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6.4 Errata: A typesetting error in *SAIL* 6.4 (Winter 1994), page 34, resulted in the misattribution of three of Arnold Krupat's works to Karl Kroeber. Line 30 on that page should read "Krupat, Arnold. *Ethnocriticism*: [. . .]." Our apologies for this typographical oversight.

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morning prayer

Thomas D. Jenks

oklahoma
this morning
the pond
was rock hard

a cold wind blew
in from the
far north
last night
some rain fell

this morning
the trees
are bent
in humble
grace
encased

great gray cranes
stab
at the
slow moving
fish

empty are the woods
my hands are cold

loud
is the sound
of the birds
bills hitting
ice

to the north
more snow is
coming
to the south

more cranes
are flying low
dipping
into warmer
waters

the sound
is only a rip
on the
surface

Gender at Work in Laguna Coyote Tales

Theresa Delgadillo

There is currently much interest in exploring, interpreting, and teaching literatures previously excluded from the literary canon of the United States. Among these literatures are numerous Native American tales, myths, and songs collected in the earlier part of this century, not by literary critics, but rather by anthropologists, linguists, and ethno-historians. That these were gathered by people other than literary scholars and critics reflects the fact that, until recently, there has been little appreciation among literary scholars for oral tradition as imaginative creation. In returning to these collections, we now have an additional resource: the voices of Native American peoples who have augmented and corrected interpretations of their literatures. This information is vital in developing an understanding of the cultural and historical context in which these stories are told, a context essential to understanding the meaning of narratives created by people whose beliefs and social organization are radically different from Western religious and living modes. Much literary criticism is devoted to a search for meaning—obvious and not-so-obvious—presented in a work of art. In the case of Native American Literatures, we can divine these meanings only if we have some familiarity with what is significant to the community that creates the text.

When I first read the coyote stories (all collected by Franz Boas at Laguna pueblo in the early 1920s) that I will examine in this paper, I was puzzled. "Coyote and Badger," "Coyote and his Daughters," and "Coyote Visits his Friends" are all entertaining, yet they are also enigmatic, partially because of the way in which they are presented. Boas published all the stories he collected in *Keresan Texts* in prose form. Today, for a number of reasons (including the belief that it most closely parallels the original presentation), traditional Native American

texts are generally presented in a poetic form that allows the reader entry. Yet another reason why the texts I will examine here seemed inaccessible to me is in the stories themselves. At first glance, these stories depict passive, obedient women being used and abused by men. An examination of the position of Laguna women, however, reveals other meanings.

Women at Laguna

For millennia American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused world views.

Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*

That many tribes have social relations based on matrilineal descent has been well-documented. However, in the ground-breaking study *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen explores and explains how woman-centered Native American cultures differ in spiritual and social life from patriarchal cultures. Allen argues that the equality between men and women in North American tribal life has been obscured or ignored in studies of tribal life and tribal literatures for two reasons: woman-centered communities have posed a threat to Europeans already accustomed to the subjugation of women, and Europeans studying tribal life have been unable to see who and what they are studying through anything other than a patriarchal framework. According to Allen:

Western studies of American Indian tribal systems are erroneous at base because they view tribalism from the cultural bias of patriarchy and thus either discount, degrade, or conceal gynocratic features or recontextualize those features so that they will appear patriarchal. (4)

If we are to understand what Laguna stories mean to a Laguna audience, and especially what these stories reveal about a woman's place in that society, then we need to gain some familiarity with Laguna culture. A good place to begin, as Allen does, is with spiritual underpinnings. Allen's views on the importance of gynocracy to Native American tribes are derived from a close examination of female deities and powers in many tribes, but especially those present in Laguna beliefs. She explains: "At the center of all is Woman, and no thing is sacred . . . without her blessing, her thinking." For the Laguna, the spirit responsible for all creation is Thought Woman, also known as Old Spider Woman, but whose many aspects are reflected in other female spirits such as Corn Woman and Earth Woman (13). Thought Woman is the principal spirit in Keres theology, creatrix of people, creatures, things, activities, and expressions, but not by procreation. Thought Woman creates this world by thinking and

singing the cosmos into being: "She is the true creatrix for she is thought itself, from which all else is born. She is the necessary precondition for material creation, and she, like all of her creation, is fundamentally female—potential and primary" (14). Thought Woman, however, relies on the assistance of others in the job of creation and spiritual guidance. For example, Thought Woman sings *Iyatiku*, or Earth Woman, into being and she guides Keres people with the help of Thought Woman. Related to Earth Woman is *Irriaku*, or Corn Mother, who links the material and nonmaterial worlds (22). The power of these female deities is not limited to the ability to give birth, although the act of reproduction is certainly venerated. Instead, these are female powers who create the world employing their mind, breath, and song—essential components of the oral stories that form the lifeblood of a people. That these creative capabilities are united with the ability to procreate seems to indicate that femaleness is generally equated with the power of creativity. It certainly points to a powerful female role in the creation of all aspects of culture. While giving birth may be one manifestation of this power, it is clearly not seen as the only power of women, rather unlike the Western view of exalted motherhood.

The woman-centered theology of Keres people does not, however, result in the domination of women over men in social relations. Instead, the social organization of Laguna reflects balance. This is seen in the distinct but complementary tasks in cultivation and distribution of food (Hewett 28-29); in wide latitude in marriage relations yet collective responsibility for child-rearing (Eggan 264-65, 273, 276); in respect for multiple spirits and peaceful, non-authoritarian social relations (Allen 40, 42); in the shared responsibility for important spiritual fetishes and Katsina masks cared for by women in clanhouses but associated with the power of medicine men (Eggan 277; Parsons, *Notes on Ceremonialism at Laguna* 96); in the shared responsibility for the proper observance of ritual ceremonies (Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion* 579-89); and in the organization of a matrilineal clan system that ensures collective cooperation in the survival of the community. Many people have observed that Laguna is a community with rigid social customs, but these customs are based on the recognition of the unique power of each sex and the need to put those powers to work cooperatively for the good of the community.

It is this understanding of social relations in Laguna culture and the spiritual basis for them that informs the meaning of three representative Laguna coyote tales. Analysis of these stories demonstrates the importance of contextual understanding in accurate literary analysis of traditional tales.

"Coyote and Badger"

The three stories I will examine were all collected by Boas between 1919 and 1921 from an individual named Ko·Tʼe (Boas xi). Besides the fact that they are all coyote tales, these three stories each begin with "a long time ago" or "long ago" and end with the phrase "that long it is," traditional framing devices in Laguna stories (which are absent from some of the other stories included in Boas' collection) (Marmon 70). All three stories appear in a section of the book titled "Animal Stories."

In "Coyote and Badger" (see Appendix to this essay for full text), the central figures are relatives and neighbors; they refer to each other alternately as "uncle" and "nephew," terms indicating kinship (Boas 168). The two journey from their home in the northwest to the west to visit with a Navajo girl. During the visit, both creatures proposition the girl and she counters with an offer of intimate relations if they can provide game. Coyote and Badger return home to pray for snowfall, which would make it easier to hunt rabbit. During the night, snow falls and the next day the pair sets out to hunt rabbit after informing the Navajo girl that they accept the terms of her offer. The girl then specifies that she will first "lie down" with whoever catches the most rabbits. Badger is more successful at hunting than Coyote; in frustration, Coyote buries Badger and makes off with his catch to the Navajo girl's home. There, the girl questions Coyote about the hunt and awaits Badger's return. Eventually, Badger does show up, with more rabbits than Coyote, and explains that he was left for dead by his companion. The girl angrily scolds Coyote and proceeds to treat him as an outcast while attending to Badger. Badger finally succeeds in softening the girl's attitude towards Coyote, and after she feeds Coyote they all sleep (Boas 167-69).

I first read this story with a post-1960s understanding of the status of women in the United States as second-class citizens and sex-objects. As a result, I read it as a sexist male fantasy where buddies clash over the affections of a woman, but in the end, their friendship wins out and they share the woman, who is reduced to an object. Western notions of "romantic love" surely contributed to this inaccurate reading. If, however, we take into consideration Laguna gender attitudes and customs when interpreting this story, a very different picture emerges.

First, would a Laguna audience view this as a tale of sexual exploitation? Allen says that "some distinguishing features of a woman-centered social system include free and easy sexuality and wide latitude in personal style" (2). Anthropological studies at Laguna in the 1940s found "evidence of a good deal of premarital freedom, and illegitimacy is common, no disapproval being expressed beyond

concern over adding an extra member to the household without a husband to aid in its support" (Eggan 265). If this is the case in the 1940s, we can assume that it was also true in the 1920s, when the stories discussed here were collected.

The sexual freedom that Laguna women enjoy is an aspect of a culture where women's participation in production is a valued and respected contribution to community/clan survival. Women are both responsible for and respected in this society. They have power. And power is freedom. Since the basic unit of social organization is the clan, relations between individuals are defined more by interdependence than by a singular dependence on any one individual. The clan system leads to a household composed of several generations of female relatives, their unmarried brothers, and spouses. Home and household belongings are property of the women (Eggan 262, 263). In this social system, couples are not solely dependent on each other for economic survival nor are their children only dependent on parents. Rather, children are the collective responsibility of the household, and in the case of divorce, which is fairly common, children remain with the mother's clan (Eggan 273). This social organization affects customs surrounding courtship and marriage. Among Laguna, marriage is monogamous, although separation is common. There is no structural barrier, then, to wide or diverse sexual experience for men or women. Instead, women maintain the right to choose their own husbands and often do so without any consultation with others (Eggan 276). Clearly, then, a Laguna audience would not define the Navajo girl's interest in sexual relations, evidenced by her counteroffer, as sexual promiscuity. Instead, the community accepts women's freedom to choose and to change sexual partners.

However, the Navajo girl in this story doesn't offer a monogamous relationship to either Coyote or Badger. Instead, she says that she will sleep with the best hunter *first* rather than *only*. And why the hunt? If the girl has the right to enjoy sexual relations, then why does she ask for the rabbits? There are three possible answers to these questions. First, her offer to Coyote and Badger may be in keeping with the recognized right to enjoy sexual relations *before* marriage, rather than an agreement to engage in a monogamous marriage relationship. Second, it may be that the Navajo girl in this story represents the sexual explicitness of many Navajo tales (Zolbrod 10); she can engage in an unusual sexual triad because she is not a Laguna and therefore not subject to Laguna custom. Yet another possible interpretation is that her request for the rabbits before she will sleep with either of them is the beginning of a marriage ritual since marriage is often effected with an exchange of food (Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion* 25).

The request for rabbits in and of itself is in keeping with sex-appropriate behavior among Pueblo Indians: while any and all foods produced by women are acceptable gifts from women to men or between women, the appropriate gifts from man to woman are game, firewood, or clothing (Hewett 88). The rabbits, therefore, are an appropriate gift from Badger and Coyote to the girl. When her two visitors ask to sleep with her, the Navajo girl has already given them something to eat, fulfilling her obligations as a hospitable hostess (Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion* 26). Coyote and Badger's request might be an opportunity for the girl to remind them of their duty to reciprocate before asking for more, hence the request for rabbits.

But the nagging question remains: is she selling herself for rabbits, and to the highest bidder? If the girl has a normal sexual appetite and has the right to get that appetite satisfied, then a Keresan-speaking audience assumes that women need not sell themselves to men in order to be provided for; that she will engage in and enjoy sex is a given. The Navajo girl's request for a gender-appropriate gift, then, may be interpreted either as a way to remind her two suitors of their own responsibilities or as a way to choose between her two suitors.

When Coyote returns from the hunt and tells her that Badger is dead, the girl is suspicious. The Navajo girl questions Coyote's assertion that he killed all the rabbits he has delivered; she then proceeds with four more questions about the circumstances of Badger's death; finally, she decides to wait longer to see whether Coyote is speaking the truth. The exchange between the girl and Coyote indicates that she does not expect Coyote to win the contest, possibly because she knows all along of Badger's greater prowess as a hunter of rabbit. An important creation figure, Badger helped claw the world open for humans to emerge into it in both Laguna and Navajo mythology. As is often the case in Coyote stories, this is also a story about the dangers of stupidity. In this story, it is Coyote who acts stupidly. The Navajo girl is not so gullible as to swallow his story. Rather than take Coyote's word, she waits for verification of his claims.

Badger does eventually show up and, in spite of the setback he has suffered at Coyote's hands, he is clearly the winner of the contest. The Navajo girl finds out that Coyote tried to kill Badger and banishes him to stand at the door like an uninvited guest. The girl then feeds Badger but exercises her power over the distribution of food to delay feeding Coyote in punishment for his actions. When Badger says "My poor nephew must eat also," he is rebuffed by the girl's answer: "let him wait." Since Badger is an important creation figure, we might view his request on behalf of Coyote not as male conspiracy against females, but as recognition of Coyote's place in Laguna cosmology. Nonetheless, Badger must seek the Navajo girl's permission for Coyote to eat.

"After some time" Badger again asks for food on behalf of Coyote. By this time, Coyote has been sufficiently humiliated by this treatment and by his dependence on the mercy of someone he tried to kill, and the girl allows him to eat.

It is interesting to note that Badger must request that Coyote be given food twice. This echoes the twice-repeated sing for snow by Coyote and Badger earlier in the story. This pattern serves as a subtle foreshadowing technique; two songs for snow precede hunting as two requests for food precede eating. The repetition of a request is effectively linked to further action in the story.

In the end, we are told "then at night they all slept," a rather ambiguous ending to a fairly explicit story. Yet, this ending exemplifies the high value Laguna people place on privacy (Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion* 5). This understated ending underscores both this respect for privacy and an acceptance of the sexual freedom enjoyed by women.

"Coyote and His Daughters"

Given what we already know about the freedom Laguna women enjoy to choose their marriage partners, the second story, "Coyote and his Daughters" (see Appendix for full text), is puzzling. As the narrative opens, Coyote desires sexual relations with his daughters, but since this is taboo, he instructs his daughters on who they should marry, fakes his death, and returns as the preordained mate. Since Laguna women may choose their own mates, Coyote's orders to his daughters do not seem plausible. And it is, in fact, his orders that arouse the suspicion of Coyote's daughters and lead them to the eventual discovery of their father's deception.

After telling his daughters to look out for someone with a "high hat and a quiver of mountain lion skin" and then faking his own death, Coyote walks off to another town where he proceeds to embellish his costume with much relish. In addition to the two items already mentioned, Coyote procures "white beads and red beads, turquoise rings, and a buck skin shirt and also shoes of buck skin leggings" (Boas 170). Either he is carried away with the "dress-up" part of his scheme or he is really concerned about disguising himself well lest his daughters identify him. This elaboration of his costume alerts the audience to the uncertainty surrounding the success of his maneuver.

Coyote then appears to his daughters in disguise and asks after his dying "uncle's" last words:

Then he said again, "Where is uncle?" — "Oh the poor one died for us," they said. Then he spoke and cried, "My poor uncle is dead. Oh, if I could talk well (?)," said he. Then he said again, "What did he tell you when

he was about to die?" They said "From the north would come down a man with a high hat and a quiver of mountain-lion skin. He should be our husband, thus our father ordered us," said they. (Boas 170-71)

The girls obediently report their "dying" father's orders to marry the stranger, but only after prompting. I believe that the girls' reluctance to disclose this information is a measure of their suspicion about this newly arrived stranger.

The fact that he refers to their "dead" father as "uncle," a term generally reserved for use among members of the same clan, indicates a relationship to the "deceased" that may make the proposed marriage unacceptable. Parsons tells us that Western Keresan tribes, of which Laguna is one, observe clan exogamy; furthermore, "marriage into the father's clan is also disapproved of" (*Pueblo Indian Religion* 44). The timing of his arrival, the elaborate costume, the eager question about the last words, and his claim of kinship are all elements noted by the sharp daughters. It then looks as if the girls are going to be taken in, but before marrying their father they insist on washing his hair. By washing Coyote's hair, the girls are following a custom governing rituals: hair washing commonly precedes Pueblo Indian ceremonies (Parsons, "Mothers and Children at Laguna" 71; Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion* 454-55), but the women generally wash only the heads of those to whom they are related by clan (*Pueblo Indian Religion* 11). The daughters are observing proper behavior here and, as the next scene reveals, their strict observance of ritual behavior allows them to see through their father's deception. The girls then feed Coyote, as is the custom with visitors, and again Coyote says they must now "lie down" (Boas 171). But the girls delay further, suggesting instead that they comb his hair. Lulled by the combing, Coyote falls asleep:

After a while he went to sleep. Then one of them said, "Sister," said the one, "I think this is our father," said they. "Go ahead," said the one, "lift up his head a little." Then the other one lifted his head and she saw a wart on his neck. Then the one said, "Oh," said she, "that is our father," said she. "Behold up here on his neck is a wart. Look at it!" Then the other one looked. "Oh," she said, "he is bad. That is our father," they said. "Let us run away. We must find somewhere else somebody who will be our husband," they said. (Boas 171)

As this scene clearly reveals, the daughters harbored misgivings about the stranger all along. Instead of falling victim to his elaborate machinations, they cleverly thwart their father while waiting for the opportunity to verify their suspicions.

Once the girls realize the "stranger" is their father, they pack all their belongings and leave. Clearly, there is no obligation to adhere to their father's orders or to endure his deceit. While we are not told where the girls will go and up to this point there is no mention of a mother, a Laguna audience might assume that at least one option open to them is to return to their mother's clan where they will be wel-comed. However, the girls determine to "find somewhere else somebody who will be our husband" (Boas 171). This statement points to the Laguna expectation of marriage as a part of the reciprocity of natural relations, but it also demonstrates the independence and autonomy of women to choose a mate.

Coyote's daughters avoid becoming helpless, innocent victims of a deceitful and abusive father in this story. Instead, they use the power of thought and song (ritual) with which they are endowed by Thought Woman to survive. By thinking for themselves, observing ritual, and using ritual behavior to their advantage, the girls escape Coyote's scheme, saving both themselves and their father. While many Coyote stories where the trickster successfully violates social norms end in his death, this one does not. It may be that in this case, Coyote's failure to outwit his two daughters spares his life.

"Coyote Visits His Friends"

The third story is the first half of a paired set titled "Coyote Visits his Friends" (see Appendix for full text). Both stories belong to the sub-genre of "bungling host" stories where, as Dell Hymes explains, trickster is served food obtained by extraordinary powers and is physically harmed in some way when he later tries to duplicate this power (171). In the first story, Coyote befriends Woodpecker and a series of visits ensues in which Woodpecker's mother provides wonderful food for her son's guest by supernatural powers, while Coyote's mother, attempting to imitate Woodpecker's mother, not only fails to provide any food but ultimately kills herself and her son. The second story has a similar theme, except the friendship is between Coyote and Snake and the story ends in Coyote's injury rather than his death. The presentation of paired stories is common in Native American literatures where the effect is to soften the blow of the first story with the milder ending of the second story. However, for the purposes of this paper, I will omit a presentation and analysis of the second story.

Many "bungling host" stories have been explored by literary scholars, yet, as Hymes points out:

Our fascination with the figure of the trickster may lead us to overlook other dimensions of meaning. The fundamental lesson of a story may be more than the futility of

trying to be something that one is not. I want to argue that the success of the first host, the benevolent host, may reveal a deeper meaning. (172)

For Hymes, what has been obscured in the particular text he is examining, and possibly in other "bungling host" tales, is the underlying view of the natural world and our relation to it as providential. This world view emphasizes the need to respect and understand the natural powers that provide sustenance (172, 194).

"Coyote Visits His Friends" is also about the foolishness of attempting to assume the powers of others. It highlights the need for the community to accord proper respect to natural powers and recognizes that there is a natural division of these powers, a balance that must be maintained, in keeping with Laguna beliefs. In line with Hymes' argument, there are other meanings to discover in this Coyote story than those that are immediately obvious.

I believe that this tale is not only about cooperation and respect for power but also about the power and respect that women in Laguna culture command. This is a story of friendship between Coyote and Woodpecker, but it is also about the relations between Coyote and his mother and Woodpecker and his mother, and the creative/productive powers of women. Immediately after Coyote and Woodpecker have become friends and agreed to a visit, we are introduced to the mothers:

"Permit me to go, let me tell mother," said (Woodpecker). "I also," said Coyote. Then he arrived at his house. Coyote said, "Mother, Woodpecker and I are comrades. In four days I go and visit him," said Coyote. Then his mother said, "It is well," said she. On the other hand, Woodpecker told his mother, "Mother," said he, "Coyote and I are comrades," said he. "That is good," said the mother of Woodpecker. (Boas 172)

In a story that is approximately 110 lines long, the mother of each character is presented within the first ten lines and continues to be a focus of attention and action throughout the story. When either Woodpecker or Coyote visits the other's home, the mother is responsible for serving the guest some food.

At first glance, it might seem that, since both mothers produce and serve food for their sons' guests, once again women are servants to men. In fact, in a cursory reading, Coyote and Woodpecker both seem to order their mothers to serve food. But a closer reading reveals another dynamic at work: "'Mother, go ahead and give my comrade something to eat,' said Woodpecker. 'Very well,' said his mother. Then she took a bowl and a poker" (Boas 172). This is one of two such exchanges between Woodpecker and his mother in the story; there

are also two similar exchanges between Coyote and his mother. Each time the son tells his mother to serve the guest, the mother assents ("Very well") before preparing, or attempting to prepare, the meal. The mother's agreement then is not accidental or incidental; it must be secured before the story proceeds; the pattern of request and agreement is repeated in every exchange between son and mother. Neither mother is ordered. Instead, she is asked to provide food and agrees, as it is customary and within her domain to distribute food to visitors. That women maintained control over food distribution is evident in this observation: "the introduction of new food plants, for example, cabbage, is often discouraged by the women, who refuse to cook or eat them" (Hewett 82). While men at Laguna are involved in cultivating crops, it is within a woman's prerogative to process and distribute food:

Crops once housed belong to the mistress of the house, who has to store and care for them, so as to feed the family during the year. She uses, gives, and sells the corn at her discretion. . . . A man always speaks of the stored corn and other food as "my wife's" and does not dispose of it without her leave. Sometimes he speaks of it as hers while it is still in the fields. (Hewett 83)

Woodpecker's mother provides sustenance for her guest and her family by extraordinary means—splitting open her leg and later transforming wood into cornbread by means of a magical manipulation of a boulder. The powers used by Woodpecker's mother to produce food in this story are metaphors for the creative powers of production that women carefully employ daily in Laguna Pueblo to provide food. A brief description of the process of producing corn meal that by the late 1940s was falling into disuse serves as an example:

Several women would grind together at night: they ground the corn successively on three or four metates ranging from rough to smooth. On the first they broke up the corn, and reduced it to fine flour on the fourth, toasting it after each grinding. Meanwhile, the men sang the grinding songs, or beat a drum, and the women kept time to the music with slow, regular strokes. There is a story that in ancient times women did not have to grind; they merely laid the mano and the corn on the metate, and it ground itself. The ritualistic use of corn meal by the Pueblo Indians is attended with much reserve and secrecy. (Hewett 83)

The boulder that Woodpecker's mother uses to make corn bread can be seen as an allusion to the stone metates used in the grinding process

and her magical production from her own body suggests the legendary magical grinding of corn. That this work is accompanied by ritual singing also indicates that it was work revered by the community. And after all this work, women had to ensure that whatever food was processed would provide for all in the year to come. Obviously what we have already learned about the freedom accorded to Laguna women is commensurate with their level of responsibility for the welfare of the community.

This story also tells us about woman's duty to provide sustenance for her community by way of negative example. Coyote's mother is a failure not only in providing food for Woodpecker, her son's guest, but also in providing for herself and her son. After his first visit to Woodpecker's house, Coyote brings back food for his mother:

"What did your comrade Woodpecker give you to eat?"
—"This green corn," said Coyote. Then he gave to his mother three ears of corn and Coyote's mother said, "Oh," said Coyote mother, "Isn't it sweet!" (Boas 172)

This pattern is repeated after Coyote's second visit to Woodpecker's house, except this time he brings sweet corn bread. Each time, Coyote's mother greets the gift of food with a fervor that suggests her own lack of productive capabilities. (This is even more pronounced in the second story of the pair where Coyote actually asks for food to take home to his "poor mother.") Coyote's mother is reduced to begging, a shameful state.

After her first failed attempt to copy the powers of Woodpecker's mother, Coyote's mother makes a complete fool of herself by confusing the directions for making cornbread that her son has conveyed and that were used by Woodpecker's mother. Woodpecker's mother calls a stone in the east, Coyote's mother calls a stone in the west. Her mistake is emphasized when she says "come here to the east" (Boas 174). When the stone finally moves, it rolls right over Coyote and his mother, killing them both. The death of both creatures at the end of this story highlights the responsibility of women in helping to ensure community survival by producing, processing and distributing food, and what can happen when that responsibility and power are ignored.

Coyote as Trickster

In analyzing these three stories, I have not directly addressed the nature of trickster stories, but obviously my approach to these three Coyote stories has been to discover how they are both reflective of and instructive for a gynecentric culture. Ballinger, Vizenor, and Hymes, in separate articles, see trickster as a representative of the necessary reciprocity with environment that is essential to creativity and produc-

tion (Ballinger 27-28; Hymes 194; Vizenor 285-86), rather than an outsider who transforms reality by challenging the accepted order. I believe that these coyote tales are in keeping with a view of trickster as an integral part of community who promotes a communal view of life. In "Coyote and Badger," "Coyote and his Daughters," and "Coyote Visits his Friends," the appropriateness of the community's social organization, especially as regards women, is clearly conveyed.

Conclusion

These three coyote stories are obviously cautionary yet amusing, indicative of a wide range of deceptive and foolish behavior, yet they also reveal much about the underlying gynecentric assumptions of the tribe. When read with some understanding of the culture from which they spring, all three of these Laguna coyote stories strongly convey the complementarity of gender roles and respect for the strength, power, and intelligence of women.

In this study, I have focused on traditional beliefs, meanings, and customs in interpreting traditional stories. However, as Paula Gunn Allen notes in *The Sacred Hoop*, the influence of patriarchal culture has certainly been felt among Laguna people, shifting attitudes on gender and relations between the sexes. In spite of this, traditional Laguna culture continues. But cultural change may alter the ways in which these stories are perceived by a contemporary Laguna audience. Even though Allen argues against it, these changes may make the application of a western feminist critical perspective useful in interpreting contemporary meanings. Be that as it may, what is most important to recognize in absorbing these stories is that context is crucial to the interpretation and understanding of the gender principles depicted in traditional Native American literatures.

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Appendix

[This and the following seven pages are a facsimile of pp. 167-74 of Franz Boas's *Keresan Texts*, Volume 8 Part 1 of the Publications of the American Ethnological Society, as published in 1928. Our thanks to AMS Press for permission to reproduce these pages in *SAIL*. The vertical bars and numbers in parentheses that appear in this text refer, respectively, to line breaks and numbered lines in the text of *Keresan Texts* Volume 8 Part 2, which is itself a holograph written in the Keresan language.]

Coyote and Badger. (Told by by ko'tʰε, 1920.)

A long time ago. — Eh. — There in the northwest, there Coyote and Badger | lived. Then there on the west side a Navaho girl with brown hair, of light complexion, | lived. Then spoke Coyote and Badger, "Since we are partners, | uncle, let us here on the west side westward go and let us visit (5) the girl," they said. "Let us go." Then there westward | they went. Here in the west they arrived. Up they climbed and westward they entered. "How are things?" they said. | "It is good," she said to them. "Sit down," she said to them. Then there | they sat down. Then the girl said to them, "Maybe you want | something," she said. "No," they said. "We just came to visit you," they said. (10) "It is good," said the girl. Then after some time | she gave them boiled corn and squashes and wafer bread. Thus spoke | the girl, "Take this and eat," said she. Then they ate. | Then Coyote and Badger had eaten enough. Then they said, "May we not | sleep here this night?" said Coyote and Badger. (15) "Agreed," said the girl. "Here below the door I shall make a bed for you. | Below here you will sleep tonight," said the girl to them. | "It is good," they said. Then after some time they said, "Might we not lie down with you?" they asked the girl. "No," (20) said she. Then she said to them thus. "If tomorrow you bring me rabbits, | then we shall sleep," said | the girl to them. "Indeed?" said Badger and Coyote. Then | they said, "Let us go to our house, uncle." — "Let us go," they said. | They went eastward and there they

arrived at their house. Then they said, "Nephew," (1) said Coyote. "Yes," said Badger, "Let us sing a song for success in hunting that there may be snow tomorrow," said Coyote. "Then, if it | snows let us go hunting rabbits," said Coyote. "Let us do so," said | Badger. Then they sang,

(5) (?)¹ |

Then Coyote spoke thus, "Go up and look about, uncle, and | see if there is snow," said Coyote. Then up went his | uncle Badger. When he had gone up and found out there was snow, he went in and sat down | to tell his nephew Coyote. Thus spoke Badger, "Yes, it is snowing, (10) nephew," said Badger. "It is good," said Coyote. Then again | once more let us sing, |

(?) |

Then Coyote said, "Uncle, go up and look out again | and see how much snow there is," said Coyote. Then Badger went out again (up). (15) Then already the snow was deep. Then he saw it. Then | (down) entered Badger. He said, "Nephew," said he, "yes, already | the snow is very deep." — "It is good," said Coyote. "Now for | a while let us sleep," said Coyote. "Let us do so," said Badger. Then | they lay down. Very (quickly) as soon as daylight came, then (20) they woke up. Then they said, "Let us go hunting rabbits. | For the girl we shall hunt them," they said. "Let us do so," they said. They went out (up). | There westward they went to tell the girl. Then there | they climbed up and went in westward. They said, "How are things?" they said. "It is good," | said she to them. "Sit down," she said to them. "All right," they said. (25) "We came to tell you this. Today we shall go hunting rabbits for you." — "Indeed?" said | the girl. "Then when you come back tonight | we shall all sleep," said the girl, "and also this I shall tell you. (1) If Coyote kills many rabbits, then we shall first lie down," said the girl, "and also if Badger kills many rabbits, | we shall lie down first." — "It is good," said Coyote and Badger. | "Let us go hunting." There northward they went. There in the north at Woa'cpa, (5) there in the north they arrived. There were rabbits in great plenty. | Then there they ran after them. It was not long before Coyote caught a rabbit. | There was water there and underneath ran the rabbits, but many times entered | Badger from there underneath. Underneath he caught | the rabbits and killed them and he would bring them out. After some time (10) Badger had killed very many rabbits but Coyote had | killed just five rabbits. Then

1. This song is supposed to be in the Navaho language, although the first words are clearly Keres future forms.

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a little towards evening, then again | three went into (the water house) their home under water. Then from there went in Badger. | Then Coyote closed the door there. Then Coyote spoke thus, "Here | the sand will bury you," said Coyote. "Now let me go," said Coyote. (15) Then he put the rabbits on his back and he went southward. He arrived at the girl's | house. Then he went into the door westward and he threw down his rabbits. "Take these | rabbits," he said to her. Then she spoke thus, "Did you, yourself, kill them?" she said to him. "Yes," said Coyote. "Where did you leave your uncle?" | she said to him. "Sand buried him there. He is dead." — "Why?" said she to him. (20) "Because water was there," said he. "How so?" said she to him. | "Because their he was in the water," said he. "Indeed?" said she to him. | Then the girl spoke thus, "Let us for a while wait for him. | If he comes, let me give him to eat," said she to him. Then | Coyote stayed there and they waited. After some time | Badger came there. He carried on his back rabbits. Then Badger entered there westward. (15) He took the rabbits down. Then the girl spoke thus. "Did you come here?" | said she to him. "Yes," said Badger. "I thought you were dead and you were buried under sand." — "Who said so?" — "Your nephew said so." — "No," said he, "he just (1) shut me up and then he left me." — "How many rabbits did your nephew | Coyote kill?" — "He killed five," said Badger. "Indeed?" said she. | "But I killed all of these," said | Badger. "Indeed? It is good," said the girl, "come on!(5) let me give you to eat," | said she. Then she gave him to eat there. Then the girl spoke thus, | "You on your part will stay at the door. When we | have eaten enough, let me give you something to eat last." Then Badger and the girl ate. | Then Badger spoke thus, "My poor nephew must eat also," | said Badger. "Let him wait, for behold, he almost killed you." Again (10) after some time Badger spoke thus, "Anyhow, | my nephew must also eat," said Badger. Then the girl said, "Go ahead," | said she, and presently Coyote also ate. | After some time he had eaten enough. Then at night they all slept. | Thus did long ago Coyote and | Badger. That long it is. |

Coyote and his Daughters.

(Told by KO'TYΞ, 1920.)

Long ago. — Eh. — In the northwest Coyote and his children | were living. Then Coyote, their father, said, "How is it? | Oh, if I could marry my daughters." Then again | he said after a little while,

"My children," said he, "I am (5) going to die," thus said their father, Coyote. | "I will give you orders. When I am dead, you shall go out (and leave this house)," said he. | "Then I myself shall also go out," thus said Coyote, their father. | And he said also this, "I only give these orders. I shall die and | you shall marry a man who comes from the north (10) and who wears a high hat and a quiver of mountain lion skin. | Him you shall marry, my daughters. | Thus I order you. I am very sick, I am | going to die," thus said their father Coyote. After a while | he said this at the last, "Verily, I am going to die," said he. Then (15) he said, "Now I die." Then he fell down there. | His children said, "Our poor father has | died for us. Let us go out," they said. "Let us go out." Then they went | eastward from their house. They said; | "Let us leave here," thus they said. After a while their (20) father Coyote arose and went out. Northward he went and went out northward over the hills. There were living | some other people. He arrived there and said, "How are things, ?" he said. | "Very well," they said. "Maybe you want something?" they said (1) to Coyote. Then he said, "Yes, I want a high hat | and white beads and red beads, | turquoise rings, and a buck skin shirt and also shoes of | buck skin and buck skin leggings and a quiver of mountain-lion skin. (5) That is what I want." They gave it to him. "Permit me to go," | said he. "Tomorrow at noon I shall bring it back," | said Coyote. "Very well," they said. Then southward | he went up and he came to the south edge of the mesa on top. There he put on the clothing, his | high hat and the quiver. (10) He took out the bow and two arrows and went | southward. He played with his arrows shooting them ahead. ' When he came near his house in the southwest | his daughters saw him. They said, "Oh," | they said, "sister, there is the man coming from the northwest (15) whom our father said we should marry," they said. | Then one of them said, "Oh," said she, "Come down. We do not | stay there on the west side," said she. "Our father died there." Then Coyote went westward playing with his arrows | and he shot. After a little while he arrived there. (20) He went up and entered northward. Then he said, "How are things?" said he. | Then they said, "Very well. Did you arrive?" they said. "Yes," | said he. Then he said again, "Where is uncle?" | — "Oh the poor one died for us," they said. Then he spoke and cried, | "My poor uncle is dead. Oh, if I could talk well (?)," said he. (25) Then he said again,

1. This game is played in the following manner: Two boys shoot with arrows. If the arrow of the second boy falls across the arrow of the first one, they exchange their arrows. If both lie parallel, the second player wins and takes the arrow of the first player.

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"What did he tell you when he was about to die?" | They said "From the north | would come down a man with a high hat and (1) a quiver of mountain-lion skin. He should be our husband, | thus our father ordered us," said they. | Then the man who was Coyote said, "It is well," said he. Then | he said again, "I have come and we shall be married," (5) said he. Then the girls said, "It is well," they said, and they also said, "Let us | wash your head," they said. "Go ahead," said he. Then they washed his head. | After a while they said, "Let us give him to eat | corn, and squashes and boiled green corn," said they. They gave him to eat. (10) "Take this and eat," they said. Then he ate, after a while he had enough. Then said the man who was | Coyote, "Let us lie down," said he. Then she said, "Wait a while," thus said the girls. "Let us comb your hair," they said. "Go ahead," said the man who was Coyote. (15) The Coyote girls sat down, and in front | sat down the one who was to be their husband. They combed him. | After a while he went to sleep. Then one of them said, "Sister," said the one, | "I think this is our father," said they. "Go ahead," said | the one, "lift up his head a little." Then the other one lifted (20) his head and she saw a wart on his neck. | Then the one said, "Oh," said she, "that is our father," said she. | "Behold up here on his neck is a wart. Look at it!" Then | the other one looked. "Oh," she said, "he is bad. That is | our father," they said. "Let us run away. We must (25) find somewhere else somebody who will be our husband," they said. | They put him down slowly on the floor and they stood up. | They tied their dresses in bundles, went westward (1) and ran away. Their father Coyote slept. Early in the morning | he awoke. He arose and looked around. "Where | have they gone?" said he. "I slept soundly." He stood up | and made a bundle of the things he had borrowed and (5) carried the clothing up northward. He arrived above at | the other place. "How are things?" he said. "Very well," said they. | "I brought your clothing and the beads and quiver and | high hat," said he. That long it is.

Coyote Visits his Friends.

(Told by KO'TVε, 1920.)

Long ago. — Eh. — There to the southwest lived Coyote | and his mother, and there to the north Woodpecker lived and his mother. Woodpecker | was sitting under a piñon tree and Coyote arrived there. | He said, "Are you here, Woodpecker?" said Coyote. "Yes,"

said (5) Woodpecker. "Where are you going?" said Woodpecker. "I am looking for somebody who will be my comrade," | said Coyote. Then Woodpecker said, | "Let us be comrades." — "Very well," said Coyote. "Where | do you live?" — "Towards the north," said Woodpecker. "After four days | visit me there." — "Very well," said Coyote. "Permit me to go, let me tell mother," said (10) (Woodpecker). "I also," said Coyote. Then he arrived at his house. | Coyote said, "Mother, Woodpecker and I are comrades. | In four days I go and visit him," said Coyote. Then | his mother said, "It is well," said she. On the other hand, Woodpecker told his mother, "Mother," said he, "Coyote and I are comrades," (15) said he. "That is good," said the mother of Woodpecker. "After | four days he will visit me." — "Very well," said his mother. | "We will wait for him." After four days Coyote came to visit them. | He arrived at Woodpecker's house. Coyote said, "How are things, | comrade Woodpecker?" said he. "It is well," said he to him. "Sit down, comrade." (20) He gave him a stool and he sat down on it. | Then Woodpecker said, "Mother, go ahead and give my comrade something to eat," said Woodpecker. "Very well," said his mother. Then | she took a bowl and a poker. Then (1) Woodpecker's mother sat down and struck four times with the poker | her leg and boiled corn came out of it and she | gave it to him. Woodpecker's mother said, "Here it is, comrade, | eat the corn," said she to him. Then Coyote sat down (5) and ate the corn. Then he had enough and Coyote said, | "Permit me to go, comrade. After four days you shall | visit me too," said Coyote. "Very well," said Woodpecker. Then | Coyote went back. He arrived at his house and his mother said, | "Have you come?" said his mother. "Yes," said (10) Coyote. "What did your comrade Woodpecker give you to eat?" | — "This green corn," said Coyote. Then he gave to his mother | three ears of corn and Coyote's mother said, "Oh," said Coyote's | mother, "Isn't it sweet!" said she. "How did she make it?" Then he said, | "She took a bowl and also a poker, (15) she sat down and struck her leg four times, | then boiled corn came out of it, thus | did Woodpecker's mother. Then she gave me to eat," said Coyote. | Then his mother said, "I will do as she did," said | Coyote's mother. "We will do so," said her son. Then after four days (20) Woodpecker came to visit his comrade Coyote. He | arrived there. "How are things, comrade Coyote?" said Woodpecker. "Very well," | said Coyote. Then Coyote gave a stool to his comrade | and he sat down on it. Then Coyote said, "Mother, give | my comrade something to eat," said Coyote. "Very well," said his mother. (25) She took a bowl and a poker and she sat down. |

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Then she struck her leg four times but no | boiled corn came out. Then his mother said, "Is there no green corn?" — (1) "Never mind," said Woodpecker, "permit me to go. After four days | visit me, comrade," said Woodpecker. He went north | and Woodpecker arrived at his house. Then his mother said, "What did your comrade Coyote give you to eat?" said she. And Woodpecker said, "Nothing," (5) said he. "She only hurt her leg," said Woodpecker. |

After four days Coyote went to visit him. | He arrived at Woodpecker's house. Woodpecker said, "Did you come, comrade?" | "Yes," said Coyote. "Sit down, comrade," said Woodpecker. | Then Coyote sat down on a stool. Woodpecker said (10), "Mother, give my comrade Coyote something to eat," | said he. "Very well," said his mother. Then she took | a basket tray and said, "Let us all go out upstairs," said | Woodpecker's mother. Then she went up and they climbed down. Then | Woodpecker's mother said, "Comrade Coyote, stand a little farther to the north," (15) said Woodpecker's mother. "Very well," said | Coyote. Coyote stood a little ways to the north, and on her part Woodpecker's | mother stood together with Woodpecker. Then Woodpecker's | mother said to a stone which was standing to the east, "Come here, | I want you," she said. Then she said again to the stone which was standing towards to the east, (20) "Come here, I want you," said Woodpecker's mother. | Again she spoke to the stone which was towards the east, "Come here," | said Woodpecker's mother. Then the stone to the east started. | The stone rolled. The stone arrived in the west. Then she put under it wood. | Then the stone turned over upside down and (25) sweet cornbread which was flat came out. | Then Woodpecker's mother said, "Let us go up!" They went up and they entered going downstairs. | Then she gave Coyote flat corn bread. (1) It was very sweet. Coyote had eaten enough and said, | "Permit me to go, comrade Woodpecker. After four days come and visit me." — "Very well," said Woodpecker. Then Coyote went south and he arrived | at his house. Then his mother said to him, "Have you come?" she said. (5) "Yes," said Coyote. "Did he give you something to eat?" said she. | "This," said he. "Flat sweet corn bread." Then his mother | ate it. Then she said, "How did she make it?" said Coyote's mother. | "It is very sweet! Nice!" said she. Then her son said, "She | called a stone standing in the east. When it had gone west (10) she put two pieces of wood under it. Then the stone turned over | and out came flat sweet corn bread. Thus | did Woodpecker's mother." Then his mother | said, "I will do the same way as she did," said Coyote's mother. | "Let us do it," said her son. Next in his turn Woodpecker came

to visit him (15) after four days. He arrived and Woodpecker said, "How are things, comrade?" | — "Very well," said he and his mother. "Sit down." Then | her son Coyote said, "Mother," said he, "give my comrade | something to eat," said he. "Very well," said she. Then she took a basket tray and | two sticks she took and said, "Let us go out upstairs," (20) said Woodpecker's mother. "Let us go," they said. Then they went out and up | and Coyote's mother said, "Let us climb down," | said she. Then they climbed down and Coyote and his mother stood | together and Woodpecker stood a little to the north. | Then Coyote's mother said to a (25) stone standing in the west, "Come here, I want you," said Coyote's mother. She spoke again to the stone standing in the west. | "Come here, to the east," she said, and spoke again to the stone standing in the west; (1) "Come here to the east, I want you," said she. When for the last time Coyote's mother had spoken to the stone standing in the west, | "Come here, I want you," then from the west | the stone started and rolled. When the stone came to the east (5) it fell on both Coyote and his mother and they were killed. | Then Woodpecker went northward alone and | arrived at his house. Then his mother said, "Have you come?" | said she. "Yes," said Woodpecker. "Didn't you eat?" | — "No" said he. "The stone rolled over the poor ones (10) and they were killed." That long it is.

Indian Men With Baseball Caps

Charmaine M. Benz

They all came out for the funeral,
She had lots of men in her family.
Uncles, nephews, cousins, and
Brothers.

They sat quietly
Without their baseball caps
It was a twentieth century ceremony
For the dead.

They sat calmly,
Like warriors without regalia,
Waiting
To go outside
And smoke cigarettes
And put their baseball caps back on.

dealing with bears

Clyde L. Hodge

accept the frightening aspect
don't hold it

when a bear stands
in your path welcome him with respect
don't look in his eyes
he'll think it's a challenge
don't greet with open arms
a bear hug is overwhelming
nor run with your cache
he will follow you and eat you both

say hello in respectful but friendly supplication
don't challenge him
danger is still potential
but not immediate
there is the better chance made
he'll move on

if he attacks
play dead until he goes away
or become him

Trickster, Trickster Discourse, and Identity in Louis Owens' Wolfsong

Chris LaLonde

In *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992), mixedblood critic and novelist Louis Owens writes that "in spite of the fact that Indian authors write from very diverse tribal and cultural backgrounds, there is to a remarkable degree a shared consciousness and identifiable worldview reflected in novels by American Indian authors, a consciousness and worldview defined primarily by a quest for identity" (20). This quest for identity is integral to what Owens calls the Native Americans' "unending battle to affirm their own identity, to resist the metamorphoses insisted upon by European intruders and to hold to that certainty of self that is passed on through tribal traditions and oral literatures" (21). It is precisely this battle for identity which is being waged in *Wolsong*, Owens' 1991 novel, a text set against the backdrop of the contemporary land rights controversy in the Pacific Northwest. Tom Joseph, the protagonist of *Wolsong*, must find his identity before he can affirm it, however, and our understanding of his quest for a certainty of self is enriched by the figure of the trickster appearing throughout the narrative, for that figure helps us understand Tom Joseph and his actions. The trickster and trickster discourse, the figure and economy which both free and compel us to re-examine the world, are also fundamental to the text's interrogation of the tropes of Indian and the vanishing Native, both of which are vitally important to resistance and the affirmation of true identity.

Tom Joseph returns home from his freshman year of college in California in order to attend his uncle's funeral. Jim Joseph had died of what the coroner called a heart attack some time after taking to the wilderness above the town of Forks in order to harass the workers and wage a guerilla action against the machines being used to build a road to a nascent mining site deep in sacred Stehemish land. Tom Joseph,

we also learn, returns to reevaluate the decision he had made to leave his family, his girl friend Karen Brant, and his home amongst the rivers and peaks of the Cascade Mountains of Washington state. He tells Karen that "I didn't fit in down there" at Santa Barbara because, he thinks, living in the valley had made him too dark inside.¹ Riding the bus north in the rain through Oregon and into Washington then, Tom Joseph feels the dampness of the climate settle deep into his body and experiences "a great sense of coming home" (13).

That homecoming is tellingly marked by a lack of immediate recognition on the part of Amel Barstow, the truck driver who picks Tom up hitchhiking the last leg of his journey home. When Amel does place Tom's face he laughs at his failure to immediately recognize someone he'd known for years and then says, "I'll be damned. . . . Must've been the hair. You're starting to look like an old-time Indian, a whole lot like a picture I seen once of your uncle when he was a kid" (18). The comment highlights the theme of transformation in *Wolfsong*, as do Karen Brant's later comments to Tom that "Your hair's longer. You look like an Indian" (63) when she first sees him after his return and Bob McBride's comment that Tom "sure look[s] like" a "timber beast" (181) after working as a logger for a time. These transformations are external, however, changes of appearance which do not necessarily signify a fundamental transformation in Tom and the way he looks at the world and his relationship with it.

Amel's comment also effectively yokes together Tom with his uncle. That union or joining prefigures both Tom's connection with Jim Joseph's cause later in the text, as Tom eventually turns to militant action in order at the very least to disrupt the desecration of the wilderness in general and the Stehemish ancestral lands in particular, and Tom's attempt to understand the connection between himself and his uncle. The difficulty of making and understanding the latter connection is signalled by Amel's statement that Tom is starting to look "like an old-time Indian," for the adjective "old-time" drives home that the image of an Indian which Tom Joseph mirrors and which Jim Joseph personified is a part of the past. To make the past a part of the present, and indeed a part of the future, to make tradition live, is what is at stake in *Wolfsong*, as it is in so many other contemporary Native American texts, for it is only through a living tradition that one might understand what it means to be an Indian and attain a true sense of one's identity.

Raven, the trickster in the oral tradition of numerous Pacific Northwest tribes, is transformed into a figure in the written text which scolds, barks, watches, shouts, laughs, and mocks throughout *Wolfsong*.² Raven's entrance into the written world of *Wolfsong* in the text's opening chapter links Jim Joseph, the trickster, and the theme of

identity. Owens writes that after Joseph fires at the bulldozers rending the wilderness, Leroy Brant comes out from behind the cover he had taken to shout up into the forest which "leaned in a black wall, wet and impenetrable" (3). Unable to pinpoint Joseph's exact location, Brant can only cup his hands around his mouth and yell "We know you, old man. Now come on down before somebody gets hurt. This ain't cowboys and injuns." The narrative then discloses that "Somewhere in the timber above him a raven barked and he shifted irritably" (3). Brant shifts to direct his gaze and voice to where the raven barked because, being a good woodsman, he believes that the raven has revealed Joseph's position. With that sentence Owens establishes a link between Jim Joseph, who is described throughout the narrative as grinning, and Raven. Brant shifts irritably because, like the trickster, Jim Joseph is an irritator. Most importantly, the passage also links the trickster and identity because the raven barks immediately after Leroy Brant shouts the hackneyed "cowboys and injuns," a phrase which the dominant culture has been all too quick to use to inscribe both the Native Americans and their relationship to the vision of the white frontier hero.

As is the case with his appearance, Tom Joseph's actions link him with his uncle and hence with the trickster as well. Indeed, the actions leading to his flight for freedom across the glacier are strikingly reminiscent of those taken by the trickster. If we know the trickster, it is through his actions: sexually active, often violent, ravenous, impetuous, quick to play tricks on others, quick to deceive and at times self-deceiving—the unwitting sufferer of his own tricks. So it is with Tom Joseph: throughout the narrative we learn that he is and has been sexually active, that he can be quite violent, that he is willing to play a destructive trick, and that he is an unwitting sufferer of the trick he plays.

Consider the subplot in *Wolfsong* concerning Tom Joseph's relationship with Karen Brant, his former girlfriend, which might seem at best tangential to the larger issues being explored in the text. What, after all, does the story of Tom Joseph's return home to discover that Karen has had intercourse with Buddy Hill, become pregnant, and gotten engaged have to do with issues of identity, tradition, and what it means to be an Indian? The story of the failed relationship does, of course, accentuate the degree to which Tom Joseph is separated from others in the valley. One could also read Karen's physical transformation, which Owens highlights throughout the novel, as symbolic of her psychological transformation: with the pregnancy and engagement Karen loses both the dream of togetherness she had shared with Tom and the dream bears that had protected and nurtured her. Either reading, however, fails to take into account the sexual intercourse

between Tom and Karen after her engagement to Buddy. The second time they make love is prefaced by a discussion about Native identity and the mine:

"Are you against the mine like your uncle was?"

"I think I saw a wolf," he said. "The first night I was back. I'm almost sure it was a wolf." He reached to touch her neck and then he kissed each eyelid slowly and carefully, moving his hand to the softness of her neck beneath the long hair and then down over her breasts to the barely perceptible swell of her belly. (105)

Karen's question elicits both the invocation of the wolf spirit that was Jim Joseph's helper and guardian and Tom's initiation of sexual foreplay leading to intercourse. The invocation and initiation tacitly form Tom Joseph's response to the question, for the combination of the wolf spirit, which links Tom and his uncle, and the trickster, a character whose sexual appetite leads to the transgression of social boundaries, suggests precisely why and how Tom will deal with the mine befouling the sacred land.

Like the trickster, Tom Joseph will turn to violence and destruction. The opening of the chapter that introduces Tom Joseph in the narrative begins to sound the connection between the young man and violence. Owens writes:

The bus slid into sight on the coast highway, trailing a mist as the tires threw rain off the asphalt. Above the red bank where the road cut across the cliffs, tall black firs stabbed a layer of cloud. The rain slanted in on the wind, streaking across the window, and the ocean slashed at the base of the cliffs, throwing seaweed and polished logs and debris against the land. A hundred yards out, columns of black rock, pocked by the wind and water, guarded the empty coastline and mists of gulls lifted in uneven lines before settling again. The wind cut the tops off the waves and wove whitecaps around the broken stone. (13)

The paragraph is full of violent verbs: the road cuts, the wind cuts, the firs stab, the ocean slashes and throws debris against the land. The connection between Tom Joseph and violence is strengthened later in the chapter when Owens writes that Tom rides the bus and plays his own violent "game from childhood, sliding the razor-edged blade out from the bus and lopping off everything in its path, seeing the telephone poles fall in neat lines, the timber mowed like grain before the inexorable blade" (14). This image of seemingly indiscriminate destruction, as Tom imagines that both the telephone poles symbolic of the artificial world of the white man and the trees symbolic of the

natural world are scythed off, is immediately tempered by the disclosure that Tom retracts the blade and spares a "dull farmhouse" which reminds him of all the Indian homes he has seen. While willing to spare what is remindful of contemporary Native American existence, Tom is quick to slice in two the "shining, two-story brick house" (14) indicative of white culture.

Later, Tom and his brother Jimmy are forced into a fight with Jake Tobin, Buddy Hill, and two other men. Tom uses violence so extreme that Tobin suffers a severely crippled arm. Tom feels "pity but no guilt" (171) for Jake and remarks that he is free of guilt because "Somethings just happen, I guess. Jake made it happen. Or he let somebody else make it happen" (171-72). Tom's lack of guilt is also suggestive of the trickster, a figure frequently characterized as free from guilt.

Tom Joseph's most violent and destructive act, of course, is blowing up the water tank at the mining camp. It is only after seeing the mine and being told of the damage it will do to the land that Tom understands why his uncle shot at the machines. With that understanding comes an awareness of what he must do. That awareness is signalled by the fact that he "memorized the site" (169) while there with forest ranger Martin Grider. He does so in order that he will know what to look for and where to plant the dynamite when he returns. What he cannot anticipate, however, are the circumstances that lead to J. D. Hill emerging from the relative cover of one of the camp cabins just as the dynamite is detonated and "ten thousand gallons of water exploded" from the ruptured tank. Caught by the wall of water, Hill is thrown against a bulldozer with such force that his back breaks and he dies (220). Suddenly and unwittingly a murderer, Tom Joseph attempts to avoid pursuit and capture while Owens, to insure that we see the connection between his protagonist and Trickster, writes that "Raven dreamed up death and then mourned bitterly for his lost daughter, the trickster tricked by death" (225).

The trickster is the sign for Tom Joseph's social antagonism. That is not, however, all that the trickster signifies in *Wolfsong*. Owens crafts his narrative so that the audience might see both the connection between Tom Joseph and the trickster and that Tom Joseph is neither conscious of the connection nor striving to forge it. Far from diminishing the importance of the trickster in *Wolfsong*, this dual aspect of the figure is indicative of the complex nature of the trickster in the text. While, as we have seen, the sign of the trickster helps us to understand Tom's actions, the signifier of the trickster, particularly the signifier "raven," helps to accentuate Tom Joseph's isolation.

The sense of homecoming Tom Joseph experiences as he rides the bus north from California is quickly replaced by questions of identity

and his relationship to the place he has called home. Seeing old-growth cedars hauled out of the valley as he rides toward Forks makes Tom realize that for nearly a year he had not thought about the copper company's plan to conduct open-pit mining in the heart of the wilderness area. Tom reminds his brother shortly after arriving home that that country was sacred to their uncle. And, he thinks, "if it was a sacred place, shouldn't it be sacred to him, too, and Jimmy?" (33). Tom Joseph knows the answer to that question, knows that the land *should be* sacred to him, and that knowledge is the catalyst for his attempt to determine his identity so that the land *will be* sacred to him.

He begins by going to his uncle's room and carefully examining all that the man had with him when he died alone in the wilderness, opening himself up to his uncle's presence, and taking the room as his place to sleep. Tom quickly realizes, however, that he is unable to see his identity and its relationship to the land as easily as his uncle had his. *Wolfsong* drives home that Tom Joseph has difficulty finding out who he is because he did not listen closely enough to his uncle and the stories he told. Tom tells Karen that "My uncle knew a whole lot that he tried to teach me . . . but I never really listened. I mean, I never listened like it would really make a difference. And now I think of all the questions I should have asked" (105). Haunted by those questions, as well as by both an earlier vision quest that failed because of his inability to believe and his failure to have the language necessary to articulate his relationship to the sacred wilderness, Tom fears that while the "map" of his home is made up of the "same mountains, rivers, and forests the Stehemish, Stillaguamish, and Skagit" had always known, the signs now "pointed in different directions, toward different destinies" (121-22). Given such a map, and without his uncle to guide him, Tom comes to feel "alone, cut off, a distant speck in the whirling world" (163).

It is precisely his isolation that prohibits Tom from understanding the signifier for the trickster, the raven, and what it twice attempts to communicate to him. In the first instance, "A pair of ravens settled in the top of a tattered hemlock and began to mock and scold" (136) as Tom listens to Karen tell him she has chosen to go through with marrying Buddy even though she does not love him. As the ravens bark and laugh, Tom feels "in some strange way that the message was for him if only he knew the language" (137). He cannot understand what the ravens are trying to communicate, however, any more than he can understand the raven that later "ratcheted a question at him" (219) as he prepares to plant the dynamite at the base of the water tank. There, too, Tom Joseph can only glance at the "disappearing bird" while "wondering what it had tried to tell him" (219).

Gerald Vizenor takes Carl Jung to task for assuming "an inert trickster, an erroneous assertion because the narrator imagines the trickster and the characters are active in a narrative discourse" ("Trickster Discourse" 205). In *Wolfsong*, however, Tom Joseph is not active in a narrative discourse with the signifiers of the trickster—raven and coyote. Tom's failure to participate in discourse with the trickster is the result of his increasing isolation. Even the articulation of community offered in the sweatlodge ceremony Tom participates in relatively late in the narrative is all too soon replaced by the "enormity of his solitude" (217) as he camps in the mountains the night before he blows up the water tank. By that time his mother has followed her brother to the grave, Jimmy Joseph has fallen further into the trap of alcohol, and Karen Brant is all but out of his life. Completely isolated from community, Tom cannot understand the trickster, "a sign, a communal signification that cannot be separated or understood in isolation" (Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse" 189). Raven turns "a black eye bright with intelligence and skepticism" (219) upon Tom Joseph as he prepares to dynamite the water tank.³ Like Raven, we should be skeptical, not of what the trickster represents as the sign for social antagonism, but of Tom Joseph's ability to assume the identity of the trickster without the necessary communal base.

Owens' understanding of the meaning of the sign of the trickster is nowhere more brilliantly conceived and carefully articulated than in his description of the raven's "black eye bright with intelligence and skepticism," for the invocation of the philosophy that absolute knowledge is not possible and that we must therefore approach with doubt the world and what is offered to us as certain and true evokes a worldview that the sign of the trickster would have us see, understand, accept, and adopt. With that adoption comes freedom and the ability to interrogate the world that is given rather than merely accepting the world as given. The trickster, the sign of freedom and chance, can liberate readers as well as characters and audience, if we are aware of and understand both the signifier and the signified which comprise the sign. Only then will the trickster be real for us. While Tom Joseph cannot understand the raven, we can. The trickster is also real and liberating for Louis Owens, for it enables him to "summon agonistic imagination in a comic holotrope" and transform the narrative of *Wolfsong* into "a discourse on the revolution in [the] semiotic signs" (Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse" 193) or tropes of Indian and the vanishing Native. With the sign of the trickster and trickster discourse, the narrative of *Wolfsong* moves from the definition of identity inscribed by the "cowboys and injuns" of the first chapter, through the various invocations of "Indian" that are found wanting in the text, and to Tom Joseph's weak grin at a "cowboys-and-Indians joke" while he

lies wounded on the glacier and "a raven made grave pronouncements somewhere in the rocks above" him (243).

The connection between *Wolfsong* and trickster discourse is most clearly articulated in a passage that conflates the issue of identity and traditional trickster tales:

[Tom]'d tried to imagine what it would've been like to have been a real Indian, before the whites came and began to cut the trees—and pay Indians to cut the trees—and everything changed. In the winter, when the valley was stiff and quiet with snow, his uncle and mother told the funny stories about coyote's tricks, about fox shrinking the animals so the Indians could hunt them, about the tall, bearded hemlock that stood near Concrete on the banks of the Skagit and stole the souls of foolish Indians who came too close, and threw the souls across the river to another tree which threw them back until the person died. (37)

What might seem like a rupture in sense, the jump from the all-encompassing change brought by the transformation of the natural world into a commodity to the invocation of the traditional time of year for telling trickster tales, is in fact a narrative strategy designed to draw our attention to the concatenation of identity, economics, trickster, and trickster discourse.

The trickster uncovers "distinctions and ironies" (Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse" 192), and the trickster discourse of *Wolfsong*, signalled by Raven, early on discloses the irony in what Jimmy Joseph had told Tom to do about the heritage and tradition they share. The passage reads:

[Tom]'d tried to tell his brother about *staka'yu* once when they'd sat on a windfall fishing for dolly varden trout, but Jimmy had laughed and said, "Forget that old crap. That stuff's for old men and crazy longhairs. You forget about wolf spirits and all those other things—Knife Man and Cedar Man and Old Man Raven and all that crap—and learn about chainsaws and carburetors. That ghost stuff is for movies." Jimmy had spit a wad of Redman chewing tobacco into the stream and grimaced. For a week he'd been trying to learn to chew, and he'd felt sick all week. (35)

Even as a boy Jimmy has accepted the Euro-American vision of progress and the future symbolized by chainsaws and carburetors, but Owens includes the sign of the trickster in Jimmy's admonition to his brother so that we might correctly read the passage as trickster

discourse. The trickster frees us so we can see that what Jimmy champions both destroys the natural world and makes him sick: chainsaws and men perversely transform trees into timber by cutting them down for profit, carburetors pollute the air, and the juice of the chewing tobacco is poison. The irony of the tobacco sickening Jimmy is deliciously complex, for the chewing tobacco making the Native American sick is at once symbolic of how what Uncle Jim called the now-crazy modern world sickens the Native and, subtly, of how acquiescing to the image of the Indian constructed by the whites, an image signified in the passage by "Redman," will make the Native American sick as well. Twice in the passage Jimmy calls their tradition, their heritage, their stories, "crap"; the irony is that he is unconsciously correct. The stories and the traditions are indeed crap: they are the remainder or excess of Native American identity that the dominant culture cannot synthesize or handle and must therefore label excrement, and they are the "waste" material that is most valuable for anyone trying to make sense of the signs of Indian and the vanishing Native.

Both signs are fundamental to Tom Joseph's struggle to determine his identity. The struggle with what it means to be an Indian is bound up in his struggle to understand his connection with the father he never knew and with his uncle Jim. Returning from the ancestral graveyard after burying his uncle, Tom recalls how when thinking of his father he sometimes felt as though "he were descended from some madman's dream." In that dream, "Indians rode spotted horses over golden plains after Buffalo. They lived in the light of the sun, where nothing was hidden and earth rose up to sky, in tipis, not in cedar-slab houses crouched in the bowels of a rainforest. They sat horseback against the infinite horizon, barechested and challenging their disinheritors" (54-55). What Tom sees is the stereotypical image of the Indian as plains warrior which the dominant culture has been quick to hold up as representative of all Native Americans. Those warriors, Tom realizes, were after all "the Indians they studied in school" (55). How, he wonders, "could the remote, disturbing figure [of his father photographed] in hat and overcoat be part of that? He was unreal, as were all of them" (55).

Raven, the sign of the trickster, appears in the next paragraph to "scold" both characters and reader for falling into the trap of either accepting the stylized, one-dimensional, monologic sign of Indian or dismissing the possibility of Indian as a suitable sign. The trickster and trickster discourse demand that we, like Tom Joseph, the narrator, and the author, free ourselves from that trap and interrogate the sign. Doing so, we come to share Tom's realization that "Books and movies seldom showed Indians who looked like the Salish people of these

mountains. Short, dark people dressed in woven cedar bark weren't as exciting as Sioux warriors in eagle-feather headdresses on horseback, the sun always setting behind them" (83).

The dominant culture has wanted nothing less than to have the sun set on the Native American once and for all. Failing that, it wants to define the light with and in which the Natives and their future are seen. Throughout the narrative, however, Owens transforms the trope or figure of "Indian" created by the dominant culture by disclosing the inaccuracies that are perpetuated by the stereotype. Like all stereotypes, "Indian" is dangerous because it enables one to hold to an image of the Native American that is at best an oversimplification, at worst a damning caricature. *Wolfsong* makes clear that understanding that "Indian" is a construct, a sign, created by the whites to suit their own ends, is only part of the struggle; one must also replace the stereotype with an articulation that is accurate in order that "Indian" might be transformed into a truly meaningful sign. The difficulty is knowing what articulates Native identity. Jimmy tells Tom that "Our uncle wasn't thinking straight. He was too old and stuck in ways you and me can't even understand. . . . He didn't understand that Indian don't matter no more. What matters is that we're people and we have to live here, with other people like J. D. and all the rest. Hell, I don't even know what Indian means, and neither do you" (112). Unlike Jimmy, Tom is willing to run the risks of discovering what Indian means. Karen tells Tom that he is "getting to be real serious. . . . Like the Indians they always show in those old movies" (104), but Tom realizes that he cannot look to that source or others like it for help in discovering what it means to be an Indian. Nor must he look to those who have romantic ideas of what it means to be an Indian, in no small measure because those romantic ideas are the product of that same appropriation and transformation of the Native Americans by the invading Europeans. Rather, Tom tells Karen, "You don't have to be a full-blood to be Indian. It just matters how you feel, what you think. Your dreams" (104). Your feelings, what you think, your dreams, come from the traditions and stories that your community keeps alive in and through oral transmission.

The questions of what the sign Indian means and what it means to be an Indian that permeate the text take on increased urgency because the Stehemish have all but vanished from the valleys and mountains they had called home. Early in the narrative we learn that Bob McBride, the one-eighth Flathead from Montana with pale skin and green eyes who is Tom's college roommate, liked to tell him that "We're related, man. You Stehemish folks are Salish, too. We're bros, man," but Tom had "trouble thinking of himself and McBride as bros." Rather, Tom thinks, "The only bro he knew was large and dark

and waited for him upriver" (18). Jimmy Joseph waits upriver to tell Tom that there is nothing for him in the dying valley and that he is better off going "back to the land of opportunity" (38). Jimmy also asks Tom, "You stop to think about how many of our people are left around here? You ever look around? They're gone, Tom. The whole goddamn tribe" (120). Jimmy only puts into words what Tom had first begun to recognize when he went to the ancestral graveyard for his uncle's rite of interment; there he thinks that "the tribes and clans had melted like July snow, with people drifting away to lumber camps and mills and the slums of Seattle, dying on the skid road that became skidrow" (51). Tom will put into words the reality of his isolation when McBride comes to visit and, as he leaves, asks him, "Where's all your people? Where's your tribe, man, your family?": "Gone," Tom replies, "My aunt's in Rockport, but that's about all. They're just gone" (195).

What Owens offers us in *Wolfsong*, in short, is the trope of the vanishing Native tribe. The idea of the vanishing Native has been stated with such frequency in North America that one cannot help but begin to think it the phrasing of an ideal created and then clung to by the dominant culture. Consider, for instance, the conclusion of Franz Boas' 1889 article on the Native Americans tribes of the Northwest Coast of Canada:

We find here very gifted people fighting against the penetration by the Europeans under comparatively favorable conditions. Their ethnographic characteristics will in a very short time fall victim to the influence of the Europeans. The sooner these aborigines adapt themselves to the changed conditions the better it will be for them in their competition with the white man. One can already now predict that the Kwakiutl, who have so completely shut themselves off from the Europeans, are heading for their extinction. Certain Indian tribes have already become indispensable on the labor market, and without them the Province would suffer a great economic damage. If we can succeed in improving their hygienics and thus lower their ruinous child mortality, and if the endeavors of the Canadian government can be successful in making independent producers out of them, we can hope to avoid the sad spectacle of the complete destruction of those highly gifted tribes. (qtd. in Rohner 13)

Boas' conclusion focuses on both the romantic spectacle of the vanishing Native and the potential economic identity of the Native that he sees as their salvation from destruction. In either case, Boas contends that the future of the Natives of the northwest Pacific coast

will be marked by transformation and, at the very least, a change in identity.

Boas' conclusion is written in what Vizenor would term the tragic or hypotragic mode; such modes are "inventions and impositions that attend the 'discoverers' and translators of tribal narratives" (Vizenor, "Postmodern Introduction" 9). According to Vizenor, "The notion of the 'vanishing tribe' is a lonesome nuisance, to cite one hypotragic intrusion that reveals racism and the contradictions in humanism and historical determinism" ("Postmodern Introduction" 9-10). Trickster, however, "unties the hypotragedies imposed on tribal narratives" (Vizenor, "Postmodern Introduction" 11) because the trickster is a chance that in *Wolfsong* articulates distinctions and ironies and asks that we engage in a discourse on the nature and efficacy of signs which are fundamental to an articulation of identity.

Approximately one hundred years after Boas identified the Natives of the Pacific Northwest, the trickster discourse that is *Wolfsong* makes clear that the future of the Natives and their identity are all too easily bound up in economics. Tom Joseph tries to "imagine what it would've been like to have been a real Indian" (37), but he is unable to do so because the commodification of the wilderness fundamentally transformed both it and the Native Americans. That transformation, the narrative makes clear, occurred "when the first two-man crosscut took a wedge out of the first cedar to fall *for money* in the valley" (124, emphasis added). Jimmy Joseph has acquiesced to the change, accepting the argument that the mine will not be so bad and looking forward to the prospect of working there even as he drinks himself into an alcoholic stupor. J. D. Hill, the white man instrumental in selling the idea of the mine to the people of Forks, offers Tom what his brother hopes to get: a job, and with it a future in the valley. Hill's offer is presented in a fashion that highlights the text's concern with identity and what it means to be an Indian in contemporary America—"A guy like you that's Indian could be invaluable for an operation like this. You could symbolize the future for Indian people, progress" (67). Unwilling to have his identity determined by economics and have that identity stand as symbolic of the dubious Euro-American vision of linear "progress," Tom Joseph can only think, "A hundred years ago I would have known who I was" (197).

In a final effort to find out who he is, Tom Joseph attempts a vision quest that is bound up with his return trip to destroy the mine. He fasts on his way up the mountain and intends to rub his naked body with the branches of the hemlock tree after bathing in order that after three days, in the words he remembers from his uncle, "When you are pure, maybe a spirit will find you and you will be a singer, a man with power" (217). He continues the ritual even as he is being pursued by

the posse from Forks. The vision quest is successful, but Tom Joseph is neither found by nor finds the spirit of the trickster. Rather, the raven's final appearance in the text serves to show us that Tom is ready to assume his identity. Tom "grinned weakly at the cowboys-and-Indians joke" that he had only received a "fleshwound" (243) because he now knows that the joke brings to light and makes light of the sign of Indian created and perpetuated by the dominant culture. That identity cannot be his, and Tom Joseph "listened as a raven made grave pronouncements" (243) signifying that he is ready to complete his transformation. The use of "grave" is illuminating, for the word indicates the seriousness with which we should take both the sign of Indian and the trickster discourse that interrogates and makes light of it. "Grave," understood for its meanings as a noun and a verb as well as an adjective, also indicates that the *bergsrund* is the burial place of who Tom Joseph was before completing his quest for identity, that the narrative is constructed to lay to rest the stereotypical sign of "Indian," and that Louis Owens appropriates written discourse to grave the importance of oral stories and tradition so that his audience might be transformed as well.

It is the narrative's articulation of the appropriation of written discourse that makes *Wolfsong*, finally, a metafictional text. Owens' novel is concerned with and concerned over its own becoming. The latter, in particular, is what sets contemporary Native American fiction apart from its equally postmodern counterparts created by writers in the dominant culture. The dilemma for Louis Owens, a dilemma shared by all Native American authors, is how to transform and transport into writing what is vital from and of the oral tradition without perverting it and losing the vitality. Native writers must be concerned about the potentially harmful transformation that results when you transport the stories and legends from their oral tradition into the written tradition of the white man; that tradition, after all, has been used throughout the history of white-American Indian relations to identify the Native American as other, as outsider, as inferior. That tradition has graven the sign of Indian that *Wolfsong* interrogates and transforms.

Owens reveals the trickery at the heart of writing even as he appropriates written discourse. In reply to his nephew's question of why logging "boots were called 'corks' but spelled 'caulks,'" Jim Joseph "had just laughed and said, 'Either these white people are all the time tricking language or their language is always tricking them'" (149). The passage discloses the difference between what is written and what is spoken and articulates Owens' relationship to written language. Refusing to be tricked by written language, refusing to be blind to the fundamental difference between what is dead on the page and what is alive in and through utterance and oral tradition, Owens

nevertheless tricks written language by crafting a narrative that uses the sign of the trickster to revitalize words, transform the text into trickster discourse, and establish a community of interlocutors capable of seeing both the nature of written language and the ends to which Owens appropriates it.

Louis Owens stands in tacit juxtaposition to both Dan Kellar, the copper company representative who uses words to convince the people of Forks that the mine will be good for them, and "the famous Indian poet" spoken of by Aaron Medicine "who's always writing about Raven" without knowing "the difference between a raven and a crow" (193). Owens, it strikes me, knows Raven, knows what he is writing about and how best to write about it so that the essence of the trickster is unperverted and his text can resist the metamorphosis insisted upon by the dominant culture even as his narrative articulates Tom Joseph's resistance to the identity the dominant culture would confer upon him. The sign of the textual metamorphosis the dominant culture insists upon is writ large immediately beneath the final sentence of the text: *END*. Owens employs the trickster and trickster discourse throughout the text so that we might see *END* for what it is when finally we reach it: the sign of closure and completion signifying a will to power and mastery that must be resisted. The *END* of *Wolfsong* is ironic, for there must be no end either to Tom Joseph's ceremonial flight to freedom or the creation of texts that articulate identity while resisting closure.

Trickster is a trope to action, and it is by taking action that Tom Joseph is able to achieve a transformation of self. One might be tempted to point to the fact that the coyotes are silenced by the wolf's howl at the close of the novel as evidence suggesting that the trickster is finally of limited usefulness. Such a reading, however, succumbs to the trap of trying to fully fix the figure of the trickster. Vizenor again sets us on the right track when he writes that the trickster is "a semiotic sign for 'social antagonism' and 'aesthetic activism' in postmodern criticism and the avant-garde, *but not 'presence' or the ideal cultural completion in narratives*" ("Trickster Discourse" 192, emphasis added). While Tom Joseph is trickster-like and while his militant, socially antagonistic actions are best understood in light of the trickster, to have Tom Joseph become trickster, identifying himself finally and fully with the trickster rather than having the discourse of *Wolfsong* identify him with the trickster while he identifies himself with the wolf spirit willed to him by his uncle, would be to confer a damning presence upon the trickster and incorrectly offer it as the ideal cultural completion in the narrative.⁴

Wolfsong, rather, offers us the trickster as what he is, "a semiotic sign in a third-person narrative, [which] is never tragic or hypotragic, never the whole truth or even part truth" (Vizenor, "Postmodern

Introduction" 11), and in so doing Owens' text becomes a model of social antagonism and aesthetic activism as the trickster and trickster discourse enable us to interrogate what has come down to us as the truth. Trickster "summons agonistic imagination" (Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse" 193) in the narrative of *Wolfsong* and asks that the readers join with Tom Joseph, the narrator, and Louis Owens in seeing the tropes of Indian and the vanishing Native, not as the cultural givens determined by those in power, but as figures to be interrogated so that we might understand both why they exist and how they are meaningful. It is for those reasons, finally, that the trickster, the trope to action, is most valuable, for the sign is what enables the text to become both a model of and an instrument for a necessary activism more insidious, even, than overt militancy.

NOTES

¹Louis Owens, *Wolfsong* (Albuquerque: West End, 1991), 73. Subsequent references to *Wolfsong* will be followed by the appropriate page number(s) in parentheses.

²Ethnographers, folklorists, and anthropologists have collected the raven tales of many northwest Pacific coast tribes. Among the most valuable collections are from John Reed Swanton, *Haida Texts and Myths* (1905) and *Tlingit Myths and Texts* (1909), and Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology* (1916). The tales indicate that Raven is both creator and trickster; rarely, however, does he act out of altruistic motives. Peter Goodchild brings together raven tales from many different tribes and peoples in *Raven Tales: Traditional Stories of Native Peoples* (1991). The touchstone for scholars examining the figure of the trickster in the Native American oral tradition remains Paul Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956). One would also do well to consider Barbara Babcock's seminal essay on Trickster.

³Joseph's decision to dynamite the water tank and cause a wave of water to wash away the camp is foreshadowed by the figure of the seal in the novel's first chapter, for in the Salish oral tradition a seal aids a young warrior adrift on a raft with a young woman and the children of the tribe. They had been placed on the raft by the elders in order to survive the rains that caused water to cover the earth; the seal helps the brave because years earlier they had become friends as the man nursed the seal to health after it had been hurt. The fact that Tom Joseph only sees the seal as he rides by on the bus is an early narrative indication that he will be without friends as he attempts to save, not the tribe, but the sacred tribal lands. Joseph's decision to dynamite the tank also echoes raven stories of the deluge from the oral traditions of the Tlingit, the Haida, and the Tsimshian-Kwakiutl. In those stories, however, the water comes to punish Raven for his trickster activities. The raven in *Wolfsong* looks upon Joseph's actions with skepticism, then, in part because such trickster

activity has in the past brought retribution. Similarly, Tom's trickster activism will bring unforeseen consequences and, at the very least, attempts at retribution on the part of the law and the men of Forks.

⁴The link between Tom Joseph and the wolf spirit *Staka'yu* is established early on and reiterated throughout the narrative. *Staka'yu* had come to Tom Joseph during a vision quest at Image Lake. Tom knows that "the spirit would have come to him" (36), as his uncle willed, just prior to his uncle's death: *staka'yu* is there, outside the house, for Tom to see the night he comes home for his uncle's funeral (42). *Staka'yu* is with Tom on each of his treks into the wilderness (90, 161), when he gets the dynamite caps (211), and in his dreams (212, 218, 248). The connection is reinforced by the description of Tom "bar[ing] his teeth" while dreaming of "flight through an endless range of mountains where wolves glided down the bare bones of rock ridges" (218) and by terming his final resting place on the mountain a den (246).

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Bigtime (at Chaw'se Sowwa)

Clyde L. Hodge

I. Acorn Festival

If everything is sacred,
then nothing is more sacred,
but consistency.
Trust is not trust
if made inconsistent:
so, while The People were celebrating—
dancing and playing and singing—
their ceremony of
Acorns and Fall,
i thought of my camera and tape recorder,
and kept them
in their pockets.

It is seen and heard perfectly
every time
i choose to recall.

II. In the Hun'ge

In the sacred roundhouse
The dancers', drummers', singers'
shadows dance again off the
Great Central Fire.

Some tourists leave after a few
minutes, like children would;
too close to the heater,

bored from watching an adult
business news forum on TV;
missing the importance of
current and ancient events.

III. Grinding (for Joan)

Chaw'se is grinding.
Nothing.
Just grinding.
I grind my teeth
for nothing's
between them;
for things are left
out
when not properly nourished.
Sowwa is fed no acorn,
and the famous ROCK
stands idle

IV. Incense

Cedar makes an aromatic water-
tight roof.
A person next to me
ponders, aghast,
the number
of spiders she imagines might abide there.
This one thinks of the first weaver and
the Web of Life.

Nearby,
a yuppie's young child,
wearing a mass-produced turkey feather headdress,
subconsciously taps his foot to the 7/4 beat.
Totally out of place,
but perfectly
in time.

"This Woman Can Cross Any Line": Feminist Tricksters in the Works of Nora Naranjo-Morse and Joy Harjo

Kristine Holmes

We meet the poker-playing, man-chasing Pearlene in the poetry and figurative clay work of Santa Clara Pueblo artist Nora Naranjo-Morse; the free-spirited, ever-traveling Noni Daylight appears in the poetry of Creek artist Joy Harjo. Noni and Pearlene are American Indian women you might meet in an Indian bar in Gallup, playing the slots in Vegas, or sitting on a front porch in Iowa.

While Pearlene and Noni Daylight have distinct differences, both characters provide the poets with a playful, sometimes painful, way of speaking about American Indian women's experiences. These experiences can take widely divergent forms in American Indian women's writings, as Rebecca Tsosie points out: "Their artistic expressions frequently lean toward traditional beliefs, deeply rooted in the spiritual essence of tribal world views; other times, the same writers speak with an essential understanding of contemporary reality — 'Indian' bars, urban ghettos, Ph.D. programs and Oklahoma pow-wows" (2). With Noni and Pearlene, Harjo and Naranjo-Morse encompass both "traditional beliefs" and "contemporary reality." The poets portray these characters as powerful, dangerous, yet vulnerable figures who are in some ways outside the poets' control. Traveling between Indian, white, and mixed-blood worlds, keeping one foot always in the mythic realm, Pearlene and Noni enact inter- and intra-cultural conflicts and gender tensions. To paraphrase a line from Harjo's poem "Alive," these women "can cross any line" (*Horses* 56).

But perhaps Pearlene and Noni's most significant common quality is their display of trickster characteristics with a feminist twist. Whether we know him as Coyote, Hare, Bottom, Nanabozho, Anansi, or Tom Sawyer, the trickster is usually gendered male. Patricia Clark Smith and Paula Gunn Allen argue that female tricksters do not

frequently appear in contemporary American Indian women's writing; they point out that trickster figures are more prevalent in American Indian men's texts:

The figure from oral literature about whom American Indian men of the Southwest write most fondly is Coyote, who appears frequently as a hellraising buddy or alter ego, or as the symbol of the dogged will to survive—the continuance, despite the odds, of both the wilderness and the tribes. . . . [In] the last ten years or so, Coyote seems to have become especially an emblem of *male* bonding, *male* élan, *male* cussedness and creativity and survival. (185, emphasis original)

This is not to imply that Coyote does not appear at all in American Indian women's writing, rather that when he is portrayed, the writers must contend with his male-inflected nature. Harjo and Naranjo-Morse do not choose simply to import Coyote or other trickster figures into their poetry, but instead create new female tricksters. While we can view Noni and Pearlene as "hell-raising" alter egos who symbolize, like Coyote, survival and continuance, the poets portray them in a female-inflected way, setting forth a feminist revision of tricksterism.

The claim that Harjo and Naranjo-Morse provide "feminist" revisions of trickster figures inevitably raises the question of defining a feminist approach to American Indian women's works. With the numerous feminisms that abound today, and with the various competing definitions of feminism, what does "feminist trickster" signify? Like many women of color, Harjo has rejected conventional Anglo-American definitions of feminism, saying that "the word 'feminism' doesn't carry over to the tribal world, but a concept mirroring similar meanings would . . . what would it then be called—empowerment, some kind of empowerment" (Coltelli 61). While Harjo's critique of the word "feminism" is appropriate, I still believe that this word, precisely defined, can be useful in discussing American Indian women's writing. For the purposes of this essay, the most appropriate definition of feminism derives directly from a dynamic operating in Harjo and Naranjo-Morse's works: both writers empower and honor the feminine, but not necessarily over the masculine, and not necessarily to claim political or economic power (which is often the aim of Anglo-American feminism).¹ In this essay, I use the word "feminist" to refer to the woman-centered ethic displayed in the poets' works. Naranjo-Morse and Harjo's tribal-inspired feminism is largely enacted through their characters Noni and Pearlene. Thus adding the word "trickster" to "feminist" provides a term that nearly approximates the writers' irreverence, humor, and focus on the feminine without restricting them to an Anglo-American definition of feminism.

In this light, Noni and Pearlene suggest a contemporary feminist appropriation and revision of trickster figures, but just as they exceed the term "feminism," they also surpass "tricksterism" and are not fully encompassed by that notion. While Noni and Pearlene can display trickster characteristics, they also display divergent qualities that indicate that Naranjo-Morse and Harjo do not limit their poetic projects to representing female tricksters. For example, Noni Daylight represents a culturally and historically specific group—the urban Indian woman of the 1970s—as well as fitting into the timeless category of trickster. However, Noni and Pearlene resemble more closely Barbara Babcock's description of the trickster as a boundary-crosser; Babcock argues that tricksters reveal a preoccupation with marginality and periphery, with areas between categories, and "the ability to live interstitially, to confuse and to escape the structures of a society and the order of things" ("Margin" 154). As we shall see, Noni and Pearlene move within the margins of society, continually crossing boundaries between "modern" and "traditional" ways of living, between tribal and non-tribal societies, and, in Pearlene's case, between artistic genres. As Pearlene and Noni travel between worlds and enact cultural and gender tensions, they parallel their creators' roles with regard to language, art, and tribal identity, as American Indian women moving among and between traditions.²

"What Kind of Pueblo Girl is She?": The Perils of Pearlene

Pearlene appears in several poems and photographs in Nora Naranjo-Morse's recent collection *Mud Woman: Poems from the Clay* (1992), which includes her poetry as well as photographs of her figurative ceramic work.³ The book's subtitle, "Poems from the Clay," indicates the crucial interrelation or, to use Naranjo-Morse's phrase, the "exciting volley of creative expression" between the artist's work in verbal and visual and tactile media.⁴ Pearlene herself exists both in poems and in clay figures, and many of the other figurative ceramic works pictured in the book are described in poems. In a lecture at the University of Arizona in 1992, Naranjo-Morse described her work in clay as an idea that resembles a poetic idea, except that it "comes out in three-dimensional form." This statement suggests that verbal, visual, and tactile media cannot, for Naranjo-Morse as for other American Indian artists, be separated, and that it is crucial to discuss her work in terms of the interaction between these forms.⁵

Pearlene expresses this interchange between artistic forms as she travels between Naranjo-Morse's poems and figurative works. Pearlene, like many American Indian tricksters, is a shapeshifter, but instead of changing into different animal shapes as other tricksters do, Pearlene takes on various verbal and visual forms.⁶ Even within the

visual medium, she shifts shapes: in a clay work entitled "Pearlene's Date," she appears as a hairless, beaked figure primping before a mirror, while in "Pearlene's Roots," she is a redhead, sporting rhinestone-studded sunglasses and flashing her American Express card. In the preface to *Mud Woman*, Naranjo-Morse suggests that Pearlene's character, like her form, is also dynamic: like Coyote, who trots between wisdom and folly, sacred and profane, "Pearlene fluctuates between confusion and clarity, reverence and mischief, while searching for her niche in life" (14).

We first meet Pearlene in *Mud Woman* in her mischievous capacity. The first depiction of Pearlene occurs in the poem "Pearlene," when we hear the voices of Santa Clara Pueblo women criticizing Pearlene's refusal to conform to the community's standards for women:

"What kind of Pueblo girl is she?
Wearing tight-fitted skirts
high above her knees."
The women smirk,
each waiting to speak their mind.
"Why she doesn't even know how to use her punte,"⁷
poor thing,
what kind of man would marry a girl
who can't even bake bread?" (59)

Here, Pearlene appears as an object of what is perhaps the most prolific oral tradition in any tribal, corporate, or academic culture: gossip. What the women do not know as they criticize Pearlene's "non-traditional" behavior is that Pearlene makes mischief behind their backs, accepting "naughty invitations from men,/ whose wives love Pearlene/ as their main staple in gossip" (59). Here, Naranjo-Morse deftly shifts the reader's laughter from snickering along with the female speakers to laughing at the way Pearlene has outwitted these women even as they critique her.

Naranjo-Morse makes it clear in this poem that while Pearlene may not know how to use her "punte," she will define her own sexuality, even if it means diverging from accepted community standards: Pearlene "tells each suitor/ single or married,/ she will accept a ride/ only on her own terms" (59). In her determination to choose her sexual partners freely, Pearlene resembles Yellow Woman in Leslie Marmon Silko's contemporary retellings of the Keres myth. In these written retellings, as in Keres oral traditions, Yellow Woman runs away with a mysterious mountain man/spirit, chooses to stay with him, sometimes is impregnated by him, and upon her return to the community attributes her absence and choice of sexual freedom to kidnapping (*Storyteller* 62). Pearlene's sexuality, like Yellow Woman's, separates her from the community. In the poem "Pearlene's Aunts," Pearlene's

Aunt Celestine explains Pearlene's failure to conform to sexual standards as a result of a failure of community responsibility: "It's all our faults,/ we let Pearlene/ go wild,/ now look at her,/ teasing the men" (65). Aunt Celestine's statement, along with the voices of the gossiping women, suggests that these Santa Clara Pueblo women deem it proper to influence and regulate other women's sexual behavior.⁸ Naranjo-Morse portrays Pearlene as an elusive figure who will neither be confined by the norms for female sexuality nor help to enforce them. In one sense, Pearlene's sexual exploits parallel those of American Indian tricksters like Coyote, whose prolific phallus frequently gets him into trouble with the tribe. Although Pearlene lacks a detachable sexual organ with locomotive powers, she still maintains a powerful, self-defined sexuality.

In addition to portraying Pearlene's transgression of the boundaries between community-approved and socially unacceptable sexuality, Naranjo-Morse uses Pearlene to explore the issue of Pueblo women's relation to money and commodification and the conflict between the Pueblo economy and the dominant capitalist economy. In a figurative clay work entitled "Pearlene Teaching Her Cousins Poker," Naranjo-Morse sculpts Pearlene as a plump "mud woman" wearing only body paint, sitting with three other nude female figures who are holding cards and a book entitled *Basic Poker*. The nudity in this piece immediately brings to mind "strip poker," and seems to suggest that maybe these mud women had no clothing, resources, or false trappings to strip away in the first place. The clay figure "Pearlene's Roots," in which a wide-hipped, American-Express-card-bearing Pearlene displays a bag full of gift-wrapped purchases, also invokes the realm of money and commodification. The piece's title implies that Pearlene's "roots" are intertwined with the roots of capitalism. However, Pearlene's purchases are wrapped as gifts, which suggests an unselfish revision of the "shop 'til you drop" culture.

These clay Pearlenes parody the capitalist economy by juxtaposing supposed incongruities: traditional Pueblo women and strip poker, cultural roots and shopping. In addition, Pearlene's association with the marketplace reinforces a significant trickster parallel: Babcock notes that tricksters "tend to inhabit crossroads [and] open public places (especially the marketplace)" (162). Indeed, many of the clay Pearlenes have been displayed in marketplaces like art shows, galleries, and exhibits. The poem "Pearlene's Aunts" provides a critical perspective on these whimsical portrayals of commodification. In the poem, Aunt Celestine, again speaking as the voice of community censure, criticizes Pearlene for having "card-crazed eyes," and both aunts "pray for their niece,/ believing,/ eventually/ she will return to tradition" (63).

For a Pueblo ceramicist, or indeed any American Indian artist, issues of commodification are crucial. In her lecture, Naranjo-Morse recounted her feelings upon receiving her first credit card and discussed how that event inspired the creation of the clay figure "Pearlene's Roots":

[Getting the credit card] put me through many things about value systems, about the value system that I grew up with and the value system this card represented . . . it was almost like somebody was handing me this weapon. . . . Did this mean that I was becoming too much of a *Mericana*? Was I taking on too much of somebody else's value systems? . . . And in order to process all that, I had to make her. And that's basically Pearlene's purpose for me.

This issue is particularly relevant for Pueblo artists because the history of Anglo-American commercialization and exploitation of Pueblo ceramics reaches as far back as the late Nineteenth Century (Babcock, Monthan, and Monthan 11). Of course, commercialization is not solely exploitative, since American Indian artists need some commodification in order to earn a living. In addition, Pearlene's "running wild into the night/ toward a place called 'Vegas'/ spending days there,/ throwing good money away/ on card games" invokes the current controversy about gambling on Indian reservations, a topic that is not entirely new in American Indian cultures, since some tribes have had gambling games for centuries.⁹ Pearlene's aunt, in criticizing Pearlene's gambling, expresses an anxiety about conflicting value systems. Naranjo-Morse's poetry and figurative clay works thus give a humorous, sympathetic view of a woman who tries to beat the commodity culture at its own game, while also giving voice to those who would object to her playing the game at all.

Although Pearlene, brandishing her charge card and playing the slots in Las Vegas, may engage in certain "non-traditional" behaviors, that does not mean that she cannot also be considered traditional. That is, gambling per se is not necessarily non-traditional, but Vegas-style gaming is. Naranjo-Morse stresses that one aspect does not exclude the other, that Pearlene need not be "either/or" but can be "both/and." This inclusivity becomes most clear in the interplay between Naranjo-Morse's figurative clay work and her poetry, especially in the dialogue created by the clay figure entitled "Pearlene's Roots" and the poem by the same title. While the clay figure seems to portray an American Indian woman trying to play into the Anglo-American capitalist culture, right down to her impossibly bright red hair, her shiny credit card and her overstuffed shopping bag, the poem "Pearlene's Roots" tells

another story. The poem acknowledges the difficulty of placing Pearlene firmly in one particular cultural context: "It was hard to imagine/ Pearlene's roots/ where she'd come from/ with her passion-blue eye shadow/ and graying bouffant" (67). However, the poem asserts that despite her appearance, "She was a Towa,/ beneath that veneer/ of Avon/ and fast,/ hard times./ Signs of her Pueblo roots/ surface,/ crooning/ in thoughtful/ respectful songs" (68). At first, these lines may seem simply to be making the clichéd point that appearances are deceiving; however, when we consider Pearlene's role as a work of visual art Naranjo-Morse's point becomes more complex. Naranjo-Morse asserts that Pearlene is an authentic Towa whatever her outward form, whatever her veneer (just as Coyote is Coyote even when he takes another animal's form). In this assertion she also claims the authenticity of her own figurative clay work whatever its form, and her own prerogative as an artist to be a shapeshifter as well, to break the formal boundaries of Pueblo art.

Naranjo-Morse's links to a community of artists run deep: she comes from a family of Santa Clara artists with a reputation for success and innovation; her mother, Rose, is a well-known potter, and three of Naranjo-Morse's sisters and two nieces also do figurative clay work. Another sister is an architect (Lichtenstein 59). Despite her close connection to a familial and tribal artistic tradition, Naranjo-Morse places her work just outside that tradition, or rather she claims that she need not adhere to the typical forms of Santa Clara art to be "authentic." Naranjo-Morse comments, "I'm sure if someone held a gun to my head I could turn out a typical black bowl . . . but you'll notice that everyone in my family is doing something different" (Lichtenstein 92). In an interview with Stephen Trimble, Naranjo-Morse further discusses the issue of authenticity: "You could use commercial clay or anything you want and still be connected, still be traditional. So I'm not afraid to use telephone wire . . . All the things that affect me—an American Indian woman making pottery now in 1987—all, good and bad, come out in my work" (61). Naranjo-Morse defines "traditional" not as conforming to prescribed artistic forms but rather as feeling a connection to her work, seeing her work as linked to the earth and to her experience as a Pueblo woman.

Pearlene acts within these intersections of so-called "traditional/collective" and "modern/individual" ways of life, which is absolutely appropriate to her role as a trickster; Jarold Ramsey points out that the trickster "keeps mediating, now creatively, now mischievously, between the Way of the Tribe, and the Way of the unrestricted Ego" (xxxi). When Naranjo-Morse's figurative clay work takes the form of a poker-playing Pearlene, it plays on notions of the ego, of commodification, of individual gain. When Naranjo-Morse creates a clay fetish,

it expresses tribal religion and collective beliefs. As an artist, Naranjo-Morse herself has become the creative, mischievous, mediating trickster, crossing genre and cultural boundaries.

Whatever form she chooses to create, Naranjo-Morse expresses the Santa Clara belief in the essential link between earth and humanity, as she points out in the preface to *Mud Woman*:

Layered coils begin to build and drain my supply of all that I absorb as a human being, a Pueblo woman, a mother, wife, and friend. The micaceous and Santa Clara clays I use are porous and absorb water quickly into their mass. At times I feel the essence of who I am being digested into each coil, connecting me forever to each piece and again reminding me of the symmetry of life cycles that Towa hold sacred. (11)

This passage reminds us that Naranjo-Morse's work does not so much draw upon an oral tradition of trickster tales as it derives from the Pueblo tradition of pottery, a fact that has important implications for a feminist interpretation of her work. In this Pueblo interpretation, the tradition of pottery has specifically female connotations. In a lecture, Naranjo-Morse recounted her mother's explanation of the sinuous, curvy form of Pueblo pottery: her mother said, "Don't you recognize our bodies? . . . A long time ago, these women were so involved, it was so much a part of who they were that went into this bowl that it only makes sense that it would be so, shaped that way."

The conventional Euro-American paradigm of woman as an empty space (articulated in numerous psychoanalytic and feminist theories), as a vessel that exists simply to be filled by a male substance, does not fully operate here. Rather than being a passive object, the clay vessel becomes a dynamic extension of its creator's body; as the artist works the clay, it becomes imbued with her ideas and interpretations, a tactile mode of expressing and working through issues. Thus the Euro-American paradigm of vessels as static, fixed, passive objects no longer functions in this context. Barbara Babcock points out that in Pueblo cultures, "Clay was not only essential to life, but in traditional Pueblo belief was regarded as a living substance. A pottery vessel was not thought of as an inert object, but a 'made being,' acquiring a kind of conscious existence as it was being made" ("At Home" 378).

Pearlene thus becomes more than a mere object of artistic discourse, words and images flat on the page, a thing to be viewed, a thing that does not speak and has no agency. We begin to think of Pearlene as a nearly autonomous actor, as a person with a life of her own, and as an extension of Naranjo-Morse, a means of enacting many cultural tensions and ideas. Naranjo-Morse confirms that the view of

Pearlene as a performative persona who could *do* things was common with her audience and that it led to a greater demand for Pearlene in clay and in poetry: "Pearlene was becoming very popular. . . . When I went to a poetry reading they wanted to hear poems about Pearlene. Pearlene, Pearlene, Pearlene" (Lecture). With Pearlene's popularity, issues of commodification became more urgent. When a Los Angeles businessman offered to mass-produce plastic Pearlenes, Naranjo-Morse decided that Pearlene's "charm might be jeopardized by demand" (*Mud Woman* 15) and she decided, in effect, to retire Pearlene after creating one final clay figure of her.

The last Pearlene occurs in a piece entitled "Indian Girls Aren't Easy," which depicts a nude Pearlene, arms and legs crossed, sitting on a couch with a fully clothed suitor. In this work, the artist creates a scene that leaves Pearlene poised on the edge of action. Naranjo-Morse comments, "There will always be that sexual tension between them because she's saying yes and no at the same time. And he's . . . ready for some romance, he's . . . vulnerable. And she's trying to decide: 'Wait a minute. I don't know'" (Lecture). Perched on the border between "yes" and "no," the last Pearlene invokes the gender and cultural politics of the earlier Pearlenes and harks back to her role as a potent sexual trickster. In explaining this piece, Naranjo-Morse stresses Pearlene's agency and power: while she is nude, it is the suitor who is described as "vulnerable." Although she does not resolve Pearlene's sexual or cultural dilemmas, Naranjo-Morse advocates a responsibility to one's artistic creations, one's own experience, and one's community. The feminist trickster Pearlene thus becomes a vessel that mediates and absorbs the artist's responsibilities. World-walker and shapeshifter like Coyote, Pearlene is a vessel that accommodates many responses and interpretations.

"Myths Have Taken to the Streets": On the Road with Noni Daylight

Noni Daylight appears in Harjo's early collections of poetry, *What Moon Drove Me to This?* (1979) and *She Had Some Horses* (1983), but does not appear in her most recent collection *In Mad Love and War* (1990).¹⁰ In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Harjo explains Noni's genesis: "She began quite some time ago, as a name I gave a real-life woman I couldn't name in a poem. Then she evolved into her own person, took on her own life" (62). Harjo adds in another interview, "In the beginning she became another way for me to speak" (Bruchac 98). Noni Daylight begins as an alias, as a way of "not naming," and eventually transforms into another entire person, another way of speaking. Harjo's phrase "another way for me to speak" suggests that Noni Daylight provides a persona in one sense separate from the poet's

own, who paradoxically becomes a vehicle for presenting ideas or experiences that she might otherwise exclude from her work.

While "vessel" is the most apt metaphor for Pearlene, Noni Daylight can best be described as an elusive, ever-moving vehicle, a "myth taken to the streets" (*Mad Love* 55). Noni Daylight is always in motion, driving in pickup trucks, riding on trains, moving within and between Kansas City, Andarko, Albuquerque, Iowa City, the Grand Canyon. Noni's travels, however, are not confined to what we might call "actual places," as Jim Ruppert argues: "Noni Daylight can move easily from the mundane world to the mythic space" (31). Like the trickster cycles that begin with "Coyote was going there" or "Wichikapache went walking,"¹¹ the Noni Daylight poems move in the realm of non-linear time, within the horizons of myth. The poem "Origin" illustrates this mythic motion:

Noni Daylight left the morning
at Bluewater Lake.
She got out and drove west
into the shiny side of the earth.
Where stars have come down into rocks
between Sanders and Flagstaff.

Noni heard
that the Hopi say that Grand Canyon
is the birthplace of their people. But
she thinks most of the world
must have originated
from that point.
And this afternoon in the vague horizon
she thought she could see
the earth's motion
formed:

of wind
of sunrise
of sandrock.

And she thinks she must still be traveling from there.
Holbrook. Seattle.
Oklahoma and Winslow.

But not very far at all. (*Moon* 33)

This poem portrays Noni's literal journey from Bluewater Lake to the Grand Canyon, but also traces her continuing emergence from a mythic point of origin, as the line "she must still be traveling from there" indicates. All of Noni Daylight's later travels, I would suggest, can represent a continuing mythic journey of emergence, which, like the trickster's, exhibits "an independence from and ignorance of temporal

and spatial boundaries" (Babcock, "Margin" 162). A poem entitled "Evidence" contains the lines "Noni Daylight drove out/ on the abrupt and whining night,/ on state roads and highways/ we never knew the names of" (*Moon* 55). Harjo uses these nameless highways to suggest an indeterminate mythic voyage in which the motion itself matters most. Asked her destination in another poem, Noni Daylight replies, "She was only going home, she said" (*Moon* 48). We never learn where or what this "home" is, and Noni never seems to get there, which suggests that she may be "homing" (to borrow William Bevis' phrase), that is, traveling toward a mythic idea of home rather than a particular place.

The emphasis on motion and travel in the Noni Daylight poems, and in Harjo's work as a whole, has multiple explanations. We might note the parallels between Noni's journeys and a trickster's journey, in which the trickster doesn't know exactly where he's going or the names of the characters and places he will encounter. Another possible explanation for Harjo's emphasis on motion and travel is more personal: unlike Naranjo-Morse, who lives and works mainly in Santa Clara Pueblo, Harjo travels frequently because of her many professional commitments. Perhaps because of her many journeys, Harjo has described her writing using the metaphor of travel, saying "Each time I write I am in a different and wild place, and travel toward something I do not know the name of" (Swann and Krupat 265). Like Noni Daylight's travels on nameless highways, Harjo's writing becomes a voyage of discovery. Harjo has also described her own mixed-blood status as a sort of world-traveling:

I walk in and out of many worlds. I used to see being born of this mixed-blood/mixed-vision a curse, and hated myself for it . . . I have since decided that being familiar with more than one world, more than one vision is a blessing, and know that I make my own choices. I also know that it is an illusion that any of these worlds are separate. (Swann and Krupat 266)

In addition to these personal explanations, an historical, tribal context underlies the theme of traveling in Harjo's work: unlike the Pueblos, who are believed to have stayed in the same region for thousands of years, the Creeks were forced to relocate to Indian Territory in Oklahoma during the late 1830s.¹² Harjo personalizes this tribal history in an interview and claims for herself a trickster/traveler role: "I've jokingly said the reason I'm always traveling is so that Andrew Jackson's troops don't find me. You know, they moved my particular family from Alabama to Oklahoma, and so I always figure I stay one step ahead so they can't find me" (Bruchac 92).

This comment raises the crucial issue of how Harjo's tribal identity affects her writing, for unlike Naranjo-Morse, Harjo does not live on a reservation, participating in the "traditional" arts of her tribe. When asked how her Creek heritage manifests itself in her poetry, Harjo comments that,

It provides the underlying psychic structure, within which is a wealth of memory. I was not brought up traditionally Creek, was raised in the north side of Tulsa in a neighborhood where there lived many other mixed-blood Indian families. . . . I know that when I write there is an old Creek within me that often participates. (Coltelli 57)

Harjo reveals that origins, both tribal and personal, are important in her poetry, as the Noni Daylight poem "Origin" suggests, describing herself as drawing upon the emergence place of memory where tribal knowledge resides. Of course, a reader might look to Creek oral traditions for Noni's parallels to the trickster Rabbit (who appears briefly in *In Mad Love and War*). But I am arguing that tribally non-specific contexts like the city also inform Harjo's work and that non-tribal urban experience provides another significant origin and helps to explain the frequent urban landscapes in Harjo's work. As Patricia Clark Smith and Paula Gunn Allen point out, "Joy Harjo's particular poetic turf is cities, especially from the point of view of an Indian woman traveling between them" (193). Because many American Indians now reside in urban areas, the city has become an "authentic" Indian turf, and the "legitimacy" or "Indianness" of a writer who draws upon the urban context need not be questioned.

The Noni Daylight poem entitled "Kansas City" portrays the urban context and introduces another important aspect of Noni's character: her role as a sexual trickster, which resembles Pearlene's. Noni's sexual choices and her refusal to be confined or defined by men simultaneously reveal Harjo's feminism and relate to the trickster's exaggerated sexuality and "privileged freedom from some of the demands of the social code" (Babcock, "Margin" 163). In this poem, Harjo intertwines Noni's sexual freedom with the urban setting:

Early morning over silver tracks
a cool light, Noni Daylight's
a dishrag wrung out over bones
watching trains come and go.
They are lights, motion
of time that she could have
caught

and moved on
but she chose to stay

in Kansas City, raise the children
 she had by different men,
 all colors. Because she knew
 that each star rang with separate
 colored hue, as bands of horses
 and wild

like the spirit in her
 that flew, at each train whistle. (*Horses* 33)

Later in the poem, Harjo writes that Noni's half-breed children will "grow up with the sound/ of trains etched on the surface/ of their bones," which suggests that the urban landscape becomes as much a physical part of one's being as the rural landscape. Instead of growing up in a pueblo, their hands muddied with clay, these children feel the rhythms of the city. Like the trickster who crosses borders between animal and human, modern and mythic realms, Noni chooses to cross ethnic borders by having children by "all colors" of men. Like Pearlene, who deals with men "on her own terms," Noni insists on sexual choice: "if she had it to do over/ she would still choose/ the light one . . ./ the blind one . . ./ the one whose eyes tipped up/ like swallows wings" (*Horses* 33).

Perhaps the urban setting provides Noni with even more sexual freedom than Pearlene has, because of the relative anonymity and lack of community censure in the city. Unlike Naranjo-Morse's poems, which present the Santa Clara women's gossip about Pearlene, none of Harjo's poems present what the community says about Noni. Instead, Harjo's work sticks to the consciousness and voice of a traveling, urban Indian woman who insists on her own sexual autonomy. Just how radical this autonomy is for an American Indian woman is elucidated by Rayna Green's explanation of the typical Anglo-American sexual stereotyping of American Indian women: "The only good Indian . . . rescues and helps white men. But the Indian woman is even more burdened by this narrow definition of a 'good Indian,' for it is she, not the males, whom white men desire sexually" (703). By this definition, Noni Daylight is not a "good Indian," because she remains outside the Pocahontas myth, defining herself (as we see in "Kansas City") in terms of her own choices and desires.

Where Coyote's choices often result in community punishment or censure, Noni's risk-taking takes her to the edge of self-destruction. In representing Noni as suicidal, an alcoholic, or a drug abuser, Harjo demonstrates that she will not confine herself to portraying American Indian women's experience in a purely "positive" light. Instead, Noni embodies the "creative/ destructive dualism" that Babcock lists as one of the trickster's essential qualities ("Margin" 163). When we meet Noni in the poem entitled "The First Noni Daylight," we find her in the

wake of a suicide attempt: "noni daylight tried it/ Saturday night special, the little white pills/ whiskey and a note" (*Moon* 27). Despite this attempt, Noni survives, and keeps surviving in other poems; like the trickster, she seems to die many times but cannot quite be killed. In "Heartbeat," Harjo again places Noni on the edge of self-destruction. The "pervasive rhythm of her mother's heartbeat," from which "there is no escape," plagues her. This origin place, her mother's womb, haunts Noni, and she tries to escape the emergence place through drugs, cutting "acid into tiny squares/ and [letting] them melt on her tongue." She considers suicide, "[toying] with the trigger." Eventually, Noni discovers that "It is not the moon, or the pistol in her lap/ but a fierce anger/ that will free her" (*Horses* 37). Noni is ultimately too strong and too angry to die, a strength which Harjo suggests exemplifies the women in her poems: "I think they reach an androgynous kind of spirit where they are very strong people. They're very strong people, and yet to be strong does not mean to be male, to be strong does not mean to lose femininity, which is what the dominant culture is taught. They're human beings" (Bruchac 97). In addition, Paula Gunn Allen argues that tenacious survival is a crucial characteristic of the trickster figure:

[Coyote] is also a metaphor for continuance, for Coyote survives and a large part of his bag of survival tricks is his irreverence. Because of this irreverence for everything—sex, family bonding, sacred things, even life itself—Coyote survives. He survives partly out of luck, partly out of cunning, and partly because he has, beneath a scabby coat, such great creative powers that many tribes have characterized him as the creator of this particular phase of existence, this "fifth world" . . . [It] is this spirit of the trickster-creator that keeps Indians alive and vital in the face of horror. (158)

Poised on the dangerous border between life and death, between birth and destruction, Noni becomes a vehicle for Harjo to affirm the feminine trickster's strength and survival.

The last Noni Daylight poem, "She Remembers the Future," portrays Noni in her full strength and power as a vehicle for expression and as a voice for what Harjo calls the "otherself":

"We are closer than
blood," Noni Daylight
tells her. "It isn't
Oklahoma or the tribal
blood but something more
that we speak."

(The otherself knows
and whispers
to herself.)

The air could choke, could
kill, the way it tempts
Noni to violence, this
morning. But she needs
the feel of danger,
for life.

She feels the sky
tethered to the changing
earth, and her skin
responds, like a woman
to her lover.

It could be days, it could
be years, White Sands
or Tucson.

She asks,

"Should I dream you afraid
so that you are forced to save
yourself?

Or should you ride colored horses
into the cutting edge of the sky
to know

that we're alive
we are alive." (*Horses* 46)

Harjo conflates Noni's voice, the one that affirms "we are closer than blood . . . / it isn't Oklahoma or the tribal/ blood but something more/ that we speak," with the voice of the "otherself," which leads to the question of the identity of the "she" who speaks at the end of the poem. Is it Noni, the otherself, or the poet? Have they merged into the same voice? By the end of the poem, Harjo has forged inextricable connections between the poet and her creation, between inner, outer, and other selves, between tribal women. Noni has become a vehicle for expressing a connection that lies in language rather than in blood or landscape. That connection transforms the temptation of violence into an affirmation of healing and life. While fear and danger can motivate survival, Harjo suggests, world-traveling, riding "colored horses into the cutting edge of the sky," is a more positive mode of survival. The words "we are alive" are the last words we hear Noni speak in Harjo's poetry. Significantly, her journey ends by affirming the connection and survival of American Indian women.

Harjo claims that she did not consciously decide to stop writing about Noni Daylight to leave her in "She Remembers the Future" (which, although it is the last Noni poem in Harjo's books, may not be the last one she wrote chronologically).¹³ Harjo explains Noni's disappearance in an interview: "She left me and went into one of [Shawnee/Cayuga poet] Barney [Bush's] poems. I haven't seen her since . . . She left and I really haven't written any poems about her since. It's like she was a good friend who was there at a time in my life and she's gone on" (Bruchac 98). Harjo speaks of Noni much as Naranjo-Morse speaks of Pearlene: as an independent person not fully under her creator's control. Harjo's description of Noni's walking out of her poetry is entirely consistent with Noni's character as a feminist in her assertion of self and of choices, and as a trickster in her constant travels, in crossing between mythic and "nowaday" worlds, and in challenging her readers' notions of American Indian women.

Harjo and Naranjo-Morse also challenge their readers' assumptions about feminists and tricksters as they bring trickster-like figures that originate in oral traditions into a tribal feminist context. In their works we see a feminism that does not define itself solely in opposition to men; we also see tricksterism adapted to particularly feminine contexts. Their feminist tricksters leap off the page, and we can only try to keep up with their wild journeys. Pearlene shows us how a clay vessel can come to life and teach us about the tenuous position a Pueblo woman inhabits. Noni Daylight shows us how a poetic vehicle can lead us onto dangerous highways and bring us back with a sense of affirmation and safety. Like Coyote, these feminist tricksters make all things possible. And like Coyote, they never cease to delight.

NOTES

¹The critical debate raging over the use of the terms "feminine," "masculine," "male," and "female" is too vast to recount here. I will use the terms "feminine" and "masculine" not to refer to the biological condition of being female or male, but to indicate qualities, conditions, or actions associated with femininity and masculinity in a particular tribal context.

²Although biographical parallels between characters and their authors may not be in vogue in some critical circles, Harjo and Naranjo-Morse's own discussions of Noni and Pearlene suggest that it would be inappropriate to strictly separate them from their literary creations. I will draw upon such parallels when relevant while recognizing that the "autobiographical" is always transformed when it is brought into the realm of the "creative" or "fictional."

³I borrow the term "figurative ceramic work" (as opposed to "pottery")

from Babcock, Monthan, and Monthan's book *The Pueblo Storyteller*; it seems to me the most accurate way to refer to Naranjo-Morse's work in clay.

⁴I mention "tactile" media because the placement of Naranjo-Morse's figurative ceramic work in the strictly "visual" realm seems inappropriate. While Anglo-American gallery owners, museum curators and art collectors might label these clay figures with a sign reading "Do Not Touch," I doubt that Naranjo-Morse herself would find this appropriate. Figurative ceramic works were traditionally designed to be handled and used, and are created by touch. Stephen Trimble notes that Naranjo-Morse has been surprised "more than once with her arms around a large piece, embracing it" (64).

⁵Perhaps the most well-known examples of this interrelation between artistic realms are works like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* and N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* in which the photographs and illustrations work in a crucial dialogue with the texts. Numerous American Indian writers work in more than one verbal, visual, or musical genre.

⁶Paul Radin's *The Trickster*, Howard Norman's *The Wishing Bone Cycle*, and Jarold Ramsey's *Coyote Was Going There* provide numerous examples of Coyote as shapeshifter from the oral traditions of the Winnebago, Swampy Cree, and Oregon Country tribes, respectively.

⁷"Punte" is a Towa word meaning an oven used for baking bread. Given the often bawdy nature of gossip, it is possible that this term may have sexual connotation in this context as well; not being a Towa speaker, I cannot say definitively whether it does.

⁸In *An Ethnography of Santa Clara Pueblo New Mexico*, W. W. Hill claims that it is common in Santa Clara for women to regulate sexual and other behaviors through gossip and criticism (148-49). Hill's book provides historical background and ethnographic information for Santa Clara Pueblo; Alfonso Ortiz's *The Tewa World* gives a native structuralist anthropologist's interpretation of Tewa communities.

⁹The Indian Gambling Regulatory Act, passed in 1987, endorsed "the rights of Indians to offer high-stakes versions of any form of gambling legal in their states" (*Los Angeles Times* A23). There are a number of court cases pending on this issue. Some tribes argue that gambling is necessary for economic prosperity on reservations with few resources. At one court session, members of the Agua Caliente tribe "picketed in front of the courthouse with signs saying: 'Support Indian Gambling.' One chanted: 'Keep me off welfare'" (*Los Angeles Times* A23). The phrase "Support Indian Gambling" is wonderfully ambiguous because it is unclear whether it refers to gambling on Indian reservations or to Pearlene-style gambling by Indians—both activities are hotly debated on and off reservations today.

¹⁰Although Harjo is a visual artist and musician as well as a poet, I will confine my discussion, regrettably, to her poetry because I lack access to her work in other media. She studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts as a visual artist and plays sax in an Albuquerque band called "Poetic Justice." She has said that her music expresses "an abstract language . . . of deep connotations," adding that "For me it becomes another place, another way" (Lecture).

¹¹See Jarold Ramsey's *Coyote Was Going There* and Howard Norman's *The Wishing Bone Cycle* for numerous examples of these conventional opening phrases.

¹²Angie Debo's *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* presents a detailed historical account of the Creeks' removal from Alabama (97-107) and provides a useful overview of Creek history in general. Joel W. Martin's *Sacred Revolt* is a historical and religious perspective on the Creek revolt of 1813-1814.

¹³Harjo's later collection *In Mad Love and War*, from which Noni is absent, extends many of the themes from *What Moon Drove Me to This?* and *She Had Some Horses*. Harjo uses a less personal voice, portrays even more traveling into inner landscapes, and makes more forays into non-linear time and the mythic realm. In this collection, Harjo begins to take on the voice of a trickster, rather than portraying a trickster, but that, as they say, is another story.

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a new poem for elisabetta

lance henson

as sudden as blue frost
after awakening

someone turns

the sorrowed signal of lateness
on everything

we seem so estranged
from the cup of courage
of laughter

darkness and the yellow moon

i will look for you somewhere in the
marrow of the sea

riva*
i cannot forget

this is how far i have travelled
from you

*riva trigosa, a small town in liguria, italy
5/11/93-11/7/93
on a plane from ny to milano

Subverting the Dominant Paradigm: Gerald Vizenor's Trickster Discourse

Kerstin Schmidt

Gerald Vizenor's *The Trickster of Liberty* is labeled "literature," a novel, on the back cover of the book. Nonetheless, it reads as a work of literary theory as well. Vizenor accomplishes a mixture between the two realms of the so-called "dry" theory and the "entertaining" novel; this mixture is—not to forget—very much in line with his own mixed-blood descent. The striking difference between his entertaining work of theory and those theorists quoted by him, such as Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and others, becomes obvious when reading the latter. Vizenor thus demonstrates the possibility of comic theory and upsets all canonical expectations that theory has to be "dry." Hence, his way of writing coincides with his philosophical preference for the comical rather than the tragic, which will be shown later.

Novel and theory in this work are thus inseparable, even dependent on one another. Consequently, my essay will pay homage to this interdependency and thus will be quite "theoretical in fiction" and vice versa. I will attempt to show how Vizenor's theoretical post-modern concept of subversion and deconstruction works at various levels in his novel *The Trickster of Liberty*. This project will be supported, above all, by some of his—no less entertaining—interviews, his superb post-modern essay collection *Narrative Chance*, and of course, by some of the more or less tragic works of other post-modern thinkers and critics, fellow writers, and a worthy panel of anthropologists.

Vizenor's *Trickster* differs from the traditional concept of the novel even in its form: prologue and epilogue seem to frame a collection of trickster landscapes, all of them connected through their bond to the tribal baronage. The novel is not made up of a logical, dependent train of thoughts and events that necessitates reading chapter one and two in order to understand chapter three. To "understand" the novel, it is not

only not necessary to read it from beginning to end, but on the contrary, the *Trickster* in its very nature seems to require a "cross-reading," seems to utter a "Beware of those who read the novel from the beginning to the end!" The trickster's nature is to interrupt, to overturn a traditional way of reading. The trickster's "shape-changing, limit-transgressing antics provide the best guide—it is inherent in the nature of the trickster not to provide a model—to who and what we are, and, as well, to how we ought to read" (Krupat 183).

This principle of disrupting and subverting, transgressing the limitations set by the dominant discourse—the dominant, traditional way of writing a novel and approaching a novel—operates throughout and at various levels in Vizenor's work. That it operates throughout Vizenor's work is indicated by the reoccurrence of his trickster figures in other works; for instance, Griever the Hocus appears not only in the *Trickster of Liberty* but also is the title character of *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*. Hence, Vizenor's works cannot be completely separated; on the contrary, he has created an intertextuality in the best post-modern sense.

This disruptive, subversive force is a major trait of character in trickster discourse which, as a trope, consequently illustrates Vizenor's theoretical concerns: it constitutes the body of his writing, be it theory and/or literature. Vizenor himself thinks of writing as embodying this disruptive force, and believes that:

writers in general are tricksters in the broadest sense of the disruption. I don't think it's worth writing, for myself, unless you can break up a little bit. I don't think it's worth the energy unless the formulas can be broken down, unless the expectations of the reader are disrupted, because I think writing is revolutionary, radical in behavior. It's radical in action, it's disruptive in the social and cultural values. That's a trickster's business. (Bruchac 294)

Words, Words, Words

One of the most important formulas to be broken down, and one of the main themes of deconstructive criticism, is language. "Language," argues Terry Eagleton, "is something I am made out of, not merely a convenient tool I use" (130). Jacques Derrida also accounts for the power exerted by language and rhetoric but at the same time demonstrates that there is no escape from language, there is no "outside" of language (213).

Vizenor, however, attempts to subvert this power by breaking the language down in the sense of re-imagining language. He compares

this agenda to breaking out of boxes (Bruchac 193). Thinking these boxes on a metaphorical level, they are designed and built by the dominating discourse; their usage is determined by the same authority, for instance the academy, or the dominating literature or the dominating social science discourse. Vizenor wants to transgress the limitations set and imposed by them on Native American literatures.

Vizenor is very much aware of the power of language; he even speaks of "a verbal act of survival [where] words take on a much more complex and subtle level of power" (Coltelli 158). This shows that it is ever more important to engage in subverting the dominating discourse, to liberate the content boxed in these "boxes." In order to ensure this "verbal act of survival," it is necessary to re-imagine language based on one's own agenda, which has been neglected and suppressed by the discourse in power. Accordingly, Vizenor has developed and used many strategies in his *Trickster*. He conceives of his tricksters, and most probably of himself, as being "word warriors" (*Trickster* 18) who play with language and fight it at the same time through the trope of "catachresis" (Velie 136), the deliberate misuse of words and mixing of metaphors. Vizenor's tricksters often use so-called "panic holes" in which they "bury voices," "scream," and "die over" (*Trickster* 7-18). Vizenor coins words and plays with words. He names the mongrels, also mixed-bloods in a sense, "White Lies" and "Chicken Lips." He creates "marxmass carnivals" (*Trickster* 39) and thus arranges—probably for the first time in history—a get-together between socialism and Christianity, a quite unusual coinage. Just like the warrior clown, he does not want to retreat in a "rather formal and footsore language" but rather attempts to "practice new words" and "pursue unusual phrases into forbidden restaurants" (*Trickster* 37). For Vizenor, playing with words is part of a mixed-blood tribal effort at deconstruction (Bruchac 293).

Vizenor not only recognizes the power of language, he goes even further when he holds the view that "we imagine ourselves into being, we create ourselves, we touch ourselves into being with words" (Coltelli 158). He imagines his own terminology, takes over the position of a wordmaker in analogy of the arrowmaker in former times. In *Wordarrows*, Vizenor writes that "arrowmakers and wordmakers survive in the word wars with sacred memories while the factors in the new fur trade separate themselves in wordless and eventless categories" (viii).

Vizenor illustrates a completely different approach to language and words. To teach her children to read, Novena Mae uses a rather unconventional method: "she wrote words and names on leaves and scattered them on the hard snow; the children collected the leaves and told stories with random words, their words, their voices on the rise"

(*Trickster* 10). One outstanding characteristic of this way of teaching to read is its being so intertwined with nature, as words are written on leaves instead of in books and are learned by scattering and collecting them outdoors. Above all, Vizenor here underscores his project of fostering creativity with words and language, thus subverting in a very gentle way the dominant paradigm of linguistic usage. The children create their words, their random words, which enables them to imagine their own stories. They are encouraged to build a voice of their own, a voice which is thus saved from being boxed into the restrictive formulas and meaning patterns taught in white schools.

The dominant discourse establishes a one-to-one correspondence of meaning between signifier and signified. This determinacy, which suppresses difference and otherness in meaning, is strongly criticized by poststructuralist theorists. As the French psychoanalyst Lacan argues, "the word never has only one use. Every word always has a beyond, sustains several meanings. Behind what the discourse says, there is what it means . . . and behind what it wants to say there is another meaning, and this process will never be exhausted" (qtd. in *Trickster* xi). Thus, there is necessarily a difference, a "differance" (Derrida 1-28), in each word. Words, then, are metaphors and the trickster is a comic holotrope, an interior landscape "behind what the discourse says" (*Trickster* xi). The children are encouraged to imagine a language of their own into being, and hence—according to Vizenor's theory—imagine themselves into being.

However, this unusual, imaginative, as well as gently subversive, style of writing makes reading not easier, of course, and demands the reader's active participation in this imaginative language game. Vizenor thinks that "when the trickster emerges in imagination the author dies in a comic discourse" (*Trickster* x). This very poststructuralist, in fact Barthesian premise of the "Death of the Author" (142-48) in order for the reader's creative process to emerge, necessitates a very trickster-like breaking up of the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of its meaning, and the only authority for interpretation. The author thus needs to be liberated from the metaphysical status and reduced to a "location." Once the author is removed from the traditional status, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. "To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes, "Death" 147). Vizenor defies this closure; he is on the side of the liberation and diversity of meaning. The reader is in this sense also liberated, in Barthesian terminology: "It is the birth of the reader at the cost of the death of the author" (148). Hence the reader is free to enter the text from any direction; there is no correct or prescribed route.

As Vizenor describes it: "The author cedes the landscape to the reader and then dies, the narrators bear the scheme, bodies are wild, and the trickster liberates the mind in comic discourse" (*Trickster* xi). Hence, Vizenor's force of liberation and disruption works here in breaking with traditional restrictions and limitations, creating space for new concepts of writing and reading.

Comic Tricksters and Tragic Anthropologists

A major force of restriction and limitation is seen in anthropology and social science discourse. Arguments against anthropologists run like a thread through Vizenor's work. His *Trickster* literally starts off with a confrontation between the trickster Sergeant Alex Hobraiser and the anthropologist Eastman Shicer in the novel's Prologue.

The anthropologist wants to codify trickster discourse and behavior, to take evidence down in his notebook once and for all, to draw manifest conclusions from his observations, to set up laws describing tribal life; he tries to trick the trickster by employing his narrow and lifeless academic tactics. He attempts building "boxes," that is, schemes and theories, into which to press the trickster and all tribal life. But his celebration of "theories over imagination" (*Trickster* xiv) does not prove to be an adequate approach to deal with the "object" of his studies. He wants to collect academic evidence, which Vizenor considers nothing but a "euphemism for linguistic colonization of tribal memories and trickster narratives" (*Trickster* xiv).

Arnold Krupat may very well have observed the cardinal mistake of this approach in his book *Ethnocriticism*: "scientific 'knowledge' is predominantly knowledge of its own rules, codes, and concepts for making sense of culture, not of culture itself" (183). The social science discourse which is dominated by and based on Western cultural concepts ignores differences in the culture to be studied. These social scientists analyze the Native American culture from the angle of Western patriarchal, monotheistic, manifest-destiny civilization. They apply a too narrow, a bigoted, a colonial methodology to study their "object." This approach illustrates very well the lack of effort being made to get a sense of the differences and thus acknowledge the inadequacy of their approach.

The anthropologist does not seem to understand the trickster's nature of playfulness; he wants to discover a pattern of rules—which is so typical for academic striving—to be applied to trickster behavior. If there is a pattern of trickster behavior to discover at all, this pattern is a shifting one, one that can never be grasped fully. This does not, of course, coincide at all with the terminal, positivist requirements of the academy. The term "trickster" has to have a definite "meaning," a one-to-one stable, manifest correspondence. This is another incident

where poststructuralist theory comes into "play," so to speak. "Meaning" can never be grasped completely; it is in the play, in the trace, in the difference. Vizenor quotes Derrida, who described the location of meaning in the following way: "Between the too warm flesh of the literary event and the cold skin of the concept runs meaning" (Coltelli 174). The trickster, however, imagines "meaning" and thus liberates from a determinate meaning; the trickster is the embodiment of the poststructuralist notion of "play." The trickster is "on the side of imagination and liberation, she's our last wild game" (*Trickster* xiv), which consequently makes the trickster Alexina reproach Shicer: "You are a method, and your methods are the death of imagination and the end of the trickster" (*Trickster* xvi). Social science methodologies in their striving for a terminal creed "separate people from the human spirit, from the spontaneity of being alive, unpredictable, and playing" (Coltelli 170).

These notions of imagination, game, spontaneity, and community instead of separation are alien to the anthropological "tragic" worldview: "The trickster is a communal voice in a comic worldview, not a tragic method in the social sciences"; the latter "separate life from death and love from hate, [they are] an academic monologue, an autistic recitation with the delusions that the world is structured in [their] heroic and isolated brain" (*Trickster* xvi). Even the mongrels Chicken Lips and White Lies howl and bark at the anthropologist.

The danger of this tragic discourse for the survival of tribal life is that anthropologists invent their own Native American culture by using their own methodology. They catalogue, they record, they explain, set rules, and thus they ignore the fact that the culture is alive. Their approach, however, not only invents a culture of their own according to their own principles and methodologies but also literally silences the culture and its voices. Additionally, the unequal power distribution between Western academy and tribal cultures strengthens the anthropological approach and makes it even more difficult for tribal voices to be heard and acknowledged. It may be worthwhile here to quote Vizenor at length on this topic, as he argues very passionately that

Everything in anthropology is an invention and an extension of the cultural colonialism of Western expansion. . . Anthropologists believe they are right and what they have methodologically constructed is true because of the socioscientific method. They got a bundle of bad methodologies, methodologies which have distorted the human spirit since anthropologists have been eagerly pursuing the invention of culture—and they invented culture. Culture doesn't exist; they invented it. They need culture so that they can get Ph.D.s and gain power in universities. And

people who have that kind of power control culture, because they control the definitions, the symbols, and the masks they've constructed about culture. (Coltelli 161)

As a consequence of the power dynamics involved, anthropologists literally cannot allow play because this notion of play will alter or even deny, at least destabilize, their socioscientific theories and thus subvert their basis of power and authority.

In the *Trickster*, Tune Browne as a "wild candidate undresses the invention" (*Trickster* 44) in a tribal striptease. He unties the cultural ties that white culture has created and imposed on them. "Through mythic satire we reverse the inventions, and during our ritual striptease the inventors and consumers vanish" (*Trickster* 47). Just as Roland Barthes, the "semiological adventurer" (*Trickster* 44), observed that in the final moment of nakedness in the striptease, the woman is desexualized (*Mythologies* 84), Tune strips away the invented and imposed symbols of the anthropologists' Native American culture.

Let's Be Bears in the Cities

Vizenor also takes a glance at the future and its prospects and difficulties in his novel. Trickster Tune replaces the old school of socioacupuncture, which was founded on a tragic worldview, with The New School of Socioacupuncture, which is described as "an active word war with a comic temper." The trickster takes over the role of the comic liberator in this new word war; he "maddens culture cultists, erudite anthropologists, and quickens their leaden dioramas at the same time; he enlivens their dead letters and blackboard schemes." There is, however, not only hope, as "last week, his comedies were blunted behind the law school" (*Trickster* 51). This hardly noticeable very last line of the glorious proclamation of the New School of Socioacupuncture dampens all too ready future optimism and indicates that there is in fact no reason to sound the all-clear yet. In "Dead Voices," Vizenor's appeal is to resort to war with the "word demons" who invented the tribes, "hunted our animals and buried our voices." For Vizenor, it is necessary to have "escaped to the cities with the animals and wounded birds" because "the stories we remember would never survive the peace on federal reservations." He himself says that he "came alive with the bear in the mirror and died with the tribe in a dead letter translation" (241).

For Vizenor, there has to be a fight of liberation; passive retreat to the reservation is no solution. Trickster Tune Browne gives an example when he, as a mongrel liberator, liberates the animals in the laboratories in a mission of "postmodern socioacupuncture" (*Trickster* 57). The life-scientists are depicted as being helpless in the face of a trickster's power of liberation and humor.

Vizenor's "message" in "Dead Voices" as well as in his novel seems to be that peace in the old traditional way is not possible in an invented, imposed, dead "culture" on the federal reservations. Retreat to the reservation as an establishment of the dominating structure is no way out; Vizenor and his tricksters went out of the reservation, out of the patronage respectively. Examples are Griever de Hocus, the Monkey King in China, and China Browne, who investigates Griever's fate. Placing his trickster in China bears subversive tendencies in a twofold way: at the time, it was considered very unusual, probably even suspicious, to visit a communist country, and the more so was this very unusual for Native American literature, which did not venture from limited regional settings. Likewise, the fact that the mixed-blood Griever de Hocus is a university professor was a novelty in the academy, which was and is still dominated by whites.

Pushing the Boundaries of Sexual Identity: Tricksters as Holosexual Mind Monkeys

A cultural striptease also takes place on the level of the dominant paradigms of sexuality and gender. From the earliest traditional stories on, the trickster is known for his breaking out of the societal limits of gender behavior. Along with Vizenor's word creations and imaginations, he describes Griever de Hocus as being a "holosexual mind monkey" (*Trickster* 34). Holosexuality encompasses a love for the "whole" of the world and is thus not reducible to homosexuality or any other determinate restrictive terms, sexual norms, and gender identities which are culturally constructed and separated by a huge cultural gap.

The French historian and poststructuralist thinker Michel Foucault accounted for this cultural, political gender construction in his introduction to *Herculine Barbin*:

Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the two sexes in a single body, and consequently to limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals. Everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity. (viii)

And again we come across the theories of the dominant discourse that presses individual difference into the boxes of theories, be they biological or juridical. In this sense, a reduction of diversity into opposites took place, and not only into opposites but into actual hierarchies, where the male gender dominates and suppresses the female gender. This hierarchy is then sustained in the domination of this discourse.

This is, of course, a case for a good trickster's liberating and subversive business. Vizenor virtually starts off his trickster imaginations by launching an attack on this theme: the first trickster we meet in the book is Sergeant Alex Hobraiser, who turns into the actual Alexina Hobraiser. This discovery immediately leads the anthropologist to draw the conclusion that she must be worried about being identified as a woman. Having proudly discovered this "peculiarity," Shicer smiles a victorious smile, but in fact even his hands, not only his mind, are narrow (*Trickster* xii). Shicer thinks in the dominant categories of opposites, proclaiming that one has to be either male or female. He does not understand that "our trickster is imagination, the humor between our minds and bodies, boats and water" (*Trickster* xii). The trickster is in-between, mediates in this location, and heals the pain caused by these restrictions and stringent oppositional thinking.

The trickster heals, like the scapehouse heals as it is a shelter for wounded reservation women. Sister Eternal Flame renounces the authoritarian convent, the dominant institution, and prefers to do her work in a rather unusual, even subversive, manner. Not only do the men not like the idea that "no men mastered these gender adventures" (*Trickster* 91) but also the tragic abbess, obviously, does not approve of Eternal Flame's humorous spirit and her energetic, alternative agenda; the abbess prefers to preach the convent's peace and seclusion from worldly affairs:

Flame had a wild spirit, and she was much too passionate and adventurous, too sensitive and inspired, to ever be at peace in a habit and a cloister. The abbess had been censorious over her humor and natural blush, her reveries, dash, and her curious manner with children; the renunciation was mutual. (*Trickster* 91)

Eternal Flame breaks out of the "boxes" of the institution of the convent with its strict set of rules and restrictive limitations of behavior. The renunciation, however, is said to be "mutual," implying that dissidents are not wanted in this system. In this "gender adventure," she also overturns the oppressive gender hierarchy in the fact that no men "master" these women but, on the contrary, men are asked to confess to the women.

Trickster Father Mother Browne represents a counter-image to the radical gender division as "he could never decide if he wanted to become a mother or a father" (*Trickster* 17). He obviously refuses to determine his identity according to the dominant culture's set of rules and decides to offer this chance to other people as well. In establishing the possibility of a "Last Lecture," he realizes the notion of changing one's identity, which, only too often, has been imposed on oneself by

societal expectations, limitations, etc. And no doubt, these kinds of activities engage him in conflict with the dominant authorities: "The church patriarchs were suspicious and banished the mixedblood priest to a remote parish" (*Trickster* 101). Hence he shares with Sister Eternal Flame the kind of repercussions they both have to endure as a consequence of their unconventional activities which undermine the present power establishment. Father Mother is a trickster healer, and his methods do not coincide with those of the "church patriarchs." As far as the people are concerned—and not to forget in the so common striving for power: the people, not the maintenance of a power position, should be the actual concern—they are healed: "Beneath his warm hands the bored and lonesome are mended and the sick are cured" (*Trickster* 101).

Not only does the trickster character itself act in this subversive manner concerning the strict division of gender identities, but the trickster even embodies an unusual coincidence of opposites, including the opposites of male and female. The trickster is an androgynous landscape and, in this sense, reconciles both sexes and thus reveals the superfluous nature of the strict gender division and, above all, the gender hierarchy. Here we should note in the best trickster fashion that the difference between men and women obviously reveals itself in the former's lack of X-chromosomes, which only confirms what even the social scientists are supposed to have found out: "Men are defective women" (*Trickster* 55).

A Statue of Liberty: Not Yet Constructed But Yet Deconstructed

"The minister of culture now dedicates the Trickster of Liberty, a statue to be erected here, on this meadow, where we come together to honor our wild ginseng agreement."

And the woman unveiled a model of an enormous statue, that would be taller than the Statue of Liberty. (*Trickster* 139)

Explicitly in comparison to the Statue of Liberty, a Trickster of Liberty—which is even taller—is erected on the autonomous tribal baronage in the midst of the United States by a communist country, China. As a result of the ginseng business between the baronage and China and the trial between the baronage and the United States, the pinnacle of trickster's trickery and mockery emerges. This political irony of erecting a monument called Trickster of Liberty on Indian land is probably the funniest subversion of the American myth of liberty.

However, planned in enormous proportions and intended as a counterpart of the Statue of Liberty, the Trickster statue is never

finished. The work is halted at crotch height, a typically sexual trickster image and a commentary on the situation of liberty and democracy in the country. At the same time, the unfinished statue reveals the hypocrisy and ignorance of a "finished" statue of liberty. Liberty in its very definition is not a terminable goal that can be achieved and established once and for all. Liberty seems always to remain in the stage of a project with many changing components and complex forces that need to be rethought and criticized permanently. This project is far from being accomplished, as not only the situation of Native Americans in this so-called liberty shows.

By placing the statue on Indian land, the main target is the politics of the American Indian reservation system. One might object that this is an easy target in the sense of being a too-old story, but the novelty lies in the fact that every party involved is satirized, not only the U.S. government but also tribal bureaucrats and the self-styled Indian radicals. If figures in Vizenor's novel are usually harassed by nothing worse than See See Arachnid's special breed of parasitic testicle sticks, "bred to attack authoritarian personalities" (*Trickster* 118), Vizenor's satire on leaders of the American Indian Movement "came close to butchering a sacred cow" (Hochbruck 276). The hypocrisy of radical activists posing for the media with braids and bone chokers is exemplified in the figure of Coke de Fountain (modeled after Dennis Banks), an "urban pantribal radical and dealer in cocaine," who "posed as a new colonial victim" and "inspired his urban warriors with cocaine" (*Trickster* 111). A woman passionately confronts his hypocritical behavior in public: "De Fountain, he's the one who saved our children with drugs, and taught them how to hate. . . . He's got no vision, he's a killer of our dreams" (*Trickster* 113). But even these "invented indians" like Coke De Fountain and Homer Yellow Snow (in remembrance of the posing "Indian" writer Jamake Highwater) are treated gently in the end. They are allowed a last lecture and discharged into a new identity.

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Mythic Rage and Laughter: An Interview with Gerald Vizenor

Dallas Miller

[This interview was conducted at the Third Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies in August 1993. I would like to thank Manuela Gheorge, a Seminar fellow, for attending this interview and enriching it with her interests in silence and irony. I would like to thank the staff of the Stuttgart Seminar, in particular Professor Heide Ziegler, Doctor Wolfgang Hochbruck, and Mabel Lesch, for making this meeting possible. And, of course, thanks to Gerald Vizenor who gave generously of his time and understanding and humor.]

V: What is the meaning of Silence? Let me hear you say it.

MG: [Translates title into Romanian.]

[Laughter.]

V: Silence is unnatural. There is no silence in the natural world. Not even death is silent. Silence is a human invention. Silence is a literature. We create silence as power. I shall sit in silence and show you how powerful it is. [Long silence.]

And as I say that, of course, I'm ironic, because how do I know all this. I'm alive and natural; I'm not silent. So as I speak of it, it's an irony that I should say that nature is not silent. How do I know what nature is? I'm between it. I'm between the silence I know is not natural and the irony that I have no right to say it. But I say it anyway. I must imagine my time. I must imagine this, these sounds I hear and practice the silences that give them more power. I can imagine a greater power in nature than nature can, not because I'm separated but because I am of nature. So I can practice these silences to enhance the power of nature, to give it more significance than the voice, to bring nature through the power of imagination and to stop it,

to hold a reader in silence, to stop the sound. I don't do it cruelly; I don't kill to create silence. I heal with silence. And I don't even know anything about that, so that's why it's ironic.

[Laughter.]

DM: I have some more mundane questions. Strange questions, maybe; I'm not sure.

V: I'll give them power through silence.

[Laughter.]

DM: I guess I'd like to start with a question about your critical writings. I've found three articles; does that sound right? "Trickster Discourse," "Reverse Striptease," "Ruins of Representation," what else do we have?

V: Two books: one, the articles that are in *Narrative Chance*, and several other articles, but the big stuff, the new stuff is in this new book called *Manifest Manners*.

DM: Okay. Can you say a word on the relationship of your critical writings to your fiction?

V: Well, I'm not evaluating my own fiction, of course, and I'm not creating a case for my own work. But what I am trying to do is develop ideas in literary criticism that are different from American or Western literary critical history. I want to find some interpretive and critical things to say about Native American fiction particularly, that is uniquely interpretative of Native American fiction and not just some Western literary interpretation that serves the dominance of Western literature. And those ideas focus on silence, transformation, episodic stories that have multiple topics with a kind of center but no closure. These are just some of the ideas that are different in oral stories from Native American communities. And that some of these values and practices of these stories end up in written form although changed considerably but nevertheless present. And I'm trying to develop a theoretical idea that includes this startling interpretation, that the interpretation of Native American literature is different than the interpretation of other literature. Or, to put it in another way, to expand the ideas of interpretation that give Native American literature a difference that is difficult to find in other literature. In addition to the things I just mentioned, a different world view of chance, coincidence and chance, trickster narratives, which is part of transformation, a kind of interpretation as well as a story, sort of a commenting on it as you tell the story and other things. But I'm trying to play these out as a difference that makes a difference. It means that the author does not essentially determine the text. It means that a text may have these

elements of Native American literary expression, but it doesn't mean the author necessarily has to be Native American.

DM: I also wanted to ask you about tribal oral traditions and humor and the uses of humor. I'd also like a word on the relation of *Summer in the Spring* to *People Named the Chippewa*.

V: Oh yeah. Well, let's see; the things I've written about oral tradition are probably more accurate than I can pull off the top of my hat. And I do often focus on the object of translation, the practice of translation, to explain the differences rather than just essential differences. The serious difference, the difference that makes a big difference, is that oral stories are not told in isolation. I mean that you have to have somebody interested, people listening. It's also sound; it's not scripture. So, reading is an individual act, and you can do it anywhere. It's isolated. You can't read in a commune. Of course, you could read things out loud. But that's different, reading things out loud, than it is if you tell something. That's much different.

DM: I was really interested in your humor because that's actually what drew me to your work in the first place. I laughed a lot.

V: Let me hear how you laugh.

DM: [Laughs.]

V: [Laughs.] Very good. You see silence is never in nature. Neither are trains or freeways, but . . .

MG: Does nature laugh?

V: Oh yeah, nature does laugh.

MG: How?

V: Well, you have to listen. You have to know what the joke is.

[Laughter.]

V: Well, actually that's a pretty good example. People have to kind of know what's going on to know what departure would be humorous. This is a so-called cross-cultural thing. [Laughs.] I mean there's nothing more deadly than to miss a joke if you're not in on the subtleties of the experience. It isn't even cross-cultural. Sometimes it's just class or experience and you just miss the playful context. Now those are kind of exclusive claims that a lot of people make, but a community that's speaking the experiences of its own time knows what's going on. And they certainly know the gossip and the business of the place. So if you depart a little bit, or if you embellish a little something, you take a scrap of gossip and turn it into something else. You know, it's very humorous, very playful. That's one idea. This

ties together pretty well with Western theories of comedy. What's comic is communal. That is, it can't be known very well as being comical if it isn't a departure from something that's pretty well established. And in most comedies, theater comedies, you have audiences in on what the differences are. Sometimes the characters are not, but that makes it all the more fun. That's a different kind of comedy, but the principle of being a communal experience is similar.

Another kind of comedy is fairly well-established stories that intend to be tricky and comical and those are trickster stories which involve transformations of all kinds. And that can be very humorous just in itself, different kinds of transformations. I argue that humor is natural, and it's healing. And it also brings people together. They trust each other more. And it's healing. And you have to know each other really well to laugh. So it's bonding in a sense too. But it's particularly healing and it's that part that I focus on. And that's even been supported pretty reasonably by science, scientific inquiry, that laughter and humor are healing. It releases extraordinary biochemicals that are very good for the body, for healing. Which is why saying something like, "This laughter will be the death of me," ought to be very humorous. [Laughs.] I'm going to die from too much healing. So, if humor is healing, then trickster stories are good for you. Okay? I mean I'm doing a playful connection here. But, I want to play that idea that trickster stories are good for people. They're not getting at somebody. They're good for people. And people expect a kind of liberation of humor from the mind. Playing the word "liberation" in its non-political sense, just that it's enriching and expanding, liberating.

But let's add some circumstances that demand humor. I've just been talking about sort of a choice of trickster stories. Let's add some circumstances that are demanding of some kind of expression. Let's take a really difficult winter season. Let's put people in desperately cold conditions, living closely together, wondering how long winter might last. Because if it lasts too long, you could starve to death from not getting enough food. Or if it's a particular kind of winter where there's been very deep snow, then there's a sudden thaw in February and then it freezes hard, so that you have a crust of snow that makes it very difficult for animals to move around and for hunters to move. You have another serious situation. Make this a very dangerous time when you're not certain food will last the season. It seems to me you need some good stories not to go crazy, not to die of fear. Trickster stories are terrific. And in those circumstances of extreme environmental circumstances I refer to these stories as a liberation of the mind. You can travel great distances with these fantastic and wonderful trickster stories. And transform yourself. They're not "true." What I mean is people don't look upon them as "fact" and play that stupid

game that modern critics play of, you know, is this true or not. I argue that Native American storytellers are very sophisticated literary artists in these terms. They clearly recognize in literature the difference between what is imagination and what is a tree. And they don't have to [laughs] constantly jump around about what's true and what isn't. And so, to have a character in a story, a trickster, transform himself or herself is not something you'd pause to say "Come on, that's not true." I mean that would be the silliest thing in the world to say. You'd definitely be an outsider. But I think of this as a superior art form because Western literature is still to catch up with this kind of principle that a character isn't a real person, you know. Or that you can't transform gender or physical form into animals and birds. I mean Western readers still have real difficulty with that. That's not a real story to them. So that's why I think these stories are superior.

Unfortunately, these stories were heard by some of the dullest-witted people in Western civilization. These stories were heard and translated by anthropologists. All they could hear was the sound of object and culture. They didn't hear anything about art. And so they turned all these stories, for the most part, into cultural documentation and validation or documentation and definition. And lost the superior artistry. It would have been a much better setup if the government had subsidized mad people and creative artists to go out and listen to these stories because they would have at least appreciated the play of language and the power of imagination and would have honored this artistry, this rich and generous sense of literature. But instead they sent out some absolutely narrow, unimaginative social scientists who seek the translations of these stories as a form of power, what I call the "tropes to power" in the academic world. And that's the service of their translation, not literature.

So, here we are now. A new generation is challenging all of this. Setting aside the power of anthropologists and others who have translated these materials. And asking and demanding better attention to this literary act. And then also imagining it all over again. Bringing it alive in new imaginative form. And I don't know what I'm talking about. And that's why everything I've told you is ironic.

DM: I wanted to ask about *Summer in the Spring* . . .

V: That's a collection of stories and songs translated.

DM: That's published in 1965, 1970 and again in 1981.

V: Well, there were several editions and there's just a new one that's come out. Completely revised.

DM: *Summer in the Spring*, these came from your great uncle's newspaper?

V: Well, some of them did. There are two parts. The first and second editions were two volumes. The third edition combined them. The fourth edition is completely redone and together. And that's in the University of Oklahoma series. They were separated. One was songs, poems. The other was stories.

The stories were published in a newspaper that my family published on the reservation. These were stories told in the late 1800s by a man in his eighties, so it would have been about the turn of the Nineteenth Century when he was born. So these would have been stories before very much contact, certainly before reservations and that contact. And they were told to relatives and then. . . . What I don't know is the translation business. I don't know what intervened. I only have what's been published in English. And then the attribution, that these were told by Day Dodge. But, I mean, it could well be that the newspaper invented "Day Dodge." I mean I just don't know that. What I also know is that these stories are another version, and there are many other versions of similar stories, so they found an older man who took pleasure in these familiar stories of which there are many versions, and then published one of these versions. So I took those and then where it seemed natural, I inserted the *Anishinaabe* words in English or in the orthographic system. I did this so that the language would have some familiarity. Now this may have been [laughs] clearly, my own particular urgent interest in the language because I didn't grow up speaking it, only words and phrases; it's not a primary language to me. So I've had to study it. So, taking that interest in studying the language and its structure, even though I'm not very good at it, I am pretty good at literature. So I can conceive of the problems in presentation and translation of these materials. So, those are the stories.

The songs were translated originally by Frances Densmore. That's "es," she. And they were done about the turn of the century also. She was an extraordinary listener and did an extraordinary presentation of these songs in translation. All over Minnesota, different communities, and she grouped these songs according to their expression and interest: a group of Midewiwin songs which were religious songs, personal dream songs, some social songs, moccasin game songs, different groups of songs. What was extraordinary about her work, and no one else has done it, is that she recorded the songs on wax cylinders and then she asked the singer to translate the words. If the singer couldn't do this, she would ask others to translate. Then she would ask the singer and others to tell the song's story. I don't know anyone who's ever done this. See, it wasn't just a song, it was also a song-story, the story about the song. Like there's a nickname, there's a story about the nickname. If she were looking at names, I'm sure she would say

"What's the name." And then she'd translate that. A social scientist might walk away, right: "I've got this cultural bit of evidence." But she would say "What's the story of the name?" And since in her case as a musicologist, the song of the story. So there's more than that. And she then asked, "Is there a song, is there a picture?" And there were indeed drawings that people could make. I don't want to use the word "representation," you understand the problem you get into using certain words where it feels natural in discourse to use the word "representation," but that really mucks it up. Now, these have been referred to as "song pictures," and I've referred to them as "picto-myths" because they're not pictographic and they're not representational. What they are are imaginative expressions that tell the story. And you can look at it and tell the story and then probably repeat the song. As many people could. She would show this picture and they would recognize the song. But it's that different thing to say that it's representational. What it does is remind someone through a visual reference of a story and a song.

Well, I mean I used her work. The problem surrounding all of this is there were many words in the songs that neither she nor the singers nor the experts could translate because they're archaic. And we do that in English too. We can't quite find the words in songs. These songs had been sung for a long time and people weren't quite sure of the meaning. They had meaning in context, but they couldn't really define them lexically. So there was that problem. And there was also the serious problem, but she spoke of all this, of recording the sounds. She then also offered a musical notation and she said that the Western measure of musical sound was not adequate to record the wavering subtle tones of the human voice, the singer. And so, she did the best she could with the instruments and the systems of recording that were possible but then pointed out the problems.

Well, I studied all of those and re-expressed some of them because the uses of pronouns were difficult: masculine, for example. References to nature were male dominated and primary. And things like that. So I then had extensive notes on what I interpreted and did. Now I went through all the songs, all the words and contexts and spoke with people, consulted all the lexicons that are present, Native speakers, to do what I could with the words of the language. But there was no way to do much more than she did. There was some nuance that I thought, but it was a choice, you know, and it probably was unique to the community she was in and I was probably getting it from somewhere else. But hers was a profound labor of love of this music. And I think many people would have no idea how rich and complicated was this music if she hadn't done it. And I was enriched by her work and the study of it and interpretation of it. I honor it and I honor her a great

deal. I refer to the work that I did there as re-expression, interpretation and re-expression. What I want to say is how careful I was to note everything that was done.

The interest was to make these more accessible as poetry. Now, that's a real problem. Right? Because you transform a song into poetry. But the translation already did that. And, while those texts are available, they're not easily readable. It takes a lot to get to the image. Maybe you shouldn't, some would argue, but I thought you should; some of the verbal images were beautiful and presented the Native American imagination in a way that I wanted to do.

Then I combined these two editions, the stories and the songs, into the one I called *Summer in the Spring* which comes from a line from one of the dream songs, which is "I feel the Summer in the Spring." I want to say also that the dream songs interested me the most because they're imagistic and it felt like closer to haiku poetry, which is Japanese, than anything else. The differences, of course, are that the Japanese imagist poem, it's more than imagist but I'm short-cutting. The Japanese imagist poem is, plays down the significance of the first person pronoun, the ego, the presence of an ego in the poem. There's not quite enough room for it. [Laughs.] But the dream songs of the *Anishinaabe* were delightfully personal and used lots of pronouns. But that's a difference. The contexts are different too. Haiku is written; this is a song. And it feels different when you say it than it does when you see it written. That's the personal, you speak of it if you are speaking permanent. So I was very keen on that, the similarities, but I have to say, I didn't feel this until I was in Japan as an 18-year old Army private and that's where I bumped into this fantastic literature, Japanese haiku and literature. It was real, I was touched; I still am. I still write it. I published three or four haiku books of my own. So that inspired me a lot. And then I found these, similar areas and could speak of them in an original way. And some reviewers said that it's hard to tell what's Japanese and what's *Anishinaabe*. I thought that was kind of nice. I thought that was kind of nice because it places Native American imagination in a kind of context of world literature rather than some developmental cultural artifact served up by some power-grubbing anthropologist.

Someday I'm going to have to learn to speak my mind about these matters. [Laughs.]

DM: *The People Named the Chippewa* comes from the same general sources or did you go directly to the storytellers?

V: Well, these are almost all Native American sources. I've tried as much as I could. I did cite some people in religion and history outside. Also *Anishinaabe* but also some others to bring in the Native shaman-

ism. Because most of the sources on experiences like that are dreadful. So there's much better sources if you, say, go to Hultkrantz or something, even though there's problems with that too. Much more enlightened perception of Native American religion you find than most Western anthropologists.

But the unique thing here among the *Anishinaabe* is that in the Nineteenth Century there were, half a dozen *Anishinaabe* authors. Now, most people don't think about this. Hardly anyone thinks about Native Americans as having a very vital and significant written literature in the early 1800s up to the time of the turn of the century. And that's something important to me to demonstrate. Many Indian communities had newspapers that the impact of federal boarding schools and mission schools in the late 1800s resulted in these, you know, Indians teaching English, teaching school, publishing newspapers and writing books. And that's yet to be generously a part of American literary discourse.

DM: And *The People Named the Chippewa* includes Copway . . .

V: Yes and William Warren, who wrote in the 1850s, wrote the first and most reliable history of the Ojibway or *Anishinaabe*. And he was a member of the territorial legislature. Quite a contradiction.

DM: Ironies.

V: Peter Jones and Copway and many others. I think that, and this is self-serving, but I think the *Anishinaabe* are probably historically the most published, more books published by *Anishinaabe* writers in history than any other tribal group. Some argue that that is because they had such early [laughs] contact with the French and Christians.

DM: I wanted to ask you a question about autobiography, but I'm not quite clear what I want to ask.

V: Well, let me help you out. Krupat and Swann in their collection of autobiographical essays by Native American writers assert that it is characteristic of Native American writers to, if they're writing anything personal or autobiographical, to call upon a larger synecdochic or whole reference, to tribe, to family, before they talk about themselves. They also assert that that is characteristic of Indian autobiographical or personal or life story writing. And I think it is. It certainly is in my autobiography. They also assert that this use of the first person was difficult, that it was not a natural thing. Okay, let me talk about that; I'll leave Krupat and Swann and talk about that.

This is a general assumption that Native Americans are so communal that they don't have an assertive first person presence, right? Now, I'm just going to say flat out that that's rubbish. For one reason, and then I'll give some others. The first reason it's rubbish is that it

comes from a romantic interpretation of anthropology. It's a popular culture thing, right? Western people are highly individualized, Indians got to be something different, so they're communal. It also supports a sort of developmental thing, from the tribe, right, where they do everything and they don't know who they are individually, to the development of some more superior individuality and industrial stuff. That notion of the communal life, for the most part, has served this racial and cultural difference between Native America and the West.

It's also a very touching and romantic image. Right now, and people wonder who the hell they are. You know, they focus on Indians and say "Indians, show us the way," with their experience in communal life. Okay, and that is a very positive energy, very romantic, very moving, very enriching, often healing. But, let me argue this. Like tribal literature, which is a superior art form, so is the expression of individual experience superior to that of the West. I'm going to argue that Native Americans are more highly individualistic, more brilliantly individualistic than contemporary Americans. I'm going to argue that contemporary Americans are communally-dependent, pretend to be individualistic, but are weakened as individuals by consumer interests, and the values of social organization. Let me show you what I mean. Bet you were wondering, weren't you?

How am I going to get out of this one? Were you wondering that?

DM: I think I know, actually.

V: Well, the first thing is subtle and the second is profound, and there are many examples. The subtle one is nicknames. Is there any more highly individualistic reference than to give someone a unique name from their experience? Is there anything more individually recognizable? It's not a surname. There's no other name like it. It comes out of someone's acts or behavior. This isn't a sacred name, this is a nickname. And there's a lot of variation on how nicknames come about. A lot of variation on how sacred names come about; sometimes there are name-givers, in other cases family members. But sacred names are unique too. And I'm just focusing on the more common expression. And one can have several nicknames. So they're very individualistic and there are stories surrounding them. And no one story is like another. So, what do we do there? Well, we have a really interesting sophisticated system of individualism and communal responsibility. What we have is a high degree of individual identification within the support of community. What a superior artistic practice, huh?

Okay. The second, more dramatic example of this: can you find anywhere in the world something more individualistic than the experience of a shaman? This is such an extraordinary journey. Many

people don't survive it. And if they do, they have been to places in their imagination that no one else has ever been. High degree of individuality.

Now, let me put that in a communal context. I'll talk about contemporary American youth, let's say, seeking a vision with the assistance of some psychoactive drug. They all can do this kind of alone, in isolation. And they have visions that are disconnected, have no responsibility, no relationship to service to a community. They're narcissistic, self-serving, quite dangerous, often dissociative. A tribal vision, arising not from psychoactive substances, but from concentration, meditation, fever, a knock on the head, something other than a consumer item, and if you recover from one of these, you have tremendous power. And that's important to communities. It's not against or isolated from community; it's part of the potential good service in a community. Now, a lot of it's dangerous. People who have an incomplete vision are the most dangerous. I don't want to idealize, but I just want to say that a successful healing vision is in service to a community. And yet at the same time it is the most extraordinary individualistic act. So we have a lot of contradictions. In my view what we have, in Native American cultures, is a superior sense of individuality and communal responsibility and recognition and identity. And our artistry in telling stories. What we have in contemporary America is the illusion of independence, a high degree of dependency, enormous isolation and loneliness and a vision that serves nothing because you might be judged crazy and unproductive. Even though God loves you.

[Laughter.]

DM: I wanted to ask you another question about incomplete shamanic visions and Neihardt's depiction of Black Elk. Does that make this a dangerous book in some way?

V: No, especially, no, it's never been a dangerous book. It's even more important now because we have so much information about how it comes into a text. Because it gives us a much broader communal responsibility for the process of that text coming into print. All right, we're in on it now. That makes it a larger imaginative project with a lot of people and a lot of contradictions. And that really gives it a lot of depth. It's not perfect and it shouldn't be. Otherwise, it's biblical. I mean not even the Bible's not perfect.

DM: All right, I asked you this once before and you denied it.

V: I was evasive.

DM: Yeah, evasive, not telling. I wanted to ask you about your development as a writer. I see some sort of movement here from haiku

to newspaper writing to editing, re-expressing Densmore's work and your own short stories and novels, working with stories from other Native American writers who are not *Anishinaabe* and your own critical essays. And I was wondering, since you've had a couple of days with that in the back of your mind, if you've turned that over at all, if there's any sense of development for you, yourself, in that.

V: Do I see development, do I recognize one in myself?

DM: Yeah.

V: Yes. [Laughter.] I'll answer vaguely. I mean I'm not my own interpreter that way. What I feel is this: that writing has always been, the use of words has always been complicated and inspiring. Now, complicated because I really had a sense of power in language. And I think I've had a sense of myself being different. That [laughs] also, can lead to mental illness. But I mean by that I felt even as a young person that I could express things differently. And I knew this. I remember this. Because I know people didn't always understand. Now, I thought I was, I perceived things differently.

I think I remember that different sense of perception, that I was able to express things differently. But it took me a long time to grasp the power of language. And I think partly it's that even though I was very lively verbally, it took me a long time to grasp the language because I wasn't interested in reading a lot for a long time. I was just too active. There wasn't time enough to read. So, reading came later. I mean I have to read and think about imagination.

About 16, 17, 18, I remember reading books that, well I wrote about one experience with Thomas Wolfe when I first discovered, discover's not a good word because it was always there, but I came upon as a new experience to me and remembered the power of being transformed by certain books, certain magical books. And that's important to me because by seeing someone else, someone else's power with the language, it gives me voice that I didn't have. So I experimented a lot; I suppose I'd use the word imagistic, a visualist, figurative kind of writing. It was sentimental, part romantic, serving a sort of large dream, a promise of things, without explaining it. You know, very romantic. And that's probably a pretty good start for a kind of romantic poetry. And I felt good about that because I was reaching beyond myself as if language would carry this great significant and essential feeling of things. It doesn't, of course; it carries it in some other way, but my point here is that I approached language in this kind of form. But it took a long time to work on language and it still does, it still does.

Well, listen, haiku was an act of liberation. I was really good at it. I just took to it. I knew how to do this. I'm being really arrogant.

I took to haiku right away. It isn't that I knew how to write good haikus. It's that I immediately took to these images, these imagistic poems. I took to that and was good at it. It took a while to try to get good at haiku. Now I say that humbly because I respect and admire Basho and he said it one time.

And I think I have one. I might have two. One came quite spontaneously out of a real experience:

Black flies squaredance
across the grapefruit.
Honor your partner.

Now, what makes that a really fine haiku image, and I like to think that Basho would appreciate this, is that he once told a disciple of his who was practicing haiku, and he said "Take a dragonfly and pull the wings off and you've got something else." And he says "No, no, that's not haiku. Take something else and put wings on it and you've got a dragonfly." And that's a nice idea. So, I had this black fly, which you wouldn't keep alive very long, especially if it walked across your food: "honor your partner." It's also a call in a squaredance. And it was right out of an experience in a restaurant; I was ready to smack it, but instead made a poem out of it. And then I told it in a restaurant and there was a film crew following me around. It was a special kind of poetry project and we had to go to small towns and see if we could find an audience for poetry and record this interesting experience.

I was in a little town called Ellsworth, Wisconsin, and we went in, all of us, in this little restaurant, a tiny little one. And I said "Listen, do you mind if they film and I'll say a poem to you, a short one, and you just respond honestly. You don't have to like poetry, just respond honestly." So I said that: "Black flies squaredance across the grapefruit. Honor your partner." She looked at me like this [gestures]: "And you're a grown man?" Right? [Laughter.] And then she looked at her parents. I think they were her parents. And they sort of gave her permission to be honest with me. And I think she felt, she wanted to help me out by telling me this probably shouldn't be a career choice for me. [Laughter.] It was that kind of expression. And she said "Well, I'm sorry but that ain't what we do with flies around here." Very nice, very nice film scene, too. Really nice.

The other one is:

We are weeds
down after a heavy rain
showing our teeth.

So, I'm writing these. I mean I took to this imagistic stuff right away because I didn't have to learn how to spell very much. [Laughs.] But it took a long time. Journalism helped a lot, too. Pretty keen

focus on things. I also liked the association with journalists. I had really good times with them. Complicated but good times. I have no nostalgia for any other job I've ever had but journalism. There was no nostalgia to act out because there isn't; well there was. But in my memories. Think of it all. The wonderful people I knew. The crazy people. And that was great. Write under pressure. Write quickly. Try to be clear. Try not to get sued.

But the novels come in, well, powerful dreams, fits of madness, anger. Not an anger that's, you know, "Fuck you" to a sales clerk. It's, uh, this is "soul anger." This is the burden of the chemical civilization. I am one of the mutants of this 500 year chemical experiment. And I have in my body the rage and conscience and burden of this. I'm one of the voices, not a big one, but I'm one of them. That's the rage, a mythic rage. And out of that comes a lot of anger, intensity, contradiction, chance.

Did I answer that?

DM: Yes, I think so. My next question is about the language games that you play sometimes. I've noticed that in at least two of your critical articles here: "noetic" and "neotic" practically on facing pages, your use of some of these words, we've talked about it before. Like this one: "durance" as if it were from "endurance," and yet it means "imprisonment" or actually, "survivance," if you look it up, has this idea of inheritance. You send me scurrying to my dictionary.

V: Well, there's a chapter in my new book called "Radical Durance." Interesting, huh? It's also a prison. We're held down by these radical boundaries, but we're also liberated. Contradiction. I like words that have the potential of contradiction. And why? Well, it gives the meaning a chance to shift. I was very pleased with the word "survivance."

DM: That's yours, isn't it?

V: A nice condition.

DM: So is "durance."

V: Well, that use of it.

DM: Well, they're in the dictionary.

V: I invent a few words. Let's see, "solucination" is when you think you have a solution but it's a hallucination. Most solutions are hallucinations. Might as well say what it is, it's a "solucination." "Socioacupuncture" is, well, the social part of applying a kind of social pressure. It's good for you.

Playing language games isn't difficult, really. Is there a time when we're not engaged in that?

[Long Pause.]

DM: Are you asking me?

V: Well, I'm asking anyone. I mean, what we try to do is find out and see if we can play the same game. Language certainly is a game. It's more than that, of course. It's less than that too. But it is a game, a form of play. It's serious. What's so delightful about language is that you don't have to make it mean what it means. How boring if it only means what it means. And what it means is that it isn't representational. So, when I play with language, you'll see in written form, well, you see in my speech, I'm not keen on puns because I think puns are sort of narcissistic, it's the turn of a phrase. They don't engage people. It's just a blunt comment, a turn of phrase, often funny.

But I like the things where you add a few words to something and you've got a new story and somebody else adds some more. It's very pleasant. Sometimes people are offended. Sometimes that's okay too. Contradictions, I pursue those. There's a difference between imagination and lying. Every once in a while you bump into people who don't know the difference. Or who do know the difference and abuse it. Imagination is an honest act. You don't know where it goes. It isn't a service mechanism that ends up in some distribution of products or something. You don't know where it goes. And nothing should come of it. It's part of the time. It's a bit like a trickster story. It doesn't have closure. The figure is only imaginative and nothing amounts to anything, except the humor, the healing. Serious too. I mean it's other things. In writing you don't have the instance of spontaneity, of listening to a speaker. And hopefully an interested reader, a little bit of experience with the language.

You know of course that everything I've said is ironic.

MG: That's what the implication of writing is for you.

V: That's why it's ironic. How do I know all this?

Where were we, a number of ways of writing. There's a phrasing, isn't there, where I add things, add things, add things, where I expand the description, multiple description, some kind of contradiction. And then get technical. Real kind of artifact. You find also all over my work documentation, historical references. Those are real, real places, real places on the map, places on the earth, dates and names that are accurate. They're not abused. Now, this is important for me, you know. I mean what you do is lay down a kind of subtle . . . let me put it another way. You draw a picture with a few lines that can be represented by others. Or they can draw the same lines, they can make the same connections of time, place and date. That isn't the story, but that gives it a way to depart from it. For example, *Heirs*

of Columbus is filled with actual historical Columbus material. Some of it's not accurate, but it is reasonably well documented. We don't know if it's accurate. It could be bullshit. But it is well documented so it's a choice. Then in the middle of the most concrete sort of historical references I can imagine a story. I can create out of the facts, out of the seams of all this an imaginative story, that is ironic, that's playful.

I don't do it all the time, but I do it in part. And I often have an epilogue where I show everybody my sources. Others have been a little puzzled by this. Why do I bother in fiction to show that I consulted the following number of books, quoted this and that. That's because I don't see a great distinction between history and fiction. [Laughs.] A particular kind of fiction.

DM: Is there anything that I should ask that I haven't asked?

V: Am I afraid of the dark?

DM: No.

V: Sometimes.

MG: And silence?

V: Oh, you know. Silence, I wouldn't choose it.

MG: Sometimes it chooses you.

V: Yeah, you get locked in a hotel room with no other sound, not even the sound of anybody living next door. Like living in outer space.

MG: What do you do then?

V: I turn on the television.

[Laughter.]

MG: What is the meaning of your statement that the irony in all these stories you were telling about has been misunderstood and not translated?

V: Oh, the transfer, right. Sexual references, bodily functions, things like that have, these are pointed out, rightly so, in much of English language literature has been sanitized in that way. I wasn't looking for competition there. Or other examples. I'm just pointing out that the best part of the story has been omitted to serve the interests of dominant readers. Well, it's one of the things that's lost. It's the embellishment and irony and contradiction and play and transformation. It's the artistry that's lost. Not lost, it's the artistry that's pleasant, appreciated.

MG: I guess there are at least two layers of irony: the irony of the style and your irony as a writer.

V: Well, let me give you a couple of examples of irony in my stories. The opening of the book *The Trickster of Liberty*, it's a collection of stories about the same family, of people in the same family. What I've created in fiction is a whole family of trickster storytellers. And each of the characters gets a couple of stories each. [Chuckles.] But it opens with a character named "Alex" talking to an anthropologist. And the anthropologist is asking critical questions as a social scientist, about things. Alex, the Native American character, is confronting, contradicting, tricking. Well, it turns out that the reader is part of that, is also tricked. Because most readers would assume that the name Alex is masculine. But a few pages in, I think when the reader has already accepted this character as being male and talking to a male anthropologist, right, it turns out that Alex is female, Alexine? And this is a nickname. Now, obviously the anthropologist knows that and if this were a real scene. But the reader doesn't. There's no reason to explain that. So it comes a few pages later that the anthropologist says "you're always hiding behind your masculine name," as a woman. Well, not only is Alex a woman, but Alex is a veteran of the Vietnam war and also disabled. So what I've done is created a number of contradictions that this active, critical, assertive person who can take on the best educated anthropologist in serious discourse is not the kind of person you would expect. To be a woman, to be a military veteran, you know, so I'm piling up contradictions, slowly, in terms of the story.

Another example, one of the characters later is an expert in ginseng. And ginseng did grow in those parts naturally, in Minnesota and Wisconsin. And was pretty well picked out of existence because there was a lively market at the turn of the century. Or following the fur trade, it was a cash crop. Well, I have a character who's developed a new strain of ginseng and grows it commercially, and it's a superior strain. It's exactly the golden ginseng that the Chinese like in particular. And he's got a very lively market going. Big trade deals with China. They like this deal a lot, and so they help him invest in the construction of a giant statue of the trickster which is bigger than the Statue of Liberty. So I'm playing ironically on the Statue of Liberty and on a reservation is this giant statue of the trickster. Well, what does a trickster look like? A trickster isn't a real person. So, they start erecting this cast bronze trickster, and they're slowly working on it. This is a Chinese investment, a cultural investment on the reservation. And then the Chinese learn that, well the federal government has a lot of laws about ginseng and form of trade in

endangered plants and it turns out that ginseng is an endangered plant. And it's on the endangered list which means you can't deal in it. He's convinced the Chinese that he's picking it when in fact he's growing it commercially. Anyway, everything is revealed and it turns out that this is not so sacred and not so valuable and everybody's cheated. But, it was the best ginseng they could find, so they stopped the actual construction of this statue. So it's completed right up to the crotch. And it still stands there. This half-finished trickster. Right up to the crotch. Birds nest in it. Stuff like that. Ironic, Statue of Liberty, statue of the trickster. In another story I finish it.

Well, there's another irony here, that at the turn of the century, early 1900s, some Americans who loved Indians convinced the federal government to build, to set aside some land on Staten Island to build a statue of a plains Indian warrior, a bronze statue of a plains Indian warrior with full headdress with his hand raised in the position of "How," you know, "Welcome to America."

Now this statue was to be larger, taller and larger than the Statue of Liberty and it would welcome, along with the French gift of the statue, it would also welcome immigrants. It would be the Indian welcome to immigrants. And land was dedicated, legislation was passed to do this, federal legislation to build this thing. And they had a ground-breaking ceremony with important people there. But the law that creates the money for it wasn't passed, just the law to do it was. The bill to appropriate the money was never passed. So it was never built. Irony, but that's a historical irony. Mine's a fictional irony.

MG: Is this irony and silence a way of keeping secrets and at the same time rendering them to the reader? I mean you say I'm building a trickster but you will never know what it looks like.

V: It's tough to do silence on the written page. I mean it really is a challenge. How do you create a sense of silence.

MG: Well, that's one way. Not showing.

V: And in some stories I've just written one word "silence," as a paragraph. Well, that's the narrator doing this, you know, through a narrator. Then I've had characters doing something in silence. The characters doing it. These are specific acts just done in silence. It's very powerful.

DM: Speaking of ironies, I don't know if I have you on this or what, but I was reading through *Ruins of Representation* and found a baseball metaphor.

MG: Baseball metaphor?

V: "Pinch hitters," you sure did. Yeah, "Pronouns are pinch hitters."

You send them in there to do the work for you.

DM: Are you a baseball fan?

V: No, I played baseball.

DM: I don't remember any sports metaphors.

V: No.

DM: It doesn't sprinkle your speech at all. It jumped out at me: "Pronouns are pinch hitters." Hey? And then "*differance*."

V: That's good. [Laughs.]

DM: The "*differance*" is the pinch hitters. What would Derrida say about that? Do you think that the French side of your background has anything to do with these . . .

V: Sephardic interests?

DM: Whatever the hell all this is.

V: I don't know, I'm a whole person. I mean I'm not parts.

DM: Could you tell us a story, a funny and pungent and light and burning feeling story that could take up about 45 minutes of tape.

V: Yes. I heard about a Romanian woman once that travelled on the White Earth reservation and she was silent a lot. And some thought that she appeared moody. But it was a silence that had great power. Her body movements were dance-like. She had these spurts of energy where she would burst into a fast-paced dance movement. And people took a lot of interest in her. They trusted her because of her body movements and her smile. And averting her eyes, her gestures of honesty and interest. But she wouldn't say very much. She was playing on the edge of silence. It was a kind of bait and entrapment. And so folks in this community were kind of talking about this and finally somebody said that she couldn't talk. That she had read so many books that she couldn't talk anymore. And that got her really bothered. She almost started talking. When people started kidding her about this. "Ha! There goes that Romanian woman with the head full of books. That's why she doesn't talk." But they really liked her. All the more. But all she wanted to do was to find a place to sing. And she was hoping she could find some connection with myths among Native Americans and sing, spontaneously moving, like she remembered from her own childhood. And finally, someone said to her "Why don't you stop being silent and sing instead of talk?" And so she did. And she sang these fantastic songs. And she lived in this community for a long time. People loved her. She sang all the time. The people sang back to her. People even started, without knowing

what they were saying, to sing in Romanian. These were such moving songs.

And anyway, the point of the story is an anthropologist was working on his Ph.D. and he came to the White Earth reservation to do his fieldwork on Indian music. And saw this Romanian woman thinking she was *Anishinaabe*. And he identified her as one of the best *Anishinaabe* singers. And as the tribal people [chuckles] didn't particularly like or trust anthropologists, they took great pleasure in the fact that this guy was totally deluded. And they supported him. And spoke as much Romanian as they could. [Laughs.] It was a variation of an ancient sacred song language. And he was just a-rumble; he had just discovered the most extraordinary thing that no other anthropologist had ever heard of. And so he took all this stuff down and back and studied his books on linguistics and he discovered the most incredible thing: there was a linguistic link between these *Anishinaabe* singers and Romanian gypsies. And he published his thesis and he now teaches at Harvard. [Laughs.]

Thank you very much. That's not a bad story.

FORUM

From the ASAIL President

As we swing into a new year and another volume of *SAIL*, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of our organization. That support has taken many forms: maintaining subscriptions, contributing articles and creative work to the journal, functioning as readers for submitted material, attending our annual meetings, and a host of other encouraging deeds. Many have generously contributed at the sponsor and patron levels of subscription, while others have secured new subscribers for us among school libraries and friends. Thanks to all of you, we can boast about being in the red, which means—besides paying our bills—being able to plan for future growth in our endeavors. (I'll get to that in a minute.)

Special thanks are due several people for their extraordinary dedication and hard work during 1994. Rodney Simard stepped down as *SAIL* editor for health reasons, but may return in the future when he feels fully recovered. We greatly appreciate the fine work Rodney has produced for *SAIL*, particularly the vision he provided as editor; he continues as consulting editor. John Purdy graciously has agreed to step in as editor for an interim period of one year or more. Not only has he saved the day, but John also brings with him a career of thinking, teaching, writing about, and puzzling over American Indian literature; he provides us with capable and open-minded, open-hearted leadership in our publication. Bob Nelson . . . well, he's nuts and bolts and much more. Without Bob's keen sense of planning—production schedules and specifications, mailing particulars, subscriptions lists—*SAIL* would simply not be possible. But more than that, he works harder than most and manages to keep a sense of humor going. Michael Wilson has taken over the editorship of *ASAIL Notes* that John relinquished in order to take on *SAIL* editorship—welcome aboard to

Mike! For those of you who do not know Mike, he is the one who keeps the electronic discussions going on The Net. Ring him up to say hello or to pass along the latest about some book or conference: MWILSON@CONVEX. CSD.UWM.EDU. Betty Louise Bell and Inés Hernandez Avila will continue to serve the Association as Vice-President and Secretary, respectively, for another two years. Thanks to each person for the unique contribution each has made to our organization.

The future I promised to talk about is bright. At this year's annual meeting at the Modern Language Association Conference in San Diego, we agreed to go forward with our plans to increase Native participation in the organization. We partially sponsored two Native graduate students to attend MLA, both of whom gave papers on ASAIL panels, with \$300 travel grants. Next year we hope to continue offering travel grants as we can afford to do so. In addition, we are planning to reach out more effectively to the tribal colleges by offering them free subscriptions of *SAIL* for one year. We hope to feature a volume of tribal college student writing within the next year. We call upon you to consider contributing an extra \$35 to ASAIL, and thereby becoming a special sponsor of a tribal college library subscription.

As President of ASAIL, I welcome any comments or suggestions you may have for the directions of the organization, journal, and newsletter. As all of you know, the interest in American Indian literary study has grown substantially over the last several years; we must have your help and contributions if we hope to continue the high standards we have achieved for discussions of our topics, writings, and teachings. Because of the increased volume of names on our *Notes* subscription list, we will soon be instituting a special charge for non-ASAIL members. (We discussed and agreed upon this plan at the 1993 MLA.) John continued the practice of sending the newsletter to individuals who are not interested in or able to subscribe to *SAIL*, but the costs of doing so have skyrocketed. We are talking about designing a new cover for the journal. Let us know what you think.

Next December we will be sponsoring two sessions at the MLA: "Identity and Intentionality: Native Language Presence in Contemporary Native American Texts," with Fred White organizing, and "Regionalism and American Indian Literatures," with A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff organizing. We will also be participating in the American Literature Association conference in Baltimore in May with several panels.

Again, thank you for your continued support. We look forward to another productive and inspiring year.

Kate Shanley
ASAIL President

ASAIL Sessions at ALA, Baltimore, 26-28 May 1995

The American Literature Association's sixth annual conference will be held at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel in Baltimore on 26-28 May (the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Memorial Day Weekend).

Though the exact dates and times of individual sessions have yet to be scheduled, the following two ASAIL sessions will be on the program:

I. Talking Red: Native American Literature and Language

Chair: Bob Reising, Pembroke State U

1. "Hoop Dreams: Sherman Alexie's Reservation Moves," Eric Anderson, Rutgers U
2. "The Subtle Politics of Storytelling in American Indian Fiction," Edward Huffstetler, Bridgewater College
3. "Lumbee Language and Literature," Bob Reising, Pembroke State U

II. Tracking Louise Erdrich

Chair: Catherine Rainwater, St. Edward's U

1. "Narrative and Ethos in Erdrich's 'A Wedge of Shade,'" William J. Scheick, U of Texas
2. "Indi'n Humor and Postmodern Play in Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace*," Nancy J. Peterson, Purdue U
3. "Of Vision Quests and Spirit Guardians: Female Power in the Novels of Louise Erdrich," Annette Van Dyke, Sangamon State U

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Book Review Editor Announced

It is a pleasure to announce the appointment of Julie LaMay Abner as book review editor for *SAIL*. Julie has been very actively involved with the journal for years, beginning as assistant to Rodney Simard. Without her help over the last year or more, and particularly during this time of change in the last few months, we would have been hard pressed to keep things going.

If you have books you would like to see reviewed in future issues, and/or would like to review books, please contact Julie at:

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REVIEWS

Our Grandmothers' Lives as Told in Their Own Words.
Ed. and tr. Freda Ahenakew and H. C. Wolfart.
Saskatoon: Fifth House/U of Toronto P, 1992.
\$24.95 paper, ISBN 0-920079-81-4. 408 pages.

These traplines, I tend to think, when someone dies, these trapline areas should not be given up . . . in our case, that could be called our life-insurance, I suppose, what our fathers have left for us, with which to feed our children and to live from. . . . —Janet Feitz (97)

Although Freda Ahenakew and H. C. Wolfart have paid meticulous attention to presenting an authoritative bilingual text that will attract specialists in the field, the seven women whose voices fill these pages are in fact speaking to an audience much closer to home, an audience they love and care about, an audience they helped to raise. The women talk to Ahenakew, whose familial connections and long-standing friendships with these Grandmothers have provided insight into the value of their stories as well as the opportunity to collect them for publication. But it is really to the young men and women of the Cree nation whom they speak.

These Grandmothers clearly hope that their words will help to sustain succeeding generations of Cree through ever-shifting circumstances. To this end, the stories they tell cover many settings, from living on the trapline or in the bush to living on the reserve or in other

settled communities, to the now changing conditions of life on the reserve. They document decades of transformations among Cree. Yet these transformations are revealed to us as they manifest themselves in life's daily events. And this way of telling attracts the reader, as if one has been invited into the kitchen to listen to the old people speak as they sip their tea or coffee.

Ranging in age from 60 to 90, the seven Grandmothers—Janet Feitz, Glecia Bear, Minnie Fraser, Irene Calliou, Mary Wells, Alpha Lafond, and Rosa Longneck—recount their experiences as children, young women, and Grandmothers with a storyteller's sense of community (27). The duty to share, strengthen, support, and counsel is evident in their stories, and in the stories they relate from other Grandmothers. One woman tells Glecia Bear: "you, too, persevere nevertheless, counsel your children, counsel your grandchildren! You must not give up in this, one must persevere to try to turn them around; one day perhaps they might think about how things had been in the old days" (82-83).

Glecia Bear expresses a concern, shared by the others as well, that young Cree are not leading proper lives. For Bear, problems such as alcoholism, abandonment of children, wife-beating, and overdependence on government money illustrate how Cree life has been made miserable by an over-reliance on the ways of whites (79). Her contribution to reversing this situation is to illustrate the power, stamina, and self-sufficiency of Cree people by re-telling the stories of elderly members of the community.

The women's belief that Cree culture is valuable is evident in the issue of language itself. The stories here collected were all narrated in Cree, then translated into English. Ahenakew's insistence on a Cree narration from the Grandmothers at one point leads to a discussion about the value of speaking Cree, especially since the younger generations do not understand it. In this exchange, Ahenakew tells Longneck: ". . . but you, too, should really speak nothing but Cree *to them* no matter what" (303). The emphasis on the project of language maintenance is also clear in the bilingual presentation of these narratives.

Wolfart's and Ahenakew's attention to the culture embedded in language has led to great care in the transcription, translation, and presentation of these stories. Facing pages of Cree text in Roman orthography and its English translation are also followed by a presentation in syllabic orthography. In the editorial comments, Wolfart notes the concern for fealty to both Cree culture and language in a discussion of the particular awkwardness of translating gender categories and kin terms that do not have equivalents in English. Wolfart's comments serve as an excellent reference and guide to the editorial and translation

choices that were made in presenting these stories, revealing the process by which this team worked to produce this book.

The Grandmothers' stories are divided into three sections. In the first, "Life in the Bush," three women discuss the experience of living in the wilderness and sustaining life through knowledge of and skill in utilizing the resources around them. Janet Feitz, from La Ronge, a woman for whom hunting is absolutely essential, tells about her adventures on the trapline, a remote hunting area that she tends alone, as well as some of her childhood hunting experiences. Glecia Bear, employed for a time as a caretaker for the elderly by a government agency, recounts the many stories she elicited from the Grandmothers she visited. These range from cooking and cleaning practices to prophecies for the future. Finally, Minnie Fraser vividly relates the story of her husband's initiation into hunting at the age of 13 and the traditional celebration that accompanied this event.

These stories highlight the traditional foods, crafts, arts, and methods by which Cree lived, but they also point to the strength that Cree derived as a people from their self-sufficiency and inventiveness in the bush. These are often proud stories of individual capabilities. They are also stories that emphasize communal support in individual achievements.

The second part of the book, "Reserve Life," includes stories from Glecia Bear, Irene Calliou, and Mary Wells. All three women focus on events from their childhood or young adulthood, describing these in vivid detail. Bear tells of being charged with responsibility for a calving cow at the age of 11 and her subsequent adventure in the forest as she tries to keep track of the wandering animal. Calliou recalls the toys and implements available to her as a child on the reserve. Wells closes this section with tales of her mischievous youthful exploits. She provides a very visual picture of her girlhood experience of school, friendships, and social relationships among both adults and children on the reserve. These stories, though set on the reserve, are far from reserved. Young women of responsibility, confidence, and spirit jump out of these pages to describe their own comings-of-age.

In the last section of the book, "Dialogue," Alpha Lafond and Rosa Longneck, both long-time residents of the Muskeg Lake area, reminisce, recollect, and laugh about their lives. These two women, with the frequent participation of Freda Ahenakew, focus primarily on the varied methods they have employed to provide for themselves and their families over the years through jobs and household crafts such as gardening, gathering, milking, weaving, soapmaking, snaring, and woodworking. Lafond and Longneck, both of whom are exceptionally industrious in home crafts, also outline the plans for an upcoming reunion of elderly Cree. Their reunion will include attention to

traditional dress, a combination of Catholic and Cree rituals, and traditional foods and crafts.

Interestingly, during the dialogue moments of self-consciousness surface. The discussion of the importance of maintaining the Cree language occurs in this context, a particular moment of self-consciousness for the women involved in this project, aware of the taping and transcription even as they question this purpose and address the importance of their native language.

The exchange that takes place in this third and final section of the book illuminates how much each of these Grandmothers resembles Janet Feitz, who tends her trapline in the wilderness alone, although none of the others travel to such remote areas. Each of these women, in her own life and among her own family, has carried on traditional ways even as she has been a part of changing them, much as Feitz, the woman, carries on a method of hunting that "fathers" have bequeathed. Each will clearly be a part of bridging the gap between the past and the future of the Cree nation.

The "Introduction" and "Notes," prepared by Wolfart, are especially useful in understanding this text. Wolfart stresses the character of oral performance that governs both the telling by the individual Grandmothers and its translation into text, as well as the fact that these tales are the records of individual life experiences rather than traditional Cree stories or performances. Wolfart's careful examination of stylistic features of the women's speech underscores this. It also points out differences between Woods and Plains Cree, and areas where Cree overlaps with other dialects in Manitoba.

The orality of these narratives is also maintained in textual presentation. Interjections, asides, and simultaneous comments are presented throughout the stories. Although editorial notes provide some useful information in reading this text of a performance, they are not essential to following the flow of the conversations and listening to the Grandmothers speak.

Not surprisingly, hunting and snaring often figure in these recollections; after all, many of the women's stories are about a time when these skills were essential to survival. But hunting and snaring remain essential for survival among these women, except that now they must hunt the stories, snare the recollections, catch the fleeting memories, recall the experiences, and construct a place where these can be held for future generations. Their voices remind me of a story by Kimberly Blaeser, "Like Some Old Story," where the action of the story is the re-telling of hunting stories. In this way, the telling becomes as important as the hunting, the act of telling also becomes an act of survival. I believe this is why Ahenakew and Wolfart stress the Grandmothers' performance in telling their stories. These women are

not archiving something in hopes it will reach some future audience; they are actively engaged in a dialogue of continuance.

Theresa Delgadillo

Born a Chief: The Nineteenth Century Hopi Boyhood of Edmund Nequatewa. As Told to Alfred F. Whiting. Ed. P. David Seaman. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1993. \$13.95 paper, ISBN 0-8165-1354-6. 190 pages.

Born a Chief took more than fifty years to create. Alfred Whiting met Edmund Nequatewa in the 1930s, but it was not until 1942 that Edmund broached the possibility of publishing an account of his Hopi childhood. Whiting, already the author of several articles on Hopi culture, eagerly agreed. The recordings and transcriptions took only a few weeks. Whiting spent more than twenty years working on the manuscript, occasionally conferring with Edmund on names and dates, until Nequatewa's death in 1969. In 1978 Whiting died and the manuscript fell into the hands of P. David Seaman. Recently, with Seaman as final editor, the book finally appeared.

For a book that took fifty years to create, it is perhaps ironic that *Born a Chief's* main claim to our attention is that so little has been done to alter the original words. Says P. David Seaman, "The Hopi narrative style of English used by Edmund is largely unedited." It is certain that this claim will make *Born a Chief* the subject of much critical discussion. (It will be especially interesting to compare this work to some of Nequetewa's other appearances in print, notably *Truth of a Hopi*.)

This book falls into a nebulous category between biography and autobiography known as "oral autobiography," in which the subject tells his life story and it is recorded by a researcher. At one time it was common practice for researchers to "clean up" the grammar of their subjects. Only in the past few years have researchers begun to realize the importance and desirability of transcribing native speech

exactly as it was spoken. Levels of rigor that were once considered excessive are now seen as insufficient. For example, another book in the same "oral autobiography" tradition is John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*. Scholars still debate the extent of Neihardt's contribution decades after the book's original publication.

All such books lead inevitably to the question of how much input belongs to the subject and how much to the researcher who takes down or records and transcribes the subject's words. The question would seem especially sharp in this case since the original recording took only a few weeks and the manuscript was then in the hands of scholars for more than fifty years. However, the presence of such well-respected names as Whiting and Seaman on the manuscript will do a great deal to allay the doubts of those who would otherwise be skeptical of the manuscript's fidelity to the original speech.

The story is that of Edmund's boyhood on the Second Mesa. That Edmund's story takes place there is a matter of great importance to scholars and historians. We have had other auto- and biographies set in this general time and area; this is the first to focus specifically on Second Mesa.

While there is very little in the way of chronological order given in the narration (even the exact date of Edmund Nequatewa's birth is unknown), the events are given in roughly the order they happened.

Edmund's youth is especially illuminating because he was an only child, a condition which confers a certain status among his people and allows him to live a life both freer and freer of consequences than that of his friends. The Hopi believe that to punish a child may cause it to wish for its own death. There is very little punishment of children of any sort. Children without siblings are especially honored in this regard; thus, Edmund often seems like an incredibly wayward child. Indeed, it is difficult to read this narrative without speculating that Edmund's childhood and his life would have been far different if he had had older brothers and/or sisters.

The Hopi have evolved a number of stratagems to cause children to behave, many of them revolving around the Kachina. When Edmund's mother tells him, "If you're going to get any presents, you have to wash your head. No child will ever receive any presents from the Kachina if they have a dirty head like you," it is difficult not to hear echoes of the modern suburban housewife telling her child that if he isn't good, Santa Claus will not bring him presents.

Edmund's mischievousness makes for a number of misadventures in and around the Second Mesa villages of Mishongnovi and Shipaulovi, some of them amusing (breaking a pottery jar while playing with a forbidden Kachina mask), some exasperating (shooting a dog with an arrow, scaring a horse which then knocks down the ladder), some

horrifying (eating the mushrooms, shooting arrows at another child in anger).

In the delineation of religious ritual and social custom there are many glimpses of familial and tribal relations that would serve as an excellent introduction to Native American life for the casual reader. Also interesting is the section on house-building.

The real meat of the book, for most readers, is in the sections where Edmund attends the Indian School at Keams Canyon. Though it was not uncommon for Hopi parents to hide their children from the white men, Edmund's grandfather urged him to go and take advantage of the great opportunity being offered him.

This would have been in 1895 when Edmund was fourteen or fifteen. Edmund did his compulsory four years there and then attended school in Phoenix for another four years. He had been charged by his grandfather to find "the truth." He instructed Edmund to study the Bible. Edmund studied the Bible and Christianity in all of its denominations that crossed his path. While Edmund is very critical of the missionaries at the end of the book, we know that he later did become heavily involved with the Christian church.

The book ends with his marriage at the age of about twenty-two, which Edmund refers to as the end of childhood.

This book should be popular for it has something to offer to everyone. For the professional researcher, it is an invaluable addition to our store of knowledge about life on the Second Mesa at the inception of the reservation system and a picture of life at the Indian School at Keams Canyon. For those who are not familiar with Native American literature, the book, with Edmund's unusual use of tenses, is an excellent introduction. The sociologically minded will get a picture of a world where social and familial relationships are far different. For those more interested in practical details, there are descriptions of how Hopi *piki* closets are constructed, how a house is built, and information on how crops were tended.

But perhaps this book will have its greatest success with teachers of Native American literature. It has long been recognized that the Big Four of Native American literature (Silko, Welch, Momaday, and Erdrich) are too difficult, their symbolism too complex, for many beginning students, while Niehardt's *Black Elk Speaks* is too solemn to serve as the first work in a course.

Born a Chief, with its straightforward linear progression, its unselfconscious simplicity and its persistent humor, might be the perfect introduction to a vast and challenging field of study.

Ermal Eston Henderson

Owl in the Cedar Tree. *Natache Scott Momaday.* 1965. *Rpt. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P*, 1992. \$9.95 Paper, ISBN 0-8032-8184-6. 117 pages.

Red Hawk's Account of Custer's Last Battle. *Paul Goble.* 1969. *Rpt. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P*, 1992. \$9.95 Paper, ISBN 0-8032-7033-X. 64 pages.

Brave Eagle's Account of the Fetterman Fight. *Paul Goble.* 1972. *Rpt. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P*, 1992. \$9.95 Paper, ISBN 0-8032-7032-1. 64 pages.

These three books are a welcome addition to any collection of children's literature. When first published, they were unique in their field; today they join an ever-expanding body of literatures by and about Native Americans, providing a much greater variety of choice for teachers and librarians. Both Indian and non-Native children need to be exposed to a wide variety of reading material about Native Americans. Historical biases and inaccuracies need to be corrected; moreover, literature is one of the most effective vehicles for transmission and understanding of cultures.

Momaday's *Owl in the Cedar Tree*, illustrated by Don Perceval, is a sensitive story that deals with the universal themes of family responsibility, respect for elders, and the conflicting expectations of children that grandparents, parents, and teachers have about the choices children should make. Haske, a Navaho boy who has dreams and aspirations like many other American boys, comes from a loving family and has a significant role to play in the family's welfare. Like other boys, he would rather stay home and look after the sheep but his parents send him to school. Though Washington decreed that all Navaho children must go to school, Haske's parents supported this move. Night Singer, Haske's father, said, "It is good! I want my children to have a good education" (52). Once at school, Haske recognizes the benefits; he learns English and he also has access to

secretly coveted art supplies.

Momaday has carefully crafted a fast-moving, satisfying story that also provides a great deal of cultural information. It is rich in spirituality and the excerpts of Navaho chants enhance the story in a non-contrived way. The uninitiated reader cannot, however, place the story in an historic context. Though this in no way detracts from the story, a teacher concerned with historic accuracy will question whether Navaho still live this way, or to what extent Navaho still live this way. Portraying Indians only as historic figures has been a common practice in American literature and history courses. The concerned teacher who is not familiar with contemporary Navaho lifestyles would be well advised to do some research before introducing this book to young readers.

The reading level is approximately grades 4-6. Though the children will enjoy the book for its story, the innovative teacher will find many uses for this attractive little book.

Paul Goble's books, on the other hand, are clearly historic in content. Precise times, dates, and events are given as Goble attempts to correct historic biases. In each book the author gives background information on the battles and bases much on his information on published accounts. In *Red Hawk's Account of Custer's Last Battle*, he uses italics to provide information that is required for continuity, leading to some confusion for the reader since it is not made clear at the beginning of the book. There are overlaps in time in the first-person accounts and the explanatory comments that sometimes require a re-reading for clarity. It is not until the Conclusion that the reader learns that Red Hawk is not a real person but a composite figure taken from various historical accounts and that the book is in large part fictionalized history. This does not detract from the initial reading, but there is a sense of regret at the end when Red Hawk turns out to have been non-existent. In *The Fetterman Fight*, Red Cloud, a real person, is quoted copiously; however, Brave Eagle may or may not be real, the reader never does know.

The books are lavishly and brilliantly illustrated by the author. He makes reference to the "ledger-book art" and his romantic portrayal of Indians in a rather apologetic introduction. The art work is arresting, interesting in its detail, and accurately portrays the events as described in the text. The reading level is approximately grades 6-8 and the vocabulary is relatively uncomplicated, but Goble's books have some limitations as "children's literature" because of the difficulties inherent in the style. They are, however, a welcome addition to any collection of children's books because of the balance they provide to historic accounts of the "opening of the West." They will also be welcomed because of the visual feast they provide.

Fostering understanding across cultures has been sadly neglected in American school systems. It is important that Native students receive instruction in a way that will enhance their self-images and provide accurate information about themselves. It is also important that non-Native students receive this same insight into Native cultures. These three books will assist any teacher, librarian, or parent in this very important task.

Agnes Grant

Love Medicine: New and Expanded Version.

Louise Erdrich. New York: Holt, 1993. \$22.50 cloth, ISBN 0-8050-7298-X. Harper, 1993. \$12.00 paper, ISBN 0-06-097554-7. 367 pages.

When Louise Erdrich first published *Love Medicine* in 1984 it received both popular and critical acclaim. A national bestseller, the novel won numerous literary awards including the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Sue Kaufman Prize presented by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. If Erdrich's intention was only to produce an excellent novel, then there was no need to change the original text.

But Erdrich is working on more here—the novel is part of a greater whole, a series of novels set on or near a Chippewa reservation. These novels detail the interconnecting lives of several generations. Taken chronologically (by content not by publication date), the series begins with *Tracks* (Holt, 1988) and ends (for now) with *The Bingo Palace* (Harper, 1994); thus, although it was the first to be published, *Love Medicine* lies at the center of the series along with *The Beet Queen* (Holt, 1986). In creating this series, Erdrich has apparently changed her vision of *Love Medicine*, and so she has recently published this "new and expanded version."

The cover of the paperback edition announces that "this is a publishing event equivalent to the presentation of a new and definitive text." Indeed, Erdrich changes the text in a number of ways, from the

correction of a few misspelled words to the addition of four new chapters plus a new section added to an existing chapter, "The Beads." Some changes serve to resolve the problem of contradictions between the original text and *Tracks* (i.e., age relationships and numbers of children). One change resolves the question of whether Nector Kashpaw raped Marie Lazarre. In some cases the changes simply involve the substitution of one word for another, subtly changing an image or the tone of a relationship or transforming one character into another. More substantive changes alter the course of character development. Still others bridge gaps between the novels, looking back to *Tracks* or forward to *The Bingo Palace*. And others, by filling gaps in the original text, add balance to the novel itself.

To better fit *Love Medicine* into the series, Erdrich corrects some of the discrepancies between the novels. For instance, she corrects one of the most glaring discrepancies between *Tracks* and the original *Love Medicine*—the relationship between Eli and Nector Kashpaw. In *Love Medicine* the two are twins, while in *Tracks* one is several years older than the other. Specifically, in *Tracks*, Eli is a young man (husband to Fleur Pillager) when Nector is only nine years old. In the new version, Erdrich takes out the reference to twins. In an added portion of the new text, however, Erdrich refers to Eli, rather than Nector, as his mother's youngest child. So although Erdrich has corrected one discrepancy, she has, unfortunately, introduced another.

Nonetheless, Erdrich resolves, as well, the question of how many children Rushes Bear (Margaret Kashpaw) has. In the original *Love Medicine*, Rushes Bear, Nector's and Eli's mother, has eighteen children, while in *Tracks* she has twelve. Erdrich has corrected the new edition of *Love Medicine* to agree with *Tracks*. Rushes Bear has only twelve children.

With another correction in the text, Erdrich clears up the misconception that Nector rapes Marie Lazarre at their first meeting. To this end, Erdrich changes Nector's narration describing his first encounter with Marie. Originally, when Marie tells Nector that she's had better, Nector says that he "was just now the first" (61). In the new version Nector says instead, "we haven't done anything yet. She just doesn't know what comes next" (65).

Aside from making corrections, by exchanging words Erdrich subtly changes the text. For instance, she slightly alters Nector Kashpaw's image when she exchanges a word. Originally, she describes Nector, in his old age, as having a "toothless smile" (25). In the new version she exchanges the word "huge" for the word "toothless." Nector no longer has a "toothless smile"; he has a "huge smile" (27). Erdrich also alters the tone of Lulu Lamartine's relationship with Moses Pillager by softening Lulu's references to him. In the original

version Lulu refers to her first lover as "Old Man Pillager." In the new version, she refers to him as "Moses."

Another subtle difference lends a more authentic touch to the text. In the original text, the characters speak of the lake where they fish as "Lake Turcot," the name given to the lake by developers. Surely the traditional name, Lake Matchimanito, would not fall out of use after only one generation. Apparently Erdrich does not think so, because she has exchanged the traditional name for the developers' name in every case. Also, along the same lines, Erdrich adds a sprinkling of Chippewa words to the dialogue of her older characters.

Additionally, Erdrich draws Fleur Pillager, a character from *Tracks*, into *Love Medicine* by changing "Old Lady Blue" to "Old Lady Pillager." In some cases, particularly when Lipsha Morrissey wants a love medicine, Erdrich changes "Old Man Pillager" to "Old Lady Pillager."

Other changes in the text are more substantive. For instance, Erdrich changes the direction of Lyman Lamartine's development when she changes Lyman's reaction to his brother Henry's death. Originally, he "slowly improved his outlook by working. He became a contractor, hired on his brothers, and in that way supported us all" (228). In the new text, instead of improving, Lyman "went down lower, lower, to where nobody could drag him up. He stayed alone in the oldest shack, where he could party all he liked" (289). Thus, Erdrich sets the stage for further development of this character. Erdrich also places greater emphasis on Lyman's reaction to Nector's death. Originally, after Nector's death, Lyman asks his mother, Lulu, if Nector had been her boyfriend once (233). Instead, he now asks, "He was my dad, wasn't he?" (294). Erdrich also omits Lulu's original observation that Lyman's voice, as he asks, was "almost sad" (233). Thus, she alters the tone here from sad to cynical.

Finally, the most significant difference in the new version is the addition of four and a half chapters (the half chapter is an addition to "The Beads"). These new chapters affect neither the beginning nor the ending of the novel; rather, they are interspersed throughout. These additions serve several purposes. Some of this new material bridges the gaps between *Tracks* and *Love Medicine*. This is accomplished in two ways: first, by bringing in characters from *Tracks* who were previously omitted (specifically, Nanapush, Fleur Pillager, and Rushes Bear), and second, by picking up with Lulu's version of her homecoming where Nanapush's narrative leaves off in *Tracks*. In addition, one new chapter, "Resurrection," ties up loose ends by resolving Gordie Kashpaw's problems. The rest of the new material paves the way for the next novel in the series, *The Bingo Palace*. To this end, Erdrich extends Marie's and Lulu's role as "old-time traditionals" who work to

restore the land and traditional ways to their people; she introduces Nector's sacred pipe; and she sets up a tension between Lyman Lamartine and Lipsha Morrissey. Each of these developments plays an important role in the next novel.

These corrections, changes, and additions are necessary for the greater whole of the series, but how does the additional material affect *Love Medicine* as an individual novel? The novel was satisfying as it was; therefore, it did not need the new material. Or did it? Some of the new material does improve the novel by tying up some loose ends and also by adding symmetry to the novel.

In fact, one new chapter adds to and resolves issues based solely in this novel. The new chapter called "Resurrection" works with the existing chapter about Gordie Kashpaw, "Crown of Thorns." It ties up the dangling thread left by "Crown of Thorns," where, the last we know of Gordie, he is heard "crying like a drowned person, howling in the open fields" (220). The new chapter provides the resolution to Gordie's story when he returns, sick, to his mother, Marie. She meets the crisis in her characteristic manner—she takes care of business: "[w]hile he was lying there, she cleaned up everything and put all that he had disturbed back where it belonged" (264). This chapter also provides more information about Gordie's and June's relationship as Gordie remembers their less than satisfying honeymoon where "[m]aking love felt like work. It wasn't any fun, but they couldn't stop" (271).

Another new chapter, "The Island," which Lulu narrates, not only bridges the gap between *Tracks* and *Love Medicine* by giving Lulu's version of her homecoming from the government school but also contributes balance to the novel itself. The chapter provides Lulu's reaction to Nector's and Marie's marriage. Since Lulu was the third part in their love triangle, and since Marie and Nector both tell their versions of the story, it seems only fitting that Lulu should tell her side of it. The original novel includes chapters in which Nector and Marie discuss their youthful experiences, but Lulu's young days are lacking (other than her explanation of the last tears she cried). In addition, the chapter balances Marie's experiences with Sister Leopolda and Marie's vision with Lulu's quest for her mother and the understanding Lulu gains from time spent with Moses Pillager. In effect, Lulu parallels Marie's experience at the convent with her own experience on Moses's island.

The chapter, in fact, is a beautifully expressed and pleasing addition. Erdrich's use of imagery in "The Island" is perhaps the finest to be found in any of her work thus far. Erdrich's poetic prose shines from the beginning as Lulu describes her feelings about the loss of her mother:

I never grew from the curve of my mother's arms. I still wanted to anchor myself against her. But she had tore herself away from the run of my life like a riverbank. She had vanished, a great surrounding shore, leaving me to spill out alone. (68)

Erdrich's powerful imagery continues throughout the chapter as Lulu ventures out to Moses Pillager's island looking for her mother, Fleur. Her encounter with Fleur's cousin Moses reawakens the Pillager spirit, as Lulu brings the last Pillager man back to life:

I turned him to the front with my gaze, put his clothes on right. I pulled him into the circle of my arms the way a mother encourages her child to walk. Touch by touch, I took down his gravehouse. With my kisses, I placed food for living people between his lips. He told me his real name. I whispered it once. Not the name that fooled the dead, but the word that harbored his life. (82)

Lulu's experience reconnects her with her heritage. Likewise, Marie, in the new section of "The Beads," reconnects with her heritage through her association with her mother-in-law, Rushes Bear. With Fleur Pillager's assistance, Rushes Bear saves Marie's life during a difficult birth by teaching Marie to ride with the flow of life. In doing so, Rushes Bear accepts Marie as her own mother would not. Subsequently, the experience has a profound effect on Marie:

I never saw her [Rushes Bear] without knowing that she was my own mother, my own blood. What she did went beyond the frailer connections. More than saving my life, she put the shape of it back in place. And even though her wild moods descended again, and again, with more violence until she was lost in those storms, sometimes for weeks, . . . I took care of the old woman every day of her life because I knew that she was in that boat, where I had labored. She crested and sank in dark waves. Those waves were taking her onward, through night, through day, the water beating and slashing across her unknown path. She struggled to continue. She was traveling hard, and death was her light. (104-05)

This addition to "The Beads" is important because it fills a gap in Marie's development. In the original version, Marie is presented as "a skinny white girl" who grows up to become "an old-time traditional." That's quite a leap, but the relationship with Rushes Bear remedies the problem. Rushes Bear is able to connect Marie with the heritage that her own mother could not provide.

The importance of what Rushes Bear does for Marie, however, can only be fully understood after reading *Tracks*. Only then can the reader appreciate what riding the flow of life would mean to a person who was wrenched into the world by "two black iron cooking spoons" (*Tracks* 135). Of course, this has also been the case with the chapters in the original version dealing with Marie and Sister Leopolda—the reader cannot fully appreciate the significance of Marie's relationship with Leopolda without the information revealed in *Tracks*. This in no way diminishes the reader's enjoyment of the novel read on its own. It merely confirms that the reader's enjoyment will be increased by reading the entire series.

Finally, the remaining two chapters added to the new version both deal with Lyman Lamartine. Lyman narrates the first of the two, "The Tomahawk Factory." The chapter works at once both to explore issues that arise in this novel and to set up the tension that plays an important part in *The Bingo Palace*. One of those issues is Lyman's reaction to his brother Henry Junior's death. Lyman explains his feelings:

I knew, from the first moment I got back to the house, I was not the same Lyman Lamartine who had left—that boy was gone. I saw my talent for money was useless with the deeper problems. Worse than useless. If I bobbed to the surface, others went down. (298)

The chapter also develops the tension resulting from Lyman's disappointment that Nector never recognizes him as his son and his resentment that Nector does recognize Lipsha:

. . . Lipsha Morrissey . . . made me uneasy for two reasons. Number one, Kashpaw had claimed him—*him*, not me—and he wasn't even blood. Number two, Lipsha Morrissey was a combination of the two age-old factions that had torn apart our band. (312)

Additionally, the chapter allows further development of Lulu and Marie as matriarchs of the tribe when Lyman becomes caught up in the web the two women spin together. Lyman sees his mother, Lulu, as an irritation:

My mother did wild things to exasperate me sometimes, as if she was anxious to regain my whole attention. You know Lulu Lamartine if you know life is made up of three kinds of people—those who live it, those afraid to, those in between. My mother is the first. She has no fear, and that's what's wrong with her. She lives hard and devil-may-care, especially in her age, and lets the worry and the consequences land on me. (302)

On the other hand, Lyman sees Marie as his ally. In a lovely scene, the two connect when Lyman, like his father, takes Marie's wounded hand. Seeing her scar, he apologizes to her for her suffering:

It was the first apology that ever made me feel forgiven too, but she didn't hear it. Marie Kashpaw was listening to the music. As though her whole life she had been pulling something very heavy and all of a sudden the trace had snapped, she straightened with such easy grace that she seemed to lift into the air. Motioning slowly, she tipped sideways, two-stepped, and then we danced to the center of the floor. (324)

The last of the new chapters deals with Lyman in a third-person narrative called "Lyman's Luck." This short chapter serves as a bridge to the next book, explaining how Lyman comes to plan the construction of a bingo hall on the reservation. Clearly a suggestion of the future, "based on greed and luck" (328), the chapter is one addition which serves no other purpose than to prepare the reader for *The Bingo Palace*. It could be left out of the novel without being missed. This is not to say that it should have been left out. The novel is not damaged by its presence, and it does serve a purpose for the series.

As impossible as it seems, Erdrich has improved upon a finely crafted novel. I highly recommend reading this new version of *Love Medicine*, preferably after a reading (or rereading) of *Tracks* and followed by a reading of *The Bingo Palace*. Taken together, the novels form a truly great American epic.

Sarah Bennett

The Indian Chronicles. José Barreiro. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993. \$19.95 cloth, ISBN 1-55885-067-8. 300 pages.

One of the central questions of recent post-colonial criticism has been, in the words of Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Is

there a position from which the colonized can speak of the experiences of colonization? In the swathe of the 1992 "celebrations" of the "Columbus Quincentenary" the question for the multiply-colonized Original Nations peoples of the Western hemisphere is perhaps more accurately "*How can the subaltern/colonized speak?*" What voices and positions are complex enough to express seemingly contradictory needs and experiences? These voices would occur at the intersections of a discourse of celebration of cultural identity and survival, and a discourse of domination and impending cultural genocide; of the valuation of tradition, and of continuance within the inevitability of "progress"; of speaking in affirmation of/for the community; and of speaking to the colonizer culture in opposition to continued oppression.

In *The Indian Chronicles*, José Barreiro has given us a narrative and a narrator that address these various needs, and more. This is the story of Guaikán, a twelve year old boy-man of the Taíno nation and a member of the first party encountered by Christopher Columbus when he landed on the island the Taínos called Guanahani (present day San Salvador).¹ In the novel, Guaikán becomes Columbus' first New World interpreter; his youth and his friendship with a Castillian servant boy his own age enable him to pick up the Admiral's language very quickly. He travels with "Don Christopherens" for five years. The novel follows Guaikán's involvement in Columbus' initial "explorations" of the "West Indies" and his trip to Spain where he met with Queen Isabel, who insisted that Columbus adopt Guaikán and "give him a Christian name" (129); thus Guaikán was baptized Diego Colón after Columbus' younger brother. When he returned to the Caribbean with Columbus he resumed his role as interpreter between the Castillians and the Native leaders, participating in negotiations and fighting during times of battle. We experience with him his six years away from the Castillians, during which he married, fathered twin sons, led his wife's family village as cacique, and learned to distrust the Spanish men, to disrespect their ways of dealing with the Native peoples. Guaikán names this "the best part of my miserable life" (211). After six years of Taíno lifestyle, Guaikán is forced back into service for the Spaniards. He witnesses the virtual destruction of his own culture, the enslavement and murder of his people (including his wife and sons) at the hands of the colonizers. Finally, he moves to a Dominican convent and becomes friends with Bartolomé de las Casas, who teaches him to read and write. The novel ends with Guaikán's participation in the 1535 uprising of the Native peoples against the Spanish. The story is a fascinating one, filled with historical data and cultural information that are obviously the results of meticulous research cautiously coupled with a visionary imagination (the novel includes a glossary of both Spanish and Native terms, a few of which have been constructed by

Barreiro's following of linguistic patterns evident from the known Native terms).

While the story, the history and the attention to detail make this novel a provocative read, the structure and narrative strategy embody some elements of post-colonial² writing. Dieguillo (as Guaikán is consistently called in the novel) reveals his story in a series of short diary-like entries he is writing at the request of his friend Las Casas. Las Casas intends to take to the King and Queen of Spain a "literate Indian's" recollections of colonization of the Native peoples, in hopes that these recollections, recorded in Guaikán's own writing, will help convince the King that the "Indians" are "nearly Christian" so he will outlaw *encomienda*, the system of enslavement of Native peoples. Guaikán's memoir is framed by a twentieth-century introduction, in which Barreiro (a persona with the novelist's name) recounts his discovery of this first Native American manuscript in the attic of a Santo Domingo family who may be descendants of a friar at the convent with Guaikán and Las Casas. The body of the novel, then, is a fictionalized "translation" of a memoir written in Spanish by a Taíno man—an interpreter—more than forty years after initial contact.

The narrative and structural elements not only give the novel a multiply-positioned protagonist, but also displace the reader into several positions simultaneously, positions that are in various ways displaced from the very experiences with which we are asked to identify. On one hand, we are invited to experience the processes of colonization through our identification with Guaikán—with his initial admiration for Columbus, with his wonderment at exotic fifteenth-century Spain, with his pride at being chosen Columbus' interpreter. The political and historical importance of indigenous interpreters to the processes of colonization is explicitly discussed in the narrative; Guaikán often mentions being conscious of his responsibility as interpreter, of being afraid to repeat threats, of translating statements so as to lessen negative impact and emphasize cooperation. And Guaikán's role as interpreter—as one who speaks the discourses of two cultures but speaks in the voice of neither—provides readers with a (false) sense of being in between the two cultures, of being witness to the experiences of both the colonized and the colonizers.

At the same time, our position of identification is consistently disrupted by narrative and structural elements that displace readers from the locus and experiences in the novel. As mentioned earlier, Barreiro frames the memoir with an "introduction" that deliberately distances the narrative from its own locus and story, both temporally and discursively. In the introductory remarks, Barreiro emphasizes the layers of translation that are occurring in Guaikán's text ("old Spanish" to English, written by an interpreter for whom "old Spanish" is a

second language and for whom writing is a "foreign" activity). In the body of the novel, that discursive displacement is occasionally reasserted by holes in the translation/text that are filled only with the remark "*illegible*," thereby disrupting the readers' processes of identification with Guaikán. A similar displacement is effected in the text and introduction with regards to time. The text, readers are told, is not just a memoir—written many years after the events (as Guaikán mentions often); it is also a rediscovered relic presented to contemporary readers by a contemporary researcher.

These strategies are crucial to the novel's success as a post-colonial narrative that provides readers with one subaltern/colonized voice speaking about colonization. Beyond that, though, the novel moves its readers from a colonizer perspective to a more tradition-centered perspective with a focus on continuance. This move is effected through the character of Guaikán, whose opinions about the Castellians (all Castellians, even Las Casas) have changed dramatically since his initial employment on Columbus' ship; his disillusionment with the white men leads to harsh criticism of them, their behaviors, and their religion. His gradual rejection of all things christian is accompanied by a narrative strategy that mirrors his changing opinions: in the memoir, the mode of storytelling moves from explicitly written ("I am writing this down for Las Casas")—corresponding with his initial admiration of Western ways—to explicitly oral (recounting verbatim in writing the stories he tells to the young Native people about their cultures and heritage)—corresponding to an angry rejection of all things Western—to a synthesis of the two (the novel ends with Guaikán's answering in writing a letter from Las Casas on the back of that letter, thereby undoing the delay inherent in written correspondence by an attempt at "talking back"; he writes, "what can I say?"). This process, of course, is a process of continuance, in which the rejection of all things colonizer gives way to indigenous cultures' growth as a part of (but not in submission to) a changing world. That Barreiro manages to invoke a sense of continuance while maintaining the displacing strategies mentioned above is testimony to his ability as a writer. The readers' knowledge that Guaikán's culture had been virtually dismantled by the Spanish by the novel's end³ makes this sense of continuance that much more poignant.

NOTES

¹The exact location of Columbus' initial landing has not been agreed upon by scholars; Guanahaní is generally accepted as a good possibility, and is the location referred to in Barreiro's novel. See Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise*

and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus (New Haven: Yale U P, 1992), 142-43.

²My use of this term is not intended to imply that the Americas are no longer colonized, that the "post" indicates an end to colonization. Rather, I use this term as it is used by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989): "We use the term 'post-colonial' . . . 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" (2).

³According to Rouse, "[b]y 1524 [the Taínos] had ceased to exist as a separate population group" (169).

Jeannie Ludlow

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