creatures (26). White ecofeminists decry such a portrayal of earth as passive female existing to serve men, but similarly strive toward a sense of global balance. It is both divisive and unjust to assume that compassion and community are somehow inherently "Indian," while selfishness and isolation are by definition "white."

Of course, such naive, sentimentalized nostalgia for some incorruptible Edenic order as that noted by Kolodny seems bitterly ludicrous in retrospect: Euroamericans have raped, looted, and destroyed everything they meant to hold in reverence. A philosophy that boils down to a subject's evaluation of objects' utility doubtlessly ensured the toppling of the idyll. But this same sentimentalization may occur as well in contemporary Native philosophies. In her preface to *Grandmothers of the Light*, Allen claims that gynocratic tribal societies promoted values that rendered "the good of the individual and the good of the society mutually reinforcing rather than divisive," and so ensured both harmony and equality for everyone (xiv). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in *Feminism Without Illusions*, agrees that such values must be

sought and such ends achieved, but judiciously warns against "the siren calls of nostalgic and utopian communitarianisms" (54). Noting that communal coherence is historically sustained at the cost of violence and inequity, Fox-Genovese seeks to reveal the oppression that typically rests beneath the benign surface of community. Silko's heroine Angelita La Escapia illuminates Fox-Genovese's point. Champion of communitarian principles and gynocratic reclamation of the land for the chosen people, La Escapia is in fact a fascist leader of a fundamentalist jihad, sacrificing civility and polity in a war for power and identity, manipulating the masses into effecting her will and ruthlessly silencing those who challenge her unacknowledged autocracy.

Angelita La Escapia proclaimed her repossession of the land for "the people," but the price of inclusion was voiceless, faceless conformity. Community can confer identity, and it can strip identity. It typically depends upon its borders for definition: those who are in can readily be distinguished from those who are out. Inclusivity demands tolerance of difference, and tolerance of difference implies respect for the very individuality that continually threatens communal fusion. Sterling, the most sympathetic character of *Almanac of the Dead*, begins the novel banished from Laguna for a crime he didn't commit, and ends it in a lonely stone hut on an outlying sheep ranch, patiently waiting for the community's pardon. Tayo's aunt humiliates him as a child and denies him help as an adult out of her fear of community disapproval. The Hill People of Hogan's novel accept Michael Horse with his typewriter, Joe Billy with his white wife, and Father Dunne with his visions of beatitude, but then decide it is "time to hide the path to their settlement" to keep out the "carriers of a contagion" (298). Although Allen is an eloquent spokeswoman for communal virtues, her character Ephanie knows only exclusion. The Indians of her pueblo exclude her because she is half white, the Native community in San Francisco excludes her because she is not part of their clique. White liberals exclude her by exoticising her, and the Church excludes her because she will not renounce love. Ephanie ultimately finds community in ancestral connections, but—ironically—in the utter isolation of her tiny room. She understands "at last that everything was connected. Everything was related," and she becomes a shaman, a prophet (191). But in the end, she dances in dreams with shadowy spirit women, physically disconnected from the exclusive communities of the living. The idea of community is probably as seductive to many whites in contemporary America as it is to many Natives. The difficulty, as these novels demonstrate, is in conceiving the nature of a community that provides identity and stability, ensures social justice, and yet creates space for the asymmetries of both cultures and individuals.



It is nevertheless probable that students of Native American traditions have a clearer understanding of community than the average Euroamerican materialist. Respecting the relational and reciprocal nature of existence implies recognition of a foundation of kinships that undermines the central premise of Western individualism: that each man is a discrete entity. And defenders of liberal individualism and the androcentric traditions of Judeo-Christianity surely could not have so grievously misused the planet and its inhabitants had they understood kinship more broadly. Still, it is not entirely fair to characterize whites as isolate objectifiers incapable of a sense of community (local, global, and cosmic) and Indians as inheritors of a stable sense of place and purpose deriving from their spiritual apprehension of inherent unity. Many eminent modern European male philosophers have challenged the Cartesian legacy and decried the social consequences of the resultant moral relativism. Buber's juxtaposition of the objectifying "I-It" with that of the respectful "I-Thou"; Husserl's phenomenology, which seeks to treat all experience without preconception; and Heidegger's concept of "worldhood" in which humankind assumes a relational place immediately come to mind. Deep ecologists and environmentalists, frequently chagrined by the fact that "the environment exists because it was made visible by the act of making it separate" (Evernden 126), attack a religious tradition that "gave *man* dominion over the earth" and, in his God-like image, license to exploit all that he saw (Oelschlaeger 43). Many contemporary Christian theologians—especially women, such as Rosemary Ruether and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza—are challenging the assertion of man's dominion and reinterpreting Scripture to emphasize the relational nature of identity and the accountability that interrelationship implies. Most Euroamericans may not attend to the rhetoric of philosophers, scientists, theologians and literary critics, but they nevertheless seek relation and kinship—sometimes clumsily, in subscription clubs and designer labels; but sometimes elegantly, in meaningfully integrative participation.

And, as the structuralists have demonstrated, to objectify is human, not "white." Objectification is a condition of sentience: we may see things differently, but we see things. We may think about things differently, but—as the characters of Allen, Silko, and Hogan attest—we think *about*. It is this inevitable splintering that gives religion significance: its metaphors help reconnect us, help erode that sense of alienation borne of our awareness of otherhood. The metaphors of Christianity, according to Allen, Silko, and Hogan, have been twisted and fouled by the vicious, undisciplined avarice of androcentric individualism. Corrupted, they have lost their power to carry the human spirit and intellect forward toward social structures predicated upon a fundamental commitment to justice.

Native American challenges to androcentric individualism and its legacies of oppression and greed are certainly not limited to these three authors, nor only to women writers. It is, in fact, the dominant theme of the literature. But, as Allen observes in *The Sacred Hoop*, the shift "from a male to a female axis" in American Indian literature has resulted in a corresponding shift of focus "on continuance rather than on extinction" (262). That new and hopeful focus is achieved in the work of Allen, Silko and Hogan (and others) through a reformation of feminine kinships, a restoration of feminine spiritual authority, and a reclamation of the values that such authority implies.

*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and *Mean Spirit* explicitly insist that male violence, aggression, and selfishness be supplanted by nurturance, healing, and collaboration. Ephanie Atencio effects that transformation by rejecting the demeaning tyranny of such male institutions as the Church and Freudian psychotherapy for the empowerment endowed by feminine kinships and spiritual mentors. Withdrawing from "the lie she had learned, had lived, had told," she turns to the mythic Grandmothers and their healing knowledge of a relational reality (204). Silko chillingly illustrates how the male "Reign of the Death-Eye Dog" has systematically destroyed redemptive feminine vision. Women in the novel adapt to an impetus of aggression, greed, and callousness, like Leah Blue or Angelita; resist misogynistic subjugation through a defiant and dehumanizing scorn, like Zeta and Yoeme; or fall in speechless defeat, like Seese. Belle Graycloud is at the center of every page of Hogan's novel, resisting the urges toward destruction of both the white villains and the daunted men of her own family. Throughout the story, she fights Law, the traditional and persistently corruptible domain of the male, with an intuitive and inclusive spirituality drawn from being "part of earth's terrain" (340).

Recent works of Allen, Silko, and Hogan all reveal an apparent ethnocentrism, but it is an ambivalent ethnocentrism that attempts to work through opposition toward integration. Their devotion to tribal spiritual truths about responsible interrelationship requires them to embrace the culture that has very nearly destroyed them and the earth that sustains them. But embedded in the very vision that might be labeled ethnocentric are correctives to contemporary destruction and strategies for global survival.

Seen in this sense, their feminine vision of justice based on inclusion, respect, nurturance, and kinship is perhaps more a transcendence of opposing cultural premises than a moral choice between timebound polarized cultural options. Leslie Silko's almanac, Paula Gunn Allen's mythic grandmothers, and Linda Hogan's medicines all serve to discredit binaries as artificial, and to find healing in the

convergences that occur outside the limitations of time.

That transcendence, however, is by no means complete. So far their inclusion of whites—especially white men—remains, understandably, tenuous and provisional. The authors rebel against a cultural milieu and a language incapable of encompassing their inclusive feminine vision, but they must speak from within the culture they defy, in its own language. As Ephanie says, "The language wasn't built for truth. . . . It made separations," but "it was the only language they all knew together—the people in her world. The tongue that only knew how to lie" (190). Joy Harjo, whose forthcoming anthology is entitled *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, has frequently spoken of the difficulty of "being able to say things well" in "a very materialistic and a very subject-oriented language" (Bruchac 94). But even as she and other Native women writers work "to make it [the English language] powerful and beautiful and to turn it around" (Harjo 31), they cannot fail to resist even as they attempt to transcend the necessity for resistance.

Allen, Silko and Hogan nevertheless extend their solutions to everyone who will turn away from destruction. The perspective is Native and female, but the message is encoded in the broadly accessible language, literary conventions, and genres of Western tradition. Through the use of literal and metaphorical illnesses, each attempts to emphasize the lethal contagion of self-absorption and the urgency of the quest for a cure. And each, renouncing the scientific and linear for the intuitive and cyclical, expresses faith that "The closed bundles of healing / are beginning to open" (Hogan, *Medicines* 84). There is perhaps no way their stories could have been told without appearing to be ethnocentric, yet their hope transcends the stubborn boundaries of culture, gender, class and race. An ethnocentrism without boundaries and a separatism that protects the truths of unity are the cultural conundrums that each of the women struggles to resolve.

It is easier to acknowledge these authors' ambivalent ethnocentrism than to fault it: their inclinations toward monolithic labels and stereotypical assumptions are not altogether fair, but they are entirely understandable. And yet, ethnocentric pride and conviction must remain a starting place—not an end point—for discourse. Their thoughtful ambivalence provides a place from which we can begin to speak frankly, and listen earnestly, to each other; where we can learn deeply, and act responsibly, *with* each other. It is unquestionably our collective responsibility to understand and respect difference and dissidence. It is the further responsibility of Euroamericans to understand and respect the legitimacy of other peoples' rage and disdain. Nevertheless, an inclusive justice must somehow ultimately transcend difference: too narrow an absorption with the delineation of distinctions can lead us

into merely reimagining hegemonies or reapportioning divisive boundaries.

Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Linda Hogan have identified the cracks in the cultural infrastructure, warned of imminent and inevitable collapse, and openly offered suggestions for a stabler foundation upon which to rebuild. The indictments of Western tradition are scathing. But the suggestions appear to invite continuing speculation on how far indigenous traditions can serve as models for postmodern reconstruction, how and by what strategies contemporary culture can be amended, what might be worth saving and how those salvageable fragments might be integrated into the modified order, and precisely how community and kinship can be restored and strengthened without sacrificing the rights and the differences of individuals and cultures. Clearly, much wisdom resides both in the women's ambivalence and in the transcendent potential of their apparently ethnocentric vision—the wisdom, for one thing, to accommodate a space where productive discourse on justice can reasonably occur.

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## ***Re Membering Ephanie: A Woman's Re-Creation of Self in Paula Gunn Allen's The Woman Who Owned The Shadows***

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Vanessa Holford

Paula Gunn Allen's novel *The Woman Who Owned The Shadows* charts the near-fatal emotional breakdown of Ephanie, a "halfbreed" Guadalupe Indian living in New Mexico who, torn between the conflicting demands and beliefs of two cultures; feels incomplete to the point of panic but, initially, lacks the strength to overcome all that oppresses her. Gradually, though, she begins to create connections and build foundations by reflecting on her past, on the forces that have taught her self-hatred, on the relationships that have harmed her, and on the necessary decisions she needs to make to remember her own creative potential. Ephanie's story is at first the retelling of a painful struggle, but, as she begins to re-discover her self, her recovery becomes an affirmation of the power of language for self-definition, the creative power of united women, and the necessity of memory for self- and tribal-preservation. Ephanie must spin her own "web" of identity to re-forge connections with her tribal community, her family, her history, and her strength as a woman.

But, the ability to spin these webs of identity requires memory and knowledge that were denied to Ephanie during her education in boarding school. By putting her story into words, Ephanie relearns the art of remembering and is able to establish a connection with the Grandmother's spirit who eventually helps reunite Ephanie with her history, her body and her self. She "had forgotten how to spin dreams, imaginings about her life, her future self, her present delights. Had cut herself off from the sweet spring of her own being" (203). Ephanie struggles to articulate and thus celebrate those "imaginings," and so Gunn Allen's use of writing as self-discovery and as a self-preserving act has an affinity with Hélène Cixous's call to women: "Woman must write her self" (*Laugh* 245). Like Cixous, Gunn Allen sees women's

writing as the potential for self-actualization. Indeed, *Shadows* is a log of Ephanie's rediscovery through language, of her personal value and abilities after years of membership in a culture that demands guilt and self-effacement as its entrance fee. Ephanie is a colonized American woman forced to deny her identity in order to fit into a social structure that ignores her value. In a dream, Ephanie sees a museum; describing it to her therapist later, she unwittingly describes herself:

I am a bulwark. A strength. Half of what is stored in me is unrecognized by the people who work here. They can't begin to understand the knowledge and the treasures that I hold in me. But I keep these things safe. For sometime when there will be those who can understand, who can recognize what the artifacts and treasures I keep are worth. (86)

As she begins to articulate her unrecognized value through metaphor, she starts to piece together her own long-forgotten treasures.

Critic Elizabeth Hanson questions the stylistic choices Allen made in writing the novel. She calls it an "episodic, uneven, seemingly unedited novel," and she feels that it results in "unfulfilled promise" (35). Indeed, *Shadows* often jumps from thought to thought, scene to scene, without transition or explanation. But women writers within different cultural contexts have recognized the necessity of self-exploration through language, and this kind of search often uses fragmented discourse. Hélène Cixous and other French feminists hail *écriture féminine*, or feminine writing, because it strives to "undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality" (Moi 108). Despite cultural differences among women around the world and despite accusations that Western feminists are part of the effort to "divide and weaken . . . [Native American] communities by defining 'male energy' as 'the enemy'" (Jaimes 335), the goals of Cixous' approach to writing make her feminist theory useful in examining Gunn Allen's creation of the character Ephanie. There is an urgency behind women's self-expression that has resulted from years of oppression. In the case of American Indian women, this urgency is unique and tenfold. Gunn Allen herself stresses this uniqueness:

I want the reader to understand that tribal women—who have many differences from and with Indian men, to be sure—have even greater differences from non-Indian women, particularly white women. . . . We are not so much 'women,' as American Indian women; our stories, like our lives, necessarily reflect that fundamental identity. And as American Indian Women, we are women at

war. (*Spider Woman's* 24)

The urgency of "women at war" enlivens Gunn Allen's text with the possibility of change. With its life-preserving purpose, Gunn Allen's writing responds to years of colonization with the same vigor and drive that Cixous attributes to colonized people in a larger context:

colonized peoples of yesterday, . . . those who have known the ignominy of persecution derive from it an obstinate future desire for grandeur; those who are locked up know better than their jailers the taste of free air. (258)

While all women have known "the ignominy of persecution," Anglo-European women writers like Cixous struggle to taste that "free air" by breaking down the male constructs of writing, searching for meaning in its gaps. Cixous' deconstructive action is not the same as the creative action Gunn Allen uses in her novel; Gunn Allen creates layers of meaning and cycles of memory in Ephanie's story that are informed by ritual and tribal membership. But Ephanie, too, must struggle with alienation from her native language and with the restrictions of the English language:

Ephanie did not talk Guadalupe. . . . She did not know the tongue, but she knew the thought, its complication that piled one thing atop another, folded this within that, went from within to without and made what was without within. She knew that everything moved and everything balanced, always, in her language, her alien crippled tongue, the English that was ever unbalanced, ever in pieces, she groped with her words and her thought to make whole what she could not say. . . . Ever she moved her tongue, searching for a way to mean in words what she meant in thought. For her thought was the Grandmother's, was the people's, even though her language was a stranger's tongue. (69-70)

Ephanie tries to piece together self-definition in "a stranger's tongue," and by the end she is able to make that tongue her own. Like Cixous, Gunn Allen's character is struggling for free air as she struggles to articulate meaning into her life:

But the words she had. The language wasn't built for truth. It was a lying tongue. The only one she had. It made separations. Divided against itself. It could not allow enwholment. Only fragmentation. And it was the only language they all knew together—the people in her world . . . The only words she had. The only containers for the food, the water, the soil of recovery, uncovering,



discovery. To re learn. To re member. To put back what had been shattered. To re mind. To re think. The beginning so as to grasp the end. (190)

Ephanie must struggle within the confines of the language of her colonizers, yet it is "the only language they all knew together." Ephanie works with the language she has been forced to adopt, using the medium through which others will be able to share in her story. She uses English to include as many complications, folds and layers of meaning as possible. It is clear that Gunn Allen and Cixous, two women from such different cultural contexts, both present women with a means of redefining, rewriting, reenvisioning themselves through language.

Cixous says that "Flying is woman's gesture—flying in language and making it fly" (258). In *Shadows*, Gunn Allen flies from image to image within her discourse. Her apparent failure to use transitions is intentional and carefully crafted both to disrupt the confinement that English has placed on Ephanie and to communicate Ephanie's emotional state through sensory representation within language. We experience Ephanie's panic by reading it. Spasmodic flight between images and thoughts communicates Ephanie's personal fragmentation, while increased use of repetition begins to create a cyclical, more unified narrative whole.

In times of panic, Ephanie longs to fly, perhaps as a means of escaping the sense of helplessness she learned in boarding school. When Ephanie's beloved childhood companion, Elena, tells her that they can no longer see each other because her parents consider their friendship sinful and somehow wrong, Ephanie longs for the power to fly: "She put out her hand. Took hold of Elena's arm. Held it, tightly. Swaying. She looked over the side of the peak and thought about flying" (29). Ephanie needs to fly, to escape the relationships that oppress her, to seek out relationships that will strengthen her through complementarity, and to rise above the cultural constraints that have subjugated her healthy-strong womanhood. She feels this need, knows that it is imperative, and attempts to remember her way back to herself through storytelling. But this flight is an awkward and shaky one for Ephanie; she has some trouble taking off underneath the weight of guilt and self-doubt with which she has lived throughout her adult life. She had been numb to her own oppression, and the beginnings of her realization that change is vital take the form of an awakening: "I must wake up completely . . . I've been asleep for years" (*Shadows* 16).

Part of Ephanie's struggle for self-definition requires her to distance herself from the relationships by which she had tried unsuc-

cessfully to derive meaning and completion. The first of her relationships described in the novel is with Stephen, an Indian man and childhood friend, whose own personal suffering has turned him into a victimizer. Ephanie sees his denial of memory and suffering mirrored in many of the faces that later surround her in San Francisco:

They all went about their lives as though the anguish had nothing to do with them. Like Stephen, lost behind the mountains, who in such fear refused, would not give himself away in word or deed. Who would not betray the pain. . . . He wanted to mean everything, be nothing. To live quietly with the anger, the lying, the blood. He did not ever want to acknowledge the brutal terror that was the certain measure of their lives. At home and here. (58)

In his determination to remain "nothing, n he refuses to allow her any attempts at becoming something, a whole being. Under his restraint she has been restricted, kept from spiritual exploration.

The portrayal of minute detail in Ephanie's life serves to illustrate how deeply centered is Ephanie's fear. For too long, Ephanie relied on her relationship with Stephen for self-definition, and the effects he had on her self-vision were harmful. Stephen's poorly veiled manipulation of Ephanie is oppressive in both its subtlety and in her reaction to it. She simultaneously recognizes and denies his control over her:

[She] did not realize that it was he who told her often, every day, more, that she would surely die without him to secure her, to make her safe. She was helpless, he said. The blow to her. The mothering. She could not do. He said it. She silent, sick and exhausted, believed. (10)

Ephanie, on Stephen's suggestion, is separated from her children who are the only "living proof" of her creative power, and now she needs to begin her search for a creative self in the apparently mundane dailiness of her life. She begins this search too terrified to contemplate a task larger than mere self-preservation. When she finally stops believing that she is helpless, Stephen insists that her desire to redefine herself is silly. Her pleas for understanding fall on his deaf ears:

"I want to be able to tell you how it was for me so you can understand." She said. . . . Reaching back into myself . . . I have to keep renaming everything, Stephen, as though it were new. As if I were new. . . . "You are," he said. "You are new, Ephanie. I have remade you." He smiled, calm and certain. She saw how her hands shook. (17)

As she struggles to find the words to express her rebirth, he uses language like a weapon against her, to cut off quickly the possibility of her new-found strength. Uncomfortable with her own ability to create, Ephanie trembles, afraid, over even a slight assertion of her right to personal discovery.

Her rebellion must begin quietly, privately, with the slightest of actions:

Among the litter of my own things, she kept thinking . .  
. . As though it was a prayer, a ritual, a rite. Among.  
Pick up the robe. The litter. Walk with it. Of my. Put  
it down. Own things. Turn out the bedroom light.  
(Among.) Turn on the hall light. (The litter.) Go  
downstairs. (Of my.) And begin again. (Own things.)  
(6)

Although she is hesitant in acting with strength for her own benefit, she at least realizes the possibility of beginning again. This seemingly small ritual is a precursor to the greater connections she will later succeed in creating for herself.

After leaving Stephen and moving to San Francisco, Ephanie finds herself still afraid to exist on her own. In another attempt to define herself through a relationship with a man, she chooses to marry Thomas, a Nisei (second generation Japanese American), who spent some years of his childhood in the World War II confinement camps for Japanese-Americans. But Thomas, like Stephen, is too wounded to provide her with the wholeness she seeks. As Ephanie wonders about her ability to help Thomas heal, we gain some understanding of his present cruelty:

how could she protect him from the years? The pain of knowing that his face, his manner, his blood, had kept him from eating food his hands had planted, had picked? . . . How did a child grow, seeing his presence causing scorn and hate on those stranger's faces? . . . And she knew what he felt, hiding it from his face with the correctness of his language, the nonchalance of his description. What words were there to describe people who would damage a child beyond repair and at the same time eat the food the scorned scarred one had picked?  
(94)

Like Ephanie, Thomas was taught self-hatred as a child. But now, as she seeks a larger truth that will save her from self-destruction, he resists the memories that such a truth would unearth and refuses to listen to her attempts. Instead, he is left in the "unending quest for

vengeance, for righteousness, for forgiveness, for salvation" (97). Like Stephen, Thomas uses language as a distancing device to remove himself from the memory of his childhood and the grimness of his current reality. Both the men in Ephanie's life can't love her because of the depth of their own wounds. Their denial of memory denies her the support, the acknowledgement, the connection for which she continues to seek through examination of memory. Stephen and Thomas keep her distant from the proof of women's strength that lies within her own history; they refuse to hear her stories. Both men turn their frustration, inability to live with their own realities, onto her. Victimized, they become her victimizers. Ephanie wants to be supportive of Stephen and Thomas, but, still too weak, she is unable. She must first become whole herself before she can help others, but her wholeness will require a partner, a balancer. Her healing will not be completely possible in isolation because she needs to find another half: "Half mind half knowing. Halves, pieces. Halves, doubles. Halves, wholes. When doubled. Placed together in the right way" (77). Ephanie needs to find her other half, to become whole, and for her this becomes possible with another woman.

Ephanie was prevented from learning the value of women's unity from Stephen and Thomas, and at the boarding school she was not allowed to learn her own people's history that would have provided her with strong female role models. Gunn Allen protests against selectivity—be it intentional or inadvertent—within history and warns of the dangerous potential of this "power-destroying blanket of complete silence . . . to prevent us from discovering and reclaiming who we have been and who we are" (*Hoop* 259). *Shadows* lifts that blanket of silence, and in doing so it disturbs some readers. Those disturbed by the fact that Ephanie is a lesbian are intimidated by the refusal of mainstream, in this case heterosexual, confines. But lesbianism in the novel is vitally important because it is representative of woman's self-love. The characters who forbid Ephanie to love Elena are forbidding her to love herself, to be complete. Distrust of lesbianism is fear of women's renewed strength, self-value, and unity. A description in *Shadows* of the two girls' relationship recalls the twin sisters described in the creation story that begins the novel, "Uretsete and Naotsete . . . double woman . . . from whose baskets would come all that lives" (1). Ephanie and Elena are like these twins who create together as one woman: "They understood the exact measure of their relationship, the twining, the twinning . . . With each other they were each one doubled. They were thus complete" (22). Like the creation twins, their identity is referred to as a single entity: "Though their lives were very different, their identity was such that the differences were never strange" (22).

United over time and through memory, women are complete; they are creators. Forced apart, forced to forget, and denied spiritual bonding between themselves, they partially lose their identities and thus their power, and "What is Divided in Two Brings War" (189). When Ephanie finds a lover in Teresa (a white woman), she finds new potential for spiritual bonding, for twinning. Notably, it is Teresa who first offers Ephanie connection with her grandmother's spirit during a psychic reading. Ephanie's return to the creation stories of the Grandmother means a rediscovery of her self: a reconciliation with the body, a renewed ability for twinning, and a new realization of feminine power. She has rediscovered her memory, and "Memory leads to completion eventually" (5). As she begins to throw off the learned self-hatred "That made her forget the ancient secret knowledge of balance between opposing things" (97), she begins to gain a new acceptance of her own duality as a "halfbreed." In the final dream vision of the novel, the Grandmother will tell her, "Two face outward, two inward, the sign of doubling, of order and balance, of the two, the twins, the doubleminded world in which you have lived" (207). But before Ephanie can completely understand such balance, she must unlearn the education that has kept her from achieving balance.

In boarding school, Ephanie learned the religion of her colonizers, and an essential part of that education was the lesson of guilt. The turning point of her childhood took place when, after being tempted by Stephen in a dare, the young Ephanie fell from an apple tree and broke a rib. The obvious allusions to Eve's fall allow Ephanie's descriptions of the change that took place in her after this fall to speak for all women who have felt forced to suppress their own views, lower their own voices, stifle their own cries, and squelch their own potentials. The guilt Ephanie experienced after her fall drastically altered her self-esteem, and it is only after years of torment that she is able to recognize the significance of the event:

Because I thought I should have been smarter than to listen to Stephen's dare. Because I was hurt . . . alone and scared and feeling so guilty. So guilty I never trusted my own judgment, my own vision again. (205)

Her retelling of her own life history becomes a regaining of trust in her own vision.

Ephanie's childhood dreams of heroism were replaced by Anglo-European society's prescription for femininity. Her new distrust of her own abilities lead her to stop taking risks, and thus, denied her the potential to recreate her self through language. She became a "willing partner in the theft of her own soul" (19). No longer able to run free, no longer comfortable with her own body, Ephanie became instead a

non-person, an acceptable woman:

Instead sitting demure on a chair, voice quiet, head down. Instead gazing in the mirror . . . curling endlessly her stubborn hair. To train it. To tame it. Her. Voice, hands, hair, trained and tamed and safe. . . . [She] dreamed of being tall and pretty and dated. Adored. Mated. Housed in some pretty house somewhere far from the dusty mesas of her childhood, somewhere that people lived in safe places and . . . spoke in soft voices. (203)

This new Ephanie tamed her curiosity, tamed her bravery, tamed her strength. She became passive and plastic: "The old ease with her body was gone. The careless spinning of cowboy dreams" (202). Her former ambitions were off-limits to women, reserved for men and boys. She distanced herself from the mesas and memories of her childhood, forgetting what she was, what she is. Her body became a stranger to her.

An essential part of Ephanie's "education" at the boarding school was a forced detachment from her body. It is suggested that the young Ephanie was molested by a doctor in the presence of a nun, and as an adult she cannot bring herself to remember the details. Also, the threat of "sin" was the only explanation given for her forced separation from her childhood friend Elena. As Cixous has recognized, a re-writing of self will also entail woman's reclaiming of her own body:

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display . . . the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. (*Laugh* 250)

Indeed, the enforcement of rules in the boarding school censored Ephanie's breath and speech:

"Don't climb those weak branches, you'll fall." Hearing the nuns say "Don't race around like that. Be a lady." Punishing her when she forgot the rules and ran, yelled, jumped on the beds and broke the slats. Sending her to confession to tell the father her unruly sins. "Bless me Father for I have sinned. I jumped on the bed. I fell from the apple tree." (204)

This stifling suppression of natural energies squelches Ephanie's potential for self-expression and growth.

Allen emphasizes the danger of such censorship preventing unity and support between women. A male-oriented society distrusts the spiritual bonds that exist between women, and so the possibility of

female bonding is stifled under the guise of piety. Lesbianism is made taboo because such cohesion between women represents a threat not only to male sexuality, but to male power. Even as a young girl, Ephanie was denied the positive, creative influence of women loving each other. She describes the relationship of two nuns in the boarding school who, because of their love for each other, brought happiness, song and dance into the dour, loveless place where the children were forced to live. That love was fleeting, however, and eventually the two nuns were separated:

The girls said, they must have been in love. And nodded to each other, and whispered. No one said anything about it being wrong. Ephanie thought now, all these years later, how glad they had all been that someone there was able to love. To laugh and shine and work and play and dance. And how very bereft they all felt when that love was sent away. (156)

This passage echoes how very bereft Ephanie felt when Elena was sent away, and how Ephanie almost ended her life after sending Teresa away, and how Stephen's leaving left the room feeling "no emptier, no more silent than before" (17). Elena offered Ephanie the twinning, a creative unity; the sisters offered each other love and companionship that they shared with the young girls so starved for love at the boarding school. Now, Teresa offers Ephanie understanding; through Teresa, Ephanie makes the first connection with the Grandmother spirit woman.

Critics and historians of American Indian women's literature and culture are often uneasy with the issue of homosexuality, some even going so far as to claim conspiracy amongst non-Indian gays and lesbians to appropriate Native American spiritual beliefs toward their own political ends. For example, M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey accuse Gunn Allen of "pandering to the needs and tastes of non-Indian gay and lesbian organizers" (333), claiming that:

the desire of non-Indian gays and lesbians to legitimate their preferences within the context of their own much more repressive society, and to do so in ways which reinforce an imagined superiority of these preferences, has led many of them to insist upon the reality of a traditional Native North America in which nearly *everyone* was homosexual. (333)

This rather strong reaction to Gunn Allen does not take into account the larger implications of preventing any union because of the genders of the individuals involved, nor does it address the role of lesbianism in Gunn Allen's novel.

In *Shadows*, Ephanie seeks spiritual union with both men and

women, but in her case it is Elena and later Teresa with whom she achieves the twinning she seeks to create her own identity. When Ephanie is at her weakest, it is Teresa who is there for her, "offering comfort to Ephanie, strength, acknowledgement, making her who was fast becoming shadow feel almost tangible for the space of time when she was there" (178). Jaimes and Halsey paraphrase a poet (who is identified only as "Inuit" and "lesbian") as warning that the connection between "Indianness" and homosexuality is dangerous: "the danger is that it could eventually cause divisions among us Indians that never existed before, and right at the point when we're most in need of unity" (333). But unity, or the erasing of divisions, is just what Ephanie is denied because of the homophobia around her and the "education" with which she was raised. With her final understanding comes memory of the "women who directed people upon their true paths" (211):

And she understood. For those women, so long lost to her, who she had longed and wept for, unknowing, were the double women, the women who never married, who held power like the Clanuncle, like the power of the priests, the medicine men. Who were not mothers, but who were sisters, born of the same mind, the same spirit. They called each other sister. They were called Grandmother by those who called on them for aid, for knowledge, for comfort, for care. (211)

The "much more repressive society" to which Jaimes and Halsey allude is a reality that cannot be ignored because it is the society that has educated Ephanie, the society that forbade her memory, and the society in which she must survive. Before she can contribute to the total unity so very essential to tribal preservation, she must rediscover her own power among the women of her history. WARN founder Phyllis Young comments on women's unity as a first step in the larger project of liberation:

Our creation of an Indian women's organization is not a criticism or division from our men. In fact, it's the exact opposite. Only in this way can we organize ourselves as Indian women to meet our responsibilities, to be fully supportive of the men, to work in tandem with them as partners in a common struggle for the liberation of our people and our land. . . . So, instead of dividing away from the men, what we are doing is building strength and unity in the traditional way. (Jaimes 329)

In *Shadows*, Gunn Allen's vision of traditional female unity is adapted to encompass the doubleminded" reality of tribal existence within the United States by offering spiritual connection that allows for differences



among its members; she does not portray a community that is closed to all but the purist full-blood members.

Allen writes about preservation of the "web" of tribal identity: "the oral tradition has prevented the complete destruction of the web, the ultimate disruption of tribal ways" (*Hoop* 45). However, a simultaneous, and very important, part of Gunn Allen's project is to modify the tales to incorporate new elements of outside influence:

The aesthetic imperative requires that new experiences be woven into existing traditions in order for personal experience to be transmuted into communal experience; that is, so we can understand how today's events harmonize with communal consciousness" (*Spider Woman's* 8)

In Ephanie's story, specific details of her individual experience are woven together with memories of, and allusions to, communal experience, providing her with strength through connection to her ancestors' traditions. As Ephanie remembers the story of Kochinnenako, she realizes that Kochinnenako was the name of any woman who, in the events being told, was walking in the ancient manner, tracing the pattern of the ancient design" (209). Gunn Allen comments that the modifications of traditional tales within the collection of short stories, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, is a positive change:

because present-day Native cultures and consciousness include Western cultural elements and structures. Assuming they do not seriously dislocate the tradition in which they are embedded, this inclusion makes them vital rather than impure or 'decadent.' If they are really good, they are as vital as the oral tradition which also informs and reflects contemporary Indian life. (*Spider Woman's* 7)

Gunn Allen's own inclusion of Western influences in her retelling of the Spider's creation story represents such vital flexibility in storytelling.

When Ephanie is visited by the Grandmother, who tells her the Guadalupe creation story, Gunn Allen presents a flexible version of the Spider's story and the Bible's story:

First there was Sussistinaku, Thinking Woman, then there was She and two more: Uretsete and Naotsete. Then Uretsete became known as the father, Utset, because Naotsete had become pregnant and a mother, because the Christians would not understand and killed what they did not know. (207-08)

The implied fact that Thinking Woman precedes or encompasses Christian beliefs illustrates confidence in a unified world view which

allows for differences instead of punishing them. In a passage that echoes the Holy Trinity, Spider Woman describes spiritual unity in the creation myth:

And Iyatiku was the name Uretsete was known by, she was Utset, the brother. The woman who was known as father, the Sun. And Utset was another name for both Iyatiku and Uretsete, making three in one. (208)

The interchangeability between sexes here represents Gunn Allen's modification of sex roles and modification of tradition. Helen Jaskoski's recent reading of Gunn Allen's poem, "Grandmother," highlights this difficult but vital negotiation between development and tradition: "the poem asserts change as well as continuity, evolution and growth as well as preservation" (248). Jaskoski goes on to read the woven blankets in the poem as "representative of androgyny" (248), suggesting that Gunn Allen's blurring of traditional gender lines is an ongoing project through which to negotiate tribal traditions' survival within the context of larger American society. An important part of the change she is initiating is evolution of storytelling into a medium to communicate with new listeners, a wider audience, outside the immediate tribal circle. In the novel, Teresa becomes the representative of this wider audience, and Ephanie's decision to tell her story to her daughter and to Teresa is a handing down of tradition to both the next generation within the tribal community and to new listeners, a move towards preservation.

When Ephanie re-evaluates the nature of her education, she understands her past and her self: "Because she felt she had turned her back on herself. Had misunderstood thoroughly the significance of the event" (204). As an adult she re-educates herself by reading about her own history, and her new education provides her with lost memories. Her remembering, which was impossible earlier because she would not allow herself to remember, is the key to her self-discovery:

And now remembering rose in her body, . . . and with it from somewhere far off, from beyond the shattering heat and the buzz of shade, of humming silence, of suffocation, there came, thin and wailing, unhuman in its wail, a long moaning rising scream. (15)

*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* is that scream of outrage, of understanding, of remembering. Ephanie understands that her self had been stolen, a portion of her life spent in a prison, where she was kept unaware. Her remembering is essential to her survival; by recreating her memory, she recreates her self. The resistance to memory she revealed in early passages about Stephen and about the doctor was a psychological defense against the necessary outrage she would

inevitably experience when remembering came. Now with remembering has come knowledge, and this time Ephanie will not let herself be punished for that knowledge. She does not remain trapped in her anger, but instead moves beyond it to seek a creative union with Teresa.

Cixous senses this unity and sees it as the driving force behind Woman writing her self: "In Woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history" (252). Old Spider Woman advises Ephanie to begin by sharing her story with her lover, Teresa, who is white. Teresa represents both woman's love for other women and the possibility of a feminine unity that transcends race. The Grandmother says of Ephanie's story, "Give it to your sister, Teresa. The one who waits. She is ready to know" (210). Paula Gunn Allen leaves her white audience asking, what place does the growing number of white readers of American Indian literature have in this arena of tribal renewal? Are we a welcomed audience? If Teresa's character is read as an answer to this question, then Ephanie's story ends with an invitation—to share in the stories if and when we are "ready to know." We are now invited to remember our selves along with Ephanie and, regardless of race, to know again our full potential. Ephanie's newfound strength is the ability to pass on her story, and through telling her story, Ephanie makes real that potential for other women while preserving the stories and memories that are a part of her.

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# FORUM

## *From the Editors*

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Robert M. Nelson

Here, somewhat belatedly, is the 6.1 (Spring 1994) issue of *SAIL*. We hope the publication delays and setbacks that have held us up this year have not inconvenienced our readers unduly, and I'd like to thank all of you for the patience and support you have shown as we've worked to get back on a regular publication schedule.

As you may have noted on the title page, this issue of *SAIL*, featuring articles on feminist and post-colonial approaches to Native American literatures, has been guest-edited by Susan Gardner at University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Our thanks to her for compiling these contributions to the discipline. Dr. Gardner invites correspondence in response to these articles (Department of English, UNC-Charlotte, Charlotte NC 28223); if readers' responses warrant it, we'll plan to run a special section of the Forum to air them, along with her words.

We hope to be back to a regular production schedule by the end of this year. Upcoming issues of *SAIL* Volume 6 will include an issue concentrating on the work of Linda Hogan guest-edited by ASAIL Vice-President Betty Louise Bell and the long-awaited anthology of new American Indian writing, *Returning the Gift*, co-produced by U of Arizona/Sun Tracks P and edited by *SAIL* poetry/fiction editor Joseph Bruchac. As usual, we welcome suggestions for future issues of the journal (as well as volunteers to guest-edit such issues).

For *SAIL*,  
Robert M. Nelson  
Production Editor



# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Betty Louise Bell** is an Assistant Professor of English, American Culture, and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan and current Vice-President of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures. Her novel *Faces in the Moon* has recently been published by University of Oklahoma Press.

**Burns Cooper** is an Assistant Professor of English at University of Alaska Fairbanks. He is currently completing a book, *Mysterious Music*, on the linguistics of rhythm in free verse and an article about the influence of class and dialect differences on poetic intonation. He is also finishing up a book of original poetry, *Figures of Desire*.

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

**Vanessa Holford** received her M.A. in English from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. She was a member of a panel on Leslie Marmon Silko's "Yellow Woman" at the Women Writers of Color Conference in Ocean City, Maryland, in May 1992. Currently, she is enrolled as a Ph.D. student at Arizona State University in Tempe.

**Jeannie Ludlow**, Ph.D. in American Culture Studies (Bowling Green State University, 1992), is a part-time instructor in Women's Studies, Popular Culture Studies and English, and a full-time mom. Recently she has taught a course entitled "Decolonizing Feminism: Native American Women's Criticisms, Responses, Strategies." She also teaches Introduction to Women's Studies, cross-cultural women's literatures, and popular media courses.

**Ann Rayson**, Associate Professor of English at the University of Hawaii, has published articles in *MELUS*, *Studies in Black Literature*, *Black American Literature Forum*, *Frontiers*, *Explorations in Ethnic*



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**Janet St. Clair** is an Associate Professor of American Literature at Regis University in Denver, Colorado. Recent publications include essays on novels by William Faulkner, Zora Hurston, Nathanael West, and Leslie Silko. Her particular area of interest is the mixed-blood woman protagonist in novels by Native American women.

**Norma C. Wilson** is a Professor of English at the University of South Dakota, where she is a specialist in Native American Literatures. She has written a book of poems, *Wild Iris*, and with her husband, Jerry Wilson, co-wrote the script for a film, *South Dakota: A Meeting of Cultures*. She has written many articles on Native American Literatures and is currently editing an anthology, *Wounded Knee in Literature*.