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**Critical Approaches**  
Greg Sarris, Guest Editor

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## ***Introduction***

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Greg Sarris

Any time the subject of critical approaches to American Indian literatures comes up, and every time I must write something about it, I am reminded of an experience I had with my Auntie Violet Chappell and Mabel McKay, Cache Creek Pomo basket weaver and medicine woman. The experience reminds me of what is at stake when reading not only tribal literatures, but also tribal "others," whether or not the literatures or the "others" are from my tribe. No wonder I began my own treatise on the subject in *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* with the story of that experience. At the risk of boring readers who might know the story, I want to repeat it here. As the old folks say, a good story can be told more than once.

"Here Greg," Auntie Violet said. "You can peel some potatoes." She placed a paper towel, a small sharp knife, and three potatoes on the table. She plunked the potatoes down just as she had spoken. Now do something, she seemed to be saying. Make yourself useful.

I was sitting at the kitchen table listening to Mabel McKay tell about a man she had known when she was a young girl, around ten or so. It was Mabel's eighty-second birthday, and I had driven Auntie Violet Chappell to Mabel's place so we could visit and celebrate. Despite her recent trouble with arthritis, Mabel looked bright, alert. She sat in her wooden chair, its seat neatly padded with colorful cushions, the arms wrapped with towels so she could rest her arms comfortably. She was near the head of the table, as always. I was sitting next to her, busy taking notes. I was a graduate student at Stanford University preparing a dissertation on the life story of

Mabel, whom I had known since childhood. No part of the project had been easy. Mabel didn't present her stories in chronological sequence. Her stories moved in and out of different time frames and often implicated me as a listener. Of course this was always my experience with Mabel. Still, I wanted to get the pieces of her life in some order so that I might grasp it for others, and when she started talking about this old medicine man, or Indian doctor, who followed her around, I quickly found a pencil and paper. It was something I hadn't heard before.

But just then I picked up the knife and began peeling one of the potatoes.

I watched Violet, who sat across from me with three potatoes of her own. I felt self-conscious; usually I did not help prepare food. I volunteered with the dishes afterwards, and the women could count on me for yard-work and trips to the grocery store. Alone, in my own home, I cooked, but here with Mabel and with relatives I did not. Auntie Violet upset routine. She was a tease, and I suspected some antic.

Her first potato looked smooth as an egg. The objective, I thought: get the potatoes smooth, perfectly rounded. I could tell she was watching me.

Frances McDaniel, Mabel's younger sister, came to the table and began working on potatoes also. The conversation turned to gossip, centering on a local man's wife, who was white. Violet bobbed her head around and rolled her eyes, mocking the woman's air of superiority. "Shoot, why did she marry an Indian if she wants to be Princess Diana?" Violet asked.

Often when whites are discussed, particularly in a derogatory way, I become uneasy. I think of my mother, who was white, of the fact that I am a mixed blood. I wanted to hear more about the medicine man Mabel knew. I pictured him in trousers and suspenders; perhaps he wore a hat, a Stetson typical of the time. Mabel said he came in the evenings and wandered outside the yard of the white woman's home where Mabel was staying at the time. What did he want? Did he know she was destined to be a doctor? Was he going to help her? Hurt her? I looked to Mabel, but she was distracted, chuckling to herself and listening to Violet.

Frances's potatoes too were smooth, egg-like. She held the potato and knife in front of her just as she might a basket and awl, as if she were weaving. I hardly had the

grace, but to my satisfaction my potatoes were smooth; I'd even gone back and planed any rough edges. And I was finished before Violet.

I set my knife down and leaned back in my chair, just for a moment, just to let Violet know I was finished. But she was not moving. Her face was tight, swollen, blushed with color, her eyes set on her pile of peelings where she held her knife, pointing. The peelings, something I hadn't thought of. . . . Her peelings were paper thin, shards of skin, thinner than carrot peelings, almost transparent. I felt the thick, coarse lumps under my hand. I lifted my eyes just in time to catch Auntie Violet hiss. "Just like a white man," she managed to say, exploding with laughter. "So wasteful!"

The entire room was laughing, and in the midst of the loud hysteria, Mabel stopped for a moment, and turning to me, said ever so matter-of-factly, "My life is like that."

I continue, saying:

I learned a lesson. It was a lesson Mabel reminded me of again and again, every time we talked about her life stories. It was a simple lesson: things aren't always what they seem. Not the way I saw two women peeling potatoes. Not Mabel.

As simple as this lesson is, it provokes and informs current critical discussion about literature and art and other elements of culture. It becomes particularly relevant as the critical discussion engages questions regarding reading in cross-cultural contexts. Specifically, how do people read across cultures? What are the aims and consequences of their readings? How are the readings located in a certain history, say that of American Indian and Euro-American interrelations? Is there a way that people can read across cultures so that intercultural communication is opened rather than closed, so that people see more than just what things seem to be?

In this special issue on critical approaches to American Indian literatures, it seems that our contributors directly, or indirectly, address one or more of these same questions. And many of the writers speak of discomfitures in their experiences with the literatures, not unlike my experience with Mabel, where I was made aware, in a somewhat uneasy situation, of my own limits, my subjectivity if you will, as a reader. In "'A Menace Among the Words': Women in the Novels of N. Scott Momaday," Kathleen M. Donovan says "a feminist deconstruction of [Momaday's] representation of women in his novels feels like a transgression of the first order. . . . As a feminist reader, my admiration for Momaday's body of work makes my discomfiture with

his representation of women characters paradoxical and disturbing." Renae Bredin, in "'Becoming Minor': Reading the *Woman Who Owned the Shadows*," talks about "[her] guilty conscience as [she] occup[ies] a dominant (white, heterosexual) subject position within prevailing power relations" when encountering a text that is "other," in this case American Indian and lesbian.

These discomfitures, of course, prompt the very questions the writers ask and explore. Donovan asks, "Is it possible [as a feminist reader] to admire a writer for how he says something while disliking what he says?" And Bredin: "How then might a white, heterosexual woman speak of Paula Gunn Allen's text without playing Prospero?" Again, questions concerning our readings in intersubjective contexts. How do we read? What are the consequences of our readings? Is intercultural and interpersonal communication opened rather than closed?

Donovan suggests a deconstructive approach grounded in feminist reader response criticism. Such an approach allows for the power and presence of her "self" as reader to inform the text rather than simply be beguiled by its exquisite language. Thus, she sees that "Momaday's novels consistently represent contemporary women as negative forces. . . . If women are devalued, language, in Momaday's own formulation, is violated." Specifically in *House Made of Dawn* and *The Ancient Child*, "the restoration of [men's] voices comes at the expense of female voices." Bredin utilizes an approach that combines the work of Chela Sandoval and Cherrie Moraga whereby "the reading transaction is precisely the space [she] wishes to explore as the borderland of self and other, a potent location in which to raise [her] questions." Not surprisingly, Bredin writes: "What I ultimately understand here is that I am required to learn before I can participate effectively as a reader. In speaking her own unspeakable position [i.e., American Indian lesbian], Allen presses me to hear her speaking." With Donovan the text is opened, exposed, and the self as reader is affirmed, strengthened rather than diminished. With Bredin, the text opens and exposes ("the unspeakable"), and the self as reader is simultaneously opened, exposed.

In "Decolonializing Criticism: Reading Dialectics and Dialogues in Native American Literatures," David L. Moore etches an approach whereby "[reading] responses may reflect a closer and fuller reading of textual aesthetics insofar as they discover the contextual experience of community which gives the words their vitality." He suggests a dialogic approach, specifically a dialogue that eludes dialectic binaries such as civilization v. wilderness and Euro-American v. Indian. The result is a dialogue with the text that "acknowledges not only the primacy of context, but the impossibility of textual resolution, a

productive indeterminacy, because it simultaneously accounts for a generalized force-field while it acknowledges the specificity of the other in that field." The goal here is to open a continuous dialogue that leads the reader not only through the text but ultimately to the real world from which the text comes so that the reader might participate not only with the text but also with the community it represents with its everyday concerns. Moore, then, suggests an approach that goes beyond the interaction of text and reader. He wishes to posit the reader in the world both in and beyond the text.

The last two essays, Paul Zolbrod's "Navajo Poetry in a Changing World" and Christopher Norden's "Ecological Restoration as Post-Colonial Ritual of Community in Three Native American Novels," do not ask, at least explicitly, *how* we read, or approach, American Indian literatures. Rather, they suggest ways American Indian literatures might be used to explore other literatures and, in the case of Norden, specific social and environmental issues. Thus, we see the aims and consequences of their readings, wherein the *how* is implicit. Zolbrod, who feels "discomfited to see honest canon revision confused with canon rejection," finds in Navajo poetry integrative themes and poetic practices that not only "help us to look at our ancient classics [e.g., Homer] more accurately than we currently allow ourselves to see them" but also, in so doing, provide a model and reason to integrate the canon rather than reject it. Norden finds in American Indian novels what is missing in contemporary Western culture for true cultural and environmental restoration to take place. For Norden it isn't just the ethics found in these Indian texts that appeals to him, but the novels' insistence on the importance of ritual; that is, ritual in the fullest sense of the word, whereby both the individual and the community are engaged in ceremonies that teach and maintain healthy relations with the individual, the community, and the entire universe. Like Moore, Norden wishes to move the reader beyond the text.

All of our contributors, then, suggested approaches whose purpose is to open, or expand, the reading experience so that the intersubjective worlds of text and reader are touched upon and explored. Of course, the approaches are different and address different needs and concerns on the part of the writers themselves. How successful the writers are depends not only on the execution of their ideas herein, including *how* they practice what they preach, particularly when reading and writing about the various American Indian texts they study, but also on your response as a reader. Ultimately, the essays provide a starting point, or more accurately a middle point, wherein critical discussion regarding approaches to American Indian literatures must continue.

My own concern with the essays is with the ways the writers practice what they preach, at least in what they reveal in their written

work here. When David Moore reads *Papago Woman*, he reads much from the text about the context from which the book comes. He finds a path to the Tohono O'odham community. But what of the community's path back to the book? What might be on that path? Renae Bredin convincingly articulates her discomfiture with *The Woman Who Owned The Shadows*. I sense more to Bredin's story, something wonderful about the opening of two different worlds, whose surface is only scratched in her essay. Of course, I am asking for more than space allows these writers. Their success lies in the fact that I am asking questions.

Mabel McKay always forced me to ask questions about who I was and what I was doing. Since I started this introduction with a story about Mabel, it seems fitting that I should close with one—not here but at the end of the issue. The excerpt is from *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*, just published by University of California Press. I don't think I need to say more. Enjoy.

## ***Decolonializing Criticism: Reading Dialectics and Dialogics in Native American Literatures***

David L. Moore

### **Politics and Epistemology**

Readers of American Indian literatures move through a range of ethical responses varying from despair to guilt, from romance to anger, from sanctimonious idealism to righteous indignation. Then there are more pragmatic responses and commitments to cultural continuity and survival. Any response will have its effects, whether in print, in the classroom, in communities, in politics, in the courts. Of course, responses that subtly reinscribe the "vanishing Indian" myth have ethical effects with peculiar political resonance, and professional critics of Indian literature find themselves under unique pressures to elude the intricate forces of that myth.<sup>1</sup>

The colonial, hence racial and ethical, context moves the discussion of ways of reading Native American literatures toward issues of epistemology. If how we know the world begins with how we know the nexus of self and other, then our view of that nexus structures our ethical relations. That epistemological sequence cycles into not only our ethics but our politics and our colonial history as well. Colonial cognitive structures underlie cultural definitions of race and ethnicity, embedded as those definitions are in the economics of colonial history.

The ways in which readers and writers conceive of culture, self and other, knowledge and experience, past and present, determine different relations between reader and text as well as different readings of literary elements. For example, Walt Whitman's 1855 line, "And what I assume you shall assume" ("Song of Myself" 28), inscribes assimilative or absorptive relations, different from Frederick Douglass's contemporary (1857) statement of resistant relations: "The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress" ("West India Emancipation Speech" 437). Yet both pronouncements

are characterized by a dualistic episteme. Similarly, Whitman's own various references to American Indians reveal an epistemological duality in American identity when he idealizes the "red squaw" in "The Sleepers" (429) but demonizes the "red marauder" in "Song of Myself" (57). Finer comparisons of epistemological structures may be made between, for instance, the choice of Leslie Silko's protagonist in *Ceremony* not to continue "fighting with the destroyers" (134) and the affirmation of Gerald Vizenor's tricksters in *The Heirs of Columbus*, "We heal with opposition" (176). The one transcends dualistic opposition, the other deconstructs it.

The epistemological point here is that these writers describe different ways of conceiving and negotiating cognitive and epistemological binaries. To map these differences, I will trace ways in which epistemology is linked to ethics and to aesthetic study by what I outline as dualistic, dialectic, and dialogic ways of thinking. Those ways of thinking echo ethical and then political ways of interacting. In the first half of this article, I explore such structures in Tohono O'odham and Omaha literatures; in the second half, I examine selected critical points by David Murray and Arnold Krupat in light of those structures.

A performative dimension frequently emerges in various genres of Native American literature, and this dimension ties Native texts to a vital context of both land-based and pan-tribal communities in at least three important ways. Those communities reside as an audience in the texts, as a tacit chorus for the communal values reflected in those texts, and as a beneficiary of the writers' political performances related to those communal values. This political linkage between text and context establishes a particular dimension of ethical commitment between performance and performer that needs to be carefully described. Further, the communal and political dimensions call for and call into being a readership to participate imaginatively in the performance. The texts thus try to increase a community that understands what I will call dialogical processes by which Native cultures often conceive of their own survival. That process shapes its readers' aesthetic and ethical responses.

Such responses are not prescribed. Readers of Native American literature certainly do not need to follow the pattern of Sol Tax's "action anthropology," which invokes "the need to help as well as to learn" (378). There are of course many kinds of ethical responses. The point is rather that responses may reflect a closer and fuller reading of textual aesthetics insofar as they discover the contextual experience of community which gives the words their vitality. The ethical impulse both "to learn" and "to help" can reflect the ethics of a specific epistemology of exchange in the texts.

James Clifford, in *Predicament of Culture*, has come close to describing that epistemology of exchange. His "Identity in Mashpee" chapter documents the unsuccessful legal effort of the Mashpee, a group of Massachusetts Wampanoags, to gain federal recognition as a tribe. The Mashpees' notion of their own identity remains American Indian after centuries of intermarriage with whites and African American sailors and ex-slaves. Yet the court's decision is that they are not Indian. Clifford's interpretation is especially useful both because it is so suggestive and because, as I will show, it can be misread by the bipolar epistemology it describes and unravels:

Stories of cultural contact and change have been structured by a pervasive dichotomy: absorption by the other *or* resistance to the other. A fear of lost identity, a Puritan taboo on mixing beliefs and bodies, hangs over the process. Yet what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject? The story or stories of interaction must then be more complex, less linear and teleological. What changes when the subject of "history" is no longer Western? How do stories of contact, resistance, and assimilation appear from the standpoint of groups in which exchange rather than identity is the fundamental value to be sustained? (344)

Clifford sets up a tricky set of two categories, one operating in terms of dualities, of absorptions or resistances, and another operating in terms of multiplicities, of a nexus of exchanges. The trick, embedded in his italicized "*or*," is that only one side denies the other, while the other draws a circle that takes in the denier. That is, Clifford's dual system suggests possibilities of multiplicity outside its own dualistic limitations. The trick is reflected in a jest of popular American oral tradition: "There are two kinds of people in the world: those who think there are two kinds of people, and those of us who don't." If it is a binary, it is not a balanced one, because the one side is closed and the other is open.

Clifford describes Mashpee identity "not as an archaic survival but as an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished" (9). He registers the difficulty of imagining a binary with only one end open to other polarities, conceiving of open-endedness via a language of closed and oscillating oppositions. The closed oscillations may safely be called "dialectics," while the open end I will call "dialogics."<sup>2</sup>

This paper then becomes essentially an examination of dialogic ways of eluding dialectic systems. Two general points are pertinent here as qualifiers. First, as is suggested by a binary with only one open-ended pole, the dialogic never erases the dialectic, though the

dialectic ignores the dialogic. The dialectic ignores the dialogic by reducing issues to binaries, while the dialogic continues to "dialogue" with the dialectic by opening up more than binary possibilities. Those who construct their world through dialectical binaries, such as civilization v. wilderness, Euro-American v. Indian, or Euro-American v. African American, miss the blurring of those boundaries that drives the pragmatic unfolding of American identities and differences. Indeed, much of canonical American history has been driven by such dialectics, either at the slave auction or along the frontier. Those, however, who see the world through dialogical interaction, through a nexus of exchange by Clifford's description, continue to negotiate that dialectical history in ways that seem invisible to dialecticians. They are perennially "vanishing Indians" who continue to survive after five hundred years of colonization's dialectical materialism.

Second, the dialogic negotiates the dialectic in two ways, immanent and transcendent. Within dialectical systems such as civilization v. wilderness, a dialogic can deconstruct each binary instead of synthesizing them, dialectically, into oscillating unity. That strategy is an immanent relation of the dialogic to the dialectic. While the dialectic fastens on one polarity in oscillating synthesis, the transcendent relation occurs outside that dialectic binary. The dialogic bears a transcendent relation to the dialectic when it reveals a wider field of intersecting binaries, each altering the others. Any single dialectic is then transcended by that multi-dimensional field.

By these two relations a dialogic eludes dialectics as context both transcends and infuses text. Through a reader's fuller attention to context, the dialogic begins to enter the reading process.<sup>3</sup> Two dialogic texts of Native lives, *Papago Woman*<sup>4</sup> and *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, express dialogue within a particular ethical context. In Clifford's terms, these two works suggest complex cultural exchanges instead of binary absorption or resistance between self and other, between tribes, or between Indian and white.

### **Non-Dialectical Knowing**

The idea of Native intercultural exchange has its corollaries, if not its causes, in Native interpersonal and ecological relations. Familiar notions about Native American values of interrelationship have reached the truth value of a cliché. Those overworked notions often assume that the sense of interrelationship does not extend beyond natural and tribal boundaries. Yet the dialogic notion of interrelations renews itself in Ruth Underhill's *Papago Woman*, in which internal values of exchange extend into the dynamics of external cultural contact.

In their annual cactus camp, the Tohono O'odham, as the formerly "Papago" call themselves, brew their cactus wine to drink in commu-

nion with the desert plants and to generate a magnetism for rain: "People must all make themselves drunk like the plants in the rain and they must sing for happiness" (40). Not only do they link themselves metaphorically to the plants but, as the following cactus camp song exemplifies, they also perceive themselves as exchanging feelings with the land itself:

Where on Quijotoa Mountain a cloud stands  
There my heart stands with it.  
Where the mountain trembles with the thunder  
My heart trembles with it. (40)

This poetic interrelationship with the land finds its parallels on Tohono O'odham cultural soil with Chona's, the protagonist's, expression of their human interrelationships.

I used to like it in the summertime when all our friends  
and relatives were around us. . . . The houses were  
scattered all over the flat land—round brush houses like  
ours. (34, 53)

Here is a seemingly universal ideal of enclosed community. Yet such a familiar notion of tribal exchange is not usually registered in its relationality across what Westerners conceive of as "enemy" boundaries. Chona, however, expresses just such a transaction between the family of a Tohono O'odham man, a "Slayer," who has killed an enemy in war, and the slain Apache:

Then they took my father out in the dark before the  
morning came and bathed him again, and they bathed us  
too. Then we were purified and we could have the  
Apache scalp in our family to work for us like a relative.  
. . . Then it was in our family and it would always help  
us. (46-47)

This practice suggests something quite different from a dialectical *agon* between conquered and conqueror, between absorption and resistance, winner and loser. Instead, a more complex dialogics emerges where the Tohono O'odham and Apache warriors, their families, and the purifying water, the darkness, the light, the land, even life and death, participate in a delicate exchange of powers that translates giving into taking and enemy into protector in a blurring of categories.

Such a delicate pattern of relations transfers logically, in another family setting, to the history of intercultural contact:

Then my husband and I and the baby went to the medi-  
cine man, and he gave us all white clay to eat as he had  
given me when I became a maiden. But he did not give  
my baby a name. We were modern and I let a priest  
name him, Bastian. (67)

Perhaps the Euro-American priest would consider this episode another coup for some progressive cultural absorption by Christianity of Tohono O'odham practices, a promise of manifest destiny. And possibly the medicine man as well would consider this Christian naming a loss for cultural resistance. But Chona and her husband, who is also a medicine man, make a choice within their circumstances. She clearly sees herself as acting in a nexus of exchange rather than being limited, in Clifford's terms, to either absorption by or resistance to Christianity. Her choices suggest a Tohono O'odham dialogics of culture that matches the value of a dialogics of nature, suggesting further that categories of nature and culture, if they are useful at all, are porous and quite flexible.

Certainly any assumption of boundaries helps to create their effects. When your non-Native enemies do not function by such a system of exchange but instead assume either your absorption in or resistance to the enemy culture, and when the enemies are thus blind to both their own and your participation in exchange, then a different sort of war ensues, and a different sort of tragedy takes over. Yet dialogic cultural exchange occurs even in the midst of dialectic culture wars. To move beyond such a dialectical history requires precisely the recognition of inexorable and mutual, dialogical historical exchange. Chona's text suggests just such a possibility.<sup>5</sup>

In the preface to his turn-of-the-century autobiographical piece, *The Middle Five: Indian Schoolboys of the Omaha Tribe*, Francis La Flesche, an Omaha lawyer and ethnologist, is explicit where Chona's account is implicit about cultural exchange:

As the object of this book is to reveal the true nature and character of the Indian boy, I have chosen to write the story of my school-fellows rather than that of my other boy friends who knew only the aboriginal life. I have made this choice not because the influences of the school alter the qualities of the boys, but that they might appear under conditions and in an attire familiar to the reader. . . . So while the school uniform did not change those who wore it, in this instance, it may help these little Indians to be judged, as are other boys, by what they say and do. (v)

La Flesche undoubtedly sees his audience as non-Indian and his theme as a presentation to that audience of Indian lives during his own childhood in the late 1860s, but he immediately complicates—or dialogically clarifies—the representation by claiming that Indian lives can be shown accurately in an intercultural rather than an authentic, pure, or "aboriginal" context.

A dialectical response to his statements might dismiss La Flesche's

claim that "the school uniform did not change those who wore it." According to binary structures such as change v. not-change, or civilization v. savage, the uniform itself necessitates "change"—just as the school administrators intended it to help them civilize the savage. Further assumed messages of cultural change in that uniform reside within the dialectic epistemology of those "educators" as well. So what does La Flesche mean by claiming that the uniform "did not change those who wore it"? Perhaps he assumes a biological, essentialist Indian identity in his phrase "the true nature and character of the Indian boy" and in his affirmation that the influences of the school did not alter "the qualities of the boys." But such phraseology must be read in the historical, colonial context of the intercultural contact that produced it. In spite of the romantic discourse available to La Flesche's educated prose in the 1890s, nevertheless he posits a "true nature" here only insofar as it affirms that what is culturally Indian in these boys is capable of negotiating with what is culturally non-Indian in the mission school.

La Flesche's dedication of the book, "To The Universal Boy," certainly suggests a humanist core, which then freely engages in cultural exchanges; but that dedication itself is clearly written as a bridge to his non-Indian audience, and whether the cultural exchange or the universal core is primary remains undefined. (It also remains undefined whether his humanist discourse is a result of his Omaha upbringing or his Euro-American education, or both.)

At the crux of La Flesche's claim are his definitions of "change" itself and of the identity that experiences change. La Flesche's text and context suggest that he operates by a dialogic of *exchange*, wherein identities may exchange cultural goods—such as clothing—without *changing* something called identity. In contrast, the dualistic tendencies of Euro-American cultural dialectics tend to structure change and identity as mutually opposed. In his article "Democratic Social Space," Philip Fisher observes:

The "Making of Americans" as Gertrude Stein called it occurred first of all by those thousands of negations by which the children of Italian-Americans, German-Americans, and Chinese-Americans erased letter by letter the accent, style of laughter, customs, and costumes of family life, dress, and idiom of the old country so as to be, at last, simply American. (63)

Fisher concludes that "In every American personality there exists a past history of erasure" (63). With "American" change must come erasure of former identity, a process necessary to Euro-American immigrant experience but relatively alien to land-based Native American experi-

ence.<sup>6</sup> Thus the multiple tendencies of La Flesche's cultural dialogics acknowledge that the uniform, as a mode of exchange, does not change the boys.

La Flesche scripts an assumption of cultural exchange into the dialogue of Omaha parents of the 1860s as they discuss whether to send their boy to the mission school:

"We are the only ones in the village who haven't sent any children to the House of Teaching. . . . There must be some good in it; we ought to send one of our boys at least. . . . Before many years have gone, our dealings will be mostly with the white people who are coming to mingle with us; and, to have relations with them of any kind, some of us must learn their language and familiarize ourselves with their customs. That is what these men who send their children to the White-chests are looking forward to, and they love their boys as much as we do ours." (23-24)

As with Chona's priest who named her baby, the Omahas' mission school "teacher and disciplinarian," whom the Omaha boys call "Gray-beard," might read such a dialogue as the first unconscious step down a slippery slope toward victory for Christian civilization. Yet such evangelical glee might be based on a misconception, arising from "a Puritan taboo on mixing beliefs and bodies," that Omaha beliefs must be erased in order to embrace Christian ones. Instead of being limited to either/or cultural options, the Omahas, like the Tohono O'odham, appear to function from a pragmatic standpoint by which, again in Clifford's terms, "exchange rather than identity is the fundamental value to be sustained." Echoing Sitting Bull's famous dictum to his children to take only what is good from the white man, Frank's own father addresses him with these words:

"You . . . have reached the age when you should seek for knowledge. That you might profit by the teachings of your own people and that of the white race, and that you might avoid the misery which accompanies ignorance, I placed you in the House of Teaching of the White-chests, who are said to be wise and to have in their books the utterances of great and learned men. I had treasured the hope that you would seek to know the good deeds done by men of your own race, and by men of the white race, that you would follow their example and take pleasure in doing the things that are noble and helpful to those around you. Am I to be disappointed?" (127-28)

Indeed, Frank's father asserts it as the logic of a specific value of

knowledge and survival to engage in cultural exchange. As D'Arcy McNickle explains in *Native American Tribalism*, "Indians remain Indians not by refusing to accept change or to adapt to a changing environment, but by selecting out of available choices those alternatives that to not impose a substitute identity" (10).

Frank's father does not advise his son to erase his own identity and become absorbed in the white culture or to resist the white and entrench his own; rather, he presumes an intercultural process. Such a view is naive only insofar as it is nonviolent. Whether the "enemy" operates by a notion of exchange or of resistance and absorption, the exchange does occur until—and even after—the enemy violates the process by asserting through violence his "Puritan taboo on mixing beliefs and bodies" (Clifford 344).

Indeed, Gray-beard in the narrative does enact that historical, polarizing violence which demonizes the other, thence the self, and which misses the dialogics of cultural exchange. Yet even in the face of the old missionary's brutality, the Omaha schoolchildren, true to the "nature and character of the Indian boy" and dramatically expressing the values inculcated by their parents, remain open to the potential for mutual existence. A charismatic character, Brush, the leader of Frank's gang of boys known in the school as "the middle five," sets the tone early in the narrative by reprimanding his mates for joking about Gray-beard's cough and about his belief in the Devil:

"Don't make fun of the old man, boys, he is here to help us; he wants to do us good."

"Yes," answered Warren; "I guess he wanted to do you good last week, when he switched your back for you!"

"I think I deserved it." (63)

Brush's magnanimity is enabled by the strength of his position in a cultural system of exchange rather than of absorption or resistance. Only a notion of dialogue could place him in such a subject position with the option to exonerate his attacker.

In terms of the historical context of Gray-beard's violence, it is important to point out that these events take place relatively early in the history of Omaha-white relations, when dispossession had not yet shown its full face. Furthermore, this story takes place on Omaha land filled with tribal tradition, where the mission school is diminished by "the highest hill for miles around. This was known by the Indians as 'the hill on which Um'pa-ton-ga (Big Elk) was buried.' He was one of the greatest chiefs of the Omaha" (10). Such a dominantly Omaha setting further generates a subject position for Brush sufficient to engage in dialogue on equal terms.

Strengthened by the land, that system of cultural exchange operates in the narrative as a microcosm of Omaha-white relations. Even in the face of Gray-beard's enraged beating of a frail and obsequious schoolboy, Brush transforms the situation through the discourse of reciprocity. The scene begins with Frank's description of the violence:

Catching a firm grip on the hand of the boy, Gray-beard dealt blow after blow on the visibly swelling hand. The man seemed to lose all self-control, gritting his teeth and breathing heavily, while the child writhed in pain, turned blue, and lost his breath. It was a horrible sight. (138)

Frank, who narrowly escapes a similar treatment, remembers the words of the small boy's grandmother: "as she gave the boy to Gray-beard, 'I beg that he be kindly treated; that is all I ask!' And she had told the child that the White-chests would be kind to him" (138). Struggling mentally with Gray-beard's violence, Frank accounts for his own depths of anger:

As for Gray-beard I did not care in the least about the violent shaking he had given me; but the vengeful way in which he fell upon that innocent boy created in my heart a hatred that was hard to conquer. . . . After supper I slipped away from my companions, and all alone I lay on the grass looking up at the stars, thinking of what had happened that afternoon. I tried to reconcile the act of Gray-beard with the teachings of the Missionaries, but I could not do so from any point of view. (138)

These are predictable feelings as a consequence of such a scene, and they play out the grueling dualisms registered by the teacher's polarizing violence. But La Flesche's narrative makes an important cultural negotiation by going further, registering the possibility of exchange even beyond material polarization. Brush takes the matter in hand, feeling entitled as he does to affirm his position in the exchange. When Frank tells of Gray-beard's violence,

Brush had been listening to my story without a word; now he arose and said, "Boys, stay here till I come back." He went into the house and knocked at the superintendent's door.

. . . When Brush had finished, the superintendent sent for Gray-beard. For a long time the two men talked earnestly together. At length Brush returned, and said, as he took his seat among us:

"Boys, that will not happen again. Gray-beard says he's sorry he did it, and I believe him." (140)

This remarkable account climaxes the penultimate chapter with a complex victory. The dialogic triumph then is overshadowed by the final melancholy chapter, in which Brush dies of tuberculosis in the school infirmary. He dies only after he proves himself generously equal to the missionary, not in a belligerent opposition but in a dramatized assumption of equality that derives from a value of exchange.

Ending on loss, La Flesche structures his narrative in recognition of the historical oppositions that engulfed his people, yet he juxtaposes such loss with the non-oppositional pragmatics of cultural exchange which lost the historical struggle and yet survives. It survives both because part of the culture operates outside the terms of that struggle and because dialogic survival, unlike dialectic synthesis, maintains difference within the dynamics of opposition. La Flesche himself, an educated American Indian working as an ethnologist in Washington DC, embodies some of that intercultural dynamic which eludes cultural dualisms. Like *Papago Woman*, *The Middle Five* suggests a possibility not only of a dialogic mode of reading Native texts but also of reading history.

A postcolonial rather than neocolonial critique must by definition be non-oppositional and heteroglossic, because colonial hegemonies are based on dualistic oppositions. Non-oppositional dialogics does not mean "harmony" or "communication," any more than it means conciliation or complicity. To the extent that Native American authors, since the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,<sup>7</sup> labor to rewrite the colonial present, their work becomes postcolonial.<sup>8</sup> It might be possible, however, through the efforts of theoreticians of various backgrounds, catching up with centuries of Native writers, for Native and non-Native readers to approach Native American texts with the assurance that knowing and understanding are processes rather than products. A final product of understanding across cultural differences may be unattainable, while an ongoing process of understanding may remain inescapable.

### **The Nexus of Exchange**

Oversimplifying for the sake of discussion, Clifford's terms of cultural interaction and identity, which we have seen in Tohono O'odham and Omaha cultural texts, may spark the following sequence: Clifford's "resistance" would equal a dualistic pattern; "absorption" would equal a dialectic pattern; and a "nexus" of exchange would equal a dialogic. Thus resistance would be two monologisms in dualistic competition; absorption would be two monologisms in dualistic co-optation; and exchange would be a dialogism of multiple voices in collaboration, not in a utopian sense but in the sense of mutual cultural

dynamics rather than hegemonic cultural domination or inertia.

While the limitations of dualism are relatively obvious, the distinctions between dialectics and dialogics are less so. In the discrete conceptual spaces opened up by these two notions there is a difference between their ethical effects in criticism. A dialogic, as in *Papago Woman* and *The Middle Five*, makes visible the possibility of exchange without dominance or co-optation, whereas the dialectic is haunted by the hierarchies of dominance inherent in dualism.

As Gilles Deleuze explains of the Platonic foundations of dialectical analysis,

The purpose of division then is not at all to divide a genus into species, but, more profoundly, to select lineages: to distinguish pretenders; to distinguish the pure from the impure, the authentic from the inauthentic. (254)

Platonic dualism is vertical rather than horizontal, an epistemological set of assumptions distinguishing truth from appearance. These assumptions take on oppressive force in hegemonic systems of authority and difference, such as civilization and wilderness, which they create. According to Deleuze, philosophy in the Platonic mode

always pursues the same task . . . and adapts it to the speculative needs of Christianity. . . . Always the selection among pretenders, the exclusion of the eccentric and the divergent, in the name of a superior finality, an essential reality, or even a meaning of history. (260)

The dialectic thus selectively locates a final meaning within the colonial subject of history as against the colonized object. A dialogic emphasizes, however, the changeability of meaning in "both" participants, the colonized and the colonizer, the text and the author, the text and the reader, by showing how they are not aligned dualistically but rather are surrounded by influences in a multiple field. In Native American literature, continuing community is part of that field.

The thesis/antithesis structure of dialectics focuses on the definitions, the "what," of each opposing term in order to effect their synthesis. In addition to "what," the multiple structures of dialogics seek also to locate "where" each term stands in its place in the contextual web. In addition to definition, relation. While a dialectic moves toward definitive synthesis between subject and object, a dialogic moves toward relationality. Instead of dialectic synthesis, dialogic difference. Instead of static and ideal knowledge, dynamic and pragmatic interplay.

The dualistic, dialectic, and dialogic modes thus function as ideologies offering different patterns of information and accordingly generating different epistemological expectations and perceptions. Yet,

if Bakhtin is correct, a dialogic heteroglossia is a given element of linguistic systems whether or not its users acknowledge those dialogic dynamics.

A dialogic system generates interactions, oppositions, and alliances in four dimensions. Instead of bipolar lines of force, the dialogic suggests Theodor Adorno's constellations or force-fields: "a relational interplay of attractions and aversions that constitute[d] the dynamic, transmutational structure of a complex phenomenon" (Jay 14). The image is of a sphere of intersecting polarities, each a dialectic interacting dialogically with all the others, while the sphere's circumference and center are constantly changing. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* conceives further of an immanent shift of dialectics that subverts the Platonic hierarchies from within, resisting synthesis and accepting indeterminacy.

Dialogism acknowledges not only the primacy of context but also the impossibility of textual resolution, a productive indeterminacy, because it simultaneously accounts for a generalized force-field while it acknowledges the specificity of the other in that field. In literary theory, a tendency toward dualistic critique aligns itself hierarchically with self and other, which then, without examining the ethics of a colonial context, projects various unfortunate forms of the "noble savage" onto the colonized other. That dualistic epistemology can produce a politics of exoticism, an "orientalism," on the economics of mercantilism and commodification, reading the text for academic lucre. A more common dialectic operates in between these modes, suggesting the changeability or indeterminacy of dialogism but never moving beyond the objectizing and commodification inherent in the self-other paradigm of the dualistic mode.

Without expectations of fully "knowing the other," what then would be an alternative purpose for reading and critiquing texts from a cross-cultural position? Implementing Bakhtin's undecidability in the dialogics of language and Clifford's nexus of interactions, I would add to the specular Baconian paradigm of entertainment and information the notion of participation as an ethical response to reading. If non-Native or Native readers cannot finally read Indian texts to "know" the other, or even themselves, they can read to trace a path through the text to context, and thence to participation with textual and extratextual concerns of Indian communities. Thus the telos of reading would be not a cognitive commodity but a pragmatic, incremental, and participatory process. It would become not "the Indian problem" but everyone's responsibility, nor would it be a canon and its exclusions, perhaps not even a set of "American" and "Native American" literatures. Critiques would thus be able to measure themselves against history not only in retrospect but also within the present perspective of ethical

relations to community context. The linkage of ethics with epistemology ultimately generates participation rather than information, an epistemology of active exchange, an intersubjective knowledge of how to participate with the other.<sup>9</sup> I will take up specific ways in which that academic participation might express itself in my concluding remarks. Generally, I have tried thus far to suggest how critiques that recognize the dialogics of cultural continuity actually participate in those political processes by visualizing possibilities apart from tragic colonial dialectics. An effort to deconstruct colonial binaries must have ethical effects.

### **Dialectical Readings of Dialogical Texts**

Critiques trailing clouds of colonial dialectics often contrast with the dialogic exchange between cultures expressed in Chona's, La Flesche's, and many other Native texts. Choices by authors, translators, editors, publishers, audiences, critics, and teachers of Native works are framed by assumptions of dialectical or dialogical cultural possibilities. Having described terms of dialogics and dialectics through which Native American literatures often construct their readership, I want to emphasize now the differences between these ways of reading by analyzing some critical oversights in relation to these terms. Dialectical approaches to dialogical texts can miss some of the cultural exchange both described and performed by such texts.

For this essay's focus on the ethical engagement of critics, I limit myself to examples of some specific choices by two professional readers, Arnold Krupat and David Murray, as they do and do not operate by a dialogic nexus of exchange with context. These two are key contributors to the current formative stages of Native American literary studies. Murray and Krupat are especially important in examining this issue of dialectic versus dialogic critique because each makes a careful effort to describe dialogics in Native texts.

It is difficult, if not impossible, in the discourse of this not yet postcolonial world to attain, much less sustain, a dialogical stance. I would be surprised if I am not practicing dialectic oversights of dialogic possibilities in my discussion of these issues. My discussion is a response to Arnold Krupat's own invitations to dialogism, and my critique of some of his and David Murray's critical choices is given in the spirit of dialogue rather than opposition. Krupat, who achieves a remarkable articulation of the foundations of a critical discourse in his *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature*, is quite open to criticism of his provisional "ethnocriticism," saying that it

does not yet exist and . . . will only be achieved by means of complex interactions between a variety of Western discursive and analytic modes and a variety of

non-Western modes of knowing and understanding. (43-44)

In their distinctive contributions to the criticism of Native literatures, Krupat and Murray both make a conscious point of not naively assuming that they can cross from the colonial self to a full understanding of the colonized or the postcolonial other. Murray marks these concerns as the foundation of his benchmark study, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts*:

In trying to avoid the colonialist assumption of an ability to comprehend (in the sense of encompass, as well as understand) Indian cultures and their difference, we could modestly confine ourselves to examining the accounts and representations of Indians, not to judge their accuracy but to reveal what they say about white ideological investments. (3)

For all the modesty in this approach, it threatens a certain cultural solipsism. The ultimate return to the (post)colonial subject as the *telos* of engagement with the other seems unfortunate, not in the sense of lacking completion or finality but precisely in its cessation of ongoing dialogue, its conclusive stasis. Is it not possible to negotiate a reading beyond the traditional one in which, as Roy Harvey Pearce describes it in Cooper, "The interest is not in the Indian as Indian, but in the Indian as a vehicle for understanding the white man . . ." (202)?

The question is the fulcrum of my effort to describe an ethics of criticism of Native American literatures. Certainly Murray sees his reflection on white ideological investments as one step in an ongoing process, although his language tends to erase such a process by the terms: "confine ourselves" to a final focus on "white ideological investments." I am outlining a critical ethics by which further exchange, however incremental, is clearly consistent with the texts. What about the focus of Native American texts for Indian and other non-white readers? Do Indians reading literature by white writers return only to Native American ideological investments?

Such polarized questions derive from Murray's carefully and consciously polarized self-positioning, and as such they suggest the dialectical limits of such a stance. In spite of his critical intentions, his discourse helps to delineate essentialist boundaries. Murray's choice, for all its semiotic logic, is to follow colonial and racial lines of readership, white and Indian, placing himself honestly on the white side of the frontier. But in so doing he follows Clifford's "pervasive dichotomy: absorption by the other *or* resistance to the other," even while Murray's purpose is to avoid absorbing the other. His choices clarify further how the ethics of Native American literary criticism call

for different paradigms.

In order to engage in a dialogue with Indian literature, the exchange becomes not merely cognitive but also participatory, not merely textual but also contextual. The knowledge of self and other, of "white ideological investments," may give way to participation in context, in community, an agonistic process in itself. Minimally, critics can perform that participatory knowing by recurring reference to context surrounding text, by visualizing the cultural constellations or force-fields that bend and shape colonial binaries.

Murray's modesty recognizes cultural representations of the other as the central focus of his project, "paying attention to the mediator or interpreter, rather than what he is pointing to," (1) and ostensibly avoiding, as he says, an "essentializing of difference, with all that this politically and culturally entails" (2). Murray's project proves to be one of the most useful applications of poststructural theory to the field so far, clarifying the complexities of colonial representation. However, the political correctness that Murray invokes in the name of modesty can subtly reinvolve the Platonic dualisms built up historically around colonial self and other. By focusing on mediations within the cultural gap, he does not reduce the dualistic tendencies of language. In fact, by magnifying the eclipsing function of mediation, Murray's "other" can slip away further into the dialectic gap of semiotic uncertainty, effectively essentializing difference. The function of a dialectic epistemology is to re-excavate that chasm, and the function of an alternate dialogic epistemology is to elude it.

Murray's reinscriptions of that dualistic paradigm lead him paradoxically to some critical choices that explicitly conflate Native and non-Native writers. Yet Murray's intention is negotiation, or navigation, of that uncertainty, as he explains in concert with Arnold Krupat:

We must therefore have a view of translation and communication which can take us between the Scylla of universalism, and the Charybdis of absolute relativism. We need as Arnold Krupat puts it, "not to overthrow the Tower of Babel, but, as it were, to install a simultaneous translation system in it; not to homogenize human or literary differences but to make them at least mutually intelligible." (3)

For all the professional care that such statements summon, the defensive use of the phrase "absolute relativism" elides two epistemological points: "absolute relativism" is an oxymoron available only to a universalist, and dualistic, discourse; and a fear of relativism as "absolute" is expressly a fear on the part of a dialectic faced by open-ended dialogism. When such conceptual parameters guide Murray's

critical choice to focus on mediation in the name of avoiding naive or colonizing readings, he redefines the options by a continued polarization.

As Murray overlooks a context of dialogic cultural survival, he produces phrases and crucial claims that take a dialectical, specular position in relation to Native American texts. For instance, when he discusses the postcolonial complexity of returning to tribally specific and local rather than universalist and hence dominating cultural identities, his cogent discussion arrives at a claim that seems calculated to startle by its scrupulous honesty. First he summarizes Leslie Silko's 1979 "An Old-Time Indian Attack," an essay that challenges the "cultural arrogance" of Louis Simpson, Gary Snyder, and white ethnopoets in their appropriations of Indian materials. Silko identifies a notion of "universal consciousness" that provides especially white writers with the assumed "'power' to inhabit any soul, any consciousness" (4). Murray agrees with this critique, writing that this process derives from "universalist assumptions which, given an imbalance of power, effectively mean domination and monoculture" (91). He asserts that "here the issue is what resources can be marshalled against" such dominating assumptions, and he goes on to suggest "the political implications of the recourse to the local" as against the universal, citing parallels in this stress on "the personal and the situational" between "primitive" and postmodern contexts (91-92).

Yet Murray's political focus narrows as he proceeds to draw on De Certeau to assert that Native American identities are

imposed from the outside—by ethnology—but I would argue that even if this is so, the problem is now that available identities are not—certainly in North America—separable from this cultural one in any straightforward way. (92)

While certainly the colonial gaze must be a key part of Native American identity structures, the underlying problem with Murray's analysis, which shows up below in his further conclusion about Silko, is that he is looking at identities, "imposed from the outside," in dialectic terms—outside versus inside—rather than in terms of a dialogic nexus of exchange. This dialectic becomes nearly paralyzed by paradox: "In particular, to write about Indian experience and be published in English is inevitably to be involved in an ambiguous area of cultural identity" (92). The reality of ambiguity is undeniable, but the direction Murray takes through it is a linear dialectical one, which leads him to his universalizing rejoinder to Silko's "old-time Indian attack": Murray asserts that because of that "ambiguous area of cultural identity" constructed by a postmodern world,

. . . modern Indian writers writing in English are not so very different from the white ethnopoets Silko criticizes, in their relation to Indian cultures. (92)

Murray seems unaffected by the prospect that his ethical critical choice to make this claim ignores other dialogic possibilities, while it presumes to do the forthright work of an honest critique. The unfortunate effect, by simply "returning the fire" of Silko's attack, is to replay the historically racial dialectic it tries to pacify.

The dialectical epistemological structure of Murray's response leads him to claim a "not so very different," absorptive sameness, thus effecting a co-optation. His last phrase, "in their relation to Indian cultures," would seem most unreasonable to a dialogic reading for the following reason: if Indian communities are a context for the Indian texts Silko contrasts with ethnopoetic texts, and if Indian communities speak dialogically in Indian texts, then writers who are part of those communities write with a significantly different context, hence dialogic text, than those who are not part of those communities. In a dialogic reading, the context is inseparable from the text, and the ethics of community in that context are also inseparable. Some white ethnopoets and others, though rarely, do become a welcome part of Indian communities as a function of the nexus of exchange. Yet Murray's equation of Indian and non-Indian writers as "not so very different . . . in their relation to Indian cultures" overlooks that dialogic context in Silko and other Indian writers who write from Indian community in ways that few if any white ethnopoets can. Murray is assuming the dialectical, a-contextual, individual voice in both Indian writers and white ethnopoets.

In a similar ethical direction, Murray attempts to restore the work of Carlos Castaneda to the academic "debate of fictional techniques in ethnography" (155). In his last chapter entitled "Dialogues and Dialogics," Murray discusses authenticity as an undercurrent behind what he calls dialogic or reflexive anthropology. He ends his book by claiming that certain criticisms against Carlos Castaneda are founded on a nostalgia for authenticity among those reflexive anthropologists, such as Stephen Tyler and Clifford Geertz, who assume a final, authentic "non-fiction." Such authenticity, they maintain, should not and cannot be fictionalized à la Castaneda:

. . . for all the talk of fiction, there is throughout post-modern anthropology an implicit assumption that fiction only operates *within* a text already authorized as ethnography and therefore as non-fiction, and that there are professional and unstated parameters of behavior, which Castaneda has violated. (155)

Criticism of Castaneda may certainly be nostalgic, as Murray suggests. Yet that nostalgia may be cut, and the criticism sharpened, by a sense of ethical dialogics that eludes the essentialism, the nostalgia for non-fictional truth, that Murray imputes to those critics.

Murray seems to miss the dialogic issue that what is authentic in Native texts and inauthentic in Castaneda is not an Indian essence, but an historical memory within the nexus of exchange in and between cultures. The point is not that Castaneda lacks some essential Yaqui identity, as the anthropologists, whom Murray criticizes, might indirectly suggest, but that Castaneda lacks a particular historical identity, an ethical context of interrelations that only a Yaqui text can speak. Murray's choice to valorize Castaneda and to place him significantly at the finale of his study of "Indian texts" eclipses that specific dialogic Yaqui history. He reifies cultural absorption, thus missing, along with Castaneda, that contextual difference. Murray's semiotics, emphasizing the dialectical oscillation and distance between representation and reality, between text and context, thus misses the ethical problems of Castaneda's appropriation of Native American representations. A pragmatic dialogic does not pause at that semiotic abyss to wonder at the irony of represented otherness; it moves by the force of material realities not to close that gap but to play around its circumference.

Not unlike Murray's, Krupat's critique of naïveté is central to his crucial work in mapping "ethnocriticism." For instance, he critiques a universalist, "idealistic vein" in Karl Kroeber for describing Indian stories as appealing "to enough common features in human nature to allow us at least entrance to their pleasures" (9). Krupat points out that "Kroeber here replicates the worst aspects of Levi-Straussian idealism" by predicating an "esthetic universalism" (*Ethnocriticism* 180) and "ignoring the particular, different, and other . . . culturally specific modes and codes" (182) of the Native text.

Krupat is rigorous in his ideological critique, as he identifies similar cross-cultural naïveté in Jarold Ramsey's evocation of "vivid feelings within oneself" as a reader's source of appreciation of Nez Perce tales. Taking exception to Ramsey's citation of Nez Perce translator Archie Phinney, Krupat writes,

As a participant in Nez Perce culture, a speaker of the language, and a fully prepared auditor of mythic stories, Phinney may well judge the effectiveness of any given telling as it does or does not produce "vivid feelings" in him. For Ramsey to appropriate Phinney's criteria as so easily available to the Western reader is naïve at best, and even then a naïveté perpetuating the worst imperial arrogance. (*Ethnocriticism* 182)

Strong words at least, setting up an oppositional and hence dialectic rather than dialogic critique of a critique.<sup>10</sup> Krupat is direct in acknowledging that his own ethnocritical alternatives "may never fully exist in other than tentative, oxymoronic . . . forms" (43).

Further, Krupat is quite explicit, in *The Voice in the Margin*, to avoid "the sort of criticism which, in the rather mystical—and, indeed, mystifying—old-fashioned way," (12) is written by early and recent scholars with more interest in simply championing Indians than in rigorous critical analysis. His critique addresses apparently naive assumptions of figures as varied as non-Indian scholars Mary Austin or Robin Riddington and Kiowa writer and artist N. Scott Momaday. While Krupat's critical challenge has sharpened the field invaluablely, he follows that line through its logical polemics to assert a position that must entrench itself in colonial oppositions. His position apparently misses the alternatives that Clifford proposes. Krupat asserts,

Nor can anyone who would comment on Native American culture ignore the perspective from which it is produced. But that does not mean that one is "obliged" to adopt that perspective or to insist on the absolute difference of it from the perspectives of the West. (14)

Like Murray's "absolute relativism" above, Krupat's own stance, in his absolute phrasing, sets him in dialectic opposition to a straw man. My discussion of the ways in which an ethics of reading overlaps with aesthetic textual issues does indeed suggest a degree of participation in, though certainly not unanimity with, alternative perspectives. Krupat's resistant hyperbole against being "obliged" to insist on "absolute difference" suggests a defensive stance that wants to circle the wagons against an imagined attack. That attack must be a dialectic projection of the menacing other, one the critical self assumes to be real.

From this more entrenched dualism, Krupat returns in *The Voice in the Margin* to an open suggestion of dialogue that echoes the participatory purposes of my discussion:

For all these strong words, I would not want to be understood as denying that one might learn from the Indians themselves how to produce a more accurate criticism of Indian literature. (15)

Krupat's and Murray's skepticism toward naively universalist assumptions, which are as traditional in American letters as Walt Whitman's amative, imperial selfhood, is certainly a prerequisite to careful negotiation of critical and cultural exchange with texts. Yet it is not naive to suggest that the particular possibilities for intercultural critical participation are multiple, however sensitive. If exchange is possible then acculturation can move in both directions. Without

Foucault's view of distributed power, however, a certain cultural hegemony assumes that the non-Native can be only a colonizing agent, whereas a view of alterity suggests that the former colonizer was and is indeed a participant in exchange. A too scrupulous application of the Heisenberg principle without a notion of exchange can lead to a mystified insistence on uncertainty, even to that "Puritan taboo on mixing beliefs and bodies" (Clifford 344), that reinforces the dichotomous Western model of cultural contact with its exotic other. An assessment of naiveté can in fact be an excess of caution that belies certain conceptual dualisms rather than dialogisms. Further, it can be the expression of a failed faith in an epistemology of cognition, where the impossible effort to know, without an alternative participatory epistemology of exchange, simply reinscribes the Native other first as the vanishing sign and then as the vanishing Indian.

An alternative epistemology of exchange logically opens up both perceptions of historically specific Native cultural survival and of academic participation in recognition of that survival. Thus a dialectic critique can miss the political context of dialogic cultural survival in these texts. A dialogic critique, however, might find textual and contextual ways for critical selves to speak neither of nor for the other but rather with the other.

Krupat's ethnocritical project is to "say something about Native Americans as subjects and producers of varieties of American discourse" (*Ethnocriticism* 3). Yet the force of historical and cultural dialectics can lead even one such as Krupat, who so carefully analyzes the "dialogic self"<sup>11</sup> in Native American autobiography, to at times take refuge in dialectical critique. A couple of further instances will serve to mark the ethical intricacy of this territory. The first is a minor one, having the uncomfortable air of a joke turned sour. Krupat's academic witticism, like much humor, functions by caricature, an exaggerated generality. (Which is why so much of literary criticism, trying to get beyond generalities to specificities, seems so humorless. Still I must apologize for the humorlessness of my analysis of his joke.) Problems with the joke are worth pointing out as an analogy of larger contextual problems in some of his critical choices.

The opening salvo of Krupat's important essay on "Post-Structuralism and Oral Literature" begins thus:

To speak of post-structuralist theory in conjunction with Native American literatures may seem as odd as serving dog stew with *sauce béarnaise*. (113)

Krupat sets up this joke as an objective description of the perceived distance between Native Americanists and critical theorists, and he does so specifically to bridge that gap. But his witticism is unfortunate in

that the dualism at the heart of its metaphorical power can so vividly reinforce the terms of a colonial history which it seeks to elude. Clearly the sophisticated humor works only for those in the *sauce béarnaise* crowd, not for the various Plains tribes whose rituals still include ceremonial cooking and eating of dog stew. But how does this backfire?

As a framing statement it selectively aligns cultural images into a comparative set which, within the context of the academic discourse used to describe those images, is unequal. Dog stew, being so far outside the context of academic discourse, must create in most of Krupat's readers a different level of response from *sauce béarnaise*, an image more familiar to the contexts of Krupat's text. This difference parallels those of positive v. negative, superlative v. pejorative, pleasure v. disgust. The effect is to further exoticize a ritual food with cultural significance to Sioux, Kiowa, and other tribes and hence to play into the inauspicious polarizations of colonialism. This is not to say that the phrase "dog stew" itself could not be used in academic discourse, but it does emphasize the dialogic need to establish a context of Indian community ethics surrounding the two-word text, "dog stew."

However much it is Krupat's logical purpose to open with the "unfortunate fact" of a misunderstanding that he intends to resolve, however much he intends to bridge the dualities that dog stew and *sauce béarnaise* represent, and however much his own text indeed speaks explicitly to "signal a change in the situation I have described" (113), the unbalanced contexts of academic and Indian communities clarify the ethical implications of his critical choice to open an essay in those terms. He allows the academic context to interact with his text without the Indian context, a dialectic choice for absorption rather than a dialogic choice for exchange. As my discussion suggests, each of those contexts, academic and Indian community, is a necessary dialogic component of both Krupat's analytical text and the brief text "dog stew," not only in terms of the aesthetic interplay between text and context but also in the ethical interplay of text and reader derived from the interplay of aesthetics and ethics.

A larger issue in relation to dialogic criticism is Krupat's "interest in a frontier perspective" for his critical enterprise (*Ethnocriticism* 5). Krupat's intention is to reappropriate the term "frontier" as a trope for his ethnocriticism. "Central to ethnohistorical work is the concept of the *frontier*" (4):

Ethnocritical discourse, in its self-positioning at the frontier, seeks to traverse rather than occupy a great variety of "middle grounds," both at home and abroad. (*Ethnocriticism* 25)

In reappropriating the word, he wishes to align himself with modern ethnohistorians such as James Clifton for whom, as Krupat explains,

The frontier . . . is not defined in the progressivist-evolutionist manner of Frederick Jackson Turner as the farthest point to which *civilization* has advanced, a series of those points apparently marking a clearly discernible line between "us" and "them." Rather, in a more relativist manner, the frontier is understood as simply that shifting space in which two *cultures* encounter one another. (*Ethnocriticism* 5)

In spite of this careful redefinition, the rationale for recycling the term is not itself clarified in Krupat's discussion, i.e., not only *whether* the frontier can indeed be redefined apart from its historical discursive context, but *why* it should be. Why eclipse that history by attempting to reclaim the word? Not unlike my choice to retain "dialogism" with its dualistic etymology as a gesture toward the historical power of dualistic epistemes, Krupat perhaps chooses "frontier" as an ironic gesture toward its historical and popular currency as well. Yet the term "frontier" does not by historical definition offer a dynamic beyond oppositional paradigms. Instead, it matches a dialectic episteme where the interplay is seen in dualistic terms, "in which two cultures encounter each other."

The critical choice to reinvest in a term like "the frontier" is made problematic simply by the history of that material dialectic playing itself out in mercantile and martial contexts. In Leslie Fiedler's words, "Guilt and the Frontier are coupled from the first . . ." (132). As Alfonso Ortiz writes in his essay "Indian/White Relations: A View from the Other Side of the 'Frontier,'" the notion of the "frontier" is, like the notion of "Western civilization," an "enemy" to "the cause of a meaningful Indian history" (3). Indeed, in contrast to Krupat's intentions, Ortiz suggests that ideologically the term "frontier" itself matches precisely the same advance-guard relation to "Western civilization" that it assumes historically. In comparison with "Western civilization," Ortiz writes, the term "frontier"

has been much more actively harmful to the cause of Indian survival and to the writing of meaningful histories of Indian/white relations, let alone of Indian tribes themselves. (3)

In making this claim, Ortiz is drawing upon the ethics of context that a dialogic critique calls for, linking text ethically to context. The text of the word "frontier" evidently contains an historical context to which scholars must make ethical responses.

Certainly the word bristles with images of settlers and Indians

aligned in opposition along that dualistic, historic, imaginary dividing line. Following inevitably on the choice of a contextually unredeemable term, the academic critic of any race and the Native American text must then take their historically constructed oppositional positions, since "the frontier," in Indian country, is always already an alienating term. Moreover, Krupat's "frontier perspective" can exclude not only the communities contextualized in Native texts but also those in the growing community of Native scholars in the academy who avoid the term. (Native scholars are not united in opposition to use of the word "frontier.") If the term is conflicted, why then select that trope?

Krupat himself articulates pragmatic alternatives:

. . . ethnocriticism wishes to constitute itself as a critical practice in no way condemned to ironic oscillations between Western narratives, but, rather, as freely choosing a commitment to the production of whatever narratives—and it is impossible to predict with any accuracy the forms these will take—may serve to tell the emerging story of culture change. . . . (*Ethnocriticism* 126)

That Krupat's critique might oscillate between open-ended dialogism and more polarized dialectics is a mark itself of that emergence. This is the irony of a dialectic faced with and thus alienated by dialogism, as an imperial *sauce béarnaise* is alienated by a relational dog stew or as so many explorers on the "frontier" were alienated, since 1492, by their own lack of perception of ongoing exchange with Native America.

Critiques of Native American texts can introduce a positive, postcolonial postmodernism that acknowledges new visibilities, new paradigms on the intercultural field. The slightly nostalgic critique to which Krupat, along with Clifford, candidly confesses as "the hope of telling the 'whole' or 'true' story" (*Ethnocriticism* 123) is less willing to see a postmodern nexus as positive. Instead of a paradox of closed "ironic oscillations," where two poles perpetually face each other, a positive postmodernism suggests many poles. Each gazes not only at its own opposite or projection, but toward an openness of positional political or ethical opportunities to act and experience, to know pragmatically. Eluding that epistemological quest for absolute knowledge, Native texts such as La Flesche's and Chona's generate instead both aesthetic and ethical participation. As Krupat says,

To read Native American literature, to take pleasure in it and try to understand it, can be an end in itself, like going to a museum or a concert. It can also engage us in a struggle for the values that determine our lives. (*Voice* 238)

### **Decolonizing Criticism**

How then can critics participate in a textual context of dialogic cultural survival? Certainly the most direct labor that literary critics can perform is a textual effort. Not only can we avoid, as Anthony Wilden says, "Any scientific theory or position which . . . can be construed as contributing to the psychological, social, or material alienation of any class or group."<sup>12</sup> Critics can affirmatively articulate modes of cultural interaction in the texts that elude domination, assimilation, or co-optation and that make visible possibilities of cultural survival through such processes as a nexus of exchange.

Elaine Jahner suggests in a similar vein that

the critic must start with the premise that oral forms reflect particular ways of knowing, that they are epistemological realities. They exist both as artifact and as process. (223)

In response to this sense of realities in the text, Jahner envisions a critical approach to the complex the field of Native American studies that begins to reflect certain Native American ways:

. . . cooperation among many critics, writers, folklorists, anthropologists, and art historians, all of whom can publish sensitive descriptions of specific artistic traditions, not in the style of the once-popular "definitive" accounts of "dying" traditions, but in a way that shows both the continuity and the open-endedness of tribal ways. (212)

Beyond Wilden's call to avoid oppressive metaphors, Jahner proposes affirmative descriptions of tribal patterns of survival. Such work would attest to dialogic relations between the academy and Indian communities.

In addition, a dialogical context does offer extratextual responses as well as textual ones in both academic and Indian communities. If the ethics of reading includes community participation by both Native and non-Native scholars, then linking academia to Indian communities (not only west but east of the Mississippi as well)—via teaching and mentoring Native students, via support of tribal college programs, via publication of Native materials, via clarifying cultural dialogics in classrooms to both non-Native and Native students—all could be additional modes of reading the contexts of Native texts. Another complex area in which professionals may reshape colonial epistemologies toward postcolonial ones is the ethical treatment of intellectual and cultural property rights.

One can "give back" in a variety of ways—by teaching, by writing, by round dancing when the invitation goes out at a powwow, by just attending cultural events such as powwows, by bringing food to a

wake, or by coming over merely to hang out and visit. Eventually I must leave the question of whether we can move experientially and intellectually outside our own received epistemologies for those who still think we cannot. Certainly critics can build toward a dialogic reading of Native American texts with a perspective that those texts provide.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See Tobin Seibers' *The Ethics of Criticism* for a cogent description of ethics as inherent to literary studies.

<sup>2</sup>It would be inaccurate to align Native American with the dialogic and Euro-American with the dialectic sides of this system. Such an alignment, aside from its obvious over-generalizations, would simply reinscribe the dualities that an open-ended dialogism eludes.

<sup>3</sup>For discussions of context in relation to Native American literatures, see Paula Gunn Allen's "Teaching American Indian Oral Literatures" in her *Studies in American Indian Literature* and A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff's "Oral Literatures," "Life History and Autobiography," and "History of Written Literature" in her *American Indian Literatures*.

<sup>4</sup>Concerning *Papago Woman*, I must pass by for now the complex and important questions of translation and editorial mediation by Ruth Underhill of this "autobiography."

<sup>5</sup>This notion of the inexorable emergence of dialogics may be understood linguistically through an application of Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology. Michael Holquist defines Bakhtin's use of heteroglossia as "the base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text . . . all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve" (Bakhtin 428). Because of the workings of heteroglossia in communication, efforts to reduce communication to monologues are doomed to failure. Similarly, efforts to reduce cultural contact to monocultural domination are doomed to failure, as cultures engage necessarily in a nexus of dialogue.

<sup>6</sup>See Philip Fisher, "Democratic Social Space" for a cogent analysis of erasure as part of Euro-American identity and imperialism.

<sup>7</sup>For instance the Incan, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, wrote a twelve-hundred page letter to King Phillip III of Spain in 1613. Mary Louise Pratt analyzes the letter's complex negotiations of cultural difference in her "Arts of the Contact Zone." See also Louise Burkhart, "The Amanuenses Have Appropriated the Text." Native literary efforts have been chipping away at colonial dialectics for centuries.

<sup>8</sup>Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back* provide a useful definition: "We use the term 'post-colonial,' however, to cover all the culture affected by

the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted" (2). They go on to include "the literature of the USA" as postcolonial as well, and they specify the uniting features: "What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial" (2). My use of the term emphasizes this latter effort enacted by dialogic strategies against colonial dialectics.

<sup>9</sup>The contextual logic of the academy expects rigorous and thorough textual research in history and culture as contexts of any text. It does not ultimately expect living, experiential community to intersect that context. In contrast, a contextual logic in Native American texts is suspicious of critics who publish on Native literatures without community experience and investment. In the politics of publication, the logic of academic publishers eclipses the relatively invisible logic of Native American communities concerning texts written about themselves. Dialogic criticism suggests that the Native American context adds extratextual dimensions to critical "research."

<sup>10</sup>Both Ramsey and Kroeber elsewhere critique Krupat's work. It is important to point out, neither in defense of Ramsey or Kroeber nor of naiveté but only toward a clearer sense of dialogic critique between even the texts of scholars, that Ramsey and Kroeber are elsewhere careful in their generalizations, that they are not transparently naïve, certainly not uninformed, and that the antidote to any naiveté's imbalanced perspective is not *ad hominem* attack but balanced analysis in dialogue.

<sup>11</sup>See, for instance, Chapter 4 of Arnold Krupat's *The Voice in the Margin*, "Monologue and Dialogue in Native American Autobiography," 132-33. Krupat describes the dynamics of Native dialogic selves primarily by textual interactions between informant, translator, and editor. The question remains how that dialogic Native informant's position in "a particular [textual] placement in relation to the many voices without which it could not exist" (133) resonates with extratextual Native cultural patterns of dialogic identities.

<sup>12</sup>Epigraph by Anthony Wilden in Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, unnumbered front pages.

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## ***"Becoming Minor": Reading The Woman Who Owned the Shadows***

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Renae Bredin

I know you can't make peace  
being Indian and white.  
They cancel each other out.  
Leaving no one in the place.  
—Paula Gunn Allen, "Dear World"

Chela Sandoval, in "U.S. Third World Feminism," posits the possibility of using the outsider position, or the borderlands, as a position of "tactical subjectivity" out of which existing modes of oppression can be confronted (14). Critical debates at this point have an ongoing history of inquiry that centers around the politics of identity, the constitution of cultural inclusion/exclusion, and the problem of the speaking subject, when the speaking subject is speaking outside of the dominant order. The question to be asked addresses the position of the other within the dominant framing of ideology. Is the other complicit and resistant in ways that affect the construction of a "white self"? In what ways can the subaltern alter the discourse of racial formation? No longer is the question *who* may speak, but rather: speaking or not speaking, does the constructed other operate as more than a blank page, thereby revising the text of the "white self"? In a similar gesture, Cherríe Moraga writes in "From a Long Line of Vendidas" that "the Radical Feminist must extend her own 'identity' politics to include her 'identity' as oppressor as well" (188). I would like to place Sandoval's and Moraga's positions into circulation together and argue that Sandoval's "tactical subjectivity" in the space of the much-discussed borderlands operates effectively in tandem with

Moraga's call for the inclusion of the position of oppressor *and* oppressed in the scripting of speaking subjects in dialogue, thereby revising the dominant version of self, scripted as white, male, heterosexual.

This essay interrogates the work of Paula Gunn Allen, who positions herself as *essentially* Native American, lesbian and "feminine," identities chosen from among several possible identities which she has taken up and set aside within the body of her oeuvre. In Allen's novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, the central figure in the text, Ephanie, (re)constructs herself in much the same way that Allen has autobiographically. This text provides a decentering confluence of the subject positions of reader, writer, and text, within which we can begin to examine the issues of positionality and essentialism. In her most recent collection, *Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature, 1900-1970*, Allen asserts a unified, monolithic "Native people" participating in a "Native Narrative Tradition," a community of people "who belong to the Turtle Island branch of the [multicultural] encounter" (5-8). Allen's work stands in a unique relationship to the debates over racial identity as socially constructed or biologically determined because her claims to authority to speak from an essential identity as Native American are made within a constructed domain of blood and bones.

### Reading

The reading transaction is precisely the space I wish to explore as the borderland of self and other, a potent location in which to raise these questions. I come to Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* as an outsider—someone not Native, nor Keresan (Laguna)—but as someone seduced, taken in, as it were, transformed by the text. The questions taken up are those that interrogate this particular transaction as one between positions of insider and outsider. If it's in the blood and bone, then the reader (presumed white) is outside. On the other hand, if identity is being constructed in the act of textual construction, then the blood and bone are only partial sites of difference, or similarity.

In *Essentially Speaking*, Diana Fuss posits that the two seemingly opposed concepts of socially constructed identities and biologically essential selves actually "underwrite" or "prop" each other. Using Lacan's "concept of the 'split subject,' divided against itself," Fuss offers "the strategy of positing the reader as a site of differences" and asserts that subjectivity allows for "the notion of the reading process as a negotiation amongst discursive subject-positions which the reader, as a social subject, may or may not choose to fill" (34).<sup>1</sup> Reading becomes a "borderland" in which subjectivity is negotiated at will.

In the terms of Fuss's argument, then, a reading by someone outside of Paula Gunn Allen's own "discursive subject position" in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* is a negotiation of different subject positions, with "fluid boundaries," positions "always constructed, assigned, or mapped. . . undermining any notion of 'essential reader.'" For Fuss, "all of these points suggest that if we read from multiple subject-positions, the very act of reading becomes a force for dislocating our belief in stable objects and essential meanings" (34-35). While Fuss is speaking of gender as a category of analysis, a similar approach to subjectivity might possibly work in the dislocation of reading in and from other subject-positions, in particular, that category designated "race."

In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha articulates the relationship between writing, reading and textuality in this way:

In a sense, committed writers are the ones who write both to awaken to the consciousness of their guilt and to give their readers a guilty conscience. Bound to one another by an awareness of their guilt, writer and reader may thus assess their positions, engaging themselves wholly in their situations and carrying their weight into the weight of their communities, the weight of the world.  
(11)

If, in Trinh's formulation, Allen is a committed writer, and our discursive positions are situated in a historicized guilt, the weight of my guilty conscience as I occupy a dominant (white, heterosexual) subject position within prevailing power relations will, of necessity, require me to assess my own position and engage myself wholly with race as a primary feature of the writings of women committed to tribal consciousness and tribal survival, carrying the weight of their tribal communities. There is a way in which occupying this position as a reader is one that silences. My acts of resistance to illicit power may be in listening to the ones speaking in that place, in listening to what Allen, Trinh and many U.S. third world feminists are speaking of, and how they are speaking.

How then might a white, heterosexual woman speak of Paula Gunn Allen's text without playing Prospero? The exclusionary practice of essentialism falters when our "selves" are socially constructed, but the social construction of identities threatens to evacuate the political possibilities of essences in blood and bone. As Gayatri Spivak notes in "The Problem of Cultural Self-representation," "What can the intellectual do toward the texts of the oppressed? Represent them and analyze them, disclosing one's own positionality for other communities in power" (56). I would argue that there are sites from which I might

read, beyond a guilty silence, grounded in a weave of theoretical strategies. Determined by the text itself, informed by the aesthetics of the multiplicity of contexts out of which the writer writes, positioned in the fluctuating power relations of what Trinh signs as I/i, in this mesh I/i as reader might find a place from which to read, learn, and engage with the text in order to speak in the writerly/readerly dialogue.

### Writing

Contemporary Native American writers occupy subject positions that are not monolithically Native American but rather are embedded in specific tribal communities (Sioux, Navajo, Paiute, Cree). This does not, however, divorce them from sites within those constituted *as* Native, sites that are in turn surrounded by non-Native/dominant cultural and political discourses. Because Native and tribal aesthetics and assumptions about art and creativity often inform and underlie writings by Native women, and because those systems are not divorced from either the sacred or the secular for many tribal people, my responsibility to attempt an understanding of those systems is clear. However, as Richard Dyer has noted in relation to gay and lesbian authorship, ". . . all cultural artifacts, are not culturally pure . . . uncontaminated by [white Anglo-European] norms and values" (190). Therefore, an examination of the aesthetics that underlie and inform writings by Native American women must include the "contaminating" elements of dominant regimes.

Aesthetic determinations emanate from individual moves within larger cultural regimes. Those regimes as understood and enacted by the writer are part of what I as reader must come to understand in order to engage in this dialogue. Allen has constituted in her critical writings a paradigm which she calls the "Native Narrative Tradition," a unifying paradigm for identifying and reading a generalized Native American literature. In her desire for the inclusion of themes of magical transformations, social change, cultural transition, shifting modes of identity, as well as "certain structural features—diversity, event-centeredness, nonlinear development . . . and transitional modes," Allen expresses some of what constitutes her personal aesthetic (*Voice* 8). These features are refinements of what Bevis, Owens, and others have identified elsewhere as necessary features of a text in order for it to be defined as Native American, including use of the oral tradition, a sense of place, and time as "circular" (rendering simultaneous past, present, and future).<sup>2</sup> In earlier interviews, and in fact in her poetry and prose, Allen also claims Joyce, Shakespeare, Keats, and Shelley as influences, thereby also claiming the artistic and aesthetic practices of Western European literary discourse.<sup>3</sup> How do these fluctuating authorial subject positions play out in a given text? And

how do I read a text grounded in an oral tradition with which I have become familiar only through written texts, even as it is imbricated with discourses in which I participate?

The genres out of which Allen's text arises, like the literary and cultural influences of many Native women writers, are Anglo and Eurocentric traditions. The novel, poetry, and autobiography are all forms from within the Western literary tradition. They are forms (in collusion with language) that arise from and reflect on patriarchal, hierarchical, imperialist hegemonies.

The English language has been the linear tongue of colonial discoveries, racial cruelties, invented names, the simulation of tribal cultures, manifest manners, and the unheard literature of dominance in tribal communities; at the same time, this mother tongue of paracolonialism has been a language of invincible imagination and liberation for many tribal people in the postindian world. English, a language of paradoxes, learned under duress by tribal people at mission and federal schools, was one of the languages that carried the vision and shadows of the Ghost Dance, the religion of renewal, from tribe to tribe on the vast plains at the end of the nineteenth century. (Vizenor 105)

The double-edged possibilities of liberation and oppression found in language and form become a space of community between "Native writer" and white reader—I, too, read and write with(in) and against the language and forms of the dominant discourse.

### Text

Following in the tradition of Virginia Woolf, as have French feminist poststructuralists like Irigaray, Wittig, and Kristeva, Allen breaks the sentence in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. In this linguistic subversion, the gaps and silences are so profound that there isn't a whole sentence that can be spoken; there is no way of using language—the sign system of the oppressor. So the sentence is broken, the narrative (to paraphrase *Shadows* 41) "inarticulate in the silence." "Fear. Bloody fingers pressing her temple. Her breastbone. Her gut. I will not be afraid. Fear, the destroyer" (*Shadows* 6). In the connective tissue of the noun/ verb—fear, separated by periods—*her* body is stressed, used, defining the thought. In the gaps, between the periods, are the unspoken, unspeakable parts of her body and her fear. This is the narrative of the broken sentence. The text is theory—it theorizes an impossible silence, an insurmountable gap between identity formation and received identity.<sup>4</sup> Between speaking the self, and the silenced self.

And low, so low, she had finally managed to say. "Stephen. I want." Pausing then. For a beat. One beat the length of one single word. Then finishing. "To go away." She did not say that one, that crucial word. "You. I want you to go away." Nor did he hear. What the tiny pause, that silence was intended, inarticulate, to say. (*Shadows* 11)

There is silence, there are gaps, there are tiny pauses, filled with meaning, filled with the essence of Ephanie, the desire that is unspeakable. To write Ephanie—mixed blood, female, lesbian—is to write the impossible. In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Judith Butler points to this kind of silence, this "unnameability" as a covert strategy of hegemonic oppression:

Here it becomes important to recognize that oppression works not merely through acts of overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable (un)subjects—*abject*, we might call them—who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law. Here oppression works through the production of a domain of unthinkability and unnameability. Lesbianism is not explicitly prohibited in part because it has not even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable, that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable. (20)

To learn what Allen is teaching, to hear what she is saying, I must listen/read to/in the gaps and silences for the unthinkable, what Allen names, speaks in the gaps and silences, just as Ephanie wishes her lover/brother/double Stephen to do (but he doesn't because he can't). Listen to Ephanie's silence, the momentary pause, that contains the meaning, the self, the who of her. Like Stephen, I cannot necessarily hear what is in the silences, but unlike Stephen, I know that Allen's silences name the unnameable and speak the unspeakable in their subversive linguistic play.

### **Tribal Stories**

There is another location in the borderland where reader and writer meet. Allen's use of Native American narrative offers a space in which to write in words the unspeakability of race. By telling the stories over and over again, from as many discursive positions as possible, Allen writes Ephanie into the "shifting modes of identity" (*Voice* 8). Allen tells several versions of the Haudenoshonee (Iroquois) story "The Woman Who Fell From the Sky." It is a story she is also concerned with in her critical work. In "Grandmother of the Sun:

Ritual Gynocracy in Native America," Allen recounts the story this way:

Sky Woman is catapulted into the void by her angry, jealous, and fearful husband, who tricks her into peering into the abyss he has revealed by uprooting the tree of light (which embodies the power of woman) that grows near his lodge. Her terrible fall is broken by the Water Fowl who live in that watery void, and they safely deposit Sky Woman on the back of Grandmother Turtle, who also inhabits the void. On the body of Grandmother Turtle earth-island is formed. (*Sacred Hoop* 15)

In "The Intersection of Gender and Color," Allen calls for a way of reading texts that attends to "the actual texts being created, their source texts, the texts to which they stand in relation, and the otherness that they both embody and delineate" (314). One of the sources of the narrative of *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* is that of written accounts of narratives told by Haudenoshonee tribal informants to white ethnographers and missionaries, then collected in Sanders and Peek's *Literature of the American Indian*.<sup>5</sup> This is also a story that continues to circulate amongst Haudenoshonee tribal people as well as Native and non-Native writers other than Allen. My attention, then, is directed to the sources and versions of this and other texts, and how they work to create this new text.

Allen's use of a tribal story she would not necessarily have heard as a Keresan child, and with which her own Keresan cosmology may have no concrete connections, appears to be based on this notion of her "Native" subject position as assuring her unique access to material marked "Native" but not necessarily Keresan. An essentialist position would argue that because Allen is mixed blood, she would have a greater connection to and understanding of the original Haudenoshonee version than a non-Native would, even though she isn't Haudenoshonee herself but rather is Keres. She may, of course, have heard this story told by someone with tribal affiliations connecting the teller to its telling. In eliding the boundaries of tribal affiliation in favor of a generalized Indian, Allen in some sense co-opts this Haudenoshonee story as one of the strands of the web of *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. This move positions her within an essentialist dynamic that sets aside the socially constructed aspects of her tribal identity in favor of "Native" as an unexamined and naturalized essence. Allen in effect creates an essential Pan-Indian. This essentialist position forecloses my own participation in *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* as an essentialized white reader. Leslie Marmon Silko, also a Laguna writer, sees this essentialist position as problematic. "The community is

tremendously important. That's where a person's identity has to come from, not from racial blood quantum levels" (qtd. in Fisher 19). Since Allen does not participate in the Haudenoshonee community within which the story she is telling is embedded, we (reader and writer) are both inside and outside of the story, undercutting Allen's appropriation of tribal material unrelated to her own blood and bone.

By telling and retelling this particular story, Allen transforms it into more than a Haudenoshonee story. It becomes more than the sum of its tellings, rather a Native American story, part of the transtribal Native Narrative tradition. In *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, Greg Sarris indicates that it is in a readerly reflexivity, an ongoing dialogue with Indian written literatures that readers of American Indian written literatures might best enter the dialogue. He argues that "the Indian writer is both Indian speaker and cross-cultural mediator, and readers must consider the Indian writer's specific culture and experience and how the writer has mediated that culture and experience for the reader" (130-31).<sup>6</sup> While Allen's use of *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* is de-contextualized from a tribal cultural specificity, she works to mediate cultural experiences with which she claims greater connection, a closer community. In this way, theory becomes fiction, and fiction reflects and becomes theory.

The story is told in the novel for the first time in a mode comparable to that of the version in *The Sacred Hoop*, as a brief, almost anthropological, recounting of the "legend." "According to legend a woman had spoken to her dead father. He had told her to marry the sachem in the village downstream, who then put her to a series of unusual and cruel tests that proved her power greater than his" (*Shadows* 38). In this skeleton of a plot, devoid of the pulse of cultural context—an incomplete telling—Ephanie is disconnected from the story—it is not hers and it fails to offer her any healing at this point. But the story has now been remembered, and it is in the act of remembering that identity is (re)claimed. As Allen has so powerfully asserted elsewhere:

... we tell the stories and write the books and trade tales  
 ... My great-grandmother told my mother: Never forget  
 you are Indian. And my mother told me the same thing.  
 This, then, is how I have gone about remembering, so  
 that my children will remember too. (*Sacred Hoop* 50)

It is Ephanie's task to remember and tell the stories. Until she finds her place in those stories, she remains out of balance, without identity.

Ephanie herself falls through the sky and through the text, just as Sky Woman does, catching herself or being caught in the web of community and memory several times along the way. At the end of

Part I, when *she* instead of Stephen leaves, she falls onto the road, leaving behind the community in which she has been embedded (mother, children, the apple tree of childhood). She falls into a new community consisting of urban Indians and Anglos in therapy. In Part II, she marries Thomas, a Nisei man, and gives birth to their twin sons. Ephanie falls again through the hole in the sky as she falls through the hole in her marriage. The fall is a document—her final divorce decree from Thomas. She falls into the next world, Part III, with her twin sons. This is when bits and fragments of her identity begin to cohere. The sickness caused by separations, silences, disconnection, and authority begins to be healed in dreams and remembering, learning to tell time and stories properly and finding a connection to "place." But she continues to fall, because she hasn't yet fully understood her place in the story. Her final fall is a suicide attempt, which she survives with the help of Grandmother Spider, Naiya Iyatiku, a mythic and sacred Keresan figure.

The fall becomes a ritual death into life, into a "right relationship" with the stories and her "home location."

She understood at last that everything was connected. Everything was related. Nothing came in that did not go out. Nothing was that did not live nestled within everything else. And this was how the stories went, what they had been for. To fit a life into. To make sense. Nothing left because there was no place else to go. Nothing left out because everything was remembered. Everything was told. What had happened in time immemorial, as the old ones called that time before time, happened now. Only the names were different. (*Shadows* 191)

Everything is remembered and told, which brings us back to the notion of remembering as identity. If everything is remembered, then Ephanie's identity has been fully realized as Grandmother Spider brings Ephanie into the web, nestles her within the stories, thereby bringing her into a balanced community and a "right relationship to earth and society" (*Sacred Hoop* 209). As Silko asserts, identity is embedded in community.

The version of the story of Sky Woman told in Part IV immediately following Ephanie's suicide and return begins like a European fairy tale—"Once upon a time, long ago so far, a young woman was told by her dead father to go and marry a stranger" (192). Allen uses two culturally specific metanarrative framing devices. "Once upon a time . . ." is the traditional opening for Western European fairy tales, and "Long ago so far . . ." opens mythic Keresan stories. There appears to be a deliberate juxtaposition of Native American and Western European storytelling practices.<sup>7</sup> This final version of The Woman

Who Fell From the Sky sets in motion a merging of all of the versions and other stories used in the text, and it is with this telling that Ephanie becomes balanced, because she understands her place in the stories, both Western European and Native American, as they are merged in this final telling.

It is when Ephanie realizes that she is Sky Woman, the one who falls from the sky, in this *epiphanic moment*, that she remembers her first fall from the tree of light/apple tree as a little girl. "After she fell everything changed. How she dressed. How she walked. What she thought. Where she went. How she spoke. The old ease with her body was gone" (*Shadows* 202). It is after this particular, first fall that she is forced to separate from her friend, Elena, her first doubling friend. Their deep lesbian attraction for each other brings on authoritative, Christian intervention. "'You know,' she said, her voice low. 'The way we've been lately . . . Hugging and giggling . . . I asked the sister about that, after school. She said it was the devil . . . That it was a sin. And she told my mother. She says I can't come over any more.'" And Ephanie understands "That she was falling. Had fallen" (*Shadows* 30). This original fall and separation from her other self sets off the cycle of illness and disintegration Ephanie suffers from for most of the text. And it is in her realization that this fall is only a repetition of all of the other falls—past, present, and future (mythic, historic, personal)—that she can be healed. She has fallen, separated and returned. Allen describes this same movement in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*: "It is not about redemption, for redemption is not a Pueblo (indeed, not an American Indian) notion; it is not about a fall from grace. It is about sickness and disharmony, and about health and harmony" ("Bringing Home the Fact" 571). The similarity between this insight into Momaday's work and Ephanie's trajectory is not accidental, I think. The text is, again, fiction theorizing.

The text itself is, in fact, another telling of the Sky Woman story which incorporates other versions of the same story (as well as other stories). Ephanie has a stronger power than Stephen, but she is unable to use it. She falls slowly through her sickness until Grandmother Spider saves her, and the soil of Ephanie's re-emergent identity forms around the community of the stories she has remembered and re-told. She is both inside and outside of the story, and "Inside and outside must meet, she knew, desperately. Must cohere. Equilibrate. No one mentioned it. They said it was all within. They said it was all outside. But she was the place where the inside and the outside came together. An open doorway" (*Shadows* 174).

### Crossblood/Lesbian

The open doorway is the one in and through which Ephanie comes

into harmony and balance. As Allen's vision of balance and harmony, this text is an open doorway for me, the reader. Allen teaches her readers about who she is, through Ephanie, through both Western European and American Indian practices and world views. My reading of this text is not a "form of theoretical tourism on the part of the first world critic, where the margin becomes a linguistic or critical vacation, a new poetics of the exotic" (Kaplan 191). I am drawn to it because it seduces me, takes me in, moves me.

In "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," Caren Kaplan offers another possible position from which I might read:

For the first world feminist critic the process of becoming minor has two primary aspects. First, I must acknowledge that there are things that I do not know. Second, I must find out how to learn about what I have been taught to avoid, fear, or ignore. A critique of where I come from, my home location, takes me away from the familiar. Yet, there is no pure space of total deterritorialization. I must look carefully at what I carry with me that could help me with the process. This is crucial if I am to avoid appropriating the minor through romanticization, envy, or guilt. Becoming minor is not a process of emulation. (194)

As Kaplan, Spivak and Sarris suggest, in order to read without foreclosing or appropriating Allen's "minor" position, I must include in this reflexive dialogue a critique of my own position in relations of dominance and subordination and acknowledge my "home location" in relation to Allen. The listing of identity affiliations (as in my case, white, working class, feminist, heterosexual, academic . . . and I could go on) has become the primary trope of the debates mentioned at the beginning of this essay. These lists never do enough. Rather, I hope to have performed a version of what Greg Sarris advocates, "written criticism" as a "kind of story, a representation of a dialogue that is extended to critics and other readers who in turn inform and are informed by the report" (*Keeping* 131). So, whether or not she intends it, Allen begins to teach me, strategically forces me to begin learning about what I have been taught to avoid, perhaps even fear. Cross-blood, lesbian—these are the places in the borderlands and on the margins where I have not been or am unable fully to go. In speaking them, naming them, Allen troubles my relation to the center. Ephanie's disintegration will not happen to me, because where I come from is a different location in the margins. The ways in which Ephanie's story moves me may or may not be the same as the ways readers speaking and reading from other identity categories are moved.

As Butler has suggested, identity categories are "invariable stumbling-blocks . . . sites of necessary trouble." Yet it is the troubling nature of those categories that makes them so compelling (14).

Here I want to return to Butler's constitution of the "abject," the lesbian as "unthinkability and unnameability" (20). It is precisely within the constitution of a lesbian identity that Ephanie is able to find balance and harmony. She in fact has access to a culturally specific practice, nameable and knowable, which allows her to draw together the disparate parts of a split self. Ephanie understands and names lesbian desire, after falling and landing on Grandmother Turtle/Spider's back.

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 mother, 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. (*Shadows* 211)

From her home location as American Indian, Ephanie remembers the figure and presence of the "medicine-dyke."<sup>8</sup> And where I come from, the double women have become known to me, have been emerging from the closet. When they come out, they may or may not be punished; however, they are not called Grandmother and looked to for knowledge or comfort. They have been, in fact, unthinkable and unnameable—abject. Ephanie, however, *does* find a place where double women are nameable—they are *double* women—twice female. In speaking and naming lesbian identity, Allen centers the double women for reader and writer in a "mythic transformation."

What I have brought to the text from my "home location" determines in part what I will take from the text. What I ultimately understand here is that I am required to learn before I can participate effectively as a reader. In speaking her own unspeakable position, Allen presses me to hear her speaking. I remain on the outside, but even as outsider I glimpse a bit of what it is to be Ephanie. Allen's tactical claims to authority as an essential identity of blood and bones construct a space in which she may speak and name, through Ephanie, a constructed social identity that transforms the borderlands of reader/writer/text—"an open doorway" (Allen, *Shadows* 174).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a full discussion of both the uses of Lacan and the problems with the uses of such a theory, see "Reading Like a Feminist" in Fuss's *Essentially Speaking*.

<sup>2</sup>See William Bevis, "Homing In"; Louis Owens, *Other Destinies*; and Andrew Wiget, *Native American Literature*. Bevis and Owens take cogent positions in constructing paradigms of what constitutes a Native American text. For a critique of Wiget and others working in similar ways, see Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners*.

<sup>3</sup>There are several interviews in which Allen refers to texts and cultural contexts which have influenced both her work and her sense of identity. See Joseph Bruchac's *Survival This Way* for a more complete discussion by Allen of these considerations. See also her most recent essay, "Glastonbury Experience," in which she describes her pilgrimage to Keats's home for healing transformation.

<sup>4</sup>To understand how the text writes itself as theory, we can turn to Barbara Christian's important formulation:

For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create . . . in the play with language . . . (Christian 52).

Christian's moves here are essentializing in that they assume an irreducible essence to which a kind of logic can be attributed, unexamined in its politicized, historical construction—"people of color" are always already "theorizing." This unexamined essence is problematic, but if we take Christian's argument at face value, then we can see that Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* does just this kind of narrative theorizing via her use of tribal stories and in her play with language.

<sup>5</sup>See Note 5 in "Grandmother of the Sun" in *The Sacred Hoop* for Allen's reference to this version of the story, as well as reference to the Mohawk version.

<sup>6</sup>The troubling underlying assumption of Allen and others that the status of the reader of American Indian written literatures is that of an outsider presumes racial categories which define Native writer and non-Native reader. However, the reader's position, like that of the writer, is one of a multiplicity of subjectivities. So it is that the reader is coming to the text from many different positions, as does the writer.

<sup>7</sup>Barbara Babcock develops the notion of framing devices as metanarration in "The Story in the Story."

<sup>8</sup>See Allen's essay "Hwame, Koshkalaka, and the Rest: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures" in *The Sacred Hoop* for her discussion of this term and American Indian lesbians.

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## ***"A Menace Among the Words": Women in the Novels of N. Scott Momaday***

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Kathleen Donovan

Clearly, then, the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in us. (Fetterley xxii)

"Have gun, will travel" is just as fitting a theme for academic achievers as it was for Paladin. (Tompkins 231-32)

It is how you feel / about the women. (Ortiz 227)

The generative influence of Scott Momaday in the current "Native American Renaissance" has been voiced by numerous contemporary Native writers. His is such a looming presence that the very process of undertaking a feminist deconstruction of his representation of women in his novels feels like a transgression of the first order. He is a brilliant, lyrical writer whom, on one level, I want to admire uncritically for the elegant artistry of his use of language. At the heart of his work is his reverence for the spoken and written word. "In the beginning was the Word," Tosamah intones in *House Made of Dawn*; like the Gospel of St. John, Momaday's words reverberate with all the resonant power of the most finely crafted language. Yet, as Adrienne Rich reminds us, "beautiful language can lie" and "the oppressor's language sometimes sounds beautiful" (123).

As a feminist reader, my admiration for Momaday's body of work makes my discomfiture with his representation of women characters paradoxical and disturbing. Is it possible to admire a writer for *how*

he says something while disliking *what* he says? This question is especially pertinent with a writer to whom language is essence. In his essay "The Man Made of Words," Momaday articulates the connection between linguistic and experiential reality:

It seems to me that in a certain sense we are all made of words; that our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives. There is no way in which we can exist apart from the morality of a verbal dimension. (162)

In a paradigm where language is essence, form cannot be separate from function. Yet Momaday's two novels, *House Made of Dawn* and *The Ancient Child*, are linked in an underlying misogyny; however beautiful its expression, such misogyny is inconsistent not just with Momaday's philosophy of language but also with the search for harmony and balance characteristic of Native American literature. Yet Momaday's novels consistently represent contemporary women as negative forces. In the novels, Momaday subverts the sacredness of tribal stories, songs, and ritual to the subtly profane purpose of devaluing women. If women are devalued, language, in Momaday's own formulation, is violated. Furthermore, because Navajo ontology underscores the achievement of *hózhón'i* as necessary to any cure, no true healing of the male protagonists can occur, since the creation of such beauty depends on the harmonious balance of male and female. In *House Made of Dawn* and *The Ancient Child*, we are witness to the darker side of the power of language; language endangers even as it creates. As one chapter title of *The Ancient Child* aptly states: "There is a menace among the words" (90).

The problem of misogyny in Momaday's fiction has deeper implications than just the usual grist for the patriarchal mill. After all, as Judith Fetterley points out, "American literature is male" (xii), and Momaday, as a highly educated and cosmopolitan man, writes out of an Anglo as well as a Kiowa tradition. The structure of *The Ancient Child* attests to his multiple influences in its intermingling of oral traditions in the Kiowa myth of a Bear Boy with the mythic Anglo folk hero, Billy the Kid. That the work of a male writer is misogynist is no great surprise; what troubles me is the fact that his words still have an undeniable attraction that does not permit me to simply lay his books aside as I do with most other writers of similar ideological bent. Furthermore, I am acutely conscious of the fact that in taking Momaday to task for his negative representations of women, I am engaging in the same sort of academic gunslinging that Jane Tompkins regrets in *West of Everything*, when she says:

The showdown on Main Street isn't the prerogative of the Western; it's not the special province of men (as opposed to women); or of popular culture as opposed to literary criticism. Television cop shows, *Rambo* and *Dirty Harry*, and their fans do not occupy a different moral universe from the one populated by academicians. Violence takes place in the conference rooms at scholarly meetings and in the pages of professional journals; and although it's not the same thing to savage a person's book as it is to kill them with a six-gun, I suspect that the nature of the feelings that motivate both acts is qualitatively the same. (231)

Even though the prospect of engaging myself in the very type of bloodless violence practiced by phallographic writers seems counter-productive, because of Momaday's stature as a writer, his ideas should not go unchallenged. In the emerging "canon" of Native American literature, his is a "normative" and "touchstone" voice which, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith notes of canonical literature in general, "begins not merely to *survive within* but to *shape and create* the culture in which its value is produced and transmitted and, for that very reason, to perpetuate the conditions of its own flourishing" (50). Nor should I, as a reader, ignore the tension in the paradox of repugnant ideas expressed in eloquent language. Judith Fetterley's 1978 *The Resisting Reader* and recent studies in feminist reader response criticism by Patrocínio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn are useful for exploring the process of "imasculation of women by men" whereby "as teachers and readers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (Fetterley xx).

Fetterley argues that women are taught to read as men, that the universal viewpoint assumed in culturally authoritative texts is nearly always male, and women readers must resist the totalizing annihilation of their own experiential authority. Yet, the process of becoming a "resisting reader" is problematic because women readers are always positioning themselves in opposition to male-gendered experience, an exercise in negativity. Even the terms "women readers" and "male readers" assume a universality of experience that does not consider the ramifications of ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation in the encounter between reader and text.

As Schweickart, Jonathan Culler, Diana Fuss, and others have pointed out, reading/interpretation is ultimately about power. Reading is not a passive activity; it is, instead, the locus of intersection between literature and praxis through the reader's interaction with a text

(Schweickhart 39). In canonical texts, the gendered reader is nearly always male. What are the repercussions to literature and praxis if the gendered reader is one whose experience and perspective have been subsumed under the generic masculine? Schweickhart argues that when the reader is male "the text serves as the meeting ground of the personal and the universal. Whether or not the text approximates the particularities of his own experience, he is invited to validate the equation of maleness with humanity. The male reader feels his affinity with the universal, with the paradigmatic human being, precisely because he is male" (41).

For a male, then, the act of reading is empowering, but the process of immasculation is disempowering to a female reader. Not only does she not find her experience articulated, but the text forces her into the divisive position of reading with a bifurcated vision, as the universality of the internalized male reader struggles against the particularities of the female reader. Such bifurcated vision forces her to read the text in a way that it was not intended to be read, in effect, "reading it against itself" (Schweickhart 50). Reading is about power; when women readers have to constantly engage in an act of resistance in order not to be subsumed by a text, they not only cannot expect to find their experiences given a credible voice, but more importantly they cannot give voice to the very ideas that shape a more egalitarian ordering of the world. What finally disturbs me most in Momaday's representation of women is that, in his refusal to even attempt to sympathetically articulate the experience of his women characters, he silences them. By silencing his women characters, he silences me. By consistently representing women as negative forces whose perversion of language demands their silencing, he effectively perpetuates the phallogocentrism that feminist theory seeks to undermine.

Angela Grace St. John, the principal female character of the Pulitzer Prize-winning 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn*, enters the narrative as the Angelus is ringing, in a scene juxtaposed with Abel's remembrance of the military tank bearing down upon him. That she will work in opposition to his healing is foreshadowed by Abel's perception of natural phenomena: the sounds of the roosters' crowing, the morning air "cold and deep," and the "hard and pale" land (27-28). Angela is always associated with disturbances in the natural world and with a sense of separation from nature and ritual. She looks for "some sign of disaster on the wind. Now and then she watched the birds that hied and skittered in the sky, but the birds always went away, and then the sky was empty again and eternal beyond all hope" (34).

Obviously, Angela associates nature with desertion and death. Even her own body and the unborn child she carries repulse her.

She could think of nothing more vile and obscene than the

raw flesh and blood of her body, the raveled veins and the gore upon her bones. And now the monstrous fetal form, the blue, blind, great-headed thing growing within and feeding upon her. From the time she was a child and first saw her own blood, how it brimmed in a cut on the back of her hand, she had conceived a fear and disgust of her body which nothing could make her forget. She did not fear death, only the body's implication in it. (36)

Since Angela regards herself paradoxically as alien to nature and also as a loathsome natural representation, the attraction to her physical beauty by Abel and Father Olguin is dangerous, for in her manipulativeness she "knew how to learn at her own expense, and eventually she would make good the least involvement of her pride" (35). After the Feast of Santiago, which we view through Angela's objectively panoramic gaze, she finds a unity with nature as she realizes that she despises Abel for his beating with the rooster by the Albino. As Larry Evers has pointed out, her final impression of the ceremony is sexual ("Words and Place" 305).

As she intended, Angela initiates a sexual relationship with Abel; as she did not foresee, Abel controls the relationship. The narrative does not tell us how this transformation of Angela from dominance to submission comes about, but it suggests that women are rendered helpless and malleable in the face of sexual attraction to a man and transformed by making love to him. "She was not herself, her own idea of herself, disseminating and at ease. She had no will to shrug him off" (60).

The scene of Angela and Abel's first lovemaking is juxtaposed with the scene of the Albino stalking Francisco in the cornfield. At the Feast, Angela had "keened" to the Albino's unnatural qualities, demonstrating the narrative linking of the evil inherent in them. They are linked, as well, by their white hands in the couplet, "Angela put her white hands to his body / Abel put his hands to her white body," which is immediately followed by Abel's memory of how in death the Albino's white hand looked "open and obscene" (94). In spite of her name, Angela functions more like an angel of death than of grace.

Angela's transformation into submission works only with Abel; with other men she retains her detached and derisive stance. Ironically, her presence in Walatowa, "By the *grace* [emphasis added] of the last few days," permits Father Olguin to feel "content" for the first time in his surroundings. "He had at last begun to sense the rhythm of life in the ancient town, and how it was that his own pulse should eventually conform to it" (65). Such relaxation of his own sense of displacement proves dangerous. When Father Olguin misreads her politeness as

interest, he fatuously decides to visit her and take her into his confidence about important priestly/male business while still retaining the protective patriarchal hegemony.

She would *perceive* that he was occupied, committed to a remarkable trust, and she would envy him—not his accomplishments, perhaps, but at least his possibilities. The prospect of her envy pleased him, and he hummed about in the rooms of the rectory until it was noon, and he rang the Angelus long and loud. (66)

Angela, however, has no intention of having her bells rung by the aged priest; in a scene of devastating rejection, she mocks him in the language of his own priestly ritual.

"Oh my God," she said laughing. "I am heartily sorry . . . for having offended Thee." She laughed. It was hard and brittle, her laughter, but far from desperate, underlain with perfect presence, nearly too controlled. (68)

For Father Olguin, the controlled laughter is more devastating than the rejection. Inappropriate laughter by a woman is a prominent feature of the text that will be discussed later in this essay. Ironically, just as Angela was brought to a reconciliation with nature through the perversion of the *corre de gaio* ritual, so also the priest loses his sense of identity with Walatowa through Angela's perversion of the confessional rite. Returning to the village and seeing the carnivalesque revelry, he focuses on the fly-infested face of an infant and is filled with fear and revulsion as the head turns "slowly from side to side in the agony of sad and helpless laughter" (69).

Our final view of Angela occurs years later at the Los Angeles hospital where a broken Abel is recovering from a severe beating. Angela's entrance and exit in the narrative are bookended by the crowing of the roosters and her talk of her son Peter, whose favorite story is the Indian myth of the boy who turns into a bear. The Biblical allusion to roosters and Peter, in a text replete with Biblical allusion, seems clear. Angela's sexuality betrays Abel by removing him from the healing possibilities of ritual and landscape.

Angela's role in the narrative and her growth as a character have been problematic for critics. Susan Scarberry-García's sensitive study views Angela as undergoing a positive transformation during the seven-year time span of the novel. "The early scenes portray her as alternately cold and vicious in her designs on Abel. . . . Yet the later scenes portray her as compassionate and understanding." Through her sexual liaison with Abel, she achieves both "pain and knowledge of the natural world. After she returns home to California her power builds accordingly. For, in the hero/heroine pattern, returning home

galvanizes power." Finally, Scarberry-García sees Angela transformed from "a person in need of balancing her own life into a protective healer of Abel" (62).

I wish to explore several issues that arise in viewing Angela as a positive force. First, Angela is pregnant when she begins the affair with Abel. In tribal societies, a pregnant woman is generally considered to be an honorable person, but Angela has transgressed boundaries by being an adulterous pregnant woman. As such, her honor becomes problematic. In Mary Douglas' terms, she is "matter out of place" (35), dirt, anomaly, only doubly so. She is literally out of place in Walatowa, due to her race and reason for being there (for the mineral baths to cure a sore back), and figuratively as a woman carrying one man's child but making love with another. When the "lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined," as they are in tribal society, crossing boundaries constitutes pollution, and "a polluting person is always in the wrong" (Douglas 112). Such marginal people are dangerous as they permeate societal boundaries. In this configuration, femininity is sexuality is power is danger. In such a configuration it is unlikely that Angela is concerned with Abel's well-being.

While she undoubtedly has feelings for Abel, Angela allows two days to elapse from the time Benally notifies her until her hospital visit, and Abel seems to sense her danger as he turns his head to the wall as she speaks to him. When she arrives for her brief visit, she tells Abel a vague story of "a young Indian brave . . . born of a bear and a maiden" (169), a story that Evers has characterized as "rootless as a Disney cartoon" (317). Significantly, it is the rootless Benally who sends for her, Benally who prefers acculturation in Los Angeles to the reservation where there "would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of old people, going no place and dying off" (145).

Angela's sense of awkward displacement during the hospital visit is palpable. Her words are rushed and rehearsed, Benally tells us, "like she knew just what she wanted to say" (169). In conventional small talk, she says in rapid-fire fashion that Peter was too busy with his friends to visit, and that "she had thought about *him* [Abel] a lot and wondered how he was and what he was doing, you know, and she always thought kindly of him and he would always be her friend" (169). As she makes her hasty exit, she tells Benally "she was awfully glad I had called her, because she wouldn't have missed seeing him again for the world" (170). Since she offers no help to Abel other than the vague storytelling, is she really a positive force that would enable him to see that his only hope of survival lies in returning to Native ritual and landscape? Her ease in using manipulative language, even though it is given voice by an equally glib male character, further casts her as a potent "menace among the words."

The other major female character in *House Made of Dawn*, the social worker Millie who attempts to acculturate Abel to life in Los Angeles, is likewise dangerous to his healing because of her perversion of the sacredness of language and her sexuality. Millie believes in "tests, questions and answers, words on paper. . . She believed in Honor, Industry, the Second Chance, the Brotherhood of Man, the American Dream, and him—Abel" (99). Like Angela, Millie is sexually attracted to Abel and sleeps with him, but he sees through her schemes on him and her easy laughter. Again, the trope of inappropriate laughter will be significant. Like Benally, Millie has severed her connection to the landscape of her youth. Her memory of her Oklahoma childhood is filled with the pain of her father trying to break the land but instead being broken by it: ". . . and at last Daddy began to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own personal and very deadly enemy" (113). The text connects her, as well, to the whiteness of Angela and the Albino in the numerous references to the whiteness of her body. Millie is no less a victim than Abel; however, since Abel's healing can take place only in his own landscape, her attempts to tie him to her through language, acculturation, and sexuality make her as dangerous and manipulative as Angela.

Two minor but significant female characters also figure in the novel's developing misogynistic focus, though their roles have been virtually overlooked by critics. Fat Josie is the sympathetic but grotesque woman Abel turns to after the deaths of his mother and brother, despite Francisco's warnings. Since she has cured him before, Abel goes to her seeking maternal tenderness in defiance of his grandfather.

She crossed her eyes and stuck out her tongue and danced around the kitchen on her huge bare feet, snorting and breaking wind like a horse. She carried her enormous breasts in her hands, and they spilled over and bobbed and swung about like water bags, and her great haunches quivered and heaved, straining against her ancient, gray dress, and her broad shining face cracked in a wonderfully stupid, four-teeth-missing grin, and all the while tears were streaming from her eyes. (107)

That Abel receives tenderness and nurturing from fat Josie is obvious, but why does Momaday characterize the only female who wants nothing from Abel in such grotesquely equine terms? The description of fat Josie's dancing is juxtaposed with the scene of Abel regaining consciousness on the beach after the beating by Martinez, a scene in which he imagines that "his whole body was shaking violently, tossing and whipping, flopping like a fish" (106), and his regaining

consciousness on the battlefield as the tank bears down on him and his "giving it the finger and whooping it up and doing a goddam *war dance*" (108). That these three acts of motion, fat Josie dancing, Abel's body flopping like a fish, and his war dance, are related by violence and grotesquery is clear, yet Momaday seems to suggest that female tenderness is an element of the violence.

Untangling this complicated weave is no simple matter, but the text offers some clues. First, the significance of fat Josie's description in equine terms should not be overlooked. Emblems of motion and journey are fundamental in expressing Navajo and Kiowa ontology, and the horse was the principal means of motion. In addition, horses are associated with self-sacrifice, loyalty, and fertility. In the story of Santiago, his horse tells Santiago to sacrifice him for the good of the people; from the horse's blood "there issued a great herd of horses, enough for all the Pueblo people" (40).

In Benally's vision of Abel's journey home, the words of the Horse Song are central to an understanding of what Abel seeks. "I am Everlasting and Peaceful. / I stand for my horse" (155). On the horse, Abel could imagine himself at peace. "You felt good out there, like everything was all right and still and cool inside you, and that black horse loping along with the wind. . . . You were coming home like a man, on a black and beautiful horse" (154). In Benally's vision of Abel's vision, a doubly reflective mirror, the horse carries Abel to a healing in the context of the land. "And at first light you went out and knew where you were. And it was the same, the way you remembered it, the way you knew it had to be; and nothing had changed" (154). The horse also carries him to the squaw dance at Cornfields and his assignation with the girl named Pony, whose graceful description stands in counterpoint to fat Josie's:

There was a girl on the other side, and she was laughing and beautiful, and it was good to look at her. The firelight moved on her skin and she was laughing. The firelight shone on the blue velveteen of her blouse. . . . She was slender and small; she moved a little to the drums, standing in place, and her long skirt swayed at her feet and there were dimes on her moccasins. (156)

But the vision of Pony at the dance at Cornfields is Benally's vision of Abel's vision, and the reality is that Pony becomes, like Abel's dead mother, just one more memory of a woman who deserts him. What Abel is left with is the heavy awkwardness of fat Josie's dancing and her gap-toothed grin in a tear-streaked face, in short, the emblem of the "grotesque realism" of Bakhtin's carnival. Stallybrass and White's discussion of this Bakhtinian concept (8-9) points out that

grotesque realism "uses the material body—flesh conceptualized as corpulent excess to represent cosmic, social, topographical and linguistic elements of the world" to effect "transcodings and displacements" between the body and the exterior world. Momaday has used grotesque realism to effect transcodings and displacements earlier in the novel as he describes Father Olguin's disillusionment with Walatowa, emblemized by the Indian child's fly-infested, corpulent face:

Its little eyes were overhung with fat, and its cheeks and chins sagged down in front of the tight swaddle at its throat. The hair lay in tight wet rings above the eyes, and all the shapeless flesh of the face dripped with sweat and shone like copper in the sunlight. Flies crawled upon the face and lay thick about the eyes and mouth. The muscles twitched under the fat and the head turned slowly from side to side in the agony of sad and helpless laughter.  
(69)

The description of the Indian child matches the description of fat Josie for the grotesquery, mockery, and ultimate tragedy underlying carnival. Bakhtin's grotesque realism "images the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish" (Stallybrass 9).

Stallybrass and White note the prominence of the carnivalesque as emblem in the literature of colonial and post-colonial cultures where "the political difference between the dominant and subordinate culture is particularly charged" (11), which is certainly the situation in Euro-American/Native-American cultures. Father Olguin struggles to understand the Native souls in his charge. Not until the end of the novel, as Abel informs him of Francisco's death, is he able to say with any certainty, "I understand" (190). In Bakhtin, the presence of grotesque realism is a positive sign of vitality. In this paradigm, it is possible to conceive of the Indian child and fat Josie as politically affirmative transgressions of the dominant, "high," culture of Eurocentrism by the minority, "low," indigenous culture. What makes the paradigm problematic, at least in the case of fat Josie, is the fact that she is transgressing both the dominant and the minority culture (Francisco's warnings to Abel about her). Perhaps it is more accurate to say that she represents on a personal as opposed to political level the diminished but real choice of female nurturance left to Abel. As he abandons or is abandoned by every other female character, she is the one constant who can cure and nurture him and demands nothing in return. Her equine representation, however rudimentary and grotesque, emblemizes the concept of self-sacrifice for the communal good. The

horse as emblem of motion permits fat Josie a positive transcoding whereas Father Olguin's emblem of motion, his automobile, carries him to a negative transcoding by turning him away from the people.

Momaday's tempering of women's negativity in the problematic portrayal of fat Josie extends into his treatment of ancestral women such as Tosamah's grandmother, Aho, who is described in a reverential, elegiac passage as a storyteller who "had learned that in words and in language, and there only, she could have whole and consummate being" (88). Aho understands that language is essence and that to corrupt words is to corrupt being. However, it is important to note that Aho is dead, and Tosamah's remembrance constitutes a lament for the passing of an individual woman and the tradition she represents. On a textual level, it infers the superiority of ancestral women to contemporary women whose language is duplicitous, perverse, manipulative, even evil.

In Momaday's characterization of the second minor but significant figure, he continues this association in the fleeting mention of Porcingula's incestuous relationship with Francisco, which results in the birth of a still-born child. Francisco and Porcingula are the children of an illicit coupling between Fray Nicolás and Nicolás *teah-whau*, who parallels the Albino with her "white mustache and a hunched back, and she would beg for whiskey on the side of the road. She was a Bahkyush woman, they said, and a witch" (15). The first time Abel saw her she "had screamed at him some unintelligible curse, appearing out of a cornfield" (15), like the Albino. Their children, Francisco and Porcingula, come together in full knowledge of their parentage, but only Porcingula is described as "the child of a witch" and is punished for her high mocking laughter and her sexual perversion in the death of their child at birth. Porcingula's laughter is specifically associated with her transgressive state. "The women of the town talked about her behind her back, but she only laughed; she had her way with their sons, and her eyes blazed and gave them back their scorn" (184). She directs her laughter not only at community mores but at individual men as well. When Francisco calls her name in the grove of cottonwoods by the river, "at last she came out of hiding, laughing and full of the devil. 'Well, you were early after all,' she said, 'and Mariano had not done with me'" (184). As her pregnancy advances, she forsakes laughter to become "whole and small and given up to him [Francisco]," but after the infant's still-birth "she threw herself away and laughed" (185).

As noted earlier, a preponderance of laughter, especially inappropriate laughter, is associated with female duplicity, sexuality, manipulateness, witchery, and grotesquery. Laughter's link to evil is suggested by the Albino's "old woman's laugh, thin and weak as

water" (77). When Angela scorns Father Olguin, she laughs derisively. Abel is put off by Millie's easy laughter. "Easy laughter was wrong in a woman, dangerous and wrong" (99). Pony's laughter at Cornfields, fat Josie's gap-toothed grin, the Indian child's "sad and helpless laughter," and Nicolás *teah-whau*'s mocking curses emblemize the female transgressive nature. Laughter becomes a perverse female counter-ritual. Cixous comments, "She laughs, and it's frightening—like Medusa's laugh—petrifying and shattering constraint" (32). Noting the frequent laughter of Kundry in *Parsifal*, Cixous points out that women witches often laugh. "All laughter is allied with the monstrous. . . . Laughter breaks up, breaks out, splashes over. . . . It is the moment at which the woman crosses a dangerous line, the cultural demarcation beyond which she will find herself excluded" (33).

In all of the textual incidences of inappropriate laughter, the women are following an innate propensity to disorderliness, Momaday suggests, that makes them dangerous to the status quo. By permeating accepted boundaries established by patriarchal societal custom, in their liminality, they represent danger in their "creative formlessness." Mary Douglas has noted that

The danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the powers inhering in the cosmos. Ritual which can harness these for good is harnessing power indeed. (161)

If ritual is capable of forcing good from disorder, might it not be capable of forcing evil as well? Momaday's text seems to suggest as much. These transgressive women are undoubtedly powerful forces working against the male's well-being. Ancestral women, such as Tosamah's grandmother Aho, derive their benevolent power from ritual and the oral tradition, but Momaday's contemporary female characters either do not know, stand outside of, or have rejected these traditional means to power. Like witches, they live in the interstices of power structures, possessing their own energy and power that make them dangerous to established (male) power. In Kristeva's definition, they represent abjection, that which disturbs identity, system, order, boundaries, and rules; "laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection" (Kristeva 8). Porcingula's loss of laughter during her pregnancy symbolizes a loss of power as she is transformed by Francisco into something "whole and small and given up to him" (185), but after the child's death-birth, she regains her laughter/power/evil as she rejects Francisco.

In the female characters of *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday depicts women whose duplicitous language, sexuality, transgressive-

ness, and witchery actively work against the male protagonist's reconciliation with his identity through a return to traditional myth, song, and landscape. They are strong women in a basic, disorderly way, but Momaday betrays their strength by insisting on the primacy of their need of a man and their intrinsic desire for subservience. Likewise, the three female characters of *The Ancient Child* are strong, independent women on a superficial level, but they also have a fundamental impulse to subservience, sexual and otherwise, to a man.

The text goes to great lengths to establish Lola Bourne and Alais Sancerre as financially independent and sexually secure enough to take the initiative with men. Neither woman would ever introduce herself by her husband's name, as Angela does in the earlier novel. But the text confuses the appearance of strength with the reality by suggesting that strong women are those who have careers, manage their own money, and make advances to men, while ignoring the more important quality of not finding their *raison d'être* in serving the needs of men.

The list of characters describes Lola Bourne as a "beautiful, ambitious woman," but her ambition seems entirely for Set, a successful, fashionable painter whose work has become prisoner to his success. The text describes Set as one who had "compromised more than he knew. He had squandered much of his time and talent; he had become sick and tired" (37-38). Set paints in order to "astonish" God, whose boredom with human matters is "infinite. Surely we humans, even with our etiquette, our institutions, our mothers-in-law, ceased to amuse Him many ages ago" (39). Set's malaise is obvious, but why Momaday chooses to gender-inscribe God's boredom is not so obvious unless it is considered in the context of the value his novels place on contemporary women.

Set views women only as objects. He recalls a portrait he sketched of Lola at a picnic on a wind-swept Point Lobos. Set likes the result, but Lola considers it to be not her but "the perfect likeness of a peasant girl named Vivienne, who lived in twelfth-century France, whose father worked for seventeen years on the south tower of Chartres Cathedral, and who was said to understand the language of chickens, ducks, and geese" (54). Set paints Lola as, and she identifies with, a portrait of a female who has no identity in her own right. Like Angela in *House Made of Dawn*, who is associated with the crowing of roosters, the text associates Lola with a woman who understands the language of barnyard fowl. Since the earlier novel develops a hierarchy of animal value based on "tenure in the land" (56), the association of pivotal female characters with lesser animals infers a parallel hierarchism of male and female.

Set's objectification of women continues in the juxtaposition of the picnic scene with his remembrance of the childhood sexual abuse he

received from the nun who "liked to loom, bat-like," over him. In the cathedralesque silence of the schoolroom, he hears the sounds of his friends playing outside on the lawn and "he was overwhelmed with the sense of banishment." As he withdraws from her after vomiting in her thighs, he notices a "yellow and purple bruise inside and above one of her knees. It resembled an ancient scarab he had once seen in a glass box" (54). The perversion of the scarab's symbolic representation of life, in the anatomical vicinity of the womb as source of life, placed as it is alongside the image of the perversion of mammalian nurturance in the nun's bat-like representation, mirrors the female perversion of religion and sexuality that occurs in Set's encounter with the nun.

The abuse scene is then immediately juxtaposed with the scene in an art class in which the instructor notes the bodily perfection of the female model. "Her body is whole, vital; every bone and muscle and tendon is in place. Her body is soft and yet firm, resilient, round, smooth, delicate, endlessly expressive; and it functions, it serves its purpose" (55).

Set's artistic training enables him to objectify women. Only through art can Set maintain control of women. The bodily perfection of the model permits no disorder, no dirt. Every part is in its appointed place and functions as it should, without challenge, and in discrete entities that are part of the process of objectification, and, ultimately, of silencing. The art studio is, of course, an artificial environment, and the passive, silent perfection of the model cannot be duplicated in real, whole women, who trick, seduce, possess, abuse, and abandon him. Like Abel in *House Made of Dawn*, Set is haunted by a sense of abandonment in the early death of his mother. That Set feels conflicting emotions about women and their bodies is obvious. He cannot forget his revulsion and shame in the incident with the nun, yet he also uses his artistic training to distance himself emotionally by sketching Lola as a twelfth-century peasant girl; by remembering the beetle-like bruise on the nun's leg; by seeing the female body as useful boundaries of a plane, boundaries that "define your limits" (55); and by emotionally removing himself from his seduction in Paris by Alais by wondering "who might be observing them in this set piece [an intentional pun?], this rich composition worthy of Gauguin" (208). Clearly, art and the emotional distance it provides are his defense against transgressive women.

Since he naturally objectifies women, Set cannot view women except through the filter of his own desires. Lola comes into his life as the buyer of one of his paintings, the disturbing self-portrait of the dwarf about to be transformed. She becomes his lover at her initiative, but after a time their passion, or more precisely Set's, begins to cool from the demands of his work and the beginnings of his transformation

into the Bear. Lola, however, remains a "good sport" (153) who will care for his ailing father while Set goes to Paris for a showing of his paintings at the gallery owned by Alais and his subsequent affair with Alais.

Like his characterization of Angela in *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday's characterization of Lola is replete with her sexual manipulateness and duplicity. In the body-painting scene, the text specifically connects her to a witch (156). Lola uses her sexuality to control men, creating a heightened tension between Lola and Set, between Lola and Alais, between Lola and Jason (Set's agent), and between Set and Jason. In Set's voice, "She was very pretty in a halter, shorts, and sneakers. I knew that Jason must be very much aware of her presence, agitated by it. He was sexually excited by her, and she knew it and teased him when she pleased" (112).

This passage is revealing on a number of levels. First, it implies that women use their sexuality to control men. Second, it implies that women are unable to control this impulse to manipulate. Third, that men are helpless in the face of universal female manipulation. Finally, it suggests a sexual tension between the two males, underscoring Irigaray's contention that in a phallogocentric culture "the very possibility of a sociocultural order requires homosexuality as its organizing principle" (192). Women are a commodity for which men compete because woman's value lies in her interchangeability among men. The concept of commodity implies the necessity of "at least two men to make an exchange. In order for a product—a woman?—to have value, two men, at least, have to invest (in) her" (Irigaray 181). Upon the exchange of female commodities patriarchal society depends for its very existence, Irigaray states, for "without the exploitation of women, what would become of the social order? What modifications would it undergo if women left behind their condition as commodities—subject to being produced, consumed, valorized, circulated, and so on?" (191). The conclusion Irigaray arrives at is that phallogocentric culture would function much differently in essential "relation to nature, matter, the body, language, and desire" (191).

Momaday's culture as evidenced by his novels is still very much a phallogocentric design in which women are always objects, never subjects. In this paradigm, essentialism is the only possible outcome. When the equation of woman = commodity = object is applied to sexuality, the female as object/commodity is self-evident. As commodities, Lola and Alais are interchangeable. The text describes Alais in terms very close to the initial description of Lola's professional pedigree. Both women are independently wealthy, but each works in professions non-threatening to males. Lola is a librarian and music teacher who also enjoys a respected reputation as a cataloger of fine

books, even though we never see her engaged in any work other than promoting Set's talents. She is a perceptive appreciator and collector of art, especially Set's. Alais owns a successful gallery in Paris with a "first-rate" clientele. She, too, has a special appreciation of Set's work. The emphasis on the business acumen and artistic success of the women adds an interesting dimension, as if Set seeks affirmation of his own success and value through valorization by the women. If so, commodities play an expanded utilitarian role as a self-reflexive mirror for the commodifier.

As commodities, women compete sexually with other women, Momaday suggests, in the tension between Lola and Alais, and between Lola and Grey. The tension between Lola and Alais is particularly pernicious as they battle for Set's attention in New York. Lola is cast into the role of "Bitch" because of her unreasonable possessiveness. Instinctively, she and Alais perceive the other as the enemy, having internalized the phallogentric concept of woman as the dark continent, unknowable and always to be feared, especially by herself. In Cixous' words, "they have committed the greatest crime against women: insidiously and violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense power against themselves, to do the male's dirty work" (68).

In this paradigm, women who are already an-Other by virtue of their femaleness conveniently emblemize other women as Other. From a phallogentric perspective, self-effacement is a desirable quality in an-Other/commodity, which explains why all three female characters are willing to assign primacy to Set's needs. For example, Alais serves very little function in the text other than fulfilling Set's sexual fantasies and assisting him in his career. On the day after his show in Paris and their one night affair, he learns from "good sport" Lola that his father is dying, an event which requires his immediate return to San Francisco. Alais is never mentioned again; having exceeded the promise of her name, she is simply a lay.

Lola is equally self-effacing. As Set begins his transformation into the Bear, the power of myth and ritual overcomes her innate possessiveness and jealousy of Grey, and she is able to subdue her "bitchy" qualities for Set's welfare. "Lola Bourne was more than a shade off *balance* [emphasis added]. She looked fleetingly into Grey's eyes and nodded. In some reach of her mind she thought of trying her luck, but in this alien place she had none, and she did not know what to do or say, how to be" (255). As Grey touches the medicine bundle in a ritualistic motion, Lola understands that "she had no *purchase* [emphasis added] here, that gratitude is all she could have expected or hoped for" (255). The commodity recognizes in appropriately economic terms that her value must be subjugated to Set's mythic fate,

that her role in his transformation is simply to be his chauffeur, and that now another commodity assumes primacy in his story. "The two women held hands without embarrassment, and there was a giving over, a reconciliation, a benediction" (255). In delivering Set to Grey, Lola has served her purpose, which was always secondary to Set's, and she c"feels one with herself for the first time in a long while" (255). Lola achieves her own transformation and balance, the text suggests, by valorizing the primacy of Set.

Of the three female characters in *The Ancient Child*, the portrayal of Grey is the most problematic and disturbing because she is the female character most closely aligned with myth. As a visionary and medicine woman, her powers are totally directed to helping Set achieve his destiny as the Bear. "Don't imagine that you have a choice in the matter, in what is going on, and don't imagine that *I* have one. You are Set; you are the Bear; you will be the Bear, no matter what" (271). Medicine people in Native culture possess a gift used to benefit the entire community, but Grey's powers are used only for Set. Grey poses the question, "What is it to pass into legend?" (182). For women, passing into legend in Momaday's formulation requires the assumption of a self-effacing, subservient, and ultimately depersonalized role. "It was Set's story that must be told, and no matter how many times the story had been told in the past and would be told in the future, and no matter how crucial was her voice in the present telling, it was he, Set, whose story it was. This was simply, profoundly so" (248), is the assured and patronizing stance of the narrative voice.

What Momaday never questions is the assumption that the story of Set as the Bear *must* give priority to the male when the myth involves *one* boy and his *seven* sisters. Could not the myth emphasize just as meaningfully the fate of the ssters as the stars in the Big Dipper? Even in the legend of Billy the Kid, which parallels the Bear's story in Grey's visions, women's purpose is solely to serve Billy's needs for sexual pleasure or to assist him in his escapes from the law.

When the paradigm is structured on phallocentrism, it follows logically that the story will emphasize the male, but such a paradigm is itself the result of phallocratic thought in which women are universally devalued. In Cixous' description of literary history,

It all comes back to man—to *his* torment, his desire to be (at) the origin. Back to the father. There is an intrinsic connection between the philosophical and the literary . . . and the phallogentric. Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman's abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery's functioning. (65)

The phallogocentric paradigm derives from a thought process that, in Trinh T. Minh-ha's words, originated in the

immemorial days when a group of mighty men attributed to itself a central, dominating position vis-a-vis other groups; overvalued its particularities and achievements; adopted a projective attitude toward those it classified among the out-groups; and wrapped itself up in its own thinking, interpreting the out-group through the in-group mode of reasoning while claiming to speak the minds of both the in-group and the out-group. (1)

That a phallogocentric system of thought is of such long and powerful standing does not preclude the positing of other systems of thought, or that alterity implies inferiority. Indeed, the very concept of hierarchy is called into question. As Cixous notes, "it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallogocentrism" (65). In a system of thought built on multiplicity and difference that does not presuppose opposition, when the connection between logocentrism and phallogocentrism is finally severed, "all the stories would be there to retell differently" (Cixous 65). This means that the story of the Bear and his seven sisters could "subvert every notion of completeness and its frame remain a non-totalizable one. The differences it brings about are differences not only in structure, in the play of structures and of surfaces, but also in timbres and in silences" (Trinh 2), and such timbres and silences can only add to the story, not devalue it. When all of the stories are rewritten, history will be altered and the effect will be "incalculable" on the concept and function of society (Cixous 65). There can be advantages to men, as well, in the rewritten stories. The fate of the two principal male characters in *The Ancient Child* is not enviable. Grey's question, "What is it to pass into legend?" is as problematic to them as it is to the women. For Billy the Kid, passing into legend requires his early and violent death. For Set, the legend carries him to an existential loneliness, to the death of his human self in his rebirth as the Bear whose failing human voice cannot be understood by his sisters. In a non-patriarchal telling, perhaps the legend could be one of healing and reconciliation in a community.

Again, because of Grey's pivotal role in the creation of myth, her devaluation is possibly the most painful to witness. Like Lola and Alais, she is superficially very strong, so strong in fact that she is able to exact her circumcision revenge on her rapist and still ride off on her horse to listen to the voice of the Grandmother, who presumably tells her to look in on Set sleeping in the arbor. Momaday handles the rape scene in an especially insensitive manner that assumes his readers will participate in the insensitivity. From her visionary lovemaking with

Billy, Grey is transported into the reality of Dwight Dicks' brutality. The text describes the attack as "horrible and ugly and dehumanizing," yet even as it is happening, Grey must find "the appropriate response" by taking control of the situation and circumcising the rapist. No after-effects of the rape are ever mentioned except the "seed of sorrow, well below the level of articulate indignation, let alone rage, that would now be with her the rest of her life" (97). If Grey feels such sorrow and anger, she hides it well. Indeed the text shows more concern for Dwight Dicks' injury when the turtle-masked Grey, in a scene of intended comic surrealism, inquires after his injury. How truly comic this scene is depends on the reader's perspective; it is evident that in this scene Momaday envisions the reader as a male who can appreciate the comic horror and puckish presence of mind of Grey's revenge. This male-gendered reader is meant to alternately recoil and feel sated in the punishment.

But to a female reader, Grey's response is not realistic. Not only is the pain of her degradation denied, but the narrative assumes a masculinist stance that the proper response for a woman in this situation is to return violence with violence, and that a woman is capable of plotting her violent response even as she is being violated. Further, it attempts to invalidate the more realistic female response of fear, outrage, and humiliation. The fact that Grey is wearing a turtle mask as she confronts her rapist is also unsettling. In most Pueblo cultures, turtle is a life-bearing creature, similar to the Egyptian scarab, the marking that Set notices on the inner thigh of the nun who seduces him. Does the turtle mask function much like the nun's scarab-like bruise, as a perversion of the female life principle?

The rape scene is troubling on a number of other levels. Not only does it diminish Grey's fear, pain, and degradation, but it also perpetuates the rape mythology that women fantasize about being raped. It is crucial to remember that when this scene begins, Grey is envisioning making love to Billy, and she is enjoying it. What other conclusion is the reader, male or female, to arrive at?

At the "Poetics and Politics" Seminar at the University of Arizona, Momaday defended his inclusion of this scene in the novel. Responding to a European friend's criticism of the rape as an example of American fixation on violence, Momaday said,

I don't have to do that [include sexual violence], but it's true. It's true to . . . the traditions of American literature, this is one of the ways in which we express the equation of the frontier in American history, you know. It's not a pastoral. It's a . . . murder mystery" ("Poetics" 24).

In this statement, Momaday links the violence of the frontier with sexual violence committed against women. Speaking of the role of the dime novel in shaping American thought about the frontier, he says,

One goes back to the dime novel, I think, and the idea that the Wild West is indispensable to the American imagination. There is no such thing without the Wild West. The wild, you know, it begins somewhere back with the discovery of America, and with Scott Fitzgerald's last paragraph, in which he talks about the green breast of the new world, and Dutch sailors looking west to something commensurate with their power of imagining. And, the dime novel is as I see it a kind of a direct reflection of that fascination. The Boston bank clerk who could go and buy a Ned Buntline novel and take it home and just be transported into a wilderness that satisfied all his cravings . . . and then even more wonderful was the fact that, by God, it was there. People could go out on the Oregon Trail and find Indians . . . in the grass, that's a terrible, exciting feature of America . . . ("Poetics" 23)

In this admittedly off-the-cuff passage, Momaday collapses the ideas of wilderness and femaleness into the metaphor that Annette Kolodny examines in *The Lay of the Land*, with the double entendres of the title fully applicable: the "experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification" (4). Furthermore, Kolodny points out, just as Momaday did above, "*this* paradise really existed" (5). As Kolodny makes clear, canonical American literature has relentlessly imagined the landscape as female with terrible environmental repercussions—women and mothers are easy to abuse, frequently forgiving, and always possessing further resources to exploit. In *The Ancient Child*, Grey functions as emblem of violence committed by "civilization" against the land. Her rape is more than the rape of a woman; it is the rape of a mother, of the life source, the land. The land will eventually enact its revenge on its despoilers, just as Grey seeks her revenge on Dwight Dicks. In Julia Kristeva's reading of Leviticus, circumcision symbolizes the separation of the male from the maternal or unclean nature (99). It seems the ultimate transgressive act and display of power by the defiled (the female) to forcibly effect this separation as an act of revenge. And still, we are left with the remembrance of Grey's pleasure in Billy's lovemaking at the beginning of the rape scene. If Grey is emblematic of the land, as Momaday seems to suggest, is he also suggesting that the American landscape was somehow complicit in its defilement by being too paradisaical, and so

invited its own destruction?

Other inconsistencies in Grey's characterization abound. As a medicine woman, Grey is rather incompetent in giving the medicine bundle to Set before he is ready to appreciate its significance. Set's premature opening of the bundle and examination of its contents unleashes many negative forces.

Furthermore, even though Grey is presented as a powerful person, the text trivializes her in descriptions of her personal appearance and her speech. In one lengthy passage, Grey describes herself in the hyperbolic rhetoric of the dime novel: "is it any wonder that I inspire the praises of Master Bonny? No indeed, for I *am* a bonny lass" (18). As if to underscore the unreliability and triviality of Grey's self-description, the narrative voice immediately undercuts Grey's voice with a more realistic description. Like one of Momaday's favorite poets, Grey has a propensity for wearing white and writing Dickinsonian poetry. Her reading tastes are analogous to those of Emma Bovary. Like Emma, Grey is positioned as a "reader of inferior literature—subjective, emotional, passive," while Flaubert, a male, "emerges as writer of genuine, authentic literature—objective, ironic, and in control of his aesthetic means" (Huyssen 189-90). The inscription of mass culture as feminine reached its height in the Nineteenth Century, the time of both Flaubert and the dime novel, an age of tremendous social upheaval and challenge to traditional (patriarchal) power structures. As Huyssen points out, many of "the masses knocking at the gate" (191) were women who saw in the combined developing forces of socialism and feminism the possibility of redress for the comparative inequities they endured. The turbulence of the times was reflected in discourse that "consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the realm of male activities" (Huyssen 191). Literature of the "lower order" is then expressly gender-inscribed as feminine and transgressive. The undercutting of Grey's voice in such an abrupt manner demonstrates the vast difference between the elegance of Momaday's prose and the exaggeration of the dime novel prose. Momaday appears eager to assure his audience that despite his professed affection for the dime novel, and although there may be pleasure and escape in reading "pulp," he is firmly in control of his aesthetic and literary purposes.

Grey's language poses other problems. Throughout the narrative, when speaking in her own voice, her language remains casual with many slang expressions, a diction inappropriate to her mythic role. However, when she and Set arrive at her mother's home, we are told that her speech undergoes a profound change. We are told this by the narrative voice but we never hear the change in Grey's own voice.

The last words that Grey speaks in her own voice are, "This is Lukachukai" (289), as she and Set arrive at the place where he will consummate his fate. For the rest of the narrative, we are told Set's perceptions of Grey's transformation.

She stood and moved and talked differently. Here, in her mother's home, she assumed an attitude of deep propriety, dignity. With Set she could still tease and joke and whisper words in her old diction, but now she spoke quietly, in a plain and simple way, and her language was made of rhythms and silences that he had not heard before. (291)

Grey's loss of voice at this crucial point in the narrative signifies a trivialization of her character's power possibly because of Set's need to control it. Her role at this point in Set's transformation is to become voiceless and pregnant. Like the silencing of Porcingula's laughter during her pregnancy as she is "given up" to Francisco in *House Made of Dawn*, the silencing of Grey emblemizes the need of men to devalue and thus exert control over the transgressive. Significantly, the text equates her medicine powers with her fertility. Michelle Rosaldo notes that "women as wives, mothers, witches, midwives, nuns, or whores, are defined almost exclusively in terms of their sexual functions" (31). Phallographic power structure consigns women's value to their reproductive abilities, while allowing men a much larger range of creativity precisely because, as Bryan Turner argues, "the feminine body is the main challenge to the continuity of property and power" (37). Sherry Ortner recalls Simone DeBeauvoir's statement that "woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life," an internal process, while men's value can be valorized externally and thus more visibly (Ortner 75).

The objectification of the female body as sex object reaches its most extreme form in the sex scenes of both novels. Sex is always something being done to women as objects in spite of, or perhaps because of, their superficial boldness. "What will you do to me?" Angela asks Abel during their lovemaking in *House Made of Dawn*. The objectification reaches extreme limits in Dwight Dicks' rape of Grey in *The Ancient Child*, but it exists even in the more mutually erotic scenes between Grey and Billy: "Uh, Billy, will you—uh, make love to me, please?" followed by the most blatantly misogynistic line of either novel, "And then, with *infinite mercy* [emphasis added], he inserted his cock into her cunt" (96). The by now rather limp idea suggested by this statement is that women are unworthy receptacles for a man's most valued possession, his penis, that women suffer from the lack of a penis, thus the truly noble man will end women's suffering.

The objectification of women's bodies and the concept of sex as something being done to a woman are startlingly similar to what Susan Griffin refers to as "the metaphysics of pornography" (14). In all of the scenes of sex in both novels, the women's bodies and reactions are described in detail, but there is not a corresponding description of the men's bodies or their emotional reactions, as if the men are physically present but emotionally absent. At one point, Abel holds Millie away from him so that he can see her response, then the text says, "he was brutal with her" (*House* 101). The women are satisfied sexually, but if the men feel any arousal at all, the text does not mention it. Like the pornographers of Griffin's study, they "make love without feeling love" (56).

At the core of pornography is the belief that women must be mastered by men and that women desire mastery. The pornographer is obsessed with the idea of female transgression that must be brought under control, so he fashions woman's body as a form of possession. In this fashioning, the female body must be amenable to his desires. The sex scenes of Momaday's novels describe each of the women's bodies by the same word: "supple." The application of this word to the bodies of Angela, Millie, Pony, Porcingula, Alais, and Grey cannot be accidental; all of these women indicate their willingness to be bent to the desires of men. Only Lola is not described as "supple," but she demonstrates her suppleness in the bizarre cartwheel scene.

To the pornographer, woman's sexuality is dangerous, so he objectifies her body in order that he not be overwhelmed by it. He must control his desire, because his coldness = control = power, by allowing him to punish or reward the female body. Presumably, the "infinite mercy" that Billy displays towards Grey could become "infinitely unmerciful" were she to displease him. When Angela rejects Father Olguin through the control of her laughter, it is a transgressive act; when men exert control of their emotions in sex, it is a fitting revenge against disorderly women. Such a sense of "detachment at the core of experience" is a result of the opposition of nature and culture, and pornography is culture's revenge against nature (Griffin 66).

At the heart of the devaluation of women and the view of woman as transgressor is the tendency of phallocentrism to view difference as inherently dichotomous. In *The Daughter's Seduction*, Jane Gallop asks if it is possible to consider difference without constituting an opposition. In the binary schemata underlying patriarchy, the answer is no, or at least that we have not yet found such a reality. But if we attempt, as Cixous, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and other feminist theorists suggest, an exploration of difference that proceeds from non-dualistic multiplicity of thought, then we have the opportunity to create a world view that emphasizes the integrity of difference. Questions of

opposition between culture and nature, activity and passivity, logos and pathos, male and female, will become superfluous as such oppositions will be viewed as complementary and lacking gender specificity.

When Grey takes Set to Lukachukai, she describes it as *hózhón'i*, a place of great beauty (269). In the Navajo sense of the word, beauty represents goodness, happiness, health, harmony. "The Navajo does not look for beauty; he generates it within himself and projects it onto the universe" (Witherspoon 98). So, we should note, does she. This search for harmony and balance underscores traditional Native American ontology and inscribes its literature.

Abel and Set are both suffering dis-ease as a result of the disharmony and im-balance of their lives. The cure is a return to tradition through the healing powers of myth, story, and song, rooted in a particular landscape, so the healing agents are to be found only in a return to ancestral land and voices. Rain, the metaphor of healing in the Night Chant (as reproduced in *House Made of Dawn* 146-47), is both male and female. "House made of male rain / House made of dark mist / House made of female rain." To achieve balance, nature requires both male and female. They are complements; one is not more essential than the other. The goal is to surround oneself in beauty so that "In beauty it is finished."

In *House Made of Dawn* and *The Ancient Child*, Momaday tells deeply moving stories of Abel and Set's journeys to beauty. Both men are rendered voiceless by their lack of identity in a community, so the plea of the Night Chant to "restore my voice to me" would be poignant except that the restoration of their voices comes at the expense of female voices. Abel and Set both achieve a reconciliation with their individual and tribal identities, so the novels purport to be an affirmation in language of the human and tribal spirit.

It is disturbing, however, that their reconciliation occurs in spite of mostly negative forces given female form, as if to suggest that the feminine must be denied or overcome in order for a male to achieve his healing. The characterization of contemporary women in Momaday's novels demonstrates a lack of harmony and balance, an underlying misogyny. Women are generally negative, manipulative, duplicitous, possessive, perverse, and transgressive; therefore, they must be objectified and commodified. Even more disturbingly, women readers are invited to participate in this objectification and commodification through Fetterley's process of immasculation. In his representation of female characters, Momaday subverts sacred myths, stories, and songs to the profane purpose of devaluing women. As a result, the sense of harmony and balance and *hózhón'i* achieved by the male protagonists is hollow and meaningless unless the feminine is also valorized.

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## ***Navajo Poetry in a Changing World: What the Diné Can Teach Us***

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Paul Zolbrod

"Remember, the most valuable thing you have is your tradition." —Ernest Bicenti, Navajo Blessingway singer, on the occasion of a kinaaldá (girl's puberty ceremony), Crown Point NM, 16 June 1994.

### I

Over the short run the challenge to the so-called literary canon has worked for the better. It has expanded our collective taste and broadened our cultural outlook. It has increased sensitivity and boosted equality, say nothing of opening our eyes to differing world views and our ears to other voices. Having begun my professional career well over thirty years ago with an outsider's interest in preliterate Native American poetry, I now welcome what has become an insider's multicultural perspective on American literary culture. Eurocentrism does not offend me as much as it bothers some of my friends and colleagues—after all, most cultures define themselves centripetally—but I certainly agree that we do well to overcome its accumulated limitations. Now that new modes of inquiry have helped us to transcend ignorant old prejudices, it's good to see textbooks like *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, with its panoply of titles by Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and African-Americans, to say nothing of its expanded recognition of women authors. On the face of it canon revision is a good thing.

Long term, however, we stand to lose more than we gain if we are not careful. Frankly, I am discomfited to see honest canon revision confused with canon rejection. I even suspect that young readers sometimes use the standard slogans against sexism and Eurocentricism as an excuse for avoiding the hard work of mastering those so-called

oppressive old texts. Although I have devoted my scholarly life to recovering the lost tradition of preliterate Native American poetry, I do not wish for the demise of books that predicate our European heritage. At the very least, we must continue to read them to take accurate measure of Western wrongheadedness. Moreover, not everything from the West is so terribly wrongheaded, and it behooves us all to preserve what's right. Finally, no culture should be completely shorn of its collective memory, right or wrong.

As I discovered one great corpus of material after another while investigating preliterate Native American poetry, I felt cheated because my prior literary education came exclusively from Anglo-European sources. Yet that long record of oversight should not be invoked to negate an entire heritage. The grounding I received in the Bible, the Greeks and Romans, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the periods that followed foregrounded my identity the way that Navajos to this day draw theirs from songs and prayers and stories intrinsic to their own tribal past. For whatever prejudice or authoritarian ill will they may instill, the likes of Virgil and Dante and Dostoyevsky and Keats speak wisely and tenderly, too, to those who have learned to recognize wisdom and tenderness in the human voice. Regardless of how sexist or racist they may inadvertently have been, essayists like Kant and Montaigne instilled in me the vision to see merit in traditions strikingly different from theirs as well as my own and to entertain new modes of thought. Their being dead white males does not preclude that.

From the Native Americans whose poetic works I subsequently came to appreciate, I have learned that the best way for a society to secure a future is to preserve its past. I found the Navajo students I have taught at Navajo Community College eager to study standard Anglo-American stories, poems, and essays, but quick to relate them to their own culture. They want to qualify for jobs in the white economy but they are confident that they can remain Navajo, too. Tribes like the Navajo or the Pueblos of Jemez and Santo Domingo who cling to their identity while they learn of ours flourish best today. The modern Anglo world somehow becomes less threatening to those who know securely who they are.

Navajos who have shared material with me over the past twenty years have shown me firsthand how traditional poetry articulates a cohesive tribal identity for them and how that identity fits their own lives. As I listened to men explain why an *Enemyway* ceremony could help them make the transition from military service back to reservation life following World War II or Korea, or in observing how expectant mothers might invoke Asdzáá nádleehé the Changing Woman—the Navajo earth goddess, as she might be called—I gained new insight into

the function of traditional poetry, which we take for granted or ignore altogether in our own culture. As the most verbal of the arts, it more than any other specifies where in the community an individual belongs who might otherwise flounder alone or at cross purposes with others. Or it may verbalize a rationale for remaining on the outside.

No matter what shortcomings it may promulgate, I began to discover, our traditional literature does likewise. The aesthetics of delivery aside, the image of Odysseus weeping for his wife and son on the shore of Kalypso's island (V, 150-60; Lattimore 92) might easily secure an added dimension of understanding to some military person serving far from home and family. Dido's relentless pursuit of Aeneas after he leaves her to serve a higher purpose remains a lasting paradigm of the power latent in a woman's love. Although she has seldom been noticed, Hrothgar's wife Wealhtheow in *Beowulf* speaks powerfully for motherhood in a poem that otherwise celebrates little more than war. In many traditions, love poetry of all kinds has served to guide readers or listeners through a thicket of powerful feelings. The bildungsroman—a story that reveals the inner life of a character coming of age—can transmit special significance to a sensitive young reader in a way that transcends politics or topical concerns. Once the women's movement began stimulating an awareness that females were virtually excluded from Western literary history, writers like Jane Austin, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf became touchstones for expressing previously unacknowledged female concerns.

We have lost the habit of doing so, but earlier it was common to locate particular human circumstances by referring to literary landmarks: hence we single out the Oedipus complex, the Byronic hero, a tragic flaw. Thanks to the title of a book by Virginia Woolf which has entered the revised canon, "A room of one's own" is a phrase now summoned to express total female autonomy. A common poetic heritage becomes a way of participating and making connections. Readers not only enrich their understanding of how their lives are linked to the lives of others, they also strengthen their awareness of how they do or do not fit in the social continuum.

That's what traditional Navajos reminded me while sharing and discussing their preliterate poetry on the Reservation; it's what the adults I teach at Navajo Community College reaffirm as they struggle to equate tribal experiences with what they read about the outside world. One woman recently provided me with an especially dramatic illustration. When her husband, a white man, had originally asked her to marry him, she hesitated with a Navajos's characteristic reluctance to leave home and community. She feared losing that strong identity which grows of a piece out of family, clan, landscape, and a unique way of seeing all of that together. "I thought of Shakespeare's Richard

II," she said, "where John of Gaunt cries that he will never see England again." Then she went on to quote lines: "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings," she repeated; "This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land" (*Richard II* II.1.49-57). At first it seemed peculiar that a Navajo woman would use lines from Shakespeare to reaffirm her ties to a place so geographically and culturally remote from Elizabethan England. But effective poetry can indeed speak to all circumstances and transcend boundaries. Her Navajo way of relating to Richard reminded me of that at a time when class, ethnicity, and gender are alleged to be establishing barriers, not overcoming them.

Few things are more socially powerful than people willing to learn new ways while remaining alert to old ones. As I continued to gather material and teach on the Reservation summer after summer, I found myself wishing I could bottle that willingness and take it back to my world, where we are squabbling over the merits of Western culture or over what texts should or should not be taught (as if poetry was created only for a curriculum or to serve some transient political aim) and where many young people either no longer know standard Western literature or begin to think that it is somehow deleterious and must give way entirely to non-Western material.

In fact, while working on project at Navajo Community College in Shiprock, I found two articles in *Diné Be'iina'*, a tribal journal, that might help us gain new respect for our so-called oppressive canon while learning about the Navajo canon, as it too might be called. The first was Herbert Benally's essay, "Diné bo'óhoo'aah bindii'a': Navajo Philosophy of Learning." There he maintains that "the foundations of Navajo educational philosophy" which "are expressed in the Navajo creation story" (133) can and should be integrated with Western knowledge (140-43). I cannot fairly summarize his argument without going into more detail than I have space for; let me just say that at its center the Navajo creation story concerns the harmony which must prevail between the sexes throughout a cosmos governed by four cardinal directions, closely connected with the four seasons as they manifest the daily, monthly, and annual solar cycles. That fundamental vision can be used effectively, Benally says, in approaching all knowledge. And in a second essay, "A Navajo Curriculum in the National Context," James McNeley further argues that "traditional Navajo thought provides the philosophical basis for a potentially effective way of addressing many concerns expressed nationally about American college education" (135). To encapsulate McNeley's argument all too briefly, too, he responds to urgent calls for reform in American education by asserting that throughout the so-called dominant culture the categories of knowledge expressed in traditional Navajo

thought can be applied at all levels and in all disciplines. Classical Navajo thought can teach us a great deal about ourselves.

Here, then, we have two items issuing from a non-European culture boldly suggesting that instead of displacing the Western literary canon, Navajo poetic tradition might have something to add to it. In my estimation, part of the reason we are in a bad way educationally right now is that, while tribes like the Navajos strive to revive their traditions, we reject ours. We do so not just because so much emphasis in video culture falls on the present, replacing the desire for a disciplined understanding of the past with a voracious appetite for entertainment, but also because multiculturalism and feminism, for all their virtues, can lead to dismissive overgeneralizations that foster polarization. After years and even centuries of dominance, the words that represent the foundations of Western "educational philosophy" are being challenged because they have fostered sexism and because their "Eurocentrism" gives an incomplete if not downright exclusionist view of the worldwide human community.

There is truth in that, of course. Racism and sexism are real, and Western cultures have treated non-Western peoples badly to say the least, as we now acknowledge: hindsight has a way of making us feel wise in repudiating past errors. But we should begin at that point instead of stopping there. Even after spending fifteen years assembling an English edition of the Navajo creation story and insisting that we include narratives from all tribes in an enlarged literary heritage, I persist in asking Anglo students to read Homer and Shakespeare, too. For their writings do for us what Navajo medicine men and storytellers and weavers do in the Navajo world: they keep the past alive not as something static but as something to grow with and perfect; not as an indelible directory of class and ethnic and gender relationships but as an elastic tradition wherein new wisdom grows out of old. However, in the current heated debate over what should be taught or what people ought to read, the assumption is that Homer and Shakespeare and Milton are rigid in their prescriptions of power and domination. It has become a little too easy for educators to question the worth of our classics because they exclude or subordinate once and for all; because they encourage conquest or domination or fixed social schemes; or simply because they were written by white males, as if great art reiterates political or social expedients that simply.

One of the strongest reasons given for rejecting our canon of great works just now is the gender one. It seems that the more we look, the more sexism we find in the texts that define who we are. To Navajos, in fact, the gender issue is very familiar and may even bring a chuckle. Basic to their creation story is how Áłtsé hastiin the First Man and Áłtsé asdzáá the First Woman quarrel and with what results. Early in

their existence together, she makes procreation gratifying to assure that males and females will bond securely. Later on, however, her ploy backfires when she suspects that her mate shares the spoils of the hunt with her only for sex. They quarrel bitterly over that, then separate, taking the other men and women respectively with them. Drastic results follow: both groups masturbate furtively. The men demean themselves longingly with mud and the innards of slain animals, while the women use cactus and stones to engender voracious monsters.

That goes on until the people realize their folly and are reconciled (see Zolbrod, *Diné bahane*' 51-70). Navajo tradition thus stipulates that it does no good for the sexes to become embroiled in conjugal warfare. Procreation will not take place while men and women live apart, let alone cultural survival. But the consequences of that childish argument are not fully overcome until Asdzáá nadleehé the Changing Woman agrees to live in harmony with Jóhónaa'ée the Sun (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane*' 272-75). Before that happens, though, the monsters conceived during the separation must be subdued by a complex sequence of events ending in warfare. Thus a basic lesson the Navajos have to teach is that male and female, envisioned both as natural forces and as individual representatives of the two sexes, should not move in opposition to one another, different though they may be. As Herbert Benally says, duality is part of the harmonious scheme that emerges from Navajo storytelling and ceremonial tradition; and that very same "duality is understood to mean male and female complementing each other to obtain completion" (136), not arguing over who does most work, who should be in charge, or who exploits whom sexually. Opposites, in other words, do not struggle to subdue each other. Doing so produces a chaotic universe wherein people cannot survive. If we wish to consider that approach dialectical, we must recognize it as a dialectic wherein synthesis does not result from a clash between thesis and antithesis but rather as an accommodation ending in harmony.

## II

I find the passages of reconciliation between the sexes in the Navajo creation story especially relevant. Following Herbert Benally's suggestion, I recommend using them experimentally to reconsider traditional Western texts as a necessary step in revitalizing our past instead of abandoning it. They offer some fresh interpretations of our own allegedly oppressive heritage; thus they can revive trust in the use of old texts as touchstones of gender equity and other such objectives we now deem crucial. Consider, for example, how our perceptions might change when Navajo storytelling provides a context for Homer's *Odyssey*, book XXIII, where another reunion between male and female ends a long period of the kind of anguish that First Man and First

Woman experience while they live apart.

Odysseus has been away for twenty years—fighting a war, taking up with other women, sometimes wandering aimlessly, moving constantly the way Jóhónaa'éei the Sun does while Asdzáá nádleehé the Changing Woman stays put—leaving his wife Penelope to face her enemies alone and his son Telemachus to struggle without a father's guidance. Not that he does not long for his wife and homeland; but his is essentially a man's absence that brings grief to a woman, made necessary by politics and a male's acquiescence to rules that females do not help formulate. Thus, the standard way of reading Homer these days is patriarchally. Women are helpless and powerless—nothing more than spoils. Men go where they please and run things, largely by raping and enslaving and waging battle.

I agree that male dominance has figured prominently in our classic texts, resulting in injustice to women. Happily, though, we have progressed beyond earlier, offensive sexist presumptions. But just as seeing Native Americans *only* as victims is yet another form of racism, so seeing women in earlier Western tradition solely as haplessly passive creatures is another kind of sexism. For that reason we must be careful with the generalizations we make. If we are to revise our vision of the past, we must do so circumspectly, and we can acquire such circumspection by following Herbert Benally's and James McNeley's suggestion that Navajo knowledge can be integrated with Western knowledge instead of displacing it. Let me now illustrate.

The classic female characters in the Navajo creation story display attributes of strength and independence seemingly absent in their Western counterparts. From that narrative I get the impression that yes, men and women struggle, but females have equal power to start with. They are not dealt, so to speak, the weak hand that women in Western tradition receive. No Navajo passage that I know of makes an assertion like Paul's, who says in The New Testament, Ephesians 5.15, "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord." Áłtsé asdzáá is not made from a man's rib the way Biblical Eve is; nor is she perforce the cause of the world's evil the way Eve and Pandora are in Old Testament or Greek tradition. She is created right along with Áłtsé hastiin out of an ear of yellow corn (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane'* 47-51). And nowhere is it implied that yellow corn is necessarily any better or any worse than the white corn out of which Áłtsé hastiin is made. If he is superior for his prowess as a hunter, hers is the superior initiative that creates a bond of sexual pleasure between women and men. When they quarrel both are equally wrong, and after they resume their conjugal relationship and go on to orchestrate the creation of a world suitable to humans, each contributes equally but independently.

Other female characters in the narrative exhibit the same mature

independence. Na'ashjé'ii asdzáá the Spider Woman works serenely alone in her underground domain, as secure in the knowledge she possesses as she is in the strength of her weaving. There is no hint that she relies on any male for her great power. Yoolgai asdzáá the White Shell Woman goes off by herself into the San Juan mountains after the monsters have been destroyed and builds her own dwelling. Rebelling against his brutality towards them, the wives of the clan leader Godtsoh take it upon themselves to brandish knives in retribution against all men during a ceremonial dance. They then stalk off to the north on their own, where from then on they periodically repeat their unending anger in the form of violent summer thunderstorms or winter blizzards (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane'* 301-04). Typical of the women in classical Navajo stories, they do what they choose when they choose, controlling their own destiny when abused by men.

Asdzáá nádleehé the Changing Woman in particular is no one's subordinate. "I alone decide what I shall do," she proclaims at one point in the narrative; "or else I shall do nothing" (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane'* 273). Called by Gladys Reichard in her classical study of Navajo religion "the most fascinating of many appealing characters conjured up by the Navajo imagination," she "is the mystery of reproduction, of life springing from nothing, of the last hope of the world, a riddle perpetually solved and perennially springing up anew" (406-07). Her creative strength stands in sharp contrast to the warrior's destructive might of Jóhónaa'éeí the Sun, whose lightning bolts and giant flint knives are used to kill. She instead is aligned with "the seasonal cycle of earth and its power to rejuvenate life each spring"; hers is regenerative power "to reach old age and then return to youth" (Witherspoon, "A New Look" 72).

As much as Asdzáá nádleehé differs from the male figures in traditional Navajo narratives, she matches them in what she achieves. Together with her sister Yoolgai asdzáá she bears and rears the warrior twins wisely with no male authority directing her. Later she fashions the first humans out of her own flesh independently of any male. And she confronts and outsmarts Yé'iitsoh the Big Giant completely on her own. She also confers the same independence on her son Naayée'neez-ghání. After he defeats the harmful monsters, she cautions him not to destroy Old Age, Cold, Poverty, and Hunger; yet she does not meddle when he tries anyway, leaving him to learn for himself why she gave that advice. Most impressive of all, however, is her refusal to live with Jóhónaa'éeí until he meets her demands for a home in the west decorated to her specifications with her choice of animals for pets. I consider that passage the high point in the whole story, in fact, because she lays out clearly the ideal of *k'é* or even-handed solidarity that must bind men and women if *hózhó* or harmony is to prevail on earth. The

entire cycle, it seems to me, revolves around that essential point, which resides at the very center of Herbert Benally's argument. That episode deserves the attention of readers from all cultures because it expresses an ideal male-female relationship.

Once recognized, it becomes a standard applicable to Homer's Penelope, thereby helping to disclose some of the same strength in her displayed by Asdzáá nádleehé. Employing Changing Woman's resourcefulness, she unravels by night what she weaves by day, stalling the persistent suitors the way Asdzáá nádleehé forestalls Yé'itsoh when she tricks him into thinking that tracks he sees were made by her and not really the footprints of the young twins for whom he hungers (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane* '192-93). In this regard, in fact, she functions as an analog to Na'ashjé'ii asdzáá the Spider Woman, as symbolic of the female's capacity to spin fabrics and weave knowledge as Changing Woman is of the capacity to create life. Furthermore, Penelope takes on Changing Woman's assertiveness when she challenges Odysseus to prove that he really is her husband. If readers of this episode see her only in the conventional way they might very well miss some powerful implications. Perceive in her traits evident in Navajo female characters, however, and she becomes a worthy counterpart to them. She no more falls into Odysseus's arms when he first presents himself to her than Asdzáá nádleehé does when Jóhónaa'éeí initially asks her to live with him. Penelope will risk Odysseus' initial anger to test him first, in effect demanding the same balanced treatment Changing Woman requires of the Sun.

Even the language in this passage (XXIII, 152-230; Lattimore 339-341) reinforces such a sense of equity and balance. The exchange between Penelope and Odysseus consists of two statements of equal length by each. According to Lattimore's translation, which seems representative, Odysseus first grumbles in a seven line passage that she has failed to recognize him. "You are so strange," he begins, declaring that no other woman would so stubbornly resist a husband's wish after returning from a long absence. She then opens her reply with a mimicking refrain. "You are so strange," she repeats, and goes on to reiterate her instructions in a corresponding seven-line passage that he is to be bedded separately outside her chamber. He then objects in a passage of twenty-two lines that no bed truly his own can be moved; he made it for the two of them out of a rooted olive tree before going off to war. Thereupon she answers him in a passage of matching length by revealing that she merely wanted to be sure he was indeed Odysseus and not a stranger.

This combination of balanced dialogue and repeated phrasing creates a stylized, ceremonial effect suggestive of dance or ritual. We know from passages of Navajo chantway poetry that language can

virtually be choreographed, given its heavy use of incremental repetition and its relationship with the theatrics of ceremony (See, for example, Matthews; the various episodes in Wyman, *Blessingway*; or Luckert, which contains illustrations and Navajo text). Because today we consider books as virtually the only source of poetry, we lose sight of its ties with song and movement, to say nothing of the graphic and plastic arts. But those arts are closely allied; realizing that, one can easily imagine highly stylized movement occurring in conjunction with this passage.

From the close examination of pottery illustrations, in fact, it can be inferred that encounters between men and women were choreographed in ancient Greece as well as being narrated through orally transmitted poetry. In an interesting study of extant Greek ceramics, Jean-Louis Durand observes that the imagery in "Attic vase painting" commonly depicts "the bodies of men and women, represented in action, situated in relation to one another, and manipulating objects that place them in relation to one another" (142). Given the way he examines them, the illustrations he cites indicate choreographed "ritual which is itself sequentially organized" (143). Such dance or dance-like movement could easily have been closely connected with familiar stories like *The Odyssey* (142), and the photographic plates of Attic vase paintings Durand provides make it easy to imagine a pattern of movement and counter-movement between male and female suggesting equilibrium between the two rather than dominance of one over the other. With its dance-like balance and repetition, the Homeric reunion episode may very well contain features that predate writing. Not only in content, then, but in form, that passage resonates with qualities that go deeper than Western literature permits because there writing somehow overshadows the way poetry worked together with other arts like dance and song before it was ever written down.

I believe that any ethnographic study of Homeric Greece would reveal that it has more in common with Native American tribal cultures than with our own print-oriented, electronic ones. The value of Navajo material, I think, is that it can help us to look at our ancient classics more accurately than we currently allow ourselves to see them. That resemblance arises from common origins in conditions that predate alphabetical systems. It also offers a new way of digging into the loam of our preliterate past, out of which our most essential humanity grew without prompting from print, which was initially nothing but a way of storing what was already being said but which gradually became a means of altering preliterate records. Maybe we have allowed print to stand in the way of our identifying ourselves as we most essentially are because it conveys an authoritative permanence the voice does not as readily imply. That could also help explain why we never recognized

that Native peoples like the Navajos had great stories to transmit from one generation to the next and that those stories were the basis for religion and for other arts.

There very well may be something deeper to us as men and women struggling to get on together than we have let our classic Western texts ordinarily reveal—something more basic to Eve in her strength than our customary way of reading Scripture allows, or something more powerful about Penelope that goes unrecognized in books after centuries of entrenched assumptions about reading. Because Navajos still *tell* their stories and live with them in their ceremonies, their narratives display that fundamental human depth in revealing new ways, even in what has recently been written down.<sup>1</sup> And if we can spot in Navajo tradition analogs to surviving ancient Greek texts, perhaps they can help us see qualities that print culture has eclipsed.

### III

The new perspective on Homer's Penelope is just a single example of how traditional Navajo stories can reinvest our own classics with new awareness. There are others. In Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*, the Furies gain added significance when compared with Asdzáá nádleehé. Taken at printed face value, that play depicts agents of motherhood angrily demanding retribution for the crime of matricide during a subsequent hearing before the gods. "You must give back for her blood from the living man," they cry to the God Apollo, who had sanctioned the murder of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes (264; Lattimore, *Aeschylus* 144). Then turning to him, they proclaim, "Neither Apollo nor Athene's strength must win you free" (299-300; Lattimore 145). Should "his crime be sustained," they complain, "every man will find a way to act at his own caprice; over and over again in time to come, parents shall await the deathstroke at their children's hands" (493-98; Lattimore 152). Outright figureheads of female vengeance to someone not familiar with women in traditional Navajo thought, to someone who is they can represent the earth moving in dynamic cycles through months and seasons and years, bringing about birth in the way seeds germinate underground, marking death with oncoming winter, and ensuring rebirth each spring. More than human motherhood, they stand as the earthly power of procreation, demanding equal redress in the perpetual conflict between night and day or frost and thaw, or insisting so to speak that equinox and solstice alternate complementarily.

Awareness of Asdzáá nádleehé and all that she represents allows a deeper understanding of the *Eumenides*. She projects nothing less than the earth itself in its ongoing movement through the seasons, dormant in winter, stirring with new fertility in the spring, gestating

and giving birth during the summer, ripening with age and preparing to repeat the cycle as autumn harvest gives way to another winter. What's more, she dances in harmony with the sun's movement throughout the year "to create clouds," to "obtain jewels and clothing," to "bring forth all varieties of plants," and "to summon corn and animals" (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane'* 312). And once she converts the earth into a living habitat for them, she creates humans out of tissue she plies from under each arm and below each breast. Female in shape and temperament, she is nonetheless more than a biological woman. She is earth itself in its capacity to recreate and maintain ongoing vegetative life. As dynamically organic as sunlight and moisture combining within a seed or as sperm and egg uniting to form an embryo, she is a latent force awaiting light and moisture to form life within and to nurture plant, animal, or humankind once they exist externally to her. To think of her in terms of human motherhood alone is to miss the deepest and at the same time the most expansive notion of what nature is and how life replicates itself.

The Furies can be put in a similar light, as I am convinced Aeschylus and his contemporaries realized. An awareness of the Navajo Changing Woman can help us regain that kind of recognition. Whatever her mortal crime, Clytemnestra bore and raised three children, and no one can take lightly her capacity for that. To blight childbirth with matricide is to deny equally nature's procreative force and a woman's maternal power. Such denial imposes as much discontinuity in the cycle of birth and rebirth as Áłtsé hastiin and Áłtsé asdzáá did when they separated. And I am tempted to add that it is the kind of denial seen say in the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian targets, in the naggingly persistent notion of nuclear warfare, or even in the use of rape as a weapon in the kind of conflict rationalized by racial hatred or ethnic cleansing.

That kind of denial represents the struggle of opposing forces to a point of destruction. In their unsated anger, then, the Furies represent the wounded earth itself in the most deeply and essentially female way struggling for full equity against forces threatening to life. Sensing their ultimate might in a paradigm for ongoing survival, they cry out, "We are strong and skilled; we have authority; we hold memory of evil; we are stern nor can men's pleadings bend us" (381-384; Lattimore, *Aeschylus* 148). To bend their will you might just as well command seeds to germinate and grow while the ground is frozen.

The insult to them is an insult upon the very earth that bears its harvest. "If I do not win the case," they cry in unison, "I shall come back to this land and it will feel my weight" (719-20; Lattimore 160) with consequences ruinous to all life: "The dry dust that drinks the black blood of citizens through passion for revenge and bloodshed"

would "be given our state to prey upon" (978-983). They will, so to speak, cancel out Changing Woman's ongoing dance of life in harmony with the male sun. Recognizing what their anger implies, the goddess Athene sees that unless they are pacified, endless winds would "wreck . . . the trees" (938); a "blaze of heat" would "blind the blossoms of grown plants" (940); a "barren deadly sickness" would "creep and kill" (942) in very much the way that the Navajo monsters born of disunion between male and female devour all life until they are subdued. Without the justice the Furies demand in the form of an end to matricide once and for all, not just human life but all life would end.

Thus these vengeful creatures become more than mere angry women. In light of what Herbert Benally says, in fact, and in the context of the Navajo Creation story, they are an essential half of a primal unity—necessary to the *hózhó* that the universe requires *nihookáá' dine'é* or humans to maintain. They are animal and vegetable life together, physically human and essentially terrestrial, mutually responsible with men for harmony between the sexes and with the separate life-giving elements for combining to create new life. If they remain unplaced, there can be no ongoing life: no earth and no cosmos. Like nature itself when set off balance, as Herbert Benally says, they "will retaliate . . . by inflicting sickness and misfortune" if they are not given "the appropriate offerings" (146), which in this case is the place inside the earth where it stirs most deeply. There, "free of all grief and pain" (893), they can "cast a benign spell on the land"—a spell that "will come out of the ground, out of the sea's water, and from the high air make to waft of gentle gales wash over the country in full sunlight, and the seed and stream of the soil's yield . . . and make the human seed be kept alive" (902-09).

Instead of focusing primarily on the power men have over women in the Hellenic world, then, which admittedly is one theme to be found there, we might notice how ultimately powerless men and women alike can become if there is unallayed contention between them. After all, they alike are mere custodians of a world made for them rather than by them and which can subdue them both. Human life hangs in precarious balance against the opposing forces of nature, manifested by heat and cold, wind and fire, or flood and pestilence, often represented as deities and spirits or the agents thereof. To mortal mismanagement instigated by folly or pride the gods in turn can respond by creating angry disorder. In Homer's *Iliad*, for example, the excessively boastful Achilles angers the river Skamandros first by killing a man along its bank then by shouting insults when it objects to having its waters defiled with human blood (XXI, 230-323; Lattimore 423-26). The result is a rampaging flood similar to the floods that occur in the Bible or in the lower worlds of the Navajo creation story because the people

have not yet learned proper respect for the gods.

The Achilles-Skamandros episode bears some relevant implications concerning war as one kind of human excess that threatens natural order as well as the social fabric. If you must kill your enemies, the river god complains to Achilles, "drive them at least out of me to the plain, and there work your havoc. For the loveliness of my waters is crammed with corpses, I cannot find a channel to cast my waters into the bright sea since I am congested with the dead men you kill so brutally" (XXI, 214-220; Lattimore 424). Wanting only to slay Trojans, however, Achilles leaps defiantly into the water, whereupon Skamandros pummels him with the bodies of slain victims.

Then, when the defiant Greek warrior tries to escape, Skamandros overflows his banks to chase him, "streaming after him" unrelentingly, "turbulent, boiling to a crest, muttering in foam and blood and dead bodies" (XXI, 325-26; Lattimore 427), until Achilles begs for help from those gods who favor him. Among those is Hera wife of Zeus, who summons her son Hephaistos the fire god to resist the enraged river. "Set fire the trees," she instructs him, "and throw fire on the river himself." And from "out of the sea" she summons "a troublesome storm of the west wind and the whitening south wind" (XXI 340, 336-37; Lattimore 427). Achilles' mortal defiance is thus protracted by nature and the gods beyond his control. On water and land alike wind and flame contend more fiercely than Greeks and Trojans until the entire landscape falls asunder in battle where mortal warfare has contaminated stream and field. Those who object to war today because of its impact upon the earth's ecosystems should read this passage carefully, especially in light of traditional Navajo poetry and what it implies about humankind's unique responsibility for stewardship in a fragile ecological system.

When the ruthless Achilles refuses to permit Skamandros to flow clearly and smoothly out to sea, the earth literally reverts to chaos. To frame the episode in Navajo terms, *hózhó* or harmony gives way to its opposite, *hóchxo'* or ugly, evil disorder (see Witherspoon, "A New Look" 34, 154). While Navajo supernaturals do not contend against each other the way Greek gods do, they can invoke destructive chaos against lesser earthly creatures for failing to maintain *hózhó*. "Everywhere in this world you bring disorder," Tééhooltsódi the Watergrabber declares to the men and women of the Nílch'i dine'é or air spirit people, who have grown unruly in committing wanton adultery with each other to the consternation of the more powerful gods (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane'* 38-39). He then joins forces with the three other presiding deities in summoning a mighty flood to purge it of such ugly behavior. The result is disarray analogous to the disorder Achilles invokes in his proud defiance of Skamandros or to the sexual disarray

that First Man and First Woman bring upon themselves and one another during the aftermath of their defiant sexual pride. In Navajo storytelling and classical Greek narrative poetry alike, order and disorder weigh heavily against each other in perpetually uneasy counterpoise. The environment is indeed fragile, which we now realize, and it is especially susceptible to the rampages of modern warfare, as the recent events in the former Yugoslavia have demonstrated.

The duality that Herbert Benally speaks of, which requires careful balance between opposites, as opposed to hegemony of one over the other, belongs to an inclusive system of contraries characteristic of Native American thought. Hence antithesis abounds in the poetry that has survived throughout tribal America: earth versus sky, male versus female, hunter as opposed to planter, day against night—all functioning dialectically like characters in a drama, as indeed they sometimes are in rituals such as the Pawnee *Hako* (see Murie), or the San Juan *Rain God Drama* (see Laski), where victory comes not in the form of death over life or victors over vanquished, but in the way new life complements old or clouds are juxtaposed against the parching sky. Opposites and polarities remain evenly matched against each other in Native American design, as we see in the sharp contrast between colors in weavings and ceramics that mutually enhance instead of subduing each other or cancelling one another out, and as we see in ceremonial practice and in the details of major narratives. "You are of the sky, while I am of the earth," Asdzáá nádleehé proclaims to Jóhónaa'éei the Sun when she stipulates what he must provide if she is to agree to live with him. "You are constant in your brightness, but I must change with the seasons." We may be very different, she admits, "but we are of equal worth" (Zolbrod, *Diné bahane'* 275-76). Sometimes that balanced antithesis is as obvious as that. Sometimes it is as blatant as the quarrel between the Navajo First Man and First Woman and its outcome. Sometimes it is as subtle and pervasive as the traditional pecked cross of Mesoamerican astronomers, with its clearly detailed scheme of a center and four offsetting cardinal directions represented by two equidistant perpendicular lines (Aveni 198; Zolbrod, "When Artifacts" 35-38). But it recurs from tribe to tribe and demands recognition, especially in the ways in which opposites are either reconciled or delicately suspended against one another.

There is wide variety indeed among the tribes, making generalization hazardous; but the central place of such duality in Native American thought is one that can be safely asserted. Perhaps that reality comes from a primeval view of the natural world. Perhaps it is a manifestation of something humanly universal that survives best in cultures that until recently were termed primitive out of a curious naiveté occurring

in an industrial, electronic culture where the heavens are no longer in direct view and an ongoing relationship with crops and animals has become likewise indirect. Perhaps it springs from what Brotherston calls "the antithesis between hunter and planter" (187) that can be traced far back in pre-Columbian America and that survives "in the two symbols given to Black Elk in his vision: the arrow, and the bowl of still, sky-reflecting water"; in "the Reed-arrow (XIII) and the Water (IX) of the Mesoamerican Twenty Signs"; in "the rituals of antagonism between such Venus-figures as Quetzalcoatl hurling his arrows at the sources of water from the east, and the thunder-rain gods, static at heaven's heart, like Tlaloc; and in the *Popol Vuh*'s contrapuntal account of the magic twins' discovery that their true calling was to be blowpipe hunters and not field workers" (187). Clearly it also survives in the Navajo creation story, where the essential difference between male and female is exceptionally well articulated and might even guide us meaningfully through a revisitation of our own "Great Books."

Whatever its origins, that reiteration of antithesis in material and nonmaterial tribal culture provides a fresh new context for our traditional Western thought and gives old works a new relevance at a time of shifting values. Some people seem to think that issues like race or gender can best be resolved by abandoning the so-called Great Books that promoted them in the first place. But maybe the problems stem from an old way of looking at those texts, not from the way they were originally conceived. Or maybe non-Western texts can lead us to a new way of conceptualizing them. In any case, and regardless of their flaws, too much of who we essentially are is invested in our classics for us to discard them. If the great slogans of our day like peace and justice and a new order are to continue to be woven into the social fabric, we still need those tried old Great Books. Yes, we must listen to newer voices like those of Zora Neale Hurston or Leslie Silko—not because they draw us away from the past, but because they return us to it with greater sophistication and added vision.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Thanks to some very good work by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, we know that those books which bear the name of Homer and the titles *Odyssey* and *Iliad* really conceal a living oral tradition.

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## ***Ecological Restoration as Post-Colonial Ritual of Community in Three Native American Novels***

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Christopher Norden

Modern society—and modern environmentalism in particular—has tended to be pessimistic about the prospects for a healthy relationship between nature and culture; being skeptical of the value of the ritual experience, we have failed to develop the rituals of communion and accommodation on which this relationship necessarily depends. Ironically, we have projected our own failure to achieve a pastoral balance between culture and nature onto indigenous Native American cultures, so much as to say that if even *they* have been unable to maintain such a balance—as witness the preponderance of Native American narrative focused on the experience of alienation—then likely such a balance should not be considered a realistic object either of literary representation or of public policy.

The theme of alienation is a common one in literature—the alienation of the individual from society and of human beings from nature is arguably a precondition of the novel if not of narrative generally. But contemporary Native American writers like James Welch (*Winter in the Blood*, *The Death of Jim Loney*), Leslie Silko (*Ceremony*, *Almanac of the Dead*), and David Seals (*Powwow Highway*, *Sweet Medicine*), who deal extensively with the phenomenon of alienation both in its historically local and its universal senses, can be read as conveying a more hopeful outlook regarding the possibility of a reconciliation between human cultures and nature—a fact that is especially remarkable considering the oppression indigenous cultures have experienced in recent centuries at the hands of colonial empires.

Contrary to the popular impression of contemporary Native writing as being conditioned by a sense of irrevocable tragic loss, there is much in today's Native writing that is optimistic regarding the possibility of restoring not just natural landscapes but also our places within those

landscapes. By such a way of thinking, Frank and Deborah Popper's notion of a Buffalo Commons—a pastoral reharmonization of nature and culture enacted by means of the restoration of large portions of the Great Plains (see Matthews)—is neither wildly visionary nor foolishly nostalgic. Rather, such restoration represents a return to a collective, ritual-based relationship between human beings and their natural environment, a relationship in which ritualized land stewardship simultaneously ensures survival for the community while providing an aesthetically enhanced experience of both community and natural environment for the individual.

A kind of written orality, or "neo-orality," typically occurs within those novels of contemporary Native experience whose dominant rhetoric, genealogically speaking, is directly related to the language of alienation invented by European and American modernists of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. By combining traditional and modern rhetorical forms, contemporary American Indian novelists such as Welch, Silko, and Seals set in motion a problem-solving dialogue that is at once intercultural and highly pragmatic, a dialogue having direct implications for ecological restoration, not just as a set of scientific technologies but also as a culturally-defining ritual for societies such as ours that are entering the "post-colonial" phase of their national history.

### **Modernism and the Loss of Community**

In a real sense one can argue that the American modernist tradition marks the low point in the ongoing pastoral project in American literature. The pastoral tradition—which in American letters includes writers like Thoreau, Emerson, Cooper, Twain, and Whitman—seeks to demonstrate a meaningful, even culturally defining, bond between man and nature, a harmony or symmetry between culture and nature. By contrast, modernist texts ranging from Melville's proto-modern *Moby-Dick* to Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* suggest that the vital link between nature and culture has been severed, *if it ever existed in the first place*, with nature desacralized and instrumentally defined relative to human needs, desires, and ambitions. The result of such a partitioning of nature and culture, as has been amply documented by Native and white writers alike, is a loss of meaning, a fracturing of community, and a sense of psychic and spiritual isolation on the part of the individual.

It is precisely the meaningful relationships between individual, community, and natural environment, characterized by stewardship and sustainable use on the part of human beings, that characterize traditional Native cultures both ideologically and spiritually and that are broken during the process of colonization. Indeed, the disruption of this

traditional relationship or balance may properly be spoken of as the primary *technology* by which colonialism operates. But as the American Modernist tradition amply attests, the culture of the colonizer falls victim to its own enabling technology, namely the analytic compartmentalization of experience, knowledge, and practice into distinct (often hermetically so) disciplines.

With the invention of separate disciplines and technologies specifically designed to interpret and manage the individual (religion, psychology, medicine), the community (politics, urban planning, sociology), and nature (zoology, botany, hydrology, geology), the notion of a single ethic capable of balancing the needs of individual, community, and natural world is largely abandoned as impracticable. Thus constituted, each distinct discipline tends to generate problem-solving strategies and technologies that advance the interests of its given constituency. Competition rather than cooperation then becomes axiomatic, given the underlying premise that the interests of, for example, the individual can only be advanced at the expense of the community and the environment.

The logical conclusion of disciplinary analytical thinking—a conclusion blatantly erroneous according to the traditional Native world view—is that modern social, political, and ecological thought can aspire to nothing more than rational compromise between principle and practicality. Systems-oriented disciplines such as limnology and field ecology mark a step in a more positive direction, seeking to balance the needs of different species within given systems, yet until quite recently human beings and their cultures were not figured as members of the natural systems or communities in question. This omission is part of a policy of expediency born of the belief that human "gains" must necessarily entail environmental "costs." Such a policy—seldom explicitly articulated by a society—posits a threshold beyond which the needs of the ecosystems must be sacrificed to a "higher order" human need, at which point ethical, spiritual, and philosophical considerations are jettisoned. When this utilitarian threshold is reached, the ecosystem and its members are reduced to the status of "resources" or tools to be freely used as part of an amoral or "value-neutral" technology.

The underlying belief that the interests of individual, community, and environment can never *really* be reconciled, but only negotiated and compromised in different ways, is at the root of our modern cornucopia of social pathologies, systems and ideologies that tend to be characterized by gross imbalances of power and by the forcible advancing of one set of interests at the expense of all others. The natural world, of course, is at a distinct disadvantage in such a negotiation of competing interests, having no voice, no legal standing, and thus no seat at the table.

Perhaps a generation weaned on Darwin, Nietzsche, and the American Dream sees this as only logical: if imbalance of power is the rule—the "law of the jungle"—then indeed it is better to eat than be eaten. By such reasoning, human interests "naturally" outweigh the interests of a natural world that then comes to be regarded as a set of exploitable "resources." This gets at the heart of colonial thinking, Conrad's "Heart of Darkness." By this thinking, both the land and its inhabitants, human and otherwise, are exploitable resources. A disturbing corollary is that genuine community—either with one's fellow human beings or with the natural world—is fundamentally impossible.

### **Man Alone: the Ritual Experience of Individualism in Native and Modern Traditions**

It is often easy to lose sight of how deeply conditioned we are to equating alienation and literature. Indeed, by some accounts, dissociation from family or community is the first rule of narrative, a precondition to any act of storytelling. To some degree this may be true, yet all too quickly does the literary expression of alienation in literature in the early Twentieth Century become an end in and of itself rather than a means of problem-solving. While useful as a means of vividly representing the psychic costs of cultural fragmentation and historical discontinuity or rupture, the modernist rhetoric of alienation—which perhaps achieves its fullest articulation in T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" (1922)—proves of little value as a tool or technology of cultural *restoration*. Instead of using literature and storytelling as tool to rebuild fragmented communities and reconnect alienated individuals with the human and natural communities of which they might yet be productive members, many modernist writers succumb to a tragic view of community in which humans seem to have lost not only their connection, but indeed their capacity for connection, with broader social and natural realms.

Conrad, Eliot, Hemingway, and others first establish individual experience as an epistemological boundary, the limit to what anyone can actually hope to know. Self-referentiality, or mastery of the self as closed system, becomes an aesthetic alternative to a pastoral beauty based on active relationships between the individual subject and his or her natural and social environments. The literary impressionism of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* are good examples of this literature of solipsistic individualism, as is, by some readings, Joyce's *Ulysses*. Similarly, postmodernism's obsession with private systems of meaning and interpretation can be seen as a modern-day variant of this same withdrawal from community and shared meaning into closed and essentially self-referential interpre-

tation. Thomas Pynchon's novels *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) each critique this obsession with private meaning while at the same time suggesting that this may in fact be the only kind of "certainty" available to us.

Finally, a dialectical (or "winner-loser") model of human interactions develops in much of modern literature where human interactions amounting to anything more than "ships passing in the night" necessarily devolve into struggle and combat. Freudian anxiety, the "war between the sexes," and the Cold War itself each in their way serve as emblems of the movement toward radical individualism and the breakdown of community in twentieth-century moral and intellectual history. The language of alienation invented in the early Twentieth Century is thus characterized not only by radical individualism but also by aggressive competition, a linear and progress-oriented rather than cyclical and maintenance-oriented model of time and history, private rather than shared systems of meaning and interpretation (typified in literature by "stream of consciousness" interior monologues such as those of Dostoevsky's "Underground Man"), by a conspicuous lack of community- or nature-sustaining ritual, and by a consequent alienation of the individual from any sense of connection either to a common cultural base or to the natural world itself.

One of the major strains of literary modernism is the decadent movement, which holds, among other things, that alienation is a necessary precondition of genuine artistic creativity. Young artists and writers are thus encouraged to repudiate the various communities to which they belong in order that they may begin to see clearly the actual relation in which they stand both to the "real world" and to some fuzzily defined notion of "pure aesthetic." According to such theories, culture is seen as an impediment to creativity and clear vision, being comprised of a set of bourgeois conventions and inflexible interpretive paradigms.

Interestingly, such a willed divorcing of self from sustaining communities has a counterpart in many tribal cultures: the vision quest. The purpose of the traditional vision quest, however, is less to repudiate or qualify community and culture than it is to demonstrate in a dramatic way the necessary role that community and culture play in harmonizing the needs and interests of the individual with the limits (or carrying capacity) of a given environment. One of the primary goals of the traditional vision quest is a deep understanding of the mediating role of culture, outside of which individualism results not in heroic, Robinson Crusoe-style overcoming, but rather in the destruction of either the individual, the natural environment, or both.

In both modern/avant-garde and traditional/Native versions of the vision quest, the seeker intentionally severs ties with the institutional

certainties and verities of his culture in order to apprehend a deeper, less culturally-inflected version of his place in the cosmos. In the instance of the modern/avant-garde artist, however, the ritually encoded reentry into society that is a central feature of Native vision quests is conspicuously lacking. In the 1926 essay "Composition as Explanation," writer and avant-garde theorist Gertrude Stein suggests that a thorough dissociation from the norms and values of mainstream society is the price the artist must pay for clear vision and creative genius:

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different. . . . Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition. . . . No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who are also creating their own time refuse to accept. . . . That is the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic. (453-54)

But social alienation, even if self-willed, exacts a high price. Hence avant-garde modernism's quintessential archetype: the self-destructive artist, who sacrifices a stable emotional life, sanity, and sometimes even life itself in order to secure a glimpse of what lies behind the veil of civilization. Melville, Conrad, Nietzsche, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Woolf, and Hemingway each flirt with despair, madness, and death in order to glimpse his or her own particular "heart of darkness."

Unlike the avant-garde experience of alienated individualism, the Native vision quest is circular rather than linear, being fundamentally a community-based ritual of immersion into isolation followed by a resurfacing into community. Community, expressed as a bond between individual destiny and the collective destinies of both the social and natural realms, is figured not simply as starting point but as endpoint also in the quest for a complete vision of the individual's place in the order of things. Instead of trading off one's community membership in exchange for clear vision, as often occurs in modern literature, an expansive, all-inclusive, sense of community is precisely the final object of the seeker's clarified vision. By allowing an individual, typically an adolescent or young adult, a glimpse of the two faces of human freedom—the beauty of absolute self-reliance and self-mastery, and the stark horror of solitary being, wholly removed from any socially constructed reality—the ritual of the vision quest sets the stage for a carefully orchestrated ritual reintegration of the seeker back into a community comprised of the living, the dead, the as-yet unborn generations, and finally the natural world itself, the cosmos conceived

as an all-inclusive community. Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* offers a modernized and feminized version of the traditional dream quest. Silko's alienated protagonist Tayo is, like Momaday's Abel, a war veteran who seeks first renewal and then forgetting in urban dissipations and casual, meaningless romantic liaisons, yet his homecoming is to a community whose identity inheres primarily in the storytelling of its matriarchs. As in her *Storyteller* (1981), a portrait of Laguna Pueblo society rendered in the diverse voices of the community's storytellers, Silko's *Ceremony* shows this community identity to consist primarily in the community's ongoing ritual retelling of its relationship to the land on which it depends:

As with any generation  
the oral tradition depends upon each person  
listening and remembering a portion  
and it is together—  
all of us remembering what we have heard together—  
that creates the whole story  
the long story of the people. (*Storyteller* 6-7)

This sense of membership in an all-inclusive community is, of course, the objective modern pastoral literature (and pastoral art generally) has pursued, without notable success, for more than a century. This becomes evident when we compare the experience of Silko's Tayo, who has the benefit of a preexisting cultural apparatus specifically designed to facilitate reintegration with the human community and the natural world with that of Hemingway's Nick Adams in the story "Big Two-Hearted River," the famous finale of *In Our Time* (1924). Alone in the woods in a condition of self-imposed exile, Nick Adams is in the difficult position of having to reinvent (or invent anew, lacking any vestigial memory) a set of rituals designed to establish a pastoral relationship between individual, culture, and nature. This Nick does by rediscovering on his own a set of Cartesian "first principles" of trout fishing. While Hemingway primarily shows Nick reinventing anew techniques of woodcraft and fishing rather than relying on received knowledge, Nick nonetheless remembers certain fragments of information regarding the relationship between man and fish which had been transmitted to him at some earlier time. In particular, Hemingway draws attention to Nick's obedience to the imperative that catch-and-release fishermen not touch a fish with dry hands, lest the fish become bacterially infected.

To present date, the ritual transmission of a pastoral world view remains by and large limited in the Western tradition to activities such as fishing and hunting, and to conservation in a fairly general sense rather than to actual restoration. Yet these accounts show that the

mechanisms for the transmission of knowledge about nature still survive in a vestigial form in the language and culture of the outdoors. What remains to be done is a completing of the philosophical and ethical circle, so that conservation and restoration come to be seen not merely as technologies necessary to the health and survival of our "natural resources" but as rituals necessary to ensure the health and survival of human cultures as well.

The Anglo-American modernist tradition often as not seems willfully blind to the causal connection between historical forces such as colonialism, urbanization, mercantilism, and industrialization on the one hand and the individual experience of alienation from community and nature on the other. American Indian and other Native writers, on the other hand, offer a distinct alternative to modernism's assertion that alienation is intrinsic to the human condition and not the product of specific, identifiable historical and social forces. By locating the roots of individual alienation in a loss of community that in turn is the result of loss and degradation of Native ecosystems, Indian writer David Seals in his novel *Powwow Highway* (1979) looks to community-based rituals of storytelling as precursor to the actual recovery and restoration of lands lost to energy extraction. Speaking of traditional Shoshone lands, Seals' protagonist Buddy angrily exclaims to his friends:

"Wyoming is a piece of shit. They've sold out. Strip mines everywhere. Gasification plants. Why, hell, Rock Springs is so full of whorehouses and cheap trailer parks from the oil and coal boom that it'd make ya sick."

"That's what I heard," Wolf Tooth said. "I been reading the Denver Post, ya know? I read about in there where you can't replace the soil when it's been stripped."

"The aquifers," Buddy added, "the underground water. It gets cut off. You can't put a river back. Look at West Virginia. It's one big pit. The Powhatans are gone, man. There's only about fifty of 'em left. Fifty. Fifty!" (199)

Buddy's companion Philbert has meanwhile been telling Wolf Tooth's daughter about how sign language was used among Plains tribes to share stories despite barriers of dialect:

"Where'd you learn all that stuff, man?" Wolf Tooth asked.

"From my Uncle Fred," Philbert said. "He used to tell stories all the time."

"Too bad those stories don't tell us how to keep our reservations," Buddy said, "and keep up with progress, and—"

"But they do," Philbert said, interrupting. (200)



however, it is necessary to consider exactly what sort of activity restoration is. It is, to begin with, a form of technology—the very kind of human activity that has so often widened the gap between nature and culture. Yet both technology and the knowledge on which it is based can play a crucial role in strengthening relationships as well as in violating or weakening them.

This may seem a strange, even illogical, suggestion, that technology has "traditionally" served as the "language" of ritual in pre-modern times, yet this is by and large true. Myth-based Native ritual traditions survive to this day, having been preserved via oral transmission, and the preponderance of these myths concern the preservation of information about the land, its limitations, its potentialities, and specifically the terms on which humans can survive in a given environment without exhausting it. Sustainable use, then, is the technology that provides the vocabulary of actions and narratives that in turn are the basis of traditional myths and rituals. The implication for restoration is a strong one—namely that restoration must be regarded as a ritual of cultural renewal. Without the cultural restoration this can bring, the mere technologies of environmental restoration will fail due to their inattention to the role of human culture as an integral part of the ecosystem in question. James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974) is a classic case in point. Welch's novel evokes the Anglo-American modernist tradition in that it focuses primarily on the thoughts and feelings of a solitary protagonist largely unaware of the nature of his own alienation. Welch not only links the protagonist's spiritual desolation with the degradation of his natural environment, but in fact implies that a technical restoration of a landscape is doomed to failure unless such a project also includes a ritually-based restoration of the spiritual landscape as well:

The sugar beet factory up by Chinook had died seven years before. Everybody had thought the factory caused the river to be milky but the water never cleared. The white men from the fish department came in their green truck and stocked the river with pike. They were enthusiastic and dumped thousands of pike of all sizes into the river. But the river ignored the fish and the fish ignored the river; they refused even to die there. They simply vanished. The white men made tests; they stuck electric rods into the water; they scraped muck from the bottom; they even collected bugs from the fields next to the river; they dumped other kinds of fish in the river. Nothing worked. The fish disappeared. . . . (6)

The analytic science of Welch's "fish department" fails because their strategy for restoring the river consists in doing things *to* the river

rather than doing things *with* the river. By excising the human participant from the ecosystem proper, Welch suggests, such analytical, non-ritual, restoration has the potential to simply reinforce the fragmentation of ecosystems which instrumental (industrial) use has initiated. Restoration fails, Welch implies, so long as it is regarded and carried out merely as a form of technology. To succeed it must be carried out by members of a human community sustained by ritual. And here we may go a step further to suggest that restoration may itself provide the basis for the rituals and narratives needed to achieve and maintain a sustainable relationship with nature.

If we look at restoration from this point of view, we can begin to see how it might work as an act that serves as the basis for rituals and narratives capable of reuniting nature and culture. It is, to begin with, a way of giving back to nature, in recompense for what we have taken from it, and so a basis for the reciprocal relationship with nature that is the objective of many traditional rituals. Like both the traditional vision quest and modern pastoral literature, it also represents a way of carrying out the perennial quest for identity and renewal through union with nature. Like the vision quest, moreover—and unlike most modern pastoral literature—it does this in a way that is essentially communal, a way allowing for individual experience but also providing a context for action by the individual as a member of the human community.

All this points toward restoration as an act that provides the basis for rituals and narratives needed to negotiate the relationship between nature and culture. The challenge, then, is to develop restoration as a community experience—a ritual of relatedness to both human and biotic communities. And the question is how to make restoration work appealing and important to the inhabitants of a given locale; how to make restoration, restoration philosophy—and most especially restoration *talk*—a part of the public discourse. In the search for allies, the writing of Native peoples will prove invaluable in helping both restorationists and the public at large make the necessary leap from the *how* of restoration to the *why* of restoration. From a purely rhetorical standpoint, it seems that one would ideally like to generate a sense of urgency while at the same time appealing to something akin to a romantic nostalgia for a simpler, healthier, and ultimately happier way of life, a way of life based on active membership in both human and natural communities.

Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* offers what is undoubtedly the most elaborate and detailed accounting of the decline and fall of Western civilization yet written by a Native American author, or anyone else for that matter. Indeed, Silko's *Almanac* is off-putting in some respects, cataloging a litany of perversions contributing to the moral decay of modern white society that includes not only bestiality,

sadism, and child abuse but factory farming as well. Ultimately, though, Silko's object is diagnosis rather than sheer accusation. Her notion of "death cultures"—cultures which become addicted to the ritual slaughter of animals, human enemies, and finally their own people—serves to redeem what would otherwise be a pointless exercise in scrutinizing and judging various subcultures and "lifestyles."

Silko's vision of the return of the buffalo near the end of *Almanac of the Dead* echoes both the Ghost Dance prophecy of the 1890s as well as modern schemes for the ecological restoration of the Great Plains. As such, Silko points to the ecological restoration of degraded or compromised ecosystems as a key element in the ritual restoration of nature and culture, the "healing" which must return into balance alienated individuals, broken families, fragmented communities, and a dead or dying natural world.

Near the end of *Almanac*, Silko offers a vision of a restored Great Plains:

Sterling felt stronger as he walked along. The wild purple asters were blooming, and Sterling could smell Indian tea and bee flowers; in the distance, he heard the field larks call. As long as Sterling did not face the mine, he could look out across the grassy valley and imagine the land a thousand years ago, when the rain clouds had been plentiful and the grass and wildflowers had been belly high on the buffalo that had occasionally wandered off the South Plains. Lecha had talked about the Lakota prophecy while they were driving from Tucson. Lecha said that as a matter of fact, the buffalo were returning to the Great Plains, just as the Lakota and other Plains medicine people had prophesied. The buffalo herds had gradually outgrown and shifted their range from national parks and wildlife preserves. Little by little the buffalo had begun to roam farther as the economic decline of the Great Plains had devastated farmers and ranchers and the small towns that had once served them. Sterling had to smile when he thought of herds of buffalo grazing among the wild asters and fields of sunflowers below the mesas. He did not care if he did not live to see the buffalo return; probably the herds would need another five hundred years to complete their comeback. What mattered was that after all the groundwater had been sucked out of the Oglala Aquifer, then the white people and their cities of Tulsa, Denver, Wichita, and Des Moines would gradually disappear and the Great Plains would again host great herds of buffalo and those human beings who knew how to survive on the annual rainfall. (758-59)

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## **From Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream**

Greg Sarris

[Excerpted from Chapter 3, "Medicine Woman," of Greg Sarris, *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*. Portraits of American Genius Volume 1. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994. ©The Regents of the University of California; reprinted by permission of the author.]

Mabel's baskets were displayed at the Smithsonian and at other prominent museums throughout the country and abroad. She was asked to teach basketweaving classes. She was sought after as a speaker at museums and universities—not just to talk about her basketry, but about her doctoring and culture. "What am I going to say?" she asked the spirit. "I never even went to college." "You just get up there and talk. I'll put it to you."

So Mabel taught classes. She spoke before audiences of all sizes at museums and universities. She asked her mostly non-Indian basketweaving students to observe her rules. "No menstruating, liquor, or drugs when weaving," she told them. "The moon time for women is a time for them to relax, leave things alone." When museum or university audiences wanted to know how she thought up her basket designs or what tools she used to make her miniature baskets, she answered, "The spirit," and then talked about her Dream. When they wanted to know about her Dream and her doctoring, she talked about her baskets. "Spirit told me to make basket for that," she said, "a basket with design for my spitting out the pain." They didn't get the answers they wanted or expected, but something different, something always Mabel.

Once Mabel sat before a group of psychiatrists and other social scientists who wanted to know about her doctoring and her "other states of reality." At one point during their conversation, Mabel told about

the medicine man who got out of jail by turning into a fly or a hummingbird. "People say he flew through the bars," Mabel said.

"Do you believe that?" one of the scientists asked.

"No," Mabel answered. The panel of scientists sighed relief, thinking for a moment that maybe Mabel wasn't so different after all. Then she said with a slight chuckle, "I believe he went down the toilet."

Another time Mabel spoke to a group of Stanford medical students who wanted to know about "ethnic medicine" and how to work cooperatively with native healers. She prayed and sang a song, all of which lasted about five minutes, then sat down and talked about the dictates of her spirit and her doctoring. Suddenly she stopped and looked up, out to her audience. "OK," she said, "now who can tell me what I just said?" The students and their professors were quiet, stunned. "Ain't nobody got a word for me?" she asked finally and laughed. "I thought you wanted to know about healers." One student spoke up and paraphrased a portion of Mabel's presentation. "Pretty good," she said, chuckling. Another student interrupted the dynamic Mabel had established by asking how she became a doctor. "Like you," she said, "long time studying." Later, toward the end of her hour with the students, she said, "You have to know me. How what I say, it turns out. And that's a long time. That's knowing me."

Despite the attention Mabel gained as an artist and public speaker, she never stopped working in the cannery. Not for twenty years. She never had more money than just enough for her and Marshall to get by. At home, out of the public eye, she worked. Long hours every summer and fall, sometimes ten hours a day, standing with other women along a conveyor belt in a hot, crowded room, grabbing apples, one after another, peeling them and cutting away bruises, making sure not a single apple passed by unchecked. After work, at night or in the morning, depending on her shift at the cannery, she was off, sometimes a hundred miles away, doctoring. Often she would get back just in time to change her clothes and make her shift at the cannery.

Her public audiences never saw her sticky, apple-smelling clothes. They never saw her traveling here and there to attend to the sick and troubled. She was always the neat-looking short Indian woman with dyed and coiffed black hair, modish glasses, and a sweater buttoned neatly at her neck. Awesome, yes. She was strong, self-possessed, and she gave wild answers to their questions and told interesting stories. But just as Mabel was always more than Mabel, more than a neat-looking small Indian woman, so her stories were more than stories. For those who had lived them, they were miracles.

. . . Like the man who had gained a hundred pounds in two weeks. He had become so bloated he could not move off his bed. Edema from

a damaged heart, the medical doctors said. No hope. He was drowning in his own weight. Mabel sucked gallons and gallons of water out of his chest. Then she and Essie walked him around and around his front room. They worked on him for four days and four nights, until he was emptied of the extra weight. "You're cured," Mabel told him then. "Your heart has been fixed. You be better to your wife and children. No more drinking that beer. It works in that mean heart of yours to kill you." She told him where to dig angelica to protect himself. She gave him a prayer. "You say that prayer, and each month at the same time you put up a good dinner for your family. You'll live that way."

And there was the young man from Santa Rosa who was possessed by an evil spirit. In the middle of the night, when he was sound asleep, the evil spirit grabbed him around the waist and tossed him out of bed. Glasses of milk and Coca-Cola were slapped out of his hands. Once, when he was at the ocean with his friends, the evil spirit threw him out of a parked car. He was thrown onto the road and then back against the car. His family was Catholic; they didn't believe in the Indian ways. But after the local priest could not exorcise the bad spirit, they went to Mabel. She took him up to Kashaya. She and Essie walked him into the Roundhouse and tied him to the centerpole to keep him from flying all over the room. They prayed and sang, tricked the evil spirit to sleep so they could get hold of its heavy invisible form and toss it from the Roundhouse. Then Mabel cut the young man loose from the centerpole and handed him a small green stone. "Keep this with you at all times," she said. "It has my song on it."

And there was the woman from Lake County who needed an operation for stomach cancer. The doctors showed her the dismal-looking X rays. She went to Mabel pleading for help, and Mabel lifted long black roots, like the roots of a plant, from her stomach. The woman told her doctors in Lake County that she had been cured. They didn't believe her, but agreed to take X rays again. The new pictures didn't show a trace of cancer, nothing out of the ordinary.

Once a young man from the Sacramento Valley came to Mabel needing a different kind of help. He was a singer and a dancer, a Wintun man from east of Rumsey. He explained to her that the dance leader of his local group of dancers had passed away. He wanted to keep the dances alive for his children. But he didn't know what to do, since the leader had died suddenly and had left no instructions for continuing or ending the dances. They had never started a dance without the leader's blessing song. "Well, I can bless you," Mabel said. "I can bless the flicker heads and give you a blessing song." The man couldn't believe his ears. It was the same song the leader had

sung time and time again. "How did you know it?" he asked. "I knew that man," Mabel answered. "I heard him sing when I was a young girl in Cortina. He came there and danced. It was part of my adoption there. Now you learn it. It's time for you. I'm giving it back."

And there was the time something strange happened with Essie. A man went to someone in Healdsburg and said he was looking for Essie, that he was going to kill her. He was angry about something she did or didn't do. Mabel didn't know what. Someone called her and tipped her off. "Is Essie with you?" the person asked over the phone. "No," Mabel answered. "Well, this man says he's going to kill her. He'll probably come to your place looking for her. Stay put and don't answer the door."

But Mabel did no such thing. She got in her car and went looking for Essie, who was living at the time on a ranch in Windsor, just north of Santa Rosa. Mabel drove to Windsor, to where she thought the ranch was, but she couldn't find the place. She couldn't find the big oak tree that marked the road into the property. So she ended up driving around and around the countryside in circles. She prayed, sang songs, but still couldn't find her way. If only Essie had a phone, she kept thinking. Then, just before she turned back to Santa Rosa, she noticed a car following her. It didn't follow for long though, and Mabel noticed that the driver pulled off the road alongside a grape vineyard. She figured he was a Mexican; a lot of Mexicans were in the vineyards cutting grapes at the time. But he wasn't a Mexican. He was the Indian who wanted to kill Essie.

Mabel found this out later that night, after the man was arrested by the police. Essie came to Mabel's with Sidney and told Mabel what happened. "We saw you from the house," Essie said. "We saw you driving around and around in circles out there. Well, you see, when you started back to Santa Rosa with that man following you, we got out and drove the other way to Healdsburg. We called the police and they got him there with a loaded gun and a bottle of wine. You saved me, Mabel."

"Hmm. I only thought I was lost."

And there were the miracles I myself witnessed.

Like the time Mabel sucked a wiggling creature from a woman's swollen eye. It was the first time I saw her doctor. I was nineteen or twenty years old. Before, I had always left her house when the patients came. I didn't really want to see her doctor this time either. But a professor friend of mine from school had asked if I could arrange with Mabel for him to watch a healing ceremony. I wanted to impress him. I asked Mabel. She said OK. But as it turned out, my friend saw very little. Mabel sat him in a chair behind her, so that he was unable to see her work over the woman laid out on the couch in front of her.

She sat me right in the line of action, where I had to see what she was doing.

Susie Gomez, Essie's sister, sang for Mabel. Essie and Sidney were there too. Mabel smoked pipeful after pipeful of angelica root. The candlelit front room of her house filled with the sweet, damp smell of angelica smoke. Something like celery, if it could burn. She called the spirit, prayed in her language, and danced and danced while Susie sang the doctoring songs and kept beat with the shiny elderberry clapper stick. Then Mabel sat down in her chair opposite the patient. "Near as I can say in English," she said, "this woman has a polliwog-trout salmon in her. She got it when she was a young girl, when she went into the river at the wrong time of the month. It's been living in her all this time. It's why she's never had any children. It's why her eye is big. It's why the white doctors can't help her."

Mabel was quiet a long time. Then she started singing again and Susie picked up the song. She leaned over the woman on the couch, started rubbing her forehead, then put her mouth over the woman's eye. She rose up, grabbed her basket from the floor, and spit into it. She sang a few more songs. Then we all got up and turned four times. "Now," she said, "those who want to witness this poison, come here." The professor jumped up, but she was holding the basket toward me. I went forward and looked. In the basket I saw a salamanderlike creature. Maybe something more like a fish. It was about an inch and a half long, red with a black stripe down its back and two bulging black eyes. It was moving, its tail flicking back and forth. "Now you've seen what people don't believe," Mabel said. And then she turned with the basket in her hand and went to the back of the house. I heard her flush the toilet.

And there was a Mexican friend of mine who lived in Santa Cruz. I took Mabel to meet his mother, who was a *curandera*, a healer, like Mabel. The two women wanted to meet each other. My friend translated for his mother, who spoke no English. The tired-looking Mexican Indian woman was nearly blind in one eye; her eye festered behind heavy lids, as if she was squinting. I thought maybe she wanted Mabel to doctor her. But then Mabel began complaining about her arthritic knee and shoulder. My friend's mother placed her hand on Mabel's knee, just briefly.

About two weeks after the visit, I saw my friend. He was angry. "Why did she do that?" he asked.

"Do what?" I asked.

"She tried to test my mother; she played with her."

"Who?"

"That Mabel. She tested my mother, man. Why'd she do that?"

I thought of the woman's hand on Mabel's knee. "You think

Mabel was testing her?" I asked.

"Ah, c'mon. My mother was upset, man. They are both *curanderas*, why the games, man? My mother believes in Mabel."

When Mabel and I left my friend's house that day, Mabel had mentioned that my friend's mother had great power in her hands, and that my friend did also. She said his mother would lose both eyes if her son did not help her keep up her traditions. "He doesn't believe," Mabel said. "He doubts. He drinks. He puts on a good show, that's all."

Later, after my angry friend left, I thought, yes, Mabel had found out about his mother's hands. She had talked the poor woman right into it. Mabel had hoodwinked her.

I phoned Mabel and told her what my friend had said, how excited he was. Mabel laughed. "Sounds like he believes now," she said.

And there was another trip to Santa Cruz, after which Mabel had to doctor me. I had driven her to the university, U.C. Santa Cruz, where she was to speak at a multicultural event. It wasn't long after the incident with my friend and his mother. I was living in Santa Cruz at the time, teaching writing courses at the university. I was just over thirty, a little tired of teaching composition, and contemplating going back to Stanford to complete a Ph.D. The trip seemed routine. I picked up Mabel in Santa Rosa and got her to the designated campus auditorium on time. She spoke about her baskets and told various stories. She also spent some time talking about following rules and mentioned the rules concerning menstruating women. This won't go over big among the feminists in the room, I thought to myself. They might not understand what Mabel means, or agree with her even if they did understand. It is the time for a woman to rest and relax. Men and other women must cook for them, wait on them. It is a special time, an honoring time, a time for women to respect themselves and be respected by others.

When Mabel finished, a Puerto Rican woman sitting next to me stood up to give her presentation. She was a good friend of mine. She bent over and hugged me. "Wish me luck," she said. Then she hugged Mabel, who was on her way back from the podium. Five minutes into her presentation, the woman fainted, collapsed to the floor. Mabel leaned over to me and whispered, "She shouldn't have touched us. She's on her moon."

An emergency medical team revived the woman. She seemed well again. During the luncheon that the university held for the guest speakers, the woman came bounding up to me. "What happened?" she asked, out of earshot from Mabel. "Someone said that lady hexed me, that she's a witch." I felt embarrassed, awkward. I tried to repeat what Mabel had said on stage. "I have my prayer basket with me.

And maybe even touching me can make you faint," I said.

"Do you believe that?" the woman scoffed. "I'm a Marxist, I don't believe anything like that."

I didn't say anything. I didn't know what to say.

"Why do people say that lady hexed me?"

What difference does it make if you don't believe anything like that? I thought of answering but didn't.

On the way home, I had an attack. My eyes swelled up, as if I had hay fever. I couldn't breathe. I kept sneezing. I had to pull off the road. Mabel sang a song, and I was able to see well enough to drive. "You been poisoned by that moonsick problem," she said. "That basket I gave you is my rule, my way."

When we walked into her house, she motioned to the couch. I knew what was happening. I was frightened, uneasy. What was happening? How did I get into this? Who is Mabel?

I rested on the couch with a blanket over me. Incredibly, her songs calmed me, even the shaking of her cocoon rattle. I felt sleepy. She leaned over and with a mouth that felt like cool running water, took fluid from each temple, my right and my left, until my eyes were clear and I could breathe easily. "Now do you believe?" she asked.



# FORUM

## ***ASAIL and Other Sessions at the 1994 MLA Conference in San Diego, Tuesday 27-Friday 30 December***

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The Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures will host two sessions at this year's MLA conference in San Diego:

**20: Return to Native Languages** (Tue 3:30-4:45 p.m., Marriott, Solana Room)

Presiding: Fred H. White, UCLA

1. "Ojibwe Language Renewal," Jillian M. Berkland, UCLA
2. "Reclaiming Language: Reclaiming Identity," Jeanne Breinig, U of Washington
3. "Oicimani Mitawa: My Journey," Gwen Griffin, Mankato State

**501: American Indian Literature in the Curriculum: Strategies and Resources** (Thu 12 noon-1:15 p.m., Convention Center, 1B)

Presiding: Kathryn W. Shanley, Cornell U

Speakers: A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, U of Illinois, Chicago;  
James K. Ruppert, U of Alaska, Fairbanks; Kathryn W. Shanley; Brian Swann, Cooper Union.

The MLA Division on American Indian Literatures is sponsoring the following sessions:

**191: Voices of Native California** (Wed 10:15-11:30 a.m., Convention Center, 5A)

Presiding: Greg Sarris, UCLA

Speakers: Darryl Wilson, U of Arizona; Janice Gould, U of New Mexico; Georgiana Sanchez, CSU Long Beach

**689: Past, Present, and Future(s): Literary Criticism and Native American Literature(s)** ((Fri 30 Dec., 8:30-9:45 a.m., Convention

Center, 5)

Presiding: Arnold Krupat, Sarah Lawrence College

1. "Where Is the Critical Center for Marginal Literatures?" Betty Louise Bell, U of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Kimberly M. Blaeser, U of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
2. "Contextual Aesthetics and Textual Ethics: Silence and the Sacred in American Indian Literatures," David L. Moore, Cornell U
3. "The Persistence of History and the Autobiography of Delfina Cuero," Phillip H. Round, U of Iowa
4. "An Absence of Literary Monoliths: A New Literary Nation of Hidden Nations," William Willard, Washington State U, Pullman

**722: Performance of Diane Glancy's *Halfact*** (Fri 30 Dec., 10:15-11:30 a.m., Convention Center 1A)

In addition to the joint **ASAIL-Division on American Indian Literatures Business Meeting** (Thu 10:15 a.m., Convention Center, Room 9), ASAIL members might also want to note several other sessions devoted in whole or in part to Native American literary or linguistic topics, including **163** (Indigenous Experience, Interdisciplinary Criticism: Culture, Identity, and Politics in the Native American Text), **227** (Uses of the Past I: Telling "American" Tales), **275** (New Perspectives on Discourses of the European-Native American Encounter), **279** (The New Criticism and Contemporary Critical Theory: Multicultural Perspectives), **493** (Maya Textual Practices: The Question of Literature), **631** (Uses of the Past III: Native Americans, African Americans, and the Problem of "History"), **645** (Teaching Multicultural Literature: A Roundtable Discussion), and **747** (Postcolonial Readings of Multiethnic Literature).

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### *Call for Papers*

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#### **IN OUR OWN TERMS: CRITICAL/CREATIVE REPRESENTATIONS BY NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN**

This collection of essays will comprise a text wherein Native American women scholars, writers, and artists articulate for themselves their own positions around issues such as identity (race, ethnicity, gender, sexualities), community, sovereignty, culture, and representa-

tion. Submissions are especially invited from the humanities and the social sciences, in the areas of history, political struggle, health, biography/autobiography, language, literary studies, the arts, film and photography criticism, sociology, cultural studies, colonial discourse, feminist studies, religious studies, environmental issues, as they pertain to Native American women, in particular, projects in which Native American women position their own and their colleagues' work with respect to any of these fields. Essays that contribute to an unlayering of the complexities of "Indian" women's identity not only in the United States but in this hemisphere are encouraged. Approaches which seek to "collapse" genres and disciplines from a conceptual as well as a methodological and/or pedagogical perspective are welcome, as are approaches which are comparative in nature. Visual artists and photographers are invited to submit work, on its own or accompanied by narrative. Autobiographical essays and essays focusing on the creative/critical process or personal essays addressing any of the above issues are also most welcome.

**Entries must be postmarked no later than January 31, 1995.** Please send submissions to Dr. Inés Hernández-Ávila, Department of Native American Studies, University of California, Davis CA 95616. For more information please write to this address or call (916) 752-4394; message (916) 752-3237.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Renaë Bredin** is currently Acting Director of Women's Studies at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. Concurrently, she is in the final stages of a dissertation, "Guerilla Ethnography," at the University of Arizona, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

**Kathleen Donovan** is Assistant Professor of English at South Dakota State University, where she teaches minority literatures and women's studies. She is currently working on a book exploring the intersections of Native American literatures and feminist literary and cultural theories.

**David Moore** teaches American Indian and American literatures at Cornell University. He recently received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington, and previously taught for years at Salish Kootenai College on the Flathead Reservation in Montana. This article is part of a book in progress entitled "Native Knowing: The Politics of Epistemology in American and Native American Literature."

**Christopher Norden** teaches in the Division of Literature and Languages at Lewis-Clark State College in northern Idaho and is currently working on a book-length comparative study of Native novelistic traditions in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. He has spent the past two summers in the arctic studying tundra pond ecology in conjunction with the University of Alaska-Fairbanks Water Research Center.

**Greg Sarris** is a Professor of English at University of California-Los Angeles. His books include *Keeping Slug Woman Alive* and *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*, both from University of California Press, and a recent "novel in stories," *Grand Avenue*, from Hyperion Press.

**Paul Zolbrod** is currently Professor of English at Allegheny College and Senior Curator at the Museum of American Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe. He is the author of *Diné bahane': The Navajo Creation Story* and other works on traditions of North American tribes; his latest book, *Reading the Voice: Oral Poetry on the Page*, is scheduled for release in Spring 1995.